

s f commentary



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of trade, a piece of chalk, and exhaustively demonstrate the "elements of good reviewing". I don't think that would gain a single new reviewer, and would probably disgust a lot of people who know exactly what they like and (think they) can tell anybody exactly why they like it.

So I will not talk about methods of reviewing. For me the purpose of reviewing is for a person to be able to communicate why he or she does or does not like a particular piece of art. Dead simple. Not according to George Turner. For him, the reviewer is primarily a journalist - an "objective" reporter on what a particular piece of art is or is not. However, without value judgments or simple loves and hates, the reviewer has little reason to turn his eyes on a book, or film, or whatever. The objectivity lies in the attempt to elucidate the material in the work of art so that it shines in the viewer's eye in the way the reviewer saw it.

But there's a paradox even here. The reviewer must still come to the work of art without any prejudices. The aim is to "see it as it is", and upon the evidence presented by analysis, then decide whether you like a piece of art or not. You are back to Base One. The evaluation then becomes the driving force of the reviewer.

Sitting in solemn silence on that dim dark rock of pedantry, I turn to perhaps the best examples of the review I have ever seen. They were sent to me in a highly informal letter from a friend of mine in 1966:

"You may remember that I anticipated that Stanley Kubrick's PATHS OF GLORY (with Kirk Douglas and Adolphe Menjou) would be a good film. I wasn't disappointed. It was bound up with an incident at Verdun in 1916. A megalomaniac French general sets Kirk Douglas' battalion a hopeless task in ordering the capture of an impregnable German position. When the attack fails, predictably, the battalion shoulders the blame. On the orders of the general, three soldiers are taken at random, tried by a kangaroo-court for cowardice, condemned, and shot. Kirk Douglas of course defends the interests of humanity against the charges (in rather banal terms) but the dunderless brass have their way. A last night in prison, plus a priest, plus anger, bewilderment, slobbering, final bravery of one of the three. One executed on a stretcher. One dies slobbering. Arbitrary death and the men's reactions to it. The general eventually is disgraced - power play behind the scenes.

The final scene is exquisite. The battalion is on short-leave in a music-hall. A captured German girl is made to sing for them. They jeer and whistle. She begins, falters in tears, gains confidence. And then the men become

enthralled, start humming, then sing softly. The song is sung in complete unison; close-ups of soldiers' faces, melting, universal clinging to near-dead imaginative instincts. Radiance envelops the moment. End of film. PATHS OF GLORY is just as good as KING AND COUNTRY but has no pretentiousness and is more tersely executed. Its sense of atmosphere, in the trenches, courtroom, music-hall, headquarters, is keenly to be savoured.

I found REPULSION very tough to appreciate. The imagery seemed to me to be despotic and had little impact on me. Indeed I could make little imaginative penetration of the film at all. Are we to imagine that lechery, distilled through the medium of a psychopathic virgin, has its just reward in butchery? Bestiality of man? How about the bestiality of women? - I think Polanski doesn't neglect this point - hence the oversexed sister with the married lover. No attempt to give a causal explanation is apparent and the fact that she progresses towards madness and gets there in the end is not made clear enough. REPULSION perhaps is an attempt to glorify the arbitrary, as seen through the eyes of a psychopath, but does not succeed, at least not in the inimitable way of THE BIRDS.

I agree that SHOP ON MAIN STREET is extremely unobtrusive in its force, while the acting cannot be faulted. The situation of the simple man and his non-political world is initially innocuous; at the finish he has been twisted into an oppressor, an instrument of the Nazi philosophy. Typically he is ripped apart by his decent motives and fear of his own death. Booze and terrified, he kills what he had loved. His suicide is a testament to his denatured goodness. The film brings a moral revolution in a lowly man who cannot cope with unbearable tensions - but only a fool would think his suicide unsatisfactory. I think that the implications of total involvement in the situation are brilliantly worked out."

And on Conrad's NOSTROMO: "Part of the attraction of Conrad really lies in the enigmas of his characters' motives, and their personal fogs which shield them from too acute scrutiny. His irony, applied to Costaguana's politicians and bestial generals, is rather like Pope's "breaking a butterfly on the rack". Surely stupidity can speak for itself."

The issue here is not whether you "agree" with Greg or not. I had, and still have not, seen PATHS OF GLORY. Greg wasn't trying to "sell" me a film or book - neither are we in the market place, and this was a private letter (like S F COMMENTARY). These are great reviews because, for a few moments I see clearly with those eyes and feel about the films in the way Greg felt about them. No review can do more...or less.

oo

NOT ONLY IS THIS THE ONLY FANZINE TO HAVE A LEAD-OFF
LETTER COLUMN AND REVIEW SECTION, BUT IT IS NOW THE
ONLY FANZINE WITH A SECOND EDITORIAL BY THE ONE EDI-
TOR IN THE SAME ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE section

oo

The bulk of this issue of S F COMMENTARY was finished before June 1. Since then it has been bulkily cluttering up a shelf in my pantry, waiting until I acquired a very bulky duplicator, a very tiny typewriter, and twenty reams of paper from Gestetner. All this took time... especially in the case of Gestetner. Their country agency at Bendigo seems to have taken on all the more healthy, lazy attributes of other country industry. Still with a bit of pushing (including two 50c phone-calls) the paper arrived... and has been bending a shelf for three weeks.

Things have, as they say, been moving, but not in the direction of S F C subscribers, friends and hangers-on. I've had some very interesting correspondence, the bulk of which has been excluded from this issue's letter-column. That was just the start of what turned out to be a steady stream of interesting mail. Philip Dick, in particular, expressed great interest in the articles being run about his novels. The summing-up article should be considerably more worthwhile because of his interest.

To my knowledge, S F C 2 has not yet reached the USofA. Although America may rightly regard this as a disaster of some magnitude, it also leaves me in some doubt as to the magazine's future. There is certainly enough response now to warrant a full publishing programme. However, I'm still not sure whether there is enough response to warrant a crack at the Big Leagues. This issue will run to 175-200 copies, and that's all. The reason? Many people want copies, but only about 25 people so far have seen fit to actually pay money. I've forgiven many of the others, because they quite rightly considered that I wanted brilliant contributions more than money. It's the other people who just sit waiting for copies without handing anything in return, that worry me. And there is, as I have said, a whole continent that has only received one issue so far.

This page was mainly written to show off my new type-face - courtesy of a benefactor who has chosen to help yet another publication shudder to a screaming halt. My thanks must go to the Fan Factory, otherwise known as Halliford House, and the Harding household, who put up with this publication for three issues. Now I have to print it as well as type it. Hence the delay. SFC 5 will be readable, big, entertaining, and late.

i n v i s i b l e . . . w h i s t l i n g . . . b u n y i p s . . .

Even at a distance of 150 miles, my printers manage to censor this magazine: The order has gone out "No columns."

I'm one of these literal-minded people who believe that a Letter Column should be a Letter Column. "But not on that typewriter...!" Wringing of hands and expostulation. So.... until I can get my own duplicator, and turn out the magazine on butcher's paper, in red ink and sloppy columns, which my untidy instincts demand... no columns. Or if I get a typewriter with a decent type-face. Or if I just tell my censors where to go.

Meanwhile, here are some letters that have slowly filtered through the mail. They're encouraging, but they do not warrant 200-copy runs in future. If you want a copy of the magazine, you must do something for it. Meanwhile, here are some people with good taste and/or an open wallet. Thanks a lot. I've answered most of these letters already, so will you pardon me if I am uncharacteristically concise in my replies?

(I've also been order'd not to interrupt letters with my own comments. With great daring, I say "Nuts". Since I can't afford telephone conversations with Melbourne, Sydney, and all points west, north, or whatever, this is the next best thing. Nuts, Harding and Bangsund).

Since I might as well fill up this ^{page} rather than start somebody's letter at the bottom of a page (a practice I keep for reviews) I might as well explain the curious order of these letters. My letter index is so far not alphabetical. I put letters in the order I receive them.

But if I receive further letters from any particular person, then the letters are not filed in chronological order, but are placed right after the previous letter(s) from the same person. I knew you would be confused. I'm confused. Everybody's confused.

But it's more fun this way:

(Completely out of order - received 18th May - but very important):

"SYNCON"
PETER DARLING

c/o Box A215
Sydney South P.O.
N.S.W. 2000

It is proposed to hold a convention in Sydney over the New Year break early next year. To make this convention a success we hope that you will be able to attend.

As yet the programme has not been finalised, but is anticipated the major activity will take place on Friday 2-1-70 and on Saturday 3-1-70, with something on both the Thursday and Sunday. Likely location is in the suburb of Epping.

We are sure that we will be able to offer you an interesting weekend, representing the best in Australian fandom, so why not decide now to persuade the boss to give ^{you} the Friday off and head for Sydney, city of Syn, for the Seventy Syncon?.

PS: We would appreciate any suggestions you could make, both with regard to items to leave out and items to include on the programme. Please send them to the above address.

BG: Consider this an invitation to overseas fans and writers as well. I'm going to suggest to Peter that we have a bit of serious discussion about science fiction. Why not a few pros with interesting papers, instead of the ubiquitous and sometimes embarrassing Authors' Panels? Why not a bit of tourist activity, instead of endless sessions in barn-like clubrooms? Just a few suggestions thrown at random. I'm sure S F C readers have other suggestions, and would be able to go Sydney. Write to Peter. (And he doesn't suggest anything about money. I wonder.... a non-Binns, free Con?)::

GEORGE TURNER
(He'll forgive me starting at the bottom of a page)
14 Tennyson St
St Kilda
Victoria 3182

(8th March)
The first issue of S F COMMENTARY seems all right to me in an ASFRish manner - which is no bad manner - and will probably get better as mat-

erial flows in when it gets around. Your fears about the reproduction were unfortunately justified, but that also I suppose will rectify itself.

(BG: Many people have sent me surprised letters about the reproduction of S F COMMENTARY No 1. They seemed to think that it was all an accident, possibly due to malevolent forces from somewhere or another.

I had not intended to apologize in any way. It looks maudlin, if only because the poor repro was unavoidable. However, to satisfy the curiosity of the curious and worried: One week before I was due to start S F COMMENTARY No 1, this typewriter broke down. I only had a limited time to get No 1 done, so I was forced to rely on my sister's Olivetti Lettera 32. And the cover? Well, John Bangsund once told me I could write. No one ever told me I could draw or design. The cover for Number 2 was a combination effort of Leigh Edmonds and John Bangsund, and it shows.

In other words, I knew all the risks when I did No 1 with the Lettera, but I felt it was imperative to get the issue out as soon as possible. And then it wasn't posted out til March! Let's hope all subsequent issues are at least readable)::

:: The same goes for George's other comments. At present there is no way of beating the long time lags between typing, and final dispatch ::

I like your idea of reviewing the magazines, but feel that it wou should be brought more up to date. (Admittedly, production difficulties increased the time lag on this occasion). It might be wise to reserve those pages for yourself each issue, and set up the material at the last possible minute, bringing the notes as close to the present as possible, even if you have to leave a continuity gap between where you left off in No 1 and where you pick up next time. Whether detailed consideration of so many stories is worthwhile is a moot point, and up to yourself. For myself I would be inclined to treat them more generally on a trend-and-value basis. In this way you would finish up after a year or two with a fairly comprehensive coverage of what has happened in the field over a period.

:: BG: I may be less perceptive than you on this point, George. At the moment I can only see ripples on a general flood of mediocrity, and it is these ripples and the occasionally higher waves, that I try to comment on. And, as in SEC 3, I try to note any striking developments in the skills of certain writers. Banks Mebane has just started the "General Trend" bit in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, but when all he can find to talk about is Robert Silverberg's stories in GALAXY.... why bother? (Famous Australian Fannish Saying)

Unfortunately, I do leave things to the last minute...but it's still five weeks too early. Also, because of the current, or maybe just finished, dock strike in America (or that's the excuse that Merv keeps giving) there have been no magazines for months. The magazines reviewed last issue were the latest issues::

Your list of B.O.W. Awards shocked me to the core with the realisation of how little s f I actually read. Of your Top Ten I had read only two (the Zelazny and the Blish) and can't understand what you see in DAMNATION ALLEY anyway. In the same way the Convention Award list discomfited me thoroughly when I saw it - first because I have read none of the three shortlisted as Best Overseas S F, and second because the four listed for Best Current Writer contain three names which I would write off without further thought as spectacular nonentities; Aldiss is the only solidity amongst them. And the Best Australian S F list is only a dreadful revelation of the poverty of the local scene. In general it all makes me feel painfully dated and out of touch and perhaps not really fitted to write about s f at all.

(I am also bitterly aware of the generation gap - but one can't explain satisfactorily to readers that their opinions will change and solidify with time, and that what seems fine now will bore in a few years. I feel that John Foyster is meeting this trouble in its incipient form, and Damien Broderick told me once that he is already on the fringes of it. Age, of course, has no intrinsic relation to insight or ability - most of the important work (the basic work, that is) of people of genius or unusual ability has historically been done before they were thirty - but the lasting work, the consolidation of their originality and ability, generally appears much later. This is not a rule, merely a statistical indication, subject to exceptions. The importance of age is merely in the accumulation of data and the sloughing off of enthusiasms, plus the hardening and clarifying of one's reactions to the mounting mass of experience. And it does mean much more than the mere impatience of one generation with another. I recall being mildly contemptuous when at some time in my uninhibited twenties - when we were saying exactly the things that the same age group is saying now - an older man told me that middle age was in fact much more liberal in outlook than youth. It is only now that I begin to see what he meant and to come to terms with it.)

:: BG: "An article in that, George?" I see what you mean. I get annoyed with my own enthusiasms at times, and wish I had the experience to see things far more in perspective. To me, there seems so much to do and to evaluate, and yet there seems no time to find out the right way. This indeed

blunts the nerve-ends to what is actually happening. And, as Lee Harding has illustrated to me from s f examples, there never has been much harm in starting late. The thing that really makes me wonder, for instance, if Samuel Delany will ever have the will-power to become a good writer, are those annoying "six novels before he was 24" that everybody else crows about::

DECLINE AND FALL was a slight and tossed-off piece, but contains enough material to give rise to thought. In particular I was taken by this: "The fans of the early thirties looked back to the twenties. By 1938 it was obvious that 1934 was the Golden Age and by '45 the turn of the decade was the new Golden Age." I feel that here John Foyster has put his finger on a point of critical significance, but has not followed it up - probably because it was divergent from his train of thought. Taken in connection with the parenthesis above, there may be an article in it - something to do with the long term view as against the adulation of the immediate idol. What do you think? Interested?

::BG: Are you kidding? ::

Damien Broderick's article is difficult but interesting, rather full of "in" Phrasology which has special meanings that have to be watched for, and one has a disturbing sense of "argument by metaphor" and of being presented with analogues instead of perceptions. However it is consistent (a rare virtue in fan writing) and possibly valid, though I do not allow Vonnegut quite so penetrating an intellectual status as Damien would appear to. There are in the novels too many internal evidences of "lucky strikes" rather than constructed arguments. But Vonnegut is worth examination in depth and hope someone will take it from there, with Damien to re-comment and expand.

::BG: So do I, George, so do I. I'm not sure that "argument by metaphor" isn't quite legitimate in critical writing - many of the best critics do little else. Again, it comes back to the problem I often wonder about - can reviewing be accounted as much an art, as the work being discussed? This is obviously Damien's view, and elliptical though it is, his article is very evocative of Damien's own feelings about Vonnegut's work. Let's hope there is a follow-up, either from Damien himself, or from Out There::

:: The following paragraph is presented, like any other replies on Dick, without comment. I want to do a sort of Philip Dick Criticollection in S F C V or VI ::
Of your Dick piece I cannot comment at length until it has all appeared. My present feeling is that it is exploratory - that you began it without first deciding what you felt

about the works in toto (save a general and not very differentiated enthusiasm) -- and that you are in fact feeling for a point of view rather than expressing one. To gain this I think you will have to drop the obvious bread-and-butter novels from your appreciation and concentrate on those wherein the novelist was at work, ruminating and searching. It is worth noting, I think, that many of the short stories were testing grounds for themes which later surfaced in more complete form. The novels which seem to me to matter are SOLAR LOTTERY (which set the form and the pace), MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE, THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH, ALL WE MARSMEN, and, perhaps, EYE IN THE SKY, which, though something of a jeu d'esprit, contains the bones of the Dick outlook in truly skeletal form. Novels such as GAME PLAYERS, CLANS, WORLD JONES MADE, seem to be tentative expositions of ideas which came to later fruition. However, this is not fair comment at this stage.

The enclosure is a subscription.

::PG: And thank you very much. Your observations are very fair comment, as you will see if you turn to the CONTRADICTIONS article in this issue ::

RON L CLARKE

THE MENTOR magazine
78 Redgrave Rd
Normanhurst
N.S.W. 2076

(27th March 1969)

Congratulations on your First. It is not often that one sees such a bulky first issue so full of well written material.

I found your editorial fairly much as first ones go - that is saying that there is no editorial needed, and then proceeding to give one.

I don't know why everyone who considers himself "educated" raves about NEW WORLDS. Is it because a New Wave becomes automatically the Front of the world's youth? Just because it is new and radical? The stories in NW are not all that good as stories, as entertainment, which is what s f is, primarily. With luck the Ditmar Awards will give Australian authors something to write for, other than money - something to show to their friends other than money, which, after all, is not everything - though it does help smooth the way. Bob Toomey's review of EINSTEIN INTERSECTION was interesting. I thought you said in THE MENTOR that the plot should not be given away?? Yes, I know that it can be mentioned, but Bob does the same thing that Frank Blamey did in THE MENTOR, and you criticized. Since I found that Vonnegut's CAT'S CRADLE was the worst s f book I haven't

read. I started it but bogged down - the only other book I have not ever finished as yet is Wolfgang Kohler's GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY, which shows how hard CAT'S CRADLE hit me.

Summing up all the above I'll say that if you keep up the standard of the first issue in subsequent issues, then the Ditmar for best fanzine for '69 is a certainty for you - ASFR WATCH OUT!

::BG: I feel guilty printing last paragraphs like that, but you must allow me that one bit of self-indulgence. I'm not sure how the Aussie fans are even going to know about this magazine unless they write to get copies beyond Number 2. :: Mike Moorcock always felt embarrassed about that term "New Wave". To quote from Richard Geis about another magazine, he always felt the American magazines were "awful... amateurish... kidlike", and that NEW WORLDS was established to provide good, mid-century-standard fiction in a pleasant layout. Moorcock's writers may have a passion for hyperbole, but on "Entertainment!" basis alone, NEW WORLDS still has it all over the American opposition. I don't know about this year's issues - they look so terrifyingly good, I dare not open them to see how the fiction reads :: And may Mr Vonnegut consider himself complimented? (To be bracketed with Kohler, that is).::

::BG: Yet another interruption. Before I realise that the magazine has run to 66 pages again, I'd better print the Ditmar Awards (Australian S F Achievement Awards) given at the 8th Australian S F Convention held in Melbourne at Easter:

BEST AUSTRALIAN STORY OR COLLECTION :

A Bertram Chandler : SPARTAN PLANET (FALSE FATHERLAND).

BEST INTERNATIONAL STORY OR COLLECTION :

Thomas M Disch : CAMP CONCENTRATION

BEST CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR :

BRIAN ALDISS

BEST AUSTRALIAN FANZINE :

John Bangsund : AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

COMMITTEE AWARD : MOST ACTIVE AUSTRALIAN S F FAN :

LEIGH EDMONDS

End of ::

GARY WOODMAN

MONASH S F SOCIETY
Monash University,
Clayton 3168
Victoria..

(1st April 1969)
What a joke. I've had S F C
for easily three weeks now, but
have done nothing about it
(except read it).

The reproduction is terrible.
This I understand is due to
your peculiar type face (on
your typewriter, that is), and
not your fault at all.

Many people bitch about what's Wrong With S F? Who cares?
If it's bad we can entertain ourselves bitching about its
quality. If it's good we're too busy reading it to be
bitching. It's all very well to say "Ah Ghu, ANALOG was:
terrible this month!" A hell of a lot of good that does.
There is little doubt that s f is bad, and worse than it
used to be. Why - who knows? What are we going to do ab-
out it - who knows?

::BG: Well, Gary, I have this old-fashioned Liberal fancy
called "Education", which says that if a situation is felt
to be intolerable, then the best thing to do is a bit of
analysis and find out what's wrong, and then find out who
can fix it up. And maybe "they" will listen and thank us
for our trouble and fix up the situation. But if I were a
new-fangled Marxist hothead (or is it anarchist SDS?) I
would shoot all the magazine editors and place a fifteen
foot high wall around America, from which not even the hott
-est of Campbell's hot air could escape. But that would
be violence, and we don't approve of violence, do we,
Gary? So what do we do? - publish nasty fanzines, of course::

It is clear that Clarke lumped for the hard-line s f theme
of Them Smart Blokes Out There Helping Us Along, when it
was fairly clear (at least, as clear as it could be) that
the film was based on a Watcher theme. I don't see any
point in arguing this. The question is: Why did Clarke
change the "plot"? It seems unlikely that he did it for
any reason other than to make more money. Possibly he
altered the film's lines to keep the masses in confusion
and talking about the film, but this seems too devious for
a mere s f writer.

I wish people wouldn't say that the film reeks with symb-
olism. It doesn't - or at least it does, to the extent of
the "symbolism" being entirely subjective and dependent
upon the observer. Kubrick has created a Universal Symb-
olism, or a symbolism of clay, - to adapt itself to, or be
adapted by the observer. This makes people happy, since
they see what they think they see. There might be ten diff-
erent interpretations of the shape of the "Discovery" (a

popular one is that it represents brain-and-spinal-cord, or skull-and-spine. However, if memory serves correctly there are seven "units" behind the "skull", the antenna "unit", then four more "units" before the propulsion units, while the spine has 33 vertebrae, arbitrarily divided at the 7th, 19th and 24th vertebra levels. And do the propulsion units represent, the coccyx, the vestigial tail of humans? Was Kubrick thinking of kangaroos, or brain-tailed saurians?), but the most likely because it was the simplest (Occam's Razor holds good even in s f) is that it was a convenient shape to build the thing in - the prop, not the "real" "Discovery". (Just thought of something to weaken my case - if the propulsion units represent the human coccyx, the fact that we never saw them in operation could tie in with the fact that the coccyx does not function).

One comment of yours made me jump: "...HAL's inability to distinguish between live and dead humans..." He killed them, didn't he? - four of them, in fact. He could distinguish enough to try and kill them all. Since he tried to kill them all, he was at least aware (if he could not distinguish) that a dead human would not "endanger the mission", as he said to Bowman when he locked the space-pod out.

The crux of the film is of course the Monolith (if indeed it was stone, which is unlikely since its discovery was due to its magnetic field), but for me the most difficult point of the film was whether the Slab had any effect on HAL, or was controlling (if only partly so) HAL. (:BG: I would think it very unlikely...)

And indeed, the more I think about it the more convinced I am of this: HAL was acting under either the orders or the control of the Entities (i.e. that) of the Slab. Ostensibly HAL kills all the crew to prevent them "endangering the mission", but he fumbled it and was turned off. Yet Bowman still went Outside to see the Slab. That was his mission - and remember - when he turned HAL off a tape of Floyd told him that the mission was ended - was HAL programmed such that if he stopped, the mission was ended? Or was it coincidence? Could it be that the Slab turned HAL off? How would the "Discovery" know the voyage was ended? HAL, of course. But HAL was turned off. So the ship would not know when the voyage was ended - unless the Slab told it or went to meet it, visually presenting itself to Bowman.

::BG: I didn't have the heart to warn readers that the only article in S F C 1 to stir extended comment was - you guessed it - 2001: IT'S THAT FILM AGAIN! (...And again... and again). So be it. You must admit it, Gary's viewpoint is certainly original. So was that of Volikowsky and Charles Fort :

A BERTRAM CHANDLER

Cell 7
Tara Street
Woollahra
N.S.W. 2025

(March 13, 1969)

Thank you for S F COMMENTARY No 1, which finally caught up with me. Any future issues please send to my home address as above. My cheque for \$3.00, for a year's subscription, is enclosed herewith.

I was rather amused by George Turner's review of the Angus and Robertson anthology. For years and years I have been annoyed by people who beat their breasts and yell, "I am an artist!" without going to the trouble of learning their craft first. Now and again - but rarely - you do find somebody who is such a good artist that his lack of craftsmanship is unimportant. The only two such that I can think of at the moment are Rousseau and Grandma Moses...

Reverting to ALL LACED UP - I have four short stories that have been published, republished, anthologised, re-anthologised and translated into every language from Japanese to Russian, the long way round. Two of them are good - THE CAGE and JETSAM. The other two are just trivial WOMEN'S WEEKLY type dramatisations of minor domestic crises - THE HALF PAIR and ALL LACED UP. I never liked either one much. But ALL LACED UP, on its first sale, paid for the iron lace required to restore the exterior of our Cobb & Co.'s coachman's cottage, and THE HALF PAIR purchased what has turned out to be the most expensive pair of cufflinks in Australia...

In/^{re}the reviews of 2001 - I preferred the film (which I have seen three times) to the book. The WHICH YEAR AT MARIENRAD sequence at the finish was far better on the screen than in Arthur's rather pedestrian prose. Nonetheless, I agree with him that the second monolith should have been found off Saturn, not Jupiter, and think it a great pity that Kubrick got cold feet at that juncture.

::FG: Nobody has preferred the book to the film except the reviewers for ANALOG magazine. In response to this letter, I asked Bert what the chances of being a writer full-time were. Many people seem to get excellent pin-money from science fiction, but only a few make a go of it full-time. And as Jack Wodhams said last issue, unless one can just sit down and write, there's not really much hope. In reply, Bert sent me this extremely interesting letter ::

(April 9, 1969)

I note that you're curious as to the financial rewards (if any) of science fiction. Well, they're about the same as those for any other kind of fiction - unless you're in the

best seller class (which means that you're either very good or very bad) writing is just a part-time occupation. As the late W. Scott remarked, "Literature is a good staff, but a poor crutch..." Science fiction, as a matter of fact, is rather better than general fiction, as one's faithful readers are far less liable to be lured away from the printed page by TV, "comics" or whatever. (I suppose that "comic" books could come in the printed page category, but you know what I mean).

Some years ago, during the dear, dead days when there were about 40 magazines specialising in s f published in the U.S.A. and U.K., my wife and I made the big mistake of regarding literary earnings as a sure and certain part of our income. When the big crash came, with thirty odd magazines dying overnight, we felt the pinch. Nonetheless, if a recent English survey is to be believed, my part-time literary earnings now are well in excess of the income of the average British full-time writer. This, of course, is because I was lucky enough to break into the American market and stay there.

I hope you don't mind some grandfatherly advice. To begin with, if you intend to write for money, concentrate on the American market. Secondly, please don't do what far too many people do - start off by writing The Novel. Apart from anything else, professional writers can always spare the time to skim through a friend's short story, but are apt to recoil in horror from 100,000 words of typescript or even longhand. Too, a 5,000 worder (say) isn't much work, and if it bounces it bounces, and so what? You just wallop out another one, and another, and while you're writing you're learning. But to get a rejection slip with the work that you've kidded yourself will make your fame and fortune is a blow to the ego. I know at least one would-be writer who, rejecting my advice, insisted on writing The Novel, and hasn't written a word since. One? Sorry, I know two, and another one who will shortly get enough rejection slips (if he can afford the postage out and return) to keep his family in bumfodder for months.

Nonetheless, there's money in writing. And you're starting out as quite a few pros have done - in the fanzines. That's where science fiction is better than general fiction - you have somewhere to learn the craft. I hope that you graduate from the fanzines to the prozines.

::BG: But aren't the fanzines nice, cosy little nooks of egoism in the meantime? Lee Harding is always telling me the same thing, but... there's another issue to type... another essay to correct (incongruously, I'm a teacher)... a letter to write. If ever I get myself wound up to send one story to the prozines, and if one is ever accepted (which is unlikely, considering the things we write about the

editors) then you guess which fanzine will go west. But I think S F C subscribers can rest assured. Besides, s f reviews and extended criticism are very attractive fields, so little of worth has been done so far. If there's a small liberal arts college over in America teaching Science Fiction.....? ::

IAN H GODDEN

6 Lewry St
Kyabram
Vic 3620

(22nd March, 1969)

What a pleasant surprise to receive an s f fanzine from Bacchus Marsh. It's a pretty far cry from s f to Frank Hardy's Benson's Valley and a bit hard to mentally associate the two.

::RG: A bit hard for me, too. I haven't read Hardy's unflattering report on Bacchus Marsh (Benson's Valley), but I have heard that he wrote about the town in the Depression. I'm not sure whether he would too much difference, even now. Besides, who cares? I'm living at Ararat this year, and only my mail goes to Bacchus Marsh ::

I'll begin with the magic words "please find enclosed Postal Order for \$3." I hope you've seen and heard these words often enough to make S F COMMENTARY a viable proposition. If ASER is finishing there will certainly be a big gap to be filled.

::PG: At the time of writing this page, 18th May, I haven't had enough response to warrant continuing the magazine. But that's mainly because, as far as I know, the second issue has not even been posted. Never fear, even if there are only 15 or 16 stalwarts left, the magazine will go on. It doesn't make much difference to the cost of each individual copy how many copies are done ::

Your first issue has most of the physical attributes of the typical fanzine: illegibility, poor stapling, and uncertain publication schedule (written in Dec, issued in Jan, received in March) and some very stimulating contents.

I like the approach outlined in your editorial: that you are not a hard science man but trained in the humanities: you use the term "Speculative Fiction" which I have always favoured for this genre and you obviously know and like s f whilst always observing Sturgeon's Law.

::EG: I must consider this the most complimentary letter I've received. Not only has Ian been the only one to realize what the magazine is up to, but (I think) someone has finally guessed what the initials in S F COMMENTARY stand for::

I am pleased to see the current magazines reviewed.. I have never been able understand why most fanzines did not do this as a matter of course. Perhaps because nobody reads them any more. I don't, for one. My reading of magazines is confined to an occasional assault on some back numbers from a large supply I bought through Merv Binns (very cheaply) about 4 -5 years ago when I first became interested in sf. I began this attack by reading through a considerable run of ANALOG and it left me much sadder and wiser.

::BG: That I can understand, Ian. Many people ask me why I keep reading the magazines, and I could have replied, up to a few years ago, to keep up with the Field. Unfortunately for both me and the magazines, both fans and writers have decided that "The Field" lies elsewhere. Or this is what I see from both Hugo and Nebula ballots.

But there were some good stories last quarter. See S F C 3;:

RICHARD E GEIS

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
P.O. Box 3116
Santa Monica
California 90403
U.S.A.

Received S F C today and am sending you copies of SFR 28-9. Your magazine suffers, obviously, from two main faults. The most deplorable is the typewriter you used. It won't cut a sharp stencil --- obviously. And the other thing is that awful cover. Hand drawn lettering, unless

done by a professional artist, always looks awful... amateurish... kidlike. It belies the interesting and mature contents. I assume you are picking up the mantle of ASFR. Good thing. But please get another typer..

::BG: You assume wrong, Dick, because ASFR is still shuffling along, and anyway, how does one reach that standard? :: It was pure masochism publishing this letter, but if this was the impression most American fans got from the first issue, it helps to explain the lack of response so far. I just happen to think that the material was too valuable to be left unpublished, and I printed it any way I could. But Americans have such tender artistic sensibilities.... ::

The mystery of
RAYMOND JOHN GIBSON

2 Baringa St, Plaxland,
N.S.W.

(On March 25, I received the following cryptic note):
Please forward me S F COMMENTARY Number 1. You will find enclosed a postal note for 40c and one

5c stamp for return postage. I want to know what your magazine is like before committing myself to a year's subscription.

:: I duly sent off the second last S F C I left out of 192 first run. Back came...::

(April 8, 1969)

What would I like to say about That Film? :: Yes, it's another of those letters. But read on anyway. It's interesting :: A lot - but the partisans in your magazine would probably stone me. Kubrick - you must admit - is a very uneven director. He was responsible for a howlerised version of Nabokov's LOLITA, an excellent film called PATHS OF GLORY, a miserable compromise called SPARTACUS (though the book was even worse), a wild comedy more horrifying than nuclear war (but ver-r-r-ry good). Kubrick sometimes makes it, more often does not. He didn't, in my view, even look like making it in 2001.

My view of 2001 is not influenced by either a J.W. Campbellian love of gadgetry (of which 2001 is more than full) or the notion that obscurity piled on obscurity makes for good art. You have to balance real meaning against a certain mystery (what's going to happen next?) if you are going to hold audience/reader attention for film, play or book. Frankl, after the superb "Dawn of Man" sequence, I didn't give a damn what was going to happen next, nor did I care much about interpreting what was obviously aimed at Zen-Buddhists and Hippies and Pseuds. "What can be said at all, can be clearly said; of that which eludes utterance, best say nothing": That sums up my feelings about 2001. I just don't care for hinted-at depth in movies, especially when no profundity exists at all. A Zen-Buddhist may waste his life figuring out the sound made by one hand clapping - or a 2001 fan may try translating the boredom of 2001 into a thing crammed with hidden significance. Me, I'd rather have my money back. I think 2001 was Kubrick's best joke on the pseuds since Resnais' *Marienbad*.

I've got to agree with John Foyster: S f is in decline. I can't help wondering whether J.W. Campbell has not aided this decline by only publishing those authors who follow his crackpot party-line. In the days of ASTOUNDING, as Mr Foyster knows, Campbell would often publish material opposed to his editorials. It is not so now. Joe Poyer and his ilk - loyal Campbellians all - have virtually destroyed whatever merits ASTOUNDING/ANALOG used to have. As for GALAXY, IF, etc, they publish trash. F&SF is the only American magazine putting out the occasional good story. S F IMPULSE and NEW WORLDS aren't bad (I liked Moorcock's BEHOLD THE MAN, Harrison's BILL THE GALACTIC HERO, Richard Wilson's SEE ME NOT).

It's a good experience to find some old ASTOUNDINGS in a secondhand bookshop. None of the modern magazines touch it - not even NEW WORLDS. My own reading of ASTOUNDING has been from secondhand copies; I was too young to read them as they came out. Do you know anybody wanting to sell old copies of ASTOUNDING? ::

::BG: I've already handed on Mr Gibson's address to Merv Binns at McGills, and suggested to him that he try Franklin's in Russell Street. They are the only two Melbourne addresses I know. Anybody want to help out on this one. I refused to say more to Mr Gibson (Raymond? John? RJ?) about 2001. This is very much the MacCallum line from ASFR 17, but Mr Gibson has not read that issue. On the magazines - I don't agree that it's all trash. In fact, the main points of my FICTION MACHINES columns, and probably John Foyster's main idea, is that it only needs a couple of strong, intelligent editors of the calibre of Gold and Campbell of old, and the scene could be as good as it ever was. I certainly agree that the old ASTOUNDINGS (and the '50s GALAXYS) were better than NEW WORLDS has ever been. But NEW WORLDS is still in there fighting. The others have copped out:..

:: Well, anyway, this here letter comes back, and y'know what? - I still had no idea how this character had heard of the magazine. I've sent it to enough people who haven't written back. Finally on May 10, I received this interesting missive, and the "review" featured in CRITICANTO :::::

Perhaps I overstated my case against 2001. However, understatement is often taken for guarded praise. If I damned the film too much, if my criticism was a bit too petulant, ("fightin' words"), it was because I have little time for the flights of fancy taken by many reviewers.

You made a good point (in your letter to me) about the terrifying nature of Poole's corny exchanges with his parents. Actually, when you think about it, real life astronauts, both Russian and American, have indulged themselves in almost identical banalities (the Russian astronauts couldn't find heaven; the Americans treated us to a NASA-sponsored sermon from the moon). Maybe Kubrick's intentions were serious, but I think he failed because he indulged in too much winking-light gadgetry of the kind we expect to view in such TV disasters as THE TIME TUNNEL. Also, I think the pyrotechnic display towards the end was an indication that Kubrick had run out of ideas. And the supposedly meaning-packed sequence in the Hotel Hilton was a plodding sleepwalker - at least, for me.

A props of the winking-light gadgetry, you may have seen the austere "spaceship" in Choler's NIGHT OF THE AUK: no levers, switches, dials, radar screens, merely an almost

empty stage upon which the audience imposed its own sense of reality. Oboler himself writes: "Let Disney on his TV Tomorrowland build the chrome-gleamed, gadgeted, bright efficiency of a spaceship replica - for my part I had intended that the NIGHT OF THE AUK would bring, not the second by second reality, but an abstraction of flight which would carry, in its imagery, the words about tomorrow which I felt I must say." Me, I prefer Oboler's approach to Kubrick's; but Oboler has more of the poet in him. You may remember Kubrick handing out pre-publicity ofr 2001 in which he was gloating (like a child with a new train set) that everything was scientifically accurate. Oh boy and who cares!

A final word: I believe Cinerama is a disaster for any picture - even a good one. Cinemascope - for some; Todd AO - yes; Cinerama - never. It's too much like looking through the slit in an armoured car - far too wide and narrow. By the way, I don't think the old postage-stamp screen was much better. That's just what you get for letting camera engineers design your screens - billboards and postage stamps.

::BG: Mr. Gibson addends a list of his favorite s f novels. It's a list that would correspond with many other lists - from Wyndham, through Pohl/Kornbluth, to SIRIUS and BRAVE NEW WORLD. Don't you feel friendly towards people whose tastes correspond closely to your own? But maybe it's more fun to "meet" people on the opposite sides of multiple fences. For instance, R.J. Gibson on 2001. ::

My mainstream reading (which is tantamount to heresy among many fans) consists of: Tolstoy, Dickens, Camus, Voltaire, Melville, Dostoyevsky, Pushkin, Sophocles, Homer, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Rabelais, etc... How's that for name-dropping? Suffice to say - thanks to paperback publishing, I'm pretty much of a bookworm. I've never been able to understand, though, the stuffy way in which mainstream readers treat s f, nor can I understand why s f readers throw up a mental block against anything outside their field. Both parties, it seems to me, don't know what they're missing.

::BG: I'll let that pass, because, very smugly, I agree. Consider yourselves challenged, exclusivists. And the mystery of Raymond John Gibson? Finally solved in this P.S. It seems that here is yet another acquaintance for which I must thank John Bangsund ::

PS: I bought 2 copies of ASFR (Numbers 3 and 4) at Morgan's Bookshop, Bathurst St., Sydney. Wrote to Bangsund about a year ago - it was he who sent me news of th your S F COMMENTARY in the COSMIC DUSTBUG. I'm afraid I am a "sleeping" fan, The only club I belong to is one in which movies are

shown about once a month. I've read s f on and off for about 20 years (started when I was twelve). I did not read MacCallum's review of 2001 in ASFR 17. I thought ASFR had died a year ago

::BG : I've already disillusioned Ray on that one. It occurs to me that others may be under the same impression. So far as I know, ASFR 20 has been produced, but it is still a myth on the horizon. Ditto SCYTHROP (which I spekt.wrongly in Number 2). Just send money, or letters of comment, to John. Ditto to me.::

BRIAN RICHARDS

50 Shenton Rd
Swanbourne
W.A. 6010

--- That's what I would like to write. Two enjoyable letters from Brian, reigning KALEW (King of Australian Letter Writers), but both foully besmirched with "DNQ". Thanks anyway, Brian.

PAUL L ANDERSON

21 Mulga Rd
Hawthorndene
S.A. 5051

(Paul is another omnibus letter writer. Excuse me if I take some breath-taking liberties with some of your letters. The only reason is that my printers don't like 46-plus-page fanzines. Needless to say, I'm saving like mad for my own duplicator, but

until then - cruel fate - censorship!) ::

I received the first issue of your S F COMMENTARY some time ago, and I thought it was very good. I had intended to see you about a subscription to it at the Easter Convention but I caught a cold at the last minute and could not attend. Therefore please find enclosed \$3 for a subscription.

::BG : Ah, what it is to have friends. Subscribers are the kind of people I really like to see at Conventions, but potential subscribers will do just as well ::

When I read the issue I thought it was a worthy successor to ASFR. It may reach even greater heights - even if you do continue the bias against the American magazines. While these magazines are not very good they are the only magazines that the s f fan has to read until VISIONS is published and released in Australia. Re NEW WORLDS - while Mr Moorcock may be discovering some new writers, its circulation has dropped to the point where it is only approximately 15% that of ANALOG's. In my view this failure is

caused by its fostering stories that are more noted for their style of writing than for their readability and "Sense of Wonder". In the case of Ballard's stories (or perhaps a better word would be 'disjointed notes') they do not even have that virtue. In your review of the s f magazines you paint a pretty dismal scene, since you have effectively condemned all of them as not worth reading! The only exception was NEW WORLDS and that is unobtainable in Adelaide. The last issue on sale here was No 179, which had only half fiction in it. I only hope that VISION is above that low standard.

:: BG : Well, with people like Bulmer and Harding in it... I say no more. Of course the American magazines are the only thing we have... that's the sob story. However, a news item came in recently that made my week: IF and GALAXY and hangers-on have been sold to Universal Publications. Pohl has resigned; the new editor is named Jakobson, formerly of the doubtful-sounding SUPER SCIENCE STORIES. There just might be an improvement.

:: BG : Paul sent two other letters, including an 8-pager on 2001, which has just opened in Adelaide. Paul didn't stand a chance of adding to ^{the} vast heap of 2001 literature, but I've asked Paul for some other reviews. Y'never know. Paul seems to have excruciating trouble buying things in Adelaide - things like NEW WORLDS and Ace novels. I advise him and anybody else in the same boat to get in touch with McGills in Melbourne. ::

(May 21st, 1969)

Now that it is the May vacation, I am able to watch TV; instead of studying Accountancy. Last Monday I saw THE CHAMPIONS, now on Channel 9 in Adelaide. I'm sorry to say that the show was down to the usual Hollywood standard. The basic idea of having three people endowed with super-human powers is straight from the comics. However in the current show the super-powers were not in evidence, apart from a couple of isolated instances. In fact, with only a few minor script changes, the plot could have come straight from THE MAN FROM UNCLE. I still think that STAR TREK is the best s f show on TV even if it is starting to fall apart at the seams. Some of the recent shows have been just plain ridiculous. I doubt if it can be granted a second reprieve.

:: BG : I've only seen STAR TREK once, and it was terrible. It has been cancelled yet again, and no doubt there will yet again be a SOST (Save Our Star Trek) Movement. But, in the words of that sage from Sydney, John Brosnan, Why Bother? ::

While reading ASFR 18 I noted your review of Michael Moorcock's

THE WRECKS OF TIME and was interested in your opinion of it. The title rang a bell when I was reading the letter pages of NEW WORLDS 162, This section includes several letters discussing this book - but they give the credit to "James Colvin"! The details given of the plot of Colvin's effort indicate that it is the same book as the one you reviewed. On reading the letters, it is apparent that Moorcock published THE WRECKS OF TIME under the name of James Colvin and then wrote an editorial (NW 158) on it, explaining the plot. Then, after he had milked it of interest and controversy, he sold the novel to Ace for further royalties. I certainly hope that NEW WORLDS can improve its sales, to eliminate the necessity of printing novels like this one. I thought it was the last straw when he reprinted Harrison's BILL THE GALACTIC HERO from GALAXY.

:: BG : Well, Paul, it's a long and sad story that stirs the heart and bores the mind. Moorcock Tells All in one of the SPECULATION magazines from early this year. Moorcock has finally given up the good fight - so has Platt and Sallis and... They've all resigned. If the magazine does not change at all, we'll know that all Moorcock ever did was write novels in a back room to support the finances. Platt was in the coal-scuttle writing novels to keep the magazine going. Sallis was writing silly stories to fill up the pages of NEW WORLDS. NEW WORLDS was edited by the tea lady. You can't say that you don't hear it first in SFC.

:: AND.. indignant fire 'n' smoke 'n' all - you should have written that LoC on WRECKS OF TIME to John Bangsund. Didn't you see the tears of blood on the front cover of Number 18?::

GRAHAM STONE

c/- Australian S F Association
P.O.Box 852
Canberra City
A.C.T. 2601

Tough luck about that Lettera. I had one of the wretched things - for text on the first series of S F NEWS, which was photo-offset - and made the same mistake trying to stencil with it. But it was only one

stencil and I found out straight away. If it had been a long job like yours I don't know if I'd have had the heart to scrap it either.

:: BG : Thanks for the condolences, Graham. I don't like to be nasty to Olivetta, but their Lettera 32 is to be avoided at all costs by stencil-cutting fans. It types a beaut letter, though ::

DAVID C PIPER

24 Dawlish Drive
Ruislip Manor
Middlesex
England

(21st April 1969)

Thanks very much for S F C
Number 1. I'm not at all
sure why you sent me a
copy... of one thing I've
never been accused and
that's of being a literate
member of the s f reading
fraternity, and I can't see

myself ever being much of an asset to a fan-ed's sub.
list.

::PG : You've just started, David. This letter is witness
of all sorts of literate qualities like wit and insight.
Why not use same, for reviewing? And that goes for every-
body else, too ::

Be that as it may, some, extremely random comments:

(a) Repro is lousy.. at least on my copy. I'm getting on a
bit now and my eyesight ain't as good as it once was. Seems
to be a lack of ink... the repro I mean, not my eyes... or
badly cut stencils. No doubt it'll improve.

(b) Don't use illos inside the thing but I suggest you have
a simple and uncluttered plate made for the cover. This
cover is awful.

(c) Talking of first issues... I got this copy on Saturday
and assume you sent it sometime in January. Ridiculous!
You've probably published another couple already so I'd
better keep mentioning the number. Numero One.

:: BG : Most of these points I've covered, masochistically,
elsewhere. Re postage - of course it's ridiculous - the
issues were sent out in March! This issue will be finished
tomorrow (last day of May 1969). It will probably reach
England in 2001 - via PanAm space-liner ::

(d) Contents idea... filched from ASFR(!)... very good.

::BG: And as I said in a letter to David, the only thing
that is not filched from ASFR is the name. Richard Geis
has that ::

(e) I'm sick of reading about 2001. I loved it. Wonderful
film. Just not interested in reading anymore about it,
is all.

(f) I enjoyed your exhaustive Part I on Dick very much.
Until I reached your "Apology" on Page 51 though, I was a
leettle surprised at your conclusions on HIGH CASTLE. It's
one of the lamentably few cases where I reckon I got the

point of a book without being told. I enjoy all Dick's books. Probably a masochistic streak... I enjoy being slightly baffled and intrigued and made to work hard at a book. Sometimes. My three favourites are HIGH CASTLE, PALMER ELDRITCH, and MARTIAN TIME-SLIP. That last one is, I think, a tremendous work. Brilliant.

:: RG : I would agree with that. MARTIAN TIME-SLIP and TIME OUT OF JOINT and a host of other superlative Dick books should have been discussed in the articles. As it turned out, I am/looking^{only} at those books I can obtain. A reprint of MARTIAN TIME-SLIP (under its original title, ALL WE MARSMEN ?) is badly needed. Apart from this constant whinge about the unavailability of Dick's best books, I will leave any and all comments on Dick until my last Dick article. If there can ever be a "last" article ::

(h) NEW WORLDS... I sometimes buy it. I don't usually read it all. I enjoyed CAMP CONCENTRATION. Only item I can remember enjoying recently is Delany's fragment a couple of months ago. I don't have strong feelings about the magazine now. It's there. (:EG: Not in Australia, however::) Probably better to be there than not. It's very uneven. Good presentation. Too pretentious by half. Some of Ballard's bits of late have been in such bad taste that I find their publication incredible. Apart from Disch I don't reckon any of its New Writers are gonna amount to anything. Your comment, Page 6, about Moorcock's "New Writers"... surely Colvin IS Moorcock, isn't he?

:: RG : I don't know. My sources of information must be drying up... or maybe they are just sick of my irate notes from Ararat. Look, Lee Harding - if Paul Anderson knew Colvin was Moorcock, and David Lindsay knew Colvin was Moorcock, how come you and I don't know that Colvin was Moorcock? -- And that zappy new experimental acid head writer, Brian Aldiss - are you quite sure he won't amount to anything? ::

(i) Foyster's piece was crap. Quantity ain't Quality. Page 28: he loads his argument by mentioning MacApp and Sabers-hagen. Jeez... there's probably a million such from his supposed "Golden Age". It was always better years ago, wasn't it! Toffee apples just ain't the same as they were, are they?! Rubbish! Against his list I'd stack Delany, Zelazny, and Disch. It gets better all the time.

(k) Enough.. enough. I enjoyed the thing very much. In the absence of Aussie cash herewith 10/-... hope that'll cover me for a couple. Assuming, of course, you'll accept feelthy money!

::RG : I don't like saying it, but that is a foolish statement. And all that optimism! Foyster, it's over to you ::

LYNN A HICKMAN

THE PULP ERA magazine
413 Ottokee Street
Wauseon
Ohio 43567
U.S.A.

Received S F COMMENTARY I yesterday ((April 28!!)) and enjoyed it very much. I am sending you THE PULP ERA (my own fanzine) in trade. I hope that you enjoy it as much as I have yours.

:::BG: Well, Lynn. You know that dock strike that held up S F COMMENTARY one way, and all the American magazines the other direction? We've just had a 15-day dock strike here, and to the best of my knowledge, 3 months of American magazines, PULP ERA, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, and large quantities of practically everything else, are still out on Port Philip Bay. That may explain wierd delays in nearly everything over the last few months. Thanks for the trade offer :: And the same to all other fan-editors. I'm willing to trade (even send you an airmail copy if you will review it) if you'll send me a note and an issue of your magazine ::

I especially enjoyed reading DECLINE AND FALL by John Foyster and agree with him in many ways. I will say that the majority of my favourite s f and/or fantasy appeared from approximately 1917 through 1938. But as far as that goes, most of my favourite reading of ALL types appeared in that span. I don't mean to say that good stories aren't being written now. They are. Just not as many. You have to wade through so much crud and sameness to hit that good or excellent story. And that makes reading a chore.

I certainly can't agree with you re Fred Pohl and H.L. Gold. I had to quit reading Gold's GALAXY. It got to the point where each issue seemed exactly the same. You could hardly tell if you were reading a new one or the one you had finished the month before unless you looked at the illustrations. Each story had to be a cute story and have a cute ending. Pohl stepped in and made something of the magazines again. He published some good stories and I started reading the magazines again.

I hope that you will start using some artwork in the zine, preferably by some Australian artists that we don't get a chance to see in most of the stateside magazines.

::: BG : That's a beaut idea, Lynn. When Dimitri and Noel :: and John and Gary and Pernie and all those other mad comics fans send me some illustrations, I'll be quite willing to feature them. But so far... :: The '50's GALAXYS I've read have certainly had sameness - a constant slickness of approach and presentation of good new ideas, that I have not seen anywhere else. I've not read any old

ASTOUNDINGS, but I suspect that they were GALAXY's only peer. Pohl published many good stories... but fewer and fewer each year. And besides, Pohl is now past history, like Gold. I can't approve of all this nostalgia. I would like to have Dave Piper's attitude. But, like John Foyster, I cannot see the evidence, and like Brian Aldiss in S F C 2 I would like to see the old style shaken off, but cannot see that the new style has been adequately woven. Prophet-like, I will mumble "We live in troubled times" and retire to cogitate behind my typewriter ::

HARRY HARRISON

P.O. Box 1058
Imperial Beach
California 92032
U.S.A.

(2nd May 1969)

My thanks for Number 1 of S F COMMENTARY edited, apparently, from a drunken bog. (Bacchus Marsh: you must explain that one to me some day!) My only complaint is the eye-destroying mimicing. Lick this mechanical

problem and you will have everything going for you.

I feel your Mr Toomey did a most perceptive job on my MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! But he does raise some questions and I would like to answer them now. That I did not in the book was my fault. A novel is a Might Construction and I agree with Hemingway that what you leave out can be more important than what you put in. But occasionally things are left out that should have been in, and this is the case here.

Plagues do not rage because we know how to control them. We immunize, control disease vectors and stop them before they start. We will still be doing this in my New York of 2000 A.D. - but just barely. This book hovers on the edge of disaster, real destructive disaster, though the way of life presented is a disaster from our present point of view. The plagues-to-come are suggested, though I should have suggested them more strongly, as our riots-to-come, and all other horrors. Disaster books are easy to write. Knock the whole bloody works down and follow a couple of characters through the ruins. It is much harder to catch the world on the brink of destruction and keep it hovering there. But this is the only way to show the horror of everyday life that I wanted to convey.

Rusch does not feel his work devalues him. That is the important point. He is one of the plodders, doing the job he knows best how to do, true to himself and the oath he believes in. He is the usual man, not the unusual one that s f talks about most of the time. Normally one would not

dare to write a novel about this kind of man. Boredom would set in instantly. I counted upon the setting and the changing viewpoints to keep the story going despite this handicap.

As to the Catholic Church. Yes, I blame them for a lot. Much more than I put in the book. They are the power for evil in the world today when it comes to blocking intelligent birth control. I wrote the book over four years ago and predicted they would not change their attitudes and, unhappily, I have been proven correct by time. In a world that is abandoning their kind of religion they can continue to exist only by becoming more reactionary since they realize that anything else would destroy their Church. I wish I were wrong. But I am afraid history is bearing me out. All we can do is expose their crime of torture and death to mothers and children and shout shame, and hope the world will listen to the voice of reason and not that of superstition. I said I felt strongly about them, and I carefully held back my strongest views in the book since I want to convince people - not bludgeon them on the head. I can now admit my stronger views within the small family of science fiction where we may differ, but can still speak up.

PS: Did you attend the Australian Easter Conference of 1968? I sent a tape with my own bumpf on it, as well as interviewing Charles R Tanner and Ross Rocklyne. I heard nothing after that. Did it arrive in time for the Con? Was it lost in the mail? What?

:: BG: I've already written to Harry informing him of the history of his tape and of the rather disorganized shape of Melbourne fandom during the latter half of last year. Yes- it was enjoyed; yes - it exists; yes - it is at the bottom of Bangsund's slushpile; no - I have no clue when it will get into print. One of the more exciting mysteries from the ever-mysterious realm of Melbourne fandom.

Rather shame-facedly, I must admit I've not read MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! It's one of large collection of s f classics that I've bought in order to "catch up on the field" but instead have lent out for everybody to read but myself. In case Harry's attitudes do offend any Roman Catholic readers, let me say that the Catholic attitudes do puzzle me, no matter how much I try to understand them. They do call for a rational and slightly less pompous than usual explanation. This seems/ a better forum on the subject than most. So...?

Thanks for the letter, Harry. An author's time is literally money and normally I would be happy for any author just to read this magazine. The letter was doubly welcome ::

LELAND SAPIRO

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY magazine
P O Box 40
University Station
Regina
Canada

(30th April 1969)

Many thanks for sending me a copy of your new magazine; I sent you the current RQ, via surface mail, in exchange -- and I hope we can trade regularly from now on.

You miss the point of Phil Dick's Palmer Eldritch novel when you refer to its "superfluous" use of religious symbolism, for such symbolism is not just added on to the novel but is, as Yogi Borel says (see enclosure from RQ No 9) its "informing notion". (Also see Phil Dick's letter of explication in the very next issue.)

:: PG : This is by far the best response I've had so far to the Philip Dick novels. (Before I forget - could someone let me have Philip Dick's address please?). My point in the articles was that Dick does a perfect job in PALMER ELDRITCH until his nightmare is fully developed... and then delivers a lot of little lectures for those who might have missed his implicit point. The novel works best as a reductio ad absurdum of the major philosophical question: How can we ever know that anything exists except our own power of perception? I'm willing to consider a more religious viewpoint than that, but I've not yet worked one out. And I did not see the Dick rejoinder. I just hope Bangsund still has Number 10 somewhere around the house. ... And again I have to remind myself that I was not going to reply to letters on Dick until the last article in the series. ::

Kindly consult dictionary as to the meaning of "protagonist". Mine says a protagonist is the "chief person in drama or plot of story." The phrase "main protagonist" is redundant - meaning a chief chief person - and your reference (P. 40) to the "second main protagonist" is not only redundant but self-contradictory.

::BG : I don't know what you are going to do with the following issues. When I did Number 3 I had left my dictionary at my place of employment. Thanks for the tip. Consider it open season on my spelling and grammar. John Bangsund probably has a list a yard long of my mistakes ::

Your remarks on the IF-GALAXY combo are quite good, especially your reference to IF's "teenage/sub-adult market" and its support from "enough undiscerning people" to make the magazine a success. But I don't think it's a matter of "which should publish whose slushpile": since GALAXY pays (and has always paid) the higher rates I'd assume that GALAXY would print a smaller portion of stories from what must be their common slushpile.

:: BG : Now we don't have to worry at all, do we, Leland?
Probably both magazines are again back to let a word ::

Anyway, keep going, man. Once you get past the third issue
(usually the toughest) things'll get much easier.

:: BG : Thanks for the good wishes. Each issue will be hard
until I have my own means of printing. I solved the "third
issue" problem - I did the fourth issue at the same time ::

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

(May 4 1969)

QUARTER MERKUR magazine
Felsenstrasse 20
2762 Ortman
Austria

Please excuse a short note;
I'm now in the Austrian army
and don't have much time or
money for anything. So far I
have just glanced through the
first issue of S F COMMENTARY
when I made a short visit
home. The magazine appears to

be very interesting, and in any case I enjoyed your reviews in ASFR 19, and was especially glad that you gave THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING MAN such a fine appreciation. This novel was much better than many that got acclaimed as great new s f discoveries. I'm definitely interested in getting further copies of S F COMMENTARY, though I'm at present not in a position to write or pay anything. But if a German fanzine is of any use to you I would be glad to send you my QUARTER MERKUR in exchange (about 4 issues a year, totally ca. 300-350 pages).

:: BG : I can't read German, Franz, but I have heard that Bernie Pernhouse can. From ~~what~~ Foyster said in ASFR 19, QM would be a magnificent source for reprint material, among other things. I can well believe, for instance, that QM would be the world's best fanzine - simply because it is edited by the world's best s f critic. I find the next two years pretty dismal without Franz's brilliance.

Thanks for the comments on TALM - but they should really have gone to John Bangsund (maybe they did). And Brian Aldiss still has not admitted authorship. See you in two years time.. or sooner, if you can manage to jump a ship to Australia and evade our Conscription lottery ::

BRIAN W ALDISS

(17th May 1969)

Heath House
Southmoor
nr. Abingdon
Berks, England

It was pleasant to get your
letter, and I'd better make
sure to answer it at once or
else I may never do so. I
also had the first two

numbers of S F COMMENTARY. You have a lot of kind things to say about my work, which of course delight me; but I never know how to answer praise except by a mute "Thank you"! Also, my instinctive response is a word of caution about over-praise, which I realise has a sadly dampening effect on the praiser.

So that while I am deeply pleased - even, one might say, relieved - by your appreciation, I set the whole matter about with my characteristic qualifications. You may recall the famous retort of Turner when a buyer had shown disappointment at one of his canvases: "You should tell him that indistinctness is my forte". I believe that one of my attractions as an s f writer is that I introduce qualifications and indistinctness where the Heinleins use only primary colours, that I use a variety of brush-strokes where the Poul Andersons use only palette knives, and so on. You must find this attractive since you relish Dick, and ambiguity is one of his hallmarks.

At the same time, some of your comments display a lack of subtlety which makes me wonder about how your splendid idea for a short of "Aldiss Revisited" would fare in practice. I mean that while you praise (I think correctly) GIRL AND ROBOT WITH FLOWERS for giving expression to writers' problems, your rather brash comments on the Colin Charteris Acid Head series in S F COMMENTARY No 1 make no imaginative attempt to interpret feeling of editor or author. The Charteris stories were as much an exploration for me as for the reader. They were not written in the usual chronological order - but why should they be (or from my point of view, how could they be)? But I was attempting to tease nobody; how could I possibly produce BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD until its component parts, the Charteris stories, were written. DRAKE-MAN forms an important linkage in the book; on paper, as you say, it stands badly alone. In the novel, there will be dizzy gaps - but better to let the reader's imagination swing across those gaps than stuff them with material that is not totally effective. But it is a slow business accreting a novel if one is trying both to throw away usual stereotypes and say something positive.

Much of this applies also to AN AGE. It is not a success as a novel, but as an s f novel I believe it has interest in that it takes care over much that is often neglected in s f: thematic material, characterisation, atmospheric description. It also concerns art as a vitalising principle of life, a motif of other of my novels (PROBABILITY A and BAREFOOT), as well as a preoccupation in my life.

It is a common complaint of authors that their novels do not get enough attention; but EARTHWORKS and DARK LIGHT

YEARS seem to fall into such a category. My feeling is that you should exercise the faculty of critic rather than reviewer - that is, indulge in exposition rather than showers of eulogy spiced with blame.

I have this concern that the s f field should behave more professionally. We should all seek to appear before a larger court. In this country, I have now largely managed to escape from the narrow confines of s f. I am known as a travel writer (next year, I hope to go to Brazil with my wife and gather material for a travel book); my recent stories have appeared in QUEEN, NOVA, and PUNCH. I am just completing the final revision of a non-fiction speculative volume, THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS (about s f among other topics). BAREFOOT will emerge from Faber in October. And next year, THE HAND-REARED BOY, first of a quartet of non-s f novels about sex and twentieth-century life will appear from Weidenfeld; it is already the subject of much publicity.

All this I tell you for mixed reasons. First, in the hope of scaring you off your project. Second, to warn you that if you go ahead, you must treat all that is published so far as early material to be seen in the light of a trajectory of development. And thirdly -

Thirdly, this professional business. I am not a fan writer but a professional author. I would like someone to write a professional critique of my work. All this letter so far has cautionary aspects: because caution is a part of critical equipment: but if you feel with me so far, come with me further and write your critique professionally. Think of it as something worthy of being paid for, addressed to strangers. Think of it as something Faber might be prepared to publish, or NEW WORLDS at least. If you are going to do it, do it extremely well and make your name with it. Hate anything less.

End of lecture, because I begin to suspect I am now boring myself. Much less formally, give my regards to the boys. Thank Lee for collecting my trophy, tell John Foyster his last exploding madonna was the best - Rottensteiner is a good punchy critic - say Hello to all in Ferntree Gully. You sound to have a vital thing going, and by 1975 I hope to be rich enough to come out and join you at the World Con. You, naturally, will ignore everything I say and go ahead and write what you want to in your own way...That's how I work too.

:: BG : For once, I decided to print this letter complete without editing or butting in. It seems to me a model of intelligent, civilized letter-writing, which is the main reason for printing what is in fact a quite personal document.

As you, the readers, may have guessed, I asked Brian what would be his reaction to a critical survey similar to the Dick survey. Obviously that last comparison made him a little green around the gills. Brian may also remember a disastrous effort in Pete Weston's SPECULATION, which seemed to consist entirely, not of quotations from the novels, but of quotations by Brian Aldiss about the novels. My ^{projected} survey was to appear in ASFR originally, and was scheduled for S F COMMENTARY when I wrote the letter to Brian. To be completely honest, I had never thought of submitting it to a professional organization. I had just not realized that the avenues had now opened in Britain for professional criticism of science fiction. The idea is inspiring.

I hope the information on the forthcoming Aldiss volumes proves valuable to everybody. In Australia's only literate newspaper THE AUSTRALIAN, James Hall reported in his weekly column from Britain (Saturday May 24 1969): "Faber, who have published his previous books, found the latest by Brian Aldiss too hot to handle. Or at least the company's managing director, Robert Lusty, did when he read it in proof copy. Mr. Lusty does not live up to his name. Outraged, he told Aldiss he would not publish a book so offensive and objectionable. So THE HAND-REARED BOY will now carry the Weidenfeld and Nicholson imprint".

I wrote back to Brian, but I would like to explain my attitude to the Charteris stories here. As I explained to Brian, I feel that these stories are so much better than most other NEW WORLDS experiments because Aldiss has remained a great story-teller in every variation on the philosophical issues worked out in the stories. The Charteris stories are well-structured stories - it was reasonable to assume that the completed novel would be the same, and that its plan was already in blue-print. Therefore it seemed a confidence trick to print the stories "out of order." The stories were so self-confident and dazzling that I did not suspect how experimental they might be. I admit the unsubtlety; I think many would share it ::

JOHN FOYSTER

UMPTEN MAGAZINES Inc.
12 Glengariff Drive
Mulgrave 3170

(May 21st 1969)

Thanks for the two letters of comment and, of course, S F COMMENTARY in which I should have commented long ago.

Re the Nebula Awards: MOTHER TO THE WORLD appeared in ORBIT 3 and THE PLANNERS may have appeared there as well.

What do you think of Sallis's ORTHOGRAPHIES in that very recent NEW WORLDS? I asked JB, but he hadn't read it, of course.

:: BG : I tried reading it at about 11 pm a few nights ago, and got through about two pages. I will try again, in a more wakeful mood. It doesn't look the most exciting piece of literature I've seen ::

On Bob Toomey's review of EINSTEIN INTERSECTION: the name is "Delany". ::BG: I had realized. I'm sure I've seen it spelled wrongly in print - probably an authoritative source, like GALAXY magazine ::

I was disappointed to find that Damien Broderick was able neither to fully discuss his vision of Vonnegut's two novels nor to partially refer to the books themselves: should Damien perhaps try to sink his teeth into, say, a Keith Laumer novel or two for afters?

:: BG: As Damien said to me - the Vonnegut piece was written about the same time as my Dick pieces - late 67, early 68. They were to be part of a series - but after the first had lain on Bangsund's shelf for six months, he just could not care much about completing the project ::

George's notes on "IQ" are essentially crap, and I think you were a little unfair to publish them. Maybe I'm just writing off the cuff, too, but the fact that Van Vogt knows little or nothing about the subject is scarcely an excuse for publishing George just because he knows a little more. IQ, as you should know, Bruce, is just an aptitude test whose meaning is as clear as that of any other aptitude test. For example, if your IQ on the Stanford-Binet scale is less than 130 you have only one tenth (or one twentieth, I forget the figure) the chance of someone whose IQ is over 130 of getting a Master's degree at Monash University. That's useful, in a way. Genius, and IQ as we know it, don't really have much connection, and I can't see anything wrong with an "IQ of 184", except that these days it is not general practice to give a specific figure, but rather a range of the same.

::BG: I still think George's self-admittedly idle "notes" were entertaining, and even useful. George may not know much about IQ (as he admitted himself) but he does know a fair bit about writing, and especially about the "authority" of the science in science fiction. Genius is still an interesting problem, and it is plain that s f has never properly tackled it. The only exception might be CAMP CONCENTRATION ::

Nice of you to dredge up my old article, but the date of

writing, 1967, is a trifle obvious in places.

PARRY MACKENZIE doesn't have any literary or scientific merit. This seems a fairly good reason for the National Board not bothering to look. On the other hand it is banned because it makes plain the meaning of everyday Australian slang without using four-letter words, indicating that 95% of the population should face daily obscene language charges.

I didn't do too well on your Best of the Year list of stories: I've only read numbers 7 and 9 which might go a long way towards explaining why I thought it a pretty lousy year.

oo oo oo

Which means, John, that you're going to have to read more crap than ever to catch up on my lists, won't you?

That's about all there's room for. To be more precise, I think that I'm probably about ten to fifteen pages outside Lee Harding's limits on this issue. No matter. I enjoyed reading these letters, and I thought you would too. I would like to receive your letter. Yes. You and you and you. (There aren't many of you yet, so I'm fairly safe in pointing at random).

Somehow I never seem to have space to be pally and friendly and tell you the story of my life - and the story of the extraordinary time schedule of the magazine. That would look too much like whining. The last stencil for this issue will be typed on or about the 1st June, 1969. Under present circumstances, the stencils go into limbo from there. For instance, the second issue was only posted in the third week of May, although I finished typing it before the Easter Convention. Hence, among other problems, I cannot make this a newsmagazine, for the same reason the prozines cannot spread s f news.

However, no matter what the delays in transmission, stencils are still being typed (at normal frenetic speed). The next issue should contain a report on the 1969 Easter Convention held in Melbourne. They may even be...and this will be worth the price of the magazine itself... photographs of the participants in that auspicious event. Some of the pix in ASFR 3 have become sadly out-of-date.

And the story of my life? That rates an editorial, maybe. Let's say that I'm still teaching, but trying to figure out ways to write and still make money. One simply cannot be Ye Grated Fan-Edde and Ye Noble Dessicated Teacher at the same time. I think it's fairly clear which way I incline. Suggestions please (like a \$2000 advance on a book of criticism on Brian Aldiss).

C R I T I C A N T O

George Turner
Bruce R Gillespie
Raymond John Gibson

THE TWO-TIERS

Bob Shaw

Ace Special.

Reviewed by
George Turner

This is the first Bob Shaw story I can recall reading, and if he writes another novel I shall certainly read that too. Not that this one will set the canals of Mars on fire -- but it is a solid and workmanlike job with a dash of original thinking.

Thinking about what type of work it is, I am reminded of the recent exploding madonna preoccupation with deciding on how to approach s f. (For me there is only one approach to any book: an open mind. The suggestion of a special approach implies ingrained limitations, things to be ignored or forgiven before you start. If a genre needs that, it is not viable; it is frozen.)

Would you approach it as a love story? It is one. Very much so.

Or as a time travel story? It is one.

Or as a cosmic disaster tale? It is that.

Or just as a novel?

I'll take it as a novel, telling a story about people. The big themes are all there, but they are parts of a design and subservient to an intellectual question. It would be unfair to reveal the precise nature of the question, but reasonable to say that it takes up the very unpleasant query posed in the last chapter of Rudrys' ROGUE MOON and examines it as a problem in human relationships.

Just what is to be done about the two personas of a duplicated man? Shaw treats of the problem on a small scale bringing it down to life size, and without the vicious impact of Rudrys' question, but what he loses in force he gains in realism. And his answer, though dressed up in drama is a commonsense one. It is, unfortunately, not possible to outline the plot without destroying the originality Shaw has brought to his tale.

He deals also with the matter of the conservation of energy, which is a subject writers on time travel have avoided like the plague, as have those happy guys who never tell you where the energy comes from when the super-teleport tosses someone's space fleet a blithe light year or two away. (Naughty! Mustn't ask questions like that!) But the fact remains that when a man-sized mass is removed from probability-universe A without compensation of some kind, and probability-universe B receives an additional mass not recognised in its balance of total forces, some sort of adjustment must be made. Shaw faces up to the problem as best he can, and offers an answer that might be as much on the right track as any other. My only quarrel with it is that I feel he rather overdoes the consequences, but at least he makes them an integral part of his plot and doesn't use them simply to provide some gee-whizz super-science!

In fact there is no gee-whizz of any sort in this tale about a man who was in love with his wife. But there is careful thinking and straightforward construction of a tricky plot. Also there is distinct if superficial characterisation (a little more of it would have helped the drama immensely) and solid if undistinguished writing.

Harlan Ellison says: "Knocked me cold; painfully good." Well, it isn't quite all that, but it is superior in so many ways to the dreary average that one can only recommend it. My thanks to Bruce for pushing me into reading it.

STAR WELL :: Alexei Panshin

Ace G-756 :: 1968

157 pages :: A.60c

Reviewed by George Turner

40

This is not the Panshin of RITE OF PASSAGE. (Groans from the right, cheers from the opposition.) This is the Panshin who has contracted to write a series of thrillers

S F COMMENTARY IV

40

for Ace, featuring hero Anthony Villiers. And let's say at once that its direct ancestor is the James Bond stories, complete with all the snobby hits and outre situations and snide sex.

Put Panshin writes so much better than Ian Fleming (whom I found unreadable) and brings a quite jolly atmosphere to his skulduggeries.

Star Well is one of those beloved artificial structures in space which double and triple as hotel, gaming hall, hide out for crooks and general congregation point for the ninety-three-million-and-one forms of life in the cosmos. Intrigue, espionage and murder are the commonplaces of daily life and nobody really knows who's up who or what for. The women are either beauties or harridans and the men talk with a nice ear for melodrama. Through it all strides Anthony Villiers, snooping with a delicate air and scattering information on good taste and correct dress.

I can't remember the plot, and it doesn't matter, because it's the same one anyway. But I do remember the major characters, and for how many s f novels can you say that? Mister Villiers I will remember for a further instalment when THE THURB REVOLUTION appears because he appeals to the small boy in me, as does his incomprehensible but companionable offsider, Torve the Trcg. Also the duenna whose intentions are misunderstood, so that the steward offered her a selection of the brothel-stock of leather goods.

It's all good fun, light hearted and of no importance. What makes it good is the writing. Panshin knows his business, and turns it on with a will. It is trick writing, designed only to put a fresh face on faded flesh, but it works because he knows his trade and handles everything with expertise and care.

Recommended for a plane journey. That's how I read it, and the time went by with a rush.

NEBULA AWARD STORIES 3

Edited by Roger Zelazny

Victor Gollancz :: 1968

256 pages :: A.\$3.90

Reviewed by Bruce Gillespie

Commercdally, any review of this book is superfluous. You either want to buy it, or you dcn't: you've either read the stories before, or you haven't.

However, even for those who have already read most of these stories, the whole volume is worth a look. There may be a number of surprises for you.

Look first at the problem of the responsibility for the choice of these stories. All of the stories in the volume were considered the "Best for the Year" by the Science Fiction Writers of America. Three of the stories were awarded Nebula emblems, as the best Novella (BEHOLD THE MAN, Michael Moorcock), Novelette (GONNA ROLL THE BONES, Fritz Leiber), and Short Story (AYE, AND GOMORRAH, by Samuel R Delany), published in 1967. (The Best Novel award went to Samuel Delany again for THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION).

However we must ask - how much "choice" did the Science Fiction Writers have in making these prestigious awards? I'm not talking about the current problems of the association itself. I'm wondering how much any such awards must be the best of a bad bunch. The Nebula Awards might not be just a test of the good taste or otherwise of the Writers, but are just as much a test of the editors of the original sources.

Unfortunately, these original sources are not listed precisely. From a bit of guesswork I would say that these stories come from sources as varied as Harlan Ellison's collection DANGEROUS VISIONS, Damon Knight's 2nd ORBIT volume, Ferman's F&SF, Pohl's IF, Campbell's ANALOG, and Moorcock's NEW WORLDS. Even that is not the widest span of s f publishers, but even this list, for instance, shows how far people now search outside the magazines, for good science fiction. (Makes it a bit hard on puzzled Australians who try to vote in such polls as the Hugo).

I've already ranted sufficiently elsewhere about the poverty of precisely these sources. Roger Zelazny, by not telling us whom to blame or praise, hogs all the limelight for himself and SFWA members. In short, this volume should be the basis of a bit of research into where s f is going, and what happened in the field in 1967. Instead, Zelazny has unwisely presented a very esoteric volume, in which he and his cronies must take the blame for the mistakes of others and... of course... take the bows for editors and agents who might never have heard of the Nebula Awards.

Therefore we can only ask two questions of this volume: (a) What are American (and some English) writers calling "good writing" these days? Do they have standards at all? Are any of their choices insupportable by any standards? and (b) How do the writers' standards differ from those of the readers? Specifically, why are these awards very different from my own favourites of the same period?

Zelazny's "fillers", his choice from the runners-up, are embarrassments. If we want to answer any serious

questions at all, then the award winners themselves will have to be the main focus of attention. I'll briefly look at Zelazny's extras at the end of the review.

The story in this collection that hovers arrogantly over the rest is Michael Moorcock's BEHOLD THE MAN.

There is a simple reason why I did not pick out this story in 1967 - I was not reading NEW WORLDS then. If I had been, I might not have had such gloomy feelings about the s f scene in 1967. However, Leigh Edmonds lent me his copy recently of the original NEW WORLDS (No 166). Therefore, the NEBULA AWARDS 3 volume was an indispensable second reading. I wanted especially to test a theory about the story that had occurred to me between the first and second readings. I think my theory is justified.

The story, as most of you would know by now, concerns Karl Glogauer, neurotic psychiatrist and compulsive dreamer, who hires a time machine to find the historical Jesus Christ. He crash lands somewhere and somewhen in Palestine, is badly injured, adopted by some poverty-stricken priests called the Essenes, meets their leader John the Baptist, and wanders around the land for several years looking for Jesus.

His amiable, slightly mad ways win him followers in a society that will follow any leader other than Herod and Pilate. He employs his psychiatric skills so effectively that he wins a reputation as a miracle-worker. He discovers that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph the carpenter and his wife Mary is an ambling idiot, and a scourge on all who know him. Perhaps Karl's quarry will come to Jerusalem during Passover week. Karl goes to investigate, is hailed by his followers, is captured and is crucified.

The "story" of BEHOLD THE MAN is that simple. Related in this manner, it seems not worth the 70 pages used in its telling. It sounds as cute and silly as Damon Knight's WHAT STRANGE BEAST. For some it might sound blasphemous. Summarized as above, the story sounds "interesting": that is, not worth worrying about.

Besides, if you take Moorcock's story at its surface intention, Karl Glogauer doesn't make much of a Christ. Moorcock shows him as shy, stunned by his situation, aimlessly drifting into a Messianic position created by the Jews' own neuroses. The New Testament stresses Jesus' authority, his qualities of leadership, his miracles, his Scriptural knowledge, and most importantly, his Resurrection. Why then does Moorcock leave out most of these qualities from his portrait?

Why does Moorcock not try to emulate New Testament prose, as maudlin SF authors have a habit of doing? The main impression of the story we get, is not one of submission before a traditional bogey, but of assertiveness in the face of numerous technical and moral problems. The prose in this story is Moorcock's own, considerably polished for the occasion.

The key that unlocks the originality of the story is the series of flashbacks dealing with Glogauer's path toward attempted Christhood.

At Christmas 1949 "they had tied him with his arms spreadeagled against the wire-netting of the playground fence." Questioned about the cruelty involved, the sadistic schoolboys reply: "It was a play, sir, about Jesus, Karl was being Jesus. We tied him to the fence. It was his idea, sir. It was only a game, sir."

Messiahship already lurks in Karl's mind. Suffering is something to be expected as well as endured, so why not follow the model of the greatest sufferer?

Five years in the past. Nearly two thousand in the future. Lying in the hot, sweaty bed with Monica. Once again, another attempt to make normal love had metamorphosed into the performance of minor aberrations which seemed to satisfy her better than anything else.

Their real courtship and fulfilment was yet to come. As usual, it would be verbal. As usual, it would find its climax in argumentative anger. (Page 125)

Karl's problems do not spring from, and are not subsumed in his failure at normal sexual relationships. It is just another failure for him, because at the back of his psyche he wants to transcend all normality. His affair is punctured by a point of Jungian philosophy:

(Monica's) eyes were for ever wary, her movements rarely spontaneous. Every inch of her was protected, which was probably why she got so little pleasure from ordinary lovemaking.

"You just can't let yourself go, can you?" he said.

"Oh, shut up, Karl. Have a look at yourself if you're looking for a neurotic mess."

Both were amateur psychiatrists - she a psychiatric social worker, he merely a reader, a dabbler,

though he had done a year's study some time ago when he had planned to become a psychiatrist. They used the terminology of psychiatry freely. (Page 126).

... "I did look at myself," he repeated. "The way Jung did...."

"That old sensationalist. That old rationalizer of his own mysticism. No wonder you never became a psychiatrist." (Page 127)

and Monica's final note to Karl:

"Dear Karl,

"...That's why I'm writing to you - to try to get my idea across. You respond too emotionally when we're together.

"You make the mistake of considering Christianity as something that developed over the course of a few years, from the death of Jesus to the time the Gospels were written. But Christianity wasn't new. Only the name was new.... You should have been a theologian with your bias, not a psychiatrist. The same goes for your friend Jung. Try to clear your head of all this morbid nonsense and you'll be a lot better at your job,

Yours,

Monica."

(Pages 138 -9)

Moorcock's point is that Monica is "right". Karl is not Christ, but an archetype of the modern psychiatrist. Or rather, he is both Christ and the psychiatrist at the same time. In one brilliant stroke, Moorcock superimposes one body of myth (Jungian) on an older body of myth (Christian, Judiac) and traces the connecting links between them.

None of this ^{is} explicit. It is implicit in every comparison in the story. It accounts for the matter-of-fact prose that manages to be terrifying. It makes Karl Glogauer an extraordinary figure.

Not only is Glogauer a madman who strides the centuries (and a doctor for two thousand years), but Glogauer's pre-occupations bring the twentieth century up for examination. Karl and Monica are not attractive as acquaintances, but we are forced to understand them. We are forced to ask why a twentieth century man must still find his Messiah outside of his own time and reference. The twentieth century can kill God and make Christ a proletarian, but not find a substitute. The Messiah-substitutes of the twentieth century

have been either Satanic and reactionary (such as Hitler) or irrelevant (Billy Graham) or anarchistic (Cohn-Bendit). Much of the world still leans on an increasingly rickety crutch (Marx - very much a man of the nineteenth century). Who remains, but Freud, and Jung, and the great scientists of the century?

If Moorcock does anything in this novella except tell a good, multi-levelled story, it is to remind us that if the other nineteen centuries had odd ideas on practically everything, at least they did not have to endure the twentieth century's ideas on anything. A story well worth any award.

If Moorcock despairs of escapism, while enjoying its implications, Leiber just escapes in GONNA ROLL THE BONES. I'm sure students of medieval folk tales could find something here to chew over, but I am sure the story would still not matter very much. If Moorcock's "Christ" is subtle and familiar, Leiber's devil is just a cute gambler with heart of purest black. The story is cliché from beginning to end (with a certain amount of obscurity as well) and readable until we realize that we've been hoodwinked. GONNA ROLL THE BONES fits the "space opera" category better than any other story I've read this year. First mark against the taste of the SFWA.

The problem of "standards" is put very much on the line when one contrasts GONNA ROLL THE BONES and Samuel Delany's AYE, AND GOMORRAH. What does this mythical group of wordsmiths want from their reading matter? Do they want schmaltz or perception? Do they want a bit of both, or does one section of the voters like to think, and another section like to relax? Or do all the SFWA members read anything that is pushed under their collective noses, and "ooh" and "ah" in mysterious but well-disciplined unison?

Harlan Ellison labelled AYE, AND GOMORRAH a "dangerous vision". According to much-documented rumour (because I have not yet seen a copy of Ellison's book), the story was so labelled because it could not be used by the stuffy, conservative American s f magazines. Now if Harlan Ellison is right in this assumption, it implies that homosexuality (or Delany's ingenious variation on homosexuality), can be a theme in any publication from PLAYBOY to LI'L ABNER, but not in the s f magazines. (Not that the s f magazines don't run kinky stuff - it's called "heroic fiction for vigorous adventurous males").

The explanation for this story's smug notoriety might be only because it is too sane and honest for the magazines. Delany is capable of doing many things wrongly. He can

leave ugly threads of non-communication hanging in metaphor like "The Princess Islands lay like trash heaps before the prickly city."

At the same time, Delany is probably the only American SF writer trying to think up new problems, and work out these problems in an honest manner. AYE, AND GOMORRAH is a "boy meets girl" story, but the "boy" is a spaceman whose sterility goes with the job, and the "girl" is a sterile free-fall-sexual-displacement. Keep the boys happy? When these two meet they nearly crack up under their mutual loneliness. It's a paradigm of the short-story-in-a-single-situation, and it's very moving because it is only a grotesque presentation of situations that affect most people at one time in their lives or another.

There's not too much one can conclude from this survey of the Nebula Award Winners. A few connecting criteria can be seen. Good, vigorous, unclimaxed prose, is one criterion. Writers become annoyed with the inanities of prozine fiction, even if 90% of the readers do not.

There's reward for good and faithful servants. Unless I'm completely misled, Delany and Moorcock have both had a lot to do with the SFWA organization, and Leiber has probably been helping too.

Americans still like a "good story". There is little evidence of the MacLuhanesque experiments of NEW WORLDS.

These stories are clubby, slightly old-fashioned, but still stylistically way ahead of most American science fiction. Two of the stories are unusual because they analyze problems as well as situations, and take the trouble to breathe life into these new problems.

Of hard-core revolution there is no sign. Even Delany's story is very much within any publisher's "safe" limits. The comfortably middle-aged middle-class must form the audience. The undoubtedly comfortably middle-aged middle-class authors dole out the entertainment. And even Chip Delany tries to look respectable.

A specious judgment? Look at the rest of the stories Zelazny has picked out.

As I've said before (until some people are starting to believe me) 1967 was not a good year for science fiction. I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't the worst year since SF started. For instance, Ballard's CLOUD-SCULPTORS OF CORAL D wasn't bad, but then, it is not Ballard 1967-style. For a second reading, the story proves disappointing, although it represents some of his best writing before he staged his

private millenium. The strongest influence here is still the more hysterical work of Joseph Conrad. (At the moment, Ballard's works seem just hysterical).

PRETTY MAGGIE MONEY-EYES (Harlan Ellison) is the only one of the stories with atrocious prose. It won't suit you unless you like stories delivered in a throttled scream. Since the consolation prize was for DANGEROUS VISIONS anyway, I don't see much point in talking about the story.

MIRROR OF ICE (Gary Wright) is a very good story by a new writer who only needs to think as well as feel to become great. The situation springs straight from TRUE MEN'S ADVENTURE, but the visualization is... well, look in Hemingway's direction, but not too intently. Gary Wright is a sort of reverse Samuel Delany: put Wright's crisp prose with Delany's sharp mind, and you would have a flail to beat them all.

WEYR SEARCH was nearly unreadable the first time around in ANALOG, and completely unreadable the second time around. Anne McCaffrey must be the most impeccably boring s f author since C.C. Macapp. I'll try to avoid both.

If you want a good night's read from this volume, you'd better not be too sleepy before you start.

If you want to see just what the science fiction writers want when they relax, you may remain puzzled. I still think it is the original magazine editors who keep this volume so lightweight. I can't prove it, because the writers have done an effective job of picking out pretty hot air balloons.

The book is worth reading for AYE, AND GOMORRAH and BEHOLD THE MAN alone. But is this worth \$3.90?

STORM TROOPERS OF THE STARS

by Robert Adolf Hitlein.

A sort of author's apologia

Presented by
Raymond John Gibson

I believe all those stories about the army being a life of excitement, adventure and manliness. That's why I joined up with the Star Stormtroopers. I am now a member of a good outfit - a mean and nasty one - called, as you've probably already guessed, "Heinlein's Hoodlums".

We don't like violence just for its own sake; it's got to be purposeful violence. You know, like twisting someone's

arm to make him do what you want him to do. But we don't bother much about twisting arms. We use little A-bombs, laserguns, nerve gas and all that stuff. We find it pretty effective.

My teacher in History and Moral Philosophy, Colonel Schitz, always used to say that violence was the only way to handle moral problems. Besides, it's the quick and easy way when you don't want to spend too much time thinking. But, as I said, Colonel Schitz would always remind us that societies die if they're not violent enough, see. And he's always right - being an older and wiser head and all that.

And you know why I love my teacher, my sarge, my captain and whoever happens to be in authority over me? 'Cause I want to live all my life in the Daddy-son kind of relationship. It saves brain-work, which is what I hate most. It also saves growing up. Come now, didn't you say as a kiddy: "I don't ever want to grow up, daddy."?

Anyway, whatever you immoral civilians may say, Heinlein's Hoodlums is my kind of gang - er, outfit. We terr- orise the whole galaxy, which makes us feel pretty good. I mean, it's not like the bad old days when we could only beat up the spicks, micks and n-----s at the end of the block. None of that goes on today. We're more enlightened, see. We brought back discipline in the form of public floggings, hangings and the rest. What's more, it works. All the potential rapists, murderers and sadists go down to the main square in the city to get their kicks from public punishments. That's why we have a well-ordered society, legalised violence being preferable to the old disorganised kind. And the people love it, believe me. Legal violence has got class and style the old kind never had.

The other things I like about the Star Stormtroopers are 1) the joys of military togetherness; 2) the patriotic songs we get to hear just before we go into battle; 3) the way my sarge loves me; 4) the fun we get from blowing up cities with mini-A-bombs; 5) the feeling I get from knowing I'm a member of a real beaut outfit. Who wouldn't want to join the Star Stormtroopers with all these advantages?

Besides, you know that you can beat up anyone you want 'cause you're an expert in karate and judo. There was this time we went into a pub and these young punks wanted to fight us. Well, we pretended we didn't want no trouble, see and they attacked. We nearly killed 'em. Boy, it was some fight - and the police (seeing that we were members of Heinlein's Hoodlums) didn't even bother to take our names. The point is, the cops had been members of Heinlein's gang - sorry, outfit - before they got jobs beating up drunks, pacifists and the rest of those slobs.

the complications caused by McBan's enormous financial adventure and its consequent impact on the economics of the Instrumentality. It also leads to that confrontation which has peeped embryonically through most of the tales featuring C'mell, between the Lords of the Instrumentality and the Underpeople. The confrontation does not take place on the grand scale, but at the end we know it is inevitable.

I do not feel that the plot should be discussed further than this, but it would be interesting to know what Smith intended, and whether any of the succeeding action was in manuscript when he died. Some clues are in this novel, and we know that he intended a millenium of some sort, with an upheaval of civilisation calming into a further series dealing with the Lords of the Afternoon. In spite of what I have always felt to be an essential hollowness in Smith's total conception, I would like to know. He was a persuasive writer.

Let us make one concession at the outset. Smith's stories were written and published with little attention to chronological order of action. One read each one and appreciated it for what it was, but lost the total compulsion of a complete vision. Anyone who wishes to achieve this must take the trouble to assemble them in proper order and read them as a continuous work. Even so I feel that gaps will appear and questions remain unanswered.

THE UNDERPEOPLE sets out very plainly the overall vision of one part of the whole, and therein lies some of the impression of anti-climax - the whole does not seem to be a worthwhile sum of its parts. It is an article of s f. faith, apparently, that the Smith future is unique, but as set out in this book it is not. It is a sublimation of the vision Wells gave us seventy years ago in WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES and which has been the standby of space opera ever since - the universe of masters and slaves. The trappings are different (and for some of them "unique" is a fair claim) but when Smith comes to producing his statement, as he does here, it is the old tale of the underdog in rebellion against the overdog.

But it has a difference. For once the underdog is not intent on destroying his master and simply taking over. He only wants to raise himself to the master's level, and then go forward hand in hand. And how does he justify this unlikely piece of psychology?

I quote at some length: The speaker is E-telekeli (is the name a reminiscence of Poe and Lovecraft?), leader of the Underpeople who, you will remember, are humanoids created from animals:

"We are afraid that Man himself will die and leave us alone in the universe. We need Man... We are the creatures of man. You are gods to us. You have made us into people who talk, who worry, who think, who love, who die. Most of our races were the friends of man before we became underpeople - like C'mell. How many cats have served and loved man, and for how long? How many cattle have worked for men, been eaten by men, been milked by men across the ages, and have still followed where men went, even to the stars? And dogs. I do not have to tell you about the love of dogs for men. We call ourselves the Holy Insurgency because we are rebels. We are a government. We are a power almost as big as the Instrumentality. We love you, Rod, not because you are a rich Norstrilian, but because it is our faith to love the mankind which created us."

It is persuasive within the context of the story, but in fact it is rhetoric, and not very good rhetoric. Do you believe it? Not if you know anything about animals and the facts of their relationship with man. I can't help feeling that here Smith was on sticky ground and knew it, and tried hard to write over a crucial point which he could not justify. The passage contains at least two careful misstatements of fact, each presented so that your attention is turned away from the consideration of truth. It was at this point that my suspension of disbelief collapsed and all that had gone before took on the hollowness of fiction betrayed.

And how about the psychology of the Underpeople? Smith falls into the trap which I have discussed elsewhere, of mentioning high IQs, and gives one as 300 -- whatever that means. We must assume it to mean that these beast-people of the future are as far beyond contemporary man as he is beyond the apes. (And, like any other writer faced with the problem of the super intelligence, he is unable to make his characters behave as anything more than reasonably bright people). Will any people equipped with such brains, and presumably able to see clearly past purely emotional issues, cling to a blind faith of love, and a love, moreover, which does not in fact exist in nature? I just couldn't take this speech, and, alas, it is crucial to the whole understanding of the social setup of the Smith universe. They might conceivably plan a peaceful revolution, but not on those grounds.

It might be remembered, too, that the reason for their revolution is dissatisfaction with their slave status, and it is made clear several times in the story that slaves - contemptible, used-up, repressed and law-ridden - is precisely what they are. Even C'mell, the Lord Jentecost's girlygirl, has only the privileges of a pleasing harlot.

The Underpeople might seek to escape from man, or to supercede him, but to travel hand-in-hand on the basis of an ancient and mostly mythical love -- no.

For me this one passage destroyed the fascination of the book.

There are other minor matters which reinforce my belief that too much has been made of Cordwainer Smith. For one, his retention of Australianisms in the speech of Rod McBan (even the almost obsolete "cobbers" makes a distracting appearance) persistently destroys the image of a future time. No doubt he used them to add force to his portrait of the Norstrilians as individualists, but it comes through as a lapse in literary tact, and one which offends too often.

Another thing is that McBan is throughout disguised as a cat-man. Yet he passes traps set to destroy humans but pass underpeople. The explanation given is that he has enough of the cat in him to fool the instruments. But it is emphasised that he is only disguised. A small matter, perhaps, but one which interrupts the vision and destroys for a moment the magic of the flow. One must wrench oneself back to the necessary condition of acceptance.

And what hit me more than ever before is the underlying beastliness of the vision of the universe. It is easy, when reading the individual stories, to be caught up in the wish-fulness of brave and charming people doing brave and charming things, but in fact the people of the Instrumentality are monsters, going to any length to preserve themselves as the lords of all, devoid of pity and common humanity and any characteristic not bound up in self-preservation. Smith knew this, and presented the disgusting picture of what they basically are in A PLANET NAMED SHAYOL.

Then why?

Was he in fact writing a parable of the present, in which the rich grow richer and the poor are beasts? Or, when all's said and done, ~~was he~~ writing fanciful variations on a rich theme which was broad enough to allow him to roam at will? We shall probably never know. Let it remain that the total vision is a brutal one, exploited for beauty, as Theodore Sturgeon exploited sadism and violence disguised as humanitarianism.

It doesn't do to examine Smith's meanings too far without more knowledge of his ultimate intention. His own habit of hiding acrostics and private jokes and puzzles in the text may be a guide, and may equally well be mere opportunist idiosyncrasy.

Does it matter that Casher O'Neill is the name of a railway station in Cairo - Kasr-el-Nil, literally the "Gate of the Nile"? Has it any meaning in the design?

Such matters are distracting. One finds oneself looking for them, seeking significance where none exists, or exists in such rarefied form as to defy detection. So, when one is informed that E-telekeli is pronounced E-tellykelly, an unwanted vision of television and Little Nelly Kelly (who also solved problems in human relations) appears, and an irritating moment of fruitless speculation intrudes.

One finds oneself wondering if Lost O'mell is a reference to the equally lost Camille, who also loved beyond her station and suffered for it. "This is the why of what she did / She fell in love with a hominid". But that referred to the Lord Jentecost, who is still her owner-master in this book, though here she falls in love again, with Rod McBan. Was she doing two things at once, or --?

The distractions become irritations.

That's one trouble with the whole Smith creation. There is just too much decoration throughout - too much indication of significance which fails to materialise.

Nevertheless there is nothing else quite like it in s f.

And you'll all read it.

Of course.

oo

EG: In an idolatorous piece of my own on Smith, featured in Ron Clarke's MENTOR, I said that Smith's actual literary stature could never be ascertained until his work appeared in hardbacks, preferably in England.

Now, the intelligent news f editor at Sidgwick and Jackson (whomsoever he may be) has seen fit to release SPACE LORDS in March to the unsuspecting British public. Could our English readers please let me know how the book was received? Personally I think a Complete Works edition, featuring the stories in chronological order, is both necessary and possible. A suggestion to book publishers anywhere.

And I still think George misses the point of Cordwainer Smith's work when he does not take account of that most marvellous of story openings: "You have all heard the story before..."

Like the preceding two articles, this was written nearly one and a half years ago. The thesis presented is very vague, and is due for some major revisions, no matter how patchwork. Since this article was written, however, only two more Philip Dick novels have been received in Australia. These will be reviewed briefly in the fourth article in this series, and some possible revisions suggested to the articles so far published. Philip Dick has now published 27 novels, and they all seem to present problems. Hence, please excuse the longwindedness and headscratching of the following:

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C O N T R A D I C T I O N S

Bruce R Gillespie

oo

Of Philip Dick's latest three novels, the most recent is the worst, and the earliest the best. But perhaps Philip Dick is not altogether falling into the depths of mediocrity. Dick's work seems to superbly fit Sturgeon's dictum ("90% of everything is crud"), but in Dick's case the percentage is nearer 66%. The differences in quality between books do not follow any developmental path in Dick's career. It's just that every third novel seems to be worth reading, and the others are "for interest's sake".

Fortunately the latter group are still entertaining in their way, but unfortunately they are sufficiently undistinguished as to cast doubt on Dick's whole achievement. Do we ignore the bad, and concentrate on the good, and canonize Dick as Everybody's Ideal Science Fiction Writer? Or do we moan about the bad so much that we completely forget the good? Or, as some reviewers have done, do we treat all the Dick novels as the same sort of thing, not even noticing the differences?

And that insistent question nags time and again - what is the "good" in Dick's work anyway? Why bother with him?

COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD

Berkely Medallion No X1372
First published 1967 : 160 pages

COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD is not only a bad novel, but it is that most irritating of the species, the bad novel with

every chance of becoming a good one.

On the surface, this novel is based on an original idea (although it has been used before in several short stories) and idea which is redolent with the kind of philosophical implications that set off the greatest s f bonanza in years THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH. In Dick's latest novel, we see time turned backwards, heralded by chapter-heading quotations from Aquinas and the Atomists, with people rising from the grave and returning to the womb. The most obvious implication, at which Dick hints occasionally, is that this world automatically pre-empts the necessity for a supernatural God to take care of the after-life. Unless one is a Buddhist, believing in both transmigration of souls and pre-existence as well, one is faced with a world without birth or death. As Dick expounds:

Ann sighed. "Okay. He says there's no death; it's an illusion. Time is an illusion. Every instant that comes into being never passes away... The universe consists of concentric rings of reality; the greater the ring the more it partakes of absolute reality. These concentric rings finally wind up as God...

"Eidos is form. Like Plato's category - the absolute reality. It exists; Plato was right. Eidos is imprinted on passive matter... (Take) the way, for instance, the child disappears into the man, or, like we have now, the man dwindles away into the child. It looks like the man is gone, but actually the universal, the category, the form - it's still there."

(Page 146)

Familiar? Apart from the fact that the novel seems to adopt a few very naive philosophical ideas, potentially there is the kernel of an imaginative growth based on all Dick's extensive philosophical and psychological knowledge, both jotted from memory and concocted on the way.

There are only two major problems. Why? and How? Dick spends most of his novel relating what the Hobart Effect (described above) does, but we do not find out what the Effect is? Is it natural effect, deliberately induced, or the end of an unsuccessfully disastrous experiment? It is never explained what happens to insignificant little cosmic factors like cause-and-effect and the laws of motion. People get younger and younger, "disgorge" instead of eating, and "desmoke".

Oh sure. Lewis Carroll did it, and lots of other people as well. Brian Aldiss uses the same idea, without much valid explanation, and without it being too important, in AN AGE. However, even the absurdists take the trouble to explain what is going on, or what is not going on, as

the case may be. The Looking-Glass Effect, which ensures that you only get to the top of a hill by walking towards the bottom, at least has a ring of its own anti-logic.

Unfortunately, Dick is writing a novel with a plot which progresses from event 1 to 2 to 3, and not from 3 to 2 to 1, which is the only feasible way of writing this novel. For the Hobart Effect to make sense at all, the events and conversations would all need to run backwards. Maybe Dick thought of this, but Berkely Books understandably frowned on the idea.

Readers of Philip Dick's work would expect this to be only a minor objection, however. Dick's compact style calls for the least possible lecturing, and absurdities abound in even his best work. It has never made much difference to my enjoyment of ALL WE MARSMEN (MARTIAN TIME-SLIP) that Dick has helicopters careening around in Mars' atmosphere, when Explorer satellites had already knocked that theory cold at the time of the book's composition. In THE ZAP GUN, the contraction of the language is so acute that many elementary explanations are deleted.

The problem stands. If Dick is a philosopher himself, he follows David Hume's niggardly turn of mind. For Dick, like Hume, it is logically impossible to prove a necessary relationship between any event and any other event. Therefore, "cause-and-effect" is never more than an explanatory term. This turn of mind both aids Dick's best art, and needlessly obscures his worst.

The whole narrative attractiveness of Dick's writing springs from Dick's unwillingness to place serious emphasis on the gimmicks. You don't think of Dick in the Gosh-Wow-Fabulous-Idea school. Unfortunately, in COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD, Dick comes dangerously near to this naivety, and then makes the pitiful mistake of not developing his gimmick. Philip Dick may wish to tease readers' minds with such practices (a commendable objective on any count), but in most novels other than this one, the clues form some clear and satisfying pattern.

COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD, and its gimmicky Hobart Effect, are doomed from the start by sheer laziness, or some other authors' disease that has clouded Dick's judgement.

The main reason why the gimmickry of the Hobart Effect stands in such high relief, thus irremediably faulting the book, is that most of the rest of the novel is equally undistinguished. Fortunately, as I have already said, this does not mean that the book is altogether uninteresting. Dick is too much of a professional to allow readers' attentions to wander during the course of a novel. The legendary Phildickian prose pounds on and on. The story mainly

concerns the marital squabbles of Officer Joseph Tinbane and Lotte Hermes, and cuckolded husband Sebastian Hermes of the Flask of Hermes Vitarium, who has a bit of fun himself.

Evidently Dick thought Percy X of GANYMEDE TAKEOVER was good for another round, as the Anarch Party's resurrected mentor Thomas Peak, who is shunted between a vast and bewildering number of people who want him dead, or alive, or neither, or both. Dick so eliminates ideas of life and death from the reader's interest that we cannot care what happens to his characters.

But the characters' actions comprise the bulk of the book, and hence there is the dullness I mentioned before. Of course, Dick's narrative powers are such that, as in PENULTIMATE TRUTH, we continue to think that something important might happen. Therefore, as in PENULTIMATE TRUTH (as only one instance), only in concluding the book do we realize that the stuff that looked and seemed to taste like candy floss lies like a lump of concrete in the mouth, to be swallowed in the best way possible. Because Dick's basic narrative skills surpass most other writers', at least we have the memory of the initial succulence.

Dick usually employs his mythic central characters as the cornerstones of even his most faulty structures. Thomas Peak proves the most disappointing of them all (except as a Philosophy Lecturer). I once said in error that Dick was incapable of glaring cliches, but both Peak and "the ^{de}marraiges" and the "affairs" of the novel, particularly in the first chapters, creak along in the most traditional Woman's Weekly fashion.

Dick systematically strips the novel of any chance of success. He almost writes an anti-Phildickian novel. The only genre of fiction that can afford so persistently to skip the niceties of rationality, is either the conventional fantasy, or, in a separate category again, symbolic drama of the stature of Cordwainer Smith's best work. Given enough emphasis on the mythic and extraordinary, causal structures can be irrelevant.

However, the last thing you could call COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD is mythic. Dick seems to deliberately demythologize Peak, and his characters and settings come the closest to conventionality that Dick has yet reached.

And yet the potentialities in one idea for a Phildickia extravaganza are all here. One can only hope that Dick rereads this novel, and, after resisting the temptation to blow out his brains, will return to his typewriter sufficiently chastened so as to never repeat such mistakes.

THE CRACK IN SPACE

Ace F-377 :: 1966

190 pp.

Swimming backwards in time, we encounter Philip Dick in much happier mood and in much more familiar waters. THE CRACK IN SPACE is the occasion, and dubious celebration is in order, for we have not only one

novel, but two stories in one.

Part I (Chapters I - VII), although Ace Books do not acknowledge the fact, consists of a slightly expanded version of Dick's novella CANTATA 140 (FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION July 1964). The first part so visibly detaches itself from the bulk of the novel, that one wonders how Dick ever proposed to convince readers that the twain meet. Inconsistencies in Chapter VIII suggest that Dick did not even reread the early part carefully before completing the novel. An attempt to judge the work as a whole will be difficult, but worth doing, because (a) Dick demonstrates some of both his worst and his best characteristics in the one novel, and (b) because he includes a new, highly entertaining feature for him (emulated only in parts of THE ZAP GUN) - straightforwardly humorous satire.

CRACK IN SPACE is also most notable when read in conjunction with COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD. If the latter fails despite its having every initial reason for success, then we must enquire why CRACK IN SPACE comes much closer to success, although burdened with every reason for failure. Even though the latter section CRACK IN SPACE appears to have been written all at the same time, it disintegrates into two separate parts again. The whole book has the consistency of a bad Van Vogt novel. Yet again, the Philip Dick reader, whether enthusiast or not, must face the contradictions present in each of a large variety of styles contained in just two novels. For its part, CRACK IN SPACE deals with world disaster but stays flippantly happy to the end.

Can one ever reach the centre of Dick's work?

The faults of CRACK IN SPACE are more easily delineable than its more remarkable characteristics. For a start, Part I is generally of much inferior quality to Part II, and much less seriously intended.

Compare the first paragraph with a passage from a little later in the story:

The young couple, black-haired, dark-skinned, probably Mexican or Puerto Rican, stood nervously at Herb Lackmore's counter and the boy, the husband, said in a low voice, "Sir, we want to be put to sleep. We want to become hihs."

Again, Dick's contraction of language, and his determination to combine both width of application, and visible importance of scene and narrative, place the reader firmly in another of Dick's problem-riddled and highly-coloured worlds. In this case, the problem is colour, and those already familiar with the Ettinger frozen-death techniques will immediately recognize overpopulation and associated problems, springing from just the few words quoted above.

The story begun in this way, and at the level of the social victim rather than that of the social-problem-solver, we have every right to expect the novel to continue upon these lines. However, those long familiar with Dick's work will realize that he will probably concentrate his attention "at the top", looking at those with the most responsibility and the least ability to control the environment. This expectation proves correct. Before switching to Jim Briskin, first Negro candidate for the US Presidency (in 100 years time!! - surely, before then?), Dick also establishes his main motive tool, the discovery of the fault in the jiffi-scuttler that might allow Earth's population to escape into a virgin world. From then on, the scope of the novel expands... and expands. A seemingly endless cascade of kinky and/or representational characters hurtle before our eyes, with about one character disappearing from, or coming into sight every ten pages.

Thus, by Chapter III, the promise of the texture of the first chapter is entirely destroyed. Instead of a Phildickian "normally" mad universe, which has problems that can at least be solved within the framework of the novel, we have an unconvincing, gimmicky and unpleasantly flashy collage, in which there are large patches of white space between the flung-on pieces. Therefore, by page 27, George Walt, not the Chaffeys (the hounded couple of the first paragraph) has become representative of the novel:

He was let into a large chamber - and there, on a couch, sat George Walt. Both bodies at once rose to their feet, supporting between them the common-head. The head, containing the unmingled entities of the brothers, nodded in greeting and the mouth smiled. One eye - the left - regarded him steadily, while the other wandered off, as if preoccupied.

Here we have a figure surpassing in grotesqueness even Bill Keller of DR. BLOODMONEY. However, unlike Keller, who is vital to the action of his novel, George Walt, at this point in CRACK IN SPACE, seems like most of the other elements of the story - merely "stuck-in". As with the other wierd objects encountered so far (the Golden Door Moments of Bliss satellites, and especially Thistle Cit), Dick has demolished the whole concept of human normality. Unlike his best novels

THE CRACK IN SPACE does not substitute a re-imagined normality for the present one. It is hard to decide which is least likable: the general greyness of portrayal in COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD, or the mocking, silly flamboyance of the first part of CRACK IN SPACE. In both styles, Dick does not distance himself from his subject, in order to explore it more thoroughly, but in order that, I suspect, he may arbitrarily order his world for the most trivial of purposes - the cheaper entertainment of today's average mini-mind. Humanity is not only reduced: it is rendered almost nonexistent. If THE CRACK IN SPACE had followed the mood and procedures of its first seven chapters, it might have been put down unread.

Fortunately, the whole novel is approached with considerably more sense and engagement. For Dick to maintain the pretence of unity in the novel, he has preserved the shells of some of the themes of CANTATA 140, including the main concept of the anonymous sleepers and their fate decided entirely without their will or knowledge.

However, he does drop two of the main themes of the first part (and the only really enjoyable passages in Part I are those dealing with these themes). Firstly, Briskin's identity as a Negro, which is stressed earlier, is almost subserved to his role as the political discoverer of the "crack in space". Says Leo Turpin, exploiter of the jiffi-scuttler:

"I don't care about the hibs... And I certainly don't care about what happens to that politician, whatever his name is. Briskett or Briskman - you know, the one who made the speech. That's not my problem: I've got other things to worry about." (Page 86)

This change of emphasis is best justified by the fact that Dick did not make much of Briskin's race as a point of conflict, in the first place. He allows enough latitude in the first part, to fully develop Briskin as politician and "central character" in the latter half of the novel.

The second theme dropped later is that of fecundity in a "replenished" world. Dick makes some quite nice points on this matter, including the encounters between the Chaffees and Dr Myra Sands, the abortionist. In such a context, Dick's normal fatuousness on the subject of marriage might have given way to relevance, if he had chosen to analyze one or more of the marriages mentioned in the first part of the novel.

The main connecting link between the two parts is Jim Briskin - perhaps the most likable Dick character ever (although plagued by Typical-Negro cliches), and certainly the

most infuriating. Dick's usual political naivety shows plainly in the CANTATA 140 section. It is impossible to imagine Briskin ever becoming any sort of politician, let alone a potential President. Dick tends to support the very vague attitudes of the Briskin of Part I, but fortunately he recognizes most (but not all) of the ambiguities of Briskin's position in the last chapters of the book.

Briskin acts with open-mouthed doltishness most of the time ("surveys" of the Moments of Bliss satellite, an "survey" of the other dimension). However he retains his temper and sanity through it all, which is more than can be said for the other characters. Dick eventually shows Briskin as the only sort of man who keeps this world even in partial focus, although he only achieves this by totally misunderstanding the world. For the rest of the characters, the more they explore and puzzle over the "other" world, the more they misunderstand it, until finally, because of a maladjustment in the jiffi-scuttler, they lose it altogether.

On the other hand, Dick gains one magnificent guffaw in this passage:

At the breakfast table in the small kitchen of his conapt, Jim Briskin ate, and at the same time he carefully read the morning edition of the homeopape, finding in it, as a kind of minor melody in the momentous fugue which was playing itself out in heroic style, one item almost lost within the account of the migration of men and women to alter-Earth.

The first couple to cross over, Art and Rachael Chaffee, had been Cols. And the second couple, Stuart and Mrs. Hadley, had been white. It was exactly the sort of neat and tidy detail which appealed to Jim Briskin's sense of proportion, and he relaxed a little, enjoying his breakfast. (Page 159)

Of course the novel is not a "momentous fugue" - it's a nasty fight between small-minded men and unsuspecting Pith-ecanthropi who seem due for the same extermination as the American Indians and the Australian Aborigines before them. Of course there is no "sense of neat and tidy detail". As the end of the novel shows, it is only the man who can ignore the disturbing detail of events, who can provide a partial solution and face this dismal future. I am still not happy with the portrayal of Briskin: Dick never clears up his own doubts on how to treat a figure that holds power without justification, and solves problems without good sense or political insight. The mere fact that Briskin is essential to the book's structure nearly ruins it. But not quite.

THE CRACK IN SPACE justifies its existence because of the strength of the centre chapters. Leo Turpin is a much better-drawn character than Briskin, but he serves mainly to show humanity at its most callous and small-minded, rather than at its best. The satire in these chapters is unexpected. Satire as an art form is generally used to explore the relevance of known people and circumstances, and as Dick has always been very careful to set the bounds of his own worlds, he has tended to avoid front-on collisions with the 1960s American. Even in this novel, Dick's image of the two parallel Earths is mainly used to widen the satire and look at some motives of humanity in toto. Although the narrative suddenly springs to life from Chapter VIII onwards, and therefore sharply underlines the new direction of the novel, Dick is careful to emphasize some of his points so they will not be missed. Mr. Average Business-man (Leon Turpin and the Jiff-scuttler mechanics) sense some of the problems in taking over this world:

May be we can kill them off, (Cravelli) thought. Maybe they'll catch some plague from us, die like flies.

He hated himself for having such thoughts. But there it was, clear in his mind. We need the room so badly, he realized. We've got to have it, no matter what. No matter how we have to go about it. (Page 96)

As the inhabitants of the parallel dimension seem to be highly evolved Peking Men, rather than highly evolved "true men", and therefore their culture has taken on some curious forms, Turpin's men seek only to denigrate the "aliens":

"What's up?" Cravelli said.

"The thing they hauled back here," Carl Bohagian said. "What I mentioned in my written report. The artifact: they've been going over it, and it's apparently the damnedest junk you ever heard of. It's a vehicle of some kind.... It's made out of wood, but it's not primitive..." He laughed. "Excuse me, but it's funny. It runs by expansion of the ice. The water freezes, expands as ice, and drives a piston upward with enormous force, and the gases expand again, which gives another thrust to the piston, driving it back down in the cylinder again. Ice! Did you ever hear of such a source of power?"

"It's funnier than steam, isn't it?" Cravelli said. (Page 97)

Dick's joke is contained at the beginning of Chapter X in particular. The "alien" culture should not work, but does, while the "human" culture is on the verge of breakdown. Everything said rebounds onto the speakers. Dick presses the point - what if it were us that were to be invaded? and

what if we are the malevolved race?

Even Dick's literal presentation of these questions later in the novel (the invasion; the quiet wisdom of the Sinanthropus leader), do not mar the bantering irony of the central chapters, that gives THE CRACK IN SPACE some stature, and just manages to mobilize its disparate components into a vehicle that moves of itself, however uncertainly.

THE ZAP GUN

Pyramid R1569 :: 1967

(WORLDS OF TOMORROW, 1965)

176 pp.

The first 40 pages of THE ZAP GUN are unreadable, and therefore many will give up the book in Chapters 3 or 4. Those who roll on to the end find themselves engaged in Philip Dick's most exciting, most unusual, and nearly one of his best novels. Expanded

from a 1965 WORLDS OF TOMORROW serial (PROJECT PLOWHARE), this apparently harmless-looking novel glories under a title, which, according to one of Lee Harding's apocryphal stories, was chosen as one of the two most typically sci-fi titles possible (the other was SPACE OPERA). Fortunately the title has some relationship to the book, and if "Zap Gun" recalls tele-"sci fi" and Buck Rogers, it also conveys some of the exuberant energy and wild "zappiness" of the enclosed product. In hardbacks, under this title, it would probably sell about three copies.

Two impressions slap violently from the first few chapters. Firstly, there are pages of indecipherable and undigestible jargon. As a necessary preliminary exercise, Dick seems intent upon severing his novels as effectively as possible from the confines of the language of both the "serious" and normal pop. novel. Sentences lie torn in half, and bleeding at their syntactical joints. Characters disintegrate into fogs of as-yet-unexplained terms, and the outstanding character, Weapons Fashion Designer Lars Powderdry, thoroughly hates the world and himself even before the action starts. For the following paragraphs of gunk, Gernsback would have supplied a detailed glossary:

Leading the way Lars said, "Photos".

"Yes sir." The KACH-man shut the office door carefully after them. "Of her sketches of - ". He opened the folio, examined a Xeroxed document - "last Wednesday. Their code - AA-335". Finding a vacant spot on Lars' desk he began spreading out the stereo pics. "Plus one blurred shot of a mockup at the Rostok Academy assembly-lab.... of - " Again he consulted his

noop sheet - "SeRKeK codex AA-330." He stood aside so that Lars could inspect. (Page 11)

Therefore the second impression, that of nastiness and paranoia and schizophrenia combined (the only way I can describe total madness), is essential to the first. It's almost as if Dick were trying to redefine "catharsis" - by Chapter 7 one is so "purified" of a reliance on normality and the English language that we are ready for almost anything. Which is what we get.

By the time Mr Average Reader snaps shut the book in disgust (and THE ZAP GUN is not for those uninitiated to Dick's writing - I thoroughly disliked the original version upon first reading) Philip Dick is faced with a nearly impossible situation. His u.h.p. vehicle is hurtling along at its greatest possible power for the th first time. Approaching the first corner, Dick must keep tight control of the potential monster or go sailing off his self-made precipice. Dick visible extends his peculiar powers to their greatest extent. Can he now order those powers? Can he direct them in such a way as to justify the original conception and statement of the novel?

The ambition of the novel lies in its field of exploration, more than any attempt to do things better than in other novels. The sheer weight of jargon, the mingling of a large number of themes and allusions in a short stretch of the novel, and the establishment of the all-importance of Lars Powderdry, without yet defining his attributes, precludes the novel attaching itself to any particular theme or themes. CRACK IN SPACE changes direction with the arbitrary and unsettling swerves caused by the introduction of multiple new themes. ZAP GUN does not even pretend to explain "social themes", or solve particular problems. Lars Powderdry is a telepathic and/or visionary Weapons Fashion Designer, despite the unexplained zaniness of this simple fact. Peep-East and Wes-Bloc are happily maintaining a species of order by "plowsharing" destructive weapons and convincing "pursap" populations of the constantly increasing dimensions of the national armouries. We are not invited or expected to question these facts. As in all of Dick's best novels, the old question of "likelihood" arising from "sound extrapolation" is just ignored. Mad as it appears, the world of THE ZAP GUN is like this. "Is it possible to understand it? No matter... that's not what we're here for."

Perhaps this maligns Dick's attitude. Understanding and ordering our impressions of the novel, form the bases of critical questioning. Rather than selected themes or philosophical attitudes, the vital material in this novel is the idiosyncratic, exploratory and extremely exciting language

of the novel itself. The mass of ideas and happenings contained within 176 pages becomes incomprehensible unless the reader concentrates on logic that is in the novel. What is the exact form of this so-called "madness", which gives the book its unique flavour?

In the first forty pages Dick directs our attention to the language itself. His subsequent task is to forge something worthy of the possibilities.

Dick's greatest initial asset in tackling this task, and the feature that proves essential to the book's success, is the "character" of Lars Powderdry. For a Dick character, Powderdry is a very integrated, individual character. His "world" revolves around him, and seems to derive its energy from his presence.

However, the novel's "world" exists narrowly, and is entirely bounded by the novel's language. Powderdry's main importance arises only from his relationship to the lingual world around him. Powderdry's psychological "character" (his "castration fear", and the consequent ambivalent meeting and relationship with Lilo Topchev; his vital, if bewildered sanity in a near-disintegrating milieu) certainly binds together the centre of the book very effectively.

However, a "character-study" explanation is not adequate explanation for the last part of the book. Dick presses the accelerator hard to the floor, slams the reader hard back against his seat, and subjects him to one of the most dazzling displays of imaginative agility ever seen in science fiction. To state the obvious, Powderdry disappears from sight as he comes closer to personal happiness, and the world leaves him behind. The novel would probably split down the centre if Powderdry were essential to it.

Dick's essential point is that Powderdry and his world are fakes, but taken as genuine and "normal" by the inhabitants of this world. When something dangerously "real" happens (the proliferating satellites which menace Earth; the old man from the future), Powderdry and the plowshared weapons must be superseded. The psychotic "man in the street" Surley G. Frebbs, nearly as important to the novel's structure as Powderdry, becomes the centre of action. If all Powderdry's extra-personal concerns are those of a deceiver, not the deceived (although Dick would be the first to see the two roles as interchangeable), then his importance to the world depends on its continuing deception. However, it is central to Dick's view of language and the novel, that the world portrayed here cannot escape its fate by ignoring the obvious. On ^{the} one hand, the world portrayed in ZAP GUN is ruled by the perception that "just barely enough is enough". On the other hand, the answer to the world's real

problems depends on increasingly madder and more "trivial" factors - a mad cartoonist's creation, THE BLUE CEPHALOPOD MAN FROM MARS, a "Man in the Maze" toy, and a figure from the future so riddled with ambiguities that he barely exists at all. Dick's world clings at straws, but some element in these straws ensures its survival.

But is this world worth saving? or are any of Dick's? On the one hand we feel that a world existing on the drugged "inspirations" of Lars Powderdry and Lila Topchev has little to do with our own. On the other hand, we also feel that Dick's despairing view is ultimately the only one which can be faced by an author with Dick's knowledge and insight, living in the Bomb-admass-brainwashing-totalitarian-Vietnam-civil-riot era. Maybe Dick simply eats away all the comforting aspects of our civilization with the devouring merciless acid of his MacLuhanesque epistemology. The bare bones of the twentieth century are left.

The resulting picture is almost insanely discomfoting, but Dick never tries to dodge his own view. The major objection to the whole science fiction enterprise has been that it is perhaps genuinely "escapist" - that writers not capable of understanding or accepting changes in our own world either reach back into history as the source of future romance or extrapolation, or, less successfully, build whole new worlds in mythical fashion.

Perhaps Dick can be placed in the latter section, except that his working hypothesis of world and individual disorder has not the kind of separate mythical logic that amounts to "escapism". The world of the ZAP GUN is not the world as it is now. Neither is it a world totally separate from ours. Dick seems to follow some of the less obvious, but more sinister implications of today's living. If the social sciences are always some decades behind actuality, in comprehending the "present", then the possibility must be faced that Dick is several decades ahead of it.

But, as I have said before, Dick is not basically a satirist, or a conventional extrapolator. He does not hold up this world to ridicule, but his own world. But his own world seems to reflect many of our present preoccupations. There is a distorting mirror, but it is the distorting mirror that provides the art of the novels.

Dick shows one or more possibilities of today's world - all of them leading to near world insanity. The emotional texture of the novels shows us what it would feel like if the world became Phildickian. We see the possible total failure of our own "normality" and the substitution of a "new" humanity that we recognize in ourselves, but normally ignore. That is why Dick's characters frighten or repel us.

In CRACK IN SPACE and COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD, as I have mentioned, Dick's characters are uninteresting and even inhuman. The idea of private personal happiness is almost absent from Dick's writing. Even when introduced (as in CLANS OF THE ALPHANE MOON and ZAP GUN) such aspirations are undercut either by the nature of the surrounding impersonal world, or Dick's deliberately quizzical cynicism. The main difference between Dick's poorer novels (COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD and CRACK IN SPACE) and his successes (among them ZAP GUN, THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH and TIME OUT OF JOINT) is that in the former, Dick allows his cynicism to lie unquestioned, hampering novels which are concerned with other things.

In the latter three novels, Dick is willing to question even his own scepticism. In Dick's poorer novels we are allowed not to be horrified at the various forms of destruction and madness that strike down the characters. In his best novels, Dick reaches down through this outer layer of perception, and makes us feel horrified that we cannot be horrified at the fate of his worlds and characters. COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD and most of CRACK IN SPACE disintegrate because we cannot become interested in the inevitability of personal fates, but in ZAP GUN it is the relentless logic of this inevitability that disturbs. ZAP GUN's direction and language is such that in fulfilling themselves Powderdry and Lilo Topchev withdraw from the novel's scope. At the same time it is the milieu that is at stake - it is the whole world that Pebbs might destroy, not what the Weapons Fashions Designers might persuade to salvation.

ZAP GUN is one of the few Philip Dick novels that contain any quotable lines. My two favourite passages are both contained in Chapter 21:

(Geschenko): "Oral Giacomini's ideas, as analyzed by the second-rate psychiatrists at Calcutta, consist of worthless, grandiose, schizophrenic delusions of world-power. And this is the lunatic nonentity whose mentality you - " he shook his fist, futilely, at Lars and Lilo - "have seen fit to tap as the inspiration for your weapons?"

"Well," Lars said presently, "that's the weapons fashion designing biz." (Page 125)

The flippancy and irrelevant truth of the remark confirms the zappy likability of one character in which Dick tries to mirror himself - the disengagement, but all-important to the story, of Lars Powderdry, are both seen in this passage. The flip cynicism and understanding of the whole situation point to Dick's attitude to his own work.

The last part of the novel firmly demonstrates the initial reaction we have towards the novel's beginning. More than in any other novel, Dick is writing about his own art:

(Geschenko describing Oral Giocomini, the mad cartoonist): "A satire on ourselves has duped us for years. The artist will be amused. Obviously he is a degenerate. That vulgar strip - and I notice it is English-language, the official language of Wes-bloc - shows that." (P.120)

We get the sensation here that Dick is slashing his own throat. He has firmly demonstrated that he is not the mad degenerate, simply by virtue of the skill with which he controls the novel. However, his style, exercised to the full, amply illustrates the possibilities in madness. Dick is hinting that it is not he who writes the comic-strip, but it is the world that is one vast comic-strip, and he is only being true to this viewpoint. And despite this vision, Dick shows that one can see this world this way and not be totally repelled by it.

However, Dick only intermittently rises to the highest level, and we must continue to hope that, although ZAP GUN was written four years ago, the artistic wheel will again turn, and that we may soon have yet another look at the splendid, intriguing, contradictory possibilities in the worlds of Philip K Dick.

- Bruce R Gillespie February
1968

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Regard this as a first word, not a last word. I've seen a fair amount of material on the Philip Dick genre since the above was written. None of it has solved any problems. I heard a whisper from somewhere that perhaps the solution to the Philip Dick contradictions, lies in a purely religious/philosophical explanation. Perhaps... as long as one knows as much about religion and philosophy as the author. I'm not sure that a pat dogmatic explanation would say much about the art either. As I've shown above, everything about the texture of the writing is paradoxical. Perhaps the best thing to do is to get the paradoxes in some sort of order.

Not good enough? Rumbles of discontent from everywhere? You've spent umpteen flippety-flip hours reading the wretched articles, and the wretched man doesn't even tell us the Answer to the Philip Dick Problem. I'm inclined to say "Do it yourself" but that would imply that I've not done it for myself. Perhaps I will nexttime:

S F COMMENTARY 5 (or thereabouts)- A sort of summing up and review of NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR and DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP. Meanwhile, you may have the answer. Write to me.

P U B L I C A T I O N S R E C E I V E D

This is not a fanzine review column.... simply because there is not the room. The fanzines have started to arrive from America, England, with one each from Ireland and Germany. They are all welcome. They are all read. One day, I may send a Letter of Comment for them all. You never know.

Meanwhile, there are some cut throat characters who have demanded publicity, and there are some other people who will get as much publicity as I can fit on one sheet.

GARY MASON, who publishes Australia's only newszine, THE NEW FORERUNNER, is somewhat dispirited because he has exactly the same ratio of subscriptions/distribution as I have. (13/80 cf. 26/180). Um. Well, surely somebody told you about the Invisible Disappearing Subscriber phenomenon before you started, Gary? For my own part, I've been grateful for every subscription, from whichever source. Let it be known: For Australian fans at least, and for most overseas fans, NEW FORERUNNER is a highly necessary newszine containing interesting items for followers of panelology, science fiction, and the Australian Scene. Views of the Cultural Desert, for only 15c each, 75c sub. (Australia). 20c each, \$1 for 5 (USA), 1/6 each, 7/6 for 5 (England). No wonder Gary hasn't been getting publicity, with a complicated sub schedule like that.

Other Australian fanzines were mentioned in SFC3. The future of Ron Clarke's MENTOR is not so much in the balance, as in a state of suspension...i.e. an interval of 1 1/2 years while Ron and friends trip to Europe in a reconditioned bus. Heicon members may see them, and watch out Aldiss and Co, for these valiant characters may visit you. RATAPLAN can only be described as hung-up, or perhaps on an extended trip. SCYTHROP is expected. And ANZAPA reached 146 pages last mailing, and has 18 members. Hurry, hurry, or you may be the first members of the ANZAPA waiting-list.

My two favourites of the fanzines I've started to receive are Richard Bergeron's WARHOON and Pete Weston's SPECULATION. They just pip Dick Geis's SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW and Leland Sapiro's RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY. All of these fanzines, like the others that I've received, seem to be fabulously successful and make me insanely jealous. Andy Porter's ALGOL is probably one of the best produced, but for my own taste, there are a few too many pictures. The same could go for most of the other magazines received. When I get a 64 page or 32 page, or whatever, fanzine, I like to have 64 pages of reading matter. Obviously, many American fans feel otherwise, and I must respect their demands (but not in this magazine, of course). For one thing, fan art often reaches extremely high standards, surpassed only by the work in NEW WORLDS. And when a few American fans start to see NEW WORLDS, I'm sure even those standards can be surpassed. However, for my own taste, Bergeron and Weston are the only fan editors who are consistently publishing hard-hitting and perceptive criticism of science fiction. Dick Geis scores in his letter column, and Sapiro nearly scores on his scholarship. The others score because they are fun to read. What more justification do they need? I'll look at them next time. (but there's another 70 pages of material to be typed up.....!)