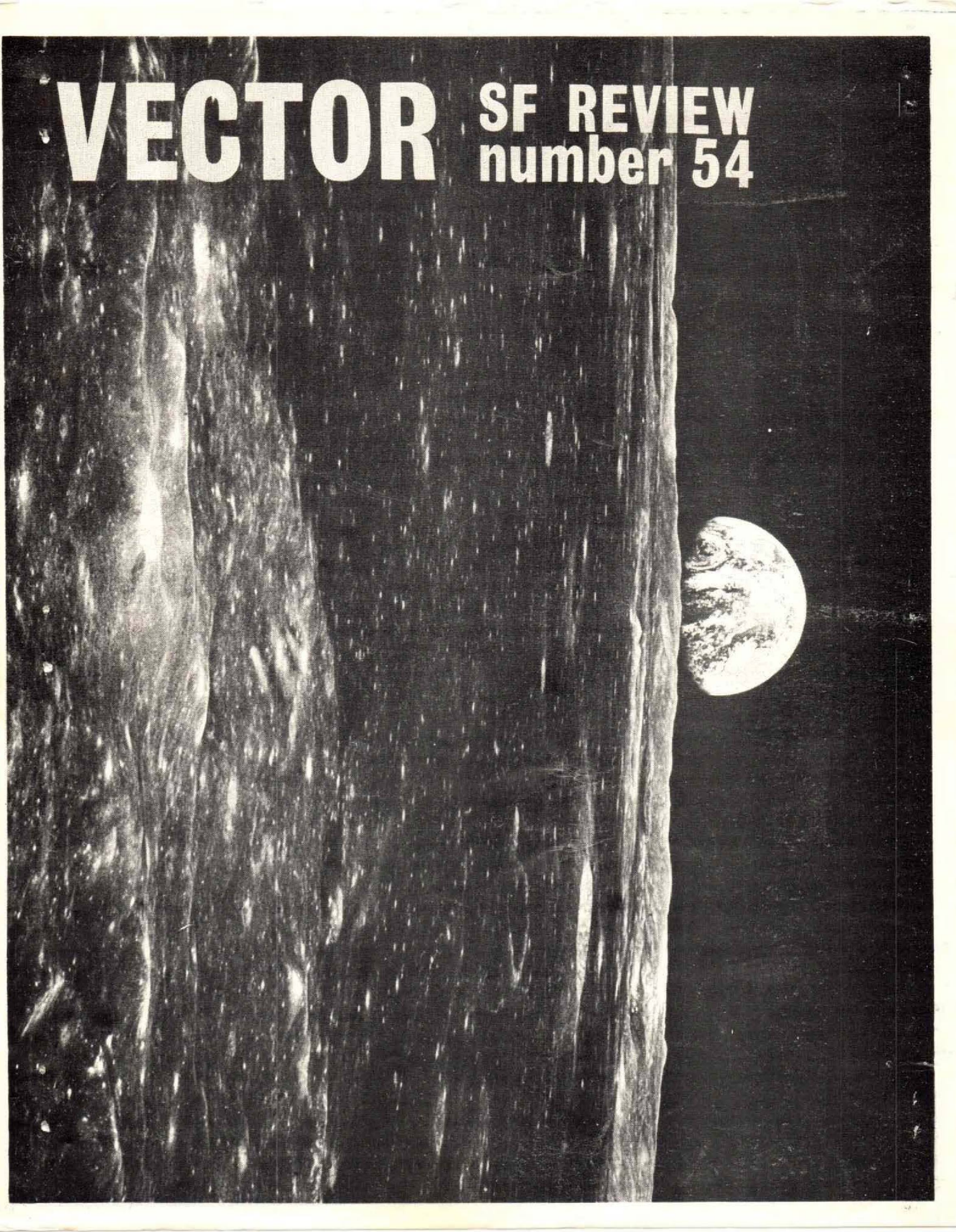


VECTOR

SF REVIEW
number 54



VECTOR



NUMBER 54

Autumn 1969

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British Science Fiction Association (Ltd), 10 Lower Church Lane, Bristol BS2 8BA

Another Dimension



BOOK BIND

The whole state of science fiction publishing in this country seems to be in a bit of a mess. Books escape rather than being released with a push. That an author should have to wait more than a year for his books to go from him to the book-buying public is appalling. Books are dated before they are even allowed into the fight for readers.

The worst hold up is at the paperback phase. A book reaches its biggest buying public at least three years after it was written. Perhaps an immediate paperback issue, with hardcover editions for libraries would be a more efficient approach. The paperback market is ten to twenty times larger, in terms of the number of books sold, than the hardback market. Libraries may attract readers, but at book prices just five times the paperback cover price it seems that the authors and publishers are giving library readers a heavy subsidy.

The wonders of publishing don't stop here. We have already heard about disappearing books (Vector 50/51). Here things don't look as bad as they did, some publishers are ~~opening suggestions~~. Perhaps they would like to reissue some of the "old masters." They might appreciate some help here. Which "golden oldies" would you like to see ressurected?

When a book finally does stagger into the book shops its troubles really begin. For a start the only sf readers likely to know what has just been published are booksellers, librarians, and BSFA members. I know of just two bookshops that have a fairly comprehensive, but by no means complete, collection of current sf. And these are in the middle of London! Specialist shops concentrating on paperbacks do exist but, as I have already pointed out, these are mostly selling history books.

And then we come to the books. One big let down! I don't mean the content, this comes in a wide enough variety for most of us to find something to taste. But the packaging of sf books - particularly the dust-jackets - is pitiful. With the exception of Faber and Hart-Davis nobody seems to bother. Macdonald's attempt at a variable cover using a standard format was a valiant attempt; together the books look interesting enough, but individually they don't succeed. It is the non-specialist publishers who have come up with the best covers, for example, Hutchinson's THE NEW SF and Allison and Busby's THE FINAL PROGRAMME.

Paperbacks fare better, with different publishers dominating the field at different times. Penguin were fine until Aldridge used up his ideas. Panther then took the lead, but allowed themselves to stagnate until Sphere took over the position that they now hold.

For publicity the publishers seem to rely on reviews - not a wise thing to do with sf books which rarely get reasonable coverage. Occassional advertisements do appear, but so infrequently as to be negligible. While the Nobel Prize is a little harder to come by than a Hugo, I would have thought that John Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR Hugo should have given the publisher a chance to give it a push. At the same time Penguin could have given SQUARES OF THE CITY some publicity and Sidgwick and Jackson could have given QUICKSAND a boost.

Looking at all this, it is surprising that the news of a book's escape ever gets through to the reading public. It's hard work keeping up with new science fiction!

Carnell Carnell

on

**Kevin
questioned by: O'Malley**

In New Writings in SF 1, you say that science fiction is an unwieldy and unattractive title and that the genre should be more aptly called speculative fiction. In New Writings in SF 2 you say that sf could best be defined as "speculative fiction based upon known facts and extended into future possibilities." The magazine New Worlds describes its content as speculative fiction. Do you agree that a field of speculative fiction has evolved which, though closely allied to sf, cannot be classed as sf?

....The term 'science fiction' has always been an anachronism and many people have suggested changes but none have been forthcoming. As long ago as the late '30s John Beynon Harris (John Wyndham) was urging the use of 'speculative fiction' to no avail as the term 'science fiction' was already well established. Since the late '40s, however, and the demise of Unknown Worlds there have been an overlapping of the fantasy and sf fields and this is where 'speculative fiction' is being recognised. Ie stories or novels which do not have any basis in science or scientific extrapolation at all. A political novel based on the future (1984 etc) is speculative fiction, not sf, by my standards. And this would rule out over 50% of all novels published in each year!

You say in the foreword to New Writings No 7 that science fiction brings scientific development into closer perspective; in NW 9 that the good sf writer has to be one jump ahead of current events, eg you point out that stories set on Venus are dated as new probes establish that Venus would be uninhabitable by humans. Do you think that scientific advance has caused the subject matter of sf to increase, for instance to include speculative fiction?

....Yes, very much so. Every new scientific accomplishment - or even the experimentation itself - widens the writer's horizons and increases his potential for including new possibilities in his stories.

Do you think that 'space sf' has been played to death? In NW 8 you say that the space history has been with us a long time and it will be part of the genre as long as sf is published, for the permutations on the theme are almost infinite. Yet as you point out in NW 12 the new writers, especially Ballard, ignore space.

....No. How can it when Man has only taken such a short step into space? Marvellous though the moon trips are (and I never expected to see them in my lifetime) the vastness of our own Solar system, let alone our own galaxy, still leaves more than sufficient room for vivid imagination of "what might happen out there." The space story will still be the basic

ingredient of sf, especially for newer younger readers. On the other hand I applaud the authors who explore other concepts and ignore space entirely. SF has wide versatility now that space fiction is only one of innumerable facets - and the best stories are in non-space areas.

Would you agree that sf has become propaganda for the space race, medical innovations etc?

....No. SF has always been predicting the possibilities of so many futures available to us - including extinction; but during the height of the Bomb scare in the '50s, sf was used as propaganda (unintentionally for the most part) to point out the terrible consequences of irresponsibility. However, once invented the Bomb could not be 'uninvented' only controlled by sensibility. This does not apply to any of the other sciences so far as I can see.

Do you think that present sf pays more attention to man as an individual or as an entity dominated by the machines he has invented?

....Yes, far more than at any time during its existence. The assumption being that Man is now in control of his technological environment and therefore master of the machine. I am fascinated, however, by the possibilities of computers and have an uncomfortable feeling that one of these days one will come 'alive'. Plenty of novels and short stories have been dealing with this possibility of late.

The series of New Writings in SF has always had an international flavour. I especially liked Belgian Eddy Bertin's The City Dying in No 13. It was reminiscent of Bester. In New Writings 14 you have an excellent Spanish sf writer's story. Do you think that European sf has anything to contribute to 'anglo-saxon' sf?

....Yes. Most of the European countries missed the magazine era which the Americans and the British grew up with. They went, in the main, to the more advanced sf novel. In this respect, many European authors have a different outlook on the genre; the French, for instance, rely almost entirely upon their own writers for their material. 'Local' writers in Germany, Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, a few in Scandinavia, Holland and Belgium, and indeed many in Russia, are producing sf stories to suit their own environment and scientific outlook. These can only add a useful contribution to Anglo-Saxon sf. The main trouble is obtaining translations.

Also in NW 13 you write that 'medieval futurism' has developed in American sf, eg Jack Vance's The Dragon Masters. Do you think that there are any substantial differences in American, British, and Australian sf?

....There are fundamental not substantial differences between British and American sf. I do not think that we can include Australian in this question because very little is published 'down under' and primarily the American and British are concerned with publishing for their own markets. It would take pages to adequately answer this question, involving a broad analysis of writing techniques and plots. The gap is bridged, however, by the number of British authors who successfully sell regularly to the American market (and the competition is tough!) and the far larger contingent of American writers whose novels are bought for British publication.

You predicted that the '60s would see sweeping changes in the general presentation of ideas in sf, and the genre would take some unexpected twists and turns. What are your thoughts on the literary content of sf, traditional and new wave?

....At this date (mid 1969) I think my original prediction has come true. There have been sweeping changes in the genre, particularly in the so-called

'New Wave' approach. These latter, however, can only add to the structure of so-called traditional sf. It is obvious that the two will merge; in fact, are doing so now. And from the result comes a more erudite and comprehensive form of sf. There is no doubt at all that the literary quality of most sf novels at least is far higher now than it ever has been and many are better than novels in the general fiction field.

In the Foreword in NW 13 you also say that since the mid-20s there have been four major changes in sf style (the present being the fifth), could you elaborate?

....I once wrote in an editorial that these changes in the style of sf writing came in 11-year cycles, corresponding roughly to the sunspot cycle. Taking 1926-37, we had the mechanical era — machine-age ideas with poorish writing in many cases, the machine dominating Man. As this period waned, 1938-49 saw the sweeping changes brought about by the result of John W Campbell's influence on the field — 'nova' stories, the integration of Man and machine, highrr standards of writing, logical extrapolations and better descriptiveness. SF began to emerge as a literature. 1950-61, the emergence of the sf novel and all its implications as an art form. 1961-plus, the current cycle, experimentation, development of writing techniques, Man dominating the machine, movement in depth into all the -isms and -ologies. The next cycle? Probably an amalgamation of the past two but I have a feeling that some really outstanding novels will be published in the mid 70s and up. Novels like Frank Herbert's Dune and John Brunner's Stand On Zanzibar are but the forerunners.

Do you foresee any future changes (or even a future) for the style, quantity and quality of science fiction?

....Partially answered above. Quality will continue to improve as quantity drops off a little. SF at the moment is still in a state of flux (saleswise) but when the level settles it will be to a very satisfactory one. Perhaps a little less low-grade material will be seen - I think that this must inevitably go to the wall. Only quality material will survive in the long term.

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The Fallacy of "Right" Thinking Martin Pitt

At the Oxford Science Fiction Convention a number of otherwise interesting lectures and discussions were marred by faults so common as to be accepted or at last pass unnoticed. Faults which may be summed up by saying that the speakers were out of date. For academics in the various fields of study known as the 'Arts' a retrospective view and a historical standpoint are necessary rather than reprehensible, since their profession demands close examination of material already accumulated. It is, however, far more reprehensible in the case of professional scientists who, although they must know of past work, should be looking to the future that they are, to a greater or lesser degree, creating. In the world of science fiction, and particularly speculative fiction, the strange way in which both readers and writers remain firmly past-oriented is nothing short of astonishing.

There are two main forces at work here, one being psychological and more basic, the other social and more insidious. The first is the simple human need for reassurance and security. This is supplied in various types of adventure and horror literature, with their terrible but make-believe dangers, in the predictability of a space-opera and in the cosy familiarity of a sword-and-sorcery setting. It is also met less obviously in the moralising of so-called sociological science fiction, in which the writer is in fact only preaching to the converted, giving the reader the same satisfaction of moral indignation that the rich once got from sermons on the sins of the lower classes. This natural desire for security has unfortunately led to a fear of anything new, and a struggle to retain what has come to be regarded as acceptable. It is the pressure of society to resist change which is the second, less obvious force at work.

In particular, society fears new ways of thought. One has only to think of the many wars and persecutions started by quite insignificant differences of opinion. Unfortunately for the anti-heretics, such measures recognise that there is an alternative to their way of thinking, and focus unwelcome attention on it. Other methods have thus been developed and may be seen in constant use by politicians the world over. The chief of these is nit-picking, arguing over minor technicalities, side-tracking the main issues, concentrating on trivia. Thus it is that most intelligent people today ignore the real discovery of the last six hundred years - science - and think in a manner more creditable to a Greek intellectual a couple of millenia ago. "Logical thinking" is worshipped and praised as if it were a new invention, whereas it is, in fact, only preventing the progress of scientific thinking, which is a great deal more applicable to the world of the twentieth century.

Logic was a system invented to deal with the real world using reason. From it came mathematics, which attempted to describe this real world in

an accurate and useful way which might be manipulated give information not otherwise available (other than possible by guesswork, intuition or experience). As an achievement, their invention is impressive, mathematics and some of the mechanisms of logic have great practical utility. A far better way of dealing with the world around us has, however, been devised. Its name is science. Yet all too often, of writers and readers, and even scientists themselves equate science with "technology" and act as if the discoveries of this technology were items to be dealt with by logic. This is where the fallacy arises.

Logic, it is often forgotten, is based on a couple of conceptions and some assumptions arising from them. The first of these is the idea of "universal truths," that is to say "hard" facts, precise and invariant statements about the real world. The second is the idea of the "self-evident" nature of certain things, in particular of certain premises and steps in a proof. If it is required that all statements of fact about the real world be obtainable from self-evident premises - regarded as universal truths - via a series of self-evident steps in the proof.

Once proven, such a statement acquires the status of a universal truth, and may be used as a premise in further proofs. So-called "science" is too often regarded as a method of deriving premises on which to base logical proofs, yet it should be obvious by now that any scientific theory - be it the rotational period of the planet mercury or the nature of heat - should be regarded as a temporary expedient or at best a partial truth. There have been too many cases where the obvious or widely accepted idea has been overthrown.

Despite the protestations of the occasional "pure" mathematician, mathematics is not an art form prostituted in the name of utility by soulless engineers. It is a tool with an extremely important function, which nevertheless only exists because of its usefulness. It has no more right than any other cow to be considered sacred, despite an unmistakably high milk-yield. The structure of mathematics is quite arbitrary, and the so-called "properties" of a part of it are only a result of arbitrary decisions in creating another part. The reason for the commonly accepted structure is that it does in some measure represent the observable universe, but this is only because it has been so determined. There is no reason to think that this is the only positive structure, or that it is in some way "natural" only that its superficial resemblance to reality makes it remarkably useful.

Mathematics can be used to construct "models" of the world. But mathematics, unlike the real world, is exact. Whenever models are built they are approximations. In practice, of course, the degree of approximation in mathematics may be so small as not to matter, and the actual mechanisms of logic may be used to deal with situations in which the premises of argument are really in very little practical doubt. Many areas of modern research, however, are starting to require new techniques of analysis, areas including the study of the manner in which the brain functions, and the studies of human mass behaviour and action, such as "peace games".

Methods of analysis are now being developed, in particular computer-based systems, in which the need to assume ideality is at least reduced by, in a simple case, telling the computer to discover patterns in a set of data rather than trying to "fit" the data to some theory. It must be realised that in such techniques the computer remains a giant calculating machine. It is not that they do not use mathematical techniques, but that they make use of them in a less limited way. In the end it may not be the revolution in technology that is most important, but the revolution in thinking.

Boiled Pertinence: Contension

Keith Freeman

What, you may ask, is Pertinence? Briefly it is a publication put out by Archie Mercer, and in his own words: "This is not a BSFA publication. That is, it is neither "of" nor "for" the BSFA as such. It is, instead, a publication about the BSFA for various people who might reasonably be expected to take an intelligent interest in the affairs of the organisation concerned."

There have, to date been four Pertinences published in January, February, May and August of this year. The fourth of these appeared after this selection of bits from Pertinence. Now that you have an idea what Pertinence is you will probably be wondering why this should be appearing in Vector, and why I should be mixed up in it. Here I can quote from the third issue: KEITH FREEMAN: "The only people who can tell us what else is wanted are those members who require something else - let them ask and no doubt the committee will see what can be done."

"One thought has just struck me - could not the "meat" from Pertinence be reprinted in Vector to get wider coverage? I'm not doubting your judgement on who should get Pertinence, but feel the essence of it should receive wider publicity." ← Just so long as the editor of Vector agrees, and as someone other than myself is willing to do the necessary re-editing, I'm all for it! AM→

The editor duly agreed, so as it was my suggestion here I am doing the "re-editing." Several subjects have been raised in Pertinence and dealt with satisfactorily - other points are still "open ended", and it is these that I feel should be brought to your attention. Herewith some pertinent points from Pertinence.....

(from no.1)

OBSERVING THE CONVENTIONS When the (unincorporated) BSFA was founded in 1958 it was generally agreed that the Association should have overall responsibility for the annual British sf convention in the future. It is widely accepted that this is how it should be, and each annual committee is set up at the Association's agm, under nominal Association auspices. The actual relationship between the BSFA and the convention committee, however, is not always as cordial as it should be.

The reason for this - or certainly a very important part of it - is that although the BSFA is nominally the senior party, the convention committee is actually in the stronger position. The Association as a whole has to be seen to be producing continually; magazines, services, ideas, or be thought a failure. The convention committee, on the other hand, has, in its year of existence, to produce once. It can lie down on the job for months at a time and still come up with a successful convention. During the year people may chafe at the lack of news, but they have the date reserved and provided they receive some sort of confirmatory newsletter a month, or even less, beforehand

they'll happily turn up. The total membership of the British annual convention nowadays is broadly equivalent to that of the BSFA, the two memberships overlapping to a great extent without being identical. Perhaps the most telling point: the annual convention is more important to its average registered member than is the BSFA to its average member. The convention is a high point in the year for those who attend, and they will happily set aside ten or twenty times the money that they are willing to spend on other BSFA matters during the year.

Thus, if a convention committee tells the BSFA to go peddle its Vector's there isn't much the BSFA can do about it. Theoretically the BSFA could disown a convention committee and appoint another one with a brief to organise a rival convention elsewhere. Even if there was time to do this, neither of the two conventions could necessarily count on even half the attendants that a single convention can - some people would stay away from both out of disgust, bewilderment, or disappointment. As a result both functions would probably run at a loss, and nobody would be the winner.

This is not a very palatable fact for the BSFA to have to be prepared to face every year. What, then, is to be done about it? The only certain way to overcome it is for the committee controlling the BSFA to handle the convention itself, with comparatively few coopted assistants. This has been done on two occasions - in 1960 and 1965. It throws a lot of extra work on people who ought to have enough anyway, and some of their duties are liable to be neglected. Another possible way would be for the BSFA to increase its membership and thus its influence to such an extent that its voice became dominant. However, a larger Association might well lead to a larger convention and the problem would remain.

Another possibility is for the BSFA to tie down each convention committee by a signed agreement under which each party undertook to do and/or refrain from doing certain specified things. There are the obvious objections to this course - the chosen convention committee might refuse to sign the document, or do the various things under protest.

Meanwhile the convention committees have the upper hand and the BSFA can only bow gracefully to circumstances and let each convention committee run the convention as it wishes. The convention committees should show equal grace towards the BSFA affording it all reasonable facilities and doing nothing that would injure the Association's good image or cause it to "lose face".

from No. 2

DOREEN PARKER refers to a recent conversation with MIK DAMTON, who is a member of a number of assorted convention-holding associations, and he regards conflict between the convention committee and the general committee in each case as virtually inevitable.

CHRIS PRIEST I would say that your comments regarding conventions are slightly off the beam, since the conventions are now totally divorced from the BSFA. That is, funds are passed from one con to another. This also means that the BSFA cannot be in any way responsible for debts etc. It would be better if the system reverted to what it was a few years back, when the BSFA appointed a particular sub committee to run the conventions for the BSFA. It should be clear that the convention is a BSFA function, and that greatly advantageous reductions in registration fees should be available to members (the present 5s is not a sufficient reduction). The con should be given more publicity through the BSFA publications, and there should be a BSFA office at the con.

At present, the relationship between the BSFA and the convention has to

be renegotiated every year. The BSFA bulletin always gives the latest convention news and tries to entice members to register. There is always a BSFA table at the con, manned by all too small a roster. Beryl points out that this is largely because people go to cons to attend the programme etc, rather than man tables. AM→

TERRY JEEVES: "CONVENTIONS - BSFA or private. First, the facts as I see them:

- 1 A yearly convention is a 'good thing'.
- 2 If the BSFA can have a finger in the pie, it's a good thing for the BSFA (an extra perk for members of discount is offered, plus added publicity).
- 3 A con needs a committee on the spot, it cannot be effectively organised from a distance.
- 4 A private (non BSFA) convention has no need to follow BSFA ideas.

At a BSFA con a group bids for the next con and they may not agree to tie in with the BSFA, in which case the BSFA may bid for an alternative site/GROUP. If the non BSFA bid wins then the BSFA can only do, and say, what the convention committee allows - or what the BSFA can buy as value for giving a loan to the committee.

The only way to alter this is for the BSFA to sew up cons so tightly that no outside bidder will step in. To do this the BSFA must offer the best organisation (programme, hotel etc.) and ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ORGANISING every year.

If the BSFA is to organise every year it must have a permanent committee to do this - and that is impossible unless the same site is used every year, and the committee lives in that town.

A risky compromise would be for the BSFA to draw up a booklet giving all the steps, rules, prices and details of running a convention - what to pay for halls, details of numbers, rooms etc required at previous conventions, insurance details etc. This should be available right from the start.

Next, the BSFA should ask, in Vector, before a con, for bidders for the con after that year's. Other people can still come forward at the con and bid but only if no BSFA members are bidding.

The above is not perfect but might ease the organisation problems and help the BSFA to slant the cons the way they want and keep them under BSFA rules.

MARTIN PITT A point of economics - a concom usually heads for the hotels with the cheapest con halls, which are usually the ones with the most expensive private rooms. The point is that a hotel which charges an economic price for the accommodation, and thus has a moderate profit margin, is forced to make some reasonable charge for the use of ballrooms etc. Conversely, an establishment with a high profit margin can afford to give away the main rooms as a "loss leader" to get customers.

EMILY LINDSAY I can't really see why the BSFA should want to have control of the cons and I can't ever see concom agreeing to hand over control.

BRYN FORTEY The BSFA must and should be concerned with the overall responsibility for the annual British sf convention. The problems are formidable. To set out a few points:

- a Serving BSFA officers have enough to do without running a con.
- b The concom should consist of people residing within the geographic area holding the con.
- c It is fairest to hold it in different parts of the country each year.

Two points which might improve BSFA concom relationships:

- i No non BSFA members should be allowed to serve on the concom.
- ii The BSFA should appoint a permanent "Convention Officer."

Point (i) might mean that the services of some excellent people would be lost, but it would mean that only people who think enough of the BSFA to join would be connected with the running of the convention and the BSFA's tie in with the convention would be strengthened.

Point (ii): a BSFA Convention Officer would liaise between the concom and the BSFA committee. He would advise both parties of the other's position should disputes arise, act as conciliation officer, and help an inexperienced concom. Ideally he would be a regular and experienced conventioneer with a flair for diplomacy and organising." ((Ref (ii), I would point out your (b) - about residing within the geographical area concerned. AM))

from No. 3

JILL ADAMS The Convention ought to be under the BSFA's wing, not privately run. The profits, if any, being handed on to the next concom as they used to be, the accounts published, the BSFA making good any loss, and taking steps to see it doesn't happen again!

Dave Barber and I are custodians of a sum of money that is supposed to be used for BSFA cons - looks as though we're going to hold it for ever!

The ideal is for BSFA members only to run cons, placing themselves under the BSFA committee who only keep a general eye on things. Under such an arrangement the final responsibility would be the BSFA's, not just financially but also for general conduct.

AUDREY WALTON I did not realise that outside people made bids to run the conventions, and this seems strange to me. Surely it would be better for an organisation to attend to its own affairs? ((A number of newcomers to the "fannish" scene seem to harbour similar thoughts. The annual convention was an institution before ever the BSFA was formed, and not every fan is currently a BSFA member. Some never have been. If there is one way in which the BSFA misfires, it is that by its very existence it divides us into two distinct categories - members and non members.)) AM

ETHEL LINDSAY Cons can help the BSFA more by making people keen on the delights of meeting. What the BSFA can do for concoms and con programmes is not very much. The N3F - in America - run a hospitality room at cons which has been very much appreciated by many fans - old and new. Now there is something that the BSFA could well copy...., however, it takes people who are BSFA members who are willing to give up con time and work. You know just what a small band of people that would be.

KEITH FREEMAN One point in Terry Jeeves comments I'd like to add to. IT was laid down a few years ago that bids would be taken for two years ahead. This was almost disastrous because a committee bid for the con, was accepted two years ahead and was then withdrawn the next year. What I would like to see encouraged is the discussion (in Vector or the BSFA bulletin) of possible sites - hotels (sizes, prices etc) - surely amongst the BSFA membership we have a pretty wide area of the country covered. Any concom who have the d tails about various hotels that would fit their plans could then bid to run a con.

TONY UNDERWOOD There are a lot of people who get more out of a con than the BSFA, everyone gets at least something out of it. Even if the food and concom are lousy a good bottle and a room party can drown the sorrows. There has to be a way to involve more people in the BSFA.

Which is where we came in really. I agreed to include bits from Pertinence in Vector because I thought that BSFA members should get some idea of the organisation and politicking that goes on on their behalf. Some may ask if it is worth all the bother. What does it influence? That's for you to decide.

BOOKS

Brian Aldiss's BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD marks a departure for its author in that it is not a work of science fiction. Daily Telegraph

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD tells of a Europe mentally devastated by a rain of psychedelic bombs. With reality and illusion confused society degenerates into an autodestructive downward spiral. New Scientist

... his text has energy and humour and it is something that it invites comparisons which it cannot live with. The Guardian

Big subject bit sinpill perhaps are no sould charabacters but freaky pose prose prize pride is conslicktent is hymnaginative does create atmonstrousphere. Observer

I put my nausea ("the future lies fainting in the arms of the present") aside: this is still a book of exemplary badness. Sunday Times

... the language is fantastic - a whole novel of colliding words with multiple meanings. At times the language reads like poetry, at others it stumbles and confuses, much as one would expect from a psychedelized tongue. New Scientist

Mr Aldiss seems to have been carried off by a sea of teenage prattle. Sunday Times

I would rather read Mr Aldiss's interesting failures than many a boring success. The Guardian

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD Faber 30s

Also by Brian Aldiss and recently issued by Sphere Books: An Age/Report on Probability A / Hothouse / The Primal Urge / The Saliva Tree

There are many books published in the USA that don't see light of book sellers shelf over here. Others turn up long after they should, often making them dated and irrelevant. You can overcome this by buying the new books from the USA as they are published. This isn't exactly going to put Britain's hard-back publishers out of business - imports are in dozens rather than thousands.

Plus books - run by BSFA member Tony Belton - sells American paperbacks at remarkably reasonable prices (ACE DOUBLES, for example, can be had for 5s each).

Postal sales address:
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For more personal attention call at:

341 London Road, West Croydon
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365 High Rd, Willesden, NW10
909 Romford Rd, Manor Pk, E12
151 Lewes Rd, Brighton, Sussex

In Plus Books' list is one of the most interesting stories I have read for quite some time. Dave Van Arnam's STARMIND (Ballantine SF 75¢) is an intriguing extension of transplant surgery. This time it is brains that are gathered together - the bits of three - into one body. For space-buccaneer addicts there is CATCH THE STAR WIND by A Bertram Chandler. Specially designed for the ageing reader: "This Easy-Eye Edition is set in large, clear type - at least 30 per cent larger than usual.

Best of the books from Tony Belton is, in my opinion, HOLDING YOUR EIGHT HANDS - an anthology of sf poetry edited by Edward Lucie Smith. This wasn't actually on the Plus Books list, but was imported for me in a very short time and at a reasonable price. (Doubleday \$1.95)

INTANGIBLES INC & OTHER STORIES by Brian Aldiss
Faber & Faber 25s

Philip Strick

The title story of Brian Aldiss' collection is both the earliest and the weakest. Written in 1959, it is a whimsical antique beside his brand new 'Since the Assassination'; the ten years stretching between these two novellas have seen the transformation of Aldiss from an efficient raconteur to the most adventurous and unsettling writer at work in science-fiction today. Once, when giving advice on how to write, A E Van Vogt said that one should never hold back ideas in order to build future stories around them; keep them flowing, he said, and the only problem will be finding time to keep up with them. There are enough ideas in INTANGIBLES INC to fill a dozen novels and fifty short stories - as with THE SALIVA TREE, Aldiss is a one-man spectacular and the reader can only grasp at the flow.

As usual his major preoccupations are those of the overpopulation problem, the attendant growth of universal psychosis, the nature and flexibility of time, and the influences of history on the future. With 'Neanderthal Planet' (a Chinese box story encapsulating a seemingly infinite number of different narratives), he defines a racial schizophrenia emerging from the conflict between the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons and uses this, not too seriously, to reassert man's supremacy over the machines that have been running his world since his abdication. In 'Send Her Victorious' the struggle is between an overcrowded 21st Century and a destructive 19th, with such extras as a dream sequence involving sex, Victoriana, and prehistoric monsters, an anti-gravitational shield to protect the Earth from the Moon's tidal influences, rats that get their kicks from spelling out 'Shakespeare' in lights, and a trip into the Earth's navel. This extraordinary story, written in 1968, is surrealistic sf at its best, composed in an infectious terror at the speed with which actuality and hallucination are fast becoming indistinguishable in a world defined by television screens (echoes here, of course, of REPORT ON PROBABILITY A) and essential drugs (at one point there is a commercial for Draculin, which will give the taker the illusion of isolation - a desirable commodity in a society where whole families live in phone booths). At the same time, it's an exercise story, playing with words, names and jokes in a cheerful irreverence that counterbalances the bleakness of its vision.

The Aldiss method seems increasingly to be one of division of style from subject: the lighter the former, the more sinister the latter, as in 'Randy's Syndrome' where the world's footuses refuse to be born because they are too disgusted at the state of society to relinquish their own individualities ("the birth of a human being is the death of a foetus," says Aldiss cheerfully). Here again, the themes of overcrowding - the average married couple occupies a room ten feet by eight - of racial instinct and of disgust for contemporary mismanagement, are offset by an almost woman's-magazine chattiness and the petty paraphernalia of television interviews, coffee parties, and a nervous breakdown straight out of THE PUMPKIN EATER. And after the whole thing has been neatly tied up as a mass feminine psychosis, Aldiss kicks it open again with a single punch-line.

Undoubtedly, however, 'Since the Assassination' is the best of the bunch, a dazzling display of notions and neuroses that nags like a mouthful of rotten teeth. Macbeth, American violence, the moon landing, television bugging, and the thought/action conflict are stirred together like an LSD fantasy to support the often-voiced Aldiss plea that 'the world can only solve its problems by throwing them open and facing them, not by suppressing them'. Suppression, as Freud can be used to prove, results only in nightmare. And this is hardly the frame of mind, Aldiss says, in which one wants to seek immortality. It's a powerful conclusion to one of this year's most important publications.

TERMUSH by Sven Holm
Faber 21s

Bob Holdstock

Danes also write science fiction; TERMUSH, a very short novel by "Denmark's foremost young writer", proves that they can write exciting and professional sf. In the form of a diary TERMUSH tells the story of a hotel occupied by a few individuals who have avoided direct contact with an atomic war, and who now live in the isolation of the radiation-proof building, stocked up for a lengthy stay until the land outside is habitable.

It is by no means an original idea but the conflict between personalities. The "big-brother" tone of the never-seen management who give the orders, and the ever-present fear of outsiders trying to break into the hotel, are all very skillfully developed. It could have had the impact of, say, COLOSSUS, but it is too short. TERMUSH is, nevertheless, an absorbing and sombre vision of one of the least pleasant possible futures. - - - -

DRAGONFLIGHT by Anne McCaffrey
Bapp & Whiting 30s

Jean Pinney

This novel brings together two superbly written and fascinating pieces of fiction. The first deservedly elevated Anne McCaffrey to first lady of sf by winning her a Hugo, the second earned a Nebula award.

The brilliant imagination of Anne McCaffrey has set the scene of DRAGONFLIGHT in a future world. Distinct from the automated metropolis so often depicted it evokes an aura of a bygone era, as if time had coursed full circle. DRAGONFLIGHT introduces a society of Weyrs, Holds, Teaches, and the righteously proud winged-dragons of Pern who, together with their riders, strive to protect the downtrodden planet from the ever-expanding threat of attack by the Silver Threads from the outer realms of space.

DRAGONFLIGHT makes compelling and exciting reading. - - - -

ROCKETS IN URSA MAJOR by Fred and Geoffrey Hoyle
Heinemann 25s

Michael Kenward

The Hoyles have clearly decided that it would be ridiculous to write a serious space-fiction story in these days of Moon flights. So they have thrown all aside and written a lightweight piece of space opera, which, whatever the authors' intentions, is a good satire on sf.

The dialogue is straight out of World War I boys' books:

"Best of luck Fanshawe," said John Fielding, the scientific leader of the project. "When you return I shall have aged much more than you."

"If your bally refrigerator works properly, Fielding," replied the ship's commander. "I can't see myself doing a recce in Ursa Major with a crew of abominable snowmen." he turned to his crew. "Right-ho, chaps, off we go. I'll tuck you up in the ice-box when we're on course."

It's all about a deep space mission sent on a decades-long trip. They return. Or at least their ship does. Empty. Inside there is a cryptic message: "If this ship returns to Earth, then mankind is in deadly peril - God help you - Fanshawe." And they are! But instead of the God's coming to the rescue a fleet of space ships appears and drives off another fleet that is blasting hell out of the Earth fleet. The appearances of the second fleet is not such a grand gesture as you might think, they are the real target of the original attack.

In a matter of weeks fleets of new ships are built to the aliens' design. All this is done by a Great Britain that has risen from the depths of today by virtue of its great scientific ability. The villains are beaten off by a typical bit of human ingenuity. But for how long?

WAR WITH THE NEWTS by Karel Capek

Bantam 10s

Tony Sudbery

Buried Treasure! This is a marvellous book. It is the story of an intelligent race of giant salamanders, discovered in the East Indies, bred to gather pearls and then spawned in vast numbers to be exploited as a source of cheap labour until they overrun the Earth. Then the newts turn and declare war on the human race.

The first section, dealing with the discovery of the newts, is a tale of exotic adventure in the Indies. The last section is a sort of political disaster novel. These are both superb but they are put in the shade by the brilliant middle section, 'Along the Steps of Civilization (The Annals of the Newts)'. This is a distillation of Capek's genius. In a condensed history of the rise of the Newts, illustrated with newspaper cuttings, he lampoons journalists, scientists, politicians, film stars and anyone else in sight. The humour is delightful, a fountain playing on every page; constantly fresh but spattering its victims with drops of acid. Lewis Gannett, in his introduction, has found exactly the right word for it - elfin. I could quote from it all day and never tire of chuckling. Occasionally Capek finds room for some real science fiction, as in his plausible account of the genesis of the newts (which is never published because of disputes about "priority and purely scientific questions").

The novel gives a strong impression that Capek enjoyed writing every word of it. Certainly I enjoyed reading every word. It is treasure that has been buried from English readers for too long.

HAUSER'S MEMORY by Curt Siodmak

Herbert Jenkins 22s 6d

Michael Kenward

At last, a novel whose characters are understandable! There is a scientist who is dedicated to his work and little else, security men who believe in the greatness that is America/Russia, an understanding wife who understands her husband perfectly. Too much understanding? Perhaps the books been sprayed with the author's RNA. But here I must explain the idea behind the book.

It is a known fact that memory can be transferred by feeding the RNA of trained flatworms to untrained worms. The unconditioned worms respond to stimuli almost as if they had been trained. Where can this lead? This novel has memory transference from human being to human being. Unfortunately with the memory go the obsessions - the loves and hates.

This must be one of the few sf stories based on straight biology. We been treated to numerous examples of the "soft" life-sciences, but rarely to the currently fashionable field of microbiology. Siodmak takes the idea further. He suggests that here is a way of providing a form of immortality, and a method of brainwashing - spray the crowds with the RNA "essence" of an idea.

Did I say understandable? Apart from this interesting piece of speculation the whole thing is transparent. A chase across Eastern Europe, where everything is grey, poor and subjugated. Well, we all know that its like that. Don't we? At least the author knows where it's at. His Germans are still secret Nazis, his agents risk their lives for love of country and the cause.

Yes, this is a straightforward book, with no complications. The idea is good. The execution is predictable. It will appeal to most science fiction addicts.

BINARY DIVINE by Jon Hartridge
Macdonald 21s

Robert Wells

Hartridge is one of the Home-Counties School. The dust-jacket of his first novel describes him as deputising for the literary editor of the Oxford Mail 'when that celebrated science fiction writer is away on holiday or collecting awards in America.' The celebrated author in question being Brian Aldiss, this must make the Oxford Mail one of the few provincial newspapers with two sf novelists on its staff.

In BINARY DIVINE the world is organised and watched over by MIND - a god-like computer in which the people of Earth have placed their confidence. Its absolute infallibility and autocracy has produced world peace, but it has turned man into a secondary being. The machine counsels, directs, organises through WHOICE. Every individual has a black box to receive MIND'S directions and in reverse to consult the computer god for a solution to personal problems.

Then the world's population is seized by a series of self-destructive urges, followed by plagues and reversion to bestiality. Only Michael Farrowday and a small band of followers remain unafflicted. They set out to solve the mystery.

Farrowday is already dead when the story opens. The narrative concerns the search of Galstead - a historian - for the 'lost month' in man's history, during which Farrowday saved man and the world.

This secondary level of the book, from which the main story is told, in flashback, seems frequently to be obtrusive and trivial. Hardly anything that happens to Galstead is worth telling.

When Galstead discovers everything in the last chapter there seems reason to accuse the author of taking an easy way out. Even going over the last, revelatory chapter twice didn't help answer all the questions raised by this interesting first novel.

A GIFT FROM EARTH by Larry Niven
Macdonald

John Chapman

Whatever people say, and there are some that say strange things, sf really is a separate and unique branch of literature. For one thing, on the good side, it offers more opportunity and variety in plot, characterisation and technique than any other popular genre. From Charles Chilton to Cordwainer Smith to...you name him; authors have done fantastically different things and done them well, and still it remains sf. The other thing is this: for some reason publishers will release sf books that wouldn't have stood a chance of publication in any other field. A GIFT FROM EARTH is one of those. OK the plot's no worse than a thousand others, the appallingly immature characterisation is compensated for a little by rather good technical details, even if the main hinge-gimmick of the plot is transparently fallacious. The whole thing would have been great as a comic book but without pictures it's a bit lost.

The story takes place on a distant cut-off planet which supports, on its one inhabitable plateau, a small but well-established colony about half the size, population and wit of California. The aristocratic "crew" lord it over the hard-working but largely apathetic "colonists" who are kept in place by the implementation police who pounce on evil-doers to get their bodies for spare-part surgery. The plot concerns a minor revolution composed of such archetypal ingredients as housewives and history teachers, and of course our not-too-keen hero whose idea of protest is to substitute ginger ale for urine in a medical and drink it in front of the nurse. Just to prove that the whole

thing is meant for kids the author throws in a couple of those sex encounters which nowadays appear to be alright even for clean-living all-American heroes, but worry not faint-heart there's nothing objectionable at all.

After a few run-of-the-mill moves the revolution gains its objectives which seem to be something like abolition of the death penalty for dropping litter, and brighter prospects for our hero. This latter is so dumb the reader is almost forced to like him though the villain shows more promise, he's engagingly called Jesus Pietro Castro and his parentage is a wonder of spare-part surgery. The telling naivety of characterisation whereby the villain is a veritable bastard and the only main figure to carry a non-Anglo-Saxon name, leads slyly to the point that the book is riddled with obviously unconscious Freudian symbolism, making it almost a secret parody of all those rumours about the transatlantic male's most awful traumas.

I'd recommend the book to psychoanalysts, not-too-bright adolescents and policemen (since for once they lose). If anyone else is interested wait for the paperback; a price of 5s for so little value is an insult to the public. Who needs to be insulted if this standard of story is a commercial proposition?

GARBAGE WORLD by Charles Platt
Panther 3/6

Philip Strick

As a celebration of the pleasures of good honest dirt, Charles Platt's THE GARBAGE WORLD provides a refreshing balance to those innumerable tales of an impeccably antiseptic future. His suggestion that once men have spread throughout the galaxies, the only way they will be able to dispose of the monstrous accumulations of rubbish will be by converting them into asteroids is a neat and convincing notion, and he makes it the more plausible by populating one such asteroid (called Kopro, naturally enough) with a thriving and noisome colony of beachcombers, recognisable descendants of tep-tote. The love-hate relationship between civilisation and its opposite is then enjoyably pursued, with much wallowing in the bleak, steaming mounds of muck through which the Koproans search for special items of junk to add to their individual hoards of worthless wealth.

Two Off-world officials arrive to prepare them for a scheme which will mean the destruction of the asteroid to make four more (such is the speed of refuse growth in these dizzy times) and while the elder is a starchy, unyielding bureaucrat the younger - surprise, surprise - is an impressionable and easy victim to the charms of the homespun daughter of the Koproan boss-man. No particular subtlety is apparent in any of the relationships between these four characters (who could take seriously a blonde heroine called Juliette Gaylord?), and their drama follows a predictable course of confrontation until garbage triumphs in a kind of masochistic animalism. Yet despite such hoary situations as an expedition in search of roaming outcasts, the argumentative debates between hairy villagers over prone to a drunken orgy or two, and the cliff-hanging encounter with a giant slug, the Koproan atmosphere is in every sense strong enough to convey a pleasing tang of novelty, and a solid foundation is provided by the constant underlying metaphor. Undoubtedly Platt knows his Ballard, and the image of the dune-like wastes recurs with inventive emphasis; if he tends to paint in black and white rather than with Ballard's complex rainbow of colours and moods, he has nevertheless made a most encouraging start as an imaginative novelist.

US - SF

some recent paperbacks

reviewed by
John Brunner**LIGHT A LAST CANDLE** by Vincent King (Ballantine \$0.75)

This is damned nearly a very good book. It has a strong theme (the forcible imposition of arbitrary "order" on natural environments, regardless of the cost in terms of human suffering or extermination of other species); it has a vivid first-person narrative style; it has some excellent sections which impress by the clarity of their descriptions and the careful detail which enters into their construction.

The world of the action is half-familiar. It may be Earth after an alien invasion, or it may be a very Earth-like world which humans once attempted to colonise by eliminating native life-forms. There are Modified quasi-humans which may be the result of alien tampering or may be due to convergent evolution. The narrator, isolated for years in the tundra of the far north, is never quite sure. And the degree of his own deception points up one of the book's weaknesses: over-complexity, so that the rather subtle revelation at the end is fighting in the reader's mind with half a dozen different explanations for "the way things are".

There is also some lack of balance in the structure of the narrative. The closing sequences are hurried, compared to the vividness of the early part, and at times are more reminiscent of a sequel than a continuation. Nonetheless, it's a measure of King's promise as a writer that one can talk in such terms.

UP THE LINE by Robert Silverberg (Ballantine \$0.75)

Bob Silverberg obviously had a lot of fun putting together this story of Jud Elliott, the time courier whose business is taking parties of tourists to view the more spectacular events of Byzantine history and who gets fouled up in a dizzying (but meticulously worked out) series of contradictory paradoxes when one of his charges discovers how to doctor his supposedly tamper-proof time machine and sets out to smuggle valuable artefacts back to the present.

I had a lot of fun reading it. I hope you will too.

DIMENSION THIRTEEN by Robert Silverberg (Ballantine \$0.75)

Thirteen (as you might expect) elegantly polished (as you might expect) short stories, most of them very slight. But if you've not read 'Bride Ninety-One,' which is extremely witty, or 'The King of the Golden River,' which is impressively poignant, you certainly should.

THE BLUE STAR by Fletcher Pratt (Ballantine \$0.75)

On the cover this is described as "The tale of a parallel world". Yes and no. Actually it's a prime example of something which is very rare because it is appallingly difficult to bring off. It's a dream story. It opens in a curiously archaic, thirtyish fashion, with three friends discussing the possibility of a world where magic was developed instead of, or alongside, early science, and the three of them experience an identical dream about such a world.

This is not sword-and-sorcery. It's far better. It's a genuinely solid novel, with believable characters, properly reasoned social settings

and rock-hard underlying logic. I'd rate it ahead of Peake, ahead of Eddison, ahead of all but the most brilliant segments of Tolkein. Go get it.

BREAKTHROUGH by Richard Cowper (Ballantine \$0.75)

If Pratt's **THE BLUE STAR** opens in a strangely archaic manner, then this one develops so and stays that way clear to the end. It's a book-long counterpart of the sort of lead novelette one often used to find in Science Fantasy, entertaining but obviously derivative and instantly forgettable. A college lecturer, whose social and particularly sexual attitudes would have shamed the hero of a pre-World War I "scientific romance", becomes involved with a girl who shares some form of what may be telepathy or ESP with him, through the mediation of a visiting American research scientist. Quote;

"But what do we know?" I demanded. "That we've got some fantastic psychic cord joining us together like a couple of Siamese twins? Why it's - indecent!"

Well put.

THE LAST UNICORN by Peter S Beagle (Ballantine \$0.75)

Peter Beagle is a maverick. He's a very delicate writer with a fine sense of language, a rambling imagination and a wholly idiosyncratic charm. If you can imagine a counterpart of Flann O'Brien who draws on medieval romance instead of Irish mythology, and then puts his tongue in his cheek while contriving to remain at the same time absolutely serious on a level one step below the surface, you may not need to bother with this book. I couldn't possibly imagine anyone like that, so I count the time I invested in reading this new novel very well spent

A delightful book!

XENOGENESIS by Miriam Allen deFord (Ballantine \$0.75)

Somehow I can't get excited about Miss deFord's work. Her stories are very competently put together, they have about the right proportions of description, action and dialogue, and yet...

Perhaps they give the impression of artificiality. A woman sf writer often feels obliged to write about "feminine" subjects - Katharine Maclean is the only exception I can call to mind - and here we have many promising openings which bump up against the rock of some domestic triviality in the ending. Far and away the best of these is 'The Children', which tackles the question of messages from the future in a markedly original context.

.... A FEW MORE

I have already mentioned Dave Van Arnam's **STARMIND** (see page 12), here I want to bring your attention to one or two other offerings from the USA.

It isn't very often that humour pays off and so it is good to be able to round off John Brunner's contribution to these pages by mentioning his **TIMESCOOP** (Dell 50c). What would happen if you could bring back a few of your ancestors? What starts off as a glorified publicity campaign for the Freitas family ends up as a hilarious nightmare for the current head of the clan. A lightweight piece that will probably amuse you as much as it must have amused John Brunner to write it.

Returning to one of my all time favourites, it was good to discover that, despite having to work from a television series, Tom Disch had again come up with a thoroughly readable book. **THE PRISONER** (Ace 60c) is unmistakable Disch. Jerry Cornelius even gets a bit part, as an antique furniture salesman. His true vocation?

AND IN RUSSIA.....

RUSSIAN SCIENCE FICTION 1968 ed Robert Magidoff trans. Helen Jacobson
University of London Press 62s reviewed by Tony Sudbury

The apparent dullness of Russian sf is related to cultural differences between Russia and the English-speaking countries. Political orientation is only one of these differences, though it is related to the others: a certain earnestness in the Russian character, a greater faith in the future, and motivations directed toward society rather than the individual. Of course, much of this could be and probably should be explained by censorship or the fear of censorship. But I don't think it would explain everything.

If we make the effort to spot these cultural differences and discount them, we can find in Russian sf sufficient entertainment and stimulation to make the search worthwhile. I don't mean that we should attempt to reverse the cultural shift and put ourselves in the shoes of the Russian reader; that would probably be difficult and pointless. But if we try to see through the greyness and other irritations of style we may find the characteristic pleasures of sf as strong as anywhere else inside Russian sf.

This is borne out by this anthology. For example, The Mystery of Green Crossing has at its centre one of those highly coloured surrealist images so beloved of the avant-garde. I had never understood why this particular pictorial style should be associated with sf by paperback publishers, fan artists and pretentious critics alike, and it took this Russian story to bring the point home to me; for this piece of undeniable surrealism occurs in a context of genuine scientific speculation, intended as such and plausible if somewhat lightweight.

We would probably expect a greater emphasis on scientific speculation to be a feature of Russian sf, and certainly there is a fair amount here, though I suspect that the portion is diminishing. There is Gennady Gor's stimulating but rather predictable puzzle story A Dweller in Two Worlds, and several other simple idea stories. Some of these are very well presented, like Yarov's The Founding of Civilisation and Rosokhvatshy's Desert Encounter. Others try to place too much weight on a flimsy structure. Evidently Russian readers are more tolerant of longeurs and anti-climaxes than Western readers would be.

Sharply opposed to these scientific stories are what one might, I suppose, call 'human' stories. The appeal of these ranges from the indulgent charm of Bulichev's Life is so Dull for Little Girls, through the sly humour of Bakhnov's Mutiny, to the naive optimism of Pod lny's Tales of the Distant Past (fables in favour of technology and progress that might have come out of any fanzine anywhere in the world).

Straddling the two types is the best story of the bunch, Storm, by Russia's best sf writer, Valentina Shuraleva. The plot of this story is flat, almost featureless. It is a straightforward account of a young scientist's struggle to get her research recognised. Yet this simple tale is told so delicately and sensitively that it completely absorbs the reader. Shuraleva is something no other Russian sf writer can pretend to be, an artist.

Or can't they? With the recent news that Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, not normally the most subtle of writers, have dared to put subversive content into their latest sf novel, there are signs that Russian writers, like their American and English counterparts, are claiming the title of artists as of right, as belonging to their occupation rather than their talent. In that case I can only report that this book belongs to the immediate prehistory of the movement.

A TORMENT OF FACES by James Blish and Norman L Knight

Faber 23s

Graham Andrews

This is a novel of the 28th century, a work of serious scientific speculation and the result of 20 years close collaboration between the authors. In the year 2794 Earth manages to support - just barely and with the fullest possible utilization of all available land area and resources - a population of one thousand billion. The technical and administrative complexities involved in housing and feeding such a horde are examined in fascinating detail.

The only means of alleviating the ever-increasing population pressure would appear to be either a programme of compulsory mass sterilization or the development of a practical star drive, with which to colonize the planets of other stars. A partial remedy has seen the creation of a new species - the amphibious Tritons - artificially-bred gill-men who maintain and harvest the undersea farms. Then comes the widespread threat of devastation in the form of Flavia - a massive asteroid on collision course with Earth.

There are some really magnificent descriptive passages as the authors fill in and expand their concept of an overpopulated rigidly organised society. The people seldom emerge, however, from behind the welter of intricate detail and technical information. They are used to carry along the action and argue out the theories, but receive little, if any, personal development. The only character to capture my interest was the merman Tioru. But then undue emphasis on individual human beings and their personal relationships could only be distracting. The real "hero" of the book is the population explosion and Man's reaction to the difficulties that this problem will create in the centuries ahead.

ESCAPE INTO SPACE by E O Tubb

Sidgwick & Jackson 24s

Hartley Patterson

Increased radioactivity is slowly sterilising Earth. A millionaire buys government support for a starship. The ship takes off with a new, untried, drive, just before a crusading politician can stop it. Travelling through "M" space, they reach another planet. This proves to be too hostile for the colonists, so they return to Earth. They find it deserted - the M-space drive has taken them back into the past. So they land and start again.....

Sounds familiar? That's the trouble with the book - there's not a single original idea, plot, or character in it. Normally it would have taken me two minutes to discover this, as it was I felt duty bound to read on to the end. Plenty of violence, a few trendy swear words, and the captain gets the beautiful computer operator two chapters before the end.

THE ANVIL OF TIME by Robert Silverberg

Sidgwick & Jackson 21s

Richard Barycz

Not having read 'Hawksbill Station' - the Galaxy story on which this novel is based - I cannot comment on how much the novel's expansion contributes to the overall effect. However, by comparison with other short stories that become novels, Mr Silverberg seems to have done better than most with his book.

Time travel again, and its political aspects. What better place for your political malcontents and revolutionaries than the Late Cambrian?

Time travel is one way only - or so the theory says - once exiled there is no chance of escape back to the future.

The society that the exiles have set up is well drawn, as are various psychological and social pressures put upon them by the utter physical and

and mental isolation of their position. Several have already cracked up under the strain. The job of keeping the rest sane and occupied is that of Jim Barrett, one of the oldest exiles at the station.

How he came to be exiled and the part that Hawksbill, the inventor of the time travel device, and Barrett's political friends and colleagues played in it alternate in flashback (or is it flashforward?), with what happens when the latest exile to the station arrives and disturbs the fairly smooth routine of the community. The new exile is not who he claims to be, and just who he is and what he is doing at the station brings the novel to its climax.

Barrett is about the only character to stand out in the story - his strengths and weaknesses are competently outlined as are the occasional doubts he has about his own sanity. Mr Silverberg's style leads itself into an occasional awkwardness, but these rare instances apart, it makes THE ANVIL OF TIME pleasantly readable.

THE FATAL FIRE by Kenneth Bulmer
Robert Hale 18s

Roger Waddington

In this automated world of the future a new class system has evolved, based on a system of labour. The Aristos are at the top, controlling finance, with their underlings - the Companies - doing the day-to-day work. Under this is the Pool - unemployed and at subsistence level, yet despising work and the masters who keep them fed.

Julian Justin is one of the Pool, with a gift for sensing danger. But this does save him from being shanghaied into one of the construction crews terraforming planets for human habitation - about the only work open to members of the Pool. He meets up with the fast-talking Ed Rayburn, who plans to escape from the construction crew and make his way back to Earth. Julian decides to go along with him. They steal an Aristo ship and force its pilot - Paul Hurwitz - to fly them home. A bomb, planted on board by one of Hurwitz' enemies, forces the ship to crashland on the planet Erinore. An epic trek across the planet draws the three men - one Aristo and two Pool - closer together than ever could have been the case in such a society. The talents of the three are united in a plan for power - Aristo power.

Life on the Aristo level is just as hard as that of the Pool, as we find out in the connected story of the Skardon family. Old Eli Skardon is trying to keep his place as head of Gorgon Industries, and avoid being removed by the Guild of Assassins. The stage is set for a mighty conflict when Julian takes his first unwary steps into this plotting power-hungry world by falling in love with Estell Skardon, over whom young Eli Skardon and Paul Hurwitz are already fighting.

First in print as a serial in New Worlds (many moons past!) this may not be literatu e, but it is certainly excellent entertainment!

SCIENCE FICTION ODDITIES edited by Groff Conklin
Rapp & Whiting 21s

Gordon Johnson

The first of the nine stories in this book is Alan Arkin's 'People Soup', a clever childhood fantasy of a couple of kids concocting a mixture to turn them temporarily into animals. It may sound dull but the result is a story which is lively, enjoyable and - surprisingly - leaves you chuckling.

Asimov's 'What is this thing called love?' is a sly dig at the Playboy policy of avoiding mention of the act of love. It is followed by 'Callahan and the Wheelies', by Stephen Barr, which uses the old plot of the inventor's invention getting out of hand. It could have developed into

another variation of Sladek's THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM and Sladek may have got his idea from it, but it is closed off rather suddenly, leaving some loose ends. Apart from that, it is exciting and a very humorous piece.

Reginald Bretnor contributes 'Mrs Poppledore's Id', a farce on controllable poltergeist, to me this seemed not to be up to standard. 'The Teeth of Despair', by Avram Davidson and Sidney Klein, is very much better. An excellently written black comedy. G C Edmonson gives us 'The Galactic Calabash', a subdued comment on the vagaries of making measurements on another planet by remote control.

'Space-crime Continuum', by H F Ellis, is a clever parody of the sf detective story. A chess playing rat is the subject of Charles Harness' 'The Chessplayer.' The final offering is R A Lafferty's 'What's the Name of That Town?' A piece on removing all memory and mention of an A-bombed city with the apparently ridiculous name of "Chicago."

Altogether a mixed bag, with the emphasis on humour. -----

THE DISASTER AREA by J G Ballard

Panther Science Fiction 5s

Michael Kenward

What is the exact nature of the disaster area? To some it is science itself. This collection of nine short stories, by Britain's most controversial sf writer, is built around some of the iniquities that have aroused people to anti-scientific fury.

In 'Storm-bird, Storm-dreamer' a "biological accident" results in gulls with wing spans of ten or twelve feet. 'The Concentration City' has a globe-encompassing metropolis - a continuous linear nightmare where the idea of "open space" is reserved for the insane. A transplant is rejected in 'The Impossible Man', but the rejection has nothing to do with a clinical reaction to alien tissue.

J G Ballard takes outwardly straightforward sf concepts and turns them in upon his characters. Science may have an immediately visible effect on our environment, but the important effects are on the minds of Man. In the technological society the instincts of the "naked ape" are not enough.

The vision of The DISASTER AREA is not an optimistic one. In it man is seen to be fragmenting. But he brings it upon himself, in 'Manhole 69' a group of men try, with the aid of surgery, to live without sleep - only to become the victims of their own minds. A man begins to see himself in 'Zone of Terror'. Is this "a purely functional disorder, like double vision or amnesia"? Even the root of the affliction shows Ballard's distrust of science, the cause is "working without a break on programming the complex circuitry of a huge brain simulator."

These stories are beautifully written with, at times, poetic imagery and language. Ballard's vision of Man's inability to come to terms with science is not particularly inviting, but it is very good science fiction. -----

NEUTRON STAR by Larry Niven

Macdonald 25s

Gordon Johnson

This is a collection of stories, each complete in itself, and yet the continuity of the scene and some of the characters make it entirely possible to read the book as a novel. For a collection of stories this is quite something.

Several main characters appear, the one we see most being Beowulf Shaeffer-- a spaceship pilot. He gets involved in various believable and well thought out scrapes. Continuity throughout the series builds up a useful picture, so that by the end you know the characters well. This particularly

applied to the Puppeteers, whom the blurb gloats over. They are most unusual in shape, physical cowards, but financial wizards. If there is something they want done, then someone else will be paid to do it.

I must admit to being predisposed towards Larry Niven, but I do not feel that I am overrating the book when I say that it is good, rousing fare and an excellent example of its kind. -----

THE STILL, SMALL VOICE OF TRUMPETS by Lloyd Biggle jr
Rapp & Whiting 21s

John Chapman

On the planet Gurnil is a world inhabited by connoisseurs of art and music, blindly tolerating the tyranny of a capricious King who obsessively hacks off the left arms of those who offend him. Throughout the kingdom wander the secret agents of the Interplanetary Relations Bureau (IRB) - masters of disguise, they have tried for four hundred years to foment democratic revolution, so that Gurnil can be guided towards union with the Federation of Independent Worlds.

The IPR is hampered by its own policy: "Democracy imposed from without is the severest form of tyranny," and by the "rule of one" which allows no more than a single technological innovation to be introduced. To try and solve the problem of four centuries of failure Forzon - of the cultural survey - is sent to the planet as a man who can understand the artistic temperament of the people. Unprepared and without explicit orders he set out from IPR headquarters, and is immediately captured by the King's men. A traitor somewhere in the midst of of IPR has equipped Forzon with the wrong language and a grotesquely inappropriate disguise.

Of course, he escapes and contacts the loyal Field Team B. From then on he spends his time slipping in and out of the King's clutches. Even while hiding in a village community of one-armed victims of the tyrant he can find no way of instilling the thought of rebellion into them. Finally, invoking the Rule of One, he teaches the amputees to play the trumpet. But there is still the unknown traitor in IPR to contend with.

The plot, as you may have guessed, is totally unbelievable. But then, in all fairness, so are the characters. Those chopped-off arms spurt tomato ketchup, the villains die happily ever after, the hero marries the girl he kissed once in chapter ten. Pure space opera, and very enjoyable at that. Lloyd Biggle's stories have always been smoothly professional examples of the classical, unpretentious, adventure story. This one is harmless entertainment for both adults and children, and only mildly offensive to constitutional monarchs.

And yet, on a different level, for those inclined to nostalgia, the book is a poignant reminder that the old school of American sf is just about played out. Beneath the competent professional clogs the same cardboard figures tread well-worn paths in identikit plots. It will be a sad but inevitable day when these faded cartoon worlds are finally submerged by the new wave of brutal intellectuality. I doubt if it's possible to inject freshness and vitality into this traditional kind of science fiction. You could almost read THE STILL, SMALL VOICE OF TRUMPETS with your eyes shut.

Perhaps it's the very familiarity of the ritual which gives the book its undeniable appeal, but the hypnotic dulling of the mind that it produces makes it as sterile as any other kind of drug. It's all been done before and much better. Mr Biggle jr, and the others of his breed are like a ciente prospectors rooting around the slag heaps of an abandoned mine.

THE MERCY MEN by Alan E Nourse
Faber 18s

Kevin O'Malley

In a world where mass psychosis is rife, Jeff Meyer hunts Conroe. He doesn't know why! But it is Jeff who, really the quarry, is lured into chasing the enigmatic Conroe into the Hoffman Centre. Here they have wiped out cancer and heart diseases, and are now trying to solve the mystery of the soaring rate of mental illness.

Surgeons at the centre use medical mercenaries - the Mercy Men - as human guinea pigs for experimental brain surgery. The surviving Mercy Men are left incredibly rich but usually demented. Determined to find Conroe Jeff becomes a Mercy Man to help him do so.

After rigorous tests he discovers that he has intense esp powers, allowing him to effect the probabilities of events. In a wild scene of confrontation Jeff learns that his esp is due to a mutant gene, and that his pursuit of Conroe is linked with his father's death. The growing madness of the population is revealed as stemming from those with the mutant gene. The government is considering the extermination of the mutants. Jeff becomes a guinea pig for an operation to locate the root of the insanity.

Simplicity is the main weakness of this book - especially the sudden introduction of esp halfway through. But although the ideas are not new nor handled in a particularly original way, this is an enjoyable book.

THE SECOND IF READER edited by F Pohl
Rapp & Whiting 25s

Mike Freeman

One of the most prominent features of sf is the dominance of the short story format, usually reassembled into an anthology. If McLuhan's dictum about the medium being the message is, as I believe, true then this preponderance of the short story in sf should tell us something significant. This, the latest anthology to fall into my hands, was published in April this year, but the copyright date of one of the stories is given as 1957.

With a brief introduction by Fred Pohl the anthology contains stories by Brian Aldiss, J G Ballard, Fred Pohl, Algis Budrys, Hal Clement, David Kyle, Keith Laumer, Larry Niven, and Fred Saberhagen - a grand total of ten eminently readable short stories. Saberhagen's grotesque fantasy masque of the Red Shift contrasts vividly with Asimov's coldly scientific tale of murder The Billiard Ball. J G Ballard's hauntingly beautiful description of The Time Tombs is countered by the wit and satire of Laumer's Forest in the Sky. My personal favourite is David Kyle's grim little fable a la Bradbury Toys for Debbie. A good collection certainly living up to the high standards of selection and production that Rapp & Whiting have set themselves.

TARNSMAN OF GOR by John Norman
Sidgwick & Jackson 21s

Rob Holdstock

A high-adventure novel with definite juvenile overtones. The planet Gor always lies on the other side of the Sun from the Earth and so is unknown. Tarl Cabot is kidnapped from Earth by Goreans and taken to "the magnificent planet" to join his earlier kidnapped father and become one of the warriors of Gor, one of the Tarnsmen.

Not really for anyone who likes their sf sober and with an element of credibility.

THE NEW WAVE BREAKS

Apart from the occasional 'Best from New Worlds' anthology little permanent evidence, in the form of books, of the achievements of the 'new wave' has been offered to the general reader. All of a sudden it looks as if this is changing. A comprehensive anthology of original material has been gathered by Langdon Jones and published by Hutchinson. THE NEW SF contains stories by Aldiss, Ballard, Butterworth, Disch, Gordon, Jakubowski, MacBeth, Moorcock, Platt, Sallis, Sladek, Thomas, Zoline; all for 30s.

Hutchinson have also accepted a monster tome (more than 100 000 words) by John Sladek. This has already been compared with CATCH 22.

Michael Moorcock continues to be well represented in the new lists. The first of his Jerry Cornelius quartet has just been published by Allison and Busby. THE FINAL PROGRAMME will be followed, at six month intervals, by the rest of the series.

Meanwhile Essex House continues to exert its therapeutic, and financially rewarding, effect on this side of the Atlantic. It is a pity that we are unlikely to see the final product over here. Even the importers of American sf paperbacks are steering clear of this new manifestation of sf's maturity.

FOCAL POINT

Dark They Were and Golden Eyed has just started corrupting the City's business men and Covent Garden's porters. They can be seen during the lunch period flicking their grimy fingers through the pages of salacious tracts such as E E Smith, Tolkein, Brunner, Monster Pix and a whole host of weirdies. Bram Stokes's shop is also establishing itself as the centre of activity for lovers of sf, horror, comics, fantasy etc. While some go to buy others go to scrounge a cup of coffee from Bram (the loon in the loin cloth at the Oxford convention).

If you are in London and you would like to feast your eyes on a mammoth collection that will, we are promised, contain all relevant American paperbacks that are available then drop in at 28 Bedfordbury. This is just up from Trafalgar Square and parallel to St Martin's Lane, behind the Odeon cinema. Eventually DTWAGE will have a 'fanzine factory' underneath it in the cellar which may also be used for poetry readings and meetings.

SCIENTOLOGISTS TAKE OVER SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

Well not really, but there will probably be a talk by a scientologist on the programme. Things are taking shape with the rest of the events. There may be an exhibition of sf paintings - London's first - at a London gallery. There will also be the usual goodies (What will Ted Tubb find to give away at this convention's auction?).

The hotel has been fixed up and registration for the convention is now going ahead. Details can be had from Dark They Were and Golden Eyed, 28 Bedfordbury, London, WC 2 (Tel: 01-836-5097)

AND FAR AWAY

Next year's world convention is in Heidelberg Germany. Details from Archie Mercer, 10 Lower Church Lane, Bristol BS2 8BA

MAIL RESPONSE

Dear Ed(itor),
SF is SF is Sf is SF (etc).

For those who like labels I would like to point out that every piece of fiction ever written is science fiction. Every piece of fiction usually has a human or humans involved; thus sociology, psychology (and usually nowadays sexology and pornography) or, if animals are involved, zoology and biology.

But noone calls the British Museum's library an sf reader's paradise. I dislike labels. Science fiction is much too specific a title, it implies a fictional story based on some science. Speculative fiction seems to mean quasi-prediction. And as for science fantasy ... I refer you to Kyril Bonfiglioli's comment that it "promised the worse of both worlds."

So what is sf?

SF is science fiction, science fantasy, space fiction, space fantasy, speculative fiction, and sword & sorcery fiction (any others?) In fact, as the label science fiction is losing favour amongst some authors, there are suggestions of dropping it. But what of us poor readers who want to nip into a bookshop and go straight to the section of sf books. If this disappears we will either have to take those by well-known authors (unless, of course we take note of those mentioned in Vector!) or read every damn book blurb in general fiction.

No, what we need is a label to take in science and speculative fiction and fantasy, so there's no need for strict classification. We have that label, it's plain and simple, and I'm satisfied with it, it's "sf".

David Rowe 8 Park Drive Wickford Essex

Dear Michael,

in reply to Gordon Johnson's article, WHAT IS SF? in Vector 53, although he pointed out at the beginning of his essay that he merely was asking questions, it came as a sort of let down to find that, even though he wanted sf defined, he made no attempt to do this. In fact, with regards to his stimulating article, Mr Johnson confuses the issue by pointing out that sf has about as much chance of being clarified as a raven has of flying underwater (with apologies to Peter Cook). Now for some time (through editing my own fanzine and reading various essays on this burning question) I've opposed this "defining" attitude to a certain extent. I agree that among fans it can provide stimulating discussion, but I would only make one definition: that a genre which includes the poor term sf, speculative fiction, supernatural fiction, sword & sorcery, psychological horrors, and borderline stuff such as LORD OF THE RINGS, as Fantasy. Forget where sf ends and mainstream begins, it isn't worth the trouble sorting it all out. Fantasy as a term is by far the best description, otherwise invent a word.

Dave Sutton 17 Cocksmead Croft Kings Heath Birmingham 14

Dear Mike,

A heck of a lot of people have gone in for classifying sf. I don't ever try. I define sf according to the moment and you might say that you can't define the barriers according to what the field encompasses, you have to define it according to what it permits the writer to do. SF permits a freedom of expression and invention that det.cowbs.histors.gangsters,romanc. are not permitted.

Here's something else to put your minds at ease. SF is indefinable because we have not yet reached all the barriers; many fields of speculative fiction have yet to be conceived and explored, so a definition is presumptive. Therefore, quid hok, science fiction is that which is fiction and indefinable. Somebody already said that.

What's more I completely disagree with YOU that the label stinks. I think they're the sweetest words ever invented; I get annoyed when sf books appear without the label and I believe that I detect awe whenever I use the term in front of ordinary people. They can't envisage what we sfans envisage in terms of the future and other worlds, but they know that that is what sf is all about and inevitably there is some fascination in knowing that a person revels in this mystifying realm. They watch, God forbid, Doctor Who, or, let's hope, Star Trek and they are entertained and they say "I could never have thought of that," and even if they don't say it, it's there in the back of their minds. When they meet or here someone who claims to be able to think of it...brother, if she's twenty and beautiful, you're made. Or she is, depending on how you look at it.

Rob Holdstock Concord 14 Coxhill Gardens River Dover Kent

Dear Editor,

In Vector 53 Mr Kenward mentions the religious theme that crops up in Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius, BEHOLD THE MAN and THE WRECKS OF TIME. This is interesting, since not only is the religious theme in THE WRECKS garbled, but it was not even written by him, it was by a Mr James Colvin. If Vector is to lavish so much attention on my favourite writer (2 other reviews in V53 and another in V52) shouldn't the reviewers at least know what they are reviewing?

S R Wilson 4 Den Road Bromley Kent

(Note: J C is Michael Moorcock)

Never one for standing still I have moved again, along with the editorial address of Vector. This means that I have produced five Vectors from five different addresses. Is this a record? Maybe not, but it is tiring. I apologise for the letters that have gone unanswered because of this and hope that this will not deter people from writing to Vector. Anybody who has something to say about Vector or about science fiction is welcome on these pages. This Vector comes from Michael Kenward, Richard Bertram House, Danehill, Sussex.

