

Speculation

NUMBER 27

SEPTEMBER 1970



THE 1ST SPECULATION CONFERENCE
BIRMINGHAM, 1970. — REPORT INSIDE

Speculation

MULTI-MEDIA
ISSUE 27 (VOLUME 3, NUMBER 3)

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1970

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Front cover by Bob Rickard illustrating the Speculation conference. Outer circle from left: Weston, Aldiss, Priest, Strick, Blish, Shaw, McNelly, Bulmer. Inner circle from left: McNelly, Shaw, Aldiss, Blish.

SPECULATION-27 is produced by Peter R. Weston, 31 Pinewall Avenue, Kings Norton, Birmingham 30, UK. Published irregularly, available for trades or contributions. Opinions within are not necessarily those of the editor. Letters are liable to be published unless otherwise requested. 3/- (40c) per copy, 5 for 15s, (\$2.00) Overseas payments in cash not cheques please! Copyright 1970 by Peter R. Weston.

Assistance in production by Vernon Brown, Jeff Hacker, Alan Donnelly and Bob Rickard, of the University of Aston S.F. Group.

WE HAVE WAYS OF MAKING YOU TALK!

It seems simultaneously both a very long time and no time at all since I last settled down to write a SPECULATION editorial (a task which when starting seems inconceivable that I could possibly fill 4 pages, and when finishing seems impossible that I could hope to fit everything into such a short space). But any number of things have happened in the meantime. Some, such as the election of a sane, Conservative government are of relatively minor importance; others are relatively major events, such as the Speculation Conference described inside, and the fact that we now have stair-carpet and wallpaper in our little house in Kings Norton. (I'm not joking. It's amazing how important these creature comforts seem after one has been married for a while. And of course they are relevant because while I have been wall-papering I have not been cutting stencils.)

But the main subject I want to talk about here concerns conventions. This is a topic which has never previously been of much interest to me before, but I think the time is now ripe for an agonising reappraisal of the current situation.

In August this year the 30th World Convention was held in Heidelberg, with some 620 people present from fifteen countries, attending the first-ever WorldCon to be held outside the English-speaking nations. Vernon Brown and Ethel Lindsay represented our EASTERCON committee, and since Bob Rickard and I could not attend we spent the weekend putting out the second Progress Report of the 1971 British Easter convention at Worcester, which now has 230 members.

Cont/d..

As an aside, Heicon had a special importance for me because as you probably know, SPECULATION was nominated on the Hugo Awards ballot for 'Best Amateur Magazine' this year. We didn't win, of course, and didn't expect to, but it was certainly exciting to wait for the results to come through, and was quite an honour to be listed up there with the major United States fanzines that are generally so much larger in circulation. (At least, larger in reaching the people who vote - in response to the people who've wondered our total print number is around 400.)

Since I haven't had the opportunity before now, I'd like to most sincerely thank everyone who was good enough to nominate and then vote for SPEC, and in particular those very kind people - Bruce Gillespie, Rich Brown, Frank Lunney, Doll Gilliland, Linda Eyster Bushyager (have I missed anyone?) who said nice things about us in their own magazines.

But back to Heidelberg. The convention was, I gather, a considerable success despite the handicaps that face Europeans in organising something of this size without the facilities, the traditions, and the presence of celebrities which are all so much more easily available on the other side of the Atlantic. I was able to meet quite a few of the Heicon charter-flight party on my first-ever visit to the 'Globe' in London - and guess what, fans, some of them stayed at the Royal Hotel, scene of this year's Sci-con! I also hope to carry a Heicon report along with 3 or 4 pages of photographs in the next issue, but in the meantime I'd like to talk about something more wide-ranging in implication and to me quite fundamental; when exactly do we have the next British World Convention?

CONVENTIONS TO THE RIGHT OF THEM, CONVENTIONS TO THE LEFT OF THEM...

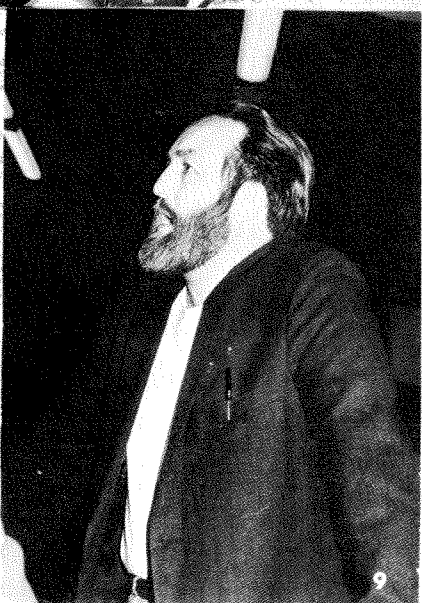
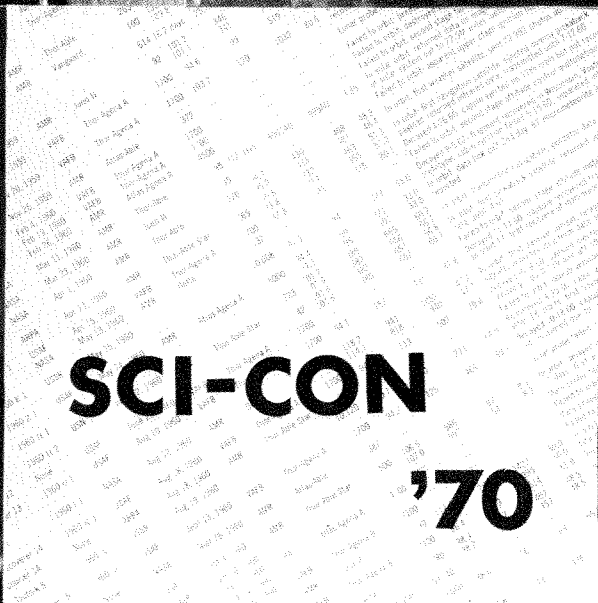
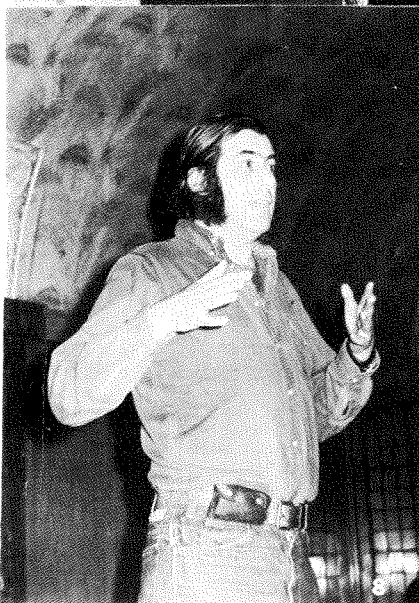
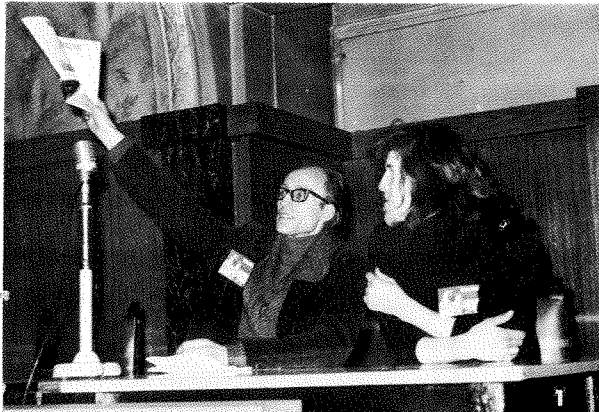
I believe that this country is tottering on the brink of an 'explosion' of conventions, and only needs a good kick in the collective backsides of English fandom. There is a watershed of sorts, that I hope will be crossed with the success of EASTERCON 22 next year (as Committee Chairman I refuse to even contemplate the possibility that this will be anything other than a tremendous success). But I will come back to this. What I would like to talk about here are several far-reaching decisions that were taken at Heidelberg. Please bear with me for a few paragraphs.

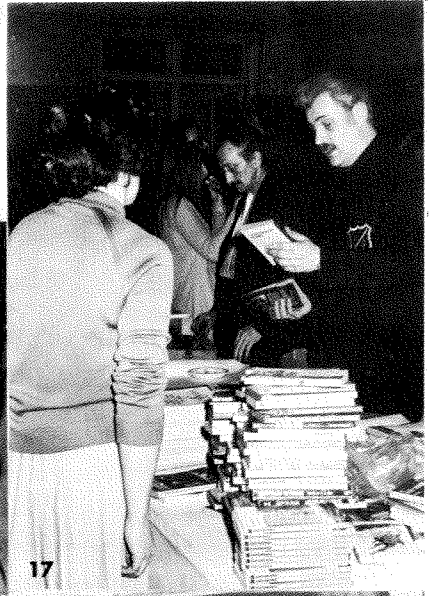
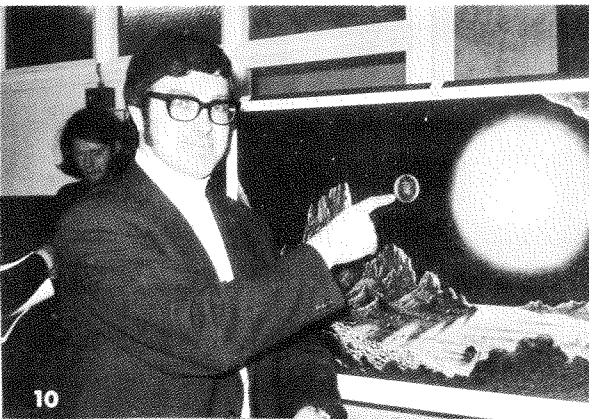
The argument about the nature and selection of sites for the World Convention itself was resolved in the only way possible, in my opinion, by recognising that this is essentially a North American event, and reverting to a 3-year rotation plan within that continent. Bids from outside the area can now be made for any year, and to my knowledge there are at present bids for Australia in 1975 and Stockholm in 1976. In the U.S.A. itself the convention goes to Boston in 1971, Los Angeles in 1972, Dallas/Minneapolis/Toronto in 1973, and Washington in 1974. TYou'll notice that short of challenging one of these other proposals there is no possibility of Great Britain getting the chance to host the World Convention before 1977.

There have previously been British WorldCons in London in 1957 & 1965, and it is my firm belief that there most certainly ought to be another one at some time during the 1970's. But it is also my belief that unless plans are made now then we will not be successful.

(Continued on Page 3)

SCI-CON 70 this year at London: On this page, 1 George Hay (Chairman) and Bram Stokes; 2 Christine Hay & Arthur C Clarke; 3 Dr Willis McNelly; 4 Harvey Metusow; 5 Raymond Fletcher, M.P.; 6 Philip Strick; 7 P.J. Hills, University of Surrey; 8 Dr Christopher Evans; 9 Perry Chapdelaine. These photographs were taken for George Hay and printed by Waldemar Kummering & Gary Kluepfel of the Munich Group. More pictures facing Page 3.





This country is the ideal and most sensible place for a World Convention outside the United States. Not only is there a large native fandom, although diffuse, who speak English, but there is a long tradition of holding conventions, a thriving community of science fiction writers and publishers, and the virtue of relatively easy communication which can successfully attract considerable numbers of Americans and Europeans to visit a WorldCon in this country. And while London presents well-known problems in finding a suitable large hotel, an ideal site looks like becoming available on the outskirts of Birmingham from around 1973 onwards (see back cover).

I used to wonder why on Earth anyone should want to take on the job of organising something as demanding and complex as a large convention. I now know the answer to that question - there is a certain feeling, not so much of 'power', which would be ridiculous, but of satisfaction in making arrangements and exploiting opportunities to the best advantage. Even so I am not prepared (at least at the present time) to put forward a personal bid for a British World Convention. What I do suggest is that British fandom as a whole should think about the whole business and in view of the magnitude of the problems that a committee be formed - perhaps sponsored by the BSFA, I don't know - as soon as possible to make a formal bid.

Unfortunately I've not yet finished. From here on in it begins to get complicated, because there is that other decision I mentioned which was made at Heicon. In the absence of plans for a European WorldCon, a number of people present formed a committee and decided that in future there will now be a quite separate, new International series of conventions. These will rotate around the countries of Europe, initially every two years, with the proviso that should a WorldCon be held in Europe then in that year the WorldCon will serve as the International event.

Already there are plans for the 1972 International Convention to be held in Trieste (following on the heels of the famous SF Film Festival), and Brussels and Stockholm are bidding for 1974 & 1976 respectively. (Stockholm, you'll see, are covering their bets in the hope of getting a major international convention in 1976 whatever happens).

So how does England fit into all this? The answer so far is that it doesn't. Perfidious Albion has so far been conspicuous by its silence, and it is my personal opinion that the majority of British fans will probably continue to more-or-less ignore European fandom and their conventions. Nevertheless this is another factor that must be considered by any bidding committee that is set up in response to my suggestion above. Ideally it would seem that a bid should be made both for a true WorldCon and for the European International Convention in the same year, so that, like Stockholm, at least something will happen!

Now let us consider possibilities. At a risk of making myself extremely unpopular with certain people, it looks to me as if 1975 is the nearest opportunity to make a bid. By that time the Americans will be ripe for the WorldCon to go some-where overseas again, and there is no competing bid for the International event. If England won a WorldCon that year, Stockholm would still have its alternative in 1976. Conversely, if we didn't get the WorldCon, we would still have the alternative of the International event. The only losers would be the Aussies. (Cont/d)...

SCI-CON PICTURE PARADE Continued. From left, 10 David Hardy, Vision of Tomorrow cover artist; 11 Keith Albarn & Gerald Bishop; 12 The Hays and Perry Chapdelaine with Dan Morgan & Vic Hallet in background; 13 Beryl Mercer presents Doc Weir Award to Michael Rosenblum; 14 James Blish, Bob Parkinson & unknown; 15 Dan Morgan gives BSFA Award to John Brunner; 16 Donald Wollheim; 17 Jill Adams, Diane Lambert, Graham Hall, Ken Bulmer, Phil Rogers; 18 Raymond Fletcher, Vic Hallet, Perry Chapdelaine; 19 Doreen Parker, Michael Rosenblum, Jill Adams at BSFA A.G.M. Something of the squalor of the Royal Hotel comes over on these photographs!

I am almost in danger of forgetting my earlier contention that we are due for an explosion of activity in our own insular scene. I believe that there is a tremendous interest in science fiction almost everywhere in this country, a potential so far hardly tapped. With EASTERCON 22 next Spring I hope we can release some of this energy, give ideas to people for other activities, and attract a great number of enthusiastic numbers to science fiction fandom (Attendance is going to be well over 200 at Worcester).

Since I recently completed 8 thrill-packed pages on EASTERCON for our Second Progress Report I don't intend to go into this further, save to say that if you don't attend you will have missed something spectacular. A river boat trip is now arranged, and we hope to have a party of U.S. fans and authors flying in by air. (Details from Don Lundry, RD 1, Old Yorke Estate, Hightstown, N.J 08520) This will be a reduced-rates trip similar to the Heicon charter flight. Among others who have said they hope to attend are Frederik Pohl, Keith Laumer, Robert Bloch, Anne McCaffrey, and Eric Frank Russell.

Registration is 10/—, to my address. Hotel booking forms, despite rumours to the contrary, have not as yet been issued and will go to all convention members on 1 January for return by February 28 (airmail to the USA). All bookings are being handled by the committee and cannot be placed with the hotel direct.

But besides Eastercons, there has been talk of another convention in this country, to be held every year. The ideal time is the end of October, and I understand that both the University of Aston Group and representatives of the student organisation at Liverpool University are interested in arranging something along these lines. The Birmingham people, incidentally, would probably use the Imperial Hotel in the city-centre, which although too small for the Eastercon proper is nearly ideal for a more modest event and is very reasonably priced (The manager, I discovered, is an SF fan, there is both a proper restaurant and a coffee-shop, and a German beer-cellar in the basement!) If the Autumn convention proves a reality it is hoped that it would continue from year to year.

Aside from conventions there is the SPECULATION-type conference, which if I may say so went off very smoothly at Cannon Hill, Birmingham this June. A report is contained in this issue, and about 100 people were present (even though the Centre itself did absolutely none of the publicity it agreed to do). We have, however, been invited by the Centre to come back next year, and whether or not we do I have learned that Vic Hallet and Roje Gilbert at Cambridge plan to arrange a similar type of event at that university in 1971.

The best part of the June conference was probably the night before, when some two dozen writers and fans held a room-party in the teetotal Cobden Hotel until 5.00 a.m. in the morning. Highlights were Ken Bulmer and myself furtively slinking downstairs to steal dirty coffee-cups and tooth-glasses for the party, only to return and find Judy Blish speaking to room service in an assertive American voice to order "two dozen glasses, we're having a party up here". Another great moment was when I upset James Blish's drink, ruining his pillow with whisky and completely destroying Brian Aldiss' fountain-pen notes on the back of an envelope which he had just made in preparation for his speech the following day.

And now a personal note. Aside from the wall-papering activities mentioned, I have decided to enroll for a night-study course, 2 nights per week, for the Diploma of Marketing, a professional qualification I need for my job. With both SPECULATION magazine and the EASTERCON to handle I shall obviously be busy and am going to have to cut down on some of my correspondence and other interests. If you don't hear from me please don't worry since I shall still be here, only submerged!

Frederik Pohl went to Japan for the Osaka Symposium and hence delayed writing his column — it arrived just too late for this issue. I hope you enjoy our other material and will comment.

— Peter Weston, 26/9/70.

One gets tired of answering, tired of listening, tired of knowing in advance the opinions they are bound to express, while continuing, for the most part, to like the people who are trotting out these weary, unoriginal criticisms, telling oneself that they mean well, that they take what they do seriously. If Aldiss's book is anything, it is Aldissian — more purely Aldissian, in my estimation, than any long work he has so far produced. When he began the Charteris stories (or, at least, when he began submitting them to New Worlds) I was overjoyed that he had found a means of combining his original vision with his original voice (this, by the way, is all New Worlds has ever hoped to encourage in its contributors — and it has said so often). There is a consistency about the Charteris stories — images, theme, style, all work together. I could mention what I believe to be the faults (the inclusion of many of the poems) and, in the novel version, self-indulgences — but as I intended here to defend Aldiss against the criticisms I have read, I see no point in offering a particularly balanced view of the book.

It is funny, it has tremendous spontaneity, it is stimulating. And it is, in many ways, a first novel — one expects Aldiss to develop and improve on what he has begun. I only hope that the unperceptive and deadeningly conscientious criticisms it has received at the hands of people like Blish and Brunner do not depress him too much and throw him off his track, as I was for some time thrown off mine by similar reactions to THE FINAL PROGRAMME.

In the light of Brian's generous piece on my stuff in the same issue, this will doubtless look like another piece of mutual back-scratching. There is nothing one can do about that impression save to say that if John Brunner ever realises his potential I will support him as fervently. Some will say that he has already realised his potential, in STAND ON ZANZIBAR, but I do not believe he has yet found his own voice to link with the original vision which can be detected most frequently in his earlier work.

It was interesting to see David Masson's article — particularly since I published almost all of his work in New Worlds and was attracted much more to its powerful imagery and originality of attitude than to its linguistic content (although he is one of the few people who has ever produced what, in my opinion, was a thoroughly successful pastiche of 17th-Century English). Which is not to say that I didn't appreciate the meticulousness of his stories which were largely to do with linguistics. Another thing which I admired about Masson was his economy of prose — and perhaps J.J. Pierce will be satisfied with the explanation that one of the main characteristics of what I consider to be a good New Worlds story is economy (Borges has, of course, been a major influence, and was the first, as far as I know, to coin the term 'condensed novel'). To hark back to BAREFOOT — or, at any rate, to the original New Worlds stories — I found 'Ouspenski's Astrobahn' not as satisfying as, say, 'Multi Value Motorway' because it lacked the economy of the latter. Masson, of course, has a specialist's obsession and therefore his article is inclined to criticise what many would consider minor aspects of a story; equally he's inclined to praise what some would consider worthy, but not very interesting, attention to detail.

I was interested in Masson's reference to Kipling (whose worthy attention to detail produced a consistent narrowing of his vision so that as his style grew increasingly economical his attitudes became less and less flexible and he failed to become what he might have been — i.e. a writer of the stature of Conrad — whose own economy of style is worth noting). Has anyone ever compared Kipling and Heinlein, by the way? ** Their states of mind seem quite similar (though I do not, of course, mean to compare their skills as writers).

Cont/d..

** Fritz Leiber did, in SPECULATION-24. You previously classed Heinlein with Ian Fleming, in SPECULATION-20, so I imagine your opinion of him is improving!

SPECULATION

I think it was James who said of Kipling that he had come 'steadily from the less simple in subject to the more simple -- from the Anglo-Indians to the natives, from the natives to the Tommies, from the Tommies to the quadrupeds, from the quadrupeds to the fish, and from the fish to the engines and the screws'. A phrase when I read it in my own peculiar perspective which seemed to indicate the way in which quite a few SF writers have gone in recent years (and the way in which Analog has gone perhaps). I suppose that was a more oblique sidetrack than usual in my letters to SPECULATION.

I've just discovered I've got a fever. Was it the shock of all that recent exercise, I wonder, or the shock of coming back to find SPECULATION there?

Masson's references to the languages of signs and gestures and their possible misinterpretation, etc, is something I'd like to see him develop in a further article. A lot of my Cornelius things deliberately contradict actions and words so that what is being said on one level is in conflict with what is being done while, for instance, the character speaks. This is not merely paradox for its own sake -- I think it is what often happens in day-to-day life and using contradictory action while a conversation is taking place is a good method of giving an ironic perspective to a piece. It is, of course, a traditional technique of the comic writer.

Where are we? Back at Brian's review. I agree with what he says about the core of a novel being a proposition rather than a statement and that everything must be looked at askance, anew, and that the job is to construct characters who move easily through uncertain worlds. Perhaps this is why I enjoyed BAREFOOT, too -- for there are distinct similarities between the characters of Charteris and Cornelius, even though I had not read the Charteris stories when I wrote FINAL PROGRAMME and Brian had not read FP when he wrote the Charteris stories -- neither, I might point out, had we discussed anything of them. Brian's piece might look as if we had discussed them since, but the fact is that we haven't, for some reason -- save in the most general of terms.

I, too, hated the time-machine bit in BEHOLD THE MAN -- I simply couldn't get round it and thus minimised it as much as possible. I also believe that the novella could have been improved by some slight shortening and revising. I hated doing it as a novel -- everything in me said I should be condensing rather than expanding the story. I have two books which I believe would have been better as short stories of 10,000 words or under -- BEHOLD THE MAN is one, and the other is THE BLACK CORRIDOR.

I think I'd agree with Brian that my approach to life is aesthetic -- though whether this is good or bad I'm not sure. My recent somewhat frenetic athleticism was inspired by the conviction that there were other ways of approaching life but I'm not sure that's done me any good and I found that I was rather disgusted, as my stay on Exmoor grew longer, by the peculiar way in which those who claim to love the landscape most have managed to prettify it and make 'comfy' the scenery which Shelley and Southey and Coleridge found so inspiring. I began to see the Lynton and Lynmouth disaster of '52 as nature's vengeance on the gift-shops and picturesque cottages and everything else which the Major's wives and their ilk have brought to the once wild beauty of the moor and its environs. Not, ultimately that I'm so strong on romantic landscapes when it comes down to it. I really do prefer the modern American cityscape. Also I discovered that I could sit a particularly cunning mare stylishly (and lose my stirrups) or awkwardly (and stay in the saddle). Like it or not, then, I am reconciled to the aesthetic approach to life...

SPECULATION

Physically, of course, I am not suited to this approach. But I must bear my cross stoically. Also, if anyone is 'the most humanly-involved' of modern British SF writers, then it is Brian himself, certainly not me at the moment. As a writer I am simply not mature enough to merit the title. Good God! Lumps are beginning to appear under my chin and on my hands. So much for the bloody rural scene. If you hear I have died of a mysterious plague, burn this letter at once.

J.J.Pierce may well attack my books he lists as mediocre. I hate most of my own books. I am offended at my own gall in offering them to the public. I writhe when I read them - cliché, clumsy sentence, badly-chosen metaphor. I write too much, too quickly, (or did) and heartily endorse Mr Pierce's comments. I am humble, you see, and wish to offer a generous public something better. By the time a book reaches proof stage I hate it. Some I grow to like a little -- but some I grow to hate more and more. I have only ever read one of my sword and sorcery novels through and was horrified at its badness and I tried to make the next one better. If they are all like that (and I suspect they are) then I fail to understand how I make a living. How, I sometimes wonder, can a writer who can turn out so much crap sometimes turn out a story as good as 'Voortrekker' or even 'The Peking Junction'? I am proud, too, you see, and know that I must try much harder next term if I am to fulfill my early promise. What a paradox, eh, Pete, eh?

The fever increases.

But Mike Harrison is not a mediocre writer. He is one of the finest stylists and one of the most complex and intelligent young writers to emerge in the past couple of years. He is a careful, clever writer who will astonish everybody when he gets into his full stride. If J.J.Pierce isn't careful (and, of course, he must be) he had better watch out because I didn't like '2001' either. Incidentally I didn't have to be rescued by Judy Merrill from Lester Del Rey. Terry Carr was concerned for Del Rey in some way I couldn't interpret and warned me with a sign not to continue the argument. If argument it was. Del Rey was in an odd, belligerent mood, presumably very drunk, and had interrupted my reply to Ted White's question as to why I had rejected a long story by Alexei Panshin. I said I liked SF stories which had an idea - which weren't all style and mood. "What is an idea?" said Del Rey from where he sat. Well, fuck that, J.J. Pierce...

And as for the rest of it, well, Don Wollheim, I didn't know about the Colvin hoax until the issue came out (and what has that to do with it anyway?) and I was not too pleased and didn't take the joke (C. Platt's) very well, as I remember. It's hard to have a penname pulled, as it were, from under your feet. The Foyster PR argument is nonsense and misinterprets my remark. But then you'll all cheerfully do that, won't you. Don't we all? It's all a question of over-reacting, as Dan Morgan and I agreed. For all your remarks, Peter G. Weston (sic), I, at least, used the London convention to settle various disputes with various people over various drinks, and that is what, in my opinion, a convention is for. I also made three separate attempts to make the peace with John Brunner, but his paranoia has gone too far, it seems.

As for a 'new waver' hurling the glass, you know very well that the person who threw the glass has nothing to do with science fiction * and was merely a poetry lover who was offended by Brunner's remarks about me after I had left the hall. **

* Mike Dempsey, the phantom glass-thrower, does of course work for Hutchinsons the publishers and is SF editor there, as far as I know. He published Lang Jones' THE NEW SF for which you, Mike, wrote the introduction. A nice guy.

** That's not the way I heard it from several other people, Mike. Since I wasn't there at the time I wouldn't know what really happened, however.

I've said a dozen times or more and for a long, long, long time that there is room for all kinds of SF (not that I'd have any power to make it otherwise!) and that there is a readership for all kinds. Most of the comments you have had from me or Charles Platt or Mike Harrison have been in reaction to what we have considered extreme statements from people like Pierce, yourself, and Dan Morgan *

You know bloody well -- or should know it by now -- that I've always said that what you like you like, and that nothing is going to change your enjoyment of writers I find appalling just as nothing is going to change my enjoyment of writers you find appalling. I relish stuff you would probably consider complete rubbish -- the various reprints of G-8, dime novels and so forth which U.S. publishers have brought out in recent years. ** I can't read pulp SF, as such, but then I've never had much of a taste for it -- perhaps because it impinges too closely on what I do myself. I can't read S & S (save for Fritz Leiber's) and know a lot of intelligent people who can read reams of it at a stretch.

But I've had enough of all this. Soon, it seems, I shall be working on a real book and it scares me because it means I'll get very depressed and reclusive (which I'm not by nature) and I'll have to give up silly self-indulgences like fanzine arguments and face up to the implications of doing a serious book. I shall look back at all this with nostalgia, doubtless, just as I'll look back on the days when writing was enjoyable and fast and cheap and with luck I'll get more of a chance to read writers like Conrad and Tolstoy and Dickens and Borges whom I deeply enjoy reading.

I suppose Franz Rottensteiner has a point. There are good writers and there are profound writers and there is no sense in comparing one with another -- though there seems to me to be a potential in writers like Ballard and Aldiss and Disch and a few others to produce real works of art. I want to find out if that potential exists in me and this decision is so full of almost terrifying implications that I literally have nightmares about it because, among other things, it means changing one's way of life, perhaps even changing one's character and dedicating oneself wholly to the art of fiction. It probably isn't even worth it. But I've tried living an 'ordinary' life and I can't, so I might as well go all the way. What a thing to write in a fanzine!

Michael Moorcock, 1970.

* You can't be serious! That's not true and you know it. Dan Morgan and I only started commenting in reply to extreme things said by people like yourself, Platt and Ballard. Even though Pierce in the USA may have been something of a wild-eyed zealot of the True Faith, the three of us have reacted, not initiated. Although you are pretending to be misunderstood by the world and by SPECULATION writers generally, that just won't wash. My statement of position is to be found on Page 48 of Issue No. 24 of SPECULATION, and it says just about the same as you say above. I can't somehow feel that you agreed with us all along! I would have liked to reprint some of the extreme statements made in earlier issues of New Worlds, except that I don't keep a file of the magazine. Maybe someone with an Encyclopediac memory like John Foyster will oblige. But in your own article in SPEC-19, Mike, you admitted that:-- "A lot of the articles we ran (in New Worlds) were unfair to established SF writers, some were almost manic in their attitudes, others were just downright inaccurate..." (Page 59)

** No I wouldn't. I'm not so much a literary snob that I have to make arbitrary judgements on what other people read without considering what particular type of enjoyment they get from it. You enjoy G-8, Charles Platt can go on reading Beano if he wants to, and I shall say not a word!

THE CRITICAL FRONT

Book reviews at length

CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS by Roger Zelazny (If magazine, Doubleday \$4.50)

Reviewed by Brian M Stableford

"In my own work, LORD OF LIGHT was a purposeful thing....CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS, on the other hand, is just a sort of hobby story, a fun thing."

So says Roger Zelazny in an interview conducted by If magazine, where the greater part of this story originally appeared. This underlines a fundamental difference between the two works, which otherwise invite comparison because of their obvious similarity of theme.

In both stories, humans and/or super-humans of other times have assumed the names and some of the attributes and relationships of one or other of the ancient mythologies. Both stories focus on strife and war. But the two novels are very different in attitude and style.

LORD OF LIGHT is a careful book with a coherent and stylish manner. Its action is on a grand scale, its plot both complex and ambitious. But it is above all a heroic fantasy. Its central character, Mahasamatnan, is human - a good deal larger than life and better too, but human nonetheless.

CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS is not careful. It sprawls over its relatively brief length, full to the brim with gimmicks and tricks, arranged to no good purpose and with little esthetic pattern. Its plot is simple in nature but decorated and confused so that its flow is discontinuous and distorted. But the least attractive aspect of the work is to do with its philosophy rather than its style. The work shelters no vestige of humanity. It is wholly a work of writing, not of communication.

The story concerns various attempts by various characters to dispose of other characters for various reasons. Anubis, Lord of the House of the Dead, sends a man he names Wakim to kill the Prince Who Was a Thousand. Osiris, Lord of the House of Life, sends Horus to pre-empt the disposal of said Prince. But both Wakim and the Prince have secret identities, and poor Horus never really has a chance. Two minor characters, Vramin and Madrak, have eyes on the positions held by Anubis and Osiris respectively, and attempt to gain same by allying their separate selves with the opposite number in each case. Also loitering in the plot, with a great deal of potential but no apparent purpose, is the Steel General, a figment of Zelazny's imagination who has little obvious affinity with Egyptian mythology.

There's a lot of cloak-and-dagger, and some spectacular fight scenes, and some silly dialogue, and rabbits galore produced from all kinds of party hats, but in the end all that emerges is a common-or-garden mess.

As Zelazny says, CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS is a hobby story. I suspect that many of the references in it are comprehensible only to the author. It is therefore difficult to apply any critical standard to the book. How can one weigh up a book whose author dismisses it as "a fun thing"? Because it isn't really our fun that Zelazny is talking about - it's his.

SPECULATION

In many ways this novel ignores its readers, perhaps even mocks its readers. Zelazny also says of CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS in that If interview: "I really intended it to be a parody of what is sometimes referred to as the new wave". The story hardly suggests a parody, but there is something both farcical and satirical in the dialogue between author and reader. Zelazny flings his words on to paper with gay abandon. He just doesn't seem to care what effect the final result adds up to.

Despite my admiration for Roger Zelazny's work, I find myself disliking this particular example intensely. All I can really say in summation is that if anyone should feel that he or she would derive a great deal of enjoyment from a silly, mixed-up, extravagant tasteless ego-trip by a fine writer who isn't even bothering to try, then they should under no circumstances miss this thing.

Brian M. Stableford.

QUICKSAND by John Brunner (Sidgwick & Jackson 27s, 240 pp)

Reviewed by Tony Sudbery

It's a very tidy world SF writers live in. Listen:

"Do I like her? As with Phil the answer is: yes/no. A reaction equidistant between liking and disliking but far off the line which would lead me to either."

That's not John Brunner talking, but his principal character, Paul Fidler, and we've caught him in the act of struggling against the inadequacies of this abstract, mathematical way of thinking about people. Nevertheless, I think the novel itself is spoilt by the same sort of inadequacy. Whether he intended it or not, reflections like the above strike me as cogent pieces of self-criticism on Brunner's part.

Fidler, a psychiatrist with a nervous breakdown in his past and recurrent neurotic fantasies in his present, is in the last stages of an unhappy marriage when he becomes involved with an unusual psychiatric case; a girl with apparently total amnesia who had ferociously assaulted a commercial traveller who found her wandering naked in the woods near Fidler's hospital. Fidler finds his own irrational fears realised in this girl's plight, and when his marriage finally collapses he buries himself deeper and deeper in her case. As his other supports are taken from him he accepts an escapist fantasy offered by the girl -- only to find that this solves nothing, and the fantasy changes from idyllic dream to nightmare.

That's the abstract skeleton of the plot, and really there's no need to go any further. QUICKSAND is rather an abstract novel; the details which should be covering the skeleton with flesh only seem to adorn the bones and make them more prominent. Its characters are schematic; Fidler himself, although most of the action takes place inside his mind, never quite comes to life as a real person rather than a psychological diagram; and his relations with the other characters are too rigidly controlled to hold much interest for the reader. Significantly, these criticisms don't apply to the section towards the end of the novel where things -- I mean real, external "things" -- start moving; nor to the minor characters -- including a splendidly incisive portrait of an academic "operator" -- where Brunner was not concerned with their inner life; here he seems to have relaxed and let his craftsmanship take over. I could point the moral that Brunner has committed a sophisticated breach of an elementary rule; Don't tell the reader, show him; or in a word, dramatise. That would be too crude by far, but perhaps there's some truth in it.

(Cont/d)

You'll have noticed that I've been treating QUICKSAND as a conventional novel, not science fiction. Aren't I confusing my categories? I honestly don't know. It's an obstacle to reviewing this book properly that it's never quite clear what sort of thing it is. This is partly external to the book itself; the publishers have given it a jacket which screams "SF" and reveals the science-fictional point which the author had taken great pains to keep hidden for most of the novel. This is unpardonable by any standard and John Brunner would be justified in getting very annoyed about it. Naturally, I read it as SF; it was only after finishing it that I realised that it made rather more sense as a mainstream novel. (If you think that disqualifies my criticism of it, I might well agree with you.)

On the other hand, this confusion is partly the book's own fault. Whatever its publishers say about it, a novel ought to announce its category *itself*; it ought to be clear where the centre of interest is. In QUICKSAND it isn't. If it's SF the centre of interest is not Paul Fidler but Urchin, the girl who is detained at the hospital; and Fidler's absorption in Urchin serves to focus our attention on her rather than illuminate his psychological development. In fact Urchin's arrival is by far the most vivid and intriguing event in the early part of the book, and it's natural to take it as the introduction of the main subject. It always retains this vividness, easily outshining Fidler's marital problems, and it is developed as if it was meant to stand on its own as a major interest; but the proportion of space given to it is appropriate to a secondary theme growing in importance until at the end it is dominant.

Let me finish this second review -- i.e. of QUICKSAND as SF -- by noting that Urchin's origin -- the objective end of Fidler's investigation -- is not startling, but the novel has a neatly-engineered surprise ending which is completely logical yet took me quite unawares. It goes without saying that John Brunner makes deft use of psychology to maintain interest in the investigation, but he's a bit shaky on linguistics (b,v,p,f and w are not "voiced and unvoiced plosives and their aspirated forms"; and is it really a fault in the English language that it has so much ambiguity?).

Now just what does John Brunner think he's up to? Well, he's an unusually articulate and self-aware writer, and he's given us a precise statement of his theory of fiction which seems to me to correspond very well to his practice here. QUICKSAND was copyrighted in 1967; the following quotations come from Brunner's Guest of Honour speech at the 1967 Bristol convention (see SPECULATION-17).

1. Psi powers offer a convenient shorthand device for saying some extremely relevant things about human relationships.
2. It remains true... that the true hero of a "marvel tale" is not a person but an event... Wait, though. Who's going to be affected by your event -- a bunch of handy stock types...? Better not, I think -- don't you?... If it is going to be definable as a science fiction event, then surely the people on whom it's visited must be a little more -- shall we say? -- exclusive than those who would serve equally for some more mundane plot.
3. There's something... which one can only call neurotic about an obsession with machines... The hardware can be left to research scientists. An author's business, the business of all fiction, is concerned with people. Not machines; people.

The first of these was only an aside in the speech, but in its view of psi powers it describes something very similar to the mainstream interpretation of QUICKSAND, with Urchin's time-travelling being interesting not for its own sake but for the light it throws on Paul Fidler's psychology. I don't think it's appropriate for art to use "shorthand devices", but in QUICKSAND this device wouldn't have been shorthand -- if it had come off.

(Cont/d)...

It's more interesting to look at QUICKSAND as SF in the light of the second quotation, because there's a powerful moral to be drawn. On the whole I agree with this quotation - not for the chauvinistic reasons that Brunner gives, but on the general grounds that everything in a work of fiction must be made specific and realised in detail, in proportion to its importance to the fiction. But Brunner has made two mistakes in applying this theory. The first is to suppose that an interesting "exclusive" character is necessarily a neurotic one. This is a ghastly mistake. All right, they all do it, from Nigel Balchin to Roger Zelazny; it's still a mistake. Brian Aldiss didn't make this assumption when he was writing GREYBEARD and he produced a masterpiece. *

I feel a bit diffident in saying this, because it seems to align me with the philistinism of Poul Anderson:

"SF is more interested in... the survival and triumph and tragedy of heroes and thinkers than in the neuroses of some snivelling fagot" (Introduction to NEBULA AWARD STORIES 4)

I'd rather have one of John Brunner's snivelling fagots than one of Poul Anderson's heroes or thinkers, any day; and I'd rather read QUICKSAND than the boring adventure story Poul Anderson would have made from the same donnée. But rather than either I'd choose a sensitive, mature individual like Greybeard.

There's another mistake illustrated in this opposition between Brunner and Anderson. Given that the SF event is the centre of interest, both the psychological novel and the adventure story represent solutions to the problem of using human characters to carry this interest through the length of a novel. Both solutions are cheating; if the event itself can't carry enough interest for a novel, then it should be embodied in a short story or a novella instead. The idea behind QUICKSAND is really too slight to be worth more than 15,000 words at the outside.

For an example of how an idea can carry a whole novel, we can go to another SF masterpiece, Theodore Sturgeon's SOME OF YOUR BLOOD. Again, there is a strong formal resemblance to QUICKSAND; the central SF event is only revealed at the end, and the interest is channelled through a psychologist's investigation. But there are no developed characters in SOME OF YOUR BLOOD (George, the psychopath in that novel, is hardly a developed character; he's regarded as a machine, and this is the point of the novel. ** But unlike Paul Fidler, he's an interesting machine.) The psychologist Philip Outerbridge is well sketched as an individual, but he's not investigated in depth; he doesn't need to be. Think what an unbalanced novel SOME OF YOUR BLOOD would have been if half of it had been devoted to Outerbridge's personal problems.

Finally, I'd like to look at QUICKSAND in a historical context. What I've got to say may be outdated, since QUICKSAND was written before STAND ON ZANZIBAR and I haven't yet read the later novel; but I hope it's still worth saying. I'm going to use a device that John Brunner himself likes to use, and make an analogy with jazz. I hope this will also bring home some of the points I've been making above. (Cont/d)

* GREYBEARD, in fact, presents an interesting comparison to QUICKSAND; it has about the same proportion of interest in the main character as opposed to the SF "event". But because Greybeard is such a beautifully-realised character, there is no conflict of emphasis, and GREYBEARD emerges as a perfectly integrated novel. In this case it becomes quite irrelevant to worry about categories as I did with QUICKSAND.

** Note that abstractness, nearly always a vice in conventional fiction, can be a virtue in science fiction.

The aesthetic parallel between jazz and SF lies in the fact that each of them works in an established medium and yet has a system of values that is completely at variance with that of the parent medium. This is where that third quotation from John Brunner's Bristol speech comes in. I'm not entirely happy with it as it stands -- or rather, I mean I'm not entirely unhappy with it; but suppose we put "things" or "concepts" instead of "machines". Then, Mr Brunner, would you still hold the resulting sentiment? Because then I'd firmly disagree. Suppose a classical musician had said "There's something neurotic about an obsession with rhythm", had refused to recognise that "swing" could be a valid critical term, and had demanded that all serious music should have a basic concern with tonality. In the light of European musical history, this would be a quite reasonable attitude; yet it is refuted by the fact that jazz is a genuinely serious music. Similarly, John Brunner's statement is refuted by a list like the following:

"Process" by A.E. VanVogt

"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" by Jorge Luis Borges

"Fundamental Theory" by Sir Arthur Eddington

These are all fiction; yet they cannot be concerned with people, for none of them have any human characters at all. What they do have is a certain quality -- call it "sense of wonder" -- that is the analogue of swing in jazz.

Of course, this is a pretty weird list; a story from a pulp magazine, a modern Argentinian classic, and a mathematical treatise. But it makes two points. First, "fiction" can be a pretty wide term (if you're perverse enough, did someone say? Give that man a copy of New Worlds). Second, there can be important aesthetic and cultural qualities that aren't considered in conventional literary criticism -- just as "swing" doesn't exist in the vocabulary of the conventional music critic.

In short, there's no reason why SF should be literature. It can still be important if it's not. Don't you agree, John?

"What I do resent is being hived off into an arbitrary and isolated area of contemporary fiction" (John Brunner, Vector 51)

Does nobody agree?

"Interestingness is a criterion no serious critic has dared to apply to art, but I can see no reason why it should not be applied." (David Daiches, Literary Essays, Oliver & Boyd 1966, Pp.186.)

Yes, that's on the right lines. But nobody inside SF?

"No writer should need to be told that a story cannot get along without at least one believable person in it" (William Atheling Jr (i.e. James Blish), THE ISSUE AT HAND, Advent 1964, Pp 14.)

Oh well!

The movement to "make science fiction into literature" * had a counterpart in jazz in the nineteen-fifties. "where do we go from here?" asked the jazz critics, and the most common answer was "third-stream music", supposedly a rapprochement between jazz and classical music. The results were just as feeble as QUICKSAND. The leaders of this movement, John Lewis and the Modern Jazz Quartet, were once described as "four soberly-dressed gentlemen with little beards, hitting little bells with little hammers", and all the time I was reading QUICKSAND I seemed to hear that sound of little hammers on little bells.

Meanwhile, behind the theorists' backs, Charlie Mingus was turning himself into one of the century's major musical figures by resolutely defying all (Cont/d)..

* Professor Willis McNelly, "The SF Novel in 1968", NEBULA AWARD STORIES 4. SPECULATION

the criteria of classical music and going back to the roots of jazz. He couldn't have got away with it if he hadn't had enormous talent; but he had, and he did, and jazz is still alive. To find a similar figure in SF I have to distort history a little - but not much, as far as the English-speaking countries are concerned - and go to Jorge Luis Borges. * His work is the purest of all SF, and defies all the exhortations to work with people rather than things or ideas; yet he is the only SF writer who can be sure of a hearing anywhere.

Of course, there are profound differences between the situations of jazz and SF. Most importantly, classical music is pretty well dead, while mainstream fiction, whatever people may say, is very much alive; also, SF has much deeper roots in literature than jazz has in European music. No doubt this is why "third-stream SF" has had the occasional success.*** It would be quibbling to say that GREYBEARD, for example, is not SF, and impossible to deny that it is a brilliant novel by any criteria. Nevertheless, I think SF writers would do well to remember Charlie Mingus and Jorge Luis Borges before unpacking their little bells.

I'd love to develop this analogy further (if you're interested it goes on, J.G. Ballard - Ornette Coleman, New Worlds - Archie Shepp, and John Tchicai, Philip K. Dick - Albert Ayler, Tom Disch - Cecil Taylor), but I've got too far away from QUICKSAND as it is, I'd better shut up.

Tony Sudbery, 1970

* (Ed) I thought for a moment that Tony was going to suggest Larry Niven, or maybe John Boyd. He'll probably hate me for the idea!

** (Ed) Do you mean such as FAIL-SAFE and THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN ?

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, by Ursula K. LeGuin (Ace 75c; Walker \$4.95)

Reviewed by Pamela Bulmer

(A full review of this novel by Pam Bulmer recently appeared in Vision of Tomorrow; this section did not appear in the magazine at the time.)

There are some serious defects in this book. Since Ursula LeGuin has obviously attempted more than an ephemeral light-entertainment novel it is valid to apply deeper, but at the same time basic, criteria for evaluation. This could have been a very satisfying science fiction book, exciting and vivid in its own right but at the same time passing perceptive and stimulating comment on society today. An analysis of why it is unsatisfying may also reveal why good science fiction is so rare, and why it is in many ways more difficult to write well than mainstream fiction.

Perhaps we make too high demands of the genre, for the science fiction writer needs to be not only a first-rate storyteller, he must, depending on the particular type of SF book he is writing, be also a first-rate novelist (a good storyteller need not be a novelist, but a novelist must be a good storyteller) and perhaps a scientist, biologist, sociologist, anthropologist, ecologist, etc. - and it is a big 'etc'. In short, he must combine an objective analytic mind interested in and curious about things, and a subjective sensitive mind interested in and curious about people.

A good storyteller must above all have a feel for 'structure' and in science fiction this structure has an additional layer. It has, or should have, the structure demanded of every story, and also the structure or logic of the extrapolated or imagined world. THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is deficient on both these counts.

The structure of a book is, of course, far more than plot. Plot is the basic skeleton of a book, the 'story' which can be condensed into a synopsis, whilst structure is the way that plot is presented. 'Story' selects the incidents; it is the eye for drama which paces each incident in such a way that the reader is coaxed, wheedled, enchanted, excited through the entire experience culminating in his complete seduction. It is this variety of pacing, the ability to place emphasis at the right time, in the right place and in the right way which is lacking here and which because of its absence gives the book a dead, heavy 'waddy' feeling.

There are climaxes of course, many of which are handled with sensitivity and perception but there is insufficient anticipation and tightening and relaxation of tension. It is rather like taking a walk along pleasant but flat country as opposed to a ramble across broken country where fresh and unexpected delights can be seen from every hilltop.

The science fiction structure or 'internal logic' is also not completely convincing. Mrs LeGuin conveys very realistically the feeling of living on a cold world by closely observed accurate details, and the journey across the ice is particularly convincing. But it could just as easily have been an account of a polar journey on this planet... What is lacking is an adventurous imagination. Too many of the different aspects seem to have been put in to assure the reader that this planet is alien, rather than evolving inevitably from the original concept.

Plastics, electricity and obscure heating forms mentioned in the novel imply heavy industry and an advanced technology. The author postulates a long period of steady but slow cultural change, but the medieval flavour of Karhide is of a nation on whom technological advance has been imposed from outside too quickly, without giving the culture time to adapt. Their form of government seems to have no understandable foundation, since a manipulated monarch presupposes power factions, and power must draw its strength from somewhere. Though fear is itself a force it must have some basis, such as personal strength or magnetism or Divine Right. The control of the population which is presupposed for the reaction to Estraven's peremptory sentence as a traitor seems inconsistent where assassination and murder are frequent.

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is liberally seasoned with the enigmatic inscrutable philosophy of the Orient, which has the virtue of sounding profound. A number of themes are worried at -- nationalism, the paradox of Yin and Yang (which supplies the title), acceptance of the unknowable -- but the scales are kept balanced, leaving the reader with no clearly-defined created world of values and attitudes from which to draw his conclusions.

What these reservations add up to is a lack of vigour and verve. Nevertheless it is a charming book with some delightful passages, and the little myths of the planet could stand separately as very good fantasy short stories. There is plenty of material for discussion within its pages and this aspect alone satisfies one of the chief pleasures of reading science fiction.

Pamela Bulmer, 1970

* Another review of the novel appeared in SPECULATION-25 by Brian M. Stableford; the above is a section of a longer review intended for Vision of Tomorrow.

FOR REVIEW IN FUTURE ISSUES:

THE POLLINATORS OF EDEN by John Boyd (Gollancz 25s); ANYWHEN by James Blish (Doubleday \$4.95); INDOCTRINAIRE by Christopher Priest (Faber 28s); NINE PRINCES IN AMBER by Roger Zelazny (Doubleday \$4.50);

THE BRIAN ALDISS REVIEW SPOT: - "The Labyrinth-Maker"

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN, By Josef Nesvadba (Gollancz 30s)
Translated by Iris Urwin from the Czech.

Reviewed by Brian W. Aldiss

A woman doctor writes a letter to the Scientific Council to report some strange happenings on Noble Island in the Pacific. She does not date her letter; we soon gather that she is writing at a date when disease has become almost a forgotten thing on Earth.

She follows a research worker called Ivan to the mysterious island, where she is stranded after her helicopter crashes. It proves to be an island of amputees, presided over by a famous professor of surgery. The woman doctor is terrified, and full of sorrow for what has happened to the armless and legless inhabitants. When Ivan appears, he too is a victim of deep surgery.

The woman's horror deepens when she finds that these men have voluntarily undertaken to have their limbs removed. Ivan tells her, "We shall make our bodies smaller, get rid of unnecessary organs." In this way, they can economise on weight in rockets and travel far into the cosmos. Art, music, sport - these mean nothing to them; science has all their love.

She has begun to feel fond of Ivan. To save him from the madness of the island, she tries to tempt him to her. "In the moonlight, I walked back and forth along the water's edge, singing songs I remembered from childhood. I may have danced too, I don't remember, but suddenly I felt as though my own thoughts, my voice, my legs, thighs and breasts, the dark hair I was twisting up with a silver ribbon, could all help somehow to save these men."

To be brief, they do not help. The woman is told she must leave or also become an amputee. She leaves and makes her report. She stresses that she has described the symptoms of a disease - a disease that may have been endemic since the beginning of civilisation; the mutilation of the human organism by its own particular degenerative process.

Such is the synopsis of one of Nesvadba's eight tales 'Doctor Moreau's Other Island'. I use it not because it is the best, but because it is the shortest in the collection, and Nesvadba's plots can be amazingly labyrinthine. Here, the plot hardly exists, but one is left with certain typical Nesvadba ingredients, such as the way people are set to follow or check up on each other, the way in which long reports have to be made frequently, and the way in which most of the characters are involved in ludicrous-sounding but menacing institutions - in this story, besides the Scientific Council, we have a Cosmological Institute, complete with Professor of Elemental Research, and the Institute for Research into the Curvature of the Universe. Such ingredients remind us that these stories were written in Prague, Kafka's city.

Sudden twists and revelations in the narrative - it is always darker than you think - are characteristic of Nesvadba, as is the way he depicts life, sane sensual normal life, as being surrounded by conspiracy, threatened by insane doctrinaire beliefs. To convey this sense of conspiracy, his methods are oblique, and the message rarely as unshrouded as in 'Doctor Moreau's Other Island'. One of Nesvadba's favourite conspiracies is the one between politics and science, a topic rarely touched on in Anglo-American science fiction - or Russian, for that matter. In 'Inventor of His Own Undoing', a scientist marries a woman in order to get a job in her father's institute. In 'Expedition in the Opposite Direction', the connection

(Cont/d) ..

between physics and politics is neatly wrapped-up as part of the tale, a bizarre time-travel story.

To anyone whose sense of life is labyrinthine, this volume will be immediately welcome. To any SF readers who remember the fustian controversy of the nineteen-sixties about New versus Old Wave and still cry 'A plague on both your houses!', this volume will be doubly welcome, for Nesvadba is plainly untouched by that teacup storm. He is neither New nor Old, but Himself. The most deadly weapon in his armoury is deployment of plot - used not as mechanical device but as an integral expression of what I take to be his attitude to life. This is perhaps best exemplified in long stories like the title story and 'The Lost Face'.

Any reader who suspects that plot is out-of-date in story-telling, might like to consider that all but two of these stories were published in Czech in 1964. Since then, time has added a painful plot-twist of its own; since the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia, the bureaucratic toils in which Nesvadba's characters labour must seem more close to the truth than ever before.

The stories are unmistakeably science-fiction; yet they tell us much about the atmosphere of present-day Prague - as if Nesvadba had an uncanny predictive sense nearer to that of Kafka than Arthur Clarke. They could hardly be mistaken for the work of either a Russian or a Western writer.

Josef Nesvadba was born in Prague in 1926. He has a doctor's degree and is a psychiatrist by profession. He was at the London World Convention in 1965, and will probably attend the International SF Symposium in Osaka, Japan, in the autumn of this year. He is well-known as a writer in Czechoslovakia; one of his stories is included in NEW WRITINGS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, edited by George Theiner, which Penguin Books published last year.

Nesvadba has had several books published in Prague, and we can only hope that Gollancz will bring some of them out over here; for there is one quality - I believe a vital one - of Nesvadba's that remains to be mentioned which sets him apart from most of his fellow writers who deal in terrible things, and which, incidentally, again is a Kafkaesque quality; I refer to his sense of humour. His ability to be amusing on serious subjects is as valuable as it is rare.

This ability shows not only in a story like 'The Trial Nobody Ever Heard Of', a nice anti-bureaucratic frolic with anti-war trimmings, told in a jocular style that indicates the author is not expecting us to take him at face value. Consider also the title story.

Constantly extolling his faith in reason, Lord Esdale obeys a telepathic request from his wife by going to visit some prehistoric caves in Spain. His wife now lives with some yeti up in the Himalayas; the attraction is mutual. Lord Esdale was going to mount an expedition to reclaim her but, at the last moment, he lost his fortune in the Great Slump. In Spain, he almost gets killed by the forces of one General Franco, just moving into power. When he has recovered sufficiently, he makes his way to Moravia, where he needs to contact a man of whom he has heard who forges prehistoric carvings; on his way, he passes through Vienna, where men are marching about in brown shirts and black boots.

Esdale passes out of the story still engaged on his mad quest, still clinging to his faith in reason, despite all he has seen. The narrator of the story is the man who forges the prehistoric carvings; he also has his own crazy concerns, and believes in reason without emotion. So he leaves his beautiful wife to go potholing with his lordship and breaks his leg. All is incredible, but entirely logical. (Cont/d)..
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Most of Nesvadba's characters represent humours or traits; their worldly successes are always marginal although their defeats are often surprisingly minor. It is interesting that a psychiatrist should spare us the psychological depths of characterisation; he has evolved a fiction in which the complexities of the human mind are acted out in fabulous many-knuckled plots. These immensely enjoyable stories belong to science fiction of that rare and peculiar order which does not demand that we take its literal meaning literally. Lively surface detail and a sense of humour relieve the undercurrent of despair. In their tenacity, cynicism, mystifications, and cheerful defeatism, they bring the Prague in which they were written vividly to mind; they also form one of the most irresistible books of the year.

Brian W. Aldiss, 1970.

THE ISLE OF THE DEAD by Roger Zelazny (Ace 'Special' 60c)

Reviewed by R.G. Meadley

Roger Zelazny's new novel, ISLE OF THE DEAD, trades almost obscenely on the author's reputation. It is the merest synopsis of a story, bulked out with tedious reflections on life by a supposed immortal, the hero. It touches on almost all the ideas which might contribute to a reasonable, trad space fantasy, but not one is developed to any degree, nor do the mass suffice to season the doughy weight of fill-

Francis Sandow, alias Shimbo of Darktree, Shrugger of Thunders, playboy /ing. immortal, Pei'an deity and millionaire worldscaper, is lured from his private planet retreat to rescue assorted companions of his boring past who have been resuscitated as bait for the revenge of Shimbo's traditional enemy Belion, alter-ego of Green Green, a Pei'an renegade with a personal grudge against Sandow.

Most of the book is build-up, the action seen in glimpses through Sandow's prattling monologue on the American Dream, an interminable mixed metaphor employing Tokyo Bay, gratuitously afloat with condoms, and the tree Ygdrasil. Towards the end the plot accelerates slightly to an unsatisfactory denouement; unsatisfactory because the book has insisted on the devious complexity of Pei'an revenge, but delivers a turgid roughhouse. As always, whenever the meagre action tries to break through the philosophising the possibility of good things is hinted at, but none of them transpire. The only advantage of this book's manifest faults is that they effectively disguise the complete absence of character portrayal.

Had less space been wasted on babbling inanity, less effort on trying to cram in Donne, Weber, Jung and God knows who else (a melange of irrelevant high-school cultural reference), and more time spent developing the anyway mediocre plot, this might have made a reasonable romp. As it is the book shows itself to be merely a hasty miscalculation of the crudest requirements for an idiot market, overloaded with trivial and endless whimsey.

R.G. Meadley.

* It might be felt that we have recently been unkind to Roger Zelazny (with Franz Rottensteiner's piece in the last issue) and that three separate reviews of ISLE OF THE DEAD are more than enough. As you might guess, I had trouble finding a reviewer for the novel, and then three possibilities materialised at once. At a risk of influencing the outcome I'd like to comment that Zelazny's new book NINE PRINCES IN AMBER is also out for review, and that once again SPECULATION will be less than laudatory, in all probability. *

OTHER BOOKS FOR REVIEW:-- UBIK by Philip K Dick (Rapp & Whiting 28s); THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS by Brian W Aldiss (Faber 35s); BEYOND THE BEYOND by Poul Anderson (Gollancz 30s); THE SANTAROGA BARRIER by Frank Herbert (Rapp & Whiting 28s); WORLDS BEST SF 1970 (Ace 95c); YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN by Wilson Tucker (Ace 75c); THREE FOR TOMORROW (Gollancz 28s); NIGHTWINGS by Robert Silverberg (Walker \$4.95).

THE SPECULATION CONFERENCE, 14th June 1970

Beginning our afternoon session at Cannon Hill, after an excellent lunch, was James Blish, to whom we had previously awarded the title "The Good, the Bad and The Indifferent". Broadly, this was intended to give Mr Blish opportunity to discuss some examples of each in the field of science fiction, as well as being a super-ficially clever little title which pleased me enormously when it was first dreamed up. Since we were not running too badly late at the time we also invited questions at the end of Mr Blish's talk, and these are reproduced here. The text of the talk is from Mr Blish's draft rather than as-recorded.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE INDIFFERENT by James Blish

Science fiction is a difficult genre to criticise because in its childhood it was considered to be beneath criticism. It is, fundamentally, a 20th-Century phenomenon, and as such began as a branch of pulp writing, subject only to those canons of construction which the editors of pulp magazines believed added up to a good adventure story for a mass audience. Some of those influences still remain, and not all of them are bad, either; but now that we find mainstream literary critics looking at science fiction, we find them baffled and taken aback by the remaining pulp stigmata, and unable, by and large, to get past them to whatever may be of worth in modern science fiction. For the same reason, there is not yet much of a critical literature about science fiction; we have had to start, belatedly, from scratch.

My own published criticism of science fiction, which dates from 1952, is narrow in focus; my intention has always been to try to supply to the writers of science fiction the kind of criticism of their literary techniques which nobody else but Damon Knight was supplying. I am aware that criticism has many other mansions, and indeed I have knocked timidly at some of them; but as a critic of science fiction, my approach has been designedly and exclusively technical. I ask you to bear this self-imposed restriction in mind throughout the brief remarks which follow. My ways of judging the good, the bad and the indifferent in science fiction are not value judgements or moral strictures, or aesthetic responses; they are only assessments of degrees of technical competence.

Our conference today is running under the general title of "Speculative literature". The use of the word "speculative" to denote science fiction and the fringe areas around it seems to have been begun by Robert A. Heinlein back in 1947; but it has only recently caught on. There seem to be two reasons for this; first, some people are now embarrassed by what they think to be the pulp connotations of "science fiction", and want a name that sounds more respectable, and perhaps more acceptable to the academic community; and second, there is a small but highly vocal group of editors and writers in the field who are innocent of any knowledge of science, and want a label that will cover what they do.

It seems to me that the new term is not much of an improvement. Those who promulgate it seem not to have noticed that all fiction is speculative, and that science fiction differs from other types of fiction only in its subject-matter.

Surely a good label ought to tell us what that subject-matter is, as do the terms "historical novel", or "western story". Nor can we call it "future fiction", since that leaves out a lot of the territory --- for example, the parallel-worlds story or time-travel into the past. No, I am afraid that if there is any single subject which dominates this genre, it is science and technology, and that Mr Gernsback's term is therefore still the best we have. It has a virtue, also, which has gone relatively unnoticed; its grammatical form, cognate with terms like "detective story", also distinguishes it from a recognisably different class of work, of which ARROWSMITH and the novels of C.P. Snow are examples. These are not science fiction novels, but novels of science.

I start with this question of terminology because before we undertake to shoot down bad science fiction, we ought to know what kind of animal we are gunning for. I therefore propose to rule out of my consideration any story which does not contain any trace of any science, on the grounds that on the contrary, good science fiction must not only contain some science but depend upon it; as Theodore Sturgeon points out, the story ought to be impossible without it.

A further qualification is also important. It is a matter of fact that science fiction today is one form of commercialised category fiction. Once one examines the implications of this statement, much that is wrong about modern science fiction is instantly explicable, though perhaps no less regrettable. For this fact we owe that same Mr Gernsback a blow to the chops. Prior to 1926, science fiction could be published anywhere, and was; and it was judged by the same standards as other fiction. Some of the pre-1926 work looks naive to us now, but unredeemably dreadful work almost never got past the editor's desks. Today it does so regularly, because there are magazines with deadlines who cannot appear with blank pages, and there is also a firm and ever-widening audience which will devour any kind of science fiction and rarely reads anything else. This is a situation already quite familiar to us in the field of the detective story. Once Gernsback created a periodical ghetto for science fiction, the gate was opened to the regular publication of bad work; in fact, this became inevitable.

I can easily use myself as a horrible example. Of the first thirteen stories that I sold, all in the very early 1940's, only two had any recognisable shred of merit. The other eleven nevertheless saw print, because there were many magazines then and I came cheap. The fact that I knew absolutely nothing about the craft of fiction, and indeed I didn't even begin to learn until after the War, had no bearing on the situation, which was governed solely by deadlines, money, and a whole lot of white space.

Editorial standards rose sharply in that decade, but this did not, of course, abolish the production of execrable work --- as anyone can testify who has the misfortune to remember the collaborations of Randall Garrett with Lou Tabakow, Bob Silverberg and Larry Janifer. Under present conditions, such trash is the inevitable and perhaps necessary ooze in which the gems will continue to be imbedded.

We must not allow this to put us off, or allow the outsider to use it to put us down. Perhaps some of you saw the item in The Sunday Times last January in which a British scientist who apparently had something to do with the "Dr Who" show was quoted as having decided to go in for science fiction on a bigger scale. He added in the next breath, "Of course most science fiction is utter rot", thus establishing his purity and, I suppose, indirectly proclaiming his intentions to improve us. (Judging by 'Dr Who' he is not leading from strength.) This is a very familiar attitude; again to quote Ted Sturgeon, "Never before in the history of literature has a field been judged so exclusively by its bad examples."

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I have a counter-ploy which I use on such people which is sometimes effective; I ask them, "How many good novels of any kind have you read lately?" Occasionally you can trap your opponent into admitting that he hasn't in fact read anything in the past twelve months but VALLEY OF THE DOLLS, or that the only modern science fiction he has ever opened was THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, and then you've got him by the scruff; but you have to know your man fairly well to bring this one off.

In criticism, as in teaching, there is no substitute for knowing the subject-matter thoroughly -- and also, knowing as much of the surrounding, larger ground as you can possibly cover. People who read nothing but science fiction and fantasy -- the Moskowitz syndrome -- are fundamentally non-readers, just as people who read nothing but detective stories are non-readers; their gaping jaws signal not the sense of wonder, but the utter absence of any thought or sensation at all. They are easy to spot by their reactions when a fifty-year-old storytelling innovation finally reaches science fiction; they are either utterly bowled over by it and proclaim it the wave of the future, or they find it incomprehensible and demand the return of E.E. Smith, who, unfortunately, is dead.

In other words, the subject matter of science fiction criticism is not science fiction but literature as a whole, with particular emphasis upon philosophy and craftsmanship. I stress philosophy not only because science is a branch of it, but because all fiction is influenced by the main currents of thought of its time, and to be unaware of these is like having no windows on the east side of the house; you don't get to see the sun until the day is half over. Craftsmanship should be an obvious item, but I am perpetually startled by how many science fiction readers, editors, and writers try to get by on intuition instead; as for the critics in science fiction, the only ones whose published work show are awareness of writing as a craft are Damon Knight and Sour Bill Atheling -- and before you conclude that I am blowing my own horn, let me add that it is profoundly dissatisfying for a creative writer to find that half the informed technical criticism he can find in his chosen field has been written by himself under a pen name.

This point emphasises, also, that criticism, like creative writing, is essentially a lonely art quite unrelated to sales figures or annual popularity contests. Colin Wilson, in his first and best book, remarked that the plots of Dostoevski novels resemble sofa pillows stuffed with lumps of concrete. God knows what he would have said of the plot, if that's the word I'm groping for, of the typical A. Merritt novel, but it is a lovely image and quite just, no matter what one thinks of Dostoevski's strengths in most other departments; bad construction is bad construction, and the fact that millions of readers have failed to detect it means nothing more than does the fact that millions of people have bought defective automobiles, or believed every word that came out of the mouth of Sen. Joe McCarthy.

The awards are equally unreliable guides, and for the same reason. The list of the Hugo winners in the science fiction novel is not quite as depressing as a summary of the Pulitzer prizes, but give us an equivalent amount of time and we may well beat the Pulitzer jury by miles. Is there a soul who is now alive who remembers THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT, by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley, which in 1953 drew the second Hugo ever awarded a piece of fiction? Unfortunately, I do, and I wish I didn't. In the succeeding year, the award for the most promising new author went to Robert Randall, the pseudonym of the Garrett-Silverberg collaboration. And lest you accuse me of shooting sitting ducks, let me add that of the four Heinlein novels which won Hugos, only one is a work of genuine merit, and one is a borderline case; while one took the award away from Kurt Vonnegut's THE SIRENS OF TITAN, which was not only the best science fiction novel of its year, but one of the best ever written. The 1968 novella award to Philip Jose Farmer is a plain case of the bowling

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over of non-readers by daring innovations taken lock, stock and barrel out of the "Cave of the Winds" chapter of Joyce's ULYSSES, which first saw print in The Little Review in 1919. As for the Nebula Awards, some of these can be explained only as the product (in the arithmetical sense) of indefatigable log-rolling and pathological faddism.

Why should we expect otherwise? Literature, as Richard Rovere has remarked, is not a horse-race; there are no winners and not even any final posts to pass. I am even prepared to entertain the notion that my own Hugo was undeserved, though if I do not hear cries of "No, no", I shall stomp off the platform in a huff. (Solitary cry of "No, no") Well, it's a good thing I brought my wife.

Literary merit is built into the work regardless of who sees it, or how soon he sees it; there is no absolutely reliable guide but the judgement of time, exactly as Matthew Arnold said. No individual critic has the lifespan to wait time out -- observe, for instance, the fluctuating reputations of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Johann Sebastian Bach -- and his only recourse is to make himself the master of his subject as best he can, and defend his perceptions of the good, the bad and the indifferent against juries, shifts in taste, ignorance, popularity contests and all other forms of mob action -- including other critics who are trying to create or mount bandwagons.

And there is one other defense the critic has, if he has the heart for it. If he does, it will save him a lot of acrimony, and vastly enlarge his own appreciation of the work he is criticising. Unhappily, it is the rarest of all critical attributes, as well as the most admirable.

He should not be afraid to change his mind.

James Blish 1970

SOME QUESTIONS ON THE ABOVE SPEECH:

(Unknown): "You say SF is a fundamentally modern form, that it emerged around 1926. I wonder if you have any ideas as to what produced the prospective audience for material like this? "

(Blish): "I suspect that it was something in the nature of the Lisbon earthquake which shook the modern Western world down to its theological foundations. Suddenly we realised that God, if he existed, was not good, and if he was not good he was not God, and the whole structure of the unchanging theological system began to crumble. At the same time, as Brian pointed out this morning, there was the impact of Darwinism, and the whole climate of opinion shifted, from that of being a 'box universe', in which we were all comfortable in our various ways, and if we weren't we were ungrateful, to realising that the Universe is a process, an open-ended process. Again, as Brian has said, Wells was the man to verbalise this feeling, and in the course of it he hit upon almost every single individual theme in science fiction, and still is the best example of most of them. The man was right for his times, and whether he was reflecting them or creating them is an open question. "

(Unknown): "You could point also at that time to writers like Kipling, who wrote the 'Aerial Board of Control' stories. But why did science fiction first become popular in America?"

(Blish): "Kipling was an exceedingly good SF writer, and is still among the best. He too was suffering from this same sudden explosive opening of the box Universe. As to America, I don't know, but will point out that historically SF became popular in America largely through the works of overseas authors. Amazing
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Stories subsisted for some time, you'll remember, solely upon reprints. Mr Gernsback had a very hard time getting any original work for a couple of years. Then he tried to get it from scientists, like Eric Temple Bell, and people of that stripe, who wrote imaginatively but at the same time very stodgily, and it was only with the development of the true adventure pulp that went out for a mass market that SF began to develop its own stable of new and original writers. It was a slower process than we sometimes think it was. It all seems like a new field to us still - at least it does to me - but in fact its birth pangs were quite long.

(McNelly): "You were speaking by and large of technical criticism - the technique of writing, and so on. I wonder if you could say something about other criticism of science fiction?"

(Blish): "The largest body of SF criticism, as with any criticism, has been the Spingarnian, or impressionistic kind, which looks at the work in question and then describes the critic's personal reactions to it. That does not in fact say anything about the work itself, but is creating a new work of art, large or small, using the original as a spring-board. This is the commonest form of criticism in any field, although most of the critics don't know that that is what they are doing. There has been quite a bit of absolute value-judgement in SF, for which I can only refer the reader to C.S. Lewis's AN ESSAY IN CRITICISM, in which he disposes for all time, it seems to me, of the whole question of value-judgement of literature. Beyond that, the main body of SF criticism has been the Moskowitz kind, which is criticism of infinite regress. You look at one story and say "That reminds me of a similar story back there" and that one reminds you of a similar story back here like the picture on a Quaker Oats box!

"Once you do get back there, all you discover is Moskowitz digging through piles of old magazines! This kind of critic believes that every idea comes from something else that the author has read. It is utterly useless even in the historical sense, eventually. Almost all SF criticism that we know today, and that has been widely published, has been of this influence-detecting kind, and in my opinion it is pernicious. In the first place because there were so few ideas in SF to begin with that were worth borrowing, and in the second place because the ideas don't matter anyway, it's the way they're handled that matters."

(Weston); "Could I ask what do you think of Algis Budrys as a critical writer?"

(Blish): "Budrys is largely a Spingarnian critic, the personality of Budrys stands in front of the book he is reviewing, and the book is passed through Algis' eyes. He does it very well - I would rather read A.J.'s impressionistic criticism than anyone else's that I can think of in this field, because he himself interests me. And if the critic doesn't interest you, then Spingarnian criticism is a dead loss. The critic has got to be a personality in his own right to bring it off. Judith Merrill is a Spingarnian critic, but it so happens that her personality doesn't interest me for five minutes, so she doesn't get away with it with me, whereas A.J. interests me profoundly. But in both cases it is strictly Spingarnian, with a little mixture of the absolute value-judgement of the eschatological kind."

(Parkinson): "You mentioned various forms of criticism, but there is one which I think you missed. This is criticism of content. Science fiction has placed great importance on content, on idea-as-hero, and when you criticise somebody for using, say, the convenient shorthand "...and then the overdrive goes on..." you are in fact criticising them for their lack of content at that point. This seems to me to be a valid critical exercise, and a lot of criticism goes into just this. I can remember an article of yours about Heinlein's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND which was essentially one of content."

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(Blish): "Well; not essentially, but a lot of it was devoted to my feeling that Heinlein had not sufficiently rationalised his Heaven. I will say though that criticism of the science in a story is not really criticism of its content but of its trappings. I do wish that people were more careful with their trappings, but really the content is not the amount of fact that fiction contains. Fiction doesn't operate, after all, essentially in the world of fact, it operates in the world of the emotions. The whole idea of a story is to move you and make you a different person at the end than you were at the beginning. If of course the trappings are badly-contrived the story won't do that, because it loses you right away.

Bradbury has that effect on me invariably. Every time he utters the word 'Mars' I realise he's talking about some place he's never even bothered to read up on. So that the sense of conviction for me is completely lacking with an author who's that sloppy with the facts. In the same way I cannot believe in Mickey Spillane when he tells me he can fire a bullet at a man and hear that bullet hitting the man. Mickey Spillane does not know that bullets travel faster than sound! So what else is new, what does he know, what can he tell me? If he's weak on other points, as he is on that one, then he's a gone goose so far as I'm concerned.

But these are trappings. The science in a science fiction story is not its content, its the setting, and perhaps its precondition. But the content is the emotional content, as it is in all fiction."

Second speaker during the afternoon was Ken Bulmer. Those of you who previously heard his THIRDMANCON address in 1968 will know how entertaining his talks can be. At the same time they make transcription unusually difficult. "My technique for giving a talk," he said, "in case you've never come across it before, is to write out a talk, completely, and then carry out a running commentary on what I've written." And this is precisely what Ken did at the conference, complete with ad-libbed quips and much ado about reading alternately from two or three different texts of speeches on various subjects. The first paragraph will give you a sample.

The difficulty comes in transcribing Ken's talks. On the one hand there is a serious, reasoned speech, which is woven about with a fine display of wit and humour that does not, unfortunately, come over quite as well on paper. So I've taken the easy way out, as I did with his 1968 speech, and am presenting here the serious part of Ken's remarks, transcribed from the tapes as nearly complete as I can make it.

I might make a personal observation that at a time when too many other SF writers are taking themselves and their words all too seriously, Ken Bulmer has if anything the opposite trouble. No matter how welcome this is, I can't help but feel it is a pity in some ways. If asked I'm sure the entire audience at Cannon Hill would unhesitatingly identify Ken as "the chap who gave the 'funny' talk", and yet as you'll see below this speech makes some fundamentally important points about the position of science fiction.

Unfortunately by this time we were running a little too late for questions. PRW

A PERSONAL VIEW by Kenneth Bulmer

When Peter Weston sent me the titles of the speakers' talks I was intrigued by James Blish's title. Then when I saw the order of the speakers, I understood immediately what he meant by "the good, the bad and the indifferent"! Of course, later on we shall hear Brian Aldiss' reaction to the "indifferent" slot, but as for myself I'm delighted to be numbered among the bad boys. As everyone knows, villains have always had more vitality and have been more interesting than heroes. Mind you - I wouldn't care to laugh at James Blish - even when he is making a joke!

But now for the serious part:

Coleridge's resounding phrase "a willing suspension of disbelief", which is so essential to reading fantasy, and to many modern novels, does not fully apply to a reading of science fiction. I would hazard a guess that no-one here believes in the djinn, or that King Solomon had to imprison them in bottles for Eternity. But I suspend disbelief in order to enjoy a story involving that plot-device, and I look to the writer to develop some other theme as a justification for using what has so often been used before. But with SF, the disbelief we are asked to suspend is far more subtle.

We are in fact asked to believe, in a positive way. SF was asking us to believe that men would land on the Moon from the earliest days that science fiction writers began to speculate about the future. We were asked to believe that surgeons would replace defective organs with spare parts from other bodies. We were once asked to believe that people could sit in their own homes and see and hear events going on at the same time at the other side of the world, using a device called a video, or a telescreen - or I think they call it TV now.

These and many other ideas called for a positive action of belief. They were of a different order to the old suspension-of-disbelief concept. They possessed a life of their own outside the printed page, long after the book had been put down. I exclude here any supernatural or occult material, for that comes into a different category with entirely different measurable devices.

In those days, readers of SF who really thought that one day men would walk on the moon were scoffed at ungently. To talk about these things in class or among friends was to invite ridicule. Parents thought nothing of confiscating and burning priceless copies of Astounding and Amazing. One cause of legitimate concern on their part, I must acknowledge, lay in the vivid and violent covers. But cloth-bound books, even by masters like Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.G. Wells fell under this draconian interdiction.

In the days of paleolithic SF, in the pulp era, men and women existed in science fiction stories, without genitals. Readers, lusting after rockets to the Moon, and immortality, and BEEMs, passed over, without a flicker of an eye, this astonishing marvel of biology! Mad Scientist's Daughter - evocative words, is all that need detain us here. (I suppose the Mad Scientist was mad in part because of the unfortunate deficiency. Because of course he couldn't determine how his daughter arrived!) But certainly in the aftermath of general fiction, the idea of sex has caught on in SF.

From my own experience I can confirm that you had to be pretty tough-minded, or cunning, or indifferent to ridicule to read SF regularly. This brought up a breed of readers with a strong sense of comradeship and loyalty. They could see that SF, however badly-written and rubbishy it was, and however much there was that masqueraded as SF -- and gave the field its bad name -- really was a form of expression distinct from the mundane writing all around. They saw the potential of SF that is still nowhere-near realised today.

One can trot out all the cliches of prophecy, of preparing for a brighter tomorrow, of understanding the pathways of scientific progress, and coming to terms with man's inner nature. One can, being honest, admit to enjoying the rattling good adventure yarn. But having said all that, one is still left with a great mysterious source of attraction and delight in science fiction that no amount of rationalisation can explain away. The brotherhood, and in its own important way the sisterhood, of the SF addict was born. The history of science fiction is now in course of being written, here and there, and many old-timers will buttonhole you and spill all the SPECULATION

grisly details of their first encounter with SF, how they hid the magazines in their bedrooms, and tore the covers off. I was sent a whole heap of ripped-off covers by Arthur Clarke — and welcoming them as I did, I was sorry he didn't send the magazines as well!

The whole fascinating history and tradition of science fiction fandom can be studied, and a rewarding study it is too. But that sense of being 'special', of being a member of a group apart, of being one of a persecuted minority, gave science fiction a glamour that in today's proliferation of supermarket displays of paperbacks is totally lacking.

Of course it was absolutely right that in its own time SF should leave the 'ghetto' — as some axe-grinding propagandists rather hysterically termed that enclosed world — and see about shaking-up the static and stagnant world of mundane fiction. Many SF stories deal with ideas of preparing a separate pool of genes, and then at the right time of letting them loose upon the genetic pool of humanity, with beneficial results. Science fiction itself was one such isolated genetic pool, and the ferment still goes on. SF ideas and concepts, the images of SF, are now common currency in the world of fiction at large, where they have given a fresh impetus to decaying forms.

Recently we have been descended upon by a monstrous regiment of academics. (McNelly: I leave now!!) Many of them merely repeated the postures of bygone days; the modern equivalents of incensed authority, schoolteachers, parents. Others saw in SF a cheap bandwagon for cut-price thinking. Others tried to use SF as a tool, with which to measure their own particular disciplines.

The divines, too, stepped in, with religious parallels and condescending nods towards some of science fiction's attitudes towards theological disputes and mysteries. And the mystics — they're still struggling to find out the inner core of SF's meaning, in defiance of the protean complexity of the various strands comprising SF.

But many academics did try, with varying results, to be helpful. To try to understand, and come to some understanding of, science fiction. I think all SF devotees welcome those who take SF on its merits, as well as its demerits, as it comes, and who are willing to learn and not stand back upon a pre-erected construct of their own prejudices.

Scientists are not the best people to write science fiction. There are a few excellent SF writers who are practising scientists, but very few. A scientist, if he is any good, must have limited his work to a very specialist approach to a single subject. This tendency has accelerated recently out of all proportions, and yet at the moment seems the only way to handle the masses of data daily being researched. The scientist is not only too close to his subject, and thus limited in handling anything else, in the same way that an ordinary person is, but more damagingly, he is as it were hypnotised by his discipline into accepting what present-day experiment tells him to be true. Thus he is inhibited from taking a wide-ranging swing at prophecy, of supposing, in the grandest sense. *

There are three or four examples here from real life to illustrate this. Penicillin: Fleming discovered this in 1928, but it was very difficult to grow, expensive, and laboratory techniques were needed. Then World War II came along and they needed penicillin — and the engineers and everyone else moved in to create it by the ton; using a different technique, looking at it from a different point of view.

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* To say nothing, Ken, of maybe not knowing the first thing about writing!

In the same way rocket engineers needed pumps of a very special rate of delivery, but couldn't think of any way to build the things. Then the firefighting men came along and said "We've got the pumps on the shelf - what size do you want?" It's the old "Wood-from-the-trees" syndrome!

Thus it is that inbuilt obstacles to progress are built by the experts. Not wilfully, but because they know what is currently happening in their disciplines. I have long, with many other writers, speculated on the creation of trans-disciplinary people, in order to correlate knowledge for the greatest possible good. If you suggest that the genetic engineering people, for instance, go right out on various attractive limbs in speculating upon the results of tailoring human beings, from their latest discoveries, I can only reply that in most cases they are merely mouthing old ideas from science fiction.

Now the SF writer is nowhere near as conversant with the scientific idea he picks up to use in his story as the scientist actually working on it. The scientist may scoff and say "that's impossible", and as far as I'm concerned he's right. But the writer, if he has any sense, can reply something to the effect that -- "If you wish to call this fantasy, then do so. I don't care. I'm concerned with showing the effect of this idea, the way in which people will react to it, and a million other things, most of them having a direct bearing on your work today. Neither of us knows whether this is the actual way your research may go, but it's a valuable exercise in humanity, to test out as many directions as we can".

We may now pass on to the 1970 edition of THE WORLDS BEST SCIENCE FICTION (Ace, 95c), a very good collection. But in this latest volume, the editors introduce a Panshin story thus:- "At the 1969 World S.F. Convention, Alexei Panshin debated with Larry Niven whether science, or man, is the proper study of science fiction".

Now at first the low level of intelligence and the wilful ignorance displayed by the very idea that SF writers would spend half-a-second on this, let alone debate it at a World Convention, must be a come-on, I thought, a joke, a send-up. In other words, Terry Carr is having a bit of a laugh at us. Then I wondered if this was another example of this dull traipse after profundity, through torturously-expressed and wordy dicta, dispersed by many of the new, self-adulatory circle of writers(applause).

Very briefly, then, to state the obvious; the study of man is the province of sociologists and their kind. The study of science is the province of scientists, and their kind. A broad spectrum of disciplines covers the study of man and science. As I've said before, mundane literature concerns itself with the reaction of man with man, human beings impacting and reacting with other human beings. Science fiction deals with human beings reacting with all the forces, both inside man and outside, that affect him.* Science and technology, the drug scene, automation and computers, space exploration and the population explosion, Science fiction deals with actions and reactions, as does mundane literature, and not, as the idiotic proposition dreamed up for Panshin and Niven would suggest, with either this half nor that half, man or science.

Having said that, one can go on. We all are aware that the SF scene has changed for the better over recent years, and much of that change can be attributed to new writers and a more liberal attitude towards the field in general. Any avante-garde movement must come on strong, it must try to destroy what has gone before, either overtly or implicitly. George Bernard Shaw (who is in a bit of an eclipse these days although his work may well return to favour) - his attacks on Shakespeare in context cannot damage Shakespeare's work. Our most recent 'new wave' writers have enriched

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* Or, as Fred Pohl says in his introduction to the DAY MILLION collection, "stories of our real world are a special and less imaginative kind of science fiction".
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science fiction, like the erroneously-called 'stream-of-consciousness' writers like Virginia Woolf have enriched the whole of literature. SF has accepted the old 'new wave' and is now advancing on various fronts, and assimilating its lessons. There will be another 'new wave' in the future, and another after that; if there were not to be, stagnation would be the inevitable result.

What is interesting is that those people who clamour for SF to return to the fold of so-called mainstream writing are blinkered. Now I leave aside here all questions of writing quality. SF has had some foul writers in its own ranks, and still has them. But the generality of 'mainstream' writing, taken over all its various examples, shows no better average. What SF is doing with validity is introducing SF concepts and common images to the mundane world. By definition, as soon as a work does contain SF concepts as part of its structure, then it becomes SF. It was thought at one time that a hybrid might be constructed, wherein all that was good in mundane literature could enhance the basic values of science fiction. But immediately, it becomes SF, simply because it no longer deals exclusively with man's reaction to man. I find this valuable. It is this liberating influence that makes SF, surely, the most exciting literature to emerge, for SF can say that man's reaction with man and man's reaction with the Universe, together make a literature far more satisfying to the latter end of the 20th Century than the literature that deals solely with man's reaction to himself.

We have been discussing the growth of SF, and it is clear that the early days saw the emergence of what can be called the naive era. This was the time when people thought, along with Wells, that mankind held in his brains and ability the keys to a worldwide prosperity on every level of life. Science could unlock the gates barring us off from the great and gracious life. To be a scientist then was a mighty thing!

But over the years, the climate of opinion changed. It was discovered, most often that one decision thought to settle a problem created fresh problems. You drive a super-highway through the sky in order to clear traffic jams, and thus stick a fuming monstrously noisy monster outside the bedroom window of a little old lady who's lived there all her life. You manufacture the Pill, to create worry-free sex lives, and you speed the spread of VD at an alarming rate. More and more people saw the way ahead becoming obscured, all the bright promises clouding over. Overpopulation, pollution, malnutrition, neuroses, politicians held in contempt, and economic system running with the governors tied down and the boilers popping rivets!

Disillusion set in, and disillusion with science itself, as if science alone was the culprit, marked the next stage of SF. So many stories knocking science appeared. Science, as is obvious, is a tool, a tool for understanding our environment, both macro- and micro-, and in the so-called 'soft' sciences, for understanding ourselves. And as the old saying goes, "bad workmen blame their tools". Science fiction is, or should be concerned with what is happening to people in the worlds it has conjured up. And, by extension, what might happen in worlds ahead if they follow the patterns continually emerging in fresh researches and technological applications.

We all know that the label 'science fiction' is in reality a misnomer, (and I prefer, as I have indicated, to let 'SF' speak for all the various brands). Because of this, science fiction, always a tender plant in the minds of the thoughtless, fluctuated in quality and appeal. They equated it with science. And a casual reading revealed the antipathy towards science in modern SF. The casual reader was bewildered — as well he might be. The high days of early SF, when science was really believed in as the means to a bright end, were gone.

Now undoubtedly there are many problems ahead — it's unnecessary to belabour them. Even the mundane Press recognises that SF has pointed out some of these dangers. But because the future looks dark and ominous, because man seems defiantly antipathetic towards perfectability, many SF writers have fallen back on what might be called

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a pre-fated attitude; "Man is evil, the world is evil, Science is the Devil. The poor deluded fools thought that science would bring universal light and brotherhood, and instead we seem to be entering a new Dark Age of proportions unthinkable to a man of the Renaissance."

So many times one hears would-be funny, facile remarks about 'how computers are going to take over'. A computer is a machine, a tool waiting to be used by man. I grant the case where some research indicates a development that in our present stage would not be to our advantage, but I do not believe that this will keep that particular scientific development under wraps for all time.

At the present moment in time, pollution appears to be one of our greatest problems. You have the needs and rightful aspirations of men, versus the profit motive. You have to put down the equation on both sides of the "equals" sign, you have to work out how you can handle it to a solution which will not injure humanity or the world of nature. That's perhaps beyond the capacity of the human mind and the human methods of today. Although perhaps it could be done in theory - but the practical difficulties are so great that out dismal band of no-hopers jump in with story after story detailing the final excreta-bubbling end for mankind! They claim that they are the realists that this is the way life is.

Of course that's the way life is at the moment, but I contend that it is part of SF's job to indicate that solutions can be found and must be found, and to indicate what they might be. Please let me make myself clear here. I am not phoo-pooing the very serious nature of the various problems confronting us. Nor am I in any way overlooking the intractable quality of human nature. There's very clearly a demoniac drive within mankind to his detriment. You may all totally subscribe to the theory that man is not perfectable. Voltaire with Candide has dealt with the "best of all possible worlds" nonsense.

What I am saying is that it is the job of SF, in whatever guise, to explore with every resource at its disposal all the avenues of hope for answers that do not end in atomic holocaust or pollution stagnation. I ask for no facile optimism - we know that from the schemes of betterment so often spring more and darker tragedies. You can say that what many modern SF writers of the no-hope school are doing is merely to parrot again and again the old tag "the road to hell is paved with good intentions".

Now although SF is widely acclaimed today by all manner of unlikely people, who a few years ago would have scoffed at SF readers as a bunch of nuts, and who have recently jumped on the bandwagon, it is this very acceptance and proliferation of SF that is at the root of its own current weakness. Science fiction is not a respectable literature. It is a literature of revolt. But there is so much of it now, most of it unreadable, that its sting has been drawn. It is accepted by the Establishment: "just another form of quasi-literature". Those who seek to do what I have indicated is impossible by definition, and re-unite SF with mundane literature, are hoping to make of SF a toothless, escapist literature.

SF is a disreputable form that goes against established authority, when that authority is manifestly incapable of visualising the future it is bringing upon us. But SF itself now shares a disrepute among those very people who should in its pages find the stimulus for questioning. I suggest that the hatred of science, so cosily fostered by SF, has recoiled upon itself. And it's not too far beyond the pale of possibility to suggest that SF itself must advance boldly into the territory of fantasy, in order once again to make itself a form of communication that will jolt no-hopers, complacent office-holders and ignorantly-prejudiced into a fresh awareness that "By God we're in a hole and we're going to be in a worse hole, but we can get out of it".

(Cont/d)..

SPECULATION

The misuses of scientific discovery and ideals have brought us to our present low state. But this does not mean that science itself can have no further help for us. If science was to be allowed to give us logical answers, and politicians had the courage to abide by them, the answers would be found and implemented.* I do not speak of science as some magical separate force, I do not speak of authoritarianism or a scientific autocracy. I ask for responsible reactions to problems. We all know that no-one is aware just who takes the decisions in government any more. The decisions just seem to grow up out of nowhere. And a decision that is right for 1970 can be drastically wrong for 1971. So it is that fantasy, which can penetrate between the crust of the single item that beclouds the issue - the human person himself - can be pressed into answering our questions about ourselves.

To sum up then, we are living at the present time in an era that has one remarkable difference from any other preceding era. Unlike many former civilisations obsessed with the past, or with the future beyond the grave, we are obsessed with what I might call "the future in the present". So intent is the current scene on the apparent concern with the present, that fanatical determination that "it's all happening now"; "I want it now"; that 'now' is all, that it has passed unnoticed that the impact of concern for the future has helped to correct this overriding desire for the present. Unnoticed, that is, except for those people who express concern for the future, and almost all of those are no-hopers.

You can pick almost any media channel and read forecasts of doom. And of course those forecasts seem right - because they have not been subjected to the rational processes of science fiction. And SF can indicate alternatives. Once that wild, revolutionary old trouble-maker gets to work on sober forecasts, pointing out that we can only speculate on the future, and that is all, then and only then will SF be doing the job that matters. And that job, incidentally, the purists will tell you debars it from consideration as a serious literature. To be genuinely optimistic it is necessary to look hard at the reality of now; fairy-tale optimism is useless.

- Kenneth Bulmer, 1970

* Trouble is, Ken, I don't think we'd like those answers. After all, there is a very 'scientific' and perfectly logical answer to the problem of overpopulation.

A somewhat subdued Brian Aldiss now appeared for the final talk, "Civil War in Science Fiction". Unfortunately I had omitted to brief him as to exactly what I had in mind when choosing that title, and so with some ingenuity Brian interpreted it as an excuse to talk about H.G. Wells and WAR OF THE WORLDS, his favourite subject at the time (this was a week or two after Brian's recording of a programme about Wells in Christopher Evan's series of radio programmes on SF). Originally I had intended that "Civil War" title to refer to the 'new wave' business, but by the day of the conference this didn't seem such a good idea and I was just as glad that Brian talked about something else. He also explained the reason for his reticence:-

"I've come here in rather low water because I'm now about $8\frac{1}{2}$ months gone. I have about a fortnight to finish a novel I've been on for a very long time. So, to change the metaphor, I'm suffering withdrawal symptoms from the world, and if I seem inarticulate it's because I'm battling away in the recesses of my mind with the Burmese jungle. So perhaps what I'm really talking about this afternoon is the SF novel I can write when I can break free from Burma."

That novel was the second in the HAND-REARED BOY epic, and was eventually completed a week or so after the conference. It is now being fought over by numbers of publishers offering vast sums of money, and Brian is, I believe, working at last on another science fiction novel, after thinking at one time that he'd never be able to write one again. PRW

SPECULATION

CIVIL WAR IN SCIENCE FICTION by Brian W. Aldiss

I've been wrestling with this title of "Civil War in Science Fiction!" I couldn't figure out what it meant. I thought I was supposed to speak for half-an-hour on Ward Moore's BRING THE JUBILEE !

But as far as I can see, civil war has always existed in any form of writing. Certainly it has always existed in a very healthy way in the SF field. Perhaps it even exists within every writer's breast, because it seems to me that the very term "science fiction" in itself seems to represent some form of civil war.

When a writer becomes excellent in his class there is a tendency for him to be booted into whatever his equivalent of the sixth form is, or to be elevated out like a rogue male elephant from the herd. And he then conducts a sort of civil war with his old buddies. The first example of this in the science fiction field was perhaps H.G. Wells, who was one of the rogue males par excellence.

Maybe I should apologise for speaking about H.G. Wells, but I'm going to go back to him later, particularly after a remark of Jim's there, about science fiction starting with Hugo Gernsback. I thought it started long before that. (I have the advantage of speaking last, you see, and yapping at these chap's heels. The sole content of my talk, such as it is, is to pick up the comments they made that I don't agree with! They can get back at me after for this.)

But perhaps Gernsback was himself a renegade in a way. He broke out and founded his own magazine, so that this in a way was a declaration of war on the rest of Western literature, a war which is still going on. Thank God we're winning at the moment, but at any time the tide is likely to change and presumably science fiction would go back into its hole. At least this is the sort of sense of desperation I think I detected in some of the things that have been said here today. I don't share that view.

For one reason, I see SF from perhaps a very provincial, or English point of view. It seems to me that it was very firmly established with H.G. Wells, and it didn't fade out in this country, it went on without taking a great deal of recognition of Gernsback. There was always a level of writers - I think we used to term them mainstream writers - who contributed science fiction. I've mentioned Rudyard Kipling, and in fact all the writers at the beginning of the century produced SF, one thinks of Chesterton, E.M. Forester, all sorts of people who wrote in this vein without being self-conscious and without thinking "My Christ, you know, when they get round to naming this they're going to see it is science fiction!"

So the science fiction tradition over here has I think been different from the States in that the writers have not been conscious of this continuity. Whether you regard the Gernsback thing as special I don't know. What has obviously been happening is that the two have come together, or rather, they came together in the '50's, quite dramatically. The hybrid of the pulp then revitalised this rather sort of shagged-out English rose, which we had over here, to produce I think among other things the "new wave", although I wouldn't like to attribute simple literary origins to these new movements. They obviously reflect the world outside, which is something science fiction should always do.

The other sort of 'civil war' that goes on, the way all writers hate each other and batter against the ideas of other writers who sit here amicably enough on the platform will always go on. We none of us agree about what we should be writing, or what the other people should be writing.

(Cont/d)..

SPECULATION

Now I want to deal with something James Blish said, about science fiction beginning in the pulps. I would like to lay out for your observation what I think is the perfect SF novel. I'm not saying it is the best one ever written, it is perfect in a technical sense; and this is going back to H.G. Wells, with THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, which I recently re-read.

It's a very good story, and it has three essential ingredients. (I'm not counting things like good writing, characterisation, I'm talking about the staple diet of the SF novel). It has first of all this scientific idea, which was fairly new in Wells' time, of contamination by bacteria. I say fairly new, because it was about as new as computers are now.

Wells' idea in WAR OF THE WORLDS was bacterial infection, and he planned very carefully in the novel so it comes as a surprise to you, you have nevertheless been alerted, and it is an intelligent surprise, not just a punch-line, because you are already informed about what bacterial contamination is.

The second point about WAR OF THE WORLDS is that it is very socially aware. That is, it is very good on social forms, on the economy of the day. You believe Wells is telling you what Victorian England was like, you never doubt that. So this immediately gives you a great deal of trust in anything that he tells you about his alien world. You believe in the little glimpses of Mars that you get here and there. I suggest that if Wells had got the contemporary scene wrong you would be very right to question what he tells you about the Martians. And this is I think where a lot of contemporary science fiction writers go wrong. You can't quite go along with their futures because you don't think they have the present-day right.

The third point that I think comes out excellently in WAR OF THE WORLDS is that overriding all this Wells has a philosophical idea - I will not say 'message', it doesn't come over as a message, but he has a moral idea, which is one you'll find in many of his other novels, including what is I think his masterpiece, THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU, and that is that intellect is worth nothing, and indeed worse than that, it is perhaps disastrous if it isn't linked with human sympathy.

I should perhaps add to these three ideas - the scientific idea, the sociological criticism, and the philosophical idea, another great value that is in the novel. And that is that Wells presents ghastly aliens. Beautifully done, and at the time they must have been absolutely shattering. And he's very careful to draw an exact picture of them within the scientific framework of his time, and make them as horrible as could be. You know, they have these little tentacles around their mouths, withered limbs, and just these enormous heads and brains.

Then when you're dizzy with the horror of these things, Wells slips in the idea that "now mankind too is learning to master machines. Perhaps these machines will serve him so well that in the future he will have no need for his own limbs, his brains will develop, and indeed the Martians may well represent the future development of humanity!" And this is cunningly worked into the plot, in a beautiful literary way, this concept that all life is one, we're all biological brothers. And in a sense the bacterial organisms that destroy the Martians are one with us, because we have lived with them for millions of years on Earth and so have reached a truce, a symbiosis, which the Martians failed to achieve.

Now this is all so beautifully integrated that you really don't notice it until you read the novel critically. I would suggest that science fiction stories in the pulps, on the whole, tended to throw overboard everything but the scientific idea. I think that in reaction to this many of the 'new wave' people have thrown away everything of these three ideas but the last, the philosophical idea. (Cont/d)..

Whether this helps to explain the pulps or the 'new wave' I don't know. But I think it might suggest to you that some of the very best science fiction writing was unfortunately written by Victorians. And in a sense we are all disinherited Victorians now. We are still living among the successes, problems, and defeats that were set in motion early in the last century. What we don't have now is the specific 'charge' that Wells could generate in his time. That is much more difficult for us to do now. I think this is one reason why science fiction here in the sixties has become a lot more cerebral. It's obviously a value-judgement to say whether it's better or not, but some of us now are a lot more interested even in its failures, because it is trying to achieve this sort of complexity.

What one would like to see, I think, is a grasp of this whole complexity, dealt with in a sort of modern equivalent of the simplicity H.G. Wells used. I don't mean that you should copy him, but if one could find a present-day equivalent of his simplicity then I think you might have a 'new wave' that is something like a tidal wave. *

I hope that a study of WAR OF THE WORLDS helps you. It seems to me that it would make things a lot clearer than would the study of science fiction criticism. I'm perhaps mistaken, Jim, but I thought you felt science fiction was slightly held in mockery. Science fiction is now in the air we breathe. People knock everything, but SF is on the whole very well and affectionately received. It is feted, and invited to exotic places like Rio de Janeiro and Birmingham. On the whole we are in fairly good standing. The dangers if anything are coming from it becoming a sort of 'easy wicket', so that the rot could easily set in. They surely had it good in the Forties, when science fiction was bad, and subversive, and Ken Bulmer's parents went through the world tearing up books and magazines!

C.S. Lewis made a point - James Blish brought in this worthy name - he had this idea (talking not apropos SF but of literature in general) that we were living in an age that had witnessed the death of religion, and what we were now seeing was literature being elevated to a religion-substitute. He claimed that we could see this by the elevation of new priests to the peerage (or priesthood), and to what he called acts of monstrous exegesis, and the worship of ancient and corrupt texts.

This may be very largely true. The odd thing is that this is what goes on in science fiction all the time. The worship of ancient and corrupt texts - and we know that the arch-priest of this is Moskowitz, and yet alas, instead of throwing them overboard we all make reference to them. I don't know what you think of the quality of Forties SF, but it's awfully noticeable that we are all in fact going over the same old ground. Instead of talking about the things science fiction should be talking about, we are looking inwards to SF itself all the time **

If C.S. Lewis is right, that literature is becoming a new religion, then I say it's a good thing! But writers should keep on writing in their own particular styles, and to hell with criticism! What I'm really saying is that it's very important not to reach conclusions, because by definition when you've reached a conclusion you've got to the end of the journey.

- Brian W. Aldiss, 1970

* While transcribing this, Brian, it struck me that this paragraph was probably the most significant of your speech. Could it be, I wonder, that this statement is a nutshell definition of what you have been looking for with your last half-dozen SF novels ?

** Something else I meant to say at the time and didn't think of it (and isn't that a definition of repartee?) - surely the reason we keep talking over the same ground is that 1) there is a time-lag during which new books and stories (Cont/d)

have to circulate before enough people have read them to make discussion possible. You'll notice in that show-of-hands we took at the end of the Cannon Hill conference (and which I haven't reproduced here) the most remembered books were all some 10-15 years old. TIGER, TIGER; DOUBLE STAR; PUPPET MASTERS; CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ, and others of a similar vintage. On that reckoning I think we can just about begin to discuss people like Zelazny at next year's Worcester convention with a fair hope that the majority of listeners will have read his books.

And 2), in case you thought I'd forgotten, it is my belief that the proper subject for science fiction writers to talk about is science fiction itself. They must obviously write about all the problems of the world, but at these conferences and conventions we don't want to hear about them. As evidence I offer the Sci-Con programme this year where the experiment was tried!

PRW

The final individual talk of the afternoon was given by Professor Willis McNelly of California State College, Fullerton, to open the panel discussion. There is a little story about this one, too. A month or so earlier I published SPECULATION 26 and rather craftily sent a copy to Prof. McNelly at his address in Eire, where he was staying to carry out research into the work of James Joyce. I reasoned that now, away from the day-to-day routine of academic life, was the ideal time to ask for material, and said as much in a covering letter.

Sure enough, back came a long, thoughtful letter, eminently suitable for publication. But unfortunately, before I could do anything more about it, Willis McNelly used these comments at Cannon Hill in an excellent parrying movement. PRW

WILLIS MCNELLY:

After a few of the remarks made this afternoon I feel somewhat beleaguered, because I am an academician and I am actively involved in science fiction criticism. I do not think the two are mutually antipathetic and while I realise that science fiction in the past has been raped by members of the academy who do not know a thing about science fiction, I do think however that SF can learn some things, aside from stylistic ones and the technical ones that Jim has been dealing with, and of course vice versa.

I'd like to think that we might ask some questions about the nature of SF that perhaps have not really occurred yet to science-fictioners themselves. Science fiction is a narrow enclave that is incredibly ingrown, and from a standpoint of one who has been reading SF since he was six, I feel that at some times we're taking in each other's washing, and that we're not going far enough to indicate some of the ramifications of science fiction.

As an academician I cannot help but view SF as a form of literature, speculative or what adjective you will, and at the same time I cannot help but view certain problems that come up in SF within the larger context of 'mainstream' literature. Inevitably then I am led to wonder, sometimes in print, if any real distinction other than the qualitative one, exists between let us say Joseph Conrad's creation of a world in NOSTROMO (in my mind one of the great novels of this or any other century) and a very similar creation by Frank Herbert in DUNE. Herbert's style is not Conrad's, to be sure, but the imagination in many instances is quite similar, together with a similar moral and ethical problem; how will a group of diverse human beings, one of whom is superior in every way, react to a substance of incalculable value and a corrupted world. Now I do not maintain for a moment that NOSTROMO is science fiction, or that Herbert is a Conrad, or even that Herbert was influenced by Conrad. (In fact when I brought this similarity to Frank's attention he had never read NOSTROMO and I was happy to give him a copy.)

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SPECULATION

What I am trying to maintain is that my view of science fiction is limited, or at least defined, by my training, personality, background, etc. And so is the point of view of everyone else connected with the field. No one person has all the answers, or any final answer, to any of the problems raised by science fiction, and we should begin our discussions by admitting this fact. Further, everyone is different, if I may coin a cliché. Spinrad is not Pohl, Heinlein is not Aldiss, and J.J. Pierce is not McNelly. Thank God, say all six mentioned, but at the same time we should not reject out of hand viewpoints which differ radically from our own. There is probably some truth in all of them, but all viewpoints are - may I say it again? - essentially limited. If I feel that Pierce will never emerge from his Foundation cocoon, fine, and if he feels that I am hopelessly 'new wave', fine, although that assertion will only bring guffaws to anyone who knows me.

Ultimately I think that what drew all of us to science fiction was the flexibility of imagination utilised by the authors. And what I am pleading for here is that same flexibility in our own particular attitude toward SF, however it may be defined.

With that as premise, let me move on to consider some implications/vis-a-vis science fiction, of certain contemporary novels. Elsewhere I have maintained that the modern representational novel is dead, expiring with Updike's COUPLES, a beautifully-written piece of nothing that leads the reader to feel that he's been inundated (if that's the right word) by pubic hair. To be sure, some 'mainstream' writers are still exploring the stream of consciousness, unconsciousness and subconsciousness (or even the stream of conscience), but certain other writers are utilising such standard science fiction devices as integral parts of their recent work.

I speak of John Barth's GILES GOAT BOY; Nabukov's ADA OR ARDOR, Vonnegut's SLAUGHTER-HOUSE FIVE; and Lawrence Durrell's NUMQUAM. Only Vonnegut has a science fiction heritage - one he now denies somewhat vehemently if one may judge by the dust-jacket to the book - but all of them are contemporary novellists who have tired of sterile representationalism and have turned to the imaginative flexibility of science fiction. And their works succeed or fail insofar as they are works of speculative literature utilising science fiction devices.

Barth posits a world divided into two computer-run campuses into which comes a sport, the Goat Boy. While the levels of allegory sometimes leave me confused or dissatisfied, I could not help but be struck with some outward similarities between Barth's symbolic view of a static world upset by an unknown, and Asimov's FOUNDATION trilogy where a Selden prediction is apparently turned aside by another unknown, Mule. Barth's novel of course deserves further examination that I cannot take the time to give here. What is important is that the very sub-structure of his novel rests upon science fiction.

So also with Nabukov, whose Anti-Terra of ADA OR ARDOR is a familiar probability world. With Vonnegut's novel, the very fact that it is science fiction enables Vonnegut, or his hero, Billy Pilgrim, or mankind itself, to face the unfaceable or endure the unendurable. In SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE, science fiction actually becomes the instrumentality of hope.

To these figures must now be added Lawrence Durrell, whose ALEXANDRIA QUARTET is perhaps the greatest epic poem of this century. In NUMQUAM, he asks some of the same questions that Asimov asked years ago. (See that, J.J. Pierce. I do read Asimov and I do like him). What or when is a human being, if humanity has become robotised and robots have become human. The hero's creation of a loving, passionate robot serves to point up the non-human-ness of a sterile, passionless human. And this science fiction device serves to free the hero from his pleasant prison dream. Science can enslave; it can also liberate.

SPECULATION

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These remarks perhaps illustrate my particular bias about science fiction; the fact that I consider it a form of literature and treat it as such. But for heaven's sake, let's not make science fiction an enclave that only the initiated can join. Science fiction is bigger than all of us.

- Dr. Willis E. McNelly.

* In the manuscript version of this last talk, the final sentence reads "science fiction is beggar than all of us!" I regard this slip as positively Freudian ! PRW

PANEL DISCUSSION, 5.00 - 6.30 p.m.

* The panel discussion lasted nearly an hour-and-a-half, and I thought it was particularly successful for the way in which audience and speakers were able to follow through with their own points and observations without the artificial barrier that often exists between the two. The discussion was of varying interest but could really stand transcribing in its entirety by some enterprising individual. Unfortunately SPECULATION can only become so big, and therefore I have chosen some of the initial remarks made at the beginning of the panel (and incidentally some of the more interesting) and present them below. PRW

CHRIS "Although writers with well-known backgrounds, with bodies of 'mainstream' PRIEST: work can come to science fiction and use it afresh, I think there is a danger inherent in that lesser writers might think "Ah yes, science fiction's the thing now", and come to it not only messing up their own writing but dragging down the field generally. I tend to feel that the writers Dr McNelly has mentioned - Durrell for instance - his better work was done before he turned to SF, and of course Vonnegut was never outside the field."

AUDIENCE "We've been talking here about writers from outside the SF field coming (Vic in and using techniques from SF and the science fiction novel. Ira Hallett?) Levin in ROSEMARY'S BABY has done this and has produced an SF novel which is readable but doesn't have in it one single plot-thread, idea, or anything which hasn't been used before. Now I don't think that Levine has written a good science fiction novel - if anything, ROSEMARY'S BABY seems to me to be a good example of a witchcraft novel!"

ALDISS: "Be that as it may, but I hate the feeling some of you are exhibiting - it has been called the 'syndrome of anxious ownership'. We don't own science fiction, indeed there's no such thing as science fiction, there are only the things which science fiction writers write. In one sense these things aren't even their own property - they have to go out into the market-place and be torn apart by the wolves. To speak of science fiction as something to be 'protected', whether from that little groovy J.J.Pierce, or from the invasion of people like Lawrence Durrell seems to me to be evidence of extreme paranoia.

"I've never been on a panel where I haven't heard this, where you get this 'new wave' and 'old wave' - it's too ridiculous to call it a "civil war" **, but if there is an opposition one knows it from other things, when the old guard comes up and says "This shall Stand!!" Well, if it's good it will stand, and if it's not it will fall apart there, without huffing and puffing all around."

JACK "But Brian it does matter. When someone goes and sees a lot of paperbacks COHEN: and sees something by Ira Levin he will buy that, and judge SF by it, and he will not buy one of your books afterwards! Ira Levin has the discourtesy to come from outside, where they read this sort of stuff, and mess up our field for us! (subsidence into outraged mutterings)" (Cont/d)..

** The sound of Brian Aldiss getting the point of his earlier talk's title ?

JAMES "We have seen this happen before and we should have learned the facts of
BLISH: the matter, when a very popular mainline commercial writer suddenly decides that science fiction is the coming thing and attempts to muscle in on it. First of all it's usually an old manuscript he wrote in his 'teens anyhow. Secondly, it is almost always bad, and thirdly it never does science fiction the least bit of harm in any detectable way."

ALDISS: "But Jim, you don't realise how emotive your language is, compared with that you were trying to use this morning. You said "when people muscle in on our field" - and you make my point. There's no muscling-in to be done. Suppose Ira Levin actually wanted to write a novel about a computer. Why shouldn't he? The signs are not up saying "this is science fiction. Trespassers will be prosecuted."

BLISH: "I should have made my previous remarks more clear. I am entirely on your side."

MCNELLY: "May I point out that the distinction you made is a good one. The writers who write science fiction because they think it's trendy are unspeakable. But the writers who use science fiction, as a deliberate artistic means to achieve a higher artistic end are another matter entirely."

ALDISS: "Also, the science fiction novelist who writes science fiction because he thinks it's trendy. Or he writes science fiction because he has already written 50 books of science fiction, and so what can he do but write a 51st? These are the people who do the damage. The old termites, boring from within!"

The OPINION column: Some views on current science fiction.

OPINION 34: "S stands for Surreal" (Ian Williams).

"...I've been reading quite a bit of 'mainstream' recently and came across a highly unusual novel by Brigid Brophy titled IN TRANSIT. It is SF, if you take the 's' to stand for surreal. The plot hinges round the personality of a young person, of Irish extraction, and who has forgotten which sex he/she is. The background is an airport lounge. It starts off conventionally enough but gradually language and style diverge into multilevel puns and parodies of pornography, detective fiction, and student revolt. The narrator becomes Patrick and Patricia, one hunting endlessly for the other in a search for identity. It is a remarkable book which I managed to read in about 3 hours and definitely recommend."

OPINION 35: "English but not dull!" (Tony Sudbery).

"...I saw your comment on a D.G. Compton book: "Very English. Very dull." Now you've shocked me! D.G. Compton is an artist - which is not so common that we can afford to shrug at it. Having said which I must hastily add that I've only read one or two of his things, but they have made a strong impression on me. 'It's Smart to Have An English Address' (Impulse 12) was an outstanding story in an outstanding issue of an outst- well, a very good magazine; a delicate, subtle and deeply serious piece of writing. THE SILENT MULTITUDE may have been superficially familiar, an ordinary English disaster novel, but there were strange and wonderful things under its surface. And a lot of J.G. Ballard in it."

OPINION 36: "Must be science fiction!" (Brian Aldiss).

"...No-one has nominated Nabakov's ADA for either the Nebula or Hugo Award. It's so good it must be science fiction!" (At the SPECULATION conference).

SPECULATION

VIEW OF SUBURBIA (six)

By Christopher Priest

IN THE period of time between the last appearance of this column and the writing of this instalment, there has been a remarkable shortage of ideas that might have presented suitable fodder. In fact, this particular idea-desert seemed at one point as if it would itself provide a subject. But beard-growing --- that last resort of the unimaginative journalist (haven't you ever wondered why so many newspaper-columnists have beards?) --- is not for me. I happen to like my receding chin.

Of course, a number of things have happened in the time, though each in itself would not make enough copy to justify ten minutes of your reading time. There was the conference at the Midlands Arts Centre, which was a success... and there was the Phun City Phreak-Out, which wasn't. I've had my first novel published, and spent an enjoyably pissed day at the Aldisses'. I've read umpteen lousy books, and one good one. My cat was run over by a bus, and I received a sort-of letter from Enoch Powell. It's a very pastoral life here in Harrow. *

Bearing in mind Pete's editorial directive ("Comment on science fiction"...I have to keep saying it over and over again) only makes things worse. That far-off day some eight or nine years ago, when came the realisation that SF existed and a bolt of lightning seemed to strike me, becomes more and more unreal. How could I have ever interpreted THE KRAKEN WAKES as being part of some kind of philosophy? How did I ever blow my mind on Analog? Why did my first encounter with Vector excite me so?

I was talking to Pete about this a few weeks ago, and he wasn't very helpful. "Go and read some magazines," he said, "Say why they're such crap."

Well, I suppose I could, but in the long run that isn't good policy for someone who might like to sell them something one day. And anyway I'm prepared to allow that the magazines aren't that bad ... that it's only my taste that has changed away from them. I haven't read (or tried to read) Analog in five years; nor If. Amazing I spoke about last time, and I think I've said my piece on poor old Vision of Tomorrow. What else is there? Sword & Sorcery isn't out yet (though it might be by the time this is published). I find I still have standing orders for F&SF, Venture and Galaxy.... though I really don't know why. Isaac Asimov is the only writer worth reading in F&SF (or so it seems to me), I haven't yet opened one of my copies of Venture, and Galaxy looks as if it's full of deep stuff about immortality and psychology. I think I'll stick to the sides of cereal packets for a while longer.

Or perhaps by magazines Pete meant something else? Not Titbits, surely? I could handle that... I'm beard-growing. Let's talk about science fiction. Or rather, let's first talk about that unsuccessful happening at Phun City.

The idea was to throw a three-day pop-festival in a field near Worthing, invite thousands of hippies, police it with Hells Angels, throw in a group or two, then fill a tent with SF people and have a freak-out. (Cont/d)..

* Chris, I'm deeply hurt. Surely Cannon Hill would make more than 10 minutes copy --- especially when we had that marvelous party the night before. And the Australians would love a description of your visit to the stately home of Brian Aldiss. And I think it very unfair not to tell us any more about your letter from Enoch Powell!

Saturday afternoon was cool and windy, but dry. We got past a cordon of club-brandishing Hells Angels and penetrated to the forbidden zone behind the platform. Here there was a bar, several groupies and a cluster of windswept poets on a cultural expedition similar to our own. We congregated in the bar. After an hour we were getting restless. The only three faces we recognised were our own; Mike Harrison, Graham Charnock and myself. What are we going to do? we muttered again and again, feeling distinctly unfreaky and unspaced out, and wishing we could lie on the grass with everyone else and listen to the music. Mike coalesced our fears into one sentence. "What happens," he said, "if the heavies don't arrive?" The heavies in this instance being William Burroughs, J.G. Ballard and Alexander Trocchi who, it had been reliably rumoured, were going to do "something with lights and film". This sounded an excellent proposition since, if all else failed, we could cluster in their inspirational shadow and lose ourselves. A problem indeed, since if they didn't turn up we'd be on our own. In desperation, a plan was fomented.

The idea was that since everyone at the festival was hippy-oriented, in all probability the only writer of whom they would have heard would be Heinlein, and that through acquaintance through one novel only. We reasoned that no-one would know us from anyone else, so if we were left to ourselves a spot of deception wouldn't be amiss. It was agreed, therefore, that Mike would impersonate William Burroughs, Graham would pretend to be Alex Trocchi (you should hear Graham's Glasgow accent sometime) and I would be Ballard. Thus restored in our confidence, we drank to it.

Five minutes later, Ballard himself walked into the bar looking as unfreaky and unspaced as us. "That's me out of a job," I muttered.

Time passed. A few more familiar faces turned up; John Brunner, Max Jakubowsky, Bill Butler, Mike Dempsey, Anthony Haden-Guest. The atmosphere was still tense, a little nervy. No-one knew what was going to happen, what we were supposed to do. I was standing next to Ballard (boning up on such things as facial mannerisms for future emergencies) when someone rushed in. "Burroughs has arrived!" Beside me, Ballard heaved an audible sigh of relief. "Now we can all relax," he said.

As it turned out, we were all out of a job. Nothing happened; no lights, no film, no conference, no SF, no nothing. We ate macrobiotic food, drank ordinary scotch, breathed pot-laden air. Then we went home. The music had been good.

But science fiction ...that's a subject worth discussing. Or so some may think. I'm not so sure. Whenever I try to bring myself round to thinking constructively about it, I find that I create either some vastly meaningless generalisation about it that is absolutely inarguable, or else some niggling point about specifics that is usually in error because I have failed to take the broader view into account.

To ascend to the figurative for a moment, I used to conceptualise science fiction as being a kind of amorphous mass that had identity over and above that of its constituent parts ... something like the way in which a city can have a character that belies that of its inhabitants. Or I saw SF as being an expanse of water; a puddle, a pool, a backwater, depending on your point of view. At any rate, it was something finite and distinct that could be described coherently and surrounded by factors that were manifestly not SF.

There is a primitive appeal to this kind of thing. In the same way that it is theoretically possible to track down and collect every stamp in the world, or every pop-record, or go to see every film, so it once seemed to me that SF was something that could be completed. There were what seemed to me obvious differences between what was and what was not SF.. and that what was could be neatly recognised and embraced. This is just the first phase in the mania-to-collect that a lot of SF fans get trapped into.

At this time, one of SF's most appealing attributes was that there appeared to be only a limited number of practitioners, and that they could be named on the fingers of two hands.. or at most, listed on the side of one page of an exercise-book. There they stood in the puddle, dignified towers, readily labelled and instantly categorised. I was prepared to acknowledge that several lesser mounds stood around them, but they were not important. What's an Agnew Bahnson or an Adam Lukens or a Nal Rafcam when you've got Simak, Asimov, Heinlein, Wyndham and the rest?

So that was how I saw it, comforted by the conservative aura to it all. I was aware, as time went by, that new books were being published. Some were inevitably the good old Foundation series, popping up every now and then in shiny new covers. But they were all right... I knew about them. And new collections from some of my old favourites. They were authorised too; I knew that there were a lot of stories in the old magazines, and wasn't it only right that they should be collected every so often into a definitive form?

All such books merely confirmed the extent of the puddle, did nothing to disturb its calm surface. But there were new novels from time to time... and some of them were by authors I didn't know. Ballard? Zelazny? Disch? Delany? Moorcock ???

It took some time to accept this, and declare to myself that it was possible that new fictions could be written --- now --- and could legitimately enter the field --- sorry, puddle. Instead of science fiction being some stagnant old pond, could it be that it was actually capable of being refreshed by new water? It became something else; a river? an ocean? But how then did my bastions of conservative ideals fit in? The metaphors were collapsing around me.

The true situation, I think, has always been that science fiction lives. That new writers have always been attracted to the field, and that with passage of time the best of them survive. The puddle metaphor is a fair one from the point of view of any reader who has encountered the genre in mid-stream (as it were), but an inaccurate one overall.

With what seems like more new books being written by more new authors than ever before (and by the older ones creeping back - noticed Wilson Tucker, Chad Oliver, T.L. Sherred around here recently?) SF is taking on more and more of the appearance of having planned-obsolescence, --- with the lifetime of each book merely a matter of months before it is forgotten --- just as it is in the bad world of 'mainstream' literature outside our (field, puddle, river).

Much as I like the idea of SF being something sedate and established and conservative, it cannot ever be so. That is stagnation whichever way you choose to describe it, and in the past can only be nostalgia and wish-fulfilment.

The nature of the field is changing. We are reading new books now which we will enjoy and shelve, and next year forget. Perhaps to some fan-come-lately in the year 1980 (if we ever get there) our modest efforts will appear like stately towers in a murky pool, but that's his affair. We are being swamped (these damned metaphors!) with new, ... and that's good. But it still worries me.

Exactly why, is because I see so much of this new as being a pale imitation of the old; facsimile images, backgrounds, situations, characters. I am not an exclusive advocate of the so-called 'new wave', however much I may sound like one, but so much of what I see around me now is flooding past in a wash of familiar mediocrity. I see novels (at least two award-winners amongst those I am particularly thinking of) which read as if written twenty years ago, in styles first popularised thirty years before that.

(Cont/d)...

SPECULATION

The past-oriented sector of the SF field is now in ascendancy (the right-wing backlash is on us, brothers) and the present- or future-oriented sectors are on the decline. When you've seen, as I have, copies of original novels like BABEL-17, or CAMP CONCENTRATION remaindered in Woolworths for 1/3d, you weep baby, you weep.

There's nothing wrong with the past, per se, beyond the fact that it tends to bore the tit off anyone who's been there more than once. And when SF, or any kind of fiction, starts to bore than it's finished. SF is boring me right now, and I'm wondering if I'm alone. If I am, then perhaps in an inverted kind of way I'm missing my secure little puddle with its complacent towers of mud. But if my present boredom is shared --- though I fear it is not --- then what?

I wish after all I'd grown that beard. At least I'd have something into which to mutter right now. Pass me that Jane Austen book. Now there's a writer who knows where she's at.....

Christopher Priest, 1970.

IVOR LATTO'S PSEUD'S CORNER (See Page 47)

"Even bad sci-fi is better than the best conventional fiction. A ton of Proust isn't worth an ounce of Ray Bradbury." "... (SF) is the only literature that matters a damn. Everybody should be forced to read it all the time. It's true."

- J.G. Ballard, Interview in Penthouse.

"It is much influenced by Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, teachers who --- I must be candid --- strike me as being as shallow as, say, Hoerbiger and Blavatsky, and infinitely less relevant to contemporary western man than the Buddha, Patanjali and the Masters of Zen...." - John Brunner discussing BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD in Vector 55.

"His PLAN FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF JACQUELINE KENNEDY produced a complaint from the American Embassy, and WHY I WANT TO FUCK RONALD REAGAN led to the prosecution of a Brighton bookseller. Experimenting in idea communication Ballard occasionally takes full-page ads in literary magazines... a typical one shows a woman masturbating with the caption 'Can the angle between two walls have a happy ending? A J.G. Ballard production'. This year he held an exhibition of crashed cars at the New Arts Laboratory, complete with topless girl to demonstrate their erotic potentialities. In the final week the cars were attacked by vandals, upended and smeared with paint, an unanticipated event which delighted Ballard."

"I've just published a piece in New Worlds called 'Princess Margaret's facelift' in which I've taken a classical description of a plastic surgery operation, a facelift, and where the original says 'the patient' I've inserted 'Princess Margaret'".

- Introduction & extract from the Ballard Penthouse interview.

"For fifty-seven years, millions of men have dreamed Edgar Rice Burroughs' dreams. Our own inhospitable Mars is no longer far Barsoom. But the deeper dreams remain. There the world has scarcely changed, and so Edgar Rice Burroughs lives on, beyond his critics, a people's storyteller, forever popular. Time has a voice. It praises dreamers." - End of article by Richard Kyle, Riverside Quarterly Vol.4 No.2

"At times Moorcock seems to be wasting space for the sake of filling the book; there are better ways of building up paranoid tension than spelling out K.I.L.L. in page-size chunks of print."

- Michael Kenward reviewing THE BLACK CORRIDOR in Vector 55

THE MELTING POT

I didn't seem to receive very many letters upon the last issue - perhaps it's just as well since space this time is so very limited. I have quite a file of letters deserving publication, and hope to use many of these next time. In the meanwhile, do please write and tell me (and through me our contributors) what you thought of this current number.

John Brosnan, London

Dear Mr Weston, "What a nasty editor you are. I'm referring to the two pieces on Roger Zelazny you so carefully positioned in SPECULATION-26. First you have the dour, grim Franz Rottensteiner who convinces us that anyone who likes Zelazny's work has just got to be sick and mentally disturbed. Then you have poor Bob Parkinson, obviously innocent as to what has preceded him, bound onto the stage like an over-enthusiastic puppy and promptly make a fool of himself.

Though Zelazny is one of my favourite writers and I consider Rottensteiner pretentious and a condescending snob, I have to admit that his piece was the more rational and relevant of the two. Zelazny does lack substance, a fact which always leads to disappointment when I read one of his books. For instance in ISLE OF THE DEAD the plot could have been lifted direct from one of Stan Lee's Marvel comic books. Not that I didn't enjoy it but I couldn't help wishing that all the beautiful writing could have been used to grace something a little more profound. THIS IMMORTAL is another good example.

Bob Parkinson was too emotional and amusing to take seriously (anyone who uses a term like 'gut-reaction' automatically loses my sympathy) even though we share a strong liking for Zelazny (though I'm curious to know how I would have felt about his piece if I hadn't read Rottensteiner first). His review was pretty hilarious in places. I particularly liked the paragraph that ended with:

"Perhaps, given time, I shall be able to take A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES apart and see how it works. When I do I shall learn something else. But not here, It would be too personal. Not now."

One has the image of him reeling back, after writing that, the back of one hand pressed to his forehead and lying down for half-an-hour to recover.

I liked Chris Priest's column. I agreed 100% with as far as Ted White's Amazing is concerned. I too doubt whether it will last but intend enjoying it while it does. Ted deserves all the encouragement he can get.

At last, someone (Chris) who feels the same way about Poul Anderson as I do. I could never understand why he was so highly regarded by most SF fans. I always found his stories and books hackneyed and dull. With one exception, and that is BRAINWAVE, one of his earliest I believe. This is so good, in my opinion, it is hard to believe that he actually wrote it. The concept is a fascinating one and extremely well-handled, and the characters, in comparison with his other books, almost come alive!

* And you are a nasty letter-writer! I hate to think what Bob Parkinson will think of you for writing the above, and me for printing it. But I must admit John that your letter made me chuckle and now that you've reached England after that intrepid journey from Australia by bus, I hope you'll be writing again.

Sandra Miesel, Indianapolis,

Dear Pete, "If Christopher Priest has read so much Anderson, hadn't he noticed long ago that the most characteristic Anderson plot is a doublet? He typically pairs an external (scientific, historical, political, etc) problem with an internal (personal or ethical) one, examines them in parallel, solves the external one but usually lets the internal one end tragically. (recent examples; 'Starfog',

(Cont/d)..

'Kyrie', 'The Sharing of Flesh'). This is an excellent device for short fiction and the novelette is his most successful length.

According to an article he wrote for the SFWA Forum, Poul wrote TAU ZERO to explore how people react in an intolerable situation. It's important to note that they do endure and survive. Their ill-fated ship was named for a Danish princess who survived an analogous intolerable situation. Their heterogenous nationalities partly reflect the world's political situation but also serve to establish a variegated gene pool for their descendants. The characters are intended to be types and bear symbolic names. With a self-confessed strong bias against Anderson, was Christopher Priest the optimal reviewer for this novel?

It is difficult to imagine Franz Rottensteiner as the optimal reviewer for anything. Gimlet-eyed socialist realism is hardly the proper yardstick to use on Zelazny. I don't quite see why "closeness to the spirit of the times" should be the ultimate literary accolade. Whatever became of "a poem should not mean but be"? How novel, the way he contrasts Zelazny to Disch, to the detriment of the former, while most people do the reverse. One of the few critics to admire both writers equally is Delany in his essay "Faust and Archimedes".

A personal observation; behind the glowing fire-opal language, Zelazny is curiously anonymous. Philosophically he seems to be for Good and against Evil, and let's not try to define those terms too stringently. Delany and Anderson, for example, express a great number of private tastes and opinions in their writing, but not Zelazny."

* Chris didn't actually review the book concerned - he chose it himself as a topic for his column. Where last issue seemed to start the discussion going on Poul Anderson (with comments from Chris Priest and Fred Pohl), this current number should attract further comment on Roger Zelazny. I believe I said elsewhere that we have a review coming up on his new novel NINE PRINCES IN AMBER. But to return to Poul Anderson. Just this morning I received a very interesting piece on BEYOND THE BEYOND from David Redd, for publication as soon as can be arranged. In the meantime, a letter from Mr Anderson himself..

Poul Anderson, California

Dear Mr Weston, "Of course it would be improper, or at least ridiculous, for me to say anything, about Fred Pohl's literary criticisms of SATAN'S WORLD -- which, as a matter of fact, never was intended to be more than a space opera, plus some Hal Clement-type speculation. But one aspect of his remarks is safe for me to discuss, since it reflects a common fallacy. This is his notion that the book also includes propaganda for a particular socio-political philosophy. He says, for example, "In Anderson's mythology, entrepreneurial capitalism is what makes the perfectibility of man a realistic hope.."

Now a writer's characters have viewpoints, at least if he has succeeded in any degree in making characters rather than names out of them. So does the writer himself; but if anything he tries to avoid forcing them upon his characters, who would then become mere mouthpieces and all identical. Long John Silver is the most vivid personality in TREASURE ISLAND; but does this mean that Stevenson was in favour of piracy? At various times, characters of mine have strongly advocated such varying arrangements as monarchism, feudalism, anarchism, and assorted kinds of timocracy, bureaucracy, military government, socialism, and even 18th-Century American liberalism. (The last happens to be my personal preference, but it presumably has no more chance of continuing to work forever -- even if re-established -- than any other system.) As a matter of fact, in the 'future history' to which SATAN'S WORLD belongs, the capitalist era presently comes to a sticky end, largely because of the short-sightedness and excesses of the capitalists.

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(Cont/d)..

In short, it is surprising that a writer as long-established and skilful as Fred Pohl should confuse the author with the fiction!

About your own remark on NEBULA AWARD STORIES-4, that my editorial introduction "takes immense pains to offend absolutely nobody", you're quite right; it seemed to me that, since I was here acting in an official SFWA capacity, I had no business making remarks that could be divisive. This is the reason I got Brian Aldiss to report on New Worlds; one who finds it unreadable should disqualify himself. Furthermore, there was the McNelly essay, and you wouldn't believe what a storm that aroused, even before publication! To his eternal credit, Alexei Panshin, who might well have had the only legitimate grounds for criticism, made absolutely none and even went out of his way to defend McNelly's right of free expression. The trouble was all from a bunch of self-appointed co-editors. I understand James Blish will edit next year's. Take warning, Jim: be completely bland or be completely tyrannical. I discovered the hard way that in this kind of job there is no middle ground."

* As a matter of fact Poul I understand (from Prof McNelly himself during the Birmingham conference) that the British edition of NEBULA-4 contains his essay complete and unabridged, whereas the U.S. edition of the book does not. Speaking of Alexei Panshin, I hope that soon he'll be writing us a review of the new Heinlein serial running in Galaxy. Speaking of James Blish...

James Blish, Oxfords.

Dear Peter, "I read with enjoyment your Sci-Con report in SPECULATION-26, which I found very funny and 95% just. I save out the 5% to cavil at your implied downgrading of Dr. John Clark's "A Scientific Theory of Mysticism", which struck me as one of the most important lectures I ever heard -- an impression that has remained during the process of making a transcript from a tape supplied by Wally Gillings. The theory itself is elegant, and while I agree that it had at best only an indirect science-fictional interest, it has aesthetic implications that (as I know from subsequent correspondence) Dr Clark himself hasn't yet thought through. Without any impairment whatsoever of Brian's right to be bored by it, let me report as a counter-reaction that I found it intensely exciting.

The chain of incidents at the poetry reading and thereafter can only be described as ugly -- this is the first convention I have ever attended in which there was actual blood shed -- but was at least partially redeemed by John Brunner's magnificent conduct under fire. I'm a little puzzled, though, at your telling us who didn't throw the glass, but not who did. Surely it's no secret; in fact, the man was present all the rest of the evening, receiving congratulations for his offences by various previously-respected figures.

I didn't attend the scientology session, since I regard the topic as a non-subject; but I was disappointed that the talk by Chris Evans (a man of whom I think highly) turned out to be a replay of his New Worlds piece "The Dreams of the Computer". True, my own talk is going to appear in Scribner's MAINSTREAM SF (ed. Harry Harrison), but it was mint-new at the SciCon; had I instead just read a chapter from THE ISSUE AT HAND, I think the attendees would have been justifiably irritated.

Nevertheless, I have nothing but sympathy for George Hay. Most of the problems he had to encounter were utterly unpredictable, and I saw no sign that anybody but George was lifting a finger to try to cope with them. I doubt that even the unflappable George Scithers could have done better under the circumstances -- and besides no convention at which I am GoH could be anything but inspired, now could it?"

* This is my cue to add a few postscripts to my SciCon report last issue, Jim. In haste to complete my editorial and in a mood of post-convention indignation at the Royal Hotel my remarks concerning the unfortunate George Hay made it (Cont/d)

less than clear that he not so much sinned as was sinned against. Or, as you say, the things that went wrong weren't as much his fault as might have been suspected from a reading of my report. Nevertheless George himself, much to his credit, took my comments as fair criticism and made not a murmur of complaint. I really think the Royal Hotel must be London's worst - and since Alan E. Nourse unsuspectingly booked-in some members of the Heidelberg charter party at the hotel, I suspect the Royal's reputation has spread to the American continent!

Incidentally, Jim, I meant to say something more about the glass-throwing incident to you at Cannon Hill. I was not present when Michael Dempsey inflicted the flesh wound on John Brunner's shin and heard only a garbled incident of the story, initially. This while slightly awash with lukewarm Double Diamond. Consequently the incident struck me as very funny, and it was not until the morning when I learnt the full facts in full sobriety that I realised what a silly, stupid thing it was to do. Enough has been said about all this - but I'd hate to be one of those "previously-respected figures" you mention.

--PRW

Ivor Latta, Glasgow

Dear Pete, "I don't know whether you, as an upright pillar of the Young Conservatives have ever surreptitiously sneaked a look at that brilliant organ of Lord Gnome, Private Eye? If so, you will have come across a feature usually on page 4, only three-quarters of a column in length, known as "Pseuds' Corner", where the more puke-worthy whimsies of Observer-trend journalism are torn from their nice warm beds in the culture-supplements and exposed nakedly in cold print for the sniggers of the hooligan. I think that, now SF has settled down into a cosy Them-And-Us situation and brought forth its very own crop of pseuds, SPECULATION might well devote some loving attention to the riper pronouncements. You wouldn't have to look far for juicy examples for Weston's "Pseuds' Corner" (Pseudofan? Pseudo-scope?); I can think of a number from the past few issues of SPEC itself.

Yes, I know it's sneaky to treacherously extract, out of context, the more unlovely extravagancies of SF writers both pro and fan; like those supercilious sods who scatter sics over anything they quote. But. On the other hand. And taking into account the other side of the question. There are quite a few balloons in this genre, who sorely need pricking. No?

I really do think that something of this sort is necessary to expose the worst posturings of the literati, and the more grandiose apologia of the Establishment. It might... it just might .. tend to make people think twice before committing to print their luscious indiscretions. Of course SPECULATION is relatively barren ground for such material (of course! PRW) ... it's too level-headed.. but think what one could do with any issue of New Worlds, the magazine which can be read from left to right, right to left, or diagonally, with ultimately the same result... a feeling of intense weariness. Almost any issue is so crammed with pseuds that it would justify changing its title to New Pseuds. Yes, that's unfair, but one does become irritated at having to plough through so much gilded dross in order to reach the few authentic nuggets.

Like BEHOLD THE MAN, for instance, which Brian Aldiss rather skated over in his back-slapping review of Moorcock's latest publications. Of all the 'new wave' work done in the past few years, or of that written in clear at least, this is surely the item which has made the biggest impact outside the narrow world of British SF. It is undeniably a serious work, a novel of love... very rare in SF... and yet it smells suspiciously of the trendily daring. The very theme can be taken as either extremely courageous or social-conscious documentary ("We've done the Queen and the Unions and the Pope, we've done the pansies and the spastics. Have we done Jesus?") This whiff of suspicion is gradually reinforced by the obligatory slices of heavy symbolism.

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The hero, Glogauer-Jesus is:

Crucified in play by his schoolmates; experiences the sadistic pleasures of the twisted owners of a kiddies' camp; acquires a personal fetish in the form of a crucifix hanging between breasts; submits to the homosexual advances of the curate; attempts suicide, one by the rope, twice by gas; is abandoned by his wife, who is having an affair with a lesbian (what else?).

Science fiction raises its sheepish face and lo.. the Time Machine. So Glogauer-Jesus travels to Nazareth and discovers the Holy Family - Joseph the defeated cuckold, Mary a slatternly nympho, and their son, their real son, a drooling imbecile. Scene ends with Glogauer-Jesus copulating with Mary, without achieving his own climax (ah, significant).

Nevertheless, despite Mike Moorcock's determined presentation of his literary credentials, I found it very moving.. again, a strange thing for SF. Despite the author's keeping one eye upon culture with a capital K, the tenderness and humanity comes through. Perhaps when a few years have passed and the tiny revolutionaries need no longer concentrate upon the PR-aspects of their tiny revolution, then the new and valuable things they have introduced into SF can be enjoyed without the annoyance of having to sit through their tedious genuflections to Literature."

* Well Ivor, as I've already told you I should be most interested to see your suggestions for a Fools Gallery but don't feel inclined to stick my neck out by choosing selections myself! Incidentally, for what it is worth I was present at Mike Moorcock's flat while the first few pages of the first draft of 'Behold The Man' were being brought into existence. Remember, Mike?

Perry Chapdelaine, Tennessee

Dear Peter, "You asked for comments on the Heinlein issue. OK. First time I met Bob he lived in Colorado Springs - deer peeked from behind pine-trees in his immediate backyard as he wrote his wild and woolly thoughts. Robert Moore Williams brought me there, cautioning that Bob didn't like the fan who adulated or dominated the conversation with SF, and that since I wasn't a fan he was sure I'd be acceptable.

The main thing that impressed me about Bob was this; He had just finished reading John Von Neuman's and Morgenstern's "Theory of Games" as background material for one of his stories. "MY GOD!" I thought. "Here I am a math major, recent graduate and I can't even understand the first chapter yet." That was about 18 years ago. And I thought, "He's casually reading right through it just for background material!"

The second thing which stood out during our three-way conversation was this; Bob asked if either of us had read a story which used the "Tarzan of the Apes" theme, putting the earthman on an alien planet. Neither of us had, at the time.

For the next 16 years I picked up every Heinlein on the market looking for that particular twist. I suppose STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND was it. If so, I read it, threw it away with disgust, then bought another simply to fight my squarish prejudices; and the latter copy I sent to my oldest boy in seminary school.

I'd like to make this personal point. My story 'Spork of the Ayor' is a direct steal from that visit with Heinlein so many years ago. It obviously lacks Heinlein's skill and so forth, as I'm a mere amateur. But since Heinlein didn't write the Tarzan story I had waited so long to read, I wrote it for him, under my own name, in my own way, and with my own faults. That's something I challenge his other detractors to try, and then to make public! So the 'Spork' series is an idea of Heinlein's sketched out in broad-brush form, maintaining to the best of my feeble abilities, the things I like best about Heinlein. (Boy! Won't the vultures pick at that one?)

(Cont/d)...

SPECULATION

SPECULATION on Heinlein was well-balanced, and one of the most interesting fanzines I've read all year. I wouldn't detract from either side of the fence -- each has rights to their opinion, and their emotions, and their own personal tunnel-visions of the world. So! All in all, I can't complain about new-waver or old-waver, and their personal views of Heinlein. He is not God; he is human. As a human he was perhaps more accurately described by Daniel Galouye than by any other writer in the issue. Neither is he as bad as the other poles. Almost no human is!

* The fascinating article by Paul C. Crawford in SF Review-35 "Archive" describes a visit to the Heinlein manuscript collection at the University of California, and indicates that STRANGER dates back before DOUBLE STAR. Incidentally I was amused by Graham Boak's description of myself as 'a lean bespectacled Pope defending his God' at the Sci-Con this year!

I ought to mention that I have numerous requests for copies of the Heinlein Symposium issue (No.24) but although we printed 600 copies they have long since sold out. I have all the stencils intact, however, and it occurs to me that a useful project for some willing and able worker might be to reprint a few more copies -- unfortunately I doubt if I shall have time for a long while to come.

Ian Williams, Sunderland.

Dear Pete, "I'm afraid I disagree with your review of THE JAGGED ORBIT in SPEC-25.

About six weeks ago I was in the Globe and managed to talk to John Brunner about his works and in particular about TJO. A couple of criticisms I made of the book he agreed were quite valid. Actually the only one I can remember mentioning was that the basic plot was too thin for its length, but I'm convinced there was another. However, to go into more detail:

You mention that one of the reasons TJO is difficult to read is because of its multiplicity of characters. Such multiplicity in a number of P.K.Dick's novels (DR. BLOODMONEY, GAME-PLAYERS OF TITAN, THE SIMULACRA) has never prevented them from being highly readable and entertaining. The point is that Dick uses this technique well, while with John Brunner it is simply boring. I found it a great effort to struggle through the first 80 pages before I found what was happening.

Further, you state that STAND ON ZANZIBAR was essentially a fairy-tale. How you can state that and then say the ending of TJO was essentially convincing I do not know. I'll agree that most of the book is good extrapolation, but the end jumps with both feet into fantasy, ruining the credibility of the story that had been steadily built up."

* Agreed! I admit it, I was wrong. My actual position is that I would like to see a particular kind of SF novel, and I thought John Brunner had more nearly approached it with JAGGED ORBIT than with ZANZIBAR. Incidentally, I have been less than fair with the latter title, and re-reading it recently I can see that it is a tremendous piece of work. I still maintain there is something flawed about the novel, the same indefinable something which I find wrong with all Robert Silverberg books (Sorry Bob, -- it may be just me!). But despite this feeling I think ZANZIBAR has an enormous content of science-fictional ideas, and for this reason deserved its Hugo. BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, which some people have said they prefer, makes an excellent contrast. Much as I admire Brian Aldiss I can't enjoy his novels in other than an abstract, intellectual sort of way. If we're talking about science fiction achievement awards and are considering the background and traditions of the field, then ZANZIBAR is, must be, almost the ultimate development of one type of SF. But enough! -- this has nothing to do with your letter, Ian, and I suspect there is an article waiting to be written (by someone other than me) on the contrast between the two books I've mentioned. Incidentally, whenever anyone comments on Philip K Dick they seem to list three more of his novels I'd never previously heard of! PRW

Bob Shaw, Belfast.

Dear Peter, "The writing and subsequent publication of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY has been an enlightening experience for me. Most important was the discovery of exactly what and where some of my limitations are; second, the glimpses I've had of the different patterns of strikes and misses achieved as the black ball of my own ideas trundled down the bowling alleys of other people's minds.

As an atheist I was particularly interested in the reaction of several reviewers to the little creatures called 'egons', which I invented for this book. Egons are electrical animals living in space which copy brain structures, so that when an earth-bound creature dies a copy of its mind is still around. The egons are purely physical in nature -- as is brought out by the fact that they can be killed by powerful magnetic fields associated with interstellar ramjets of the type described by Bussard. Going further, the whole motivation of the story springs from the stated data that egons are both physical and mortal. Were this not the case, the aliens would have had no reason to exterminate the humans who unwittingly were destroying egons with their ramjet fleets, and there would have been no story.

My surprise was considerable, therefore, when several reviewers (four so far) told me I had written a religious/mystical/metaphysical book. At the Birmingham SF conference I tried putting this view to one critic, but was told -- "You might think you were writing about physical beings, but you were really writing about souls, and I can't be convinced about souls, so I'm going to pan the book".

There is little point in going deeply into the attitude of the reviewer who works on the level of 'I don't like fried eggs because they give me flatulence; this book is about fried eggs; therefore it is a bad book', but I would like to query one or two points raised by Tony Sudbery in his review in SPECULATION-26.

How can a physical and mortal being be "metaphysical" in nature? I use quotes because this is the word he uses consistently throughout his review. When he is going to give a book a bad notice and, if his ambition is realised, depress its sales ** -- does he read it more carefully than a book he is not going to review? I ask this, because, for example, he says that Tavernor's death (P.124 Ace edition) is associated unsuccessfully with a death-wish "only referred to immediately before his death". A quick skim through the book shows -- apart from the general death-oriented character of Tavernor -- the following: P.16, Tavernor almost yields to a suicidal urge while piloting a power boat; P.49, Lissa refers to his urge to get himself killed; P.76, almost a full page of self-analysis by Tavernor dealing with his urge to die in the same way as his parents; P.78, his realisation that the only way he can find relief from guilt will be in death; P.85, ditto. This list is getting tiresome even for me -- suffice it to say that there are specific references to Tavernor's urge to die also on pages 104, 106, 107, 122 and 123. To my mind, this constitutes a crescendo of death-wish references. What more, may I ask, can an author do to get his message across?

I have other minor queries (about why Tony apparently credits me with the invention of the word 'panspermism', and why my use of the name Mnemosyne should suggest to him that I have read Koestler) but he may be pleased to learn that I bow to him, and others, when he discusses the structure of the book. THE PALACE OF ETERNITY was deliberately designed on what I call the venturi principle, which is something I dreamed up hopefully as an alternative to all the SF yarns appearing now in which the veteran reader has only to scan the first few thousand words, visualise the remainder, turn to the last page to check his conclusion and set the book aside.

(Cont/d)..

**Logically, Bob, that might seem true but I'm sure Tony nor our other reviewers want to depress sales (leaving aside the point that of course, fanzine reviews have no effect). No, in writing anything an author must put his work on public show and my intention is purely to discuss these, for better or worse. PRW

Corresponding to the gas-flow in a venturi, the action in PALACE speeds up and converges on the hero's death. The "throat" of the venturi was the chapter inserted immediately afterwards, in which, still in the frame of reference of Part One, the reader is forced to accept that the hero really is dead - then there was the "explosion" or "combustion" sequence in the final third of the venturi in which the active medium entered a new state of being as different from the previous one as the flame of a rocket exhaust is from the unignited fuel, yet is entirely dependent on the constituents of the fuel.

The idea was to expand the reader's imagination in sympathy, to shock him, to strain and hurt his mind. My defence is that the brutality of the transition was not a result to clumsiness, as Tony says, but of carefully-executed intent. Many people have given the book good notices, people like Gordon Dickson, Wilson Tucker, and Kingsley Amis, and some fans have even ventured the opinion that it was one of the best books of the year - but I begin to suspect that it was very wrong of me to have treated in such a violent fashion the gentle imaginations of some science fiction readers."

* I'm afraid that in my case you failed, Bob (not that I was asked), and I tended to agree with Tony's conclusions last time. Whether you deliberately killed the hero off so abruptly is a good point, but the fact remains that you did it and I wish you hadn't! Now NIGHT WALK, as I believe I said to you at Birmingham, is a far better novel, in my opinion, and really one of the year's bests. Now it would be fitting to hear from our arch-villain, Tony Sudbery, although his letter is entirely separate from PALACE OF ETERNITY. The story is that I had asked Tony to do a review for me and in another, shorter review he sent for consideration he made an interesting statement about TIGER! TIGER! which seemed to me to be worth further explanation:

Tony Sudbery, Glasgow.

Dear Pete, "I really don't think I can review AND CHAOS DIED. The reason being the very ignominious one that I didn't understand it. I wouldn't normally be shy of saying so, but I think there just may be something worth understanding in this one, and it might be worth your while to try it on someone else. It irks me to admit defeat - I think this is the first time I've refused a review - but I simply couldn't make head or tail of AND CHAOS DIED. It was baffling from the start, but in a familiar, enjoyable way promising enlightenment later on; but for me, at least, the enlightenment never arrived. I rather like Joanna Russ's writing, though; while I was reading I made a long list of arresting, odd but effective phrases.

I'm inclined to look a bit cynically at the opinions quoted on the cover. "Dazzling, baffling, ferociously inventive, subtle,..." gushes Robert Silverberg. "I wouldn't really call it a novel at all. I'd call it a Trip." Evidently he didn't understand it any more than I did. "AND CHAOS DIED is a spectacular experience to undergo," says Samuel R. Delany. Looks like he didn't understand it either. On the other hand, Fritz Leiber reckons "there is a science fiction rationale for all the startling, stinging and shocking imagery... and there is also a good, strong, human story, well resolved." Fritz Leiber must be a clever bloke.

Now. Why is TIGER! TIGER! a bad book? Hell, I don't know, it's just bloody awful. Ask Franz Rottensteiner, Graham Hall or Chris Priest, see if they can tell you - they're the three of your reviewers I find most sympathetic. Yes, I know everybody admires TIGER! TIGER! and it's an SF classic - it's one of the things that makes me wonder whether I've got a goblin nesting in my bookshelves who pies up my books before I read them.

SPECULATION

(Cont/d)...

But I'll tell you a funny thing. I've had conversations about TIGER! TIGER! with Brian Aldiss, Tom Disch and (I think) Michael Moorcock - all big, confident and persuasive men who like the book. But when I, diffident and (orally) rather inarticulate, said how bad I thought it was, they all seemed to go on the defensive. Now that's curious isn't it? I wonder what it means?

Why is TIGER! TIGER! a bad book? Because it's not a novel, it's a comic strip. Because it's the same sort of thing as Colin Kapp's THE DARK MIND, which (I hope) everyone will agree is terrible. Because it's tawdry, violent, crude and sensation-

The obverse of these adjectives, I suppose, is "powerful". Well, let me propose a test. Suppose TIGER! TIGER! was being filmed. Can you imagine any genuinely powerful actor - say Rod Steiger or Nicol Williamson - playing Gully Foyle? I can't. I can't even imagine Steve Reeves playing him; I can only think of him as a crudely-drawn cartoon character. Because as a real, living human being - let alone as a hero or a superman - Gully Foyle just doesn't exist for me.

Yet people still talk about Gully Foyle; they quote his sayings: Michael Moorcock calls him a "great, bizarre character who lives in the mind long after the book is finished". I find this incredible. He's not even two-dimensional - Gully Foyle, science fiction's proud boast of a one-dimensional character! That dimension happens to be revenge, but it might just as well have been ambition, lust or dyspepsia - you wouldn't have to change TIGER! TIGER! much to make it fit any theme you liked.

Why is it a disasterously bad novel? Because of its disastrous influence. I don't care if it leads a writer like Colin Kapp to write a book like THE DARK MIND but I do care when it prompts a Brian Aldiss to perpetrate an EARTHWORKS.

I've heard that Alfred Bester coldly examined the science fiction market, asked himself "What will these idiots pay for?", calculated what proportions of what ingredients he would need, and constructed TIGER! TIGER! I've heard that its plot is precisely that of THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO. I've been told to enjoy the details, like the man with a goldfish bowl in his wooden leg (is that right?). The suggestion that TIGER! TIGER! is a satire on SF, or at any rate only a bit of fun. OK, perhaps when I read it (several years ago) I was stupid to take it so solemnly. (Judging by the way people talk about it I'm not the only one who's guilty of that stupidity.) I want to accept this interpretation of it, because I admire Bester's other work so much (No, dammit, I won't forget THE DARK SIDE OF THE EARTH. It's good. It's very good).

But flipping through its pages again, I find it hard to believe that it's anything like as funny as THE SIRENS OF TITAN, or even BARBARELLA. And if Bester was being satirical, he was satirising a tendency that he himself was very liable to - look at the way THE DEMOLISHED MAN disintegrates in its last few chapters.

I realise that this is just the sort of sneer that we all got sick and tired of before NEW MAPS OF HELL replaced it with a different set of misconceptions - "Science fiction? What, bug-eyed monsters and rayguns? Comic strip stuff, like Batman?" I'm as keen as anyone else to repudiate this, possibly keener, but I think there is a tendency to Batman stuff in some SF; to me it shows clearly in TIGER! TIGER!, and that's why I've been writing about it in such strong terms. Certainly there are good things in TIGER! TIGER! which I've ignored, and I've no doubt it will survive my pinpricks."

* Treason! heresy! Mark my words, Sudbery, you can attack Bob Shaw but to snap at the heels of Gully Foyle is a dangerous business. I'm quite sure that we'll hear more of this next time. Incidentally, Alex Eisenstein tells me that the English edition of TIGER! TIGER! is very different from the U.S. version, and has been promising for some time now to write me an article on these cuts and changes.

Graham Charnock, Brighton

Dear Pete, "Your issue's preoccupation with Heinlein troubles me, I must confess.

Certainly forties, fifties and sixties SF owes him a debt etc etc, but surely now, in the seventies, and with the embarrassing Apollo anti-climax safely behind us, we can declare ourselves out of the red. We should be looking to the writers of today and tomorrow, not reliving our various childhoods through a nostalgic (and hardly very objective, I might add) haze. My own reaction, whenever anyone mentions Heinlein (and not too many people do these days) is that I can't help feeling instantly sympathetic towards any book with a cat in it. And that, I'm afraid, is about as far as I'm willing to involve myself with a dead issue like /Heinlein."

* More heresy! I thought I'd use this paragraph of your 1969 letter at last, Graham, because it is too good to lie in my files indefinitely. Anyone who can call the Apollo moon-landing "an embarrassing anti-climax" has a certain claim to fame! Meanwhile, more Charnock, circa. 1970:-

"I feel impelled to comment on the David I. Masson article - a sad little piece of introspective reasoning. The first thing is the title; 'Some Thoughts on Language in Science Fiction'. This implies, surely, a consideration of style and aesthetics? What we get is, rather, a tract on the applications of philology, which is a very different thing.

Masson obviously knows his field, but the way in which he discusses what is, after all, a topic of very limited importance, in a manner which suggests it's of earth-shaking and fundamental relevance to SF writers everywhere (as indeed, a study of style and aesthetics might have been), hints at a lack of perspective. "You must live in the world you depict - not present it as a travelogue, a specimen or a joke," he says (one could wish for a little more qualification of a statement like that). This may very well be relevant (if slightly pedantically relevant) to what Masson calls 'forecast-SF' (another term that needs more qualification than Masson gives it) but then there are more things in heaven and Earth (and even in the SF galaxy) than 'forecast-SF'.

This faintly amusing ivory-tower approach of Masson's (yes, one can picture him brooding over "phonetic sound in poetry") reaches its faintly ridiculous climax when he adjudges H.G.Wells as "less professional" than Kipling. Again, the frustrating lack of qualification... we have to infer that Masson means a less professional writer of 'forecast-SF', and perhaps even of that branch of forecast-SF dealing with philology. I don't think that Wells, if he were alive, would argue with that. I think he'd find the point, and the article in general, tediously irrelevant. As I found it."

* More letters - quite a number of them from lots of kind people. Ian Williams writes about Sci-con, admits it may have been the worst ever, but says he had a marvelous time. A letter from Rick Sneary...three or four from Andy Offutt. David Piper sends a hilarious note, comments on Franz Rottensteiner's material and says "the thing that turns me off is when a person starts quoting from some hoary old mid-European writer, and then resorts (no doubt to sort out the men from the boys) to words like 'getsalshumidderfurgt' to explain his point further! Unkindoof you but I know what you mean, Dave! Letters from Buck Coulson and Joe Patrizio remain unquoted-from; as do those from Patrick Strang and JoAnn Wood. My apologies have to go to Darrell Schweitzer, both for not quoting from two letters; not answering them, or using the review he sent in April! Other people who wrote were Neal Gelfarb, Brian Williams, Graham Boak, Paul Anderson, Brian Cox, Richard Newnham, Mark Barclay, Cy Chauvin, Matt Hickman, Jack Marsh, Alex Eisenstein, J.J.Pierce, Bryan Bird, George Geddes and no doubt several others I haven't mentioned. Perhaps next time...

SPECULATION

PRW

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SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE

Every science fiction title received since the previous issue is mentioned in this Guide; longer reviews will be found on Pages 13-20, along with a list of books scheduled for review in future issues.

Looking through previous instalments of the Book Guide, it occurred to me that some of these comments might seem somewhat patronising; but please be assured that this is not the intention. The brief comments I append to the titles below represent only a very personal, rapid reaction on my part.

PRW

FROM GOLLANCZ:

STURGEON IN ORBIT, 28s. Five stories, 'The Wages of Synergy'; 'Make Room For Me'; 'The Heart'; 'Extrapolation'; 'The Incubi of Parallel X'. These date from 1951-55, perhaps Sturgeon's most productive period (and here is a major writer who is overdue to produce something new). You should remember most of these stories - and I believe the collection was published by Pyramid some years ago. To be reviewed at length.

A WILDERNESS OF STARS ed. William F. Nolan, 32s. "10 stories of man in conflict with the Universe of Tomorrow" says the blurb, quite correctly. An excellent collection including two stories by one of my favourites, Walter M Miller, Jr (and what has happened to him?), Bradbury, Sheckley, Anderson, Chad Oliver, Arthur C. Clarke, etc.

THE LION OF COMARRE/AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT by Arthur C Clarke, 28s. This just about completes the set of Clarke's work in print in this country, with the 1946 novella and novel contained in this volume. Mr Clarke has always had a distinctive style, which comes through clearly in both stories here although perhaps somewhat less - sophisticated (is that the word?) than later works. Interesting reading.

HAVE SPACESUIT - WILL TRAVEL by Robert A. Heinlein, 24s. One of the best Heinlein juveniles. Who else could write a dozen fascinating pages on the care & maintenance of a spacesuit? Gollancz now publish almost all of the Heinlein juvenile series.

SARGASSO OF SPACE by Andre Norton, 20s. Interesting novel - copyright 1955.

THE REBEL OF RHADA by Robert Gilman, 20s. Juvenile novel, although previously published by Ace (I believe) and first of a planned trilogy.

FROM SIDGWICK & JACKSON:

THE GOD KILLERS by James Ross, 25s. An original novel.

PRELUDE TO SPACE by Arthur C Clarke, 25s. A long while ago when science fiction was difficult to find, I remember that Sidgwick & Jackson were the major English hard-cover publishers of novels by Clarke and Heinlein. They sold for 9/6d in those days. This present book was written in 1953, and I first encountered it as one of the early Pan science fiction titles. It is rather amusing now to see the book labelled "this terrifyingly accurate prediction of man's efforts to land astronauts on the moon" since of course, PRELUDE TO SPACE is nothing of the kind and is already dated as one of that strange new category of SF stories that didn't come true. Oddly enough, Clarke's idea of a two-part reusable spaceship is what we shall be using for the second generation of mooncraft. Ignore the blurb and buy the book - for old time's sake!

THE SEA THING AND OTHER STORIES by Van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull, 27s. /sake! Seven stories, one written especially for the collection.

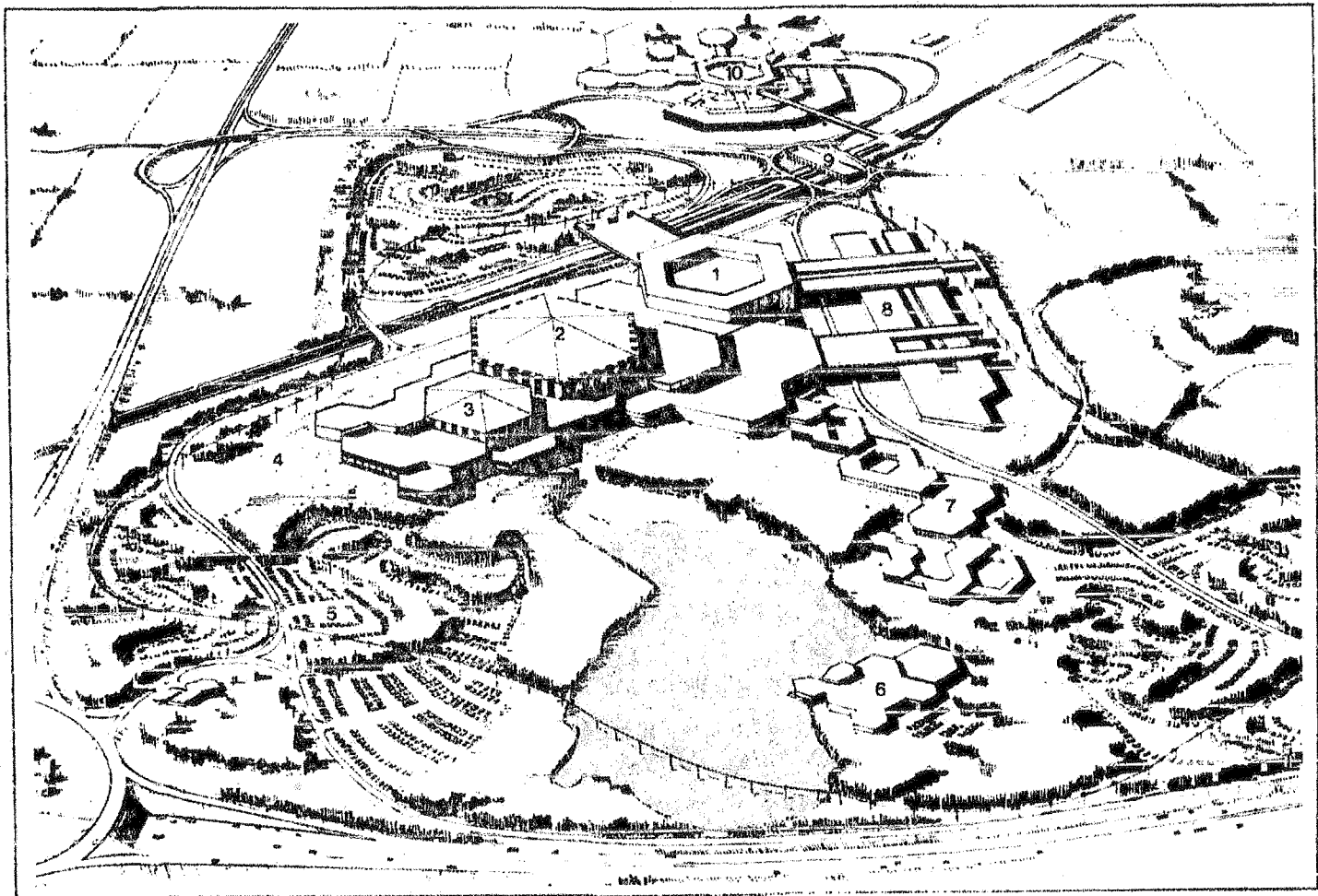
BEACHHEAD PLANET by Robert Moore Williams, 25s. "From a far galaxy the Narks had come, hungering for the tempting green planet called Earth".

SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL -1, 30s. Three novels, THE WORLD JONES MADE by Philip K. Dick, THE SPACE SWIMMERS by Gordon R Dickson, THE WATERS OF DEATH by Irving A. Greenfield. An ingenious way to re-use the type of previously-published books, and so to be able to offer three novels in one binding at a very cheap price.

FROM WALKER & COMPANY:(U.S.)

I AM LEGEND by Richard Matheson, \$4.95. Almost a 'classic' of science fiction, written in 1954. But read Damon Knight's comments in IN SEARCH OF WONDER.

THE NEXT BRITISH WORLD CONVENTION?



KEY: 1 - Main concourse; 2 - Main exhibition hall; 3 - smaller exhibition hall; 4 - Outdoor exhibition; 5 - car parking; 6 - hotel; 7 - motel; 8 - workshops; 9 - main-line rail station; 10 - airport terminal.

WHILE Americans and Europeans discuss the whole question of World Conventions, this country has been strangely quiet. Inside this issue of SPECULATION are suggestions that something should be done, now, to arrange another British WorldCon. The illustration above shows the proposed British National Exhibition Centre, to be built by 1973 on the outskirts of Birmingham, next to the main North-South rail line, motorway, and an international (Elmdon) airport. At some weeks of the year (August Bank Holiday) this Centre will not be in use - there is a large hotel on site, a motel, and any number of new hotel developments being built all around. This to me promises to be an ideal WorldCon site; private, large, modern, at the centre of a communications network.

THERE IS THE SITE - NOW WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT!