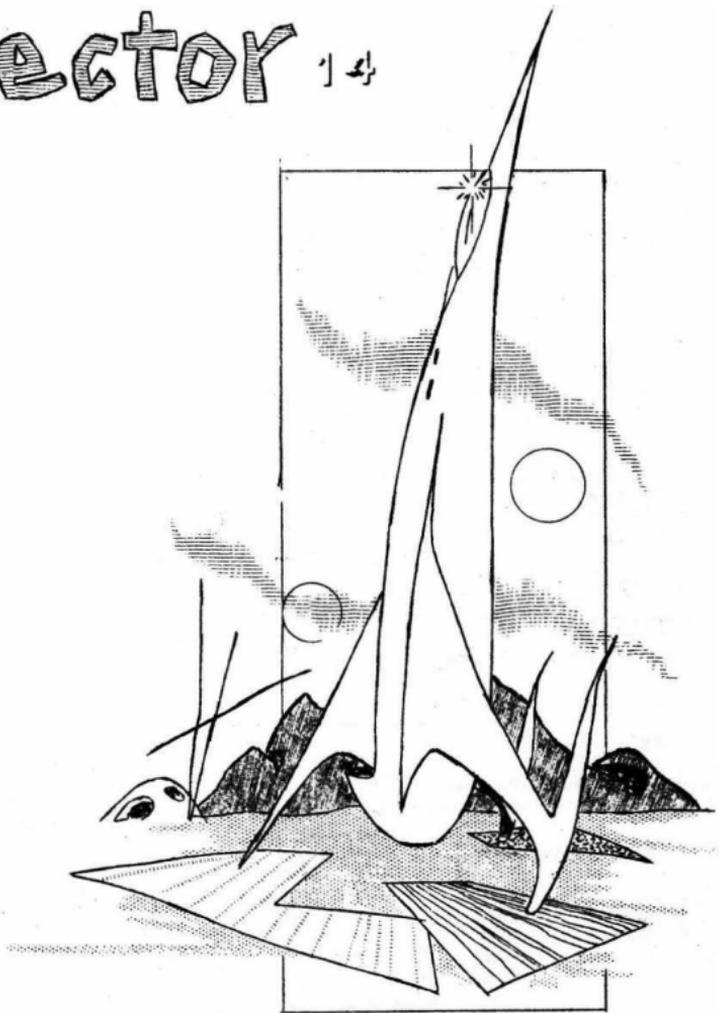


vector

14



VECTOR 14

This is the 14th issue of VECTOR, the official organ of the British Science Fiction Association, published quarterly for distribution to members. This issue dated Winter 1961-62.

CONTENTS & credits

	page
Cover.....ATom.....	1
Editorial..... Jim Groves.....	3
Secretary's Report..... Joe Patrizio.....	4
The Planet Maker - Hal Clement....	
..... Bob Parkinson.....	7
That Certain Feeling..... Kingsley Amis.....	11
Book Reviews.....	13
Full page illustration.... Ken McIntyre.....	22
Sound the Anti-Toosin..... Walt Willis.....	23
Letters.....	26

Headings by ATom on pages 3, 7, 13, 23 and 26.

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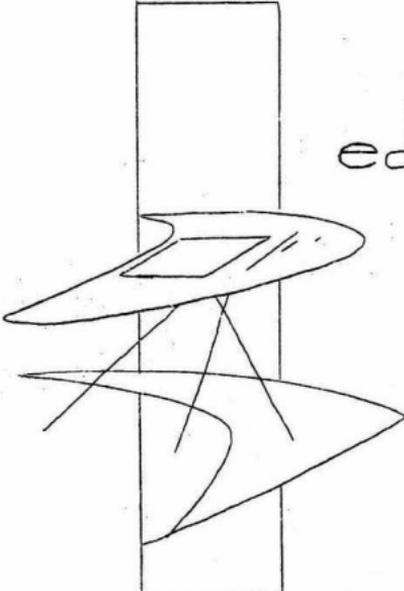
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editorial

JIM GROVES

Once again the end of the year has arrived and two big questions loom on the BSFA horizon. For individual members there is the question whether or not to renew membership and for the organisation as a whole there is that of finding officials for the next year's committee. It is mainly the second of these two questions that concerns me here. It has always been difficult to find people willing and able to take on the responsibility of running the Association, but if it is to continue to give you whatever it is that makes you continue to re-join each year then someone must do these jobs. This year is even more difficult than usual with all the offices, excepting the Vice-Chairman who automatically becomes Chairman, being vacated. It is unlikely that we shall get another dedicated member like Archie Mercer, who you will remember was Treasurer three years running. One year of office is more than enough for most people; even in what I consider the most attractive of the positions, that of Editor, enthusiasm begins to flag after eighteen months or so. So what we need are people willing to take on one of the jobs for a year to keep the wheels turning.

Arrangements were made in the new Constitution for postal voting on new officers but this year, apart from there being little likelihood of any post being contested, it looks as if final arrangements will be made at the AGM at Easter.

continued on page 6

SECRETARY'S REPORT

by
JOE PATRIZIO

This time I am sitting at the typewriter with vague thoughts at the back of my mind that I might say something about Science-Fiction, and perhaps a few words about the BSFA as well. But really, this time I am starting my piece without having what I am going to say all worked out in my head so the following will be off the top of my head. Pay attention, all you psychiatrists out there.

The thoughts about saying something about sf came to me as I was reading a letter from one of our members, E.R. Hedger. The point in his letter which set me going was one he made about the current tendency in the field towards introspection. Not only in the ranks of the amateurs but in the professional field also. Mr Hedger and I seem to have similar feelings of suspicion about this tendency, one which he says "marks a grooved-in class", that is one that is set in its ways, and all that implies. I tend to think of it as a parallel to the Roman Empire calling its legions in as it was falling apart. Not that I think sf is falling apart, but if you compare sf now to what it was some years ago then you must admit that it looks in none too healthy a state.

Introspection itself seems to be a symptom of decadence, overtaking cults, sects, and small groups interested in anything from sport to religion when these groups lose their initial drive. Whether or not Science Fiction comes into this class has been discussed pretty fully, and the fact that it has lends force to the idea that it does come into this class...that is, if you accept the statement at the beginning of this paragraph. In fact, I am indulging in a fair bit of introspection at this very moment, and although there may be some argument in favor of this, in the Official Organ of an SF Association, there is surely something wrong when the professionals start to write more interestingly about sf than they do of itself. I suppose I will be told that it's easy for me to talk, but when I read the views of some authors on what's wrong with science fiction (and of late I seem to have done quite a lot of this), it strikes me as being a piece of monumental buck-passing. People will only buy magazines when there are stories in them that are worth reading, and it is up to the authors to write those stories.

But perhaps I'm not being fair. I suppose this is where economics rears its ugly head again, and although it would be fine to think of dedicated writers doing nothing other than polishing every story until they were satisfied it was ready to be presented

to the rest of us, we must grant that they have got to eat, which, by all accounts, isn't always possible on the rates paid by most magazines. I'm not going into the normal cycle of Writer, Editor, Publisher, Reader, but a little thought will show you that they are all trying to prove conclusively that it is the others who are to blame for the state that sf is in at the present time. In fact they all are. I've read articles, or letters recently which do just this, everybody writing about sf, and nobody seeming to give a damn about producing the subject in question...i.e. Science Fiction -- GOOD Science Fiction. Perhaps it's just that my Sense of Wonder is all shot to hell, but in the last three years I have read only about a dozen sf stories that I have really enjoyed, all the rest left me with a feeling of so much time wasted.

Now don't think that I'm going to come up with some miraculous solution for all the problems of sf...if I had that solution I wouldn't be here now writing this, but out doing something about it. There probably isn't any real solution, as we must face the fact that sf doesn't appeal to the majority of people, which means that authors will never be able to make a financial success at it, which in turn means that if they want to make a living they won't be doing it at sf. But I seem to be meandering a bit now, so perhaps it would be a good idea for me to leave the subject, with the thought that this introspection lark can make for some very interesting reading, but you never seem to get anywhere with it.

So far this year, the figures for the recruitment of new members has been most encouraging. The only trouble, as far as the Committee is concerned, is that once a person becomes a member only rarely do we hear from him (or her) again. Now although it would be very nice for us to be flooded with letters after each issue of VECTOR, we don't expect this to happen, and would be most surprised if it did. But as I have said before, if we got no indication from you as to what you think, then all we can do is come to the conclusion that the membership is satisfied with the way things are proceeding.

Our illusion is somewhat dented when the beginning of the next membership year sees an appreciable number of these members not renewing. This I assure you causes us some concern because obviously something is wrong somewhere. But where? If members don't stay with us they must be dissatisfied with what we are doing for them. However it may surprise some members to learn that the BSFA Committees to date have never been comprised of telepaths, and so have had no indication that there was dissatisfaction. What is perhaps worse is that once we had learned of the existence of this dissatisfaction from the un-renewed memberships we still didn't know what was the basic cause. And we still don't know.

Now unless things have taken a surprising change for the better at this moment a number of you have decided not to rejoin this year, and perhaps there are others who are still considering whether or not to do so. I am not going to beg you to reconsider, and hang on for another year. This would be useless, and frankly pointless, as it would be unlikely that circumstances would have changed at the end of next year, to such an extent as to make you

feel any different to what you do at present.

What I would ask all of these members to do would be to spare the Association half-an-hour or so to sit down and write to me. Tell me why you are displeased enough to leave us and just what you would like to see done to make the BSFA interesting, and worthwhile enough for you to retain membership.

When you joined the BSFA you must have felt that there was a place for such an Association, and if you did then, the chances are that you do now, so why not help to make the sort of Association you would like to see exist. I don't care how long or short your letter is, or what terms you use to tell me what you think is wrong, if only you will write - so please do so!

There is still a great deal to be said on both the subjects I have touched on here, but I gather from the hunted expression on our Editor's face that now is not the time.

Until the next issue then my best wishes to you.

J.P.

EDITORIAL continued from page 3

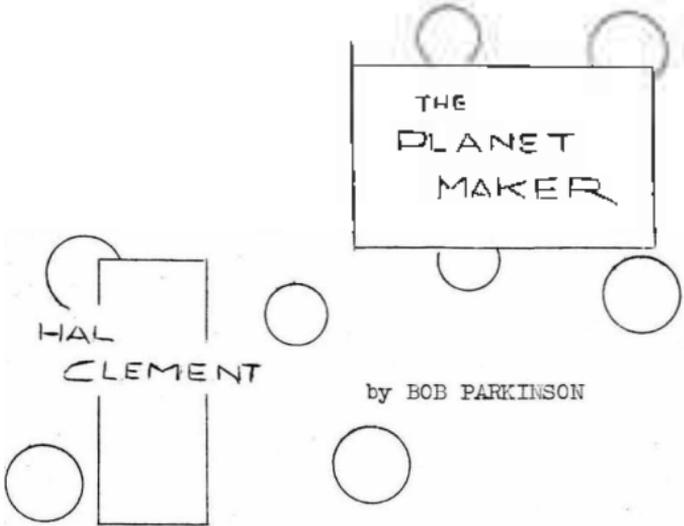
When Arthur R ("Doc") Weir died early in 1961 the BSFA and SF fandom lost one of the most learned of their number. Only having been in touch with us for a comparatively short time, he had already made his mark amongst us as a critic and commentator of considerable erudition in diverse fields, whilst remaining an exceptionally easy person for the less-erudite to talk with. Himself a scientist, he had a particular love for free fantasy, and during his lifetime accumulated a notable collection of fantastic literature of all kinds.

At the Easter convention, the suggestion was made that it would be worthwhile offering to purchase the relevant portion of Doc's collection, thus saving it from probable dispersal. Accordingly, a fund was launched with the object of raising sufficient money to offer Mrs Weir a fair price for the items required. These would then be administered by the BSFA Library as a special Memorial Collection. If for some reason the scheme proved impossible, the money would be otherwise used to commemorate Doc in appropriate fashion, probably by the purchase of books from outside sources.

It is estimated that at least £50 will be required to bring the project to fruition. Some of this is already in hand, and more has been offered, but further donations are still needed. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that the object of the Fund is to provide something of lasting benefit to lovers of the fantastic in literature, if possible by preventing the dissipation of an important collection of the genre.

Archie Mercer, until recently our Treasurer, is now acting in the same capacity for the fund. Donations should be sent to him at:

434/4 Newark Road, North Hykeham, Lincoln.



THE
PLANET
MAKER

HAL

CLEMENT

by BOB PARKINSON

In 1942, with most of his best authors going off to fight the war, John W. Campbell Jr., editing what was then Astounding Science Fiction, introduced a newcomer to the world of SF writing. This new writer was called Harry Clement Stubbs, but he preferred to sign his stories Hal Clement.

From 1942 onwards, ASF continued to feature stories by Hal Clement, and he even at one point contributed a tall story to the Probability Zero department. However, for the time being Clement remained just another SF writer, producing a series of short stories and novelettes in his own particular style.

Even at this early stage, Clement wrote a type of story that was peculiarly his own. It might be called a Scientific Detective Story, although it was more a case of 'What-dun-it?' rather than 'Who-dun-it?'. Clement would set up a story where, in general, the solution would depend on the physical quantities involved in the story rather than the social quantities. It appeared that Clement used scientific facts as a story base and then let his characters act out the story among the science. But at the same time his stories never became uninteresting lab.-reports, they still remained good yarns, which must surely be the aim of any good writer.

By March 1949, Clement had written ten stories of short or novella length for ASF. The March '49 ASF contained the eleventh, a short story called 'Fireproof', which was based on an idea which later appeared in A.C. Clarke's 'Islands in the Sky'. Basically the idea was that you can't burn oil without a

convection current, and you can't have a convection current in free fall. This story is not so important because of any idea it may have contained, however, but rather because it marked the end of an era of Clement's writing.

Two months later, the May '49 ASF carried part one of a two part serial entitled Needle. It represented the first really long story that Clement had written, and although it kept to the previous tradition of having a perfectly logical solution it gave Clement scope to expand his idea, in this case a creature whose body structure was based on a virus-molecule structure rather than a cellular structure. It was a great success.

Strangely enough, although Needle was in the usual Scientific-Detective story tradition, it was also a perfectly genuine DETECTIVE story, since it contained a detective looking for a criminal. It also showed us how Hal Clement could take a completely alien character like the Hunter and make him/her/it quite understandable to us. This was a new departure, since previously his stories had concerned human beings, and his aliens had not really come to life quite as vividly as these new creatures did.

From this point the humans in Clement's stories began to take a back seat, in favour of even more alien creatures. In the next major story Iceworld the hero breathes gaseous sulphur, drinks, at rare intervals, molten copper chloride, and sets his thermostat at a comfortable 500 degrees C. According to Asimov in a much later article (Planets have an air about them: Isaac Asimov, March '57 ASF), Sellmann Ken, the hero of Iceworld could never have extracted enough energy from breathing vapourised sulphur. I don't know how much is known about the chemical properties of sulphur at 500 degrees C and 20 lbs/sq. inch, but I wouldn't decry Clement's science on this point.

There are human beings in Iceworld. In fact I don't think that Clement ever quite got rid of the humans in his stories, but to see them from a new angle as in Iceworld is something quite unusual. His description of the Iceworld, a planet of unapproachable cold, our Earth, is something that only occurs in SF at very rare intervals.

After Iceworld, Clement set to work on the intricate background of his next story, which eventually appeared as a four part serial starting in the April '53 edition of ASF. I refer, of course, to Mission of Gravity. Here he created a precedent by not only selling a four part serial to Campbell, but also selling an article on Mesklin, the planet on which the story takes place, to the same magazine at the same time.

With Mission of Gravity Clement started a series of stories where the background was a planet having some form of unusual characteristics, which had obviously been carefully worked out. In general the story consisted of the effect of a Terran survey expedition on the natives of the planet with whom they came into contact. Mission of Gravity had as its background a planet that had a surface gravity of some seven-hundred 'g', but revolved so rapidly that at the equator the apparent gravity had been lessened by centrifugal effects to a mere three 'g'.

There is quite a lot of room for argument about the conditions set up in Mission of Gravity, and certain people have spent some time in checking Clement's theory. This, however, merely shows what pains have been taken by the author, that the story has attracted sufficient interest to make people investigate the conditions.

There appears to have been a considerable gap between Mission of Gravity and his next novel Cycle of Fire. Cycle of Fire, however, was a departure from the normal run of Clement stories in that it was not published in ASF. Admittedly there had been a short story called Halo in GALAXY some time before, but this was a full length novel. It was published complete by Ballantine Books.

Cycle of Fire was theoretically a 'juvenile' book, in that the lead Terran, not the hero, was a boy, which usually means a story aimed at younger readers. However Heinlein's Starship Troopers was also classed as a 'juvenile', and the two stories are about equally juvenile.

One unusual point about Cycle of Fire is that the hero (alien not human) knows in advance the date of his death. Now this is not unique to Clement, but as far as I am aware Clement is the only author who gave a complete and logical explanation of how this could occur. As might be expected, the answer depends on the conditions present on Abyrcmen, and not on any supernatural explanation. In fact Abynomen is quite a n Earth-like planet, which is surprising. Matters are rectified, however, when we find that the sun-system about which it circles is definitely not normal, and it is this sun-system that determines the story and its eventual solution, including the rescue of the marooned Earth-boy, who initially appears to have absolutely no chance of being rescued.

One test that is often applied to SF is that if the story could be rewritten with a normal here-and-now background it is not SF. Hal Clement's stories, however, depend on their background for the story. The story could not take place without the background conditions, and the eventual solution will also depend on the same conditions. This must surely be one of the purest forms of SF written, by anyone's definition.

After Cycle of Fire Clement went back to ASF to publish his next novel length work, Close to Critical. (ASF April '58, 3 part serial). This concerned the doings of a race inhabiting a planet circling Altair, but although the race concerned breathed oxygen they were not living on the Altair IV of the film Forbidden Planet. The conditions on Tenebra were closely approximated to the inside of a sulphuric acid plant.

With Close to Critical Clement once more showed his grasp of the workings of physics, but at the same time he expanded the ideas until they seemed equally as amazing as some of the more far-fetched inventions of his colleagues in the SF field. He manages to introduce fifty-foot raindrops quite legitimately into this story, and what's more, they seem quite a natural part of the environment his characters live in. In fact, it almost seems as

it
 though/is the humans who are the weird alien creatures.
 Since Close to Critical appeared in 1958, Clement has written only one more short story, and no other work has appeared, unless, of course, he has taken to writing for some of the less known magazines. However, it may be that we are going to be blessed with another of his vastly entertaining novels in the near future. We can but hope.

Stories by Hal Clement.

Answer	ASF Apr. '47	s
Assumption Unjustified	ASF Oct. '46	Nt.
Attitude	ASF Sep. '43	Nt.
Avenue of Escape (Probability Zero)	ASF Nov. '42	ss.
Close to Critical	ASF Apr. '58	3pt. Srl.
Cold Front	ASF Jul. '46	Nt.
Cycle of Tire	Ballantine Books 1957	
Fireproof	ASF Mar. '49	s.
Halo	Galaxy Vol. 5 No. 1	s.
Iceworld	ASF Oct. '51	3pt Srl.
Impediment	ASF Aug. '42	Nt.
Mission of Gravity	ASF Apr. '53	4pt. Srl.
Needle	ASF May '49	2pt. Srl.
Proof	ASF Jun. '42	s.
Sunspot	ASF Nov. '60	s.
Technical Error	ASF Jan. '44	Nt.
Trojan Fall	ASF Jun. '44	s.
Uncommon Senses	ASF Sep. '45	article
Whirligig World	ASF Jun. '53	article.

POSTSCRIPT.

After the completion of the above article, yet another story by Hal Clement came to my attention, and after having read it, I felt that it ought to be included in any article about Hal Clement claiming to be comprehensive.

Hal Clement's speciality has been to develop alien entities that are unsurpassed in sf. Thus his story "Planet for Plunder", which appeared in the Feb. 1957 issue of Satellite, represents at the same time a typical and yet a most surprising story. The story was originally written in a shorter form by Hal Clement alone, and concerned the difficulties of an alien entity visiting Earth with an important and urgent message for the local inhabitants. However, in keeping with the editorial policy of Satellite which demanded one long novel and a number of short stories per issue, it either had to be lengthened or cut for inclusion.

The lengthening that took place was achieved by the use of a story written by Sam Merwin Jr., which described the reactions of Earthfolk to the visitor. This serves as an interesting counterpoint story which blends into the original story, and in a typical Clement manner the final solution, which includes both sections of the story, is based on the physics intrinsic in the story, and gives a quite surprising and yet perfectly logical answer.

This next item has had quite a chequered career. Starting when Kingsley Amis, or rather one hour of his time, was put up for auction at the 1961 Convention, it has wended it's way to VECTOR via the group of Science Fiction Club of London members who purchased said hour. My thanks to them all.

THAT

CERTAIN

FEELING

Kingsley Amis

I seem to have taken so long over dreaming up some comments on LIXICON that by the time they appear - if they ever do, because I can quite see why the Ed. should consign them instantly to a solar collision course - we shall be more or less half-way to LXIICON. However, I'm sure that fans will understand from their own experience what it is to have to earn a living among those backward Terrans, and I hope I'll be forgiven if some of this reads as if it came off the top of the heads.

In those far-off days of Easter 1961 I was a newcomer to fandom - not any more, being a fully paid-up (I think) member of the E.S.F.A. But at LIXICON I had several surprises. One was the absence of crankiness. I had expected to find Rosicrucians, Fortians, flat-earthers, orgonomists, dianeticians and personal representatives of little green men from Venus, all more or less crawling out of the woodwork. There were none, or at least they kept out of my way. I did, it is true, bump into some characters who seemed to believe in faster-than-light drives, time travel and the universal translation machine, but whatever I may have said at the discussion on these matters - I was too busy trying to hold my end up to notice very closely - I regard them as fairly harmless eccentricities. The only one of these I do feel strongly about (I forget whether it came up or not) is the fallacy which says that the human mind and human society may some day be the subjects of real scientific study. This is inconceivable, but if

it were not, it would be hell. I throw this in simply because I regard the pseudo-scientific sociologist as, consciously or unconsciously, one of the outstanding long-term dangers to freedom. Politically inclined fan, kindly take note, and rip those offending passages about the sociological computer out of magazine or paper-back wherever you may find them.

Finding that I have got so far off the track so soon brings me to my second point. This is that I haven't really gone off the track at all. The really fascinating thing about science fiction - and another LXICON surprise for me was that this idea seemed to be so widely appreciated - is that it leads straight into quite specialised fields. I don't just mean physics, astronomy and the rest, but politics, philosophy, social comment, psychology and (not least) literature. SF is a meeting-point of all these. It's also, of course, a form of entertainment. I think I may have given this aspect less than its proper weight in discussions at LXICON, or at any rate given that impression. The trouble is, perhaps, that it's really much easier to discuss SF in terms of politics, philosophy and the rest than it is to talk about what it does to our sense of wonder, of the mysterious, of the far-fetched idea that turns out to have a curious immediacy and relevance. What makes one invasion of Earth boring and merely fantastic while another seems frighteningly apt? What makes a good monster? Which writer has imagined the best Mars, and how does it differ significantly from others? I'd like to see something like "SF: Literature of Wonder" on the list of possible topics for LXIIION. In case you're thinking of me, I said enough, or more than enough, at LXICON; but I'll come along and listen.

My other surprise at Easter was the talk, the conviviality, the social mileage, the comic effects, the drink. Oh no, not the mere fact of their presence - I've enough imagination to have foreseen that. It was the sheer quantity of everything that staggered me. I shall be up and about again, I trust, come LXIIION.

f.y.l.

You are all familiar with the names of Aldiss, Amis, Bulmer, Brunner, Ballard, Carnell etc. Well now you can learn more about them. The February 1st issue of the womens magazine ***'VOGUE' will contain an article about them.

Also concerning these gentlemen is a half hour talk on the B.B.C. Home Service sometime in the near future. Tape recordings of each of them answering questions, presumably on SF, have been edited to produce a discussion programme. I haven't any date or time for this as yet so keep an eye on the Radio Times if you are interested.

***Stop Press on the VOGUE article - it is two pages and mainly photos. It also contains a mention of a cover from ASF and wrongly attributes it to NEW WORLDS. Take a good look before you buy. -ed.

Door Reviews

ATLAS SPRUGGED by Ayn Rand. Signet paperback. 95c 1084pp.
Also in Random House board edition at \$6.95.

Like THE FOUNTAINHEAD which came before it, this is a massive book, and too sprawling to be judged as a unit. Three separate themes compete for attention. One, the gradual development and self-discovery of the principal characters; two, the manifest decay and rottenness of the society in which those characters try to live; three, the single-minded, ever-repeated 'message' of absolute objectivity as a way of life. The book itself qualifies as SF only by the narrowest of margins, in that there are 'inventions and processes' which change the set values, and hence the structure of the society. A new 'metal' which is better in performance than steel; a 'motor' which profoundly affects the power-production problem .. these are mentioned and described in typical sf vagueness, without any suggestion of research or underlying principles. This is the kind of one-man genius producing secret devices which went out of sf many years ago. Ayn Rand has used this form simply as a peg on which to hang her plot.

The background of her story is equally vague, an America in which railroads are still the key method of transport, with little or no mention of road or air haulage, in which diesel engines are very modern .. yet a world in which there is a People's State of England, plus get-away-with-it piracy on the high seas .. a thorough mix-up, in fact. No rockets, no Russia, no mention of atomics of any kind, point up that this is strictly a synthetic reality, manufactured to suit the purpose of the author and the story. For me, this tends to reduce the impact of the message, and this is one message which would have gained by being reduced a little. All the way through the book it is being hinted at and expanded on through the trials and tribulations of the leading characters. Then, between pages 936 and 993 in one long speech (57 pages of it) the doctrine of 'Objectivity' is explicitly given. All it amounts to is 'Live for yourself, think for yourself, do what you think is right .. and you are entitled to keep and own that which you have made'. The author herself, in an endpaper, makes it quite clear that it is the message that she is concerned with, that she means every word of it. The last news I had was

that there is a rapidly growing society formed around this doctrine, in New York. Their emblem is the dollar sign, worn as a pin, in gold.

As a philosophy, 'Objectivity' won't stand a moment's examination, and is every bit as subjective as the things it condemns. It was possibly a subconscious awareness of this that made Ayn Rand run into over a thousand pages in an attempt to hammer it home. Certainly her characters suffer tremendously in their attempts to live up to it. For all their proclaimed superiority, they seem dreadfully slow and stupid in not being able to see what becomes apparent to the reader very early on. This, too, is a recurrent fault, all through the book. In boxing parlance, Miss Rand 'telegraphs' her punch lines incessantly. The other outstanding flaw in the story is the one-track monotony of feeling. It is tension and hard-pressed gloom all the way through, with never a moment of humour, or lightness. All is deadly serious and severe. Defy, suffer, cling to your integrity, and all will come right in the end.

The plot, like the message, is simple .. and dubious. It is claimed that society is held up and kept going by a few people with real talent and ability .. that the rest merely act as parasites on these 'objective' people. Thus, to get their rights, all these objective people have to do is to withdraw their talents .. to go on strike ... and the civilised world will collapse. I find that a very dubious proposition. I am also inclined to doubt, very much, whether talent, as such, automatically guarantees ethical values in the person who has it. There have been clever, talented, gifted .. and evil .. people, before now. Many of them.

Nevertheless, this is a book to read. To set against my criticism of the faults, and there are many more that I could mention .. wordiness, shifting viewpoints, over-exaggerated characteristics, cardboard villains .. let me say, here, that Ayn Rand can write like an angel, can conjure up a scene such that you can see it, feel it, even smell it, at times. The size of the book will make your arm ache, but you will be reluctant to put it down, once you've started it. And it will make you think, and change your thinking. The message and the philosophy may not be one hundred percent workable, but it certainly provides a jumping-off point from which to take a caustic look at some of our more obvious faults.

And it is done with a plausibility that has you believing every word as you read, until you put it down and think about it a bit more. As a basis for long and heated arguments over a pint, or a cup of tea, I don't think it can be bettered in the last decade, and I for one am looking forward to the next effort from Ayn Rand, if there is to be one.

John Phillipent.

PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION Anthology edited by Brian Aldiss.
Penguin Books 3/6d

Somebody down there at Penguin must have his head screwed on right, because it was a stroke of genius on their part to get Our President to put together an anthology for them. For 3/6 they

have put out the neatest package of SF you can possibly imagine. The sort of volume that is just made for propaganda. Keep a few extra copies on the shelf and press them into the hot hands of possible converts.

To begin with there is a compact little introduction that is as easy to read as the stories themselves. I was most pleased not to see Kunchausen's flight to the moon, Aristophanes' The Birds, Bacon's Now Atlantis and all the others that usually mar introductions, and in the attempt to give authenticity to SF, give it instead the touch of death. None of that. Instead, a witty little essay that nudges the reader delicately in the ribs and fills him with the desire to read on. And when he does there are many pleasant surprises. Here is Steinbeck's The Short-Short Story of Mankind for all those who missed it in Playboy. And Schmitz's fascinating experiment in symbiosis, Grandpa. There are a lot more - twelve stories in all - from many different sources over the last twenty years. Yet there is an even flow of pace and interest the I'm sure was no accident. A nicely composed and evenly balanced work. Don't be put off if you see old favourites like Asimov's Nightfall here. It fits, and that is reason enough.

An interesting fact, and one that might be long pondered on, is that the best story in the volume is by the anthologist himself, Poor Little Warrior!

Harry Harrison.

THE GIANT STUMBLES by John Lymington. Corgi paperback.

Lymington, who I have not had the pleasure of reading before, is a master of the English language. He has an unflinching sense of what is right and never fails to chose the wrong word. That he should have brought his talents to SF is a mixed blessing. While we are admiring his gross structure of malapropisms, grammatical monstrosities and scientific impossibilities, we will be bothered by the crawling sensation that this abortion has been written, purchased and may even be read as SF.

There has always been much talk about how badly mainstream writers do when they try SF, and this is a case in point. You can almost hear John's thoughts as he plotted the novel. "Why not do one of those SF things, childishly simple. Just make the whole bloody world go bang, grass or monsters or wind or anything like that." Boy. You should see what John came up with.

"The sum total of all nuclear fission has created a charge within the earth's composition... these storms are part of a chain reaction... the crisis of that reaction will cause the spin rate of the earth to decrease momentarily."
When this happens, because
"It is generally thought that gravity is controlled by the spin rate..."

everything on the surface of the earth will fly off into space. Wow! I defy anyone to make a particle of sense out of that. And while you're brooding on it, remember - an editor liked, believed in and brought this collection of nonsense as SF!

If the science doesn't put you off, the language does. He

talks of "illusions of grandeur", a man being "exhausted from his hurts" and constructs this jolly little simile when the hero has his face bashed in.

"I feel it's bursting in a pail of hot water."

The hero, who is supposed to be a world famous science writer, talks a good deal like this. His curtain line in chapter eight is a classic for all time.

"Not long ago," he said. "I wish I had somebody to be all together with."

Just I be accused of cruelly taking it out of context, I hurry to explain that this is a complete paragraph, and the boy is described as looking into a long Scotch he has just poured. Presumably he drinks it before going on to chapter nine, since after that he certainly needs it.

Kannel, a character who wanders in for a while then vanishes, describes the pending destruction of the world.

"It's all cook."

he says. He's right, you know.

Harry Harrison.

THE GREEN SUNS by Henry Ward. Sidgwick & Jackson 15/-

If we try to visualise the perfect sf writer, we have to build him up on Identi-kit patterns, with ears, eyes, and noses supplied by extant writers. He would have to have Bester's touch of surrealism, Bradbury's love of symbols, Blish's knowledge of science, Ward Moore's knack for characterisation, Asimov's capacity to construct plots, Damon Knight's intelligence, Wyndham's flair for conviction, Heinlein's productivity - but let's not go on. One thing he would have to have is monstrous assurance.

Henry Ward has monstrous assurance.

What is more, his symbolism, his science, his plotting, and his intelligence are well in evidence. This is only his second novel. I hope he writes many more. If he does, he may well become one of the great names in sf.

About the GREEN SUNS, there is little that is original - which is not to say that it is derivative. Of a novel that is not original, we can ask that it be better than its predecessors; only if it is clearly but a feeble reflection of those predecessors can it be called derivative. There is nothing feeble about Ward.

The novel begins with a Publisher's foreward, which outlines Ward's history, and the role he played in international affairs. This excellent bit of spoof contains passages like this:

An American diplomat, whose name we are obliged to withhold for obvious reasons, was good enough to give us a statement: "All I can say is this, that Ward has got in touch with you on our instructions. It is of the utmost importance that his book should be published." Etc.

After this, the novel is a straight report of what Ward actually did on behalf of the Western World in a dire emergency. In other words, this is fiction dressed as fact - and done with considerable panache.

During WWII (the story goes), Ward was in the Wehrmacht, spying for V3 and V4 information. When the book opens, he is a special secret agent. His bosses have information that sub-nuclear fields of force are passing through Earth-Time.

The first Green Sun appears over ASAI - Atomic Stock Authority I, in America. It is a disc of considerable circumference, but without thickness. From it comes a shaft of green light called the Alpha phenomenon, which renders useless the H-weapons in ASA I.

Naturally, this alarms the Americans. They believe this may be the work of the Russians. The refusal of Ward's bosses, hard-headed military men, to believe in extra-terrestrial forces is one of the nice touches of the book - particularly as even at the end they remain incredulous.

Ward is ordered off to see what the Ruskies are up to. How to get there? Easy for Ward. In England, he has a false identity waiting for him. Sir Philip Morrison is a top-ranking nuclear physicist who no longer exists. Ward takes over this identity and absconds to the East amid an angry blaze of publicity such as attended Fuchs and Katz. Aided by the organisation called 'the Janus network', which consists of double spies, he reaches Frankfurt, where a Russian contact meets him.

The Russians do not take him to Moscow as he expected. He is isolated somewhere in the Urals because there is some sort of panic on. Katz appears and explains. Atomgrad II, the USSR equivalent of ASA I, is also out of action - and the Green Sun hovering above it is thought to be American work.

This tells Ward what he wants to know: that the Suns are not Russian in origin, and that the fact that the US is virtually unable to retaliate against aggression is not known in the USSR.

Meanwhile, Katz reveals to the fake Sir Philip that this is what the Russians wish to find out. He suggests they put Krossler on the job.

Krossler, in fact, is Ward's opposite number in Russia. Ward met him in his Wehrmacht days, and knows Krossler for a tough number. Absorbing this information, he eventually gets Katz to fly with him unofficially to see a Russian scientist called Gorsky, who has been working on ternary depolarization for twenty years. This is a ruse to pinch a plane. Once in it, Ward clobbers Katz, and flies for the West. There is a fight, they crash. "I was well into Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, only a stone's throw from the Hungarian border."

All the same, it takes Ward a fortnight to reach Munich. In that time, as you may expect in one of Ward's books, events have not been standing still. A third Sun has appeared motionless over the Indian Ocean. Half the world's reporters are gathered in Colombo to cover any eventualities.

Two of these reporters are not what they seem. One is Barbara, Ward's assistant; another is Krossler, Ward's enemy.

Ward himself, back in America, delivers his information, and is sent on a new assignment. This time he has to go to Paris. There he calls on an old friend from war days, who mentions to him the name of Count Charles Francois du Gouroux de Savignac. Savignac is a man the world judges mad; in fact he is the only man in touch

with the sub-nuclear world, or the sub-corpuscular universe as Savignac himself calls it.

I will not reveal the rest of the story, for the benefit of those who have not yet read *The Green Suns*.

What has been related so far represents almost exactly the first (and less scientific) half of the novel. I relate it without either particular approval or disapproval, for the plot after all should be the bare bones on which the author assembles flesh, and the flesh is what chiefly concerns us, given that the skeleton is not deformed.

But Ward is noticeably long on plot, which means weak on flesh. However, people seem to like labyrinthine plots, and here it must be said that at least the bits fit together, though at one point there is some vagueness about what Barbara and Krossler are doing where. Mostly, the narrative is of admirable clarity.

"Next morning, on the dot of eight, I sat opposite him in his office. He began speaking. At 1 p.m., he had four hot dogs and two glasses of milk sent up, and ordered two more packets of cigarettes. At 9 p.m. our conference ended. At 9.10 p.m. I left the building carrying - in the special pouch I always wear round my waist - the most extraordinary administrative file I had ever set eyes on."

Only occasionally does this admirably concise style, in its force and lack of adornment so suited to the theme, slip into something else. Sometimes it parodies itself: "It was now November 17, 1530 hours," interpolated to increase the bustle, becomes silly in context. Sometimes it lapses into melodrama: "On your success or failure depends the survival or destruction of the U.S.A." [Perhaps this is less melodrama than a sentence culled from a hundred other books.] and there is an unintentional bit of humour; when Sir Philip is described as "a typical Englishman, untalkative, unmarried".

These are minor blemishes. On the credit side, the civilized virtues are implicitly maintained. For instance, a quiet pervasive humour shows Ward being serious without being solemn. A quote from Pascoal or a mention of Verlaaine's poems comes in quite naturally. Though there is a certain amount of tough stuff, effectively done, there is no sadism.

All this I enjoyed very much, but what chiefly delighted me was that in these pages you can find something so often missing from sf: a genuine intellectual excitement. For when we get down to hearing Savignac's explanation of what is happening, this is no perfunctory shuffling off of an excuse for the action (as was Fred Hoyle's shameful and shame-faced ending to "Ossians Ride"); it blazes into all sorts of elaborations, unnecessary but startling and stimulating. We will deal with some of them in a minute.

First, it is worth pointing out that - although a summary of the plot may not suggest it - *The Green Suns*, with its complexities and surprises and super-pseudo-science is nearer in mood to Van Vogt than to any other sf writer. In the way in which it becomes steadily more and more fantastic, it recalls the pleasures of Van Vogt's "Wizard of Linn" - without its pains.

For besides having a monstrous assurance that parallels Van Vogt's, Ward has a clear mind; and by setting his tale in the present, he gains immediate and what some may regard as unfair advantages.

One advantage is that he does not have to create his back-grounds. These bleak offices in Washington, these shoddy hotels in strange towns, these massive atomic establishments, are a powerful part of the Twentieth Century myth - if we do not know them at first hand, then we know them intimately through the fiction of Graham Greene or Ian Fleming or the newspapers. With a story set in 12,000 A.D. (as is "Wizard of Linn"), we need to have our back-grounds drawn in for us.

Another advantage concerns the characters in the foreground. Since *The Green Suns* passes almost as reportage, with Ward as reporter and hero, it can get away with almost featureless personages, and we do not mind. These are public faces in public places, and they fit. With stories set far ahead, we would have more curiosity about the character's upbringing, ways of thought, manners, etc.

So we pass to the pseudo-super-science, and here again a parallel with Van Vogt suggests itself - you may remember the 'spheres of energy' in the "Wizard of Linn". Ward's sub-corpuscular universe is more staggering and well explained.

This universe, passing through ours, is projecting the Green Suns so that no nuclear explosions take place on Earth while the passage is in progress. The Sun over the Indian Ocean covers the site of an ancient stock-pile of atomic weapons left by the inhabitants of Atlantis. The sub-corpuscular universe has passed through more than once! You may groan at this hoary old theme of Atlantean civilization being raised yet again; I did. But see how newly the theme is decorated. The sub-corpusculars tell Ward, via Savignac, that in those days the moon was much nearer Earth than it is now:

"They say this proximity produced quite different geophysical conditions As a result of this, the waters of the Pacific, instead of being level, were strongly convex. This produced the following conditions: the water trapped between the continents formed something like a huge bubble, the top of which was more than fifteen thousand feet higher than the land..."

I take it that it is for this sort of oddity that most of us read it. There is more. To find how light behaves in the other universe, to find why that universe is all one large consciousness, to find how it communicates with Savignac, to find what our oil supplies really are, to find what is happening on Mars - you must read the book. Here I can only suggest that Ward generates real light and heat while enlarging on these questions.

The one question he never answers is why the sub-corpuscular universe passes through ours. Otherwise the novel is as watertight as an ark.

The Green Suns is translated from the French by Alan Neame, and reads smoothly. Just before it was published, I wrote to Sidgwick and Jackson to try to find out more about the author. They replied that he is something of a mystery man. He is half-English;

his mother was French, and he lives in Paris, writing in French. Apart from that, little is known about him.

One thing, however, is clear. He is an exciting and audacious new SF writer; his first novel, "Hell's Above Us", had much to commend it; his second, "The Green Suns", is even better. It is to be hoped we get many more novels from him.

Brian W. Aldiss.

THE HEART OF THE SERPENT Anthology of SF by ranking Soviet writers. Published by the Foreign-Language Publishing House, 21 Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR. paperback, 266pp. No price.

A solid, good-feeling item, on good quality paper, free from typos, cover illo crude and impersonal, double-jacket giving details of authors on the inside flaps.

The title-story, deriving from a not very effective play on the star-name, Cor Serpentis, is a new examination of an old standard plot. A pioneer warp-ship, making instrumented surveys of distant stars, encounters intelligent alien life in the long spaces between the stars. Making some high-powered inferences, the humans deduce that the aliens are of equal status and non-hostile. Pre-contact, the author takes time out to have his characters analyse and point up the flaws in the old classic US version 'First Contact'. This part, alone, is worth reading for the insight it gives into the Soviet attitude towards US-type SF.

The aliens prove to be humanoid, but with a fluorine-based metabolism. This makes for difficulties, but these are disposed of with the same technological emphasis which characterises the rest of the story. Everything works out strictly in accord with logic, even to the up-beat ending. The story moves slowly, in close detail and thick with philosophy and stilted dialogue. There is an air, here, of those early days in ASF, when it was claimed you needed to be a graduate of MIT in order to follow the hypotheses. The author, Prof. Ivan Yefremov, gives the impression of being far more interested in exploring ideas than in telling a story.

The same applies, not quite so markedly, to the second tale 'Siema', by Anatoly Dnieprov, a physicist with special interest in cybernetics. This is a carefully worked out account of a man who made a robot-brain so efficient that it .. 'she' .. got out of hand, began arguing with him; and very nearly cost him his life. The touch is lighter, here, with a deal of humour very reminiscent of Dunsany and a very neat trick ending. Trimmed a little, this story wouldn't be a bit out of place in F&SF.

'The Trial of Tantalus' by Victor Saporin, journalist and editor of a popular geographic magazine, has a basic theme that is completely new to me; the deliberate collection and preservation of specimens of all known bacteria, microbes, viruses and germs, in one specially designed centre, a sort of 'germ gaol'. This to serve a double purpose; to facilitate research into preventative measures in the event of an epidemic and to permit experiment and modification so as to produce new and 'useful' strains of germs. The story is thin, but good enough to hold up the idea.

Valentina Zhuravleva, the only woman contributor, a graduate of the Azerbaijan Medical Institute, takes as her theme 'bio-automatons'. Her story 'The Stone from the Stars' deals with a meteorite that turns out to be not a meteorite at all, but a miniature space-ship, enclosed in a protective shell of rock. On opening, the astonished humans find that the 'thing' inside is not a tiny alien, but a modified 'brain', a synthetic control device intimately linked to the operation of the tiny ship. Opportunity, here, to make the observation that we, too, will be able to do this sort of thing, someday.

The final story, 'Six Matches' by the brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, is another old theme with a new treatment, in this case the strange effects of neutrino acupuncture on the human organism. Brain cells are stimulated strangely, and lo! we have our old friend 'psionics', Soviet style. A good story, though, and readable.

With such a mixed bag, generalisations are few, but there are some common aspects worth mentioning. There is a refreshing absence (for me, at any rate) of the 'arty' moody, abstract, obscure-type writing .. of suffering, agony, violence, viciousness or anything sordid .. of animosity against 'science'. The writing, in general, is steady, almost pedestrian, with little slickness or pace, and it wants a bit of getting used to; there is a lot of padding, and far too much heavy philosophising .. but this is hardly a fault, when one considers much of recent Western SF, with its overloaded side-issues, and its almost pathological fear of taking itself seriously, with its beautifully plotted, polished and paced 'style' that is far too often just a facade, with nothing underneath. These writers obviously take their science seriously, and tell their stories in the same way, as if taking it for granted that we, the readers, will find these ideas intriguing and interesting, and worth thinking about. I'd be happy to read more like this.

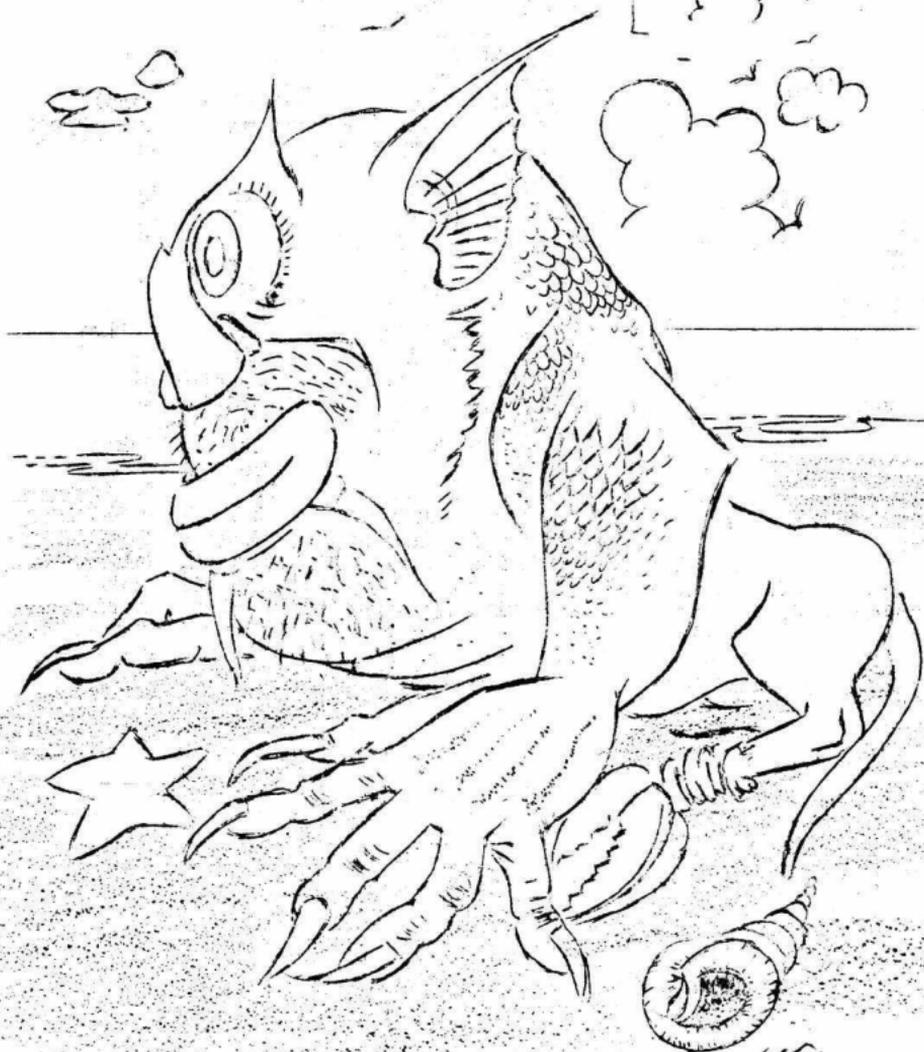
John Phillifent.

f.y.i.

Ella Parker, ex-BSFA Secretary, has produced an anthology of the art-work of Arthur (ATOM) Thomson, who's work you have all seen gracing the pages of VECTOR. This collection, of over 100 pages of cartoons and serious drawings, is selling at 7/- a copy, and all the proceeds are going into BSFA funds. Cash with order, please.

To sum up then - the name is the ATOM ANTHOLOGY, the price is 7/- and the address to write to is:

Ted Forsyth,
11 Ferndale Road,
London, S.W.4.



M^CINTYRE

Sound the Anti-Toxin

Walt Willis

Friends, have you ever felt persecuted, wronged, the victim of a vast secret conspiracy against you? You have? Well, you were quite right, and you can tell your psychiatrist I said so and ask for your money back. (If you get it, tell some other psychiatrist about him.)

But let's take this gradually, because this is too shattering a revelation to be faced all at once. Have you ever read or heard a phrase, a sentence in a book, or overheard conversation which lodged in your mind like a tiny poisoned dart? You scarcely notice it at the time, but it festers there dully, spreading, growing, until - aaaggggh! One night you awake screaming with a monster in your mind, full grown. It happened to Dean Grennell one quiet Saturday afternoon, as he was half listening to a sports commentator discussing the prospects for the day's football games: the voice ebbed along innocuously on the threshold of consciousness and then suddenly tripped over it with the unforgettable words, "No upsets are expected." Poor Dean. His fine, delicately adjusted mind has never quite recovered.

It happened to me in this case way back in 1952, while I was reading Other Worlds. I know I have only myself to blame, but this dreadful sentence wasn't in the Palmer editorial, where I'd been on my guard; it was in the Personal Column. It was a little advertisement no bigger than a man's hand, and it read:

"Phyllis Hollans, 209 Forrest Ave., Redford, Va., would like to correspond with anyone who shares her dislike for S. Fowler Wright."

Well, it so happened that I had other things to think about in 1952 and I dismissed this with a light laugh. Ha ha, I

thought, just like that. What a funny idea. No doubt this girl will get in touch with another girl who dislikes S. Fowler Wright, but what then? Will they exchange girlish confidences about the bits they hate most, wallowing in a sort of perverted literary masochism? Or maybe it'll be a boy who answers and, united by this common disinterest, they'll get married and raise their children as dedicated Wright-haters. How dreadful it will be when they find their eldest smuggling in a copy of THE WORLD BELOW disguised as LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER. You could write a long, turgid psychological novel about a family like this. Or maybe Phyllis will form an organisation: they'll write dozens of rude letters to Wright's publishers under assumed names and put his books behind others in bookshops: maybe there'll even be an extremist wing that wants to capture and torture him. (Come to think of it, I haven't heard much from S. Fowler Wright recently.) Ha ha, I thought, as I told you. I had considered the matter from all angles and this was my conclusion. Ha ha.

But had I? Was it? As the years went by this advertisement refused to let itself be forgotten. A niggling doubt kept recurring in my mind in that mysterious way such things have (but you know what the Bible says about the way of a niggle), and I kept puzzling about it. Why S. Fowler Wright; he isn't in practically everything but the wallpaper, like Bob Silverberg. Why not Heinlein-haters, Bradbury-baiters, Leinster-loathers, Ellison-enemies, As'mov-abhorrrers? Why not indeed? There could be a club for every science fiction author. They might even form a loose federation and publish amateur magazines to spread their gospels of hate, and hold conventions and everything. There would be a National Anti-Fantasy Fan Federation composed of those who hated all the science fiction authors.

And then a cold shudder ran through me, leaving me gasping with belated realisation. There was such a thing! There must be - nothing else could account for all the dozens of hitherto inexplicable facts which leaped to my mind in a terrifying horde. These anti-fans have been ganging up on us. Ever since that advertisement of Miss Hollan's and maybe ever before (maybe they just needed more recruits for the anti-Wright branch), these dedicated science fiction haters have been getting together in secret, organizing, conspiring, scheming - and striking. Treacherously, they have been attacking, sniping, sabotaging, kneeling us in the groin while our backs were turned like the famous mad dogs once did to Harlan Ellison. Of course it's only too obvious when you think about it, it's just that we sf fans were too noble and generous-minded ourselves to suspect such a dastardly thing. Even now, a few of you might still be in doubt. If you are, just one example will convince you. Ask yourself this. You know these people in convention hotels who always complain to the management just when you've got a really good party going? Well, did you ever see one of them? Of course you didn't. Ha. No fan ever did. They take good care not to show themselves because they're the same people year after year. Every September when the sf convention comes round, they book into the hotel, taking care to get a room in the middle of the fan rooms, and punctually at 11:30 pm they take up action

stations beside their telephones. But of course that's not all they do at a convention. No no: Didn't you ever wonder why so many unpleasant things - damage, thefts, etc. - happen at conventions, when you and all the fans you know are decent, honest, well-mannered and refined people? Well, you know who's responsible now, don't you? And these fiends don't let us alone between conventions either. Oh, no, they never rest in their villainy. You must have noticed that when fans plan anything, like a trip or a meeting, something always goes wrong, like a convention programme. You don't still think those things happen through any fault of ours or of the Convention Committee, do you? With us intelligent, clear-thinking fans? Come now.

Of course, all that is just a sideline to their main work, that of sabotaging science fiction. You will have realised by now how they do it, of course. You must have said to yourself several times a month as you throw the latest issue across the room, "Iy Ghod; what made John/Horace/Tony/Larry/Bob/Bill/etc. print that?" Well, you know now. It was because the last time he ran something by that author he got a flood of appreciative mail from you-know-who. These people scan the new authors for the worst potential hacks they can find and then sedulously build them up. How else do you think ~~XXXXX XXXXXX~~ was able to turn prof? Their plan, of course, is to disgust everybody with science fiction, and lately they've been wildly successful.

Too successful. They've overreached themselves and put themselves at our mercy. At the last moment, with victory in their grasp, they can be thrown down in utter defeat. The Russians, of all people, have delivered them into our hands. When the satellite went up, up went the prestige of science fiction fans everywhere. We were the people who were right all along. More important, we were the people who had tried to save the Western World from the ignominy of being beaten in the race into space, the true patriots. Conversely, the anti-fans are obviously fifth-columnists, un-American, traitors. This gives us a weapon to smite our enemies and destroy them utterly. It may take time, but we can root them out from cover one by one. The next time someone in a cinema jeers or guffaws during a good science fiction film (and to think I used to wonder why people went to see sf films when they didn't like them!), or the next time someone in a hotel complains about your party, you know what to do. Report them to the FBI.

DON'T FORGET TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

20

letters

Jean Graman, 7 Wayside, East Sheen, London, S.W.14.

After getting VECTOR 13 I feel I must defend one of my favourite stories against one of my favourite authors; i.e. "Born of Man and Woman" against Brian Aldiss.

This is not a story of "madness, violence and insanity" (what is the difference between madness and insanity anyway?) but the story of a child who, through no fault of his (her?) own is born a monster to normal parents. To ask why they did not turn it over to the authorities is indeed irrelevant, as witness reports we read from time to time in the papers about parents who imprison their feebleminded or otherwise abnormal children for years in attics and sheds for fear of what the neighbours would say.

There is nothing in the story to show that the mind of the monster child is in any way abnormal. It takes its miserable position for granted, as would any child if it had never seen anything else, and is just starting to realise that the others live in light and happiness, while it can only watch water falling from the sky from the little window of its cellar. It longs for its mother (my mother is a pretty) and is hurt by it's father's loathing of it. Is that not the way any child would react?

True it does kill the dog. But do normal human children ever kill or even deliberately torture animals? In this case it is even self-defence against an up-to-then unknown enemy.

That the monster child does not know what to call a dog is simply because it has never seen one before. Therefore it has no expression for it in it's own mind, while 'cellar' and 'coal' are things known to it. Surely it is clear that all the story takes place in the child's mind.

That, in the end, the monster child turns vicious and threatens to frighten the people is no more than a perfectly normal reaction of a maltreated child. It does not even think of killing anybody, only to 'hurt' them back if they beat it again.

Fred Hunter, 13 Freefield Road, Lerwick, Shetland Isles.

I am all agog to learn the results of the poll on sf fans v. readers. The O'Haire hypothesis doesn't seem all that logical; certainly only children would, in all likelihood, be inclined to turn to books for entertainment and thus would discover sf, but I can't figure why this should apply to first-born. As my poll-card shows, I am third oldest in a family of four - the other three being girls. Naturally, when we were growing up, their interests

were entirely divorced from mine and so, to all intents and purposes, I might as well have been an 'only' child. Anyway, I hope everyone sends in their cards to give you a 'true' response.

Geoff Doherty discoursed most sensibly on the place of sf in Eng. Lit. although he disappointed me slightly in referring to psionics, hyperspace, time-warps etc. as 'gimmicks'. Non-existence does not imply impossibility because non-existence, when applied to any of the above, refers only to the present. Few of us, for instance, would feel inclined to state that there never, ever ever will be such a thing as an anti-gravity motor or drive. Therefore an author employing such a device in a story should not be accused of having a 'gimmicky approach'. Doherty cites Wells and Verne as being the 'true progenitors of worthwhile sf reading'. They didn't use gimmicks? Hah.....

The Art Folio was first-class: John Curtis deserves a special mention for his EEMs. Gee, they could have been from the hand of the .TOMIC master himself.

Of the Book Reviews, I enjoyed those done by our Worthy Pres. He combined sound judgement with humour - an excellent combination.

The Fanzine Reprint (which is a Good Idea) was one of the funniest things I have read for ages. And what more can one say? More, please, of humour such as this.

* * I don't know about the O'Leary hypothesis being logical, its just true thats all. Even the original survey did not discover why it was so, just that it was.

The trouble about those 'gimmicks' is that most people confuse ideas that are contrary to known fact with those that are contrary to accepted theory. Those you mention fall into the second group and are within the province of sf. *) *

Don R. Smith, 228 Higham Lane, Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND seems not for me. I've always had an equivocal feeling about Heinlein which has been difficult to define, but is, I think, basically that I admire and enjoy his craftsmanship as an author while finding something rather jarring about his underlying philosophy. In any case, I only go for the most expensive types of eroticism.

Mr. Doherty baffles me with a reference seeming to suggest that as a lad he used to regard ASE as a possible source of pornography. The covers of "Weird Tales" yes, but poor old Astounding - incredible! Even Mr Doherty's young virgin of sweet sixteen (male or female?), so unnaturally sensitive to pruriency that Shambleau could titillate her naughty fancies, could read through my entire collection of Astounding (complete save one) without blushing once - except, perhaps, at some of the more painful puerilities.

The book reviews are commendably exhaustive, reasonably witty, and carry conviction. I'm definitely for these.

The reprint is a characteristic piece of fan caffery, most entertaining to those acquainted with the characters, less so to those who aren't. I, alas, am at the top of the list of the latter.

The letter section seems devoted chiefly to a wrangle about the definition of science fiction, a wrangle which to my knowledge was going on nearly thirty years ago, and will doubtless be continuing thirty years hence. My own worthless opinion is that any tight definition will inevitably exclude a number of stories which, being somewhat off-beat, do not fall within its bounds but are recognised by everyone as in the class; any vague definition will let in even more stories which are just as obviously not even fantasy.

I observe that there is to be a catalogue of the library. I can hardly wait.

(* STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND is hardly cheap, the hard-cover edition will set you back nearly £2, and as for being erotic, well the only thing left uncut after censoring down to the level of SIALI would be the works of Enid Blyton. It's quite a reasonable story, well up to Heinlein's usual standard. True he takes a tilt at the status quo in the fields of sex, politics and religion - but who reads sf expecting peacans of praise for things as they are?

The fanzine reprints are bound to contain references that non-fans won't get, but so far I've managed to keep them to a minimum. You need wait no longer, the library catalogue is here.)*

Jill Adams, 54 Cobden Ave., Bitterne Park, Southampton.

I am appalled at the fact that only 19 members could be bothered to vote on the Constitution. It really is shocking. I sometimes wonder if it's really worth it, and the Committee must feel worse. It's no wonder discussions die quickly when there are only 5-7 letters received each issue.

I can't agree with Peter Gooch about the book reviews. If the reviewers wait for only good books they could wait forever. Acclaimed by who anyway? Just love Brian's reviews, especially the one of "Starship Troopers", which I haven't read yet. Must read it and see if I agree with him. Both Brian and John in their own ways are good reviewers.

I haven't waded into the 'Definition' because with all the ones I've seen I can usually recall stories that lie outside them and yet are usually classified as sf. Being one of the lazy types I can't really see why people go to such lengths to try and define sf. I mean, why bother? I rarely bother to find out why I like or dislike something.

Mr Doherty's article was most interesting. I find the idea of a teacher actually teaching sf fascinating. I don't suppose my English teacher knew it existed. More power to Mr D's elbow.

Most of the pics in the art folio bore the faint imprint of Atom. In fact I thought the two by John Curtis were Atom's. I should like to see Ken McIntyre's in colour - at first I didn't like it but it's grown on me. On the whole the art-work wasn't too bad and they should all be encouraged to do more.

(* I think the Committee get used to little or no response from members, or rather they get used to, and don't really worry about, part of this lack of response. There are quite a few members who re-new their membership every year and don't otherwise

communicate with us. Fair enough - they are obviously getting what they want from the Association and are, so to speak, voting for the status quo. The group we do worry about are those who aren't getting what they want from the Association and who, instead of letting us know what is lacking, just fail to re-new at the end of the year. I'm rather more fatalistic about this loss than the rest of the Committee and here's as good a place as any to say why. Of the entire population of this country only a fraction read sf. Still fewer collect it to any extent, are willing to spend money on it. Therefore it is to be expected that very few will be willing to spend money indirectly on sf, by buying books about it or joining the BSFA. Our potential membership is small to start with. And we lose about half of those who do join because they don't find anything they want in the Association. I'd take a guess that most of these people don't really know what they do want from the Association, they just know it's missing.)*

John Oaten. Bulls Down Farm, Wraik Hill, Whitstable.

I have had so much pleasure from reading books from the BSFA library that I felt I must write to express my thanks to the Association's officials, and Mr Peter Haby in particular, for this excellent service. I do hope you can spare room in the next VECTOR to publish my brief letter, as I am sure it expresses the sentiments of many other members who, like myself, do not take an active part in the Association's affairs, but are very grateful to the officials for all they do on our behalf.

(To which I can only say, on behalf of the Committee, thank you very much.)

WEALSOHEARDFROM

J.R. Campbell of Liverpool, and Ken Cheslin of Stourbridge.