

JULY 1987



AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
Second Series Volume 2 Number 4
Whole Number 9

CONTENTS

- 2 **EDITORIAL** Yvonne Rousseau
- 4 **LIFE'S GRIMM** Cherry Wilder
- 8 **THE LONG VIEW 4** John Foyster
- 30 **WHY AUSTRALIAN SF MAGAZINES FAIL IN THE MARKET** George Turner
- 36 **REVIEWS: Starkindler** (Lucy Sussex)
- 37 **SF International** (Russell Blackford)
- 40 **Interzone** (Yvonne Rousseau)
- 42 **Omega** (Yvonne Rousseau)
- 45 **LETTERS** Doug Barbour, Michael Moorcock et al.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (Second Series) (ISSN 0818-0180) is published six times a year for the Science Fiction Collective (Jenny Blackford, Russell Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau, Lucy Sussex (Convenor)) by Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. In Australia, it is available for \$10 a year by subscription, or for \$2 for a sample copy. Copyright by the individual editors and authors.

Registered by Australia Post, publication number VBG7895.

Logo by Steph Campbell/John Bangsund

OUR COLLECTIVE WAYS

In the first eight issues of ASFR's second series, those who love editorials were gladdened by always having two of them to read: one from some member of the present editorial collective, and one from John Bangsund, the editor of the original ASFR. Extremely attentive readers might, however, have been wondering whether John Bangsund was altogether contented with his role. In the second issue, he wrote that John Foyster had 'more or less conned me into' it; in the fourth, that 'John Foyster rings me every Thursday [...] and I just can't get out of it'; in the sixth, that 'I'm damned if I know how I let myself in for this'; in the seventh, that 'I never volunteered to write these editorials' - and feared being 'stuck here for ever [...] like a fly in amber'. In the eighth issue, he finally found a solution; which was simply to mention that this was his 'final up-front contribution to the second series of ASFR.'

And John Bangsund has further distanced himself (bringing nostalgic tears to eyes old in fandom, which were dazzled in the past by the degree to which he changed addresses); he has moved ten kilometres north-east to Kingsbury and the street of Clunes - which (as alphabetical readers will instantly realize) is something between Clun (in England's Salop, near Offa's Dyke - which was built by the Saxons to keep off the Welsh) and Cluny (France's Benedictine stronghold, which once contained the largest church in the world); moreover, he is almost in the shire of Diamond Valley, and close to the moat of La Trobe University. These details accord well with his image as Australian fandom's 'mythic link' (a role which, as he mentioned in our fourth issue, was first proclaimed by Bruce R. Gillespie); and this mythic link is not lost to us, but will be manifested anew in letters of comment.

Meanwhile, in spite of the increasingly interesting vagaries of the post, letters of comment from readers overseas have been pouring in - as will become very apparent in our tenth issue. But, despite the knowledge that a published letter of comment is rewarded with one free issue, Australian readers are keeping mum just now; and I fear that this is my fault. In my first editorial (in ASFR 4), I was aware of strong local disapproval of any attempt at collective editing; if you couldn't produce a fanzine in Australia without getting fans to co-operate with one another, then (the opinion seemed to be) things had come to a very sorry pass. To counteract these misgivings, I gave warm, personal and mathematically correct details about ASFR's Mean Collective Editor - that it had one-fifth of a beard and one-fifth of a pair of spectacles, for

example, and that its diet when collating consisted largely of meringues and champagne. Readers were pleased to know these things, and further details have continued appearing, until the Mean Editor has become the name for something more like an Aggregate Editorial Entity - of which I will now further reveal that, in Chinese astrological terms, it is one-fifth Horse, three-fifths Rooster and one-fifth Snake; while, if it is elementally analysed, in terms of Western daily-newspaper-style astrology, it is four-fifths Fire and one-fifth Earth. (It is disquietingly written, however, that a Rooster-Snake conjunction will bring either 'bad luck' or 'nothing but unhappiness and disaster'; fortunately, a more recent authority - a women's magazine of 1987, rather than 1974 - calls it 'a good match' and even assures Roosters that 'the Snake and Horse will go along with your dreams'.) The Mean Editor was a happy thought; but it was a mistake (I see now) to go on to point out how easily people who preferred to write to faceless initials could work out whose initials would be answering letters in which issue, and could time their letters accordingly. Since the genial JF is scheduled for letter-answering this time, I fear that Australian fans (notoriously diffident) are loath to risk his responding to their letters, as he did to David King's, with remarks on 'self-important twits' and being 'boring'; hence their present uncanny silence.

The Mean Editor itself is always responsive, and has therefore devoted much of this issue to discussions of short stories - since these are often proclaimed to enshrine the best of sf. Having listened to George Turner, it has taken care to discuss more than one Australian sf magazine; but it has dealt with only one contemporary magazine from America and one from Britain because, after all, these countries are very far away. On the other hand, the current instalment of John Foyster's 'The Long View' deals extensively with American sf short-story publication in 1943.

Next issue - answers to many more letters from overseas! YR 30.6.87

Russell Blackford's Debased and Lascivious ASFR Article wins Atheling

This year's Australian Natcon in April gave the 1987 William Atheling Jr. award to Russell for the article 'Debased and Lascivious', which we published in ASFR 4 (September 1986). We thought it was pretty good, too. It is about Delany's novel **Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand**. Back issues are available for \$2 notes, charming letters, champagne etc.

LIFE'S GRIMM

CHERRY WILDER

Many and many a year ago in the Antipodes I used this title for a feature in the Canterbury University College paper *Canta*, a cultural-tinge title, echoing that of a Cambridge undergraduate periodical, *The Granta*. Maybe our rag should have been called *The Takahe* or *The Kea*. (See also the *Kea-Kea Bird* which slides down the icy slopes of the Southern Alps crying 'Kea-kea-kee-ah-ris Jesus, this snow's cold!') The feature 'Life's Grimm', subtitled 'Tales for Tired Students', was a series of funny fairy-tales, including the story of Mary Ann who found a genie in a bottle. This helpful spirit tidied her flat, did the cooking and wrote her French assignments. Alas, he was indoctrinated by a communist student called Bill, smashed his bottle and walked off the job. Moral: Never uncork bottles in front of guests. Then there was Steve, a member of the First Fifteen (Rugby Union of course) who had a Fairy Godmother. He became gloomy and fatalistic and was picked up by the coppers driving his Godmother's latest gift, a new pink Studebaker. (The Studebaker was the first fore and aft car to be seen in Christchurch N.Z. and was followed by the Ford Forty-Niner.) Anyway Steve's car had no number plates, no warrant of fitness etc., etc. Moral: Always register your Studebakers. These artless tales shaded off into a bunch of silly serials: a gothic, a thriller, a western. The best was entitled 'The Space Demon or The Universe Up-turned' and it featured Orion O'Brien, the Universal Eye. What I did not know was that in the fullness of time my name would be Grimm. Moral: The future is always wilder and grimmer than you think.

GLIMPSES OF THE LARGE

What got up my nose about George Turner's graphic account of Fat Cherry bearing down on poor him like a galleon in full sail at Seacon I in 1979 was the fact that it was pure poetic licence. It Simply Did Not Happen That Way! George saw me on various occasions walloping around in a kaftan and it stuck in his mind. I recall our first meeting perfectly well. I wore trousers. I sneaked through the throng in the lobby and said diffidently, looking down at the neat grey-haired gent in the blue shirt: 'George, is that you?'

Well, the years have passed and one has mellowed. One has published a few books, one has even lost weight. But Life tends to imitate Art. If I spot George (The Little Incorporal) Turner anywhere within a radius of a hundred yards at Conspiracy I might just be tempted to bellow his

name and, kaftan or no kaftan, to bear down on him like the Queen of the Amazons leading a charge ... (and drag him off for a beer).

THE GOOD OLD AVANT GARDE

A Pre-Post-Modern Poem. For Man, Tristan, George, the Tea-Cup Lady, Hans, Jimmy and Mike. Ah, those days in the Cabaret Voltaire ...

The Dying Dadaist

Fill me my fur-lined teacup,
Pour me a neat gold leaf,
We backed a rockinghorse winner
But the movement came to grief.

O Heavenly Dada, receive me!
Don't snub me like the Guermantes ...
Verlaine's at the end of the Rimbaud,
While I rot in the Jardin des Plantes.

The shades of night are falling,
They always do when they're blind,
I'm dying, Egypt, dying ...
Do you think the sphinx will mind?

Zürich, my kind old mattress,
My means have outstripped my ends ...
Read Joyce and be glad in the cafés!
And keep on watching the trends ...

GOOD'BYE JOSHKA!

Well, we're really in trouble now. The shaky red-green coalition of SPD/Grün in Hessen has broken, the conservative not to say reactionary CDU is in government everywhere and we have lost the only decent Environment Minister we've ever had, Joshka Fischer of the Greenies. Before the plutonium gets us it is time for a fannish history of Langen

...

A LETTER TO IRWIN HIRSH

Dear Irwin,

Congratulations on winning GUFF. All those articles on football, cricket, squash, badminton, fives, Aussie Rules, two-up and on the development of your personality have reaped their reward! I was

particularly taken by a sentence in a recent Larrikin: 'I don't have a great many fannish contacts in continental Europe and would appreciate it if I could be put in touch with people who'd be willing to show us their city, etc.'

Well, Irwin and Wendy, I don't make a practice of showing my etc. around much these days but you are both cordially invited to Langen, the Pearl of Hessen. Pity, you'll be just too late for the Apple Wine Festival. Never fear, we will be able to show you the Blunt Tower, with remnants of the city walls, the Four Pipe Fountain, lots of picturesque half-timbered houses and the Old Lock-Up, just across the road.

More than that, we can give you a tour of our orchard, with leaves and fruit, two garden sheds, dated Early Bronze Age, our yummy cadmium tomatoes, and the Sausage Kitchen, where once a master butcher made delicious Würst.

In former years it was pretty adventurous staying in our flat over the road at 16B but many brave souls, including the Sandercocks, the Foysters, Vera Johnson, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Maxim Jakubowski and Al Fitzpatrick, stood the test. On one unforgettable night in '81 Marion, Kees and Angelique all stayed there, en route to Holland.

Now at number 19 Engelsbacher Strasse we have this smoke-free room upstairs with nice unfolding blue couch. It used to be uncluttered until Louisa started using it as a studio but the clutter can be easily negotiated. In fact it has been negotiated by Jan Howard Finder and his friend Mary, Jim Frenkel and Peter Singer, our man in Vienna.

Mind you, we have an alternative for persons in an upper bracket or desperate for a truly smoke-free environment: the Deutsches Haus, a hotel just around the corner. Its restaurant has a star from the Swiss Hotel Guide, if one is crazy for venison or snails. Marion stayed there last time she was in Germany, also our friends from Newcastle N.S.W. - John and Jill Stowell. Last December it housed that stout bearded party with beauteous companion, Mike and Linda Moorcock. A big plus-point of this establishment is the print of 'When Did You Last See Your Father?' - showing a brave little cavalier being questioned by roundheads - in the dining room.

As far as eating goes I can cook the Ozanne Family Roast or the Charlie Brown Two-Chicken Blow-Out - tested on these worthy eaters - or we can repair to Little Chicken Eric's nearby, where Finder drove us crazy fishing the chopped parsley out of his soup. Not far away there is the Acropolis, which has a copy of the Discus Thrower outside, sometimes painted bright pink by the local pranksters. Of course there is also the Chinese restaurant where Foyster once caused an epidemic of beards. Langen, come to think of it, has at least ten other decent eating houses,

which shows how the locals spend their time. (In casting about for towns of similar size to Langen we came up with names like Albury and Gosford.)

Advice about touring Europe? Get Eurail tickets which entitle you to loads of first-class train travel. A filk singer of our acquaintance who invested in one of these tickets was able to sing in Berne, Switzerland, sleep on the train to Paris, have breakfast, then tootle back on another train to sing in Berne.

Finally if we really get through the scenic wonders of Langen we could take a day trip up the Rhine. Castles. The Lorelei. Food (of course) and wine. This trip, invented by 19th century English tourists in search of Wild Gothic Scenery, is very soothing to the Antipodean eye. On our first Rhine journey we heard an American tourist remark, as he gazed up at the terraced vineyards: 'Nice bit of stonework there!' I'll drink to that!

So goodbye for now, Irwin, *alte Pappnase!** Let us know when your train or plane arrives!

Yours till they leg-roped the Bunyip,

Cherry

Twelve years ago in John Bangsund's Philosophical Gas

In July 1975, in Philosophical Gas 31, George Turner responded to some epithets John Bangsund had applied to him:

'Arrogant'? Well, er, yes - and aware of it and occasionally attempting to do something about it, and just as often seeing the attempt go down the drain like a New Year resolve. But 'humble'! Are you suffering a hangover from a Salvation Army meeting? I know the onlooker is supposed to see more of the game, but that word has never occurred to me in any personal connection, and I just don't grasp the implication. I'll have to think about what I have said and done that has given such an impression. I know I am not totally a bunch of thorns, but 'humble'? You've succeeded in mildly upsetting me.

*Term of endearment. Literally 'old papier mache nose'.

THE LONG VIEW 4

JOHN FOYSTER

The first three instalments of **The Long View** appeared in the first three issues of ASFR. The intentions of the series were there set out, and the method to be used introduced. In those earlier instalments the January and February editions of **Astounding Science Fiction** 1943 were considered, briefly, and at the end of the last-published instalment (in July 1986) I was considering the developments in 'The Weapon Makers', and in particular the differences between the hardback version and the serial version.

In this episode of **The Long View** I will complete my consideration of **Astounding Science Fiction** in 1943. The next episode will deal with **Unknown Worlds** for that year and begin the treatment of 1953. In order to increase the sales of back issues of ASFR I will not, however, give a further synopsis of what has gone before, except to say that the 'he' referred to in the opening paragraph is Dan Neelan: now read on.

He travels to the new address (pausing at the Weapon Shop where he hoped - lucklessly - to gain more information about his brother) and here he discovers that a spaceship has been constructed inside the building. He finally confronts the man behind the voice, and is disarmed. The action now shifts to the Imperial Palace and Robert Hedrock: all which has been described above is almost completely expunged from the book version of 'The Weapon Makers'.

I have given over four pages to the consideration of about ten pages of 'The Weapon Makers' as it appeared in the magazine. This seems worth while because the section I have dealt with does not appear in the hardcover version. But most of the remainder of the serial appears in that version and a survey such as this which purports to cover a whole year in the life of magazine science fiction is not the place to consider at great length and in depth so complex a work as 'The Weapon Makers'. Perhaps the situation can be adequately summarized by suggesting that 'The Weapon Makers' deserves careful reading as an exemplar of popular and successful science fiction of 1943 - but in the magazine version rather than the book version.

The remainder of the year will be covered in rather less detail than has been used so far, and different aspects of the works in question will be explored. But many of the comments which have been made here may accurately be applied to generic science fiction of 1943.

March 1943

Selecting back-up stories to consider for this issue and the next is relatively straightforward. This month Lawrence O'Donnell's 'Clash By Night' had a rating of 1.75 according to Campbell's 'The Analytical Laboratory', which gave the readers' ranking of stories, with 1 being the highest rank (or a rating of 130 in Bainbridge's later analysis which gave all the stories assessed in 'The Analytical Laboratory' an absolute rank on a scale of 1000); not far behind the serial. 'O'Donnell' was Kuttner and Moore again, and 'Clash By Night' has one quality which separates it from all the other stories considered for this year: the relationship between male and female actually plays a significant role in the plot.

In a fictive landscape filled with neuters, to discover an oasis in which characters reflect upon their sexual relationships is almost a marvel. Though in many ways 'Clash By Night' is a conventional shoot-'em-up, set on/in an exotic world (the oceans of Venus - a dear, forever-lost world to us now), it defies many of the pulp traditions. Thus when the younger brother of the Other Woman, taken into the protagonist's group of mercenaries somewhat reluctantly, breaks the code ('No Atomics') he is immediately blasted out of existence by his own side - no questions, no excuses.

Scott's relationship with one of his fellow officers in the mercenary team is unspectacularly but thoughtfully developed. Kuttner/Moore skilfully show that it isn't necessary to think or write about humans in black-and-white terms, and Bienne, the fellow officer, consistently reveals an attitude towards Scott which we know to be unjustified in Scott's terms but which, in terms of what Bienne knows, is exactly justified.

It is also as though Kuttner and Moore are here (and elsewhere in *Astounding* in 1943) experimenting with what might be done in science fiction. This example of daring - using a straight pulp adventure to explore character - is a most worthy effort, not properly recognized.

(By the way - and it is by the way - Scott rejects the Other Woman because to accept her would be contrary to the kind of man he is - a soldier. If you look at this story in crude terms - what happens at beginning and end - you'll quickly see that it is nothing to do with the

Keeps of Venus, or action adventure, but about Scott and his perceptions of himself and those near to him. Remarkable, and too often unremarked.)

April 1943

Raymond F. Jones's 'Swimming Lesson' picks itself out by its rating (1.91) and Bainbridge ranking (179) but its other qualities are not admirable.

This is fundamentally an exploration of motivation, and a confused one at that. For some reason Jones felt that he had to arrange for each character to seem to have multiple motivations for each act, but on top of that some key characters were not given any chance to show their stuff.

I think it a great weakness that the protagonist's best buddy (male), about whose well-being the protagonist is greatly concerned from time to time throughout the story, never really emerges as someone with the kind of characteristics which would underlie so strong a relationship.

Similarly the bad guy (well, the one who actually turns out to be the bad guy) is never adequately developed: when he appears he is satisfactorily pleasant - his unpleasant characteristics emerge only after it is necessary, from a plot-development viewpoint, for him to become a bad guy. It is surely a great weakness in a piece of fiction for the characters to be so underdeveloped that they may be turned to any purpose as the plot requires.

Overall Jones (I consider two stories of his in this survey) seems to have been somewhat overrated by Campbell and Astounding's readers. It is interesting that, in so many other cases, the judgments about relative competence (or greatness) which obtained in 1943 held true forty years later.

May 1943

As usual, the top-rating contribution to the May issue was a serial instalment - the first episode of Fritz Leiber's 'Gather Darkness!'. (This was the second serial of the year to have a title ending in '!', possibly a prefiguring of Campbell's postwar belief that all sentences should end thus! or thus...)

'Gather Darkness!' experienced the usual success of serials in **Astounding**: during the whole of 1943 the only time a serial instalment was displaced from the top rating was in February when the serials overlapped and one had to give pride of place to the other.

The ratings of 'Gather Darkness!' were, in May 1.10 (Bainbridge, -71), in June 1.55 (Bainbridge 14), and in July 1.55 (Bainbridge, -20).

Of all the novels published as serials in *Astounding* in 1943 'Gather Darkness!' probably has the highest reputation. But it is difficult, I feel, to admire it overmuch from the perspective of forty years on.

'Gather Darkness!' has been often reprinted in paperback and hardcover form, and would certainly be a successful seller now, but this may say more about our era than we would care to know.

For in truth 'Gather Darkness!' is a rather trite piece of work. I find it so defective that in order to convey what the readers of the time thought I find myself falling back on quoting others.

Alva Rogers, in *A Requiem for Astounding*, is extremely enthusiastic:

This was a marvelous tale of action, color, intrigue, and romance, which still managed to convey a subtle and disturbing message which gains increasing immediacy as time goes on. [...]

Although this was purely a science fiction story and one with a grim warning of the hazards of secrecy and monopoly surrounding science and scientific research, it was, at the same time, an exciting adventure tale with many of the elements of 'sword and sorcery' fantasy with which Leiber was, and is, so adept.

The letter columns of *Astounding* are not very helpful in providing information about why readers liked the novel: Chad Oliver was enthusiastic in his letter published in the August issue, but only the letter by-lined Paul Carter in the November issue gives us much to hang on to:

'Gather Darkness!' was all we expected it to be and a little more. The Fanatic unveiling came as a most unexpected surprise; in fact, this story's charm lies partly in the variety of surprises it encompasses. But more than that, Leiber has created a set of characters that really stick in the memory. Goniface, the Black Man, Brother Chulian, Mother Juju, Brother Dthomas, Cousin Deth, the familiars, Jarles - I imagine that the specific names will linger in the mind far longer than most of them do. It's really a pity to have to take leave of these very real people. Such a pity that I am tempted to ask for a sequel. Have a heart, Mr. Campbell, and don't leave the Black Man in the lurch. Poor guy, he deserves some reward.

Each of these judgments is wrong, I believe. Although Leiber wrote some significant science fiction I do not regard 'Gather Darkness!' as being part of his best work.

Rogers claims for the story 'action, color, intrigue, and romance'. The manner in which these exist in the story is worthy of investigation. They are there, but what the writer (Rogers) means by those four words remains to be uncovered. Carter claims for the novel memorable characters and the element of surprise and the way it is used; these claims ought also to be investigated.

Leiber takes the notion of a priesthood based on science which holds secular power and introduces an element of fantasy by giving the priesthood the kind of trappings one would expect in a work of 'sword and sorcery' - primarily witchcraft. The secular power of the priesthood - the Hierarchy in the novel - is challenged by 'witches' operating at a number of levels both in the society and in the novel.

The power of the witches, like that of the Hierarchy, is based upon scientific inventions which masquerade as the supernatural. In the case of the Hierarchy this power is exerted to control the masses - the Commoners - who have almost no part to play in the story, except to serve as a source of extras.

The novel is constructed on a sort of ecdysiast onion principle, with layers of plot underpinning being stripped off as each development occurs: frequently the plot cannot proceed until Leiber zips off-stage and arranges some new layer to reveal. The case cited by Carter is worth considering as an example of this. One of the mysteries in the novel is who is master-minding the rebellion by the witches: who is Asmodeus?

The characters are so interchangeable (pace Paul Carter) that it really doesn't matter who turns out to be Asmodeus - one could build a case for each of the likely persons, and there's scarcely virtue in Leiber settling upon a character he hasn't much used. He could have used, for example, Brother Chulian instead, except that Brother Chulian has been used as a stock Fat Man throughout. And Carter's plea for a sequel is based upon the Black Man's failure to Get The Girl. But if he (instead of Jarles) did Get The Girl the plot integrity would have been unaltered, for the Girl is merely an element shoved around by Leiber as the exigencies of the situation demand.

Mind you, one should not take Alva Rogers's words too strongly to heart and imagine that 'romance' means 'Romance'. In fact, the only thing we can be sure of is that in writing about 'Gather Darkness!' Rogers could not have used 'romance' in the sense of sexual relationship on any level whatsoever. The Guys barely even speak with The Girl, much less romance her.

'Intrigue' is, as one might guess, the element which a pulp plot has when the author hasn't made up his mind how the novel is developing. I suppose one might read Rogers to mean that the characters conspire

against one another, but they cannot manage even that effectively: I think every single plot comes unstuck.

'Action' and 'color' are words which I find it difficult to cope with in Rogers's comments. There doesn't appear to me to be much of either in the novel in my reading of it, but the words seem more likely to be used in advertising puffs than in seriously-intended statements about a novel.

'Gather Darkness!' may have had great novelty value in its day. In perspective it can be seen as an unremarkable example of the pulp novel, typical in its incapacity to engage the reader except at the rudest level.

The general success of longer stories as opposed to shorter ones is a pattern which is disturbed this time, for the second-rated story in the May issue is Henry Kuttner's rather short 'Ghost': with a rating of 2.75 (Bainbridge ranking 438) it is far behind 'Gather Darkness!', but it did come in ahead of Cleve Cartmill's much longer 'Let's Disappear'.

'Ghost's' rating is a tribute to Kuttner's power as a writer, for the basic idea is an uncomplicated one - that computers may be susceptible to human neuroses by infection - but the story is quite gripping. The few participants in the drama all believe, or come to believe, the same explanation for dreadful happenings near the computers, they all know that the main character is of the same psychological type (manic-depressive) as the man whose 'ghost' now haunts the research station by the manifestation of his personality through the infected computers.

They all know that the psychologist has given a little lecture (pages 63-4) on the differences between manic-depressive personalities and schizoid personalities, and the fact that those of the first persuasion who become severely affected may be treated and cured while this is unfortunately not true of the second type. And they all know that the psychologist is of the second type.

In the story, the psychologist sets out to treat the empathetic computers by treating the similarly-disturbed protagonist; it is a slow process, occupying a long time and placing great strains on everyone. Yet the denouement - a schizophrenic outburst from the psychologist, with his resultant death and the infection of the computers with 'incurable' schizophrenia - is easily predictable from the premises on which the story is based. Kuttner's approach is so skilled, however, that rather than looking to that future we are drawn into the problem of the truth or otherwise of the psychologist's initial hypothesis - that he can cure the computers by curing the man.

As a bonus, Kuttner manages to invent a case for the existence of 'real' ghosts by technological rather than supernatural means. This must have pleased Campbell immensely.

June 1943

The Leiber serial continued here, of course, and finished well clear of the other contents in the ratings battle. This was an issue on which there was great agreement (at 0.94, the highest of the year), and I'm not going to deal with the second-placed story to provide more information about what the sf of 1943 was like. The second-rated story was another Gallagher piece (by Padgett), while the third-rated story was a bit of George O. Smith's 'Venus Equilateral' series, and my views of that will be presented in treating a top-rating story in the November issue.

I'd like, instead, to tackle a low-rating story, Anthony Boucher's 'Pelagic Spark'. With a rating of 5.1 and Bainbridge ranking of 748 this can't be regarded as a great yarn in the opinion of *Astounding's* readers. But three stories finished behind it!

'Pelagic Spark' is a gimmick story: Boucher takes as his inspiration an article written by L. Sprague de Camp and published in the December 1942 *Esquire* in which de Camp essayed to show how foolish were those who believed in the prophecies of Nostradamus, and invented a limerick-like Nostradamian prophecy to illustrate his point.

Boucher decided to embroider this by creating a story in which the de Camp prophecy - as it appeared in the *Esquire* article - comes true. But it only comes true because the prophecy itself, by some freaks of chance, is preserved and made significant over the years, so that a character far in the future sets out to act in order to make the prophecy come true. As we might expect, the prophecy does come true, though not quite in the way the aspirant intended.

To make the story a little more interesting, Boucher predicts the death of Adolf Hitler in 1945.

Lester del Rey's 'Whom the Gods Love', which fell off the bottom of the ratings chart, has one feature which may make it worthy of note: it is written from a viewpoint so omniscient that there are no uttered words in it - no dialogue, nor anything genuinely distinguishable as interior monologue.

July 1943

The final episode of 'Gather Darkness!' was the predictable winner of the ratings race. Van Vogt's 'The Great Engine' was second, but I prefer to deal with its sequel, 'The Beast', which appeared in the November issue.

The third-placed story, with a rating of 3.0 (Bainbridge ranking 388), was Clifford D Simak's 'Hunch'.

This is very much a kitchen-sink of a story. The ancient inhabitants of the pre-asteroids planet, having somehow survived the millions of years since their planet was destroyed by the Martians by going into a form of suspended animation, are now hell-bent on taking over the solar system.

Human beings have spread throughout the planets, exploring, discovering, and doing all the things mankind can do in the few pages available in the introduction to a thirty-page story. Some of the humans go mad, and when they do they are inclined to shuffle off to a place called Sanctuary which turns out to be run by the Asterites who take it as an opportunity to take over the bodies of the loonies. In the end the humans work out how to overcome this plot.

Firstly, the wonderful jewels found in the asteroid belt, and much valued on Earth, are actually the superhibernated asterites, so if you can get some way to get rid of the jewels before they decrystallize then you'll cut down on the asterite population. Secondly - and this discovery is visited upon us at the end of the story, after a fair amount of hinting and nudging - the best defence against the asterites once they've decrystallized is to be the sort of person who has hunches: several characters we meet early in the story have hunches which they talk about a lot and which are made important in the plot.

All that would be quite enough for a story of this length, but Simak has a lot more to throw at the reader. The first twelve pages are taken up with little narratives about four sets of characters, and they are really not tied together until the story has gone 40% of its length: although a great deal is revealed in those early pages, this must nearly set a local record for a slow start.

Then there's Simak's dealing with the main character, who is blind. Chambers 'sees', however, through the telepathic agency of an alien who has recently been found out in space, but whose characteristics are otherwise unexplored. It turns out that the alien, Hannibal, is actually one of the ancient Martians. The Martians learned some of the asterites' secrets before being almost exterminated by them, and arranged for the survival of several of their race through a different variety of suspended animation: these survivors were intended to wreak revenge on the asterites when they revived, and had been especially prepared to attack them ferociously.

That's what Hannibal does when he is sent on a mission to Sanctuary. Chambers still receives telepathic messages from Hannibal, however, seeing with Hannibal's eyes just what is going on at Sanctuary.

And when Hannibal dies fighting the asterites Chambers is much affected. Simak's concern for warmth of feeling between humans and others emerges strongly here: it may be that as a result of Hannibal's death Chambers is once again blind, but Simak conveys the clear impression that the loss affects Chambers more deeply.

Slowly he walked around the desk, felt his way across the room toward the window. Once he stumbled on a rug, once he ran into a chair.

The extended description, going beyond the merely necessary, is a nice touch.

August and September 1943

These two issues are treated together because separate treatment hardly makes sense; there are two serials in them which I propose to discuss, and but one isolated short story.

The first serial is C. L. Moore's 'Judgment Night'. The first episode was one of the most popular items for the year, with a rating of 1.20 and a Bainbridge ranking of -118, while the second episode was only slightly less popular (rating of 1.5, Bainbridge rank 52). In each case the gap to the second-rated story was quite substantial (about 0.9).

'Judgment Night' has remained popular over the years, and my current paperback edition (August 1979) is bundled up (as has been the case for some years) with four other stories by Moore from 1945 and 1950. At around 170 paperback pages, 'Judgment Night' is of course just right for a small paperback of its own, but history seems to work against that and publishers imitate the original hardbound version from Gnome Press.

Unlike some of the serials discussed in this article, 'Judgment Night' was not revised for its later editions. In some senses, unlike 'Opposites - React!' and 'The Weapon Makers', it perhaps hardly needed revising. On the other hand, in at least one sense it is a very strange piece of work, and I shall focus upon this strangeness in what follows, perhaps at the price of ignoring other merits the novel has.

'Judgment Night' is a Crashing Empires story. The old decadent rulers of the galactic empire are being replaced by the new, young, vibrant race of etc., etc. The major viewpoint is that of the old emperor's daughter, Juille, and the plot is simply that she distrusts her father's judgment in handling the rebels, goes to a pleasure satellite for relaxation, and there half falls in love with a young man who actually is there to assassinate her and who proves to be hereditary leader of the rebels, the H'vani.

When the two young 'uns leave the pleasure satellite Juille returns to the centre of the galactic empire where the H'vani have almost reached beyond the last defences. The H'vani send two delegates, one of whom proves to be that handsome young man we've already been introduced to, to negotiate terms. Juille tries to kill Egide, the young man, and is kidnapped by the two delegates and her faithful old retainer, who proves to be a member of the earlier race on the empire's power centre. These, along with everyone else who moves in the damned novel, are plotting with the H'vani to overthrow the empire.

Well, there are all sorts of secret, ancient weapons exchanges, escapes and recaptures, consultations with the Galactic Ancients who Guard the Destiny of the Universe, reconciliations with pets, gun battles, falling in love, and discovery that it isn't actually going to be the H'vani who take over from the old empire. It really quite whizzes along and, like not a few stories of the period, is written in a way which allows, at any given point, a multiplicity of possible plot developments. But as I have indicated there is one aspect of this novel I want to deal with at more length: this is its function as a paranoid novel.

In 'Judgment Night' nothing is as it is at first represented to us. A few surprises are to be expected in any science fiction novel, but when the only plot developments are new elements one is entitled to sit up and take note.

Juille, the lead character, is less obviously a surprise than some of the other manipulated elements. When we meet her she is poncing about, booted and spurred, hand on sword, abusing her emperor father and all his ways. Childhood rebellion - or even late adolescent rebellion - is all very understandable, but is that damned sword defensible? I do not know who first thought that high-tech future societies would be populated by sword-waving heroes, but it has now gone on too long, and even then, in 1943, surely someone must have been wondering exactly what function these swords would have. (In 'Judgment Night' none at all: but the spurs come in handy late in the novel. Not for urging on the randy young lover - this is Astounding and 1943 we're talking about, my friend - but, when tightly bound, Juille is just able to reach down and free her hands by sawing ... but you've possibly read about such things before.) On the other hand, it is surely nauseating to read, forty years or more later, of even more of these young heroes in sword-swaggering gear who camp it up through high-tech societies, and some sort of restraining measures against authors who continue to use such a device - such as trade sanctions, perhaps - might justifiably be contemplated.

But Juille, presented as a tough young thing, turns out to be quite otherwise: in physical combat she is bested, and although she survives she is not the Saviour of the Empire.

But her father proves not to be the doddering old fool she takes him for, but a wise warrior who is brave in defeat. Her lover, Egide, is both soft and tough, but is also not destined to Rule the Sevagram, no matter what one might have thought, because Jair, his loyal general, proves not to be loyal at all - and wants to rule himself - which he can achieve because he is not, in fact, humanoid at all, but an android.

But, as has already been mentioned, Juille's maid is not loyal either, but is of the Old Race (but not One of the Ancients!) willing to supply arms to the rebels. But they do this not out of loyalty, but because they want rebels and rulers to fight to death and so allow them, the Old Race, to take over the empire.

But this is not the way the Ancients want it. They come on stage both in the Mysterious Temple and when the envoy from one of the last outposts of the empire proves (ultimately) to be an Ancient come to make sure that things go as planned. And for that matter Juille's pet turns out to be part of the Ancients' scheme of things and not a charming affectionate, warm, etc. And for that matter, it looks as though the Ancients might be looking favourably on these pets, the Ilar, rather than the android-led rebels.

It's all rather breathless, and with that amount of freedom to expand the plot in all directions at once it is no surprise that the reader doesn't have much chance to think about whether it is worthwhile.

'Judgment Night' is High Pulp - a form not sufficiently appreciated for what it is, although too many writers now strive unsuccessfully to imitate it.

The other serial in August and September 1943 was Willy Ley's 'The End of the Rocket Society'. It wasn't rated, of course, but it ought to be noted for several reasons.

Firstly, unlike almost all **Astounding/Analog** non-fiction pieces, it is direct and personal. Willy Ley was there, and is essentially reporting his experiences, or at least his perceptions of events in which he was a direct participant. This article is one of our few opportunities to read a firsthand account of the **Verein für Raumschiffahrt**.

Secondly, although Willy Ley was a popular columnist in **Galaxy** for many years, and wrote other popular science books as well, he really was not a gracious writer. But here, writing about his own experience, he produces a delightful narrative, albeit not quite so clear on all points as some readers might ask.

Thirdly, combining these two themes, 'The End of the Rocket Society' is not only important in itself because of the information it contains and because of the unLey-like style which is used, but because it also stands out from the other articles of the period in being lively. Although some of the more speculative pieces of the 1940s were readable, most of them were drearily technical, published because the author knew something about his subject and not because he managed to succeed in conveying any of this knowledge to the reader or even, judged rather harshly perhaps, because he showed any signs of wanting to convey any of that knowledge. 'The End of the Rocket Society' is a piece of writing which is as fruitful to read now as it was in 1943, and there are precious few works of science fiction from that year about which as much can be said.

This is certainly so for Ray Bradbury's story in *Astounding*, 'Doodad' in the September issue. One's possible doubts about the tastes of *Astounding's* readers in those days are momentarily relieved by the knowledge that they gave this awful and embarrassing piece of work bottom rating of 4.20 with a Bainbridge ranking of 886. One might, I suppose, have hoped for an even lower rating: after all, the authors of the other stories in the issue, apart from Moore, were Hal Clement, Boucher, and Van Vogt, and the rating result means that some readers thought Bradbury's clunker better than these.

'Doodad' fails because Bradbury has no idea of what to do with his idea. His idea is the rather slight notion that all those objects we call doodads, thingamajigs, and so on, could actually become anything we want them to. The protagonist runs into a character who sells doodads as wish-fulfilment devices and he uses several of these to kill off his enemies. (I ought to add, in fairness, that the protagonist is a normal, useful member of society who is being pursued by crooks.)

Well, Bradbury was sufficient of a craftsman even then to realize that he had at this point used up his idea without telling a story. He has the protagonist left over at the end and nothing in mind to do with him. There's only one possible solution - 'and then he walked across the road and was run over by a truck'. This is fairly clumsily done: when George Turner used this same device (but used it literally) in *Transit of Cassidy* at least it formed a coherent piece with the rest of his novel. In 'Doodad' the literary equivalent is tacked on a story which has already failed anyway, and does nothing to enhance an amateurish effort. 'Doodad' is best forgotten, and garbologists like me ought to be ashamed of referring to it, for Bradbury went on to produce great works of science fiction.

October 1943

The October issue - the last of the pulp issues - was also the first for the year not to have at least one episode of a serial. If one looks down the contents page, there's also a feeling that we have reached the age of modern science fiction: the authors are A. E. Van Vogt, Raymond F. Jones, Lewis Padgett, Eric Frank Russell, Fredric Brown, and Frank Belknap Long, and only Long is of the older generation. There's still more evidence of a break: the high-ranking stories which will be discussed here (by Van Vogt and Jones) are not the ones still be anthologized and reprinted, but the other three (Padgett's 'The Proud Robot', Russell's 'Symbiotica', and Brown's 'Paradox Lost') are.

Since I make much, both above and below, of the change to digest size and the haste with which it came about, bringing forward as evidence the lack of advertising in the November issue, it's important to reprint here John Campbell's attempt to explain what was going on, in his October editorial:

But there will be surprisingly little reduction in content, because we will omit all advertising material; every page of the magazine will be a page of editorial material.

That's from the left-hand column of the editorial, where JWC is talking about the future of the magazine in general, as a digest-sized publication. But by the right-hand column of the editorial the description which is used allows the interpretation that only the November issue would be without advertising (which was in fact the case):

incidentally, the change is sudden; our first new issue may not be able to take full advantage of that for lack of time in preparation - giving us a total of 176 pages. There will be no advertisements, so there'll be one hundred seventy-six pages of text.

Whatever Campbell's intention with this curious near-repetition, it is the reading that Campbell was in this second passage hinting that advertising would appear after the November issue which proved correct.

For the October issue we deal with two curious stories: A.E. Van Vogt's 'The Storm' and Raymond F. Jones's 'Fifty Million Monkeys'.

'Fifty Million Monkeys', with a rating of 1.85 (Bainbridge rank 65) was the top story. It is a very curious piece of super-science, contrasting strongly in one particular with 'The Storm'. In this story Jones sets up a super-capitalist society in which a parallel-processing computer is invented.

In this society, when the lust for gain of the capitalists reaches the stage at which the universe is about to be destroyed, the protagonist throws himself into an orgy of innovation and invention. At last he invents something which will save the universe (he thinks), and all he has to do is convince the man whose fortune he has made with his previous inventions that he should use this new money-saving device. But it isn't so simple as that: the customer has just lost a game to the protagonist's father and will have nothing to do with him and his invention (which, as we believe, will save the universe).

There are no legal processes in Jones's universe which would allow one to, say, obtain an injunction against some other fellow destroying the universe; presumably such a societal construct would unnaturally interfere with the individual's freedom of action. So Jones (and the fictive universe) has to rely upon the wiles of a woman (in a restricted sense) and a *deus ex machina* to get out of the impasse. (I ought to confess that having read the last section of 'Fifty Million Monkeys' has left me none the wiser as to how the destruction of the universe is averted. The protagonist comes to understand what has been screwing up his parallel-processor, but what's this to do with the pathological denial of reality by the world-wrecker? We don't know whether he will agree to change his practice.)

Now, this is a story in which a male and a female, Craig and Carlotta (precursors in their names, more or less, of Barry Humphries's satires of the 'seventies and 'eighties), are together throughout the story, have grown up together (more or less), are yuppie-successful (world's greatest inventor and world's greatest psychologist respectively) but there is, you will be relieved to learn, no spark of sex between them, no residue of romance in the fictional world is allowed to impinge on the reader's page. But since the world's greatest inventor does most of it by chance, and the world's greatest psychologist seems to be unsuccessful at getting two old friends to talk to each other in less than two months, one can't really be surprised that the fundamentals of human relationships simply don't exist in 'Fifty Million Monkeys'.

'The Storm', which had a rating of 2.35 and a Bainbridge ranking of 205, is also an oddity. It's odd because, confronted with a super-science theme - a storm created by the interaction of terrene and contra-terrene matter - Van Vogt chooses to deal with the remainder of the plot-elements. I suspect that this is a story which would warrant an extensive investigation, for what Van Vogt chooses to deal with is a series of relationships for which 'The Storm' is a metaphor: the relationships between male and female, between members of different classes, between members of different cultures, and between members of

different races. Some of these clashes are built into the general plot structure: an Earth spaceship investigating the Lesser Magellanic Cloud comes into contact with an Empire there which wants the Earthers to go away, for example, but Van Vogt has chosen, I suppose, to do this story as part of the 'Mixed Men' series, which adds the element of racial(?) difference.

Given the magnitude of the theme Van Vogt tackles, it's not surprising that he is not wholly successful: the relationship between the Noble Lady and the military man is rather forced and scarcely convinces, although some super sci-fi devices are used to hurry it along. But if this is what Van Vogt was attempting to do - to write a story in which he explored the meaning of 'storm' in human life rather than in the superficial slambang physical style common to science fiction - then he deserves recognition for being one of the first working within the pulp genre to do so. This story, carefully read, is definitely a surprise and quite different from the other Van Vogt stories published in *Astounding* in 1943.

November 1943

The November issue of *Astounding* was the first of the digest-sized issues. As I have previously indicated, the decision was made with such speed - or lack of preparation - that the advertising department did not have time to produce ready copy. This is probably the only issue of *Astounding/Analog* to contain no advertising at all: the nearest things to an ad. were the inside back cover plug for the December issue (which only repeated information from 'In Time To Come') and the back cover invitation to buy war bonds and stamps.

What was inside the covers was also unremarkable. Readers rated almost all the stories (participation index 0.99) but weren't in strong agreement about them (index of agreement 0.66). I shall discuss the two highest-rating stories, George O. Smith's 'Recoil' and A. E. Van Vogt's 'The Beast'.

'Recoil' rated 2.12 (Bainbridge 244), just ahead of 'The Beast', but neither of these stories has much to offer the modern reader.

'Recoil' is part of the Venus Equilateral series. I am unable to admire this series, and perhaps part of this failing on my part is revealed in my opinion of 'Recoil', though even Alva Rogers, usually so unflinchingly admiring of the contents of *Astounding* of this period, described this story somewhat despairingly (in *A Requiem for Astounding*) as 'something about an electron gun'.

Exactly so. 'Recoil', illustrated with some general purpose doodles by Orban, recalls much of the worst of the period. Outstanding amongst

the defects is the use of the 'characters'. It quickly becomes obvious to the reader that the actions and words of the characters are not carried out or delivered for the enlightenment of the other characters but (perhaps solely) for us as readers. Here's a reporter talking(?) with Don Channing about a missing space ship: the reporter wonders whether the spaceship might have tried to duck some meteors and wandered out beyond Mars:

'That's out, too,' laughed Channing.

'Why?'

'A standard ship of space is capable of hitting it up at about 4-G all the way from Terra to Mars at major opposition and end up with enough power and spare cathodes to continue on to Venus in quadrature. Now the velocity of the planets in their orbits is a stinking matter of miles per second, while the top speed of a ship in even the shortest passage runs up into four figures per second. You'd be surprised at what velocity you can attain at 1-G for ten hours.'

'Yes?'

'It runs to slightly less than two hundred and fifty miles per second, during which you've covered only four million miles. In the shortest average run from Venus to Terra at conjunction, a skimpy twenty-five million miles, your time of travel is a matter of twenty-five hours add, running at the standard 2-G. Your velocity at turnover - or the halfway point where the ship stops going up from Terra and starts to go down to Venus - is a cool five hundred miles per second. [...]

And so it goes on, the hapless reporter a captive of the Smith/Campbell lecture. The 'Yes?' is particularly painful, revealing as it does Smith's awareness that his lecture is becoming boringly long. Note that the top speed on the Terra-Venus run (second paragraph) is less than the four figures per second we are told ships achieve on even the shortest run (first paragraph).

Some indication of the haste with which these little lectures were written is shown in the transformation of a Venus to Terra trip to a Terra to Venus one in just one sentence: one could go on to complain further ('inferior conjunction, I presume?' - 'why quadrature and not inferior conjunction?') but that would be to take seriously in 1987 what was all too plainly taken seriously in 1943.

These characters talk to each other in the same way, by the way (that is to say, at the reader). Here's a sample from page 26:

Walt returned after a minute and said: 'Warren's measuring the inductance of the betatron magnet. He'll calculate the value of C required to tune the thing to the right frequency and start to achieve that capacity by mazing up whatever high-voltage condensers we have on the Station. Now, Don, let's calculate how we're going to make the thing mobile.'

'That's a horse of a different color. We'll have to use electromagnetic deflection. From the constants of the electron stream out of our souped-up Suzy, we'll have to compute the necessary field to deflect such a beam. That'll be terrific, because the electrons are hitting it up at a velocity approaching that of light - maybe a hundred and seventy thousand miles per - and their mass will be something fierce.'

[Etc., etc.]

It's all heavy going, with little relief in sight at the end of the story. The original mystery - the missing ship - has not been solved, Hellion Murdoch has been disposed of without coming on stage (since it plainly will take the heroes some time to solve the engineering problem, the villain thoughtfully gives them five days to think over his dastardly proposition...), and there's still the problem of the meteor showers. Perhaps all this is part of the consequence of being part of an ongoing series.

The same problem exists in spades for Van Vogt's 'The Beast', rating 2.14 (Bainbridge 250). It's a follow-up to 'The Great Engine' in the July issue, and hardly stands on its own.

We are plunged immediately into a future world (1950) with Nazis on the moon, matter transmitters, atomic engines, (semi-)immortality, and all the general Van Vogt baggage which is such a struggle to accommodate.

Today's reader will be struck almost immediately by Van Vogt's use of that increasingly-widespread but still rightly unpopular grammatical innovation: The capital letter following a colon.

Although Van Vogt shows no more capacity here to develop characters as people than does Goerge O., there's also relatively little tendency to lecture at the reader; if anything, Van Vogt tends to gloss over detail that would have been worth a chapter or two in the works of most writers of the period.

For example, the hero is captured by the Nazis and taken to the moon in a plane (propellorless!) which behaves like a rocket. Van Vogt then cuts to another, parallel, story (as in 'The Weapon Makers' two almost disjoint stories operate in parallel throughout 'The Beast'). When we return to the hero, the plane has crashed, his captors are dead (one

assumes) and he is wandering around seeking warmth. That's a lot of action to happen offstage.

Surprisingly enough, it's while the hero Pendrake is alone that Van Vogt comes close to creating a character. Pendrake is confused and not sure where he is going or what he is trying to do. None of his superhuman powers (actually he is rather weak for a Van Vogt hero, merely has one extremely strong arm) are visible, and the natural ambiguities in Van Vogt's writing (and thinking?) help to make Pendrake an appealingly lost person.

As soon as Pendrake gets together with the other strange inhabitants of the moon - terrans who have walked through a machine-generated spacewarp with the earth-based end in the Western United States - matters quickly reduce to a surprisingly flat slambang-style adventure yarn.

The scenes back on Earth - the yarn parallel to Pendrake's lunatic endeavours - are sometimes more interesting. Although there's an occasional sign of characters explaining to one another what has happened, or what might have happened, or how things happen generally, and the good guys move in a rather predictable direction towards success (when the leading character runs into a little trouble - 'The first burst of bullets caught him squarely in the chest' (page 63) - no reader can have thought for a moment that he is actually in trouble, much less murdered), there are some moments of description, of interior emotional conflict, which suggest that had Van Vogt taken a different path in his writing (away from super-science fiction) he might have become a very decent writer indeed, rather than merely an outstanding one in very peculiar company.

Alva Rogers regarded 'Gallegher Plus' as the best story in this issue, but the readers of the time didn't share that opinion (rating it fourth (second-last)), and we have already described one Gallegher story here. We now turn to the last issue for the year.

December 1943

This issue was one without an outstanding story in it. E. Mayne Hull's 'The Debt' was the top-rating story (2.1; Bainbridge 238), but the second-placed story, Anthony Boucher's 'We Print The Truth', with a rating of 2.55, was a story plainly left over from *Unknown Worlds* and was more or less introduced to the readers in that way:

Warning Pure Fantasy. This is a tale of pure fantasy, run as an experiment. If you don't like an occasional fantasy, the experiment ends right here. But this is a story of a newspaper that always printed the truth - for anything it printed became truth!

The remaining stories were about equally popular, making this issue almost equal to the January one in terms of the extent to which readers disagreed. I'll deal with these two popular(?) stories to indicate something about the confusion readers must have been in.

Both are 'guy gets gal' stories. 'The Debt' is a sequel to the low-rated 'Competition', which had appeared in the June issue. Artur Blord, the hero of these and other stories of Hull's, is a superman who achieves his goals by deviousness rather than any physical super-powers. In some ways, in 'The Debt' it is Blord as super-capitalist who triumphs: 'The right to buy labour is the right to be free', as it were.

Blord's superiority troubled Hull too, I think. She certainly found it necessary to go into some detail about it on page 8:

The odd quality in his character that made him curious about anything and everything, the quality that enabled him to withdraw his entire attention from an important deal and become absorbed with an almost mindless intensity in something seemingly completely irrelevant and immaterial, had made him the despair of his associates and the wonder of his enemies.

Nevertheless - and it was Blord's greatest secret - it was this very capacity to which he attributed the enormous success he had had in the Ridge Stars. The capacity for pulling his mind clear of past triumphs and future hopes, and savoring the moment, the now.

In 'The Debt' it is not clear that Blord has associates; he has employees, over whom he exerts powers of life and death. But he does have an approximation to an enemy - the Skal Thing and its employees. The Skal Thing is not, however, an enemy so much as a business rival. The Thing and Blord jockey for power - over human beings - and are Awfully Jolly to one another about their relative successes and failures.

The secrets of Blord - how he maintains his control over men and events - are not revealed directly, and there's no on-stage evidence of the capacity to 'become absorbed with an almost mindless intensity'. Instead of going through the agony of producing a believable plot development Hull merely provides a series of *post hoc* explanations: 'Aha! I had already thought of that and unbeknownst to you my men have surrounded' ... etc., etc.

It cannot be surprising, having given this impression, that I find it difficult to detect anything human in 'The Debt'. Blord certainly seeks power - successfully - but he does so effortlessly and cannot deeply appeal to our attempts to understand our fellow human beings. The other characters - despite Hull's occasional attempts to flesh them out -

are twice puppets, Blord's and Hull's. There's not much to offer in this one.

Boucher's 'We Print The Truth' is rather lack-lustre for this author. It's a quite simple-minded story about what would happen if one man were given the power to change the world merely by printing what he wanted to be true in his newspaper.

To bring this about Boucher has the editor have in his employment a man who grants one wish; and the editorial wish is that the paper's slogan - We print the truth - will always be true. Whether this can be extended to 'The world will conform to what we print' is quite another matter, and indeed Boucher takes that up late in the story.

There're all the expected plot developments you would expect: murder mystery solved, labour rackets wiped out, editor gets girl he wants (no matter what she wants), war ended ... But this is where Boucher begins to look more deeply at the meaning of his plot idea: is truth absolute or relative?

This kind of truth, Boucher decided, is relative. So while the editor writes about local things, they are made true. But when he writes of global things, they are made true only locally. Thus for Grover, the town in which the story takes place, the war is ended. All the information that comes into Grover confirms that belief. But outside the war goes on. It is only when he ventures outside Grover, troubled by his own power, that the editor discovers this limitation.

Because he then understands that his manipulated truth is relative, the editor decides that he must undo all that has been done; there is a greater absolute truth to which Grover must conform. But he still gets a girl, even if it isn't the one he thought mattered.

1943 in Astounding - some final notes

With the November issue **Astounding** settled in to the size and style it was to maintain until its conversion to **Analog** and a brief further fling with bedsheet size. The rotogravure section, also added with that issue, made possible better reproduction of photographs and thus encouraged the use of more 'scientific' articles - a landmark of **Astounding/Analog** ever since.

The articles in the November and December issues are very much oriented towards contemporary technology/engineering: making astronomical movies, submarines, chemistry, and bacteria in meteorites. Photographs actually enhance these pieces only very slightly. It seems clear that this development was not quite so well-planned - rather as the size-reduction caught the advertising department unawares.

In dealing with the February issue (in ASFR 2) I noted that the Padgett story 'Mimsy Were The Borogoves' would be dealt with at this point. This story was much admired when first published, and the fact that it is so easy to admire now testifies to some of its qualities. What are these?

Besides, it was the sort of warm spring day, with a touch of coolness in the breeze, which invited a boy to lie down in a field and stare at the occasional clouds till he fell asleep. Nuts to geography! Scott dozed.

About noon he got hungry, so his stocky legs carried him to a nearby store. There he invested his small hoard with penurious care and a sublime disregard for his gastric juices. He went down to the creek to feed.

These early sentences in the story provide us with some clues. For a start, there's some insight here into what it means to be human, and to describe human feelings. The first paragraph drifts quietly through a morning. But in the second paragraph we see the master writers at work. The boy wakes; he is hungry for food; his actions are described in language which is striking because it is over-elaborate - 'penurious'? 'gastric juices'? for a seven-year-old? He goes down to the creek 'to feed': like a domestic animal, perhaps?

Exactly so, exactly so. For when Scott leaves the creek he has begun the process of learning to control his gastric juices. It is the first sign his father has of Scott's change. It is the first insight we have into what is to happen: Scott is about to LEARN.

Even when Padgett has to lecture - almost a requirement in **Astounding**, it would seem - this is done in a meaningful way, with a psychologist struggling to discover what is happening to Scott and his younger sister Emma.

The plot of the story - educational toys sent back from the future and their impact on present-day children - is sufficiently straightforward not to detain us. But how it is done is of some interest, I believe.

Firstly, there is no ad hockery about it. We are told the story plainly; we always know what is happening, and we learn in sequence of the significant plot developments. We are told the circumstances of the toys' appearance in our world before they are visited upon us (and the children), although the **Astounding** make-up department, always alert for an opportunity to screw up, places the illustration of this first scene

(page 52) on page 58, while the appearance of the toys is on page 53 or 54 depending on whether you read the text or look at the pictures.

One really ought to consider the effect of this sequence of presentation upon the original reader (an effect not visible or possible for the reader of 'Mimsy Were The Borogoves' in any of its many anthologized appearances). The exact magazine page sequence is

- 52 - toys sent from the future
- 53 - drawing of boy playing with toys (top
boy introduced (bottom of page)
- 54 - boy finds toys and plays with them (text)
- 58 - drawing of toys being sent from the future.

Many silly things have been done in terms of illustration layout over the years - especially in *Astounding* - but this kind of foolishness doesn't make much sense at all.

Secondly, there are relationships between humans in this story; they care about one another, they try to understand one another, they grieve for one another. This makes it possible for the reader to engage in the action of the story as though it mattered.

Thirdly, although the conventions of science fiction are observed fairly strictly, they are not allowed to stand in the way of an inevitable resolution.

Fourthly, the science fictional element - the introduction of super-scientific educational toys into our times - is one which is internally consistent. The toys work in the kind of way one would expect and they have the kind of effect one would expect.

'Mimsy Were The Borogoves' has become one of the classics of science fiction, and is susceptible of far deeper analysis than I have provided here.

So, at the end of 1943, the age of the digest-sized science fiction magazine, and with it the liberation from the tyrannies of pulp conventions, had begun. Ten years later the digest-sized science fiction magazines were at their peak. But before considering 1953, it is appropriate to consider a death in 1943, that of *Unknown Worlds*.

(to be continued)

WHY AUSTRALIAN SF MAGAZINES FAIL IN THE MARKET

GEORGE TURNER

[This is a copy of a talk given by George Turner at a Nova Mob meeting in March 1987. It emerged later that *Aphelion* 5, the issue he discussed, was the final issue of the magazine.]

In the current issue of *Aphelion* Mervyn Binns lists eight Australian sf magazines published in the last forty years - eight and a half if you count the newly defunct *Omega*.

Of these only *Aphelion* remains in print.

The longest-lived were those of the immediate post-war years. They survived not because of their abysmal contents but because no American or British sf was available due to import restrictions. They fed a starved fandom and died as soon as overseas sf became available.

The lesson was plain: Australia can support a science fiction magazine only if its content is as good as or better than the imported product. 'As good as' here means 'as satisfactory to a mass readership'.

Vision of Tomorrow died of editorial ineptitude and internal dissension. Paul Collins came and went, despite Literature Board assistance.

In 1986 *Far Out* appeared, lasted three issues and vanished.

Almost simultaneously came McNamara's *Aphelion*, a glossy quarterly funded to run for two years (eight issues) and needing to sell 3000 copies per issue to break even. We are keeping our fingers crossed.

It begins to sound like masochism.

So, a question: Why has Australia, with a growing stable of writers who are by no means inept, never produced a viable sf magazine?

My answer is: A lack of understanding by both editors and writers of what is required of a mass product.

Please keep that answer in mind.

I have said that the Nova Mob and ASFR concern themselves too much with cerebral minutiae of sf criticism and ignore the questions raised by Australian production going on under our noses.

John Foyster assures me that ASFR reviews all Australian work. I assure him that this is not enough, that reviewing tells *what* but only rarely *why*. We should dig deeper.

So, tonight I propose to examine one issue of one magazine in some detail and draw some tentative but practical conclusions. Please note

that these are technical criticisms. I have tried to avoid value judgements.

Aphelion, issue no. 5, features ten complete stories and no serial. It seems to me the most promising issue to date, in terms of fiction content, and consideration of the stories can tell a great deal about what is going on in Australian science fiction writing, particularly when we compare it with such recent anthologies as *Urban Fantasies* and *Strange Attractors*. The lead story is 'Neighbourhood Watch', by Greg Egan, who has written enough to develop some facility, sufficient to keep you reading across a few irritations, hoping the end will justify all. It begins: 'My retainers keep me on ice. Dry ice. It slows my metabolism, takes the edge off my appetite, slightly.' Fair enough; hook 'em with the first sentences and then maintain the emotional pressure. It is a variation on the bargain-with-the-devil anecdote wherein the victim wins by a neat trick; it is told with relentless emotional loading, short sentences, emotional reversals, sly violence and the eating of victims as the neighbourhood watcher fulfils his contract to eliminate local crime.

But what is he and where did they get him? And how does a mere written contract restrain a raging appetite supported by inhuman powers? And what sort of disgusting people hired this disgusting thing? We are not told and in the end the tale is unsatisfactory on every level. Egan has thought it enough to rely on a mix of popular elements and a driving style, but by the final word the reader has realized that these are only tired old fantasy tricks in a creative vacuum, instantly forgettable.

The next story is mine. I say nothing. Any who have read it may prepare your ammunition.

Next comes 'Crime of Passion', by Bill Dodds, not so much a story as a construct, slapped together from bits of traditional space opera. There are no human characters and so no chance of reader identification. A space ship crewed by members of several exotic races is forced down on a strange planet. Murders are committed, the members of exotic races all behave peculiarly and it turns out that the ship's computer is the murderer. Since the reader is given no means of working this out for himself, the solution is arbitrary, particularly as the unconvincing motivation reads like a copout afterthought. There is no *raison d'être* offered for any of the peculiarities of the exotics and the whole thing is a stew of '50s sf. The narrative style is vaguely offhanded Ocker, the sort of thing that should be attempted only after some study of demotic speech. This is mere junk food authorship.

Of story no. 4, by D.T. White, with the ineffably pretentious title 'Short Are My Days of Light And Shade', I can make nothing. At different

times I suspected that the protagonist was a ghost, an artificial intelligence or an actor watching himself on film, but none of these finally fit. Multiple repetitions of phrases about 'soundless noise' and strange lapses from historic present into past tense left me wondering if the writer had bothered to work out what he was doing. Perhaps it is a great work of art and I a philistine without sensibility.

'Waltz of the Flowers', by Paul Collins and Trevor Donohue, is a competently written piece about videotapes that involve the viewer physically, leaving him a part of the action. The scientific means is not suggested, leaving the process unbelievable. It is authentically nasty in a more subtle fashion than the beast of 'Neighbourhood Watch' but, like it, passes out of the mind with the final words because it does not relate to any reality and so has nothing to communicate. The reader is told instead of involved. Lack of involvement with perceived reality is the besetting weakness of too many fantasy short stories. They offer no hook on which to suspend disbelief.

'The Jirra-Mee', by Ingrid Whitethorn, is again a competently written little mood piece about an Earthman abducted for study by a stellar race. Nothing happens except his death during a passage of Halley's Comet, and Whitethorn rounds off with some portentous nonsense about Christ to which I can attach no useful meaning. It is all calculated to impress with a depth of woolly imaginative subtlety but in my disillusioned reading, impervious to stylistic trickery, it has none.

'Alexia And Graham Bell' is, fittingly, the most accomplished narrative in the issue, being written by Nova Mob attendee, Rosaleen Love. It is perhaps not quite as effective as her tale which won the Swancon competition last year or the other in a recent issue of *Overland* (yes, sf in *Overland*!) but its gentle sendup of the more spectacular effects of General Relativity is good for an appreciative chuckle and a self-promise to take a second look in a week or two. The simple, effortless prose, using no special effects, leaves straining technicians for dead. Alas, there are only two pages of it. It is a deliberately minor story, a jest, but it works because it is properly done.

'Collector', by Bill Congreve, is a competently written snippet of future Australia in what seems to be the aftermath of a nuclear winter. The action is properly paced, the characterization is sufficient for its purpose but the unoriginal Grand Guignol of the ending is a letdown. We have been to the cannibal meal too often before. Still, Congreve has promise. He needs a story idea with some fresh guts to it, preferably not the hero's.

In 'The Resurrection', Gail Neville exhibits a neat idea and sensibly expounds it mainly in dialogue. This gives some solidity to

characters whose existence in any real world is in doubt - the nature of reality is the theme. The ending, a mite disappointing, may be the only one possible without an equally disappointing downbeat, but Neville has some style and a properly disciplined imagination which should gain her an audience.

Disciplined imagination - the kind that even in fantasy is always aware of the real world - is evident in only three of the nine stories I am discussing and the last, Terry Dowling's 'For As Long As You Burn', is the one least disciplined. I am hard on him because he has talent but is satisfied to present cheap effects in a disguise of lush prose. A confidence trickster. This story, as with most of his, has an artificial setting which allows him to do as he pleases without restriction of logic or probability. And even so, he manages to trip himself up.

In some far future, where sophisticated computer-communication systems are available but men fight with swords - if you care to believe it - Earth is dominated by the Amazi, a stellar race, of whom a single representative is resident overlord. The overlord practises the *jus primae noctis* (*droit de seigneur*) on the women of the region and there is a lot of psychobabble about why the husbands do not rebel. Inevitably, one man does, but his efforts are foiled by the Amazi, who seeks understanding rather than brute domination. The crux of the story is that the Amazi impregnator turns out to be female and that her penis does not impregnate but causes high fertility in the Terran females. This raises two problems. Since it has been going on for forty years, why haven't the women noticed this result? If they had, there would be no story - that's why. The other problem concerns the compatibility of alien and terrestrial biochemistries but Dowling doesn't let on that such problems might exist. Also, I have my doubts about the usefulness of an intellectual hero who can't control his urge to violence. I can only suppose there had to be some way of getting his silly sword into action.

This story, written around a situation with no parallel in human experience, set in a carelessly invented culture, peopled by sf clichés and fleshed out with some highly suspect Egyptian mythology to which I can find no reference in Larousse or Campbell, is pure fictional snake oil. It is sufficiently gimcrack to irritate while the reading proceeds and logical questions go unanswered. Disbelief is not suspended.

(Unfortunately the editor likes Dowling's work - he told me so - and can see no wrong in it. It seems to me precisely the sort of thing which discourages readers who want more than junk food.)

Let me try to codify these conclusions. Of the nine stories, I find that one - 'Short Are My Days' - is too stylized for easy comprehension,

one - 'Crime of Passion' - is so derivative as to be not worth printing,

one - 'The Jirra-Mee' - is inconsequential,

three - 'Waltz of the Flowers', 'Collector' and 'The Resurrection' - have strong writing and strong ideas, but weaknesses of climax destroy their impact,

two - 'Neighbourhood Watch' and 'For As Long As You Burn' - are very powerfully presented but with such faults of internal logic as to leave the reader unimpressed, and

one - just one - 'Alexis and Graham Bell' - fulfils the requirements of a mass-readership magazine - and fulfils them without conceding a jot of artistry or authorial integrity.

Three of these stories could be well done without. Five might reasonably find a place in an average issue of a commercial publication but would need strong backing by other stories of much greater impact and expertise. One only is worth a place in any sf magazine published anywhere in the world and also, quite possibly, in a specialized literary journal. The two venues are not incompatible.

I assume that these were the best the editor could get, but they are not the material on which to build a circulation. I return to my earlier statement that these writers, despite their industry and enthusiasm, do not understand the needs of a periodical market. They can do the work but do not comprehend the requirements.

A marketable magazine story needs certain qualities, dictated by its readership.

1. It needs a clearly defined story line. The readers are not BAs or members of Nova Mob; they are ordinary men and women in search of a good escapist read. Subtlety is not beyond them but they don't much appreciate obscurantist art for art's sake. I am not suggesting a restriction to the production of shoddy, only that development should lead to a logical and practical climax.

2. The story should say something. This does not imply preaching, didacticism or message-planting. It does mean that the climax should

strike home without ambiguity and that even a trick ending should be justified somewhere in the body of the narrative. A good way to test the viability of your story is to reduce it to an anecdote - say 200 words - shorn of frills. Then see if it sounds interesting, particularly the ending. If the punchline doesn't work, look for another one. Expertise and decoration will not cover basic faults.

3. Fantasy should never lose touch with the real world. Unreal people in an unreal landscape facing unreal situations for unreal purposes will eventually leave the reader cold if he/she is over fourteen. It is the thirty to sixty group who actually buy magazines; they are interested in real problems, however bizarrely presented. Fantasy should be an aid to statement, not an end in itself. Fantasy contemplating its own navel is a bore.

4. Characters need to be clearly drawn and quickly graspable. This does not mean that they have to be superficial; it means that they should have individuality immediately demonstrated. Great depth is not required, only that the character should fit the requirements of the story and not be a faceless puppet. As a helpful tip, the tone of each one's dialogue is the most impactful way to define them.

If a writer can manage any three of these requirements he may well get away with fudging the fourth, but he should aim for all four.

This does not reduce the magazine story to mechanical process work. These are the basic requirements of fiction for the bulk of the world's readers and every great storyteller has observed them. Wells, Saki, Blackwood, M.R. James and Maugham observed them and published their best tales in mass-circulation magazines. And all were, at their best, artists of considerable power.

A great deal of what we call artistry is no more than an ability to work within defined limits. The challenge is not to break out of them but to transcend them. When the writer is truly proficient it is time to play at breaking out - and by then he knows that every rule removed must be replaced by another. Artistic freedom is not to be confused with licence to do as you please.

Australian writers seem to have nobody to teach them these things. They keep on imitating the writers who interest them but succeed only in reproducing the obvious surface details, not understanding that these are not what makes the work acceptable. Others produce ephemerae in the delusion that 'good writing' and 'self expression' are all that is needed. For the mass audience this is simply not true. Good story telling is the basic art.

REVIEWS

Starkindler, Issue 5, Spring 1986, \$A3.00

reviewed by Lucy Sussex

Milan Kundera's **The Book of Laughter and Forgetting** is no preparation for reviewing **Starkindler**. In his novel, Kundera is highly cynical about why people burst into print - and **Starkindler** is devoted to such bursters, being a forum for new writers. 'Yet more graphomaniacs!' Kundera would say, his coined word describing an obsession with writing books. Great minds think alike, perhaps; those acquainted with Lee Harding will recognize in graphomania a synonym of Lee's term 'print fever'.

Very often I have the feeling my whole body is bursting with a desire to express itself. To speak. To say something. Sometimes I think I'll go off my rocker or explode I get so keyed up [...] I want to tell the story of my life, my emotions. They're really quite unique. Really they are.

(**Laughter and Forgetting**, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983, p. 90)

Of course, Kundera is himself a graphomaniac, as are Harding, this reviewer and the **Starkindlers** (Sussex, will you stop rabbiting on about Kundera and review the bloody magazine - the rest of **ASFR**. Oh all right - LJS).

Starkindler is 45 pages of poetry and very short stories: 14 writers are represented. All are amateur and concerned with sf or fantasy; such is **Starkindler's** policy. 'Over the past year we have become aware of a large number of talented writers working in this area and we feel that there is a great need for a magazine such as **Starkindler** to provide a chance for such writers to gain exposure' (from **Starkindler's** covering letter to **ASFR**).

In a sense, **Starkindler** defies criticism - initiatives such as this are very necessary for young graphomaniacs. However, it is possible to niggle, to say perhaps that two mermaid stories in one issue ('In the Soup' by Graeme Turner and 'An Adventure in Iceland' by Veronica Rance) is excessive. In addition, if David Muirhead's 'Will the Real' is a chunk of novel, as it appears to be, then it should be presented as such.

None of the writers in the issue reviewed are without potential. Most promising are Robert Verdon, whose 'In Black and White' concerns the

disappearance of colour, and Mark Morrison, whose 'Jonah' is an effective example of that difficult literary form, the monologue. Of the poetry, Anne Elvey's 'The Eighth Day' is quirkily imaginative; easily the best poem and possibly the best item in the issue.

After all the foregoing sweetness and light, some vinegar and darkness. Yes, it is Kundera time again:

every individual without exception bears a potential writer within himself [...] all mankind has every right to rush out into the streets with a cry of 'We are all writers!' [...] everyone has trouble accepting the fact he will disappear unheard of and unnoticed in an indifferent universe, and everyone wants to make himself into a universe of words before it's too late.

Once the writer in every individual comes to life (and that time is not far off), we are in for an age of universal deafness and lack of understanding.

The invention of printing originally promoted mutual understanding. In the era of graphomania the writing of books has the opposite effect: everyone surrounds himself with his own writings as with a wall of mirrors cutting off all voices from without.

(Laughter and Forgetting, pp. 106,92)

SF International 1, January/February 1987; ed. William H. Wheeler

reviewed by Russell Blackford

This is the first issue of a new magazine put together with the goal of presenting 'good SF stories to the English-reading public in the U.S., Canada, and other countries which have been originally written either in other languages or in English and not yet published in North America.' The Editor's Note pronounces that the magazine will publish both original stories and reprints, and that it will include both authors who are well-known in their own countries and new authors 'both from North America and the rest of the world.' Given the stated goal, one wonders what new authors from North America are doing here (Mexicans? French-Canadians?), but a leavening of American writers in a truly international magazine produced in California does not seem like such a bad idea.

The format of SF International is fairly modest. Issue 1, in fact, resembles a very thick issue of ASFR. Presumably, the magazine is

produced on a low budget, and one wonders what limitations this will place on its ability to attract professional writers. Nonetheless, the format is neat, clear, unpretentious, and would-be contributors can assume that their work would, if accepted, not be disgraced by the appearance of the magazine. The idea is a good enough one for me to hope that the magazine receives support from both contributors and readers sufficient to give it a chance to succeed - the sub-text being that I fear for it.

Issue 1 contains eleven stories from a total of eight countries (two stories from the USA, three from Holland, one each from West Germany, Britain, Japan, Australia, Yugoslavia, and Poland). Most of the pieces are about 3000 words, and none is sufficiently ambitious or robust to invite intensive criticism. The American writers have produced fairly slight and vaguely old-fashioned but competently written stories which could have graced modest corners in any other of their country's magazines. Both Steve and Melanie Tem with 'The Sing' and Kathe Koja with 'Happy Birthday, Kim White' have adopted a first-person monologue form and quite neatly balanced their narrators' experiences and reflections on experience, the Tems writing in the voice of an ageing mining foreman on a planet called 'Matchhead' which is mined by both humans and aliens known as the 'Cleer'. Koja writes about a future world in which boys, at the onset of puberty, are forced to make a decision between castration and exile to a remote planet - all this the result of the 'Gender Wars' in which women emerged victorious. While these stories are among the magazine's most traditionally realistic in narrative technique, they suffer a crudity of technological imagination which undercuts the technique and inclines the reader to perceive plots and situations as fairly awkward symbolic models for, on the one hand, mechanisms of loss and coping, and, on the other, feminist anxieties. In particular, Koja's narrator spends much of his monologue worrying about 'it' being cut off (and one wonders what 'it' is really supposed to be; strange locution even for a twelve-year-boy in a society where being 'newtered' is a normal fact of experience and common subject of conversation).

Far and away the most exciting story in narrative style and technique is 'Kool Running, the Computer Booter', by one of Australia's own golden boys, Paul Collins. Some readers may remember the story from when it was first published in the March 1985 issue of *Omega* simply as 'Kool Running'. The plot is little more than a sequence of subversive acts by a character opposed to the rule of computers in an undefined future - with a promise of the coming revolution. The style is slick, cool, fast and alienated: Collins seems to owe something both to the

cyber-punks and to the Harlan Ellison of "Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman'. But the picture of a society is so systematically sparse, and the depiction of computerization so dependent on sub-literary discourse (the source appears to be 'Dr Who' rather than IBM or even William Gibson), that one wonders what is left in the end other than flashy stylistic variations on simple and hand-me-down strategies of plot and situation. Such strategies appear to be little more than typewriter-fodder to Collins, born-again hipster stylist.

The stories by non-English writers tend even more to depend on simple plots and situations which appear in most cases as symbolic models through which issues and anxieties are explored - often awkwardly and reductively.

Uwe Luserke's 'The End of the Hunt' is one of the more interesting (and puzzling) stories in the book, but it suffers from being an almost schematic analysis of a particular case of conscience. The protagonist must decide how to use his invention the 'C organ igniter', which could save a blockaded Earth in some vaguely defined interstellar war. But can humanity be entrusted with the plans for a weapon that could potentially give it power to destroy any other species it encounters?

Less interesting is Manuel van Loggem's 'Touchvision', a case where flaws in the story drive us back on crude, if confused, ideological content. It simply describes a situation, through some fairly obvious narratorial strategies, in which aliens from outer space have set out to take over the Earth by inspiring the invention of a machine which broadcasts convincing three-dimensional multi-sensual replicas. The media companies exploit this by broadcasting attractive male and female 'announcers', naked, and taking up compliant sexual positions. This, it is assumed, will eliminate sexual contact between actual human beings, and thence wipe out Earth's human population over a generation or two. The complex social and political responses to the invention of any such device are simply ignored. As well, the story depends upon the inability, indeed failure, of the aliens to conquer Earth by force. Yet, there seems no reason why it would be beyond the aliens, using such a device, to create an infinitude of adequately 'solid' warriors to deal with the human population. The story rapidly dissolves away as a narrative, leaving the reader to grapple with it as an awkward model of anxieties about media, sexuality, human nature, and God-knows-what else.

In addition to problems of this kind, the translation of those stories originally written in languages other than English is often stilted, so much so, at times, as to make them almost unreadable, and on one occasion unintentionally hilarious. Most sf readers are familiar with the idea that we construct events and situations when reading sf

narratives according to different tacit rules from those applying when we read mainstream fiction. In particular, descriptions which would be interpreted elsewhere as idiomatic metaphor are more likely to be taken literally in sf; this is now trite theory since it was first popularized by the likes of Samuel R. Delany, and it means that there are special constraints on sf authors. Then try on for size this 'subjunctive tension', as such examples used to be called, perpetrated by Mire Adzic, translating Dragan R. Filipovic's 'A Ribbon for Margaret's Doll':

A powerfully-built man with gray hair sat at his neat brown table, twisting his mustache. Suddenly, he exploded and hit the intercom. Hum!

Most of the writers and translators have a bit to learn, but none of the stories are totally without promise, and I would hope to see all of the writers concerned producing longer, more robust and intricate stories. It certainly cannot be said that the magazine is choosing pieces that make no attempt to exploit sf's possibilities as an enabling device to deal with issues, anxieties and ideas. It will be worth watching how *SF International* develops, and to find a way to give it some support.

Interzone 19, Spring 1987, £1.50

reviewed by Yvonne Rousseau

Interzone is an illustrated quarterly British bedsheet-size magazine, currently of 60 pages, and containing 6 short stories, in addition to an interview (with Gwyneth Jones, in issue 19), pages of book reviews (the longer ones in this issue by Lee Montgomerie and John Clute), sf publishing news, Nick Lowe's film reviews (entitled 'Mutant Popcorn'), an extremely healthy 'Letters' section, and an editorial which will always define what kind of fiction *Interzone* is likely to publish, and why.

As was mentioned in the 'News' section of *Interzone 12*, Summer 1985, the magazine was begun by a 'collective of eight' who 'came together in the summer of 1981 in order to launch a new British sf magazine'. Issue 12's editorial by David Pringle and Simon Ounsley described their aim of encouraging 'genuine science fiction' by means of 'a living, continuing magazine, promoting the art of written sf'; and also explained how they saved trouble for magazine-labellers by coining their own description: 'Radical Hard SF'. Reader-assessment of the published stories is always solicited and the letters - along with the editorial presence - convey the sense of an audience that one could write one's darnedest for. Among the many well-known writers who have done so - as the list of 'Back

Issues' demonstrates - are J.G. Ballard, Michael Bishop, Angela Carter, Thomas M. Disch, William Gibson, Gene Wolfe and Pamela Zoline.

I have found the fiction in recent *Interzones* more enjoyable than *Interzone: The 1st Anthology* (ed. John Clute, Colin Greenland and David Pringle, Dent, London, 1985), which contained the 'best' from the first nine issues - and indeed David Pringle's editorial in *Interzone 17* mentions that 'the number of good stories which are submitted to us have been increasing of late'. In particular, in issue 18 the 'microlite fable' by Ian Watson - 'When Jesus Comes Down the Chimney' - and Peter Lamborn Wilson's 'Fountain of Time' and Gregory Benford's 'As Big as the Ritz' gave pleasure.

Interzone 19 calls itself an 'All "New Star" Special Issue' - in Simon Ounsley's editorial words, 'featuring the work of six emerging writers, two of them with their first published stories, the others adding the second or third story to their body of work in *Interzone*.' Each story is followed by a short writer-biography (sometimes mentioning what kind of response earlier stories received from *Interzone* readers). The two first-appearance writers are Christina Lake with 'Assyria' (a somewhat-Christopher-Priestish paralld-universe-people-swap story) and S. M. Baxter with 'The Xeelee Flower' - the latter, like Paul J. McAuley's 'A Dragon for Seyour Chan', is the amusing space-adventurer-with-resented-employer-succeeds-by-the-skin-of-his-teeth kind, and is one of the most enjoyable in the issue. Richard Kadrey's 'Goodbye Houston Street, Goodbye' is an equally enjoyable absurdist Manhattan-art-scene story where a very pinko-grey piece of 'fun-de-siecle' performance art receives wild applause from a crowd on the beach, 900 000 consecutive life-sentences from the State, and second prize from the Art Commission. Kim Newman's 'The Next-But-One-Man' is a traditional horrible-narrator-gets-his-horrible-due story; and Neil Ferguson's 'The Second Third of C' is set in a grey Orwell-1984 Thatcher-tribalist police-state England where an etymologist - whose interests strongly colour the narrative surface - dies by the (nineteenth-century) book.

Not one of these stories seemed a waste of time to have read; and I endorse Simon Ounsley's exhortation in issue 18: 'Read *Interzone* conspicuously on buses. Keep it with you at all times, making sure the cover is facing outwards. Carry placards in the street. Go on - spread the word.' (Subscriptions are available from *Interzone*, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton, BN1 6LU, UK, and are £6 in the UK or £7 overseas (payable by International Money Order); or Americans may pay US\$10 - or US\$14 for airmail delivery - by cheque. This buys four issues. For a lifetime subscription, UK inhabitants may pay £100, while overseas subscribers pay US\$200 or equivalent - US\$250 for airmail delivery.)

Omega Science Digest, January 1987 (Jan/Feb issue), \$A6

reviewed by Yvonne Rousseau

Omega Science Digest was an Australian bi-monthly, not of digest size but of small-bedsheet size (275 x 210 mm), and its contents included many large and shiny colour plates and some amusing American cartoons. A note 'From the Publisher' in the January 1987 **Omega** regretted that this was the last issue - after 'some six years' - and mentioned that the American 'parent title', **Science Digest**, had 'also been recently discontinued'.

Until 25 January 1986, when the also-defunct-now **Aphelion** was launched, **Omega** was the only professional-looking Australian magazine committed to publishing sf fiction in every issue. The fiction was sometimes only one story, which was sometimes reprinted from elsewhere. A reader who bought the final issue for its fiction alone would have paid \$A6 for 9900 words: a story by Terry Dowling that is spread over 15 pages, if one includes in the page-count the story's title. This is 'Marmodesse', supposedly the name of an island and not - as it sounds - a word designating a person or thing that spoils a well-known brand of sanitary napkin.

'Marmodesse' belongs to a series described in the **Omega** of January 1986 as

a cycle of self-standing stories called 'The New Adventures of Tom Rynosseros' [...] Dowling writes: 'The stories are set in an unspecified future time, following some sort of global turmoil, when inland Australia is divided into many Aboriginal tribal States, each ruled by an Ab'O Prince and his Clever Men. The Nationals and other outsiders are confined to the coastal cities. It is a land of incredible technological progress, but of enforced medievalism as well - where kite-drawn sand-ships called charlovants provide the only acceptable form of travel.'

The 'unspecified' and 'some-sort-of' element is notable in these stories about Captain Tom and his sandship **Rynosseros**, where a thin thread of adventure depends on phenomena that seem expressly invented for a particular plot, having no deeper reason for existence. Moreover, Dowling seems to draw on other people's fiction for blandly decorative effects - where more impassioned or exuberant writers will build on existing fiction to explore or reveal unmistakably personal implications of the dreams or the possible futures that others have envisaged. With such writers, a reader's recollection of the way a theme was treated

elsewhere will lend substance to a work; but in 'Rynosseros' stories, it detracts. Thus, in 'Marmodesse', the reader's imagination is incompletely engaged and each plot-device sends it slipping away to some other work where a kindred idea is treated with intensity, and is an integral part of the whole.

'Marmodesse' begins with the questioning of a double agent who has been 'death conditioned' - no sense of his personality is given, and the ploy set me reflecting instead on George Turner's *Vaneglorry*, with its horrifying account of a son's inflicting this upon his own father. A fight between sandships, with details of the tactical deployment of the wind-catching kite-canopies, recalled to mind C.S. Forester's more mesmerizing accounts of Horatio Hornblower's battle-management of sails and soundings and psychology. And the main plot includes a villain rumoured to be 'a ruthless individual, completely self-serving and very cruel', with armed protectors; his contriving, for the woman who rejected him, of a death involving prolonged agony associated with the growing, inside her own flesh, of an alien aquatic creature's flesh; the villain's transformation into an aquatic creature; and a revenge upon the villain for the woman's torture and death. All these elements (although differently applied) are also found in Michael Bishop's 'The White Otters of Childhood' (1973); but there the tortured woman is knowable, through the narrator's love for her, and her monstrous death is as sickening as the wife's death in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (a recollection that reinforces Bishop's effect, rather than seducing the reader's imagination away from it). In Dowling's story, the narrator is only told about the tortured woman's death - 'her screams were heard from here'. He and the reader know what she looked like, because he meets (and describes) her identical twin - 'a young Samoan woman, slender and very beautiful', with 'long dark hair' that often stirs in a breeze. Nothing more intense is offered. But the themes that Dowling purports to deal with - revenge and love, corruption through power - require intensity. An adverse critical response to Turner's or Bishop's work might be: 'Yuk! I didn't want to know that!' - but having read them, one inescapably does know, and the most one can hope for (if one really doesn't like the knowledge) is to be able, given time, to forget it a little. In Dowling's work, no characters are sufficiently developed to impress their fate on the reader's emotions.

In specifying the works to which my own imagination fled for sustenance when confronted with 'Marmodesse', I am not suggesting that Dowling explicitly borrowed from them; nor that other works would not have been called to mind by other readers - especially thriller-

connoisseurs confronting the final gunplay where villains go down like coconuts at a fair. I think it likely that Dowling is attempting an original use of (enabling) themes that he has observed recurring in science fiction. His probable intentions are suggested by articles he has written in the past - about Jack Vance's work particularly. In 'The Art of Xenography' (Science Fiction 3, December 1978, p. 50), he writes of 'enforced medievalism' - the term he applies to his own imagined Australia in January 1986's *Omega*. In his 'Rynosseros' stories, he is using the plot-outlines that he ascribes to Vance (in Science Fiction 6, August 1980, p. 248): 'All Vance's xenographical works share roughly the same elements: a feature culture to be showcased, a central mystery to be solved, or a quest to be completed.' And in 'Kirth Gersten - The Other Demon Prince' (Science Fiction 11, June 1982), he traces Vance's account of the alteration and the unmasking that revenge brings upon the revenger's character (an account possible only where a character exists - and in 'Marmodesse' the author has stayed too aloof to create one).

To discern the themes in another's work is far less taxing than to bring them alive in one's own fiction; guilt or grief, for example, however harrowingly presented, require that the writer be harrowed still more, in developing them (from the recesses of personal experience) to the level of print. My impression is that Terry Dowling has hoped to be able to present such themes without ravaging his own emotions - without descending into himself (into 'that lonely region of stress and strife', as Joseph Conrad described it); and that he needs either to attempt that descent, or else devote his skills to the kind of story that does not require it. The other possibility is that he has attempted it, but has so far encountered the same failure of 'central transparency' in his writing that Virginia Woolf diagnosed in Vita Sackville-West - who then reported (on 20 November 1926):

Damn the woman, she has put her finger on it. There is something muted. [...] Something that doesn't come alive. I brood and brood, feel I am groping in a dark tunnel. It makes everything I write a little unreal; gives the effect of having been done from outside.

If this is so, there is always hope that a breakthrough will occur.

At least 'Marmodesse' has been competently proof-read - in contrast with the fiction in the previous January's *Omega* (1986), which not only contained such disturbing plausibilities as 'overnight' for 'overnight' and 'Ironmonger' for 'Iremonger', but also secreted two pages of Russell Blackford's story inside Freda McLennan's. The non-fiction bulk of the 108-page January 1987 *Omega* abounds with misprints like 'anancephalic',

'dabate', 'flourshing', 'spin-ffs' and 'vaid' - in this expensive setting, they are like gaps in the floorboards under an expensive carpet. Equally jarring are pages of colour plates with captions that explain nothing - merely repeating a small portion of the text. And it is irritating to find articles introduced editorially with unnecessary misstatements of up-to-the-minuteness; for example, 'Latest developments in evolutionary theory' heads an article explicitly dealing with Dawkins's theory of 'about a decade ago'.

Overwhelmingly, the American digest articles date research or discoveries simply as 'recent' - a vagueness engendering mistrust - and it is amusing to see that 'World Update', reputedly bringing 'news of scientific, technological, medical and lifestyle events from around the world', consists solely of news from America - except for one British study suggesting that American grocery bags are better for the spine than British shopping bags.

Apart from the absence of letters (to the Editor), this seems a fairly typical Omega - and there are many unkind things I could say about it if there were going to be future issues to benefit from admonition. As it is, I merely conclude that, for keeping in touch with the latest scientific developments, Melbourne's daily newspaper (the Age) has always been a far better buy.

LETTERS

Douglas Barbour
11655 - 72nd Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 0B9, CANADA

You've been so good to me, continuing to send copies even when I've not managed to say more than a few words in reply, that upon receiving the March 1987 issue, and shouting hallelujahs because of the Delany essay, I felt that I really must try to let you know that I am properly thankful.

Actually, busy as I've been I have not managed to read all the ASFRs, at least not properly, so the lettercol sent me scurrying to find the September issue, and that sent me back to July: gee, all this interesting stuff! And I did enjoy and learn from it. Isn't that how it's supposed to work?

Well, the thing of it is that unlike so many of Bruce Gillespie's friends, I am an out and out Delany fan (of course writing part of one's PhD thesis on a writer and one's only academic book so far has its effects, too). I had read 'Of Sex, Objects, etc.' but I believe it to be a Very Good Thing indeed that it has finally (and finely) seen the light

of published day. Moreover, having retreated to ASFR 4 and read Russell Blackford's intriguing review essay on *Stars in my Pocket*, I think that ASFR was definitely the right place for it to appear: for although written much earlier and about another book, it actually provides, if not answers, then ways of perceiving (thru) the questions Russell raises. I liked his review, but must confess that, perhaps because I've never read sf as much for the logic as for how a newness can be presented, I wasn't as bothered as he was by what he felt were flaws in Delany's extrapolations. I wonder if being closer to the American feminist insurgence also let me accept many of the games he played with nothing more than sheer delight - I mean I loved the effect of the twisted gender pronouns. And, for me and some of my friends who have also read the book, it was an almost visceral effect, yet it had huge intellectual impact. I guess, also, I will forgive minor slips in anyone who can offer me the kind of intellectual fiery leap of imagination involved in providing the emotional, as well as intellectual, sense of learning a whole cultural tradition (as Delany does when he shows us what Rat Korga learned when he 'read' all the 'books' his new glove allowed him to comprehend). And, I guess that for anyone who's read all of Delany, the Web appears inevitable, even if I don't fully understand all it's doing there yet. I really liked Blackford's judicious reading, however, and thank him for it. And think having Delany's provocative thinking on the problems he was engaging in *Dhalgren* (and since) in print is a very fine thing indeed.

Like John D. Berry, whose intriguing review of Hartwell and Cordesse had all the wit and grace I expect from him, I enjoyed Janeen Webb's review of *Count Zero* (a book I finally have to read). I have to admit I enjoy Gibson partly simply for his pizzazz, but I think he plays his games fairly if roughly sometimes. Certainly, as he has admitted (at least to the readers of *Rolling Stone*), he is not that good on science, but he loves what certain kinds of technology offer him as 'metaphor' (not the best word here but it will have to do for now). I'm looking forward to the book.

In fact, not only do you keep inundating us every two months but the damn mags have a lot in them. When I do find the time to read them I find I can't put them down. If your conversation is like that I hope I meet you all the next time I get to Melbourne. It can only be a lot of fun. I enjoy the editorials too.

Our local reputation suggests that we are known better for food and partying than conversation or editing, but feel free to drop in anyway. (JF)

Michael Moorcock,
Anthony Sheil Associates,
43 Doughty Street,
London WC1N 2LF
UK

A short note in haste. Hope the enclosed [a number of items on the topic of pornography] is of interest. I sent your article ['Who is John Norman and why is he saying these dreadful things about women' by Lucy Sussex, ASFR 8] to the sleazy MD of WHS [the Managing Director of W. H. Smith]. The enclosed stuff might be of interest. Have you read Andrea Dworkin? She's superb. I happen to believe she's right on almost everything, too. I also like her fiction. If you want to quote my letters, fine. I'm sick of being misquoted however. And nothing's likely to diminish my anger, either. I'm convinced pornography incites many men to acts of violence (many of them 'minor') against women. It also confirms men and women in mutually destructive roles. Better people than me have said this. I'd like to see more ASFRs - it's about the best magazine in the sf world by the look of this issue.

Keep in touch.

Michael Moorcock to W. H. Smith & Sons Ltd
12 May 1987

Dear Mr Hornby,

No doubt you'll remember our correspondence of last year regarding Feminist Book Fortnight and John Norman.

Last year you chose to ignore my points about John Norman and suggest that I was trying to get you to remove the books of a 'competing author' from your shelves.

Once again could I suggest you ensure that you display these books out of the reach of impressionable children?

I enclose a recent article (one of several published in the last couple of years) in which the author quotes from one title in the series. Would you care to read it?

I don't think Professor Norman and I are competing for the same readers. I certainly hope we're not.

Michael Moorcock to Science Fiction Chronicle
published April 1987

I gather there's been some reporting of my correspondence last June over W. H. Smith's half-hearted support of Feminist Book Fortnight. I was not attempting to have John Norman's books censored. I merely suggested they be removed from the casual reach of impressionable children.

However, I wouldn't want anyone to think my personal views are anything like as liberal. It would give me great satisfaction, for instance, to see Mr. Norman garroted in one of his own bondage harnesses and his publishers taken out by almost any means, conventional or nuclear.

Michael Moorcock
Address as above

Below is the expected response from the MD of Smiths to my sending him your article.

Simon Hornby to Michael Moorcock Esq
21 May 1987

Thank you for your letter. I remember our correspondence last year which, as I recall, you gave to The Guardian without having the courtesy to inform me first.

I am grateful to you for writing and note the advice contained in your letter.

I'm currently involved with a group of people (brought together by C. Itzen) discussing a means of making it illegal to publish material which depicts violence against women as described in [a piece by Itzen]. This doesn't clash with my own stand against censorship since my politics allow quite a lot of room for strategic inconsistency. That's one good reason for remaining an anarchist. I already have a means of operating effectively while remaining aware of the paradoxes involved. Yes, this was a small piece of proselytizing for anarcho-feminism...

It saves a lot of time.

We are still not sure that quoting directly from letters is always fruitful, but it seems a step ahead of not quoting directly. (JF)