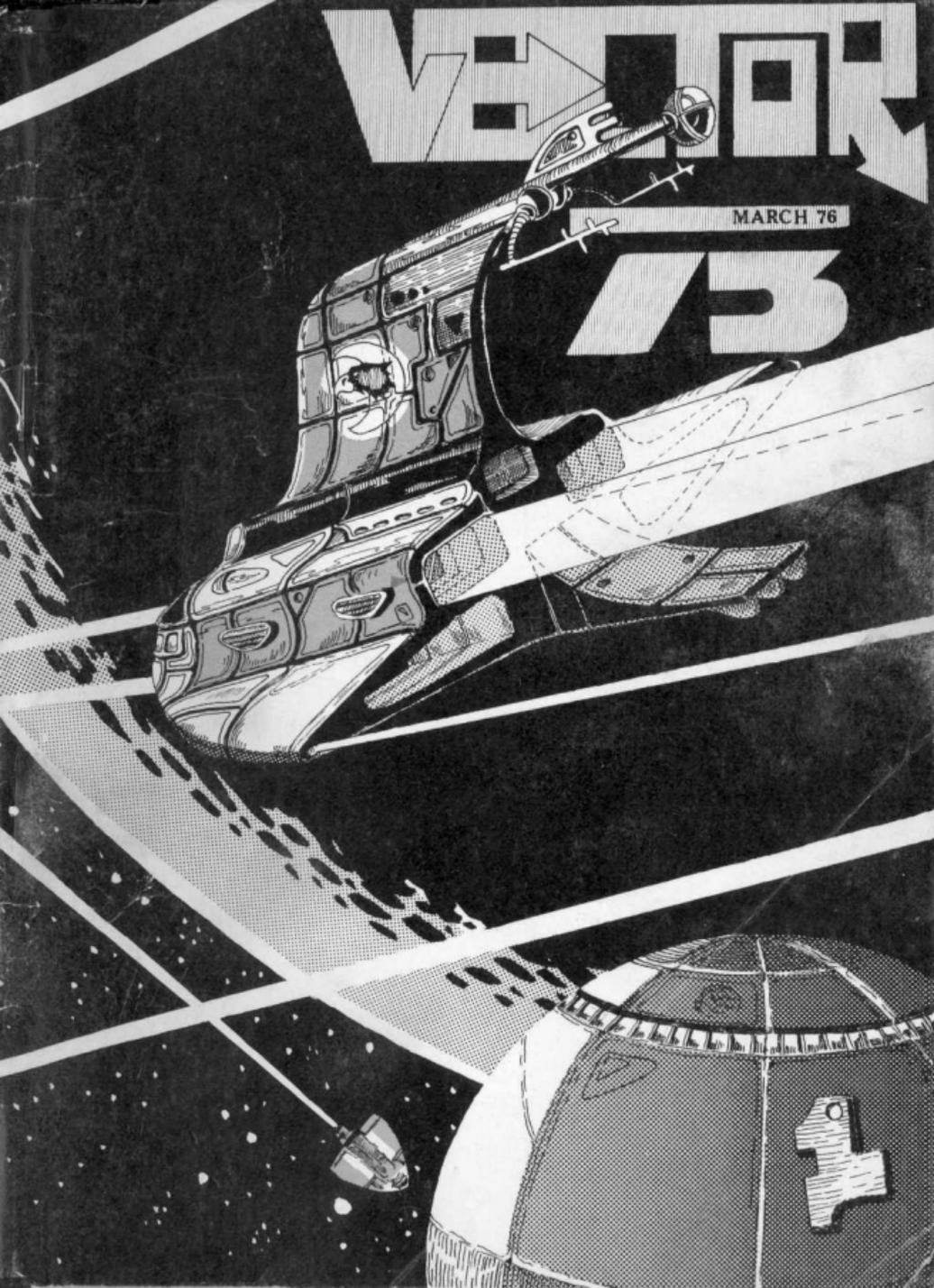


VECTOR

MARCH 76

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VECTOR

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of Reading SF Club, too numerous to
mention

This issue is for the Little Red-Haired
Girl, whatever colour her hair may be,
and wherever I may find her...

Thanks to everyone in the Fantasy Work-
shop, especially Ursula...

...Bon voyage, Judy and Takis

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Back issue availability on page 71

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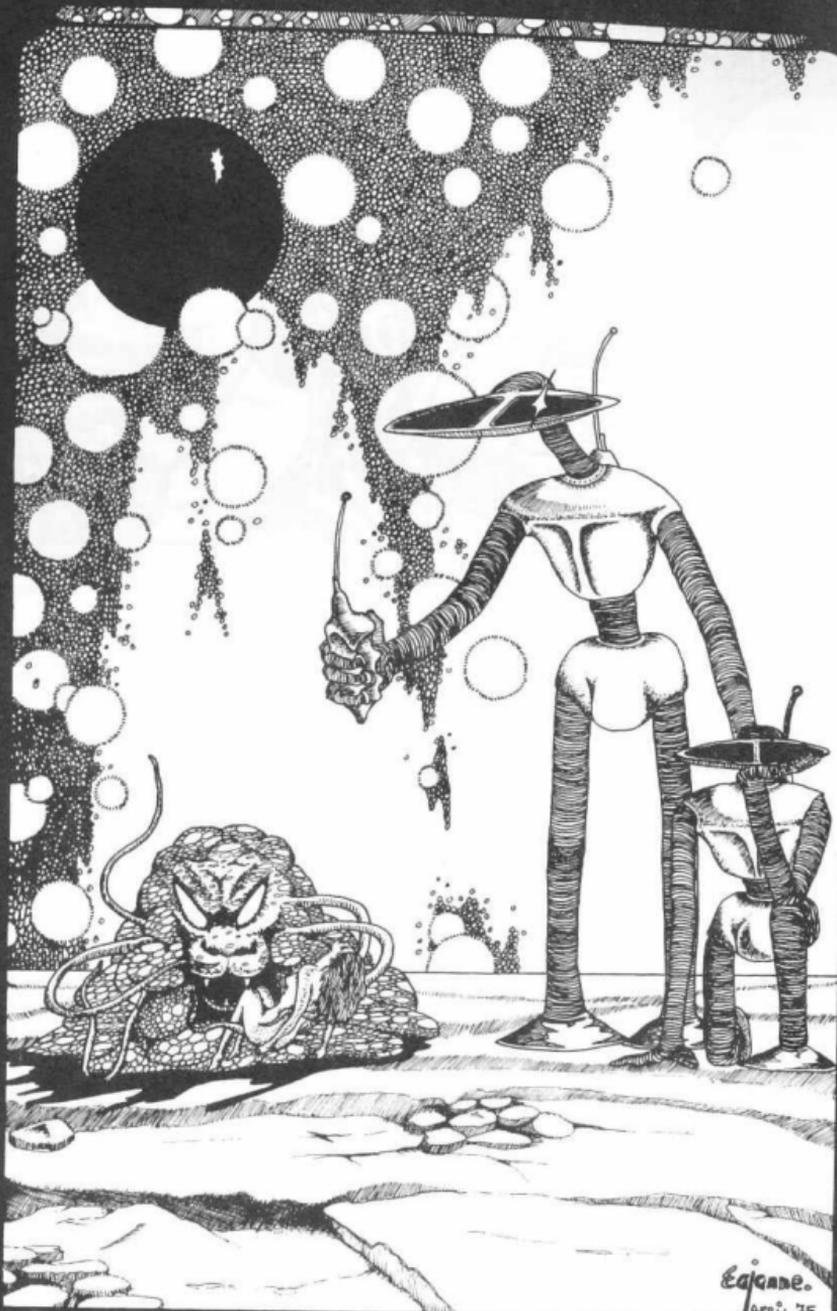
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LEAD-IN

Once more I find myself at the end of the long hard slog of producing the copy for Vector, once more behind schedule, with material held over; once more typing out an editorial and putting together the last few pages, with most of the issue rushed to the printers for production in three days time. As usual, this issue is not the one I had hoped it would be. I had to curtail production when it reached 72 pages, with the Elwood interview still not included: to have put it in, given that it runs longer than the Ballard one, at something around 28,000 words, would have made this not a double but a triple issue! That may be OK for SF Commentary, but it would present some insuperable collation problems for us. So, hold over until next time is that interview, as well as a number of film reviews. There should be a large "Celluloid Dream" next issue. "The Infinity Box" is also likely to be well-stocked, judging by the number of books at present "being reviewed". As I explain elsewhere in this issue, the Letter-Column is likely to be trimmed a bit in length next time - 18 pages out of 72 is a rather high proportion for a journal of this type.

So - plenty of good things waiting in Vector 75; but after that issue, due in May, things become more uncertain. The material will be there, both written and drawn, but will the money to produce the magazine? This depends on you, the readers. If enough of you renew in the next few weeks, and if enough new members come in, and if we can boost overseas subscriptions... then all should be well. If not - well, we have contingency plans, but hope not to find it necessary to put them into operation.

Enough of this casting of gloom over your contemplation of the new issue (I like to fool myself that you all rush to the editorial first...), since even if this issue doesn't have all the material in I should have liked, and even though I have had to hold over an enormous amount of art-work, I hope it still has something of interest to you all. The Ballard interview, by Jim Goddard and David Pringle, is something which I am extremely pleased to be able to present to Vector readers. It is due to appear in a forthcoming collection of articles about



E. J. Kane.
April 75



THE CYBERIAD by Stanislaw Lem, translated by Michael Kandel (Secker and Warburg; London; 1975; 292pp)

THE FUTUROLOGICAL CONUNDRS by Stanislaw Lem, translated by Michael Kandel (Secker and Warburg; London; 1975; 148 pp)

Reviewed by Ursula Le Guin

I want to take this chance to say some things about Stanislaw Lem which have been building up pressure in my boiler for a couple of years. First, however, if you don't know who Lem is, or think he is a Lunar Excursion Module, or that he wrote the script for the movie Solaris - go and find the novel Solaris, and read it. Twice. If you can find The Invisible, read it too. Then read Solaris again.

Now, to open the safety valve. Lately, when Lem is mentioned at all in America of circles, it is with sour mouths and sometimes hateful sneers. A little of this is due to sheer envy; some to natural resentment, for Lem is a heavy-handed, polemical critic; and a good deal is due to Franz Rottensteiner, who, in his zeal to praise Lem, has too often isolated that, next to the Master, all of writers are incompetent backs - neither true, nor endearing. But envy, resentment, and Mr. Rottensteiner all accounted for, still there is a mysterious insistence upon badmouthing Lem (whom nobody has met) personally. His books are ignored, he is vilified. The American author whom Lem himself has praised most highly has vacantly been announcing that Lem has cheated him out of a lot of zlotys, and should be boycotted if not pilloried. Details of the swindle have not been made clear, and until they are I thoroughly disbelieve it; I wonder if the American author did not realize that the Polish government "reabsorbs" its book advance zlotys after a brief period, if you don't come to Poland to spend them. It will take some gilt-edged proof to convince me that Lem absorbed them. He obviously doesn't need them, being an immensely successful author; but, much more important, he is not working hard to get certain Western books translated and published in Poland for love of zlotys, but for love of those books and love of literature.

* For readers to whom this reference is veiled - see a letter from Philip K. Dick in the current SFWA Forum. -Ed

It is also love of literature, I think, that has made him so exigent and arrogant a critic. We're still used to a lot of backpatting in of Sloppy writing and soggy thinking infuriate Lem. He roars with pain and wrath, and starts flailing about in a temper, and makes dreadful ignorant generalisation about the United States and Western of in his torment. But it is real torment - he *cares* about writing and about thinking. The arrogance is a fault, yet I find the rather naive, thunderbolt impersonality of his criticisms more magnanimous than the ad-hominem rancor they have provoked. Nobody seems even to dare slap his books, they merely make aside comments about his wammers. Here the uneasy side of the sf pro-and-fan community shows itself, the anti-intellectual, xenophobic side. What wonder that he soon damn American sf as a clique of hickering hacks? It is the face we turned to him.

Meanwhile, fortunately, his books remain, and reviewers in England and Australia have discussed them and more, I hope, will be forthcoming. These two are (to my taste) minor Lem, light Lem, but to other readers they might well be more attractive than the somber, intricate beauties of *Solaris*. They are both games, intellectual and verbal games (like the "solaristics" chapter, but much funnier!). A pause now for a 21-gun salute to the translator, Michael Kandel, who has done the impossible and made it look inevitable.

"And the theosophy on Sixth Avenue has to be a theological apothecary cafeteria, judging from the items on display Aleles and styles of absolutes, theopathic, reBullin, orisol. All the faiths are represented too - there's christending and anti-christending, orctual, arYmenol, anebaptiban, methadone, brahman, supralapsarian suppositories, and torosapice, quaker oats, yogart, miskanmeal, and apocryphal dip.... Many of the boxes come with haloe...."

(The Futurological Congress, p.80)

"I see the eigen value in thine eye,
I hear the tender tensor in thy sigh.
Bernoulli would have been content to die,
Had he but known such a² cos 2 θ !"

(By the Mechanical Bard, in *Cyberiad*, p. 53)

I should love to know what quaker oats were in Polish.

The *Cyberiad* is a collection of outty tales (not short stories - tales) about Trurl and Klapaucius, who are Constructors. They construct ingenious machines. Great flights of scrupulously logical fancy follow. Some of them are allegorical - my favourite is "Bally 5-A", a curiously tender send-up of bureaucracy - and some satirical, and some just outty. Anyone who likes Lewis Carroll or Italo Calvino will probably like them. Best not to read the book at one sitting; the wit is intellectual and verbal, as I said, and so highly concentrated that if you go on too long at one time you may get an appropriate, but disagreeable, metallic taste in the mouth. The tales are grand for reading aloud to a ten-year-old, if you have one handy; if not, try any other age.

The *Futurological Congress* is a long tale (not a short novel - a long tale. The form seems to flourish in Central Europe, where people have a good deal of practice in not saying things straight out.) Here the fireworks almost take over: verbal Catherine wheels, logical Screaming Wessies, a dazzling show. Levels of reality sink like ice-floes under the reader's feet. Beneath the play of bright sharp wit, far beneath, is a solid stratum of good humour (not always a concomitant of wit) and moral seriousness (not always an ingredient of sf). The essential and necessary coldness of the satirical tone puts us off, so that I admire the book without feeling strongly about it; but anyone to whom the emotionally detached tone of Ballard's tales or Aldiss' experimental writings is a pleasure will surely find further pleasures here.

THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER by John Brunner (Dent; 1975; £1.95; 288 pp; ISBN 0-490-04237-8)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

BACK INTO THE FUTURE

Over the last ten years or so, John Brunner's major novels have been social (but not socialist; humanitarian, rather) propaganda, aimed at saving us from ourselves. Set in the near (or very near) future, never as much as half a century ahead, they have painted increasingly dire pictures of What Will Happen Unless We Act Now. Arguably, the first of these was The Squares of the City, Brunner's South American extrapolation of the Buchanan Report, plotted as a chess game. It was followed by Stand on Zanibar, The Jagged Orbit and The Sheep Look Up, to which The Shockwave Rider has now been added. All are long novels (the latest being the shortest), complex, fast-moving and frighteningly convincing, in which plot and message vie for pre-eminence. If their connecting premise is that the future will always arrive more quickly and devastatingly than one would expect, then The Shockwave Rider is the central novel of the five, for this premise is Alvin Toffler's in Futures Shock, a book whose help Brunner acknowledges, and whose title is the basis for his own.

CATCH-22 HAS YOU TAPED

The central fact of life in The Shockwave Rider (set in about 2015) is the computer - simultaneously evil and bona fide. A single data network exists for the whole of North America, containing details of all transactions, wages, taxes, credit-worthiness, and so on, for individuals, companies and government departments - the whole lot. All that's necessary to enter or retrieve data is knowledge of the correct code. This means that you never know who has access to all your personal details or who has added some piece of derogatory information to your file. Personal privacy and security of information are almost things of the past. This puts intolerable pressure on the individual, leading to 'overloading' - a nervous breakdown manifesting itself as a series of attacks very similar to heart attacks. On the other hand, the lifestyle of 2015 is one of rapid change - in job, house, location, etc - which means that the data net is indispensable for keeping track of everything. So you can't live with it and you can't live without it.

THE SHADE OF THINGS TO COME

Although this particular future seems nowhere near as bleak and downbeat as that in The Sheep Look Up, this is only because its horrors are not as obvious. Instead of plague and pestilence there is widespread corruption, a serious law and order problem, an economy overextended to the point of collapse, and a threatened breakdown of family life due to the "plug-in" lifestyle of rapid change, all this backed by a veneer of affluence. If I seem to be concentrating my attention on the background of The Shockwave Rider this is only because it is a very accomplished creation, so sophisticated, logical and believable that it deserves the highest praise. John Brunner has the knack of thinking up eye-ear for his furious futures (I still remember the "shiggies" more than five years after reading Stand On Zanibar) and now he gives us "pokera" and "sitties" (guys and gals), "devees" (to declare void), "swaadach" (je suis d'accord) and a couple of dozen more. While I admire the props, though, this is a future several shades blacker and nastier than I would be happy to inhabit.

UNHEARD BY THE MIND

The sole respite from this stress-filled world is a listening service known as Hearing Aid. Anybody can call them on the phone and talk, confident that only one discreet listener at Hearing Aid can hear them. Hearing Aid provides no answers or conversations, but the fact of talking to somebody relieves the callers' stress. Any attempt to tap a call to Hearing Aid will result in a section of the data net

being automatically scrambled - a form of computer based protection which angers the government very much

WALKING ON THE WATER

The shockwave rider of the title is Nick Haflinger, a young man who, better than any of his contemporaries, manages to cope with the age in which he lives. He has a talent for carrying complex codes in his head and writing instant computer programmes. He leaps from identity to identity and from profession to profession, able to rewrite his own computer file at any time from any telephone with a little help from a stolen government code. His major "crime" has been to set up within the data set a special computer programme (a "tapeworm") to protect the existence of Precipice, the only North American community which has remained independent of government control and free from most of the bases of the 21st century "civilisation". (Precipice is the home of Hearing Aid.) Haflinger has been caught, though, his early life being shown in flashbacks and illuminated by lengthy (occasionally over-long) arguments with his interrogator on the subject of what I shall (to avoid a page of explanation) call "government policy". But Haflinger is a true hero figure, a computer superman whose ability seems limitless. He succeeds in persuading his interrogator to change sides. Escaping, he sets up the biggest tapeworm of all time. This consists of "a comprehensive and irrevocable order to release to any printout station any and all data to store whose publication may conduce to the enhanced well-being, whether physical, psychological or social, of the population of North America." (p. 257) In other words any form of corruption is made public. (Now do you see what I meant, earlier, about humanitarian propaganda?) Haflinger's miraculous deeds are not the most credible of John Brunner's inventions (though Haflinger himself is well-developed and credible - an excellent character). Also, the final revelation, as to who is pulling the strings, is too facile. In fact, the last third of the plot requires an accompanying pinch of salt.

GOING, GOING, WON

In order to underscore the thoroughness of the author's conception, I should mention that he introduces an entirely new two-person board game called fencing. It is a territory game, too complex to enable a winning computer programme to be written for it. Widely popular in this fractious society, it is dragged into the plot when Haflinger, who is supposed to be in hiding, beats the Best Coast champion, thereby drawing attention to himself. I cannot see any symbolic relationship between fencing and either the society or the book's message. Perhaps the game is intended as no more than icing on a rich and tasty cake. I'd like to see it catch on.

PRIZE PRESENTATION

This is not a book which one can easily put down. John Brunner treeds a tricky path between different points of view, flashbacks to various times and places, conversations between interrogator and subject, chunks of explanation, definitions, jokes and short, pithy observations. He breaks up the narrative into about a hundred short, named sections, and the names are more often than not word-plays. The result is slick and magnificent, driving the reader on towards the gripping climax. This is professionalism; we could do with more of it in SF.

PROS AND CONCLUSIONS

To put: The Shockwave Rider is persuasive, it's the best SF novel by a British writer to appear in 1975. I expect to see it on the ballots for the major awards, although it is not my choice to win. Its price is steep, but the book is a very tastefully-designed package (obviously photo-reproduced from the US Harper and Row editions) with a striking cover illustration by Mike Little.

Nice one, J.B.

BOOK REVIEWS

A SCATTER OF STARDUST by E.C. Tubb (Dobson; 1976; London; 119 pp; £2.75; ISBN 0-234-008-2)

ORBIT UNLIMITED by Poul Anderson (Penther; London; 1976; 174 pp; 60p; ISBN 388-04271-7)

Reviewed by James Corley

My impression that it improves with age becomes more definite. Such relevant contemporary subjects as ecocrash, pollution, overpopulation, the breakdown of communications, violence, sex, alienation, the breakdown of morality, corruption, subversion, (to save space two paragraphs were deleted here) I can study in the newspapers, a cheap and convenient source of lurid fiction. You might guess that stories about disintegrating inner space are too close to home for comfort. No, what I want from a book in these difficult and dangerous times is something that takes me away from it all. Sucks, I like old fashioned escapism.

Not everyone thinks this way. My good friend J.G. Heinz for example used to read all the important books, he was tuned in to the currents of contemporary thought, up there where it's at, getting together a high definition picture of the very frontiers of literature as it dissects the soul of the seventies. I think it was Best Stories from New Worlds II which finally broke him. He came round one evening, deposited a tea-chest of paperbacks on my floor and swigged to Spyn - the merest backward country whose language he couldn't understand. He reads nothing now except old copies of Horse and Hound in the British Embassy Library.

If you too have begun to lay barbed wire around the front door you'll be relieved to learn that there is an antidote to this dystopian culture shock. It's called nostalgia and it's as prevalent in sf as it is in the cinema and the record charts. Old books are still being published which are totally innocent of any harmful innovations, which contain no new explorations of social trends to become disturbed about. All they remain capable of in this decadent age is entertainment, they relax the mind, leaving no nagging doubts about whether the passage just read was a brilliant but obscure insight or a priater's error.

In an ideal world I suppose all of would be laid down in a cellar for a minimum of ten years to allow it to become obsolete before being brought out into the glare of publication. A decadent would decay most of it into undangerous dust, what was left would have matured to cut through grim reality like vintage booze

Both A Scatter of Stardust and Orbit Unlimited have merged from hibernation in the cellar. I put E.C. Tubb's collection of short stories first not in deference to age - these date from as far back as 1956 up to 1966 - but nostalgically because Mr. Tubb was one of my first discoveries in the genre and also coincidentally a co-founder of the BSFA. (This does not quite make him a contemporary of Jules Verne, 1975 saw his paperback adaptations of Space 1889 nos. 1 & 2. But quickly back to the past...)

Even flashbacks don't prevent these eight stories from driving, in the manner of the day, straight from beginning to end on a single uncomplicated theme. Impossible therefore to describe them in any detail without unfairly giving the game away. What can be disclosed is that the characters labour under more than their fair share of mental strain. The bereaved central figure of "The Bells of Acheron" who hears seven voices on a tourist planet, the bereaved scientist wiping out a planet of telepaths in "Survival Remains", the bereaved scientist whose lunacy gets in the way of his important discovery in "Little Girl Lost", the convict suffering isolationism on a space station in "The Eyes of Silence", the agnostic psychotherapist hexed by a magician in "Enchanter's Encounter". Times were hard even before the discovery of inner space.

There is also a tendency exceeding statistical expectations for characters to suffer from bad feet. "Anne", the latest and most downbeat of these stories, describes the relationship of a spaceman fatally injured in the lower extremities with his equally damaged spaceship. Other stories range from secretaries with

tight shows to military men with crippled legs. A useful device for fleshing out a character is so isolated story, but a procession of figures limping though a book makes one long for the novelty of a broken arm or a missing ear.

There were problems certainly, both social and pedal. In the future of the fifties, but where problems can be an end in themselves for modern writers they were there to be overcome for E.C. Tubb. Individuals may get it straight between the kneecaps but they soldier on. To a happy ending? Sometimes, but even at his grimmest, when for example the world is threatened with destruction by the suicidal scientist in "Little Girl Lost", the final sentence has a character limping towards the abort button. Tubb always avoids the totally bleak ending. His characters may suffer from depression but the style is far from depressive. Their problems are not our problems and thus we can safely enjoy them. It's unsophisticated and unfashionable and great stuff.

And now Debit Unlimited to which the honours in our battle of the odds must be given. Poul Anderson is after all American which is even weirder than a mere anachronism. The Atlantic is as good as any cellar for some of Anderson's books. Design Floundery took ten years to make it across, it was a long thirteen years before Orbit Unlimited reached British shores. Publishing of course is in an economic crisis and Poul Anderson is a slow swimmer.

Appearing as three separate novellas in two different magazines between 1959 and 1960 the joints of the 1961 novel hardly show. The characters provide continuity, welding together three times the moral idea quota and three separate dramatic crises. Peter Nicholls has described the typical Anderson character as an American-Capitalist-huckster-pragmatist. Who would dare argue with no erudite portrait? Such an ACHP is Svoboda who has maneuvered his way up through the rigid social layers of the future to become the Commissioner of Psychologica, one of the privileged group of Guardians. The masses, 90% illiterate, are opiated by pragmatic-seeping mysticism and esoteric sandwiches between the two extremes are the professional middle classes, scientists and technicians, who are showing signs of unrest. They believe in Constitutionalism, a philosophy which has more than a loose connection with American-Capitalist-huckster-pragmatism. There is a surprise development in this first section which fear of the SFA enforcers prevents us from revealing. What I can say is that Svoboda, realising the threat to the ruling Guardian, attempts to destroy the middle classes by closing their rationalist schools and replacing them with inferior anti-educational establishments where the next middle class generation are reduced to prole mentality. What else can the middle classes do under the circumstances but emigrate?

Welcome back. I expect at that point you staggered several paces across the room, as unsteady on the pine as an E.C. Tubb hero, before collapsing in an admiring swoon onto some convenient piece of furniture. What foresight! One could almost swear PA had some prescient vision of England in the seventies under the evil Wilson and his comprehensive hoax. This is a prediction which should be chronicled by all historians alongside atom bombs and communications satellites.

Svoboda's estranged son, Svoboda Jr., a leading Constitutionalist, takes us into the story of the emigration. Veteran astronaut Joshua Coffin captains the fleet of starships to the newly discovered planet Ruetum. Crisis during the trip is overcome and Ruetum eventually reached - for here occurs the mandatory scientific problem, an element as easily missed in modern sf as locked rooms containing corpses in Hawaii Five-O. A ship with essential equipment aboard is stranded in a lethal radiation belt and there is no way to rescue it!

In part three of the story the colony has been established. (Right, Svoboda Jr thought up a way to rescue the equipment.) But Svoboda's problems are far from over. Anderson is determined to point out comparisons between his migration and the colonisation of the American West. Unless we have another fantastic coincidence here his background research included Hollywood - you remember the

Rib Tin Tin movie where the orphan gets rescued from the eagle's eyrie? Barely restraining his smug sentiment Svoboda is bucketered into playing the canine role, trekking into dangerous unexplored lowlands to find Josue Coffin's runaway adopted son. I expect the kid was looking for foster parents with a more normal name. By this time we know the characters well enough to wade through the corb with them, but original it isn't. No one can breathe life into an ACEP like Anderson but sentiment sits heavily on ACEP heads.

A minor criticism, though, for pace is maintained and the characters of that period were still uncomplicated with just enough pimples starting to show to make them interesting. An undemanding and enjoyable read and no bad language.

THE COMING OF STEELEYE by Saul Dunn (Coronet; London; 1976; 142 pp. 40p)

Reviewed by Phil Stephenson-Payne

The Coming of Steeleye must rate as the worst SF novel I have read in the past five years. It reads like something T. O'Connor Sloane rejected from Amazing Stories in the 1930s.

The plot is simple. In the 89th century space is ruled by a federation of planets called the Sylvan Empire. Another planet, Sroot, wants to join the federation because the only natives on Sroot - the Esmigs - are android and a federation law (invented to keep out the Esmigs) says that each member planet must contain "a child born of a natural mother". So the Esmigs decide to create a live creature modelled on a race "now extinct in the Universe" - Man. The scientist picked to do the job creates a woman - while a rival scientist, piqued at not getting the job, secretly creates a Man. The Man is called Steeleye, because instead of one of his natural eyes he has a Esmig eye - a very powerful weapon that enables him to start conquering the Universe single-handed (or should it be single-eyed?).

Which doesn't do the book justice - it is far worse than that. Steeleye and Chaos (the Woman, in case you didn't guess) are created from "books and films, tapes and records...giving exact details of his anatomy", and within minutes of creation the Woman is making such brilliant comments, to her android creator, as

"I wish not to be naked."

'Why?'

'Because...because you are able to see me.'

Not only a woman, but a prude as well, obviously. Steeleye sensibly restricts himself to less revealing comments like:

"I am a Man. I will lead you."

The book is obviously trying to jump on the bandwagon of success created by Doc Smith recently - it has the same brand of space opera. Superweapons come and go, but the hero goes on forever. But where Doc Smith had good qualities, Steeleye has none. However out of date, or out of fashion they may be, the Doc Smith books do have some sort of plot and some sort of characters. Steeleye has none. All its characters are cardboard and the plot is laughable. They could be worse - for the prose certainly is; I've seen better coming off an IBM computer. Here is a sample of its brilliance:

"The first two launches moved at space speed, riding each ten, perfectly aligned alongside each other, their disruptors firing continuously, and a curious flash exploded from each hull, sending out firework displays of light and heat. They were equipped with a high-tension, light, mist explosive, which surrounded their advance with what seemed to the enemy like a halo of bright flames."

It is a great shame that Coronet, who were beginning to establish a good name in the sf field with their diet of Anderson, Cooper and Venneget, should be responsible for such rubbish. Even worse, it is the first of a series especially commissioned by them. Let us hope that they get some sense, or taste, and cancel their plans for continuing the series and concentrate on repairing their reputation.

COSMIC CAROUSEL by David S. Garnett (Robert Hale; 1976; £2.90; 192 pp; ISBN 0-7081-5003-2)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Most noticeable about David Garnett's writing is his lack of style. I don't mean that his style is so careful as to be invisible; just that he speaks with the same voice throughout the seven stories in this collection (three reprints and four previously unpublished). It is a voice which is not necessarily consistent within a paragraph, but which is never varied deliberately to suit a particular story. This, coupled with the fact that so little trouble has been taken to develop (or even to describe) any of the characters, means that the stories here stand or fall on originality alone.

The most original is "The Pension Dimension" (which appeared in New Writings in SF 23 as "Ragibon"). Earth is using other worlds (whose location in time and space is uncertain) to provide living space for its old people. There is instant access by means of matter transmitters. But when one of these gateways hits it cuts off nine and a half thousand pensioners, eight guards and a nurse from food, air and water. They expect the fault to be repaired quickly. When it isn't, the guards reason that the gate may be working in one direction only, and they begin to herd the old people through it. There is disagreement between the guards, who proceed to kill off one another. The surviving guard and the nurse stay put (miraculously, the planet turns out to be inhabitable), living together for almost fifty years. Then the gateway begins operating once more. From Earth's point of view it had been out of action for just ninety minutes. Ah, yes, many and varied are the effects of relativity.

"Now Hear the Word" (from WSP 24) is about a radio newscaster who is unaware of his talent for prophecy. (All the items which he adds to his script, apparently unconsciously, come true.) Is he clairvoyant or is he controlling the future? While the idea is not totally original, it does make for an intriguing story. It's a pity the ending is so lame.

The only non-reprint story which I enjoyed is the appropriately titled "Adventure of a Stone Age Man". It is a complex and rather plaintive tale concerning a journalist who pursues his story (of interstellar conflict) from one planet to another, and even back through time, until he is caught in a paradox.

Of the other four pieces, two are hackneyed and two are plotless. In all honesty I cannot recommend this collection, but a reader who is relatively undiscriminating may find something here to interest him.

THE TENTH PLANET by Edmund Cooper (Coronet; London; 1976; 80p; 192 pp; ISBN 0-340-20512-1)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Whither at?

It's a question which has been asked before, but the answer always seems to be different. If anything is certain it's that sf is in the middle of a quantity boom. For the US I have a figure (from Locust) of 830 titles (hardback and paper-

back, originals and reprints) published during 1975, which is a 23% increase over 1974. For Britain I haven't seen any statistics, but the trend is obvious to anyone with eyes: bookshop shelves are carrying more of that ever before, more publishers are issuing more of titles per month than ever before. This is not the very beginning of the upsurge in sf, either. The increase has been obvious over several years now, which means that the public are demanding more sf. (An increase in just one year could be due to any number of factors; a steady increase over five years is prima facie evidence of a change in reading tastes.) And remember that 1975 was a bad year for publishing in general.

I find it interesting that, out of all this sf published, scarcely a single title - in Britain, anyway - either makes a loss or becomes a runaway bestseller. The only sf to make the Sunday Times best-seller listings in 1975, apart from fringe items like Waterlily Cove, was Clarke's Imperial Earth. So the average reader is demanding more sf, but in an indiscriminating way, and is as likely to buy a copy of the latest Book, Perry Rhodan or Star Trek Log as the latest novel by Le Guin, Silverberg or Dick. So, why should sf authors bother to write careful, literate novels which have depth and meaning, when they could write shallow rubbish in a quarter of the time at the same payment per book? Only for personal pride, I guess.

The result is that some of authors (thank goodness) continue to write literature. Others bow before the tide of commercialism and, regardless of their ability, write crud. And occasionally a quality writer gives up writing in despair at this situation (see Factor 72). It's ironic to think that the latest novels by Robert Silverberg (Dying Inside) and Edmund Cooper (The Tenth Planet) to appear in UK paperback - both are newly available - will probably sell about the same number of copies. While Dying Inside is the summit of achievement by a very fine writer, The Tenth Planet is deliberate crud by a writer who can do a lot better than this.

The Tenth Planet is a standard "loner awakes" story about a dead spaceman who is brought back to life after umpteen thousand years, by - in this case - the remnants of humanity who are living underground on the solar system's tenth planet - Miserva - which is way beyond Pluto. The first people whom the revived spaceman, Hamilton, sees are (surprise, surprise!) a beautiful girl and her old, white-haired scientist father. The latter's first words are: "Greetings, Ioris Hamilton. I am your psycho-surgeon and you have been my life's work. When you were brought to Miserva - no more than a handful of desiccated tissue - I was a young man. I dreamed the impossible dream. I dreamed of restoring you to full consciousness. I have spent my life to that end. It has been a long, hard task." (p. 34) That's a fair sample of the book's wooden dialogue and general lack of approach.

You might logically expect Hamilton to be grateful, and to live happily with these pleasant, peaceable people. (It's only 7000 AD, so they're still fully human.) But the author was determined to write a novel full of gratuitous sex and violence. So Hamilton is ungrateful, making unprovoked attacks on various members of this society (killing one of them), refusing (because of his male chauvinist principles) to accept the society's liberal sexual mores and allying himself with a minority of teenage dissidents in an attempt to destroy the Miservan civilisation. Hamilton's excuse for this is simple: he is from Earth and therefore better than anybody else.

When Norman Spinrad portrayed this kind of sick, jingoistic attitude in his "Hitler" novel, The Iron Dream, he was indeed on satirising it by means of over-glorification. By contrast, Edmund Cooper tries to show Hamilton as the good guy, the hero who wins out in the end: another victory for senseless violence and both male and nationalistic chauvinism. And while I'm tolerating the knife I'd like to mention the rip-off of Bari Seidou (from Aelmore's Foundation trilogy, of course) which occurs close to the end of the book. The Tenth Planet must have taken Edmund Cooper all of two or three weeks to write, back in 1973 (it first appeared in hardcover in 1973), allowing him to make easy money out of the indiscriminating demand for sf.

Assuming that Sturgeon's law is correct and that 90% of everything is crud, including 90% of sf, it seems to me that the current boom, focusing on quantity rather than quality, could increase that percentage, driving out the good that remains. It's already driven out the best, in the person of Robert Silverberg. Let's hope he isn't going to be followed by more, and that even he will change his mind within a year or two.

So - whether sf? I'm not sure, but if books like The Fourth Planet can get into print then I'm not very hopeful.

TIME'S LAST GIFT by Philip Jose Farmer (Panther; 1973; London; 173 pp; 50p; ISBN 0-680-04200-1)

Reviewed by Christopher D. Evans

Reviewing is a difficult business. A strategy I sometimes adopt on completing a novel is to try to think of a single sentence which sums up my feeling about the book, and working from this basis, with the aid of notes taken whilst reading, begin to shape a critique. My reaction on completing Time's Last Gift was: No. Bum, not a dull book.

About four pages into this novel - it's a time-travel story, folks - it occurred to me that the prose possessed a staid, sedulous quality quite uncharacteristic of much of the author's previous work. I recalled the invention and stylistic innovation so freely given rein in such tales as "Riders of the Purple Wage" and Tarzan Alive. Was I reading the same author? Unfortunately, yes.

So, on page 35, we have the time-travellers in hot pursuit of west-robbers across the landscape of France in the year 12,000 BC:

"They crossed the plain while going toward some hills about a hundred feet high on the horizon. In the distance, to both left and right, were herds of gray-brown mammoths and brownish reindeer. A pack of a dozen hyenas skulked along behind the reindeer. A brown-gray fox sped across the plain after a hare and presently caught it."

Now, this isn't bad writing. Images are adequately conveyed and the reader acquires a certain mental picture of the scene. But the prose possesses no imagery, it conveys no sense of movement, of life, of the smell and feel of the environment, of "being there". It reads, in fact, like a report.

The above passage sets the scene for the rest of the book. The time-travellers wander over half of Europe during their four year stay in the past. They come into contact with many different tribes of people and survive various hazardous encounters. And all the while the reader remains firmly rooted in the present day.

Why do some writers of proven ability turn out works which are substandard? Does it pay so badly that the full-time author is forced into producing a book characterized by inefficient thought, a disregard for style and imaginative quality, a blithe unconcern for that section of his reading public which requires just a little more than a series of words arranged in grammatical order? What was in Philip Farmer's mind when he wrote this novel? Did he have an urgent mortgage to honour? A newly-born set of triplets to sustain? An outstanding hospital bill for the treatment of flaccid grey matter?

The infuriating thing about this is that Time's Last Gift is not a bad book; Farmer is too much a professional for that. It's simply an unconsidered, uninvolved work. My guess is that it was written as a one-off project with few, if any, revisions, or afterthoughts. One imagines the completed pages coming off the typewriter with grimy regularity, and the completed manuscript being mailed to the publishers before the ink had dried on the final full stop. No doubt the author promptly relegated the book to a lower level of his memory and got on with more serious work. So, too, will his readers.

PATRON OF THE ARTS by William Rotler (The Elmfield Press; Leeds; 1976; 210 pp; £4.50; ISBN 0-7057-0082-3)

Reviewed by Christopher D. Evans

One of the raisonns d'être given to science fiction is that it is capable of teaching (things which mainstream fiction cannot accommodate or investigate fully. Whether or not this is true, it seems to me that SF as a genre has evolved the tools for dealing with certain moral and philosophical dilemmas which are not, at present, open to practical study. The SF writer extrapolates, substituting literary imagination for physical measurement, thus giving us a glimpse of possibilities. In addition, he may select devices which enable him to investigate particular aspects of a problem while laying others in abeyance.

In The Rose, Charles Harness explored the relationship between science and art, with a view to establishing their compatibility. In Patron of The Arts, William Rotler assumes a compatibility and asks: what form will it take, and how will it affect us? Rotler does not ask his questions with the insistency and urgency of Harness - there's a good deal of planet-hopping, lovemaking and fighting in between - but the intent remains.

On an earth of the near future the new art form is the sensatron cube, a three dimensional image capable of movement and the transmission of emotions. The artist, when creating the cube, must be able to manipulate cameras, EEG machines, alpha and beta wave recorders and so on, to produce the effect he desires. He must, in short, be technically as well as aesthetically proficient, and it is significant that the highly talented artist Michael Cilento eventually makes a discovery of great scientific importance.

Well-executed cubes can be so lifelike as to be almost real. Cilento is commissioned by Brian Thorne, the "Patron" of the title, to produce a cube of his wife. This he does, to great artistic effect, and promptly slopes with his subject. At this point I expected the hapless Thorne to fall in love with the sensatron image, but no, the author moves us off to Mars, where Thorne acquires a new love, survives several assassination attempts and finally discovers the key to the universe.

Stated thus, the plot may sound trite, but Rotler develops the story well, aided by some vigorous characterisation and well-realised milieu. One of the more interesting developments in modern SF is that the newer, bolder SF writers are capable of inventing off-world societies which have their own social and cultural orders and are not simply models of our own society with exotic names. Rotler's novomartians are a blunt, pragmatic people, in keeping with the austerity of their environment and their immediate concerns with survival. The author is aware that living conditions and attitudes would be tempered by local factors.

Rotler cites Heinlein as an influence, and the protagonist of this novel is a typically Heinleinian character. Thorne is very rich and powerful; he has a masculinist complex (although the author is at pains to deny this) and he possesses high aesthetic judgment - a kind of athletic Jugal Kharabha springs to mind. We also have the frontier spirit found in many of Heinlein's books re-emerging in Rotler's novomartians, and, in the early chapters of the novel, the characters indulge in a lively debate on the merits of various works of art. Thankfully, Rotler is less inclined than Heinlein to let his creations preach, or perhaps it's simply that when a Heinlein character dispenses a theory of personal morality which conflicts with our own we are inclined to view it with suspicion, but when Rotler's characters discuss art we more readily allow them the benefit of personal preference.

Patron of the Arts is based on a short story of the same name which was a Nebula nominee. Rotler uses many of the tools inherited from his predecessors in the field, combining them with a keen eye for characterisation and a fluid stylistic approach to produce a book which should have a broad appeal. Two minor

quibble regarding word-usage: on page 29 "idiomatic" should have been "idiosyncratic", and on page 70 "disorienting" would have been better as "disorientation".

ARMAGEDDON 2419 AD by Philip Francis Nowlan (Pastor; London; 1976; 186 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Phil Stephenson-Payne

With the current nostalgia craze which is running through SF, I suppose it was inevitable that this, the "Original Buck Rogers Novel", would appear sooner or later. However, anyone with fond memories of the Buck Rogers cartoon strip or radio show will probably be surprised and disappointed with this book.

Anthony Rogers, in search of "radioactive gas" in 1927 for his company is trapped in a cave where an unusual form of "radioactive gas" puts him in suspended animation. He wakes in 2419 to find the world radically different to the one he knew. He finds that the First World War was followed by a second in which Europe united against America to break the latter's economic power. This war was a Pyrrhic victory for the Americans and both America and Europe were then overrun by the Huns from Mongolia. For the last three centuries the Huns have ruled the world, but have shut themselves away in their splendid cities.

Meanwhile, a large and powerful resistance force has grown up in the American wilds, and has developed a scientific technology that in places exceeds that of the Huns. When Anthony Rogers appears the scene is almost set for a full-scale uprising against the Huns and, with his intimate knowledge of the fighting techniques used in the First World War, he is able to produce a large number of useful ideas, for which he is made boss of the largest group of Americans and leads the first full-scale attack on the Huns.

Which seems far removed from the Buck Rogers of legend - which it is. Armageddon 2419 AD is the book that started Buck Rogers off, but it is not itself really part of the canon. "Buck" Rogers was a hero, fighting dastardly villains, evil geniuses and meeting the occasional friendly alien. Anthony Rogers is a soldier, devoted to the total and merciless annihilation of a race of people.

Which, in itself, is the book's main fault - the relationship between the Huns and the Americans is too clearly Black and White, a good Hun being a contradiction in terms. In a brief epilogue, Rogers looks back at the period of the war and, recalling the intensity and "bloodthirstiness" of the time, he rationalises by saying:

"Had the Huns been raging tigers, or reptiles, would we have spared them? And when in their centuries of degradation they had destroyed the souls within themselves, were they in any way superior to tigers or snakes? To have extended mercy would have been suicide."

and, later, he talks about the reaction of his wife, Wilma:

"That monstrosity among the races of man which originated as a hybrid somewhere in the dark fastnesses of interior Asia, and spread itself like an inhuman blight over the face of the globe - for that race, like all of us, she felt nothing but horror and the irresistible urge to extermination."

All of which is a little out of place in the "tolerant" 1870s

One must make allowances, of course, for the book's being 48 years old. Nowlan's knowledge of warfare and science are limited to the 1920s and earlier - he places far too great an emphasis on the efficacy of artillery barrage, for instance. Also, as was the trend of the day, he tries to explain scientifically the devices of the book (which include anti-gravity, invisibility and disintegrator rays) in jargon which is virtually unreadable. Fortunately this, in the main, just comprises

one chapter (Chapter 9) which can be omitted with no harm to the story.

In all, it's not a bad book, though - much better than many others from the same period. So if you're in on the nostalgia game, you'd probably enjoy it - if not, the 30-year-old style would probably irritate you.

PITMAN'S PROGRESS by Douglas W. Mason (The Elmfield Press; Leeds; 1978; 24.50; 172 pp; ISBN 0-7075-0081-3)

THE MALE RESPONSE by Brian W. Aldiss (Panther; London; 1978; 80p; 224 pp; ISBN 0-585-04310-1)

Reviewed by James Corley

"Death's been going on a long time. Somebody must have worked something out."

A morbid but understandable topic to muse on if, like Pitman, you have just obliterated yourself in a car crash. However as another, more perceptive, victim of our atrocious road system points out "I thought there was fair dealin' in the ever after. All I can say is it's a right buggar's muddle."

The unfortunate Pitman discovers quickly that death is much like life only he is now invisible to all except other phantoms, he can walk through walls, transport himself through space and time, and frighten dogs. But there is a sad lack of political consciousness on the astral plane of England, in fact, there is a buggar's muddle which would not disgrace downtown Chicago.

The late departed have divided into two factions, the Organiser's mob who are baddies and the Omega People who are goodies. There are no doubt metaphysical reasons for the fact that the baddies wear black pullovers and the goodies white ones. Being of evil inclination the baddies are constantly picking on the goodies, attempting to abduct them from the ectoplasmic apartment block erected inside the local cathedral and drag them into the lascivious name of the ectoplasmic ecampment on the local race course.

Pitman fights back.

Having discussed the plot we must turn to the philosophical implications. Mr Mason will have no truck with all the nonsense perpetrated down the ages by hell-fire preachers, paranoid theosophists and spiritualists sounding luminous trumpets He suggests, and his opinion is as good as the next man's, that the afterworld consists of baddies chasing goodies. It must be admitted that the foundations of this eschatology contain certain logical flaws and incongruities (about 50 at a rough guess). But in fairness the same complaint might be levelled against best-sellers like The Tibetan Book of the Dead.

The suspension of disbelief which Mr Mason asks us to make is not aided at all by his chosen setting. Almost paradoxically a mundane afterworld is less plausible than a completely bizarre one. These spooks inhabit the commonplace world of supermarkets, buses and office blocks. They do not even completely at home. We expect something odd about the hereafter, the odder the better; how easily for example the ghoulish ambience of Lovecraft's short stories goes down as midnight nears. But expect no tingling epises from Pitman's Progress. The point is highlighted by a narrowing of the credibility gap when Pitman accidentally transports himself back in time. The quaint idiosyncrasies of the year 1813 lessen the alienation between the reader and characters. Ghosts in stagecoaches, yes. On the top deck of buses, though?

Before you accuse me of narrowminded temporal prejudices we must sit back and calmly think a while about this jarring factor in the scheme of things: death is, after all, only Nature's way of telling us to slow down. A story about life after death must be a fantasy. But Mr Mason has not adopted the conventions of fantasy. He has instead opted for a science fictional superhero story, using death only as a way of giving his superhero superpowers - the ability to teletransport like Gilbert Gosed in World of Bull-A and the ability to instantaneously

construct by the power of the mind truncheons, machine guns and, when the chips are down, a Centurion tank. Oh yes, ghosts can be killed, since if you have superheroes you must have green kryptonite to provide dramatic tension. Still, killing ghosts is an uneasy corner to write yourself into.

A Buchan adventure story is a fantasy setting and a science fiction hero with, before I forget, overtones of true romance. Oil and water are recklessly poured over chalk and cheese but not even a solvent of acetoplasm can homogenize it all. A consolation prize though for bravely attempting something out of the ordinary, as the ghost that haunts the ruined library of Corley Castle is apt to say, "Better read than dead"

Something very ordinary is Brian Aldiss's The Male Response. To quell the psychic waves of shock and horror let me explain that this was written in far off 1961. He's improved since then.

15 years! So short and yet so long. So full of incident: the wind of change across the Dark Continent, the white heat of the technological revolution, and not least, or so they tell me, the Permissive Society. If (like were 1961 again, and I was asked to devise a novel with guaranteed one hundred per cent built-in obsolescence) should like to think I would advise a story about a computer salesman looking for sex in Africa.

After a decade and a half the sex is so restrained it's a shock to read it; the descriptions of backward Unhalathorp and its natives seem patronising after half a generation; and after three computer generations the tin box inside which a man sits with a ticker-tape machine makes you wince.

Time can be so cruel. It was a mistake to re-issue this particular Aldiss. It was a mistake to send a review copy to Vector because it isn't af.

So why mention it? Sweet revenge for all the superior sneers of the philistine. We say not yet have an immortal Shakespeare but by and large sf shows its wrinkles less than mainstream fiction. Pitman's Progress will mellow with age; in 1991 who knows are as quaint as stagecoaches if say even be credible. But The Male Response was better left dead than read.

THE GUIZER by Alan Garner (Hamish Hamilton; 1975; 213 pp; £4.00)

Reviewed by Phil Stephenson-Payne

Of all the writers regarded as being on the "fringe" of af, Alan Garner must surely be one of the most remarkable. His meticulously researched fantasies The Widdowson of Brisingamen and The Moon of Gomrath won him a place in many children's hearts, and his more recent, densely interwoven, Red Shift, has gained him widespread acclaim as an adult author. Thus the appearance of a new book by Garner is always worth noting, even when it appears as unannounced as this one.

The Guizer (or guizer) was an actor in a mumming play, somewhat akin to a jester of medieval courts, or to the original circus clown. He represents all that is comical, grotesque and cunning in Man; at the same time he represents the Godhead in Man. In his widest senses, he also plays an integral part in the elevation of man from beast to intelligence.

The book is subtitled "A Book of Fools" and it is probably as the Fool that the Guizer is best known today. Either as the primitive village fool - where folly was considered akin to divinity, and the fool a mouthpiece of the Gods - or as the first (and last) of the Trol tramps. As Richard Cavendish puts it in his recent book on the Trol:

"He is marked zero for No-thing, the indefinable and limitless source of all things... the Fool is the divine Spirit about to descend into the abyss at the beginning of time. He is also the perfected spirit of Man approaching the Godhead... If he is mad, it is a holy madness."

What Garner has done in this book is twofold. Firstly he has demonstrated how widespread the primitive belief in the Guizer was. In all mythologies and legends, from Iceland to Sumatra, he has his counterpart - the folk-hero who was responsible for introducing mankind to fire and death and all the other things primitive man found incomprehensible. Garner uses extracts from a large number of these legends - adapting some, editing others and rewriting the rest - to build his book. He also organises them to represent the three - to him - essential roles of the Guizer: the Guizer as Fool, the Guizer as Man and the Guizer as God.

The Guizer as Fool represents the folly we would call childishness. Innocent and prankish - a kind of primeval Ever Rabbit playing tricks on the Gods. For his main example in this section Garner turns to the Spider stories of the Akan Ashanti of Ghana. The spider stories are usually about a spider - Kwaku Ananse - but to the tribesmen the spider was only a manifestation of childish deceit and cunning, and so some tales in the canon do not feature Kwaku Ananse at all. In the selection Garner has chosen we learn how Kwaku Ananse brought wisdom and disguise to mankind. The natives still hold such a belief in the power of Kwaku Ananse that each story must be prefaced with the ritual "We do not really mean, we do not really mean, that what we say is true".

The second section - the Guizer as Man - introduces a far more familiar figure, that of Faust. Here the essence of the Guizer is human folly, the man who obtains forbidden knowledge from the Gods by one means or another. A large part of this section is devoted to the early Flemish legend of Sir Balwyn (which has only come down to us in a 16th century version, written in 16th century French, by Charles de Coster, based on earlier songs. The knowledge Sir Balwyn seeks is that of strength and beauty, for he is weak and ugly. But the secret, when he obtains it, is a terrible one, forcing him to periodically slay a virgin - for which just retribution is exacted in the end.

The Guizer as God is the most complex, and yet most nearly complete, facet. The main extract here comes from the Hare cycle of the Winnebago Sioux. Hare is born with a human mother and a divine father and manages to pass on to his "aunts and uncles" (the humans) many of the secrets of his grandfathers (the Gods). He differs from Kwaku Ananse mainly in that Hare is aware that he has a purpose in life - to make Earth peaceful for his uncles and aunts - while Kwaku Ananse was just a foolish trickster. So Hare drives away all the dangerous birds, gnomes and spirits, fattens up the Elk and the Bear for eating, and swears the Dog to eternal allegiance. However, life cannot be all good, for as his grandmother says:

"If the people live forever they will soon fill up the Earth.
There would be more suffering than there is now, for some
people would always be in want of food if they multiplied greatly.
That is why everything has an end."

And so Death must come to Mankind.

Alan Garner regards The Guizer as one of the most challenging books he has written, and it is not hard to see why. He has tried to capture in relatively few words one of the basic facets of human consciousness (the "trickster" of Jungian psychology) and to a great degree he succeeds. But it is a correspondingly difficult book to get the best from. A single, fast reading presents it as a collection of amusing tales, some in outlandish English (Garner has tried to retain the essential feel of the original tale in each case) and some seemingly nonsense, but - like Garner's Red Shift - a second, more careful reading reveals a lot beneath the surface.

It seems unlikely that The Guizer will ever become a very popular book, but it could become an important one. It offers, in a relatively simple manner, an insight into one of the basic, universal facets of mankind.

THE MOON CHILDREN by Jack Williamson (The Elmfield Press; Leeds; 1978; 190 pp; £4.50; ISBN 0-7057-0080-7)

Reviewed by Peter Hyde

The Moon Children is set in the not-too-distant future when space exploration, (controlled by an international agency COSMOS) has found alien life forms elsewhere in the solar system. Then a COSMOS ship sees a mysterious glow on the surface of the dark side of the Moon, and a strange installation (perceived differently by each of the three man crew). The ship lands and the crew are later rescued, barely alive, having left the ship and returned with quantities of strange black grit but minus their spacesuits. The three later return to Earth where they each marry and father a child. Two of the children, Nick and (Val)Kyrie are unmarvily bright but the third, Guy, is a dull, hairy parody of a human being.

These events and those that follow are narrated by Kim Godian, the brother of Guy's father, who in the opening pages wishes "that chance had selected a better historian". One can really only agree. The book falls unhappily between three stools: an autobiography of Kim (the problem here is that he is in himself a rather dreary fellow), a history of the future (but pseudo-history needs to be very well done if it is to be interesting - this is not), and thirdly an account of the moonchildren (yet they are off-stage much of the time). The result is an unconvincing pastiche.

Unconvincing is perhaps an odd word to use in reviewing science fiction but it is nonetheless appropriate. The characterizations are weak and stereotyped, with the exception of Kim's brother Tom, whose character and motivations can only be guessed at and who flits in and out of the story in a most bizarre fashion. COSMOS is a totally unreal body and seems to exist only to give Williamson a vehicle for some bureaucracy-bashing. At one point he refers to "new fissures in the sandcastle of COSMOS" - yet this is not really the right metaphor; straw man is the one usually used.

The main problem though is the total absence of ground rules - in the course of the children discovering their purpose and achieving it anything can happen and sometimes does, so much so that each new twist of the plot is robbed of its impact. Science fiction consists generally in the creation of new worlds but to be interesting these worlds must have their own rules even if they are radically different from the rules of our own world. It transpires that the moongrit was left there by a galactic civilisation to reveal to it the existence of intelligent life in the solar system. Once formed into an object (called a nexode) by Guy it then transmitted a message to the galaxies. The role of the other two then became the construction of a tachyon terminal to enable the galactic ships to land. This they eventually succeed in doing and the galactic arrivals to teach Earthmen the secrets of co-existence with alien bioforms - for by this time Earth is being troubled by visits from deadly fogs and energy-draining space snakes which have been agitated by man's exploration of the other planets. Fair enough - but there are a lot of unanswered questions. How did the COSMOS men survive to collect the moon grit without their space suits? (What, anyway, happened to the spacesuits?) Why could only Guy assemble the nexode although he had shown little sign of intelligence and subsequently puts the nexodes to use for his own purposes? Finally, how was it that after Guy had killed Nick he himself died, was skinned by Tom and Kyrie and came back to life as Nick?!

Lastly, the writing has a curiously juvenile quality - I say curiously because Williamson is of course in his sixties. It's hard to pin this down but perhaps it is to do with many of the characters having one-syllable names - Kim, Tom, Nick even Valkyrie is mostly called Ky. Also of course there are the Jovian space snakes, which I found hard to take seriously. So, it gives me no pleasure to write a wholly negative review, but this book really has no redeeming features.

FRIENDS COME IN BOXES by Michael G. Coney (Sphere; London; 1976; 160 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Phil Stephenson-Payne

Michael Coney's writing varies considerably - from the absurd to the superb. In Friends Come in Boxes he is near his peak.

In the near future immortality is discovered, but not via any elixir. Instead, at the age of fifty, the adult brain is removed and put into the (enlarged) brain cavity of a six-month old child. But then the human birthrate begins to fall, and there is not always a body available and so, unless you have Preferred Status, there is a choice - either put the brain in an android body, or keep it in a nutrient solution in a box with audio pickup and vocal chords - the Friendship Boxes - until a host body is available. But androids are unpopular and the waiting list grows. Even when the government institutes Total Death - i.e. no more transfers - for every crime it cannot make up for the increasing fall in birthrate, and so the waiting list grows and grows.

All this is background material and is explained in a short prologue by the author. Although this may seem a clumsy method it is very suitable here - as the social background is so complex - and far better than all the explanatory interpolated conversations which would otherwise be needed. For Michael Coney is not really interested in the system - he is concerned with the people involved. The book is written as the "memoir" of Phillip Ewell, an android Transfer Surgeon, and covers five incidents with which he was involved.

The first story, "Creche", is about Eleanor Jones and Nancy Blackett, both guilty of severe crimes and both working at the same Transfer Hospital. Eleanor has a baby that she has concealed - instead of handing it over to the authorities after six months - and Nancy is involved in stealing babies from the hospital to sell to the illegal black-market Transfer Surgeons. When each discovers the other's secret it quickly becomes a question of who can effectively blackmail whom.

The second, "Never Girl", concerns Linton James, receptionist at a Transfer Hospital, and Mary Atkinson, who comes to take out a couple of "Friends" to keep them company. It is not until she has left that Linton notices that one of the friends is also called Mary Atkinson - and has the same ID number! Suddenly he has considerable power over this very attractive young girl - or so he thinks.

"Maggie" is a rather slower story. Les Anstead also takes out a "friend" - his mother, Ada Anstead, despite the fact that she is always complaining and demanding. But this time she is demanding something new - an illegal transfer - and Les finds things not quite turning out as he thought.

"A Woman and Her Friend" introduces Coney's self-styled heroine, Alice Lander, Preferred Status, who also takes out a "friend" for company. But Friends are not good company, particularly as the waiting list is stretching to three years and more. So, distracted by the Friend's continual chatter, Alice makes a mistake - and in this world you cannot afford to make mistakes, especially not with a Friend nearby.

But it is really in the last story, "Cherily Hub", that Coney introduces his warblers and heroines - the renegades of Bovey Tracey. A peaceful community who have just opted out from the rat race, live their three score years and ten and then die - after seeing their children begin their own lives. They are not entirely ignored by the Establishment, but seem quite capable of defending themselves. And gradually their numbers swell as more and more, including Phillip Ewell, become disenchanted with the outside world.

Coney is shaking on very thin ice in this book. He concentrates purely on a microcosm of a system which, in its entirety, seems totally unworkable - and succeeds thereby. He has set his stage and brought on the players - and can extract us sufficiently with the players and the play (but we don't notice the holes in the backcloth). This is a very good and enjoyable book - I hope we see many more like it from Michael Coney in the future.

THE MAN WITH A THOUSAND NAMES by A.E. van Vogt (Sidgwick and Jackson; London; 1975
141 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Phil Stephensen-Payne

It had seemed, recently, that A.E. Van Vogt had completely lost his touch for writing good sf. Substandard novels like The Darkness on Diamondia and The Secret Galaxies appeared to be his limit. Thankfully, however, The Man With A Thousand Names, while still not quite up to his old standards, is a hopeful sign that he is regaining his touch.

The plot, as often happens with van Vogt, is not remarkable for its coherence. The protagonist is Steven Masters, billionaire's son, who is totally used to getting his own way. Thus when he decides he wants to be on the first manned expedition to Mitted, the curious "Earth-like" planet that has seemed to just appear around a nearby sun, there is, naturally, nothing that can stop him and

he is back on Earth, in the body of a bartender named Mark Brosbe. Never a man to learn a lesson Steven/Mark persuaded his father of his "real" identity and is sent to Mitted with the second expedition that is out there in search of "himself" and the first crew. This time they are more fortunate and capture a native girl. Sadly Steve/Mark, on his turn of guard duty, decides to rape her and

is back on Earth, in the body of a history teacher called Daniel Utgere.

So it goes.

One of Steven's old girlfriends, Stephanie, gets roped in and, together with Steven/Mark/Daniel, the native girl and part of an alien entity called "mother", performs a complex pas-de-six where you change bodies instead of partners. Then another alien race, the Gi-Int, join in and life gets very complicated.

All of which could surely be written by no one but van Vogt in full flow. We have the usual "explanations" of the phenomena - simple matters involving the universal consciousness and the Kiriliana fields separating body and soul - but all is really lost in the spite of rapid and confusing action.

Probably the main thing that puts this book a cut above other recent van Vogt novels is Steven Masters - he is actually a character. Detestable and disgusting, perhaps, but a real "flesh and blood" character nonetheless. Van Vogt makes him come alive as so few of his heroes have recently. Attention has even been paid to some of the minor characters.

But, when all is said and done, the question really boils down to whether or not you like van Vogt. If you don't, this book won't change your mind. If you do - try it. It has its faults (tying up the plot in six pages is a little fast really) but is unmistakably the Mull-A man again, rather than the hack who has been filling in for him recently.

THE FACE OF HEAVEN by Brian Stableford (Quartet; London; 1976; 151 pp; 60p)

Reviewed by Phil Stephensen-Payne

"Good things come in threes". So, it seems, do bad things, for The Face of Heaven is the first part of a new trilogy by Brian Stableford.

The story is set in the far, far future. After continued pollution and a second "dark age" a movement arose on Earth, called the Eucronians, who proposed to build a new surface to the Earth, far above the old, ravaged one. A modest project, estimated to take only five hundred thousand years. The plan gained support and, despite the knowledge that Earth's technology was insufficiently developed, the platform was started. Then, by pure coincidence, an alien - Hissr - arrived, and offered help. In return for a base on Earth he, and some

more of his race, agreed to help the Earthmen and the job is completed in only eleven thousand years. The Underworld is forgotten, as is Sisyphus, as the Euechronians now settle to life on the platform - such as if nothing had happened.

But the Underworld cannot be forgotten - life still exists there. The life cycle has changed - from one dependent on photo-synthesis to one that derives energy from the wastes from the platform above - the people have degenerated to a near-primitive state and a few animals have mutated, but - except for the absence of sky - it is still recognisably Earth. It is this world of which Carl Magnus, in the Overworld, dreams and of which he writes in his book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (the title is borrowed from one of Blake's prophetic books) demanding that an expedition be mounted to free the inhabitants of the Underworld and let them see "the face of heaven". It is to this world, also, that Carl Magnus's god goes - and does not return.

The book has two main faults. The first is the set-up. It is inconceivable that mankind - as we know it - could devote itself to one task for eleven thousand years. The length of the period is a practical necessity (it still works out at several thousand square miles of platform a year) but the lack of change in mankind is unbelievable. In eleven thousand years the entire plant life of the Underworld has changed its entire life cycle from photosynthetic to - in most cases - radioactive, yet Man in the Overworld is unchanged. On its own this, together with the unrealistically altruistic aliens, would be awe-inspiring - by evoking a heavy charge of "willing suspension of disbelief" - were it not that Stableford commits a second fault: he tries to justify it.

Let us quote you a piece of his deathless - or rather, lifeless - prose:

"If, however, the evolutionary burst at the threshold is successful in providing a whole new schema of adaptation without taking the absolute numbers of the scientific population too low, the evolutionary burst is followed by a rapid increase in numbers, during which selection still continues to foster a rate of evolution faster than the normal horotelic mode characteristic of a stable species in a stable environment. Relatively rare species with a high degree of genetic homogeneity existing in an ultra-stable environment may slip into the third mode of evolutionary pace - the bradytelic - thereby change slows down drastically and the species retains little capacity for change."

And so on, page after page of monotonous pseudo-scientific justification of this, that and the other. Possibly, somewhere, Mr Stableford has an ability to write - on the basis of this evidence I suspect it to be in his academic role only.

THE SMALL ASSASSIN by Ray Bradbury (Panther; London; 1976; 50p; ISBN 086-04128-8)

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

Hitherto, when faced with volumes like The Small Assassin or It is for Space (which are re-hasbees of old collections, justified by the inclusion of elsewhere-unavailable or out-of-print stories), I've been faced with a conflict between my Bradburymania and my wallet. No doubt there are others like me, so I can take this opportunity of telling them what they're missing in The Small Assassin. The six out-of-print stories in this collection are culled from Bradbury's 1948 collection, Dark Carnival. Of these, "The Night" (which first appeared in Weird Tales in 1946) is a version of what eventually turned out to be an episode in Dandelion Wine; only in this version Doug is the stay-at-home and his elder brother, Skipper, is the one who's far too late coming home from that nasty Revise. There's no "Lonely One", John Huff becomes Augie Baris, the central character is referred to throughout as "you", and the whole is placed in the present tense. Apart from that, it's very much the same. Still, the atmosphere is worth recapturing; and in the case of the very last sentence, I think the present tense actually makes for an improvement. Read it, and see for yourself.

(By the way, OMP "Ezra" was an old diseased scabby court, wooded and overgrown: what was yours?)

Of the other elsewhere-unavailable stories, "The Handier" (Weird Tales, 1947) is well worth reading - a really original vision of personified death. "The Tombstone" likewise - a short piece of precisely-executed vagueness; W.H. James, minus scholarship, plus Bradbury atmosphere. "The Dead Man" (the earliest appearance in Weird Tales, 1945) shows more clearly than anywhere else, I think, RB's early indebtedness to the O. Henry tradition (and a lot worse tradition you could have, too). You could almost call it an O. Henry plot, the only difference being that the leveler central character happens to be one of the Walking Dead. A fascinating oddity. "The Smiling People" (Weird Tales, 1946) is a "Fruit at the Bottom of the Bowl"-type guilt fantasy. The latter, which first appeared two years later, is the better story; Bradbury was growing fast in those years, leaving the pulps behind. But "The Smiling People", though relatively predictable, is worth a visit. "Let's Play Poison" is an Evil Children anecdote (Weird Tales, 1948). Again, it pales in comparison with "Zero Hour", which first appeared a year later, but is still worth a visit.

So out of the six elsewhere-unavailable stories, I shall certainly keep two by me for future reading; and the variant of the Dandelion Wine episode is of real interest. Three out of six - and I have a habit of changing my mind about not-so-good Bradbury stories. Sometimes they turn out to be good.

Here I am, going on like an ancient connoisseur, and Chris Fowler tells me that there may be people out there who don't know all about Bradbury. Can such things be? I suppose so; in which case, The Small Assassin is a good introduction to the Weird Tales, as opposed to the Thrilling Wonder Stories side of him. Besides the title story (a first-class chiller), and the six aforementioned, there are six really vintage stories from The October Country (which is, by the way, due out from Panther in June). The two really classic ones are "The Next in Line" and "Jack-in-the-Box".

About "The Next in Line", the one about the neurotic American woman trapped (in the subtlest way possible) by the mummies beneath RB's own personal Mexican graveyard - frankly, I don't care how often he revisits that graveyard. (The last visit, to the best of my knowledge, occurs in The Hollows' an Tree. No, I tell a lie: there's "God is a Child; Put Toys in the Tomb" in When Elephants Last.) Every visit turns up something new. In fact, I'm beginning to feel uneasy at home there. I don't agree with Edmund Cooper in Cypher 12, when he says that Bradbury has been reduced to turning out pastiches of himself, like Reingway in his latter end. He's still very much alive, and working magic in his own special dimension. So he's still lingering among the mummies, handling the candied deathheads. So what? Aren't we all? Sometimes I dream of being able to explain just why Bradbury is rather special; but then I find that it's like trying to explain why I find life rather special. The proposition is true, but unprovable.

I can say this, though: like life, Bradbury improves with time. I did pass through a period of doubt, round about the appearance of I Sing the Body Electric!, in spite of the very good things in that collection. Was RB becoming too facile, was he churning out the stuff regardless of quality --- ? Then came The Hollows' an Tree and When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed, and my confidence was restored: I suddenly realized that the total Bradburian magic worked inside the time-dimension. A present story or poem illumines past stories, and vice versa; and this interaction is somehow a part of life itself, revealing what would otherwise be hidden. I once simply wondered at Bradbury's Chamber of Mummies; now I watch it grow up around me, and feel a different sort of awe.

Then there's "Jack-in-the-Box". First time round, this is just a marvellously-elaborate Freudian fantasy. But now? Now I see it as an even more marvellous, more-than-Freudian fantasy. Its secret lies in knife-edged ambivalence. "Mother" is, certainly, a crazy widow trying to rear the fragile Edwin in the Universe of

Father-God's family mansion, away from the horror of Outside. But at the same time she is an archetypal figure, reminiscent of the veiled Mother-Teacher figure of paranoic Natures in Spenser's final Canto "Of Mutability" at the end of The Faerie Queene, seated at the centre of Father-God's Universe, surrounded by her subjects. I'm not saying, of course, that Bradbury intended this consciously; but it's a fitting tribute to the power of his imagination, that such a comparison is far from odious.

These are the two big stories in The Small Assassins. For the rest, the atmospheric pieces - "The Cistern" and "The Lake" - work as well as ever, if not better. "The Crowd" inhabits the same region of death-in-operation as "The Next in Line". That leaves "The Man Upstairs", which I have still to re-explore. Ah yes - dear old Mr Kobersan; he of the midnight walks, silver-phobia, and incredible imparts. I wonder how he's developing in the fifth dimension, the dimension of imagination? Not too alarmingly, I hope ---.

THE FACE OF THE LION by John Blackburn (Cape; London; 1976; £2.00; 158 pp; ISBN 0-224-01184-7)

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

John Blackburn is an experienced writer of thrillers and chillers; and this taut, short novel, apparently his first venture into sf territory, shows his background. It is, in fact, very reminiscent of the Hammer horror films I like watching on TV: the two main protagonists are obviously played by Chris Lee (in one of his "goody" roles) and Patsy Cushing (in one of his tortured, remorseful scientist roles). As in a good Hammer horror, there is a persistent air of absurdity about the plot: we have, for starters, a mad millionaire Scots Nationalist laird who shows every sign of holding the UK to ransom with his own nuclear warhead - and the rest of the plot operates on a similar level. But also, as in a good Hammer horror, it works. There is a good opening sequence, nicely-nasty; and once John Blackburn has grabbed you, you stay grabbed - he moves too fast to be stopped.

As sf, it's good, functional stuff: even the oldest of formulae, in the hands of a good technician, cannot help casting their spell. In this case, a catastrophic mutation of the Spanish 'flu virus runs amok, creating giantism in human and animal subjects, who are thereby transformed into grunting, guzzling, slobbering ogres, intent on destruction and the transmission of their sickness to everyone else. Blackburn is convincing in his description of the mutated virus and its isolation, and of the desperate search for its origin and antidote.

But is there anything more to The Face of the Lion? Does it operate only on the what-comes-next level? No, there's more to it than that. For one thing, Blackburn shares with other professional thriller writers - I'm thinking especially of Desmond Bagley - the ability to spike his plot deftly with meaning and association, so that the whole adds up to more than its parts. By bringing to a wrecked Spanish galleon (a survival of the Armada), scuttled four centuries ago by superstitious Scots because the one survivor, the captain, carried the "lion-faced" Plague and acted like a demon; which same galleon is now being salvaged for gold by the mad Scots Nationalist laird, who runs the risk of re-awakening the plague-carrying spores with radiation from his private atomic research station - by this and other means, Blackburn exploits deep associations. Plague 1 irrevocably-lost beauty - hollow by doomed tradition (the megalomaniac laird comes from a degenerate line that can be traced back to Bonnie Prince Charlie) - madness, guilt, remorse - and finally, of course, Original Sin (the mutated virus is referred to as "the Enemy"). None of this is rubbed in: while reading, you're dragged along by main strength, and it's only afterwards you realize what it all adds up to.

The immediate appeal of The Face of the Lion lies in good old-fashioned suspense, and John Blackburn knows precisely how to create this and sustain it over 166 pages. I could draw attention to the virtually total absence of characterization, and to some stylistic awkwardness - but what the hell! I enjoyed the novel, and I hope Mr Blackburn atays with af-related themes when he writes his next thriller.

SHORT MENTIONS:

THE DISPOSSESSED by Ursula Le Guin (Pasthor; London, 1978; 75p; 318 pp; ISBN 586-04218-8)

Reviewed by Peter Hyde from the US paperback edition in Vector 72: "A major achievement of the book is the totally convincing way in which (sarcnetic) Anarresti society is described and related to its theoretical basis in the teachings of Udo ... also has an excellent narrative... (there is almost no limit to the good things one could say about The Dispossessed... it is a magnificent book, certainly Le Guin's best so far..."

BOOKS ALSO RECEIVED (to be reviewed)

THE MOON MOTH by Jack Vance (Dobson)

THE REMAINS OF EARTH by Jack Vance (Dobson) - to be reviewed by Peter Hyde

THE SPACE MACHINE by Christopher Priest (Faber) - to be reviewed by Roger E. Wolf

A MULTITUDE OF VISIONS edited by Cy Chauvin (T-E Graphics)

BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR: FORTYTH ANNUAL COLLECTION edited by Lester del Rey (Eys and Ward)

STAR PROBE by Joseph Green (Killington)

... Plus a large number of Berkley titles, passed on by A Friend

A NOTE TO INTENDING REVIEWERS:

Some of you have written to me about reviewing. Please forgive me if I haven't replied yet... my mail is overwhelming me. You should hear soon, especially if you sent a sample review - Ed

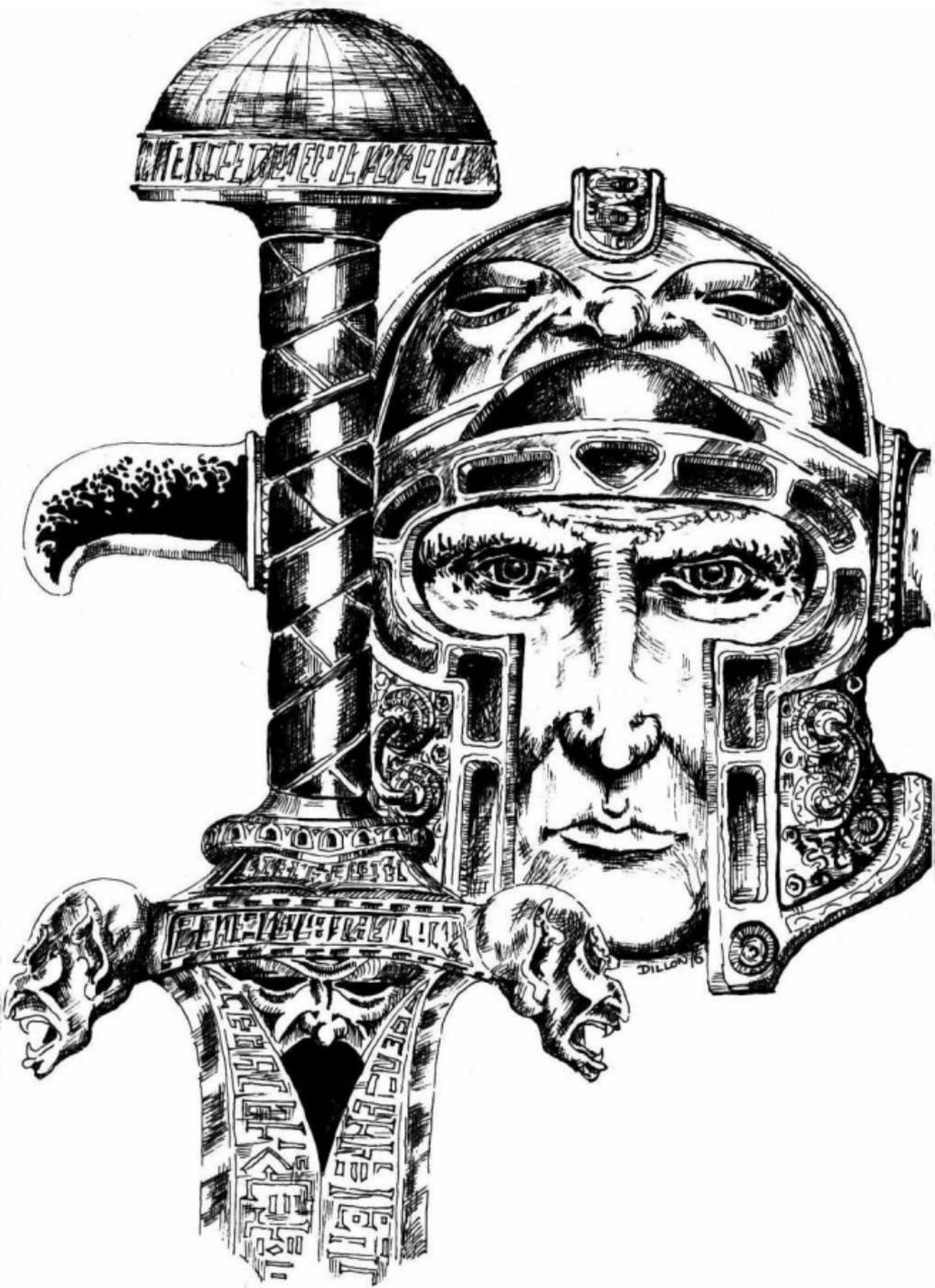
A NOTE TO PRESENT REVIEWERS:

It helps a great deal if you can remember to put at the top of any review sent to us the following:

TITLE Author (Publisher; Date of Pub.; City of Pub.; no. of pages; cost; ISBN)

Tbanke - Ed

The illustration opposite (or at least, it should be opposite, if it isn't then I or the printers fouled-up) is by Paul Dillon and is taken from A 1,000 Light Years From Home, an A4 size portfolio by Paul. It is available shortly at an as-yet undecided price - definitely no more than £1.00 - and includes an as-yet undecided number of drawings in glorious black-and-white. Further details and advance orders - no money as yet please - from Paul at 26 West Crescent, Burlington, Co. Durham, or ring Bnndgate 7834. Lucky fanzine editors can get the portfolio on an exchange basis. Further information in the Vector mailing after Manco's, early May.



J.G. BALLARD

AN INTERVIEW WITH



DILLON 76.

Goddard: I'd like to start off by asking you to tell us something about your origins and background.

Ballard: I was born in Shanghai in China in 1930. My father was a businessman there. We returned to England in 1946 after three years of internment by the Japanese. I went to school, and then to Cambridge University where I started off by reading medicine. After two years I gave that up and began writing. In 1950 I had my first short story published in New Worlds. After working on a scientific journal for a while I became a full-time writer - that was about fifteen years ago - and I've been at it ever since.

Goddard: Do you think the period of internment under the Japanese has had any effect on the kind of fiction you produce?

Ballard: I would guess it has. The whole landscape out there had a tremendously powerful influence on me, as did the whole war experience. All the abandoned cities and towns and beach resorts that I keep referring to in my fiction were them in that huge landscape, the area just around our camp, which was about seven or eight miles from Shanghai, out in the paddy fields in a former university. There was a period when we didn't know if the war had ended, when the Japanese had more or less abandoned the whole zone and the Americans had yet to come in, when all of the images I keep using - the abandoned apartment houses and so forth - must have touched off something in my mind. It was a very interesting scene psychologically, and it obviously had a big influence - as did the semi-tropical nature of the place: lush vegetation, a totally water-logged world, huge rivers, canals, paddies, great sheets of water everywhere. It was a dramatized landscape thanks to the war and to the collapse of all the irrigation systems - a landscape dramatized in a way that it is difficult to find in, say, Western Europe.

Pringle: Your Far-Eastern childhood interests us. Did you live anywhere else apart from Shanghai?

Ballard: No, but we travelled a fair amount in the Far East. We made a trip to America in '39, just before the outbreak of the war, across the Pacific via Hawaii. By the time I came to England at the age of sixteen I'd seen a great variety of landscapes. I think the English landscape was the only landscape I'd come across which didn't seem anything, particularly the urban landscape. England seemed to be very dull, because I'd been brought up at a lower latitude - the same latitude as the places which are my real spiritual home as I sometimes think: Los Angeles and Casablanca. I'm sure this is something one perceives - I mean the angle of light, density of light. I'm always much happier in the south - Spain, Greece - than I am anywhere else. I think a lot of these landscapes meant a great deal. The English one, oddly enough, didn't mean anything. I didn't like it, it seemed odd. England was a place that was totally exhausted. The war had drained everything. It seemed very small, and rather narrow mentally, and the physical landscape of England was so old. The centre of London is now a reasonably modern city - so much of it has been rebuilt. Then, of course, none of these high-rise office blocks existed, only the 18th century city. The rural landscape of meadows didn't mean anything to me. I just couldn't latch on to that. That's why the sf of John Wyndham, Christopher, and so forth I can't take. Too many rolling English meadows. They don't seem landscapes that are psychologically significant, if that means anything.

Pringle: You mention light. The visual values are a strong element in your writing. Is this just from growing up in a place like Shanghai, or did you have any artistic background? Were your parents artistic?

Ballard: Not particularly. I've always been very interested myself. I've always wanted really to be a painter. My interest in painting has been far more catholic than my interest in fiction. I'm interested in almost every period of painting, from Lascaux through the Renaissance onwards. Abstract Expressionism is about the only kind of painting I haven't responded to. My daughter, about two

years ago, bought me a paint set for my birthday. I'm still waiting to use it. When I start painting I shall stop writing! I've said somewhere else that all my fiction consists of paintings. I think I always was a frustrated painter. They are all paintings, really, my novels and stories. The trouble is I haven't any talent - that's a bit of a handicap. I approach many of these stories of mine, like the Vigilant Heide stories - even the novels like Crash - as a sort of visual experience. I'm thinking particularly of painters like - I hate the phrase Pop Art because it has the wrong connotations - the British and American Pop Artists, or people close to them, like Hamilton and Paolossi over here, and Wesserman, Rosenquist... and Warhol above all: a tremendous influence on me. I composed Crash to some extent as a visual experience, marrying elements in the book that make sense primarily as visual constructs - I've always wanted to paint, but never actually done any, never had any form of training.

Fringle: You talk about places and landscapes which you remember. I recall a three-word sentence in "The Assassination Weapon" where you simply say: "Guns in 1947", and this evoked for me when I read it the landscape of some American airbase littered with rusty wire, etc. Have you actually seen these things?

Ballard: Yes, I have, absolutely. A lot of that post-technological landscape stuff that people talk about is a straight transcript. After World War II, the American war machine was so prolific - you got B-29s stacked six-deep on the ends of airfields. The riches of this gigantic technological system were just left. Right from early on I was touched not just in an imaginative way - but as though some section of reality, of life, and movements of time, were influenced by the strange paradoxes that are implicit in, say, a field full of what seem to be reasonably workable cars, washing-machines or whatever, which have just been junked there. The rules which govern the birth and life and decay of living systems don't apply in the realm of technology. A washing-machine doesn't grow old gracefully. It still retains its youth, as it were, its bright chrome trim, when it's been junked. You see these technological artifacts lying around like old corpses - in fact, their chrome is still bright. All these inversions touch a response to the movements of time and our place in the universe. There's no doubt about this. I think perhaps my childhood was spent in a place where there was an excess of these inversions of various kinds. I remember when the Japanese attacked China after Pearl Harbour, in December 1941. I see





going to the scripture exam at the end-of-term examinations at the school I went to. Pearl Harbour had just taken place, the previous night I suppose, and I heard tanks coming down the street. I looked out of the window and there were Japanese tanks trundling around. It doesn't sound very much, but if tanks suddenly rolled down this street you'd have a surprise - Russian tanks, say. The Japanese took over this place, and they segmented Shanghai into various districts with barbed wire, so you couldn't move from Zone A to Zone B except at certain times. They'd block off everything for security reasons, and on certain days the only way of going to school was to go to the house of some friends of my parents who lived on one of these border zones, between I think the French Concession and the International Settlement. There was an abandoned night-club, a gambling Casino called the Del Monte - this is just a trivial example - a huge building in big grounds. We'd climb over the fence and go through, and go up

the main driveway on the other side of the borderzone, and go to school. This abandoned casino, a huge multi-storied building, was decorated in full-blown Casino Versailles style, with figures holding up great porcelain over bars and huge roulette tables. Everything was junked. I remember a roulette table on its side and the whole roulette wheel section had come out, exposing the machinery inside. There was all this junk lying around, chips and all sorts of stuff, as if in some sort of tableau, arranged, as I've said, by a demolition squad. It was very strange. Now I was only about eleven when this was going on. Examples like this could be multiplied a hundred times. Our camp was a former university campus, occupying I suppose about one square mile. In fact, we occupied about two-thirds of the campus. There was a section of buildings which for some arbitrary reason - maybe the Japs were short of wire - they'd left out. Something like fifteen buildings were on the other side of the wire. You can imagine a little township of big, two- or three-story buildings, the nearest of which was about twenty yards away. A complete silent world, which I looked out on every morning and all day from my block. After about a year the Japs agreed to allow these buildings to be used as a school, so we used to enter this place every day, and walk through these abandoned rooms. Military equipment was lying around all over the place. I saw rifles being taken out of a wall. All rifles were taken away, but spent ammunition, ammunition boxes and bayonets, all the debris of war, was lying around. We used to walk through this totally empty zone. It had been deserted for years. I'm sure that that again must have had a great impact on me. There were curious psychological overtones. One's a product of all these things.

Pringle: The Marxist critic of of Darko Suvin...

Ballard: Never heard of him. Go on.

Pringle: ...suggests that the fall of the British Empire is a "hidden theme" in your work. What do you say to that?

Ballard: I'd say that my stuff is about the fall of the American empire, because this is what I was brought up in. I wasn't brought up in a British zone of influence. The area was dominated by Americans, by American cars, by American styles and consumer goods. I remember when I landed at Southampton in '46 looking round at the little roads and bean houses by the docks. It was a sad place. The British working class, I suddenly realized, existed. They were nine-tenths of the population and they were appallingly treated. The little side-streets away from the docks were lined with what seemed to be black perambulators with doors - too large for perambulators! - which I assumed were some sort of mobile coal-scuttles for bunkering ships. Because cars then were all black, you see. English cars were black, whereas American cars were every colour under the sun, in the '30s. These things impacted. Going back to your question: what I saw, what I've been writing about is a way, in the end of technology, the end of America - a lot of my fiction is about what America is going to be like in 50 years time - But it's an interesting idea.

Pringle: Do you regret the world of the past, the pre-war world, in any way? I'm thinking of your story, "The Garden of Time", where one man appears to be trying to halt history.

Ballard: No, I don't. I think some social changes that took place in this country in the mid-60s are the best and greatest thing that ever happened here. It's slid back now, but for about five years this country emerged into the 20th century, and a whole new generation of people emerged - the youth explosion. The class divisions began to break down, which was excellent. There was a tremendous pouring of energy in every conceivable way. That was marvellous. It all slumped into reverse a couple of years ago, which is a shame. But I certainly don't feel nostalgic, because I came from a background where there was no past. Everything was new - Shanghai was a new city. The department stores and the skyscrapers were about my age. I'm exaggerating abit, but not much. The place didn't exist before the year 1800. It was just a lot of mosquito-ridden

mud-flate. I was brought up in a world which was new, so the past has never meant anything to me. The use in that story of an old aristocrat, or whatever he was, was just a convention.

Pringle: What was your favourite type of reading as a child?

Ballard: I was one of those children who read a great deal. Up to the age of 14 or 15, I read everything from Life magazine, Readers Digest, to American best-sellers. Plus all the childhood classics, which, in those days, you read as part and parcel of childhood - all the English children's classics, Treasure Island, Alice in Wonderland, etc. Nothing out of the ordinary. What everybody else of my age was reading.

Pringle: So you didn't discover it then.

Ballard: I was unusual in that I came, unlike most of enthusiasts, very late to science fiction. I don't suppose I picked up a copy of Galaxy or Antarology or what-have-you until I was about 22 or 23. It was really when I was in the Air Force, in Canada. There was nothing to do, nothing to read on the newstands. There were no national papers, just local papers. These were packed with stuff about curling contests and ice-hockey. They relegated international news to about two columns on the back page. The papers were packed with ads for local garages and so forth - you know, this was Moosejaw, Saskatchewan. Time magazine was regarded as wildly highbrow. The only intelligent reading matter was science fiction. This was in '54. I suddenly devoured it. This was the heyday of these magazines, there were dozens of them, or seemed to be... some of which were really rather good. Magazines like Fantastic Universe - it was probably over distributed over bars - published some great stuff. Plus Galaxy, which I thought was the best, the most tuned-in to me. And Antarology. I started reading it all then. And I started writing it very soon after I started reading it. And then I stopped reading it. There came a point when I just couldn't read it any more, particularly when the American writers - all credit to them - began to run out of gas a bit. By the early sixties they weren't really doing anything very new.

Pringle: Which authors impressed you?

Ballard: A lot of American writers were very good. Bradbury above all. I thought he was head and shoulders above everybody else. He had that wider dimension to his writing which the others, however good, didn't really achieve. I liked Shackley very much - very droll and witty. Pohl, too, I liked. Matheson, I liked - very much, actually, because he showed you why it wasn't about outer space, wasn't about the future. So many of his stories were psychological twist stories. I liked those.

Pringle: The Incredible Shrinking Man?

Ballard: That I liked - the film too. Yes, I read the book. But I liked Matheson's short stories - the sort of standard story where the character begins to forget everything, the story ends with SANGLI and he can't remember who he is. Those sort of stories I liked. They did them so well. Fritz Leiber I rather liked. Funny thing - I was throwing out a lot of stuff the other day, and I came across a copy of a Fritz Leiber story - the actual sheets that I had kept from Galaxy. The Big Time. I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but it impressed me enormously when I read it in the mid-50s. I thought, really, this was an brilliant.

Pringle: You must be a fan. It won a Hugo.

Ballard: In its day, you mean? I thought how brilliant that story was. I remember when I first met Edmund Crispin...

Goddard: Bruce Montgomery.

Ballard: That's right. When I first met him about ten years ago, we were swapping anecdotes and swapping stories. I mentioned The Big Time and he said: "What a marvellous story!" anyway, I read it the other day, and I thought "My

God, what did I ever see in this thing!" It wasn't really very good at all. But - who else? I don't know. I never liked Asimov, I never liked Heinlein, I never liked Van Vogt - that school of American sf I couldn't take. I never liked Astounding very much. I thought that fellow - what's his name, I bet him once, the editor...

Pringle: John Campbell.

Ballard: I thought he was a baleful influence. He consolidated all the worst tendencies of American sf. He introduced a lot of bogus respectability, all that hard sociology thing. You know: "I was up at MIT last week, talking about the future of ..." something or other. And it all sounded very serious. He allied sf to the applied engineering, social engineering, and so forth, of somewhere like MIT. He gave sf a serious, real dimension which was all wrong because that isn't what sf is about. I couldn't stand those writers. Kuttner and all those people: they're all good.

Goddard: You have none of the sf background that was almost regarded as obligatory for success as an sf writer at one time, and yet you've achieved an enviable reputation as one of the leading exponents of the field. Any comments?

Ballard: Was it obligatory? I don't know.

Goddard: Well, we read of people like Bradbury and Pohl and Asimov growing up reading the stuff, writing letters to magazines, joining clubs, doing their own fanzines and so on, yet you have none of this background.

Ballard: In America, yes, that's true, but there have always been people outside that. Bradbury apart, I think the best American sf novel I've ever read is Herbert Wolfe's Limbo 90. He's never struck me as having anything to do with sf fandom. You're really talking about fandom, aren't you? Which is an awfully different kettle of fish!

Goddard: Well, the writers who have come out of fandom.

Ballard: There are some, I suppose, but I don't really know the American scene. It's a very peculiar thing, after all - modern American sf was virtually invented by a single generation of writers. They lived in a sort of intense closed world with each other. Everyone seemed to be married to someone else's second wife or third husband or something. I know Judy Merril very well, she was of that generation - in fact her second husband was Pohl, and she lived for a long time with Skorbluth. I think, though I don't know if they ever married. She described to me this world of the American sf writers in the '50s, where they would move around the States like something out of On the Road, living together in little groups and enclaves. There were all of these collaborations going on, and they just surfaced now and again at an sf convention, and plunged around in endless car-rides - a strange sort of Bonny-and-Clyde existence. They never seemed to meet anyone outside that little world. The tremendous homogeneity of American sf, and the rigid conventions that sprang up concerning what was or wasn't the correct way to write a story, were all part of the self-protective ghetto they built. That's something that's never taken place over here. Americans are always surprised when they come over here and realize that for the most part sf writers don't meet each other. There's no more homogeneity here among sf writers than there is among writers in general.

Pringle: You mentioned collaborations - would writing in collaboration with someone else be entirely unthinkable to you?

Ballard: I'd love to collaborate, and I talked it over once or twice with Mike Moorcock. The Americans collaborated very easily, partly because they all produced this very standardized fiction. It's not all that easy to tell if you're given a paragraph of Pohl that it's not by Cheekley or Matheson or Kuttner. Particularly with all the pseudonyms they used, there are very few writers you can identify stylistically. Here the opposite is true - collaborations would be difficult because the writers have had free to evolve in their own separate

directions; they've not been, for the most part, constrained by a set of house rules.

Pringle: Talking about style: to what extent are you aware that you evolved your style deliberately? I suppose it just happens with most writers, but your style is very distinctive, and most readers who know your work don't confuse it with that of other writers. How conscious was this?

Ballard: Totally unconscious. I've never given it a thought. I've written certain stories and novels in a particular style, the style that seemed natural to the subject, but I've never consciously tried to evolve a literary style that is unique to myself. One writes the way one feels.

Pringle: One of the most notable things about your style is a certain repetitiveness of words and phrases, particularly in The Atrocity Exhibition and to some extent Crash. You repeat words, and this is something people have criticised. It was Martin Amis, I think, in his review of Crash, who went through and counted how many times you use the word "metallised" and one or two others, and came up with a figure of forty or fifty.

Ballard: That's very true, but I was using language certain words and phrases, to a fixed and obvious end. The medical and pseudo-medical jargon that I use a lot is all deliberate - these are particular notes that I can strike, which, I hope, signify something to the reader. It's all part of a second language, if you like, that is carried along by the surface of the narrative, a series of signposts with codes or whatever you want to call them. They're jokes on myself in a way, I suppose.

Pringle: Apart from the medical language that you mention there's also use of emotional, rather poetic language, "flowers and wounds", which reminds me of the French surrealists. Did they influence you?

Ballard: Yes, they certainly did. Genet - not a surrealist - but Genet certainly. Jerry, their sort of language was a big influence, there's no question about it. Not many English writers.

Pringle: Conrad?

Ballard: It's a funny thing, but when The Drowned World was published people said it was heavily influenced by Conrad. Oddly enough, though I was 31 or 32, I'd never read a word of Conrad. I remember Victor Gollancz, the publisher, taking me out to lunch after they'd bought The Drowned World, and turning to me jokingly and saying: "Well, you stole the whole thing from Conrad." I thought, "Oh, what's this?" and going away and actually reading some Conrad - which I found rather heavy going, though he's obviously a great writer with a unique evocative style - I could see a resemblance. But that's partly because if you're going to try and build up the atmosphere of steaming jungles there's only one way of doing it.

Pringle: I think it was Graham Greene who compared The Crystal World with Heart of Darkness. Was there any influence there?

Ballard: I don't know whether I'd read Heart of Darkness at the time I wrote The Crystal World. I honestly don't think I was influenced by Conrad. I don't mind being influenced - after all, we're all influenced to some extent - but if you're talking about conscious imitation: certainly not.

Pringle: Have you influenced by Graham Greene - because he was influenced by Conrad?

Ballard: Probably, yes. There's something about Greene's handling of solitary characters, externalising the character's mind in terms of the situation in which he finds himself, the particular landscapes. He does this so brilliantly. He can have a solitary figure standing by a jetty in the Far East, looking at some sampan, and he brings in a few things like the local police chief scratching his neck and so on, and with a paragraph one has a marvellous evocation of the psychology of the hero and of what the book is about. Yes, I probably was influenced by Greene, but I never consciously imitated him.

Pringle: Were you attracted to Greene because of your Far East background?

Ballard: What I liked about Greene, and still do, is that although he's a brilliant writer he has not, from my point of view, been equaled by the English literary "thing". He's very much a 20th century man, and his fiction is generated by his experience of the world outside England. He couldn't be further apart from someone like Kingsley Amis or Anthony Powell, whose fiction is entirely generated by the closed world of not just England but of a very small part of England. In Greene's fiction one can breathe the smells, see the sights and hear the sounds of the whole world. Not having spent my childhood and adolescence in England, I received a very big shock when I got here in 1940 and found it was a closed little island containing a lot of lesser islands - a world of English professional life, professional middle-class life of those days was incredibly narrow. I just couldn't breathe in it. That's one of the reasons I started writing of - one could get away from all this sort of thing. I certainly admired Graham Greene a great deal.

Pringle: You studied medicine at Cambridge. Many of the protagonists of your stories have in fact been doctors. Is there a rationale for this?

Ballard: Well, I suppose if I hadn't become a writer I would have been a doctor. So, in a sense, the protagonists of these stories are myself. I couldn't make them writers - the obvious thing to do was to make them doctors. My training and mental inclinations, my approach to everything, is much closer to that of a doctor than to that of a writer. I'm not a literary man. But I am interested in - admittedly popular - science. I approach things as a scientist would, I think. I've a scientific bent. It's obvious to me that these characters are what I could have been if I hadn't been a writer.

Pringle: Your National Service period in the RAF - did this influence you at all? Were you a bomber pilot?

Ballard: No. I did a sort of basic training course but I left after a while. In fact, I didn't do National Service. I was exempt. I thought I'd like to try flying, to see what it was like. I thought I'd like to try service life, because it was at least sort of forward-looking and that helped. This was in 1954. I was in a bit of a dead-end. I hadn't started reading of. I wanted to be a writer. I was writing short stories, planning a novel like any novice, but I wasn't organised. It struck me - I was very interested in aviation - that it might be worth going into the service for a couple of years - one of those short service commissions they had then. You could go in for a very short space of time, just to see what it was like. But in fact it wasn't anything. It was completely unlike anything I imagined. I didn't like service life at all. Also, I spent my entire period in Canada, out in the back of beyond. I was writing while I was there. The moment I got myself organised I wanted to get out of the RAF and get back to London, and start churning out the stuff. So I resigned my commission and came back to England. I had to get a job. Ted Carnoll arranged for me to get a job with the parent company, on a technical journal. I moved from there to being assistant editor of a scientific journal. I stayed there until about 1961.

Pringle: You were actually writing before you'd read any of?

Ballard: Oh yes. I wasn't writing of though. It never occurred to me. I started writing of partly because it seemed very exciting - and the sorts of things I wanted to do in of had not been done by anybody else - also because there were so many magazines. You could write for so many. This was when I was a complete novice, hadn't published a single story. I could see at a glance: there were ten American magazines and about four English ones. So there was a market greater than the literary field then. There were very few literary journals of any kind, and they were very prestigious - you know, *Borixon*, etc. It was obvious you couldn't make a career out of writing short stories for *Borixon*. It wasn't a matter of making money, but of actually being able to write a good deal, to write with freedom too, which you could do in the of magazines. You were free, within the rough conventions of the field. You don't have that sort of

freedom in literary journals.

Pringle: The picture you draw of yourself as being interested in science, editor of a science journal and so on, makes me wonder for the first time why you wanted to be a writer at all.

Ballard: If one's got an imagination, if the imagination's going overtime, you have to start writing it down. If you've got the talent for that sort of thing, you write it down without too much difficulty. As a child, I was good at essays, writing stories. Even at school I was writing short stories. It was something that just grew out of childhood. I would have qualified as a doctor, without any doubt, but for the fact that the imaginative propensity to write was so strong. I was beginning to neglect medicine altogether. I was primarily interested in anatomy and physiology. These were the subjects that I did for two years. Once I had covered the basic course in those subjects, I found the more advanced medicine so technical that it didn't relate to the system of metaphors that, say, anatomy is so rich in, or physiology, or pathology. Once you've dissected the cadaver - thorax, abdomen, head and neck, etc. - you go on to more exhaustive anatomy of, say, the inner ear, and the metaphors aren't so readily forthcoming. So I'd had enough of it in two years. I could see it thus became a very technical matter, and it also became applied. I'd go into hospital and actually be taking boils and looking at people with skin diseases. I didn't want that. I was more interested in the general scientific underpinning of medicine. In some ways I wish I had become a doctor. Such a mind-blowing course. If you've known anybody that's gone through the medical degree course, they all say you leave half your mind behind. The feats of memory required are really absolutely gigantic.

Pringle: You won a short story competition at Cambridge. Was the story published?

Ballard: It was published in a Cambridge student newspaper called Varsity, in '51, I suppose. That was my first published story.

Pringle: Could you describe it?

Ballard: It wasn't of it was short story set in the Far East, set in Malaya during the British military struggle with the communist terrorists - whenever that began - in the late '40s, early '50s. It's difficult to describe.

Pringle: In an old New Worlds, I saw in the blurb for your story "Reception" in 1954 ..

Ballard: That was my first story, I think, for Carnell.

Pringle: Carnell said in his blurb that you had almost, at the time, completed a novel called You and Me and the Continuum.

Ballard: That is interesting. The title must have been around in my mind. Before I started writing it, before I went into the Air



Force, I was writing some "experimental" fiction, based on intensive reading of James Joyce and whenever else one was reading then. I was trying to get away from the English 19th century novel. I was writing these bits and pieces. I think I did have half an experimental novel lying around, which I probably just threw away. I obviously retained the title, which I liked. Do these old New Worlds and Science Fantasy's still exist?

Pringle: There are avid collectors of them

Goddard: They're worth a lot of money too.

Ballard: Are they really? How much are they worth? You mean more than their cover price? How amazing. Perhaps I should have hung on to my stuff.

Goddard: How much of an influence was Ted Carnell on your development as a writer?

Ballard: He was an influence in the sense that, but for New Worlds, I would have been in a bit of a spot. He had three magazines for which I was encouraged to produce a continuous stream of short stories over a period of getting on for ten years. He gave me complete freedom to write anything I wanted at a time when...you will remember that I began writing in '36-37, round about the time of the flight of Sputnik I, which seemed to confirm everything that the SF fans, writers and publishers in America believed in. This was the millennium, it had arrived. It would have seemed, superficially, the worst time for moving away from writing a science-fictional art based on space, interplanetary travel, the far future and what have you. It would have seemed the worst time to stop writing that kind of thing, and yet he encouraged me, and go ahead. One tends to forget how resistant to experiment and change of any kind of is. That's the paradox: it ought to be dedicated to change and novelty and experiment. You found in the '30s and '40s in the States an absolute resistance to any kind of novelty. Ted Carnell was unique in giving me this freedom to write anything I wanted to, and he dealt with the American editors and publishers. I don't know whether Ted would have published the stories in The Atrocity Exhibition - possibly not, though he did publish "The Terminal Beach". I remember some of the rejection slips I got from American editors when that story came back. Ted established the possibility of change. He recognized that as by the mid-'50s had used all its material, it had built its world, the last brick, as it were, was slotted into place - there was no way out, there was no possibility of change; he recognized that. He used to caution other young writers who modelled their fiction on the kind of stories that appeared in Galaxy in the early and mid-'60s, and he would caution them very much against the kind of art that required an intense familiarity with science fiction before you even began to understand it. The kind of stories that Galaxy and Antwounding, in their different ways, were publishing made very little sense to an outsider because they didn't know what the narrative and plot and subject-matter connotations were, and without that knowledge you were lost. Ted, even before I arrived on the scene, felt that the time had come for a change of direction. English art has always been much more open to change and novelty. It always depresses me when I meet Americans who really believe that they invented it round about Gernsback's first mag, 1926, and the ten years after. In fact, what they did was to limit its range, conventionalise it, and fossilise it. English writers, who've been writing the stuff for a hundred years or more have always had a much more open approach to the art they've written, so English art has always been much less homogeneous than American art.

Goddard: Did Carnell ever suggest ways in which your work could take new directions?

Ballard: I think there were one or two stories where he suggested I could enlarge a particular aspect, but he never suggested any ideas, or any particular directions I should take. Most of the stuff I wrote then is pretty conventional, at least outside the narrow little world of SF. Half of the stories aren't even art within the popular definition of the term.

Pringle: Did you write The Wind From Nowhere as a conscious attempt to break into the paperback market?

Ballard: Yes I did. I wanted to give up my job, you see. I had my first story published in December '58. By 1961 I'd been writing of for five years and I'd written quite a lot of short stories. I had this gap after I went to the SF convention in '57. Don't take this personally or anything - I think times have changed - but it put me off. I didn't do any writing for about a year and a half, so there was a sort of gap. Then I restarted, and I wrote more stories. After five years, I realised I was getting old. I had three children, I was thirty or thereabouts, and I realised I was getting nowhere. We'd come to live here, out of necessity. We were driven out of London - once you had small children you were anathema. I had this very long railway journey up to Central London to my office every day. There I was coming home with these small children running around, and I was absolutely exhausted. My wife had had all these babies and she was tired. I knew the one thing I had to do was make a complete break and become a full-time writer. I knew I'd never write a novel - a serious novel - while I was not getting home until 8 o'clock in the evening. I was just too tired. But I had Libis fortnight's holiday coming up, and my wife as a joke said - we hadn't enough money to go away - "Why don't you write a novel in a fortnight?" So I thought: "Good. That's sensible talking." I'd already got, through Carnell, certain contacts with the American paperback people and I had a feeling that if I wrote a novel I could sell it, even if I wasn't going to get very much money. In those days £300 could keep you going for a long time. So I said: "I'll write a novel in ten days, six thousand words a day, during this holiday", and I thought: "What shall I do?" So I had this idea about a whirlwind. I was tempted to approach it seriously. I mean, it could have done on a completely serious level - by serious I mean on the level of the other novels, The Drowned World and so forth - and I nearly did do it that way. I don't know whether it would have been any better, because the wind thing isn't that interesting. So I thought I'd use all the clichés there are, the standard narrative conventions, and I sat down at the typewriter and I wrote the book. Six thousand words a day, which is quite a lot. I kept it up, and when I went back to the office, I had a manuscript of the novel, which Carnell sold. He was then acting as my agent. I think I got £300 - then, though of course it's gone on and on. But that was enough, and immediately I sat down and started writing The Drowned World. I wrote it in a short version first, and then expanded that to a novel.

Pringle: What about The Crystal World? Wasn't that published in three versions?

Ballard: Originally I wrote it as a short story, "The Illuminated Man". Then Mike Moorcock, when he took over Nae Worlds as a small-format magazine, asked me to write a lead serial. He wanted a novel, in short I didn't want to write a novel at that point. My mind was already beginning to change, I was starting to think about The Atrocity Exhibition type of approach - this was in 1963 or '64. So I said to him: "I'll expand this short story if you like", because I'd got a lot more ideas. I felt that the short version was incomplete. It was too much of a science fiction fantasy. I wanted to develop more of the serious implications of the idea - which I did, I think, in that serial. When I'd done that, it occurred to me - or it occurred to my agent - that I'd got a novel. So I then expanded it even further. It was a peculiar way of writing a novel, but it just happened that way.

Pringle: Was The Drought written before, or was it written between versions of The Crystal World?

Ballard: The Drought was my second novel, written after The Drowned World. I didn't like it very much at the time. There was something too arid - something of the aridity of the landscape spilled over into the novel, and it didn't take off for me. I still don't care for it very much, but it contains so many of the ideas - quantified image, isolated object, and emotion detached from any human context - that I began to develop in The Atrocity Exhibition and in Crash. They were all implicit in that book.

Goddard: One of the most popular areas of your work is the series of Vermilion Sands stories. A critical reading of these shows that they are all,

to some extent, variations on the same theme. Could you tell us something about why you wrote these stories?

Ballard: I've never really analysed them myself. I suppose I was just interested in inventing an imaginary Palm Springs, a kind of world I imagined all suburbs of North America and Northern Europe might be like in about 200 years time. Everyone will be permanently on vacation, or doing about one day's work a year. People will give in to any whim that occurs to them - like taking up cloud-sculpture - leisure and work will mesh in. I think everybody will be very relaxed, almost too relaxed. It will be a landscape of not so much suburbia but exurbia, a kind of country-club belt, which will be largely the product of advanced technologies of various kinds, for leisure and so forth. So you will get things like computers meshed into one's ordinary everyday life in a way that can be seen already. I'm just writing about one direction that the future is taking us. I think the future will be like Vermilion Sands, if I have to make a guess. It isn't going to be like Brave New World or 1984; it's going to be like a country-club paradise.

Pringle: Is this a sort of literary conceit, or what you really think the future's going to be like?

Ballard: I'm not a literary man at all. That's my guess at what the future will be like!

Pringle: It's not the impression of the future people would get from your books as a whole, where you tend to write about disaster and doom.

Ballard: I think that's a false reading of my stuff. I don't see my fiction as being disaster-orientated, certainly not most of my stuff - apart from The Wind From Nowhere which is just a piece of backwork. The others, which are reasonably serious, are not disaster stories. People seem to imply that these are books with unhappy endings, but the reverse is true: they're books with happy endings, stories of psychic fulfilment. The geophysical changes which take place in The Drought, The Drowned World and The Crystal World are all positive and good changes - they are what the books are about. The changes lead us to our real psychological goals, so they are not disaster stories at all. I know that when The Drowned World was accepted by my American publisher about twelve years ago he said: "Yes, it's great, but why don't we have a happy ending? Have the hero going north instead of south into the jungle and the sun." He thought I'd made a slight technical mistake by a slip of the pen, and had the hero going in the wrong direction. I said: "No, God, this is a happy story." I don't really understand the use of the word "disaster". I don't regard Crash as a disaster story. In a sense, all these are cataclysm stories. Really, I'm trying to show a new kind of logic emerging, and this is to be embraced, or at least held in regard. So I don't really see any distinction between any of my work - between Vermilion Sands on the one hand, and the rest on the other.

Goddard: Why are all the female characters in Vermilion Sands movie-queen types?

Ballard: Well, those stories are frolics of a kind, aren't they? I've never been to Palm Springs, but I dare say if you go there in season, or to St. Moritz in season, which are equivalent places, you'll find a lot of movie-queens and all the rest of them. You'll find a lot of pink Cadillacs and men in raffia trousers - these are all elements of that kind of place. If you wander around Shepperton on a Saturday in high summer - Shepperton being a modest, cut-price Malibu down by the river, a Malibu of the Thames Valley - you'll find that sort of atmosphere, an exurbia of the future. The more wall-off places are particularly like that.

Goddard: Why have you never produced a work with a sympathetic male/female relationship?

Ballard: That's an interesting question, actually! Such as in whom novels? What other writer does that sort of thing?

Pringle: It's in the great tradition of the English novel!

Ballard: Being serious, of the 20th century writers which would you say do this?

Goddard: Some of Hemingway ..

Ballard: Now that's interesting, really. What? Which? Where? You're thinking of the film version of For Whom The Bell Tolls presumably?

Goddard: No, I've never seen that.

Ballard: I suppose the relationship in To Have and Have Not, between the tough guy and his wife, is happy in a way. What I'm really saying is that sympathetic male/female relationships - and your question is quite a pointed one - are not all that common in fiction, are they? The serious answer to your question is that my fiction is all about one person, all about one man coming to terms with various forms of isolation - the total sense of isolation that the hero of "The Voices of Time" feels, various other kinds of isolation, psychological isolation of the kind the hero of "The Terminal Beach" feels. The protagonists of most of my fiction feel tremendously isolated, and that seems to preclude the possibility of a warm fruitful relationship with anybody, let alone anyone as potentially close as a woman. I don't think this has anything to do with any quirks of my own. I've got three children with whom I'm extremely close, and yet I've never introduced a child into any of my stories.

Pringle: There have been one or two dead children.

Ballard: Yes, that's true, but there are no living children in my fiction - yet all the people who know me closely know that I'm a very fond father and all the rest of it. It's just that children are not relevant to my work.

Goddard: Could you tell us more about your four disaster novels, which you insist aren't disaster novels? The Wind From Nowhere, The Drowned World, The Brought, and The Crystal World all have disaster in them, in the classic British form.

Ballard: You're right when you say that it's a classic English of form, but that's the reason why I used the formula of the disaster story. Usually these disaster stories are treated as though they are disasters, they're treated straight, and everyone's running for the hills or out of the hills or whatever. If it's going to be cold they're all putting on overcoats. I use the form because I deliberately want to invert it - that's the whole point of the novels. The heroes for psychological reasons of their own embrace the particular transformation. These are stories of huge psychic transformations - I'm talking retrospectively now - and I use this external transformation of the landscape to reflect and marry with the internal transformation, the psychological transformation, of the characters. This is what the subject-matter of these books is: they're transformation stories rather than disaster stories. If you take the classic among English disaster stories, The Day of The Triffids, I think it's probably fair to say that there's absolutely no psychological depth. The characters react to the changes that are taking place, but they are not in any psychological way involved with the proliferating vegetation, or whatever else is going on. They cope with the situation in the same way as the inhabitants of this town might cope with, say, a reservoir bursting. In the classic English disaster story there's no involvement on a psychological level with whatever is taking place. My novels are completely different, and they only use the form superficially.

Goddard: Why did you stop writing them when the plot permutations seem endless?

Ballard: Did I? That's a good question. I don't think I did. Cranb is a disaster novel, an urban disaster story, so is Concrete Island. So is the one I've just finished about a high-rise apartment block.

Pringle: The disaster "has happened" in your most recent stories - or that's the implication.

Ballard: Well, it is happening. Even the stories in The Atrocities Exhibition are disaster stories of a kind. The book is about the communications explosion of the '60s. From my point of view, the '60s started in 1963 with the assassination of President Kennedy - his death and Vietnam presided over the whole of the '60s. Those two events, transmitted through television and mass communications, overshadowed the whole decade - a sort of institutionalized disaster area. But what you mean is why did I stop using the formula? I don't know. I probably got more interested in other things. You say is your question that there are limitless possibilities - well, what are they? You've got to have a convincing and interesting transformation of the physical landscape.

Pringle: You've mentioned your admiration for Ray Bradbury. Did you try to "do" a Bradbury in your story, "The Time Tombs", with its dying planet setting reminiscent of The Martian Chronicles?

Ballard: I don't know why I wrote that. I certainly wasn't imitating him. Maybe you shouldn't write about a dying, abandoned planet without sounding like Bradbury.

Goddard: I think it was the first Ballard story I ever read.

Ballard: Was it? A mistake. In a way, it's very easy to extract those elements of nostalgia, a sense of past time never to be regained, by using those sorts of landscapes, the clichés of interplanetary SF. You describe an abandoned planet, empty palaces, silent computers that haven't ticked for ten thousand years, fossil seas and all that stuff. It's very easy to do that. It's much more difficult to do it here and now, to find those dimensions of time, nostalgia, dream, imagination and the rest of it, in the real world.

Pringle: On the subject of space travel: you imply that it's an improper subject for SF writers, but of course increasingly it is taking place.

Ballard: No, you're wrong. Decreasingly it's taking place. I wrote a review of some book, a mad book...

Pringle: The Next Ten Thousand Years?

Ballard: Yes, I wrote a review of it in New Society, in which I said the Space Age lasted about ten years. It's true. That's the extraordinary paradox. At the time of Gagarin's first flight in '61, everybody really thought that the Space Age would last for hundreds of years. One could say: "Now the Space Age begins, and it's going on forever." In fact, it ended with the last Skylab mission.

Pringle: You really believe that?

Ballard: Absolutely. It happened. I'm sure there will be a Space Age, but it won't be for fifty, a hundred, two hundred years - presumably when they develop a new means of propulsion. It's just too expensive. You can't have a Space Age until you've got a lot of people in space. This is where I disagree, and I've often argued the point when I've met him, with Arthur C. Clarke. He believes that the future of fiction is in space, that this is the only subject. But I'm certain you can't have a serious fiction based on experience from which the vast body of readers and writers is excluded. It's absurd. In fact, there are very few manned flights, if any, planned now. I think there are some

Pringle: There's the Soviet-American link-up flight this year.

Ballard: Sorry - yes, orbital flights, but not lunar flights. Public uninterest became very evident in the '70s really. People weren't even that touched by Armstrong landing on the moon. This was a stupendous event. I thought the psychological reverberations would be enormous, that they'd manifest themselves in every conceivable way - in department store window displays and styles of furnishing, etc. I really did believe that the spinoff from that event, both in obvious terms and in psychological terms, would be gigantic. In fact it was almost nil. It's quite amusing. Clearly, the Space Age is over.

Also, I think it's rather difficult because, when SF writers have a monopoly of space travel they can define, they can invent machinery literally, and they are the judges of their own authenticity. This is one of my objections to SF, that the decks are all stacked, the reader doesn't have a chance. As I've said for years, the stuff isn't won from experience. It lacks that authority therefore. Now the SF writers are competing with the facts of real space flight. I haven't read any recent SF. Perhaps it's good, I don't know.

Goddard: Could you tell us something about what it was like to work for New Worlds during the time of its change from an SF magazine to a literary magazine in a wider context?

Ballard: What's the period you're actually thinking of? The period of Mike Moorcock's editorship basically?

Goddard: Basically that, but more specifically the time when it changed from paperback format to glossy magazine format.

Ballard: Right. I've been tremendously lucky - that was the most exciting time there's no question about it. The late '40s was a period of totally unprecedented excitement in almost every field. I think by the time the change from a small to a large format magazine took place it was really the final break with the American dominated SF of the '40s and '50s - the break was complete, the battle had been won. The group of writers that Moorcock published in New Worlds, myself included, had proved their point, and the old guard had run out of gas. At that time New Worlds was not just the most exciting of magazines in the world - it made all the American magazines like Analog look terribly dull - it was one of the most exciting magazines of any kind in this country and was extremely lucky to have Mike Moorcock running it. I think, with the benefit of hindsight, it ceased to be an SF magazine at all, even within my elastic definition of the term, and became something much closer to avant garde experimental writing. Perhaps that was inevitable.

Goddard: Why did it change from an SF magazine to an avant garde magazine?

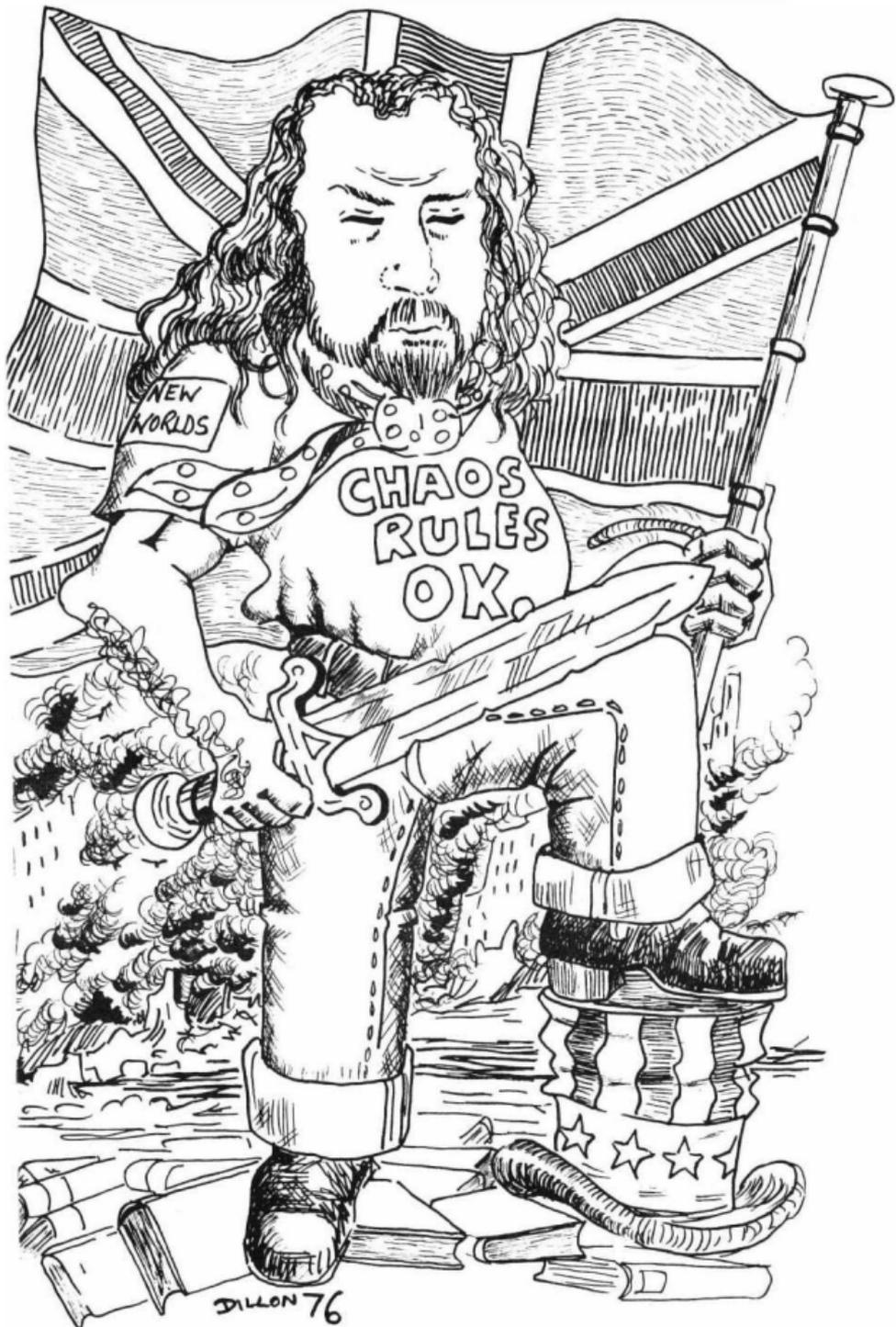
Ballard: Why? Well, it's not a case of blaming anyone...

Goddard: No. I mean was it a matter of editorial policy, or did the writers orchestrate it?

Ballard: Oh, I think it was that the writers themselves rather lost touch with SF. A group of writers came along who weren't really interested in SF. Many of them were close friends of mine and they won't mind me saying this, but writers like Sladek, Diach, Spinrad, Pam Zoline, Mike Moorcock himself, none of these are really science fiction writers in the sense that I am a science fiction writer. These dominant New Worlds writers began writing from outside the genre. I think the magazine suffered from that, but for heaven's sake don't make too much of it. I'm not knocking New Worlds. I'm extremely grateful to Mike Moorcock, and before him to Ted Carnell - without those two it's hard to see how I would have published any of my fiction at all over the years. It was a very exciting period, and it's a pity there's no magazine like it now.

Goddard: For a few years in the mid-80s your work had a sort of Jekyll-and-Hyde nature about it. You were producing linear SF and the so-called experimental stories. Were you testing the water before taking the plunge, gauging public reaction?

Ballard: They weren't called experimental by me - I dislike the term. It implies a test procedure of uncertain outcome. The trouble with most British experimental writing is that it proves one thing, and that is that the experiment has not worked. I wasn't influenced by market considerations at all. To fact, all through the '80s I was writing conventional short stories at the same time - there weren't many of them, but I was still writing them. I've started writing some more now. In a review that Peter Lianett wrote he said something about my giving up writing those Atrocity Exhibition pieces for financial



reasons. I don't know where he got that idea from. The simple fact is that the ideas that went into that book, good or bad, took years to generate. I'd like to write a follow-up to it, but it will take me ten years, probably, to accumulate the material inside my own head. Also, the climate is wrong now.

Pringle: There may have been no financial reasons for you to stop writing them, but were you at all influenced by adverse criticism?

Ballard: Criticism by whom? By the of readership? The literary critics or reviewers? I don't know. Obviously a book like that is not going to be as popular as a conventionally-written book, there's no doubt about that, just as a book like Crash is not going to be popular. I found those stories in The Atrocity Exhibition produced more response from people than anything else I've ever written, people whom I'd never had any contact with, from all over the world, took the trouble to get in touch with me, which is a sure test of something. I felt the response to that book was better and larger than anything else I've ever had. In fact, I was encouraged to go on, because as I wrote the stories over a period of four or five years the response grew.

Pringle: Have you written some stories in this mode since the book was published?

Ballard: Only one, actually. They've more or less come to an end.

Pringle: I'd like to ask about the change from non-linear style of The Atrocity Exhibition to the more conventional style of the two recent novels. Does this reflect a change of mind on your part about the worth of such techniques?

Ballard: No. Maybe, when I was writing the stories and people questioned me about why I broke everything up, I tended to exaggerate a bit in the hope of getting something through. I may have made over-large claims for non-linear narrative or whatever you want to call it, but basically I still feel that the subject-matter comes first and the technique you adopt comes second. It was the subject-matter of those stories that defined the way in which they were written. At the same time it's true that once you develop an approach like that it, of itself, opens up so much more territory. I once said those condensed novels as I called them are like ordinary novels with the unimportant pieces left out. But it's more than that - when you get the important pieces together, really together, not separated by great masses of "he said, she said" and opening and shutting of doors, "following morning" and all this stuff - the great tide of forward conventional narration - it achieves critical mass as it were, it begins to ignite, and you get more things being generated. You're getting crossovers and linkages between unexpected and previously totally unrelated things, events, elements of the narration, ideas that in themselves begin to generate new matter. I haven't read any of those stories for a long time, but I remember it comes out of them - the crossovers become very unusual. It was very exciting to do. But those stories were written very much about their period, which was the middle to late '60s. I know I shall write more stories in that style, but a) it takes a long time to generate material, and b) - Mary McCarthy said somewhere that the novel should be news, and those things were news - they were like newsreels above all. There isn't any news in that sense, nothing is happening. It sounds silly, I suppose, but in a way the events in the external world are not equal to the requirements of that narrative approach. It would be very difficult to write stories of that kind about 1975. But I'm waiting for the subject-matter to come along. Meanwhile, other ideas occur to me.

Goddard: How do you view your books since The Atrocity Exhibition in the greater science fiction context, in which you maintain they still have a niche?

Ballard: You're entirely right, and I've said so myself, they do still have a niche. I was tremendously exhilarated when I started reading American science fiction - the excitement, the enormous power of imagination, etc. But I felt they weren't really making the most of their own landscape and subject-matter. Right from the start what I wanted to do was write a science

fiction book that got away from speculations, the far future, and all this stuff which I felt was basically rather juvenile, to writing a kind of adult science fiction based upon the present. Why couldn't one harness this freedom and vitality? If it is a form, above all else, that puts a tremendous premium upon imagination, and that's something that seems to have left the English novel in the last 150 years - imagination is enormously important, and I felt that if one could only harness this capacity to think imaginatively in adult life, one would have achieved something. Right from the beginning I tried with varying success to write a science fiction about the present day, which is more difficult to do than one realizes, because the natural tendency when writing in a basically allegorical mode is to set something at a distance because it makes the superabundance of the allegory that much more obvious. I wanted to write about the present day, and I think Crash, Concrete Island and the book I've just finished, which are a kind of trilogy, represent the conclusion of the particular logic I've been trying to unfold ever since I began writing. Are they SF? I don't know - maybe the science fiction of the present day will be something like Crash. They come into a category of imaginative fiction, don't they? With a strong moralistic, cautionary and explanatory note. But I don't know whether they're SF or not.

Pringle: What do you mean by "moralistic"?

Ballard: Trying to say something about the quality of one's moral direction in the ordinary sense of the term.

Pringle: There's one thing that people who dislike your work often talk about, and that's the lack of moral standards, a lack of some sort of touchstone, where you stand...

Ballard: I would have thought there was too much moralising in my stuff.

Pringle: This disturbed a lot of people who reviewed Crash.

Ballard: They were supposed to be disturbed. When I set out to write Crash, I wanted to write a book in which there was nowhere to hide. I wanted the reader, once I'd got him inside the book, never to lose sight of the subject-matter. It would have been very easy to write a conventional book about car-crashes in which it was quite clear that the author was on the side of sanity, justice, and against injuring small children, deaths on the road, bad driving, etc. What could be easier? I chose to completely accept the demands of the subject matter, which was to provoke the reader by saying that these car crashes are good for you, you thoroughly enjoy them, they make your sex-life richer, they represent part of the marriage between sex, the human organism and technology. I say all these things in order to provoke the reader and also to test him. There may be truth in some of these sentiments, disagreeable though they are to consider. Nobody likes that: they'll think "God, the man's mad", but any other way of writing that book would have been a cop-out I think.

Goddard: Was Crash in any way an experiment in self-exorcism? I believe you did experience a serious car-crash once.

Ballard: Yes, but that was after I'd finished the book. One's attitudes and feelings to a whole range of human activities are ambiguous, aren't they? This is the whole problem - what one's real motives are. There are elements of self-exorcism, I suppose. I'm an introverted person, my real life is going on inside my head. Obviously I can see that in writing Concrete Island and describing a man who resembles me to some extent, I am playing on my awareness of my own obtuseness. I probably wouldn't mind being marooned on a desert island, or put in solitary confinement as much as a lot of other people. There's an element of that, but the books are not, in any way, biographical pieces.

Goddard: Why did you call the protagonist of Crash "Ballard"?

Ballard: Well, that was part of the whole business of being as absolutely honest as I could. I wanted a first-person narrator to stand between Vaughan and the reader - the honest thing to do was to give him my own name. Although

the superficial innuendoes of the book's "Ballard" and my life are different there are many correspondences. Also, I wanted to anchor the book more in reality; I had a named film-star, who never speaks of course. The constant striving of the writer over the last few years has been to lower the threshold of fiction is what he writes, to reduce the amount of fiction. One's seen this in the theatre over the last fifteen years, and in the visual arts it started a long long time ago. The move is to reduce the fictional elements in whatever one is doing and get it to overlap reality as much as possible, rather than keeping it separate from reality and ordinary experience.

Goddard: How do you react to criticism of your books? I'm thinking particularly of those criticisms. Going back to Martin Amis and his review of *Crash* - he said something like "Be uses the word penis 147 times"

Ballard: I didn't read that. I didn't read any of the reviews of *Crash* in this country. There didn't seem any point after the reviews of *The Atrocity Exhibition* - nobody read the book. Having been a reviewer myself, I can always tell at once when somebody has stopped reading the book he's reviewing. As for criticism in general, well, science fiction writers have always been handicapped by a lack of intelligent critical responses. That's why it's so encouraging to find intelligent magazines like *Cypher* around now, and intelligent critics like David Pringle here - they didn't exist ten years ago. On the other hand, in America particularly, the critical response to sf has got totally out of hand. Now and then someone shows me a copy of *The New York Review of Books*, and I recently saw an ad for some of the most extraordinary stuff, either a series of lectures someone was giving, or a series of publications - sort of Levi-Strauss and Heidegger's such-and-such - all of them sounding like self-parodying, the application of serious literary criticism to popular authors.

Goddard: In *Billion Year Spray*, Brian Aldiss said of your early work that you had never resolved the problem of writing a narrative in which the central character pursues no purposeful course of action. That seemed rather harsh!

Ballard: It ties in with what I was saying earlier. I think Brian is at heart an sf fan, and he approaches my stuff - about which he is very generous and always has been - like an sf fan. He judges what he sees. To him, these books have a sort of vacuum at their centre - the characters' behaviour, superficially, seems to be either passive or meaningless in the context of the events. Why don't they just run for the hills? Why don't they head north? There won't be a problem - there won't be a world either of course. Therefore I think he fails to realise that, in a novel like *The Drowned World* - and this applies to all my fiction - the hero is the only one who is pursuing a meaningful course of action. In *The Drowned World*, the hero, Kerard, is the only one to do anything meaningful. His decision to stay, to come to terms with the changes taking place within himself, to understand the logic of his relationship with the shifting biological kingdom, and his decision finally to go south and greet the sun, is a totally meaningful course of action. The behaviour of the other people, which superficially appears to be meaningful - getting the hell out, or draining the lagoons - is totally meaningless. The book is about the discovery by the hero of his true companions, both mentally and literally. It's the same in the others: in *The Crystal World* the hero decides to go back and immolate himself in a timeless world. In "The Terminal Beach" why does the man stagger ashore on an abandoned island, what is he doing there? I can well understand that to the sf fan his behaviour is meaningless and lacks purpose - this, I think, means that Brian may have read too much sf.

Goddard: He goes on to say, in the same book, that the stories of your "Terminal Beach" period will be best remembered.

Ballard: Which stories does he mean?

Goddard: Well, he says your "Terminal Beach" period - that came around '82 or '83,

so I suppose he means the stories you were writing around the late '50s and early '60s.

Ballard: What he means, I think, is that the traditionally-constructed stories will last the longest. A lot of American and British sf is extremely well-written, well constructed, really very old-fashioned in construction. They're all based on the author's early readings of Maupassant or Somerset Maugham. All of it is really constructed in the classical mould - stories like that do tend to survive, not because they're particularly important or anything like that, but because they're well told.

Priggle: Can you tell us about your physical methods of writing, and whether they've changed over the years?

Ballard: They haven't changed. I don't find that I work late in the evening now unless I really have to. My eyes are tired. But basically I haven't changed my approach. I set myself a target, about a thousand words a day - unless I just stare out of the window, which I do a lot of anyway. I generally work from a synopsis, about a page when I'm writing a short story, longer for a novel. Unless for me the thing works as a story, unless it works on the anecdotal level, unless I feel it holds the attention of the reader, I don't bother with it. It's got to work on that level, as a pure piece of story-telling. If it does I begin writing. I spend a tremendous amount of time, I won't say doing research, but just soaking myself in the mental landscape, particularly of a novel. Most of the time I'm thinking about what I'm writing, or hope to write. Particularly with Crash and The Atrocity Exhibition. I was carrying those for something like six or seven years. I was totally immersed mentally in this very overcharged world. It was an exciting time, but very tiring.

Priggle: Did you actually visit motorways and inspect the landscape?

Ballard: Oh yes, I did a lot of research of that kind. I photographed this, that and the other.

Priggle: Was the inspiration for Concrete Island an actual place?

Ballard: No. I've always been interested, since it was built, by the Westway motorway near Shephard's Bush, where I set the novel. It always struck me, driving around these complex interchanges, what would happen if someone stood by the wayside and tried to fling you down? Of course, nobody would stop. You can't stop - you'd have a multiple pile-up. You'd be dead if you tried to stop. France is a much more technologically-oriented country than England, with the big high-speed boulevards that circle Paris. You can drive on the motorway from the Channel right down to Paris. You enter this boulevard and drive right around - it's not the outskirts of Paris by any means, you can see the Eiffel Tower half a mile away - on their equivalent of our circular road. You can circle Paris if you want to, and you can pick up the motorway going south without stopping at a single traffic-light. It's an enormous complex of interchanges and multi-level high-speed avenue, and the French seem to drive much more aggressively than people do over here. It often struck me, every summer, if you were marooned up on one of those balustrade ramparts - it's not just a two-dimensional island, they've got three-dimensional islands up in the air - you'd never get off. The traffic seems to be flowing 24 hours a day. The French are ruthless, they don't stop for anybody. Jesus Christ himself could be crucified by the wayside and nobody would stop. It was an obvious sort of idea to have. What's so interesting about the technological landscape in the way it plays into people's hands, people's possibly worst motives. It's difficult to maroon yourself on the A1, but much easier to maroon yourself on Westway.

Goddard: Would you care to tell us something about what your future plans are?

Ballard: Well, I finished a novel about three weeks ago, and since then I've written a couple of short stories and am writing a third now, and just

catching my breath a bit.

Pringle: What's the new novel called?

Ballard: I call it The High Life provisionally. I may change it, I may stick to it, I don't know.

Pringle: And you've written some short stories?

Ballard: A couple have been published.

Pringle: I've seen one in Ambit called "My Dream of Flying to Wake Island"

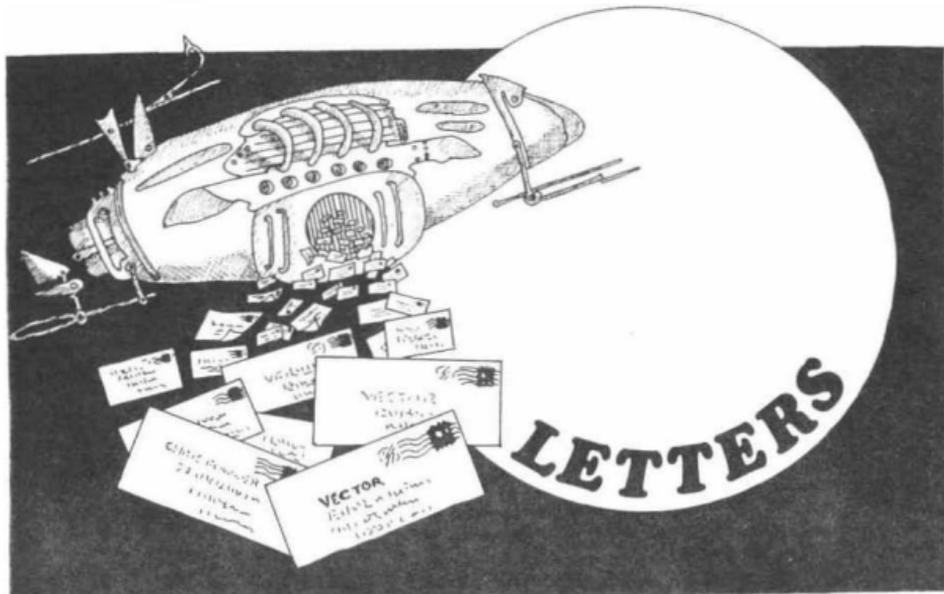
Ballard: I only wrote that about a month ago! That was quite extraordinary. Martin Sax, the editor, wanted me to write a short story for his sixtieth number. I wrote that in about one day, from a standing start. I think I wrote it on the Saturday, and I got the copy through the post on - something like Wednesday. An incredible turnaround, and very exciting when that happens. One of the nice things about writing for magazines is that there is always such a tremendously quick feedback. I wrote another - "The Air Disaster" - for a girl I know called Emma Tennant who's just published a new magazine called Bananas.

Goddard: You've no plans for another trilogy of novels on the lines of the last three?

Ballard: I just tend to write whatever comes mentally to hand, and what I find interesting at a particular time. These decisions as to what one's going to write tend to be made somewhere at the back of one's mind, so one can't consciously say: "That's what I'm going to write". It doesn't work out like that!

(Interview conducted 4/1/1975; copyright (c) James Goddard and David Pringle 1975/78





John Clute, 221 Camden High Street London NW1 7DU

Much honoured to see my name taken in vein a couple of times in Vector 72, along with B. John Barricou's. J.O. Baldwin's letter is not the first to suggest that the criticism we publish in New Worlds reflects a recognisable programme, nor is it the first to leave the nature of this putative programme completely undefined in the indictment. It's like being accused of conspiring to conspire to conspire to conspire. There may be legal precedents for this sort of indictment, but there are none in discourse. Mr Baldwin does adduce obscenity on our parts, which on my part I certainly recognise as a fair comment, but goes on to ask a rhetorical question about the existence of an in-group. Or: When did you stop beating your wife? Rhetorical questions are their own answer, after all.

But if it's of any interest, Mike Harrison and I have known each other personally for some time, agree with some regularity on the books we dislike, disagree about why with more frequency, and have strongly different tastes on the positive side. Except in the matter of "obscurity", our writing styles and styles of discourse in general differ radically; both of us readable our pre-New Worlds selves far more closely than we do each other. Much. My main animus is against contempt: the contempt so many SF writers seem to feel for the books they write, the genre they write within, the audience they write for. Mike's main animus - I'd argue - seems to be against cultural delinquency, against the current counter-cultural refusal of the Western episteme. He's put it differently.

Appreciated much of what Brian Griffin attempted to say in his review of New Worlds 8, though it is true he reads me as meaning precisely the opposite of what I said. This may be obscenity again, I don't know. Mr Griffin reads me as claiming that the 1954 film Them "is really about the Bomb" instead of recognizing that "the Bomb was only a flimsy pretext to introduce giant ants". What I actually said was reasonably clear: that because the film was laid in the American desert in 1954 we had generic knowledge of the fact "that Them, whatever they turn out to be, have something to do with nuclear explosions". This turns out to be precisely the case; my interest was in getting at the grounds of our knowledge: how do we know what we know is a genre film (or book)?

I did not argue that the film was "about" the Bomb, a very silly view indeed. What I was getting at, obviously, was at some sense of the grounds of pretext, if Mr Griffin will permit me to deconstruct him into M Barthes' Epistemology rules OE? I won't repeat the arguments I made about the functions of "onomatopoeic moves" (or the revelation of the pre-text) within a genre matrix, except to claim that Mr Griffin's misreading of my argument about the sign-value of the American desert in 1954 follows directly from a more fundamental (though in view of my style more understandable) mistaking of my arguments about the relationship of genre to "reality". Ontology is not my bag: Being is Gas. The essay was about how we perceive, how we are comforted. There was no subtext to the effect that we should not be comforted. There, of course, I differ most radically from the likes of Mike Barrison.

Christopher Priest, 1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow Middx HA2 0DA

I'd be very grateful if you'd print this letter in the next issue of Vector.

A novelist builds up many large overdrafts of favours done him, and although a good proportion of these favours come inadvertently, every now and then one is done to full knowledge. Overdrafts of favours - unlike the other sort, that writers get used to - rarely get called upon for repayment. I'd like to credit one such.

My new novel The Space Machine (which should be published by the time this sees print) ((Publication date 22nd March - due for review is V75 - Ed)) contains a rather nice gadget. The Space Machine is set in Victorian times, and as it is (for part of the story) about space travel, I thought it would fit the mood to have the spacecraft fired from a giant cannon, rather than launched by rocket. I wanted to have a cannon that fulfilled the following requirements: (1) it should be a real cannon, and fire its projectiles with a loud bang. (2) It should be feasible in an engineering sense. (3) It should not kill the occupants of the projectile.

I put the problem to Andrew Stebbenson, and during the course of a long conversation he came up with the answer. Modestly, he attributes half the result to me...but I have very little doubt in my own mind about where the notion came from. Andrew, I think, had later doubts about the engineering practicality of the thing, because he produced copious calculations to prove that it would not after all work; nevertheless, the cannon in The Space Machine is much as he first suggested it.

Therefore, the ingenious notion that figures in the middle section of the book (not, incidentally, the eponymous machine) is Andrew's. The fact that a few minutes with a pocket calculator would prove the thing preposterous is not Andrew's fault, but mine. The engineers who built the thing in the novel are capable of technological marvels, the occupants are not quite killed, and the cannon does indeed give off a satisfactorily loud bang. That was good enough for me.

So, many thanks, Andrew.

((Watch the lettercolumn of Vector for more startling revelations of where of writers "get those crazy ideas"...read how Arthur C. Clarke was told about Sal 9000 by Malcolm Edwards...how Bob Shaw pinched Orbitaville from Sheila Boldestock...Ed))

Ian Williams, 6 Greta Terrace, Chester Road, Sunderland SR4 7BD

Here is a typed double-space letter from yours truly.

First off, my apologies for not writing before now....

...Don't feel too bad about not getting any Valentines (shit shit shit), I didn't get any either. That's the trouble with being so lovable and popular as we both are, people think we're going to get loads, so rather than swell our heads they don't bother. As a result, we get none.

Gnawetfandom doesn't have anything against you, Chris. I think you've doing a very competent, hard-working job and deserve every credit for producing Vector the way you do. It takes per severance, dedication and gullibility for doing it in the first place. No, I have every respect for what you're doing. I simply happen to disagree with your editorial taste. In particular over your review section. Oh you've got some competent people there, like Andrew Tidmarsh who is improving. But, you've got a lot of very ordinary reviewers who give plot/content summary and chuck in a few personal opinions. But so what? Any literate person could do that. The kind of reviews I enjoy are those that add to my knowledge/awareness of a particular book, that show me something I hadn't noticed. This is what separates your Vector from Little Malcolm's - the depth of perception of your reviewers. Basically, they lack any. Most of the reviews in Vector are like any to be found in other fanzines.

Okay, you could say that what I'm after is not reviewing, but criticism. Could be. But if anyone wants reviews all they need to do is look in Analog, BFR, J&SP, for more and better.

Incidentally, Harry Bell says if you want any artwork, send him size requirements.

I told you Gnawetfandom didn't have anything against you.

Can't say the same of the person who's reading this letter over your shoulder. Keith Freeman seems incapable of seeing any point at all.....

(I've deleted the rest of this letter since it is more relevant to the BSFAM, wherein I hope it will appear. Keith is perfectly able to defend himself, so I won't reply to the criticisms made of him and his fanzine review column. I will reply, however, to the criticisms made of V, and of my editorial taste. You suggest, Ian, that my reviewers lack depth of perception, and that any literate person could do as well. That is precisely where you are wrong, Ian. Any literate person might think he could do as well - but how many have ever tried. Reviewing is not as easy as it looks. I dispute, in any case, that the reviewers in V lack any depth. I should not be sending them books to review if they do such a lack. Mor - and this brings us on to an important point - should I be sending them books to review if they weren't reliable: i.e. they turn in reviews of a suitable standard on time - which is more than can be said for most of fans, who never meet a deadline. Whatever happened to those fanzine reviews you promised me back in November, Ian? In your critique you make one useful point - that what you are looking for is criticism, not reviews. I dispute that you can find as many or as good reviews in any of the publications you name, but we'll let that ride. You seem to forget that "The Infinity Box" is a review column. What I am attempting to achieve therein is to cover the SF publishing field as widely as possible - which is rather different to what Malcolm Edwards attempted. A close examination of the Malcolm Edwards Vectors reveals that very few books got reviewed in any except the last, double, issue. Malcolm picked out the best books to review, and as should be apparent to anyone, it is much easier to say something deep and critical about a good book than a run-of-the-mill one. Reviewers in the present V are called upon to review a large number of books, many of them mediocre. When the big books come along, then they get correspondingly deeper criticism - see Jim Goddard's look at High Rise or Chris Morgan's review of the new John Brunner book. I am endeavouring to secure the services of people who will be willing to review occasionally, people who are among the best reviewers in the country, but many of them are unable or unwilling to do so at present. But give me some time, Ian, and they'll be there - and so will the deeper, more critical reviews you are looking for. - Ed)

Malcolm Edwards, 10 Rammoor Gardens, Harrow Middx HA1 1UQ

Well, here I am sitting at home with a nasty attack of coughing and sneezing, having just finished reading the contents of the BSFA envelope that arrived this morning. It seems a good opportunity to repay the effort you've put in

by propagating a few germs in your direction...

You seem to be getting a little pissed off by the refusal of certain people to accept the Chris Fowler Vector as an entity in its own right, when they notice its existence at all. That's understandable, but I really wouldn't worry about it if I were you (easy for me to say now, of course; at the time I used to get immensely irritated by the constant comparisons with Speculation, which was then staggering uncertainly towards extinction). It will pass, even if only when you eventually give up and the next editor has to suffer endless comparisons with the Chris Fowler Vector...

I really must stop finishing paragraphs with three dots...

I missed Dan Morgan's speech at Novacon, but I've now had the opportunity to read it twice. Unfortunately, that doesn't inspire me to say anything about it, except to point to his remarks about good old General Franco. I'm glad Dan has put me straight on this: I now realise that Franco was a Bad King but a Good Thing, as proved by the fact that the people who have prospered under his regime are laughing. Sure he shot a lot of people - but what the hell, they were only degos. I wonder - purely as a matter of interest - if Dan would agree that Lenin and Stalin did an admirable job turning Russia into a world power, and it's silly to make a fuss about a few troblesmaking kulaks who got in the way. Once you've argued that the ends justify the means, you've little cause for complaint if people with ends opposed to yours start to use the means on you.

((It hurt me to type that bit in Dan Morgan's speech about Franco, it really did. I was willing to be persuaded that the complete speech was "something that BSA members like to read", and I don't like cutting things, but I didn't like putting that bit in. So thanks for writing in, Malcolm, I had my fingers crossed someone would do so and save my editorial conscience - Ed))

The book reviews are variable, with Brian Griffin standing out as having something interesting to say and the ability to say it. (I don't mean by that that the other reviewers lack those qualities, I hasten to add.) I must take mild issue with Chris Morgan's review of Decade: The 1940s. Firstly, it's an sf anthology, not a fantasy anthology. OK, the distinction is a fairly arbitrary one, and the two happily co-exist in many magazines; nevertheless, if you are putting together an anthology of sf stories, clearly Father and the Grey Monster don't belong there. The same applies to most of the contents of Weird Tales (which, by the 1940s, was pretty assembled) and Unknown. There was another stream of sf parallel to that represented in Astounding, but the magazine in which it was best represented were Startling Stories, Planet Stories and Thrilling Wonder Stories. Bradbury mostly wrote for Weird Tales and Planet, until he broke through into better-paying markets; I wouldn't argue that he might have been included (as might Heinlein). Leigh Brackett is best remembered for stories which mostly appeared from 1949 onwards; and were mostly of short novel length. The best is Sword of Rhiannon, which was in Thrilling Wonder in 1949 (under another title); but it is obviously too long for an anthology. De Camp and Sturgeon were both Astounding authors (or, to be precise, Astounding-and-Unknown authors). De Camp has always been much happier writing novels. All Sturgeon's best-known sf of the 1940s did appear in Astounding.

As to the question of "major works" - well, it all depends what you mean. I take it to mean those works which are considered particularly innovative and influential, and with which the authors' names are therefore particularly associated. Either that or work of exceptionally high or lasting quality. What does this mean in terms of the three authors mentioned? For Asimov it means, give your teeth or not, "Nightfall", the robot stories, and the Foundation trilogy. The End of Eternity, The Naked Sun, "The Martian Way" etc - from the 1950s - may well be better stories, but they are hardly towering literature; neither, by any stretch of the imagination, could they be said to have changed the course of sf. Van Vogt, of course, had stopped writing by about 1950 (discounting the

(incomprehensible lunatic who churns out novels under his name nowadays) so there's no argument. And the same argument applies with Heinlein as with Asimov with the exception that a) his juvenile novels in the 1950s set new standards and b) some of his novels - notably Starship Troopers and Stranger in a Strange Land - have created as much of a stir as anything published in the field. The generalisation is more shaky with Heinlein, as generalisations tend to be about Heinlein, because whatever his faults he has rarely marked time.

.. Well, keep up the good work. Two wishes: cos. that Tom Jones acquire a typewriter that will cut stencils; too, that you proof-read a little more carefully. Last issue it was Brain Aldise; this time it's Brain Lewis and Brain Griffin (see contents page), and if I were John Williams I could very likely sue you for the typo on page 9.

And never mind the lousy typing on this letter - I'm a sick man

Merf Adamsco, 14 St James Close, Hedon, Hull HU12 6RH

Cripes! You don't give people much chance to write in time for the next issue; my copy of V72 arrived this morning, and the copydate is tomorrow (that's today). Eh, well, can't be helped, I suppose (and it is a suitable punishment for not writing last time - I anticipate very sore fingers by the time I get this posted, mainly due to the fact that this is aggravating a condition brought on by writing lots of letters this morning...)

But then again, no. I haven't had time to read it through, I'm afraid, so to attempt a proper loc is a bit fatuous. (I have already read Dan Morgan's GoB speech in Logo, but I can't really say anything about it other than that it was just as good to read as it was to hear.) The cover is suitably stunning, and I like the interior illus too. Also liked V71, which I really should have read before last Thursday..

.. Several people seem to have written to say that they weren't announced of the cover of the last Newsletter. Well, I want to say that I liked it, by god I did. And I'm glad there was nothing on the back of it, cos I've detached it and put it on the wall. Lovely! (One thing disturbs me, though: who is she??) I have the feeling that you get when you half-recognise someone.. was she at Beacon or Novacon B? Eh lad, I never thought the BSFA could be like this!

((You ask a tricky question there, Merf. Who is she? Who indeed? Are you listening out there, Sally? Not a question I'm prepared to answer in print...ask me at Hedon when I'm in the right mood. Merf. And so, she was not at any previous cons ..except immanently, of course. Ah well. - Ed))

In conclusion I will praise you for your efforts with Vector, she's coming along lovely (and there weren't that many typos in the last one!); I promise, really I do, to write a proper loc on the next one.....

Paul Dillon, 26 West Crescent, Darlington, Co Durban

Thank you kindly for my copies of 72, it was as usual up to standard. I must admit to the idiotic mistake of missing Dan Morgan's speech at Novacon, I soon to remember I was in the middle of an interesting conversation with Paul Ryan when the speech was announced and somehow we never got round to hearing it. So thanks for the chance to see it in print. While we're talking about guest-of-honour speeches, I missed Harrison's at Beacon, I must have been up most of the night before and slept through it - is there any chance of seeing it in Vector? Somebody must have recorded it.

I wouldn't worry too much about the size of Vector because, as I keep trying to explain to Paul A, it's the quality that counts; and although of the four copies I've seen so far, some seem just a little heavy on the old grey matter, this seems to be what your readers want, judging from the heavy brigade who send in lots. I seem to remember in a past letter you said that Vector wasn't always going to cater for conservative tastes. So how about a resident cartoon strip - I'm

willing to have a crack at drawing one....

And so to the artwork. Well, for the last week I seem to have elapt on buses, in armchairs, slumped over the drawing board and in other unlikely places, the reason being of course the rush to get the artwork together...I hope you aren't planning too many express issues in the near future! Don't get the idea I'm grouching, far from it - I have enjoyed every minute of it. There's nothing finer than watching the dawn come up over West Crescent viewed with bloodshot eyes over a sea of rough sketches, failed ideas, overflowing ashtrays, empty tea cups - it makes me feel like everybody's idea of an artist, and it's fine - but somehow it all gets spoiled when I remember I've got to show my face at work in two hours time. Fortunately I only have to work part time, but it's still an awful drag - well on the day I can spend my time drawing and painting sf. I'll start with the cover as that was the first to be finished and probably needs some explanation. As I told you, I was kicking around a couple of ideas, this one and one based on a picture symbolically portraying the "salvaging of Vector". This latter idea was my favourite because it was a sort of tribute to your modest self and all the work you're doing, and also a thank you from me for giving me the chance to get my stuff over to a bigger audience. Unfortunately, it was the most difficult to execute without it becoming kitsch, so I let it go for the moment; but the idea is still there. Perhaps we can use it to mark the first anniversary of your edship, which, if I'm not mistaken, comes up soon. Anyway, I went for the more general vector-as-a line-in-space - well, that's what my dictionary said. I don't think it meant quite the kind of line I've drawn but I used a little artistic licence. I hope it doesn't give your Printer too many headaches...

...And so to the pics for the Ballard interview...the title page is fairly self-explanatory. I'm sorry the word "Ballard" got a little lost behind the lamp-post, but I was so pleased with the lamp-post I couldn't bear to paint it out. I'm sure the amateur Freudians will point out that it is symbolic of my dislike for Mr Ballard, but it's not...The soup tin and the paint brushes are from page two where he is talking about wanting to be an artist and his regard for Mr Warhol. He, as I'm sure you know, immortalised the Campbell's soup tin on canvas. I couldn't resist the pun on John Campbell and Astounding, mentioned later in the text. The picture of Moorcock refers to the bit where he is talking about New Worlds and specifically the illu is intended to depict the line "the battle had been won". The end is of course from "The Cloud Sculpture of Coral D".

Dennis Tucker, 87 Oakridge Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP123PL

Vector 72 to hand and read: a very good issue.

Firstly, of course, I have to dispute your statement on p. 50 that you are publishing all letters received, (or at least the important bits), since my own is nowhere to be seen. As soon as I received V71 I read it (on 31st December to be exact) and I sent a brief note to Keith Freeman with my renewal subscription; this was received, since I have my new membership card. With it - actually on the same sheet of paper - I sent some comments on the issue (in response to your appeal) and asked KF to pass them on. So there are two possibilities: either a) he didn't do so, or b) your statement is - shall we say - not one of fact.

((Darn it, Dennis, you caught me out. This is a scandal of Watergate proportions which will no doubt read the BSFA rim from rim. I admit all, the tapes cannot lie...I lost your letter somewhere in the echoing vastnesses of my filing system, I lost it, I'm sorry. Truly. And it won't happen again. Now where the heck did I put the rest of your letter....? - Ed))

For the record, (and I wish there to be a record) I complained about the article "Towards an Atlas Linguistics" occupying space in a magazine which is supposed to be devoted to matters science-fictional and suggested that the Average Fan does not want this sort of material. I observe that I do have a little

support in some letters in V72. (One reader even uses the word "drivel" for what I, rather politely, I thought, called "elegant nonsense"!) I feel that the fact that some members enjoyed it is really quite immaterial - that it had no connection whatsoever with science fiction and therefore no place in a magazine which, after all, is the Journal of the British Science Fiction Association, not a "private" fanmag.

(The overwhelming weight of opinion, both in letters received and in personal communications, was in favour of the running of the Ian Watson piece. I consider that the content of the article was perfectly at home in a magazine such as Vector, and I do not so underestimate the intelligence of the average reader as to suppose that he or she could not understand the article - Ed)

In V72 I liked all the articles, especially Dan Morgan's dry humour.

I always particularly enjoy the book reviews, although I feel that one or two of your regular reviewers are perhaps just a little over-fond of the sound of their own voices. (The clatter of their own typewriters?) For me, the ideal book review consists of a reasonably brief synopsis of the story plus a succinct - but also not too lengthy - expression of the reviewer's opinion as to why it is a good/bad book. In this issue I'm afraid I couldn't resist a little inward smile at Andrew Tidmarsh's concern that his unfavourable review might "destroy" a book. A review in a Journal read, at best, by hundreds of people? Surely the wonder of it is that any publisher sends free copies to the BSFA? I am really not trying to belittle us, but let's leave Clod-Cuckoo-land and face facts: fanmag makes no difference in real terms to book sales, either way.

David V. Lewis, 8 Aldis Avenue, Stowmarket, Suffolk

Herewith, comments on V72:

Artwork: Brian Lewis is redolent of Frazer and Fabian at their best; could be fantasy, but then P&SF are so intermixed as to be hard to tell apart. The illo could be a warrior on old earth, or a man-like denizen of some far planet, so the relevancy to the sf argument against it falls down. The use of the medium of black and white was superb.

Ryan's style is somewhat crude but enjoyable (his Orion Express is of course full of it). The black silhouette and lines style of illo I enjoyed as it involved the observer in the interpretation. Some were obviously fantasy based (pp 36, 43, 48); however, I don't mind that, but expect others will howl with anger at fantasy invading the pages of an sf-based organ. I equate Ryan's style to that of old-fashioned woodcut prints and accept the crudeness as part of the method of presentation, which is effective in the limited area of black and white illos.

Dillon's style is not so crude, he is what I call a "line" man and does not use the stark contrasts of h/w as Ryan, so providing a relief from the harshness of Ryan, with a more subtle composition. But I found his "Letters" illo somewhat lacking in originality and rather mediocre. The other illos made up for this somewhat flat style with innuendo humour in them. With over 20 illos in V72, those of us who like a lot of artwork in zines must be getting nearly all we require in this area.

Dan Morgan: I enjoyed his speech and explanations of his life style, ESP, hangups, etc. I know he has been around BSFA a long time, as well as sf writing, but I must admit ignorance of his work - I don't think I have read any. Although I have seen them on display lately, the article was by way of an intro. to Dan Morgan to us.

Eric Bentcliffe: A little piece I found tart to the taste, but of course true (the illo was very good except for the top part having been lopped off); down to earth sums up Bentcliffe's message, in his own style of humour.

Robert Silverberg: Similar to that elsewhere, but it would have been first



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XMAS75

of course if that incident had not happened, so the scoop quality has been lost. But to be fair one must judge it as if it had come ahead of the other zines' interviews. Malcolm Edwards extracts every bit of meat from this and shows what a fine interviewer he is! Although the facts are now well known - large words cut down, sexual elements in recent work, Dying Inside autobiographical etc. But if Malcolm Edwards had not undertaken to secure this interview let it be known - would others have been so eager to jump on the bandwagon? A glorious first for the BSFA! Unfortunately delayed, but the trumpet must be blown.

Book Reviews: Plenty of them and very interesting. Good to see Andrew Tidmarsh is still with us. I look forward to seeing his fiction in print; I believe you said somewhere he is working on fiction. I am pleased to see his dissection of Chalgren, although I haven't read it yet. From what I have seen of various reviews his comments are very true, and probably are true of a number of writers around at the moment: acclaimed by critics mainly on brilliant styles, but when read by little ole me, have no content or meat to get into.

Charisma by Michael G. Cowey, I read in a zine somewhere and it seemed to be a typically uninspiring "English" sf book in the style of Wyndham. Very middle class bobemian, i.e. bare living I recall on a house boat or launch and had no real visible means of support, except he worked when he felt like it at the research station.

Madness Emerging by A Cole seems to be the same "English" grunt. Chris Morgan has a good word there, which I shall introduce into my vocab, i.e. M.A.M. - Nameless Alien Menace.

Good to see a name on the mag chain list, to which I belong and urge other members to take advantage of, pop up with a review: Phil Stephenson-Payne. I enjoyed Flight of the Hares by Larry Niven, which is light, humorous stuff and I agree with Phil that Niven ought to look at his collections a little and edit out all the repeated explanations, which become niggling after a while, spoiling the enjoyment of them.

Letters: I am glad to see from the letters that I was not alone in not really grasping Ian Watson's article. However, other letters were helpful in this and I am striving towards enlightenment.

Good to see the fair sex well represented in the letter spot.

I hope Joan Welsh's letter shakes up a few more members into action to let you know what they think of Vector and the BSFA and whether or not they think they are getting a square deal. Feedback is vital to your function, without it you are operating in a vacuum. I try to get down on paper my reactions to Vector, not because I want to see my name in print ish after ish, but because I feel I owe it to you for the effort you put in. Also I don't just praise, as you will know, but try to offer constructive criticism. I echo John Welsh - get off your buttocks and write in long, short, praise, criticism - it is all needed to help keep BSFA alive and kicking.

((Thanks for those words of encouragement, David. We're indeed glad to have feedback from members to V and the BSFA, of whatever length and depth - Ed))

Andy Sawyer, 14A Fifth Avenue, Manor Park, London E12

Another Vector ... another letter...

...the obvious first mention is the Dan Morgan article; no doubt you've had thousands of letters attacking him (no doubt you haven't, but I try to be optimistic) so I won't get hysterical. Let's forget "sure he was a bastard, sure he shot a lot of people and put a lot of people in prison" - I mean Hitler built the autobahns as well as the gas ovens, Muscolini made the trains run on time, and Stalin put Alexander Soshentayn and millions like him in labour camps so we could get amazing books like The First Circle - and remember that when he's not talking politics, Dan Morgan is a writer of some fine stories and the article itself was very illuminating - I'd had my suspicions that the Stars series was an

attempt at another Star Trek. If ONLY that had been televised instead of that pestiferous abortion of a TV series, Space 1999! In any case, I'll always be grateful to Dan Morgan for his boob on the guitar - many a happy hour spent practicing chord changes in "Little Brown Jug"!

The best part of Vector 73 was the Silverberg interview; although it wasn't completed - and read as if it wasn't completed - it was worthwhile including. I wish more Silverberg would become generally available over here - despite his "high output" I find his novels hard to get hold of!

I also liked the artwork throughout Vector, and I think I must point out Paul Ryan's art as being excellent - especially as I feel I criticized his magazine Orion quite heavily on this count in a letter-of-comment; sorry Paul! Eric Bencliff's piece threw up a few ideas but was too light-hearted - or maybe I'm put off by the "we're running out of resources but science will give us a new technology and all will be well" implications. Maybe I'm treating it too seriously...

Varon Speed, 63 Lytton Avenue, Letchworth, Herts SG8 3HY

Thanks for Vector 72: I hope you can keep up the same high standards of presentation and contributions in future issues. Together with the Newsletter, a nice bulky package, and one which raises quite a few issues in my mind.

Firstly, feeling chastised for not having written before, I must explain (excuses, excuses) that I haven't done so because, as a recently-joined member, I didn't want to jump in at the deep end without seeing a few issues of Vector and getting an idea of what the BSPA is all about. I imagine this goes for a lot of new members, but as for the burden of old-timers, well... (I mean, I could have written some rambling discourses on an aspect of SF in general, in the hope of stirring up some discussion, but since you're obviously pre-occupied with getting the next issue typed and ready on time, and trying to find out what we want in it, this would be a bit out of place.)

About Vector 72. Notable chiefly for great strides forward in book reviews and illustrations (both quantity and quality). A pity that the Silverberg interview was unfinished - it gave a tantalising view of a complex writer, and there's obviously a lot more left to say about him. The most important part of the issue must surely be "The Infinity Box", filling 20 pages (including illcs) and reviewing such prestigious books as High Rise, The Dispossessed and Omigron. Quite honestly, I feel that you (or the reviewers) are taking on too much within a short space: James Goddard did some justice to Ballard's novel in a piece which was, in effect, an article, tying in with earlier work, etc, but I don't think you can properly review an important work like The Dispossessed in just over a side, or dismiss Omigron as a book which "contributes nothing to SF" without explaining this viewpoint at more length and in more detail. The reviews of New Worlds 2 and The Best from FAER, on the other hand, were ample and satisfying, perhaps because the books are not as significant as the three mentioned above, which really require sizeable articles. (Incidentally, thanks to Chris Morgan for settling, at least for me, the dispute over the authorship of "Ship of Shadows", which had me baffled for some years.) Overall, also, I think, there seems to be a need for a wee bit more enthusiasm in this section (Robert Jackson notes this with regard to the fawning reviews in BSPAN): I know this is a harsh judgment as well as an over-generalized statement; I also know that I say it hearing mind Ted Sturgeon's reviews in Galaxy, which isn't a fair comparison because everybody doesn't think like Sturgeon. But - as must surely be so much emotional as intellectual in impact, and, well, enthusiasm in injections.

None of the above can prevent me in the slightest from praising all and sundry for a very fine and very full review section.

In your "Lead-In" to Vector 72 you ask for "more intelligently argued letters, constructively criticising the journal and its contents". I hope I have, at least

partially, not your need. As a final point, I'd like to say that I find Vector a peculiar mixture of, for want of better words, the "intellectual" (like Ian Watson's article in V71) and the "chatty" (I don't necessarily mean humorous or Goll speeches, but something like Edmund Cooper's "Violence in SF" in V70). The difference between the two is something of tone rather than subject-matter, and that's what makes them clash. In spite of Dave Langford's fears of "the dreaded creeping academe" (V71) I really think you'd do well to move Vector more positively in one direction or the other, preferable to the "intellectual" side, not because this is the "superior" side of sf or anything, but because you can then use the Newsletter for the specific purpose (as well as providing reports from the various BSFA officials) of counterbalancing this seriousness, rather than mixing the two up indiscriminately under the same format. (David Lewis expresses a similar opinion on page 9 of Newsletter 4). It would be pretty impossible, as well as pointless, though, to divide the letters up in this way. Most of them (like this one) are a mixture of seriousness and light-heartedness and it's important to publish a wide spectrum of views.

Did I say "final point" a while back? Well, we're all fallible. Talking about letters, it occurs to me, reading a few Vectors, that there doesn't seem to be much feedback between their writers (Andrew Tidmarsh seems to have a monopoly of this) - which explains why I've dropped too many names in this letter...

It's suddenly occurred to me, writing this, what a bloody difficult job it must be editing a magazine. Apart from all the hard slog, achieving the kind of balance that perfectionists like me praise you for must be practically impossible, except for a genius. (I've got great faith in flattery.)

Keep the Vectors coming and all is forgiven.

David Penny, Nantycraws, Gofa, Welshpool, Powys

It crept in with the dawn and lay in ambush in the letterbox, just waiting for me to saunter past on my way to work, oblivious to any such threat of danger. I saw it peering out at me with little staped eyes glinting through the spines of the holly-bush, above the spines of the barbed wire (it really is that kind of letter-box - I made it myself from an old packing case and half a written off alodge). Just as I reached for it, the Thing leapt. Straight to my throat, fangs nibbling, up, up, always closer to the jugular. I went down in a heap, but managed to knee it in the groin and we rolled downslope and into the stream where I got on top and held it underwater until all signs of struggling had ceased.

When I opened it up there were just these two comics inside, Vector and some piece of foreign called BSFAN (alien foreign, perhaps?).

Seriously though (if you can believe that you can believe anything) I like the way both Vector and the Newsletter are going. Vector, in my opinion, ought to be the more serious since it is, and the present mixture of news, articles, information, letters and the rest is about right. Vector should not, under any circumstances, become more fanzish. The fanzine review run in the Newsletter is an excellent service, and of great use to those not familiar with the fanzines there are (and who is?). But the BSFA, although helping fandom, should not be fanzish itself. There is a little too much lunacy in fandom that the official body supposed to represent sf in Britain should not be too involved with. If it is to get anywhere over here then it must have someone willing and able to promote it, and the BSFA is the ideal organisation for doing this. (Like they say - when you go for a job, you need to impress the boss, so you comb your hair and wear your best suit. Once you've got the job things can slip a little. It's the same kind of thing with the BSFA and fandom. One is the face we show to the establishment, the other is the face we show to our friends.)

I enjoyed the loose, chatty style of the Newsletter. This is how it should be in a "house" zine circulated to members only. And I agree with a remark made somewhere that Vector should be the pretty one (graphically). Just so long as the Newsletter is legible (nearly this time, nearly) then anything more is

really superfluous.

I enjoyed the transcript of Dan Morgan's speech. He said a lot of sensible things about writing. It is not the heady, inspirational thing that most non-writers seem to view it as. And writing is most certainly not an excuse for not "working".

The book reviews were okay, though I did find the one on Bellard a little too offensive. It was more a short article on the man than a review of High Rise.

I agree completely with Brian Griffin about New Worlds. I always read it, and I always feel that I ought to enjoy it, but somehow it never quite comes off.

I read Chalgren (or most of it) a couple of months ago. I honestly can't remember the truck ride your reviewer tells of, but maybe that's just my memory. It was that kind of book, and the details tend to blur after a while. I wasn't too impressed by it. Clever, but a bit like playing all the right notes but playing them all on the same pitch - i.e. lacking in something called soul.

(It's a pity all the books that get reviewed that are published by Robert Hale get such bad notices. Because they publish both my books son! Yes, I do know they bring out an awful lot of crap. But I also like to think that they bring out some that are at least readable. Honest. Really. A few.)

John Walsh, 23 Kelvinside Gardens East, Glasgow G20

The ink covered fly crawls again. I'm thinking of swatting it and buying a typewriter.

Anyway, thank you for V72. And thank you for printing that invaluable postal interview with Robert Silverberg in it. It was illuminating and informative, a delight to read (but then, anything Robert Silverberg writes invariably is) and depressing if the answers to some of the questions raised in it haven't changed by now. For example, one point raised in the interview was the question of the use of vernacular language in sf magazines. I'm afraid I don't read many sf magazines, and I don't even read those very regularly. I stick to books (it's this damn soap, y'see). So I was somewhat surprised and saddened to discover that there was, and for all I know still is, censorship in Galaxy and other mags. I can hardly believe it. I'll really need to get hold of some of them and see if it is still the case. Because to have to hamper and destroy a story in such a way, such a senseless way, is a concept that is very hard to grasp. And why is it done? (Assuming it still is.) Because the mothers of the kids who read the magazines complain. Presumably the children won't be allowed to buy them unless they're kept completely chaotic or, at the most, written euphemistically. Well, perhaps that does partially excuse the editors. But to find that such influential traces of the mothers' puritanism, which no doubt does arise sincerely from a similar early indoctrination in a sense of decency, still exists, makes me feel very queasy. That whole facet of the concept of decency (i.e. censorship in general) should be totally eradicated, I sometimes feel.

I shudder when I imagine the gruesome effects that would be produced by censoring one of Robert Silverberg's or, worse, one of Harlan Ellison's short stories. Might as well burn them, and for the same reason that witches were burned: none.

I won't say anything about Silverberg's fairy tale like transformation from back to struggling genius other than that I would like to know more about the reasons that caused him to attempt to regain his artistic integrity (which he's done, admirably). And it's a pity to discover that NEL are keeping so many of his books out of print.

Another worrying thing in the interview, and thank the gods he said later he probably wouldn't, was when Silverberg said "Periodically I think about eliminating the remaining bit of output".

No. He mustn't ever.

It would, I imagine, be like losing a baby that has just been born, is fresh from the womb, and is truly alive for the very first time.

I warmly approve of the quantity and, much more important, the quality of the book reviews in V72. I suspect, unjustly perhaps, that the rest of the book reviewers are becoming slightly sickened by all the praise Andrew Tidmarsh has been receiving of late. Well - prepare to puke again. His reviews really are very distinctive, through their apparent polish and insight, and because of his fine critical ability and his personality.

It's unfortunate that the others have to be judged beside him because all of the reviews, in themselves, are a pleasure to read, even if I for one never buy a quarter of the books mentioned.

Anyway, V72 and the Newsletter (especially the Bob Shaw article) were on the whole enjoyable, except for one little part, Chris, when you allowed yourself to indulge in "over-reacting to negative criticism". I can't make any judgment on the validity of the criticism, being too recent a member of the BSPA, but I'm afraid the temptation to vent your spleen about it on paper will never be very commendable. But, since it is so easy to over-react to apparently personal criticism, and hard to believe criticism at that, I guess you are forgiven. This once.

COMMENT ON THE ABOVE LETTER:

Personally, I think it's brilliant ... (I dare you to print that!)

Ray P. Harrison, 18 The Witham, Grange Est, Coventry, Northants NN11 6QW

Thank you for V72. I enjoyed all of it very much. I think this is the best looking Vector you have edited, mainly due to the profusion of interior lilos, although the cover was good too. I liked the Dan Morgan GOM speech and found it quite readable but not particularly enlightening. The Silverberg interview, even though incomplete, was, I thought, worthwhile printing, though as always I find myself disagreeing with him. One piece I sound hard to swallow was his answer to the last question, when he referred to genre fiction and true novels. This reads to me like a back-handed insult to SF writers and readers. Still, each to his own.

"The Infinity Box" was really good this issue and one of the best reviews was of Dhaigren, by Andrew Tidmarsh. I certainly hope Mr Tidmarsh will not stop contributing to Vector as he seems to be able to strike a balance between attacking a book and raving enthusiastically, rarely matched by many other reviewers. One reviewer who can match him, however, is James Goddard, who wrote the very good piece on High Rise. Unfortunately it was merrid by the last paragraph, which was in no way pertinent to the book.

The Letter Column was not bad, but I personally prefer them to be more controversial (this is my lurid nature coming out). Let's hope you get more response this time.

I feel congratulations (or thanks) are due to you not only for putting out such high standard Vectors, but also for the frequency of them, which in itself should help to inspire a response.

David E. Bridges, 51 Crawshaw Grove, Sheffield S6 7EA

I was going to start off by saying that it's been a long time since I last locced Vector and that it's about time... etc, when I suddenly realized that I haven't in fact locced Vector before (or at least if I have I've forgotten). Oh well, think yourself lucky and then start to wonder why your luck just ran out.

I'm doing as you suggest and double-spacing. It sure looks funny though.

This is getting ridiculous. Who ever heard of a rine coming out regularly. You just can't do it, this regular-as-clockwork-every-two-months bit is more than the human nervous system was built to take. Now I'm not criticising (though I

suppose it might look that way), but I just wonder how long you'll be able to carry on at this rate. 'Huff said. You're doing a grand job. I am very pleased to see so many illustrations in the new type Vector; I'm sure there's nothing more calculated to prevent a mine being read than a dearth of illos. Actually I'm surprised you haven't had bucketfuls of complaints about that - usually coming over 2% illustrations attracts letters from folk complaining about the reduction in text/page increase and hence cost, etc etc, that illustrations cause. Of course in cases like SP Monthly folk write in to complain that the textual content is squeezing out the artwork.

I agree with you about the size of the review column, it is looking good. I would like to see a return to the short-short review, though, the not-excluded-from-review-at-a-later-date type of thing. Possibly for paperbacks, just to aid readers over a snap decision of which new book to buy next. It would be useless for hardbacks because either you are going to buy a hardback whatever review it gets, or you are willing to be persuaded to buy one, in which case it would take more than a couple of lines to do the job.

Dave Langford, Boundary Hall, Tadley, Basingstoke Hants

Again thanks for Vector. Don't mention Mr Hall's device, please, I'm loaded up to here with traumata resulting from its use combined with my lousy hearing. This reached an exciting new low two weeks ago, when I phoned the GPU themselves to ask about a phone with a turnable-up volume... I think I got through all right but whether they told me anything remains obscure, as I couldn't hear them.

I won't headwrite any more letters. I know you were thinking of me when you wrote that bit at the end of V72's letter-column... know ya that when the fusee blow in this damned hotel, there is neither power for the electric typer nor light by which to use the portable, and with shrieking of frustration I go out for a drink and do my writing in the bar, which accounts for several things. All this happens pretty often.

....(second letter) ...Having finally assembled my do-it-yourself Vector kit thanks to the kindly one (oh all right, Keith Freeman), who provided me with the full text of the page which was blank in V when I first had it... and which I type this on the back of, that you may know I did not squander it on useless projects such as writing best-selling novels... hell, I've forgotten where the sentence started. Also I'm in Typing Mode B - portable, no carbon ribbon, sitting on the edge of the bed, Tipp-Ex out of reach - so this ain't gonna be a nice pretty letter like the last time's. Where was I? Oh yes, the magazine. Well, I read it. And... Er, a bit thin this time, no? Ursula Le Guin's speech vaguely annoying, maybe a bit pretentious; Ian Watson's piece quite "splendidly unreadable" like the good old TIS said about his first book... Seriously, I showed that one to Hazel, who is a linguist (pearls before swine) where I'm concerned, (a linguistics) and she said, I don't understand this. Oh well...

It warms up with the reviews, and even excluding mine, the letters are pretty good. Get someone to send you some better Articles, Chris. Who? Me? Not me? Aaaaargh...

F.I. Barycz, 18 Musgrove Road, Newcrossgate, London SE14 5PW

Many thanks for the copy of V71...

...As to more original work, I spent a pleasant and rainy hour one day in the City of London's Guildhall Art Gallery looking at the remarkable pictures of an exhibition of prints, drawings, designs etc, entitled "London as it might have been". The exhibition closed on 30th Dec; there is a scent of stale news about it but I can make something of it using it as a point of departure - some of the proposals for altering London or rebuilding bits of it were and are truly amazing. This piece should be coming your way in the nearish future...

...A suggestion about locs. If it does not make your printer hold out his hand palm up why not use the actual letter received as a master and reduce it in

size for printing? Not only would it save typing time, it would also encourage the development of legible handwriting and the spread of typewriters with new ribbons and scrubbed type.

((Unfortunately, attractive as this idea may seem, it is quite impractical. 98% of the letters sent to us would not reproduce satisfactorily in this way. It needs a bit more than scrubbed keys and new ribbons... It needs an IBM Selectric and a carbon ribbon to get this quality... anything less would be illegible - Ed))

If it doesn't run your print order up the creek why not get Vector's cover on coloured paper? No matter how careful the proofwork and collation and how frequently the hand-washing, white paper covers look grubby from the word go. Who knows, it could lend itself to a sort of visual indexing, viz every year's first issue: shocking pink; the second electric blue; third issue: frog green, and so on, eye-cruciatingly on.

((Money, Mr B, money...-Ed))

In the unlikely event you find a dearth of small bits of original artwork coming your way, why not try the Dover Pictorial Archives? They give you the free use of up to ten illustrations from their series in any one publication. Expensive yes, and ruinous as you have to cut them out to stick them on your sweater, but then where else could you get 1800 woodcuts from Thomas Bewick and his school (of various but mostly small sizes) for under £3.00 (probably £4.00 by now).

((An interesting notion, but at present we have no shortage of original artwork - Ed))

I look forward to the Blish special issue. Crave no-one's indulgence, especially those who don't want it good but in the next issue and sooner. Blish is one of those curious writers that needs (here I speak personally) thought on. Like any writer you could (if so inclined) tot up his faults on several pairs of hands but when it comes to his virtues... they are much more subtle, much more elusive, simply because they are more fundamental and essential, more a matter for the parability of the reader. I can now not pick holes in the logic and math and technicalities of the Cities in Flight books but I can still remember them with an inviolate vividness. Until I discovered a secondhand paperback copy of Earthman Come Home (and paid 30p for it in the days when 20p was 4/- and quite a sum to spend on a single item) some of my free time was spent in the idle consideration of how to remove a library hardback of it on a junior ticket and if not that then how it could be made to vanish from the shelves in an undetectable and perfectly legal manner. I have no doubt I could have cut my intellectual milk teeth on something better but somehow I never found it. He managed to expand the mind rather than inflate it. So much for the personal as a reader. Now for the more general. Once again his impact on sf as a whole is subtle - an atmosphere and a tone is taken entirely for granted and is not as found difficult to define. The next twenty years will probably answer the question - this is if anyone will care to make it. Blish had not the sort of chrome flash and pretension that attracts the pundits and those who write about it rather than write it. They'll probably ignore his set of wickedly subtle clues and the nasty hook to his beak and the rake of his wings and put him amongst the dodos and thus dismiss him from discussion. Still, he'll be there and paid the back-bowed compliment of either virulent denunciation or the sort of apologetic dismissal that will be, somehow, always felt to be necessary.

...Incidentally, do you subscribe, or the BSFA, to an agency for cuttings about science fiction in general? If not why not? Can you think of a better way to get together (with no more effort than the glitting of envelopes) a sort of regular Vector feature entitled "Beyond the Ghetto", "As others see us", and so on full of quotes and prefalls indulged in by newspaper hacks?

((No. Why? Money...-Ed))

Mrs. Le Guin's blowing of the ram's horn inside Jaricho is inspiring stuff but slow, premature. The ghetto will not go just yet, it may even intensify, partly cut of economic conventions, viz sf sells in an unspectacular manner when labelled

as such, mostly from the perverse habit of bookshops who prefer to divide up their stock into such categories as novels, sf, crime, westerns, autobiographies, etc. out of customer courtesy. Fancy having to wander through the whole alphabet of shelving just to see what had been newly published in sf? Incidentally, up to a week ago my local library used to shelve Dick next to Dickens; now, by popular demand, all the sf occupies one labelled section of shelving to itself next to historical romances and I give you two guesses which of the two shelves has the best books on them. Holl on public lending right.

Besides which has Mrs Le Guin ever stopped to consider the folly of breaking out of one ghetto and being content to remain in the one you find yourself in then? I speak about that dreadful, solipsistic, ratbale with a cracked looking glass ghetto known as modern literature. That smug stamping ground of triviality, conceptual narcissism and lobotomised reality. Why should sf exchange one set of clichés which are so well worn that it is virtually demanded of any new writer that he use his imagination, use all his inherent skill from the word go or perish before birth; for a set that restricts the field of literary endeavour to autobiography (naked or tastefully disguised as fiction - James Joyce's *Old Acquaintance* if you like) surrealism and water, milk and Kafka and angst in a bedsit. All energies would be devoted to cleansing that sty and life is too short for it.

That was, perhaps, the whole tragedy of the New Wave. It threw away the baby with the spaceship. It demanded of sf that it be literature with a capital L and at least be aware of the wide world outside the ghetto wall but it never asked of itself: what is, what should be, literature? It attempted to be a wave but it chose a puddle to be it in and that was that. It took what it found at face value and self definition, it raised not a peep about the Emperor's New Clothes.

There is a spectrum outside the ghetto but what sort of spectrum and does sf (speculative or science) really suffer from such an inferiority complex that it must accept everything in that spectrum out of a desire to belong to it? The poles of the spectrum might be characterised as Jaws - "the sort of book you can read while knitting or watching the TV" is someone's definition of the popular species of which Jaws is but the latest example; and the rarified hothouse atmosphere of the avant-garde and the groves of academe, symbolised perhaps by Oh Calcutti! and an American university which has a tame poet who writes nice little poems in the manner of Emily Dickinson, which are printed in the university magazines, collected and published by the university press and have learned articles writ upon them and the influence of Emily Dickinson on them by the trainee critics and literary pundits of that U.

Those two poles will never cross-fertilise. The gap is too wide. I've no doubt such a polarity exists in sf: say Mrs Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* at one end and *Barf the Barbarian* at the other; but unlike the mainstream, the gap is bridgeable, the imagination to build such a bridge is not dead, and the demand for it is still there. The Jaws end of mainstream is quite happy where it is: in the next few years we can all look forward to *Son of Jaws*, *Face Teeth*, *Jaws meets Godzilla*...can you not hear the cash registers? If not Jaws, well.. *sardines*, *Mouse*, *Ant*, etc...

The groves of academe are quite happy where they are: symbolised perhaps by someone's observation that if you wanted to publish a learned and definitive commentary upon the works of Nathaniel Fear the Lord and Flee from Fornication Smith (1808 - 1859) puritan divine and religious poet, the academic presses will fight amongst themselves for the privilege whereas the publication of a new edition of Smith's works will meet with a profound publishing indifference. The only creative thing they are likely to come up with is for example the logical outcome of the mountain of scholarship accreting to the works of Henry James which may be crudely summarised as "Henry James is God, but he was too coy and allusive about sex". I.e. one of those critics who by now should know more about James than James knew ...

(All right, folks, there comes a time to call a day, and this has gone on long

enough. What I have run of this letter is about 4 1/2 pages out of 6... it goes on and on and on and on in the same semi-coherent way - and if you don't think it is semi-coherent as printed, then you should see the original... I would attempt to reproduce it but I'm afraid typing it would make it too clear. Yes, it's hand-written. I'm sorry, Mr. Barycz, but there's just so more room in the letter-column, and if I type another word and have to spend another minute trying to decipher your writing and meaning, I'll go insane. Hiding inside this distribute of a letter are one or two good ideas which, if clearly and cogently expressed on a couple of pages instead of eight would be worth reading... and printing. No more, good readers, no more - Ed))

ENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTERENDLETTER

When I took over as editor, I requested letters of comment - I wanted feedback and I still do. Any comments - send them to me. But if you want them to be published - bearing in mind that: a) we are short of money and can't afford this many pages; b) we are expecting someone to read these letters - then make your letters clearly argued, coherent, cogent, precise, and grammatical. In future only the letters which best fit this definition will be published. Sorry and all that, but that's the way it's got to be to maintain standards -Ed



VECTOR 74

...Well, actually V74 is in your hands, this being a double issue..

Next Vector will be 75, due in the first fortnight of May....

...to carry reviews, including that of Chris Priest's new book; the Elwood interview which got squeezed out of this issue (yet again); and as much of anything else as we can fit in...

...plus a cover by Paul Ryan (probably) and more interiors by Dillon, Cooke and (I hope) Higgins

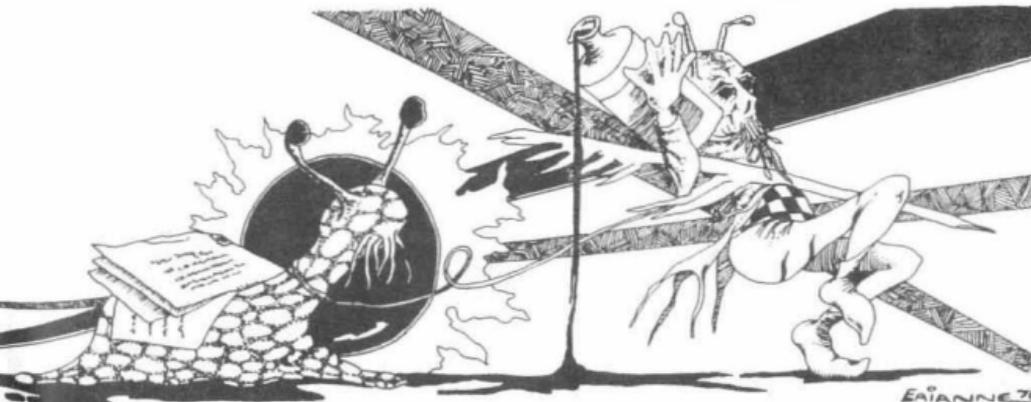
(cont from p 3)

J.G. Ballard, edited by Jim Goddard. It is due out in a couple of months, and we hope to bring you more news of it as soon as it becomes available. It will of course be reviewed, though whom we shall get to do it when the two major Ballard experts are so intimately involved in the book is hard to tell! Anyway, good luck to Jim with the book, and many thanks for the chance of using the interview in V13/74. I hope you'll all agree with me that Paul Dillon has done very well with the illustrations, striking a light-hearted tone which nicely contrasts the serious note of the interview.

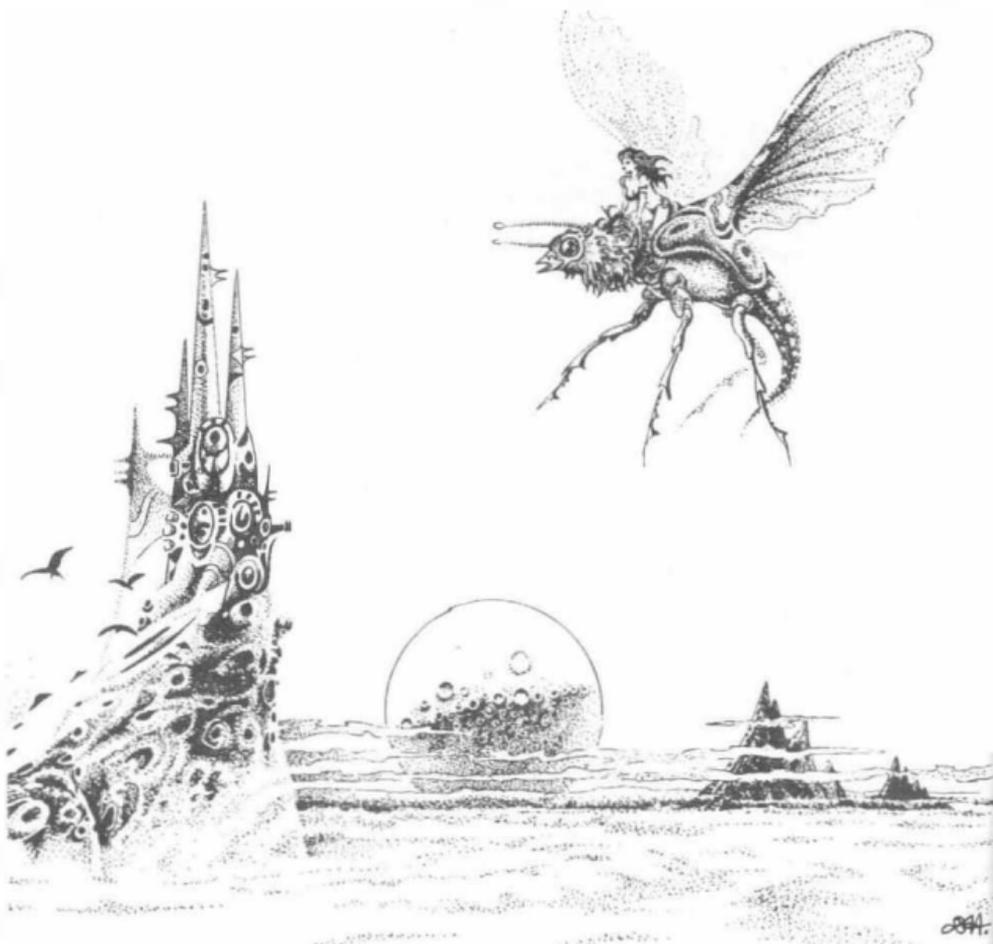
The other major item in this issue, "The Infinity Box", once more occupies a high proportion of space whilst it is beginning to achieve the breadth of coverage which I desire, it has still some way to go before it achieves the critical depth which I should like. In the long term I have great hopes in that direction, but for the present the column will no doubt fall rather uncomfortably between two stools, not deep enough for the lovers of true criticism, and not brief enough for those who just want short reports/reviews. An inspection of the letter-column will show there is considerable division amongst the correspondents about this: it's quite apparent that we cannot please all of you all of the time. I get the impression that most of the criticism of my "editorial taste", and unfavourable comparisons with the Malcolm Edwards issues of the Journal centre around the book reviews. Despite the impression which may have been gained elsewhere, I do listen to this criticism, and I am striving to do something about the inadequacies which correspondents observe. My relatively slow progress in this direction should be judged against the fact that I am also heavily involved in other aspects of the tortuous process of getting the BSFA onto its feet again, as well as in boosting Vector's sales, especially overseas. All this takes time, time which I would gladly use for the better editing of Vector. But such is not to be, for the present, although things may change when Keith Freeman guesses on the Treasurership and comes over to Vector as Business Manager.

You are probably feeling that this is yet another of those Fowler editorials which say nothing. If so, I offer up the excuse that I am always so tired by the time I get to this point, that I never find it possible to make my brain work well enough to find something world-shattering to say. I'm just a bumble editor putting my job, mumble, mumble. I am cheered by the thought that ManCon looms ahead, and that I shall see all kinds of exciting people there, renew old friendships, and perhaps make some new ones. Perhaps I'll even meet some of you mysterious people who send me letters, artwork, or reviews. That's a very pleasant thought to end on.

--- Christopher Fowler, Reading, 17/3/76



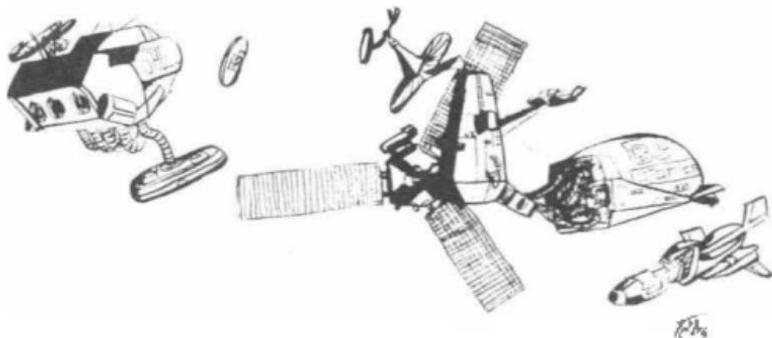
I think that you will agree that the illustration which takes up most of this page is really something. I only hope that my filling of the space above with typing doesn't unbalance it, and that the delicacy is not lost in the process of photo-reduction and printing. This picture dropped through my letter-box, out of the blue, with a note from David Higgins, from which I quote: "...it started off as a pencil sketch for a painting, which I have covered with felt tip pen. I realize that it may not even be printable even if considered printworthy - anyway, please let me know what you think about it." Well, David, what I think about it is that it is one of the most beautiful and delicate pieces of artwork which I have seen in this or any other recent issues. It has echoes of Steve Fabian and perhaps even early Eddie Jones, but has a loveliness and a strangeness all its own. I hope that we shall be seeing more of David's work in the near future. I'd hoped to use this as a lead-page for "The Celluloid Dream", which as I explain in the editorial, got dropped, due to lack of space. But his picture remains as a delightful memory, a haunting dream. - Ed

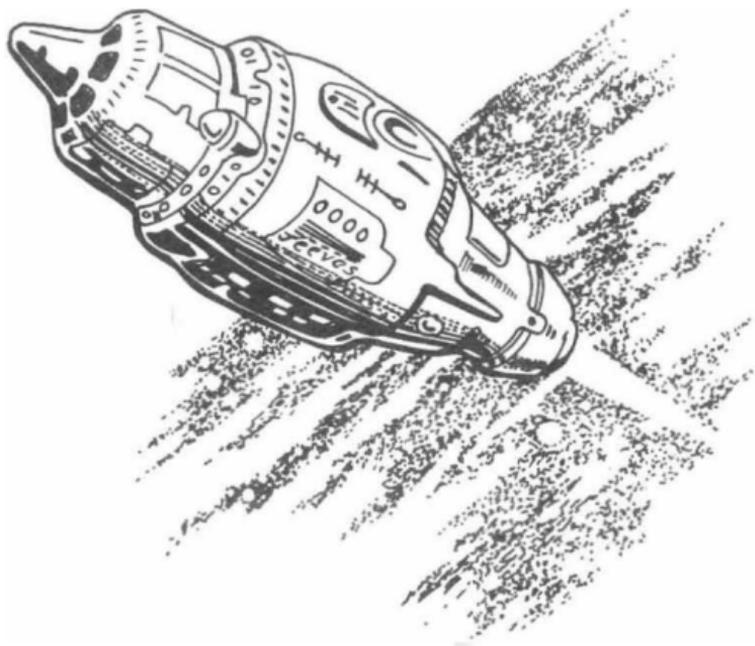




I just love those Tery Jeeves creatures... couldn't resist putting that one in.

I find myself with about a page between the above illustration and the advert for Hancock with nothing much to put in it. Time then, to tell you some of the films which will be reviewed in the next issue of Vector in "The Celluloid Dream". Roger Wolf has next to me reviews of a number of movies, both recent and not-so-recent. Amongst these are Alain Resnais' Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime; David Cronenberg's quite remarkable and unique science fiction film Storage (which Andre' Tidmarsh took a brief look at in an earlier issue) and Crimes of the Future; George Romero's Night of the Living Dead; and possibly the more recent The Cars that Ate Paris and Chosen Survivors, from Australia and America respectively. We may even have something else from Andre' Tidmarsh...or I may even pull my finger out and do some reviews myself, if Deathrace 2000 makes it out this way.





Mancon 5

Friday 16 - Monday 19 April
Owens Park, Manchester

Guest-of-honour
Robert Silverberg

Fan guest-of-honour
Peter Roberts

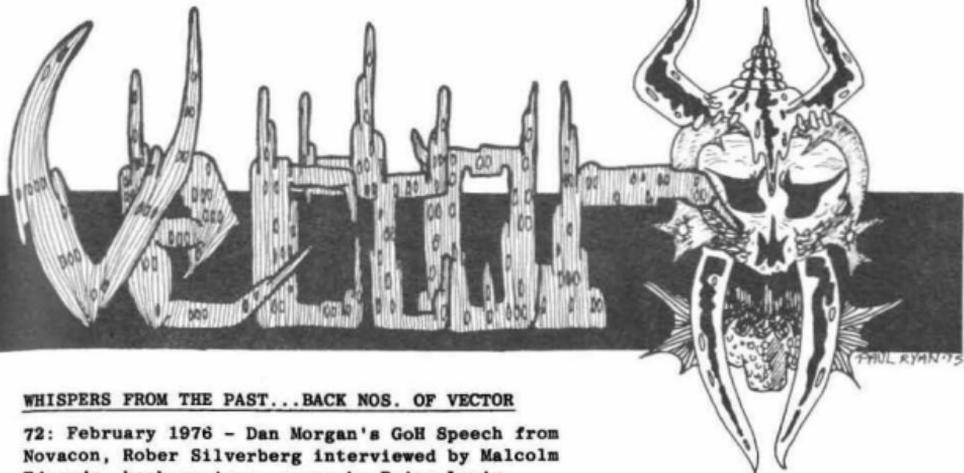
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WHISPERS FROM THE PAST...BACK NOS. OF VECTOR

72: February 1976 - Dan Morgan's GoH Speech from Novacon, Rober Silverberg interviewed by Malcolm Edwards, book reviews, cover by Brian Lewis

71: December 1975 - The Stone Ax and the Bush Oxen by Ursula Le Guin, Towards an Alien Linguistics by Ian Watson, book and film reviews

70: Autumn 1975 - Time Travellers Among Us by Bob Shaw, Violence in SF by Edmund Cooper, SF's Urban Vision by Chris Wampett, plus book, film and fanzine reviews

69: Summer 1975 - The Science in SF by James Blisch, Early one Oxford Morning by Brian Aldiss, The Value of Bad SF by Bob Shaw, Science or Fiction by Tony Sudbery, film and book reviews

67/68: (the last Malcolm Edwards issue) Three Views of Tolkien by Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and Peter Nicholls, Letter from Amerika by Philip K. Dick, Period of Transition by Michael G. Coney, After the Renaissance by Brian Aldiss, Machines and Inventions by Brian M. Stableford, Down-at-Heel Galaxy by Brian Aldiss, book and film reviews: Spring 1974

66: July/August 1973 - Robot in SF by Brian Stableford, D.G. Compton: An Interview, D.G. Compton and New Standards of Excellence by Mark Adlard, book, film and fanzine reviews

65: May/June 1973 - Gene Wolfe: An Interview, Lost People by Pamela Sargent, The Man Who Could Work Miracles by Brian Aldiss, Ad Astra by Bob Shaw, Author's Choice by Roger Zelazny, book and fanzine reviews

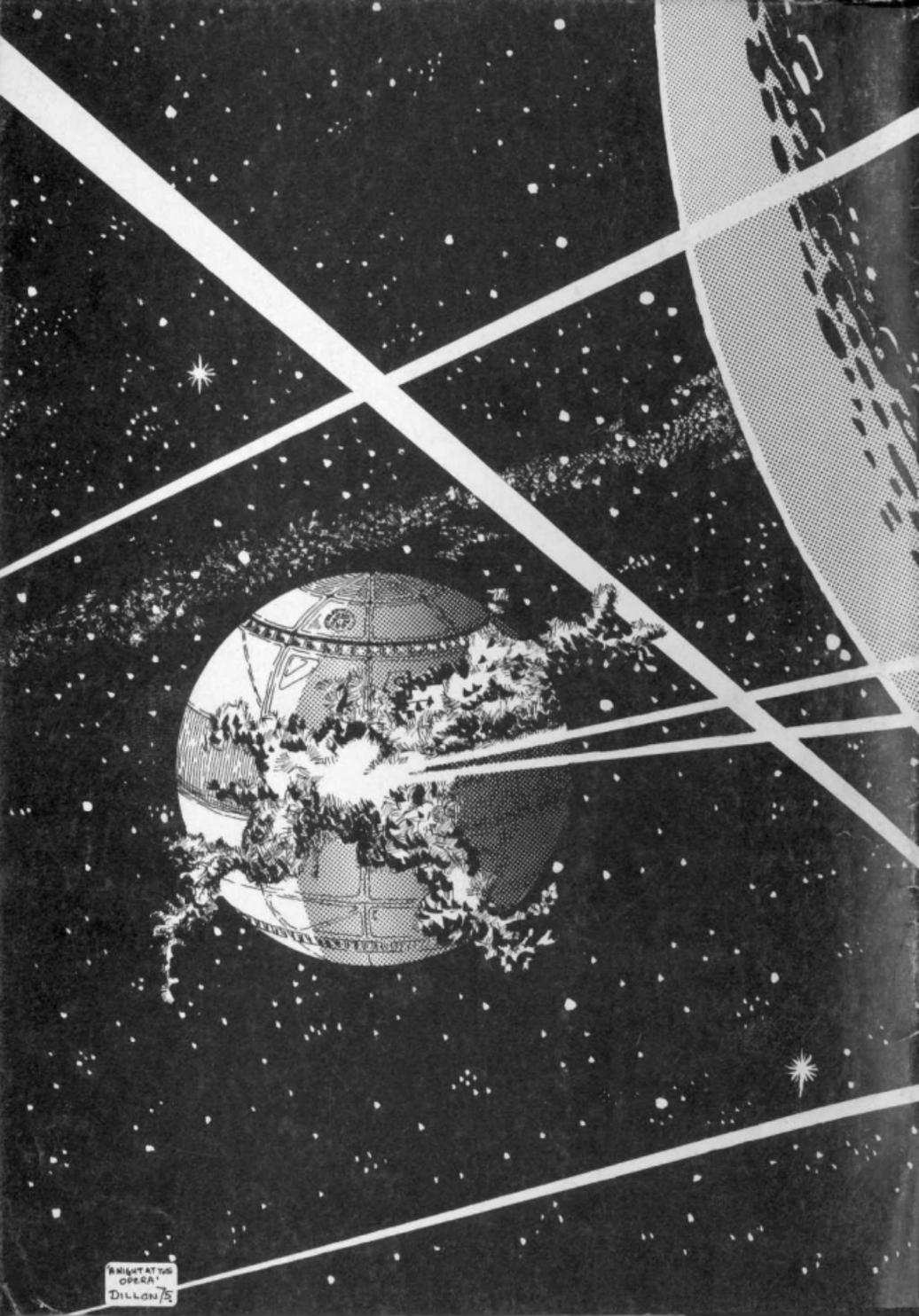
64: March/April 1973 - The Android and the Human by Phillip K Dick, The Extraordinary Behaviour of Ordinary Materials by Bob Shaw, Author's Choice by Poul Anderson, book and fanzine reviews

61: September/October 1972 - The Arts in SF by James Blisch, An Interview with Peter Tate by Mark Adlard, book and fanzine reviews

60: June 1972 - Through a Glass Darkly by John Brunner, SF and the Cinema by Philip Strick, The Freudian Living Thing by Bruce Gillespie, Edward John Cernell 1919-1972 by Harry Harrison, Dan Morgan, Ted Tubb and Brian Aldiss, convention report by Peter Roberts, book and fanzine reviews

59: Spring 1972 - An Introduction to Stanislaw Lem by Franz Bottenstein, A Good Ending by Stanislaw Lem, A Cruel Miracle by Malcolm Edwards, Why I Took a Writing Course...and Didn't Become a Writer by Dick Eowett, SF Criticism in Theory and Practice by Pamela Gulmer, book reviews

Each of these issues is available from the editor at the price of 50p (\$1). Please make cheques payable to Vector. Hurry, hurry - many are in short supply!



8 NIGHT AT THE
OPERA
DILLON 75