
* This magazine tries to talk seriously about science fiction and as many similar subjects as I can squeeze under the initials "s f". Yet this is the second S F COMMENTARY which has devoted itself to the proceedings of a convention of science fiction fans! After an attempt to render an objective account of the "poor misunderstood" authors, do we now commit that usual hypocrisy of fanzines, and start to pat on the back all our friends, hangers-on and convention attendees? Why are science fiction conventions important to anybody who wants to talk seriously about science fiction?

A column by Chris Priest in SPECULATION 24 has the following to say about "John Calder's Third International Literary Conference", one of a number of writers' conferences that are held disastrously in Britain from time to time:

A lot of people came a very long way to listen to writers talk about writing, and, I think, a lot of them went away disappointed. At one point in a totally absorbing discussion between three members of the audience as to whether or not the lay-out of the seating was "democratic", it came home to me with perfect clarity that it is almost impossible to collect writers together and make them talk about writing.

So much for the writers who attended that conference. You may remember reports of a writers' conference in Britain several years ago where the attendees promptly split into opposing political camps, and fought energetically about such issues for the duration of proceedings.

Not so s f conferences. You may see the evidence in these pages. S f conferences (including the legendary Milford S F Writers Convention) may well be the last places left on Earth where writers gather together and talk about what they do with their typewriters during that small amount of time when they are not attending conferences.

What do the s f fans do at conferences, then, while the writers face the microphones? Much of the time they listen attentively. Much of the time they ask the questions that really make writers' panels interesting. But for a large part of the time, fans talk - to other fans, to curious "observers", and to pros. For some reason that nobody has ever quite analyzed, s f conventions are the places where pros decide what they might write during the forthcoming year, and ways they might sell what they write, fans decide they might have a crack at writing, and mad fanzine editors try to sell their wares and warn other fans away from their penniless hobby. In brief, s f conferences are the places where non-fans decide they want to be fans, fans decide they want to be writers or fanzine editors, and writers decide they want to be great writers. Optimism indeed - but the optimism springs from people who have some idea of the possibilities that underly the science fiction field.

* Perhaps this is a peculiarly Australian view of s f conventions - I've never attended any other kind, so I would not know. As Dick Geis wrote to me: "The basic problem for Australian fans, though, is the Pacific". The writers would echo this, only more loudly. S f conventions are American institutions, which we have followed in our own way for a number of years. Quoting the program book for the Sydney Science Fiction Convention (Syncon) held January 1, 2 and 3, 1970, we have the following list of Australian conventions:

Sydney, 1952 - 1st Australian Science Fiction Convention
Sydney, 1953 - 2nd Australian Science Fiction Convention
Sydney, 1954 - 3rd Australian Science Fiction Convention
Sydney, 1955 - 4th Australian Science Fiction Convention
Melbourne, 1956 (The Olympicon) - 5th Australian Science Fiction Convention
Melbourne, 1958 - 6th Australian Science Fiction Convention
Melbourne, 1966 - 7th Australian Science Fiction Convention
Melbourne, 1968 - Melbourne Science Fiction Conference
Melbourne, 1969 - 8th Australian Science Fiction Convention
Sydney, 1970 (Syncon 70) - Sydney Science Fiction Convention

There is some talk that Melbourne and Sydney have agreed to dub Syncon the "9th Australian Science Fiction Convention", but since nobody has officially said anything to this effect, I will leave the table as it stands.

The table tells its own story very effectively. Sydney was the centre of fan activity for several years in the early fifties. For reasons that nobody has ever been willing to tell me precisely, (I have this typewriter, yessee....) Sydney fandom fell apart about this time, and the Melbourne Science Fiction Group, whose early activities Lee Harding relates in his Guest of Honour Speech, took up the reins and held two conventions. As Harry Warner Jr has pointed out in ALL OUR YESTERDAYS (Advent Press) Australian fandom had to operate during that time virtually without a prodrom.

In 1966 came a Science Fiction Convention which, as Lee relates, set the tone for every Convention since then, and started an avalanche of conventions which ~~thunders~~ to a shattering climax during 1970 and 1971. Amongst other things, AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW was born at the 1966 Convention, and with it came a renaissance of Australian fandom. In its way, S F COMMENTARY is one of the more meagre results of that Conveation, even though I did not attend.

I printed several extracts from the 1968 Conference in S F COMMENTARY 3. That was my first conference, and other fans may understand the mythic importance of such an event. Something had been started, but nobody knew what.

* Again I repeat Lee Harding's words, even though he relates the whole process far more impressively than I do. Important as ASFR, John Bangsund, and the fans that gathered around them, were, there was another growing trend which guaranteed the continuance of Australian conventionality. The 1968 Conference featured an authors panel that included figures that were already old hands, as well Australia's first full-time s f writer, Jack Wodhams. In 1969 many of the same writers returned, but there were more of them. David Boutland, who writes under the name of David Rome, made himself known to fandom, and was featured prominently at the 1969 Easter Convention. Jack Wodhams

could not attend again, but by Easter 1969 he was already well on the way to an established reputation in America's top s f magazines. The other writers were not doing a great deal better than they had been in 1968, .but at Easter 1969 came news of a project none of us had ever dared to hope for: an Australian based professional science magazine! The story of this magazine is already well known, and future reports from Syncon will deal more precisely with the success of VISION OF TOMORROW. SCYTHROP will print some of the proceedings, too.

The important thing about the 1969 Easter Convention, was that Australia now had hopes of a viable prodom, and a working relationship between fans and writers that might put Australia on the writing map after years of hopelessness in this direction. The optimism raised at the Easter Convention was such that Leo Harding decided to go full-time writing, David Boutland went freelance, many Australian authors have been newly discovered or have seen print for the first time in many years, and Australian science fiction now has some reason to turn its eyes to England and America. More of this later.

* All right, you say - those are the trends that link all the recent conventions; what happened at Easter 1969?

After this period of time, I cannot remember a large number of the details myself. 1969 added new innovations to an old traditions. The first two days (April 4 and 5) were held in the traditional meeting-place, the holy ground of Australian science fiction, the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. No description could adequately circumnavigate the wonders of this institution - but it has one great disadvantage: there was no room to move. The Convention showed John Frankenheimer's film SECONDS on the Friday night, and 70 to 80 people tried to crowd into a space that will admit only 40 or 50 at the best of times. Suddenly it dawned on us all that future Melbourne Conventions could not, and would not be held in the clubrooms. (First holy tradition shattered).

On the afternoon of the first day, a new tradition caught most conventioners by surprise. Tony Thomas invited interest groups and individuals to report on their activities during the previous year. This invitation would have been pointless the year before - John Bangsund would have risen to his feet, reported on the success of ASFR and everybody would have clapped enthusiastically. At Easter, reports were heard about (a) the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group, which then had about 80 members (b) the newly-formed Sydney Science Fiction Foundation, which showed the first signs of Sydney fan life for some years (c) the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, which had survived innumerable crises during another year, and still managed to pay its rent (d) the Monash Science Fiction Association, the first University s f group in Australia (e) the Melbourne Grammar School S F Group, which nobody knew about until David Penman ably related its activities (f) a proposed s f group at Sydney's Macquarie University and (g) the vast concourse of Australian fanzines, few of which had been operating the year before. ASFR was already showing the last signs of its operation. Everybody at the Convention sensed that considerable changes were taking place, but (and I shall come back to this) it remained til Syncon for the extent and kind of changes to appear clearly.

So much for a whole new chain of traditions and experiments that appeared during one year. The Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards (the Ditmars), a breakthrough in themselves, came almost at

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JOHN BANGSUND: I'm quite sure that Lee Harding needs no introduction whatsoever, and so I won't give him one. Here he is....

LEE HARDING: Thank you for that encouraging ovation. I've got my notes.

There are a lot of very new faces here I'm not familiar with, and a lot of older ones, but there is only one guy right up the back who I think has been associated with the Melbourne Science Fiction Group longer than I have.... that's Mervyn Binns. I don't know about Keith McLelland? I know that both Mervyn and Dick Jensen were present at the founding of the Melbourne Science Fiction group. That was the night I was.... Weren't you, Merv? Well, Dick definitely was because he always pulls it out as a one-up ploy. I do know that the night in question I was home with a raging toothache. That was some time in 1953.

I've attended three conventions in Melbourne starting with the 1966 Convention and I think it's rather obvious that conventions in Australia are built on a somewhat different plan to the ones overseas. In America in particular they've grown out of a need, a desire for writers and fans, publishers and artists, and everybody connected with Science Fiction to get together and have fun in the manner of conventions. In Australia we don't have this professional influence at all. I do remember that the very early conventions we held here, in the fifties, in Sydney, were very dull affairs. People organised the conventions, they looked at a few magazines, they had auctions, but because we were so insulated from World science fiction at that time - there were no American magazines available in the country - so we got together from a herd instinct. We felt better when we were together.

But I've been conducting some research into the why of Australian conventions recently. It seems to me we have been trying, on two occasions, to recapture that wonderful atmosphere of the 1966 Convention. I'm sure that some of you here were at the 1966 Convention: it was quite different, very much different, from any other convention that had preceded it.

There were numerous things I would like to recall. There was John Baxter with his marvellous last minute display of snippets from old fantasy films which he brought down from Sydney and we somehow borrowed an 8 mm projector.... it wasn't on the programme; it was just a filler for the Saturday evening but it was very very good. Charles Higham was present and gave us that very funny writeup on THE BULLETIN, which I think was about the best we'd ever had, certainly the closest to accurate. Then there was Kevin Dillon's great moment. You remember how he walked down

the aisle and pressed I think it was ten quid into John Baxter's hand to finance the next Sydeny convention. (Laughter). I don't know what happened to the convention and I don't know what happened to the ten quid.

We also had an author panel that year. I think it was the first occasion when an Australian convention had an author panel as there just hadn't been authors around in sufficient quantity at that time. This was repeated last year at Boronia and it began to become apparent that Australian conventions were beginning to assume some of the qualities of overseas conventions, because of the fact that you could ^{get} six people up waffling about s f instead of just smoking cigarettes in a corner.

The inauguration this year of the Achievement Awards I think is a considerable step forward in making ^{the} s f part of the convention somewhat more official and perhaps of more interest to people overseas.

Australians have been writing s f almost since the magazines began. Some of you older fans may recall how they scurried around in the old days buying up remaindered copies of Earl Cox's OUT OF THE SILENCE for two bob and flogging them to the Yanks for exorbitant prices and getting those prohibited pulps in exchange. Later this afternoon you will be able to meet a man who was actually writing for AMAZING STORIES in the 1930s - so we've been around. But it wasn't until well after the Second World War that Australian writers really began to emerge in quantity (I did not say quality). A magazine appeared in the very early fifties called THRILLS INCORPORATED. I use the term magazine loosely. It was a sort of cross between a comic book and TRUE ROMANCES, or something on that level, and it published a lot of very dreadful fiction by house name writers. It did discover a young lady in Sydney, Norma Hemming and it did publish quite a lot of her fiction.

At about the same time a Queensland journalist, Frank Bryning, began selling documentary type s f to the local slicks. There was a magazine called AM, a sort of pseudo-COLLIERS and the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL also published several of Frank's stories. These stories were eventually resold overseas to FANTASTIC UNIVERSE in America, and Frank was encouraged to write a lot of new material for them. In England Ted Carnell of NEW WORLDS started buying Frank's stuff and later several stories by Norma Hemming were sold to NEW WORLDS. A friend of hers, Norma Williams, started selling to the English magazines. So we were starting to get geared up then.

Norma, unfortunately, is no longer with us. She died several years ago. Norma Williams is still writing, as is Frank, although sporadically. We may be seeing some of their more recent material in print very soon if all goes well with a certain venture. Frank Bryning was Guest of Honour at the 1956 Convention which was held in Melbourne.

Unfortunately he couldn't be with us, but Wynne Whiteford is. You may not know that Wynne has been a pretty adventurous guy, and after myself he's probably the next oldest member of the MSFC - I think you came in when I went out, sort of, in the early 50s. I think he started writing about 1953 for the local magazines -

I remember seeing a story of yours in SQUIRE. When the puny little Australian professional magazines came out, POPULAR and FUTURE, paying about £1 a 1000 words and all the Sydney fans wrote like mad for them. I think at the same time you were associated with WHEELS motor manual. He used to take these fancy European sports-cars out and road test them.

It was some time in the mid fifties when you went overseas (1957). Wynne wrote his way across the United States, selling to most of the major American s f magazines, and also did some motor writing at that time. He made so much - that was the boom time, you could actually make quite a bit out of s f - there were about 40 magazines being published at that time. Then Wynne went over to England and sold Carnell a lot of stories, too. Then he came back here, a beaten man.

It was about the time Wynne came back when I had just started selling to NEW WORLDS - about 1960. At the same time a writer whom I'm not quite sure is Australian, David Rome or David Boutland - David, you're English by birth, aren't you? (("Yes")) - emigrated out here at an early age, realised your mistake, and you went back to England and discovered Ted Carnell amongst other people and you wrote quite a bit of s f. Twice you've been in Judith Merril's BEST anthologies - PARKY and THE STARMAN IN WARD SEVEN. I think David and I were writing and selling to Carnell at the same time.... at least for a while we overlapped, and then David stopped writing s f so much and came back home. You made the mistake again.

Then, while I was still selling steadily to Carnell, John Baxter in Sydney also started selling.... science fiction.... on street corners. And Damien Broderick, another local lad, who comes from all points of the compass, on various occasions, also started selling to Carnell.

So, by this time, the early sixties, Australian writers were really getting a foothold on the overseas market. As far as quality goes I think we still had a long way to go. About 1963 the Australians started to disappear a bit again. It is significant that last year John Baxter, in his role as s f editor, edited the Pacific anthology which for the first time showed people that there were enough Australians writing s f in one way or another to produce not a great volume but a very interesting volume of stories. I know that the collection has probably not been as popular with the s f fans as it has been with the more general reader, but I think it would be good to bear in mind that John was collecting for a sort of literary audience that he wanted to impress, to get across the idea that s f could compete reasonably well with other sorts of writing. I still think the market is wide open for a blood and guts collection of Australian s f. I'd certainly like to see one - I like blood and guts.

That about brings us up to the present moment. We've all been leapfrogged by that Jack Wodhams fellow up in Queensland. He sells straight to the highest paying market without any effort whatever. He's a tremendous sort of person. Damien Broderick writes only sporadically, when he's hungry. John Baxter seems to have stopped writing short s f completely. He is very busy with his British publisher on film books, as John Bangsund has already informed you. I certainly look forward to his book on

s f films. It should be out later this year.

By now it should be quite clear that, for the first time since s f magazines began as a form, we now have a group of writers in this country who can compete qualitatively with the tenth rate British writers, or perhaps not quite as bad as that. But the thing is to get them producing and producing steadily. Wynne has mentioned personally that it is much easier to supply a local market than one ten thousand miles away, and this tends to be true of s f writers in the past. In Australia they tend to move in a field where the rewards are much quicker and the company is more stimulating. I hope that with the inception of VISION OF TOMORROW that writers will be able to work with the editor and perhaps produce more s f than they have previously, and better s f as well. There was going to be a display of Australian s f writings to impress the hell out of you, but all we've got is a rather feeble display over here at the moment. This is the latest British NEW WRITINGS and it has two stories by Australian writers, David Rome and John Baxter.

We now have a situation where there are sufficient Australian authors to make a mark on the field. They are being widely re-published in Europe and in some cases in America. So it seems to me, particularly if the VISION enterprise is a success, that next year's Convention may be somewhat different again to this one, and this brings in certain discussions which we had awhile ago.

Now, I think what any organising committee has to face is how much they want professional participation in future conventions. You can do without it, but if by the time the convention rolls around there are going to be perhaps six new writers discovered and being published overseas, they'll want to come along to a convention and walk around. I think this is the only s f club in the world where Bert Chandler could walk in and browse through the bookshelves and not be noticed. We're not used to having professional people around - we feel a bit awkward and a bit embarrassed - but there are going to be more of them here next year if you want them. In other words a more professional atmosphere is creeping into the proceedings. In 1966 I don't think anybody stood up to take a bow anywhere, but you've all been popping up and down. Incredible, the number of fanzines.

As a footnote, I would like to give future organizing committees one thing to consider, when they're going about their business. I'd very much like them to study overseas programmes, convention programmes, and they may pick up a useful idea or two from the way the American and English and German conventions are run. One aspect I would dearly like to see included in future conventions is entertainment, and I don't just mean laughing at a few funny old movies. I'll conclude with a plea that the next convention committee explores its sense of humour.

- Lee Harding 1969

Transcribed by Lee Harding

FAN GUEST OF HONOUR SPEECH

John Foyster

Transcribed by John Foyster

(Introduced by Lee Harding, then....)

I'm a little embarrassed to be here. Partly because I can think of so many people who should be here before me: but I won't speak about that for too long because then you'll believe it and throw me out. But I must admit that I can think of approximately 20 people who should have been here before me. I'm playing this up, if you like....

(Deathly silence on tape)

....Jack Wodhams was the first Guest of Honour last year! However, I'll try to struggle against that.

You'll have noticed that, in the program, Lee Harding has, opposite his name as professional Guest of Honour, the word "address". So we knew what we were getting from him; but if you look at the program you'll see that it just says "Fan Guest of Honour - John Foyster" with no indication of what I'm going to do. I listened very carefully to Lee, but I did not hear him sing BASIN STREET BLUES, so I figured that what was put in the program was not exactly what the program managers had in mind. So I had to think a bit about what I'd do and the most obvious thing in my particular case was to take off a few clothes and show you the fantastic shoulders and chest you develop from turning a duplicator handle.

But then again, perhaps some of you are even better endowed in this region and having looked there this morning I'd say this is certainly so. Of course, I could do a few card tricks; I thought of doing a bit of tap-dancing but the table is not sufficiently strong and singing, of course, is ruled out immediately, so that I find myself reduced to speaking to you, whether I like it or not.

Well, this was the way I was thinking, up until yesterday. But then I listened to the professional panel, and I was very put out to discover that they had chosen, more or less, the same subject as I had chosen. However, I'll steer away from that, and I will not be speaking about Philip Jose Farmer's REAP. I'll be speaking about something slightly different and it will concern science fiction fans as individuals, not as members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, the Australian Science Fiction Association, or any other body; nor even the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Press Association which, I remind members, will be having a meeting after the Fan Panel.

I want to speak about the science fiction fan and the future. Now the reason I want to speak about this is that science fiction

fans have regarded themselves, since they first banded together in the early 1930s, as the people who look to the future. You find that, for instance, in New York, we had an organisation called the Futurians: this name has lived on in Sydney. But the Futurians included people who later on became known as Michelists - named after one of their members - and they were devoted to the introduction of a new social order. One of the members, you'll be pleased to know, was Donald A Wollheim, who presently seems to be opposed to this sort of thing: this shows the advantages of getting older, and getting more money.

(Taken from crude memories of Moskowitz's IMMORTAL STORM)

Nevertheless, science fiction fans, from that time on, and probably before then, because even in the letter columns before fans became organized as such, there was this tendency of fans to think of themselves as people who looked to the future. Now the fact of the matter is that, all too sadly, there are very few people in the world who look to the future at all. If people look to the future, it is looking at the future of themselves for a short period of time. I'm not saying that there is anything wrong in this. But there are occasions where you have to think of more than yourself; at least, over a short period of time if you are to survive over a long period of time. And this is approximately the situation in which we find ourselves today.

Philip Farmer, and the panelists yesterday, discussed the matter of air pollution, water pollution and stuff like that. This is interesting but, I think, beside the point. What I want to talk to you about this afternoon is the problem that has really only faced us since the Second World War: the problem of the growth of population.

Now I'm talking to you about this because I think the problem is so important that each additional person who thinks about it is something gained. Let me illustrate by just stating a few words quoted about a particular book. The book is called FAMINE 1975. It is written by two brothers named Paddock in the United States, and their contention is that there will be world-wide famine in under-developed countries in 1975 - 6 years away. Now they don't mean in Europe, North America or Australia. They mean the rest of the world. Now of course 1975 is a pretty pessimistic date, and the person reviewing this, whose name is James Bonner (and he reviewed it in the issue of SCIENCE for 25th August 1967) said that this seemed to him pessimistic and that, to him, a range of dates rather than a specific date was more precise. And he suggested 1977 - 1985. Now that may seem to you to be rather soon.

Perhaps you'd like to know when the US Department of Agriculture expects world-wide famine in underdeveloped countries: 1985, one year after George Orwell's year. Now this is not Isaac Asimov writing in VENTURE Science Fiction: this is fact, this is expected by relatively skilled scientists.

(this is polemic)

In 1985, some sixteen years from now, there will probably be

famine in most of the world. Now that is, in a way, a median view. Neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It assumes that the present endeavours to offset the situation will be continued at their present level. It doesn't assume that people will let things get slack, in which case the famine will come earlier, and, fortunately, it doesn't assume that people will really do something about it, in which case, of course, we may not have to worry about the famine.

What sort of arguments do people use in producing these figures? They don't use the arguments of Thomas Malthus completely any more. When Malthus made his predictions about food shortage in the late 18th century and the early 19th century he predicted that fairly soon there would be food shortages. He did not consider the fact that there were large areas of land still to be opened, for instance, in North America, and of course South America and Australia. He didn't consider the Industrial Revolution. This meant that his estimate was inaccurate. However, today we have a different situation. There are no new places that we can open up, except perhaps South America to some extent. Generally speaking, if we are to get any more land, we will have to spend a lot of energy and a lot of money doing so. What is more likely is more intensive culturing of our present land: in Japan, for instance, the number of calories produced per acre is 3 or 4 times that of the rest of the world. So we can obviously do quite a lot about it. We can grow a lot more food for a lot more people.

But we can't do this indefinitely. We cannot continue to produce more food indefinitely. Isaac Asimov considered this in VENTURE Science Fiction in 1958 when he made some calculations (as he always likes to do) about what the population of human beings would be, in the universe, if the present rate of expansion continued. And according to him, in about 3000 years every atom of the universe would be human beings. So you can see that there is an upper limit to just how long the present situation can go on.

Now what is the present situation? Well, the present situation is that from a birth and death rate of between 40 and 60 (per thousand) in the years BC continuing until perhaps the 18th century - no earlier than that - we have now cut down the death rate considerably: to something like 20 or 25 per thousand over all for the world and of course, in the developed countries, it is getting down towards ten per thousand. In non-industrial countries of course, it is still very high. The birthrate, however, has not kept in step with the death rate. The death rate has gone down: the birth rate has, in many countries, remained fairly constant. There have been dramatic decreases, though, in some parts of the world. Japan is one example. Between 1950 and 1962 the birth rate dropped 40%. Now this means, of course, that the Japanese standard of living rose somewhat, since the death rate could not be altered so much as to offset that. Thus the situation can be met up to a point: we can face the problem.

Now the real problem is knowing just what to plan for: how many people are we going to plan to feed in any particular year? As you might expect, the United Nations has investigated this problem, and they've made various projections on the population of the Earth at different times. Alas, their predictions up

to date have always erred on the low side: they have always predicted a lower population than the earth in fact had in their predicted year. So now they don't predict populations so precisely - they indicate a wide range. The mean prediction for 2000 is about 6000 million - about twice the present population. That is, the population is to double in 30 years. Their low prediction is about 5000 million, their high prediction is 7000 million. 7000 million is a lot of people, but it is believed that we can feed them. In fact, I've seen suggestions that we can feed 12000 million people from the world's resources. Now you don't really need me to tell you that if we can feed 12000 million people on the Earth, and the population doubles in 30 years, from 3000 million to 6000 million, that unless the population growth is curbed pretty soon or rather, some time in the next 60 years, we're going to have just enough food to feed all the people then living. Anyone else won't get any food.

Now there are two ways of facing this problem, it seems to me: cutting the birth rate, which is a method which has met with some success in some parts of the world; the other way is to increase the death rate. Now increasing the death rate is pretty good as a short-term policy if it is carried out, say, in a war. In one of the republics of the Soviet Union ((Byelorussia : Transcriber)) the present population is just reaching the size it was in 1939. Having a large number of people killed in a war is a fairly good short-term way of cutting the population. But of course the Soviet Union is an exception in that 20 million people were killed there: that is, three times as many people were killed in the Soviet Union as Jews were killed, and if you wonder why the Russians don't like the Germans you might like to consider that figure and also consider how many Germans were kidnapped by the Israelis.

But it is a short term policy to kill off a few people over a period of six years. You'd have to kill people pretty steadily to control the population, unless you were going to cut the birth-rate as well.

Perhaps we could kill people: in fact, if you look at it from the point of view of someone who is slightly pessimistic, or cynical about the way governments work you'd find that that is what's inevitably going to happen. It seems to me that there are, roughly speaking, two things you can do: You can say, let us limit the number of births in our country, and you'd have to do that now, or fairly soon, or you can say let us limit the age to which people will live and you can do that later.. Now there may be some of you who believe that governments are in the habit of doing things sooner rather than later. I'm not one of them. For this reason, I suspect that unless something is done, perhaps not us, but perhaps our children, if we have any, will only have a limited lifetime. Not limited by medical science, but simply limited by the fact that there's not enough food. This is the problem that we face. Are we going to try to do something about reducing the birth rate, at the same time, of course, keeping up the present battle to feed the people who are here? (I point out that we here, no matter how poor we are, live in the top 5% of the world population: half to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world's people are in such a state of malnutrition, and if you look at India, say, the average lifetime is not 70 years, as it is in Australia, but 25 years). Well, I think we can do something. But to do

something requires people who worry about the problem, and who will do something about it, and who will, perhaps, even try to urge others to do something about it.

It seems to me a far more important problem than polluting the air. I mean, after all, that if we get air pollution we're going to kill off a few people; not very many - perhaps we'll evolve people who can survive the air pollution. But I don't think we can evolve people who don't eat.

For this reason, I'm quite in favour of people spending money on space travel. Because if there's some ice on the moon, as there may be, we might be able to feed a few people there. And when it comes to spending a bit of energy from blokes' backs, digging water out of the ground, and paying the salaries to get them up there, then it is better, I think, if we are going to be able to relieve the population pressure a little. I don't think it's significant: we may be able to reduce a little tiny bit of the pressure, but not very much. But if I were really to be consistent about this, I'd say no, don't spend the money on that; spend more money on the war in Vietnam, because it kills more people. Alas, if they were fighting in India, that might be a good idea. But there's no fighting in India. ((on that scale)) You may not see the connection immediately, but I am talking about India now; there's the well-known story about the Chinese who march around the earth, and they never get around because there's always more of them being born. The current prediction is that by the year 2000 there will be more Indians than Chinese. And, of course, in a smaller area of land. You know that every year there are famines in India now? It is estimated that by just after the year 2000 there'll be half as many Indians as there are people in the world now: something over 12000 million people. And their present expected lifetime, as I have said, is about 25 years.

So, we've got some problems to face. Let me give you some idea of how people do think about this. I've got some quotations here from the BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS for January 1968.

Here's a bloke talking about the problem of getting across to people: his name is Gunner Myrdal:

My main practical conclusion is that the first condition for planning a democracy like USA is to teach the people and enlighten them in regard to the social and economic facts and the policy conclusions to be drawn from the ideals and the facts. Without success on this popular level, all planning becomes nothing more than an intellectual exercise.

He's talking about the problem of poverty in the United States. He's not talking about the problem of poverty in the other countries, all of which are less well off.

The publisher of SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN had this to say: (and this is despite the fact that the USA spends a lot of money aiding poorer countries)

The gap between the industrial and the pre-industrial nations has been widening and deepening. At the present rate of population growth in Asia and Latin America it will take a fifty per cent increase in food production over the next 15 years just to maintain the present inadequate nutrition.

Fifteen years, you will recall, brings us to 1984.

After making the suggestion that we may be able to support 12000 million people on the earth, he goes on:

But the human species must eventually bring its numbers into stable adjustment with its own environment.

This is what Sten Dahlskog was talking about yesterday when he talked about the importance of ecology in the world. We must study just how much food we can squeeze out of the planet without ensuring that next year there will be none. It is relatively easy to go out and grab a whole lot of food now, but you've got to plan for next year as well. And so this is something which has to be studied.

But the publisher of SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN is optimistic and he says that we can expect, perhaps, it is possible "that we can attain a world free from want within the lifetime of this generation". That's within 50 years. We can do it. It is possible. But if he is like me, he doesn't think it'll be done.

Now let's see what the opposition says: a social scientist named Theodore Schultz has this to say. You'll see that part of this is actually suggesting that there are a lot of problems. And when he comes to the problem he just brushes it away: I'm interpreting what he says here, but I want you to be aware of it when we come to it:

It's altogether naive and very misleading to project for the next decade or two the recent and rising net production curve. The assumption that the family planning of parents will show little or no downward response in birthrates to the decline in death rates is, I am sure, invalid.

This is not a convincing argument to me. I see no reason to believe that people will automatically have less children, just because there are less people dying. Although there is some truth to this in India where people have a lot of children so that at least one of them will grow up. If you have four children in India there's a fifty-fifty chance that they'll all grow up to maturity.

So that these people are not particularly enthusiastic about our chances... When we come to an optimist, he's generally the sort of person who, in 1938, thought that Hitler could be contained by giving him a little bit of land here and there. This is not the kind of problem we can think about and then say: "It'll be all right"... "It's not my worry, the next generation will look after it". Because of the nature of the problem, it's one that this generation must worry about.

And where do science fiction fans come into this?

I think science fiction fans, in general, fail to think at all about the future. Not just science fiction fans, but science fiction writers as well. Now we did have a panel up here yesterday making the point that really their job was to write stories - and this is quite so. But we nevertheless need people who think about the future. And if occasionally one of them wrote a science fiction story I don't think it would do any harm. But we don't seem to get many of them. I don't think that

science fiction writers have the time to thoroughly investigate the possibilities of the future and most of them don't have the inclination to spend a short amount of time, which they could afford, to have some familiarity with what is going on in the world and what will happen in the world in the near future.

Science fiction fans, then, being brought up on this particular sort of fiction, will not take a really serious attitude towards the future at all. The problem for both science fiction writers and science fiction fans is that they fail to think through carefully all the consequences of the original bright idea. If you take SECONDS as an example: watching the film, I had the impression that the director thought that all you had to do to make a man young again is to give him a face-lift and make him do lots of exercise. Now this is approximately the sort of thinking that you get in science fiction stories. And because s f fans read it, it carries over to them.

I'd like to read one last thing to you, concerning the sort of people science fiction fans are. I don't know that it applies holus-bolus to people: when it was written it wasn't even considered as applying to s f fans, and it probably doesn't apply to us all. But it does apply, I think, to some of us. And sometimes we have to face a few facts. I'm going to quote from A S Neill's SUMMERHILL (which you can read because it's come out in a Pelican recently):

It is the introverted child who flees into fantasy to find his superiority. In the world of reality he has no superiority: he cannot fight, he does not excel at games, he cannot act or sing or dance. But in his own world of fantasy he may be the heavyweight champion of the world. To find ego-satisfaction is a vital necessity for every human being.

Now if you consider the way in which the first space-ship is invented in science fiction stories, you'll have to agree that what the authors are trying to do is give you a wish-fulfillment, some tremendous power that one man can have. In many s f stories the major theme is the immense power that one insignificant man can have. The chapter from which this was quoted is called INFERIORITY AND FANTASY. Not superiority, but inferiority. And I think that any person who takes the attitude of retreating into fantasy as a world to live in is being inferior in some way; in the sense that they are not facing up to what the world really is: this is why I wrote an article for Gary Woodman, though it was published by Ron Clarke last year, about Andrew Sarris's comments on 2001. Sarris felt that couldn't get along with people who talked about a fantasy world when he had a full-time job worrying about the real world. Now I'm not going to suggest that we should make it a fulltime business to worry about the real world but I do suggest that we should think of the real world occasionally.

There are some people who say: "I think about the real world all the time at work between 9 and 5; when I get home at night I need time off - I have to escape into a world of fantasy". This is more or less a comment I read by a person I had thought of as pretty down-to-earth in an American fanzine not long ago. If you think about it, you'll realise that more children are bred out of office hours than in them.

I didn't want to bore you or talk about tremendously serious things, but as I said, to me this is something that everyone should think about, and if I've made one person think about it who hadn't thought about it before, then as far as I'm concerned then it's worthwhile. Now in the fan panel that follows I'll talk about anything that appears in ASFR or anything like that. But I did want to say this to you, because it is very important to me and whether you like it or not, it's important to you. Thank you.

(Transcriber's note: I have manfully restrained myself from turning this into English when necessary.)

THE MURKY IMAGE

The pages of photos did not turn out very well. But, as in all the best stories, it was not my fault. The printer dun it, and took money for it. But, let me assure you, the images still tell a measure of truth, and some are very accurate indeed.

THE FANS (Sheet facing Page 6)

TOP Left: LEE HARDING who could fit on either page. As great a fan as pro. (Photo by Peter Darling).

Right: JOHN BANGSUND in contemplative frame of mind. (Photo by Lee Harding, who took all the photos except two).

MIDDLE Left: LEIGH EDMONDS who is now thinner, has longer hair and wears spectacles as little as possible; and DIANE BANGSUND who remains as stubbornly beautiful as ever.

Right: GEORGE TURNER; JOHN BANGSUND; LEE HARDING. A serious moment from the Author Panel. (Photo by Peter Darling)

BOTTOM Left: JOHN FOYSTER, whose wife did not recognize him in this picture. John has joined Beard Fandom, but that diabolical smile remains.

BRUCE GILLESPIE, who smiles sometimes.

THE PROS (Sheet facing this page)

TOP Left: DAMIEN BRODERICK, who "writes when he is hungry", but not very often.

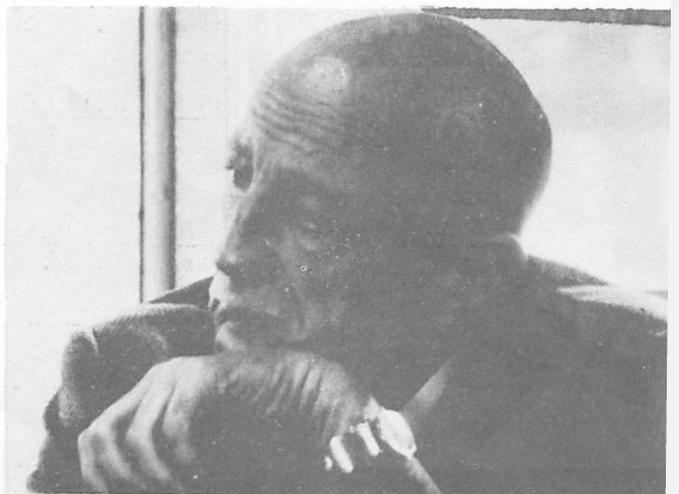
Right: JACK WODHAMS - "Happy Jack" (Photo taken at 1968 Con).

MIDDLE Left: GEORGE TURNER, who also smiles sometimes. Lee Harding wasn't there when he did.

Right: DAVID BOUTLAND and WYNNE WHITEFORD - I'm glad somebody enjoyed the Authors Panel.

BOTTOM Left: DAVID BOUTLAND again.

Right: PHIL COLLAS, another Aristotle, who thought well on the Authors Panel.



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

John Bangsund presiding

Transcribed by Peter Darling

BRG: JOHN BANGSUND prepared the Introduction to this Panel, and moderated. Seated with him on the Authors' Panel were LEE HARDING, a writer for John Carnell's s f magazines for some years; has now turned full-time writer, is actively involved in the VISION project.... PHIL COLLASS, who wrote for AMAZING STORIES in the 'thirties, remains in touch with s f, and (I think) was recently awarded the OBE.... GEORGE TURNER, who writes mainstream novels and s f criticism.... DAVID SOUTLAND, who, as David Rome, has written many stories and TV scripts.... and WYNNE WHITEFORD, whose adventurous career is related in the Guest of Honour Speech:

JOHN BANGSUND There's not really room for me to stand up here and address you - I'm not supposed to address you - this is supposed to be a Discussion Panel.

I want to set the theme, and it's very hard to set the theme when I'm sort of poised here like this, so I'm going to sit down and do it. I have a few notes here on what I'm going to talk about.

First of all, the Guest of Honour at the last Convention of the New York Lunarian Society was Donald Wollheim who is well known to you from his being editor for Aca Books. He is a man who has done anthologies and... well, you know him. In his Guest of Honour speech, Mr Wollheim had some very interesting things to say, and I'm going to read you some of the things he said. He said, for example, about science fiction, what it is that makes s f so interesting, particularly to young people and particularly to the people with money in their pockets who buy books and magazines. He says "it's the Grand Adventure, it's the lure of other worlds, the wondrous vision of days to come and the land on the other side of the mountain. Escape reading, sure, but escape into something one would love to be involved in. It's the road away from the hum-drum world of cold reality, the inborn human desire for the victory of good over evil, the glorious trek on the golden road to Samarkand, the crusade for right against wrong. It's an innate belief in the.... "

(Cynical laughter)

He said it! He said it... "It's an innate belief in the rightness and goodness of mankind, a belief that so often must be sustained through fantasy as a barrier against the ugly cynicism, shoving and pushing and crass commercialism of daily life."
I will skip a couple of similar paragraphs.

(More cynical laughter)

"This is the key to the reading of s f today. This is what really

sustains s f in this effort, not smart-aleck New Wave writings - all stylistic claptrap and downbeat. Not writers whose desperate ambition is to be mistaken for mainstream writers and abandon all this childish stuff about idealism to wallow in cynical satire and hold up distorting mirrors of the world about us. We all know the world is a frightening one. That's why we read escape literature. So what do these writers think they are doing?"

He probably gave his speech just like that.

"If they ever succeeded in persuading the majority of writers to turn out only their ugly satires, their thorny futures of sadistic societies and Freudian anti-heroes, you would see how rapidly the sale of s f would dwindle. There is no nourishment in such visions. Science fiction cannot survive incarceration in a Coney Island House of mirrors."

In his concluding remarks Wollheim says: "If there is any danger to science fiction today, it is that the influence of embittered writers will be allowed to dominate. People do not read science fiction because they want to be told how lousy the world is or how rotten people are. That's exactly what they want to get away from. And because these particular writers - and I include much of what is not humorously called the Milford Mafia - themselves have become sour on the wondrous vision doesn't mean the rest of us are. If they want to write sick mainstream literature, let them. Only don't clothe it in the garments of fantasy."

And so forth.

This view of the nature and purpose of s f is shared by a number of people, but there are many who would say that s f is more than escape literature, that fandom is more than just a bunch of escapists. One of these people is a gentleman called Isaac Asimov who, in a recent paperback called IS ANYONE THERE? (which I've lent to somebody so I can't quote it accurately) has a chapter in which he suggests that the American government, if it is really serious about scientific research and catching up with the god-damned Russians and everything like this, what they should do is cultivate the science fiction readers, because apparently these people have got something as a group that nobody else has.

Another person who disagrees with Don Wollheim - and this is the person I really want to get onto, the person whose ideas will be discussed by the Panel, a gentleman named Philip Jose Farmer, one of the more eminent s f writers, regarded simply as a writer... and I think a fine fella.

As Guest of Honour at last year's World Convention in Berkley, California, he stressed not s f's wondrous visions but its lack of vision. His speech is long and brilliant and packed with controversial ideas, and it is rather unfair to pull out quotes from here and there. I wish you could read it, and perhaps you'll get a chance if I manage to reprint the thing.

I'll pull out a few quotes anyway: "We science fiction people were once content to be entertained by the dreamers of our field or content to criticize the dreamers because their dreams did or did not agree with our dreams.

"We had a field wherein, theoretically, the writer was unlimited in his choice of subject matter, wherein he had the whole cosmos to roam, or could even go outside the cosmos, wherein he could

write superb prose if he wished, take any physical science or philosophical or psychological idea and explore it, and so on.

"But he didn't!"

Mr Farmer goes on about the sort of thing that we read about in s f for years and years, about the problems that weren't faced, the things that these dreamers of the future should have seen, and been aware of, back in the thirties even. They neglected to mention them. They didn't notice such things as these: "Mechanization, civil rights, space travel, population expansion, the failure of capitalism, communism, and socialism, the revolt of youth, and psychedelic drugs."

This is a pretty formidable list, and I think there could be some debate over whether everybody actually had his eyes shut. But the fact was that these things just weren't exploited, weren't noticed by the majority of s f writers and they thought that it was the bug eyed monster from Mars who had to be beware of. They didn't notice that perhaps the economic system needed taking a bit of notice of too.

In 1952 Farmer tried to sell a story to "a prominent science fiction magazine". He doesn't say which one it is, but we know which one it is, since he mentions probably the greatest editor in terms of influence that the field has so far known. And this story, which would have taken place around about 1965 just wasn't faced as far as this editor was concerned but it described in vivid detail the oppression and hatred American negroes really feel - the riots, the repressions, the attacks by militants and so forth.

This was in 1952, and this editor, unnamed, didn't like the story. He said: "Negroes were inferior. They'd made no contribution whatsoever to civilization, except possibly magic, that segregation should be rigidly maintained, because the goal of evolution was the differentiation of the human species into races (for some unknown but no doubt worthy purpose). For these reasons, he could not even consider my story." This is a funny thing as most s f fans could accept - what did he call them? - "blue-skinned, six tentacled, four-eyed ten-legged Martians as brothers, but they couldn't accept Negroes as brothers".

I'm going to skip a lot of this stuff. The point that Farmer comes to is that there is something about s f that makes it a unique thing for foreseeing what's going to happen in society, by using s f as a means of propogating ideas as to what our world is going to be like in a few years time. This is one of the functions of s f, and he mentions such things as this. The Civil Rights crisis is only one of the many that Man is facing. Even more important than this one, because it threatens the survival of all of us, is one which I will describe only briefly.

"Do you know that insecticides have been found in the phytoplankton of the oceans? Why do I mention insecticides and phyto plankton? Because the combination of the two means a shortage of oxygen in our air." And so he goes on.... "Phytoplankton also provide 50% or more of the oxygen in our atmosphere. Yet the phytoplankton is being poisoned, killed off, by insecticides originally sprayed on plants on the land. What happens if this insecticide continues to be used? What happens when our air is cut off? Do we have to find ourselves gasping for breath before we start to do anything about it? There are many things I could talk about, but it would

require a book to present fully. I plan to write such a book".

While he is writing the book, Farmer tells us that there are things we can do, and especially addresses the s f fans. He mentions the fact that, as most of you will know, s f fans organized a massive protest against the cancelling of STAR TREK. They wrote letters, they protested all over the place, and the result was that STAR TREK continued. Now there is the threat again that STARTREK is to be cancelled and again the fans are going to protest - what they will do this time we don't know.

Farmer said this is a good thing. But there are other things s f fans could be protesting about. Farmer is about to launch an organisation which he calls REAP. What this stands for doesn't matter terribly much at hthe moment - it could be Rights Economy of Abundance and Peace or Ritual and People or whatever is appropriate.

Anyway, the thing is to get this thing off the ground. He concludes his speech... Sorry, this REAP organization has the main function as doing the legwork for the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara in California, a group which was written up in TIME magazine some time ago under the heading HERESY IN SANTA BARBARA, an organization that is backed by the Government to study things but not to do anything about them. Farmer wants his group to do something about them - to propogate ideas and in particular these ideas about civil rights and ecological things and so on.

He concludes with this speech: "You, the science fiction people, have always dreamed of the future. You have been too neotenic to do much more than dream, and this was good, because a long period of juvenility means a more intelligent adult. Now, you are the "fertile void" mentioned earlier. You are ready to convert dreaming into action. And you have a long-standing - if loose-knit - effectively operating group which contains many compassionate and idealistic people.

"I am inviting you to join REAP when its principles and programs have been definitely formulated and published. When REAP becomes established, then REAP will offer its services to the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions as an activist auxiliary. If the Centre should accept our offer, then we advance with the Centre. If it rejects our offer, then we find other channels. You and I - we - must not just speculate about the future. We must inseminate the future. We must bring the future to term. We must deliver the future! Otherwise the future becomes still-born!"

I wrote to Mr Farmer and said "What sort of reaction did you get to this speech?" He said the fan reaction has been mixed, ranging from cries of indignation and suggestions that I am a Communist, an idiot or both to pledges of full support, morally, financially, and physically. The Centre for the SDI is interested, but it can act only in an advisory capacity - if it gets directly involved in political action it loses its support from the government.

I decided it would be better to go on without relying on them - the centre contains a number of conservative elements, to my way of thinking. I have applied for State recognition of REAP as a non-profit organization. I have been working off and on on the first declaration of REAP which will state the need for it, its aims and

proposals for initial action. This will be published later in the year and will be advertised in s f magazines and fanzines before initial publication. The immediate aim of REAP will be to fight air and water pollution - unless the world's air and water is cleaned up we won't have to worry about economic systems, healthy minds and bodies, or anything."

From Mr Wollheim's view of s f to Mr Farmer's is quite a long way. To simplify and exaggerate a bit you have on one hand the view that s f is simply escape literature, the literature of the wondrous vision. On the other hand we have the view that s f can be a vehicle for a changing society and that the s f society should be ... rather could be... organised as a pressure group.

These views raise all sorts of questions, and I want to throw a batch of them at the Panel. They can start answering whenever they like. I'm going to give all the questions at once.

The first one: Isaac Asimov and Phil Farmer imply that s f readers are something special. Is this true or are we just kidding ourselves?

The second question: To what extent can or should social criticism be regarded as a function of science fiction?

The third one: Should s f writers and fans, with their capacity as such, not just as s f writers and fans, should they become actively involved in movements for social change?

Finally, I would like to know what the Panel thinks of Philip Farmer's REAP organization.

I'm going to ask Lee Harding to start.

LEE HARDING If you think I'm going to answer all that....!
I'll try to do it broadly. I've always liked to believe that the business of a writer is to write. If he has hobbies on the side, like freedom marching and things like that, this is his business.

Mr Farmer puts up a very interesting case. On the other hand, in Mr Farmer's writings I have never detected social involvement on the level of even some of the minor writers. Farmer seems to have been, apart from a very competent wordsmith, writing what Mr Wollheim likes.

As for Mr Wollheim: I think he is not propounding so much escape fiction as what I like to call withdrawal fiction. Science fiction fans seem to be such that they are non-social creatures on the whole, and because of their reading of s f are not likely to be involved in social matters, and embracing schemes such as that which Mr Farmer puts forward.

As for Mr Wollheim's diatribe against the New Wave; you must realise that Mr Wollheim grew up (if that is the right word) in an era of pulp fiction, when writers just churned out stuff to suit a market with very little thought of formal expression. In the process, some very good stories, and an occasional novel, appeared. One would be foolish not to recognize that the contemporary s f writer of today has been educated in a different way. He's been educated by publishers - which is completely different to these old-time writers who grew up with the magazines. As such, they are perhaps

more concerned with exploiting their own potential than in plying Don Wollheim with sword and sorcery. It is quite natural that a degree of involvement will be apparent in their work which has been sifted from most of the s f we are familiar with.

To get back to the question I started on - the job of a writer is basically to write. The degree to which he involves himself in society, and the degree to which this involvement adds to, or improves his work is really up to him.

I can't see much hope that "Science fiction readers of the world unite - you've got nothing to lose but your withdrawal fiction" is going to help Mr Farmer much.

BANGSUND Mr Collass, what do you have to say to that?

PHIL COLLASS I agree with Mr Harding to the extent that, if one looks at a reader's intelligence, as ANALOG has from time to time, and other magazines, you'll see the readers come from all levels. They are reading s f because they like it. They either want it as escape literature or because their minds might be adventurous and are looking for something else.

But basically people are always products of their environment, so we can't imagine, as Lee Harding just said, all s f fans uniting on aspects which are really outside s f.

I think where Phil Farmer may be wrong in his intentions, trying to tie social criticism in with s f is that our social life, our social laws at any time are governed by our immediate environment, so that if Lee, or any of us wrote an s f story dealing with the future and we alter the social conventions in that time to suit what we like in our present society, I don't think that can be taken that we should agitate to have our social system now as it should be a hundred years hence.

Our social life, our way of living now is completely dictated by our technological society. Science fiction is of course concerned with a good many different sciences. It's not just the science of electronics or mechanical engineering or the social sciences or political science and geopolitics - everything. So that the whole basis I think of a way of life, a way of living, is dictated by certain standards which will come into being or which exist now.

I think we are kidding ourselves if we think that we who have been interested in s f can take things straight from s f to try and improve modern life. I don't think we can do it - I think we've got to take our immediate environment and, as the third paragraph there mentions, consider it basically as an ordinary individual.

I'm all for improvement in our social way of life. There are always things that we would like, but I don't think s f fans constitute a big enough group to do it. The fact that s f people may have managed to get STAR TREK continued isn't, I think, of any value as a precedent. I mean, s f people got something of s f value continued, but until such time as we can alter thinking in higher government levels - and I haven't seen that happen anywhere - we will be wasting our time. I think that's enough for now.

BANGSUND Good. George, you must have comments on this.

GEORGE TURNER Well, yes. I'd go halfway with Phil Farmer, but only halfway. This idea that the s f fans can form some sort of a worthwhile pressure group seems to me a bit out of line. For one thing, the s f fan, as he exists today, is an s f fan who is the fan of s f as it exists today - that is, 95% escapism. Turn on something else and you will have a new brand of fan, if it gets accepted at all.

This, I think, brings us back to one of Lee's remarks, that the function of the writer is to write, and that certainly comes first. What he writes will be determined, as Lee indicated, by his interests. I think if you go through the whole history of literature you will never discover a novelist who originated a social idea or precipitated any kind of worthwhile social change. Don't cite to me Dickens, because he only hopped onto other people's band wagons, and so did nearly all those who are normally thought of as being the harbingers of change. They weren't. In fact they were only playing up games that were already well in the air.

The same goes for the s f writer. S f has never done anything worthwhile in the way of prediction. There was one fantastic incident early in the last War concerning the trigger mechanism for the atomic bomb, which is often cited as how clever a good writer can be, in that he gave a reasonably good picture of the trigger mechanism simply by picking up information from various magazines. He pointed out, after a lot of uproar, that anyone else could have done the same.

The fact remains that not only s f writers but all writers are bound by their own interests. There is something they can do, or rather that a small number of them can do, and these are the people that Farmer would find useful. They are not only in the s f field. They are well outside it as well.

I don't think we can pretend to predict with any kind of accuracy, not as individuals. We might as groups. What we can do is the thing that basically Farmer is trying to do - that is, to draw attention to the things that need attending to. Whether it is worthwhile to form pressure groups to get these things attended to in a particular fashion is another question. The experts come in there, the people who really know their business, not just the writers who only know the bit that particularly appeals to them for their work.

Drawing attention is more or less our job. I don't think I've got a much more highly developed social conscience than most, but there are things that interest me, things that irritate and upset me and I write books about them. Not that I hope to get anything done, but merely to draw attention to the fact that these things exist.

Many s f writers do the same thing. An outburst of s f on the subject, say, oxygen starvation, would produce an awful lot of bad stories and probably complete fed-upness with the whole thing. Two or three really good ones might do a great deal to focus attention, particularly if they could be read outside the s f field, and the best work is.

I would like to remind you that one s f writer did a lot of this sort of thing, a bloke who is very nearly forgotten now, one who was very rarely published in the magazines except towards the end of

his life - John Taine. John Taine wrote a whole novel about the bad results that could be obtained from uncontrolled genetic interference, and this was long before the atomic bomb. It was called SEEDS OF LIFE. He was also concerned with the problem of the Lessons of History, and what could be done with them politically. The story was called THE TIME STREAM. He did quite a lot of other work with similar thinking. Unfortunately, his work was discoloured, as is almost every other writer's work, by his private prejudices - for instance, he was terrified all his life of Russia and the Yellow Peril. He just couldn't keep them out of his books, with the result that the real message he was trying to put over often went unheard.

Yes, I think there is room in s f for drawing attention to the things that need attending to, but I don't think that s f as it stands today, dominated by the magazines, would pay much attention to it. I think such s f would be much more likely to be published by the major publishers and not published as s f. If you want an example, rather a bad one because it is an extremely bad book, I'd name ATLAS SHRUGGED. It unfortunately screamed its head off instead of attacking the problem in a credible manner.

This sort of thing can be done, and no doubt will be done if there is a market for it, and there is a market for it where the books are well written and there is a reasonable attention to popular requirements. If you want to attract public attention, one of the first things you have to do is, unfortunately, throw some of the tenets of art out the window. This is unfortunate, but if you are going to write with a purpose, other things must be subordinate to the purpose.

Whether s f can do this I don't know, because the purpose of the magazines, in writing for the magazines, is to make money. It is not to predict, because most s f prediction has been completely up the pole, mainly because the science is wrong, the facts are wrong, and the bloke is not interested in turning out anything but a salable yarn.

The thing can be done, and done on a large scale it could be helpful, but I would draw the line at any group of writers, s f or otherwise, trying to actively interfere with progress that should be left in the hands of those who know more about it.

BANGSUND Good.

Mr Boutland?

DAVID BOUTLAND What worries me is that I am in agreement with almost everything that has been said, and to get a good discussion going, we are going to have to diverge somewhere.

This special group - I think s f fans are a special group because there are so few of them. As an example, I suppose the average circulation of a magazine would be 20,000; 50,000....

BANGSUND ANALOG is 100,000

BOUTLANDlet's say 100,000 maximum. Compare this with a television program. An ordinary Australian TV drama

like HOMICIDE, has 2,500,000 viewers every week.

It's not much good in saying something if nobody is going to read it. Protest writing is an individual thing. The job of a writer, to me, first, is to entertain, to record what exists, to leave people to draw their own conclusions from what they read, and from what they see on television. I think an honest writer tries to present things as he sees them, without bias, and it is up to the individuals to approve the work or not, depending on what they think.

REAP is, I think, an example of beginning something that has no possibility of doing anything... and that's about it. I don't think there's very much to say about it. We are all in agreement.

BANGSUND Well, let's see if Wynne is in agreement.

WYNNE WHITEFORD Well, not completely. I agree with 75 or 80% of what has been said...

HARDING Would you believe, 50?

WHITEFORD One thing I would like to pick up George on his prediction. I think that there have been some quite close predictions, and I'm not talking about satellites or the atomic bomb.

If we go back to Jules Verne in FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON, written about 90 odd years ago, I think, wasn't it?.... his mode of propulsion was wrong but at least he had a capsule very like the Apollo - it had men in it....

(General laughter)

HARDING That's a fluke.

WHITEFORD ...and further, two of them were Americans.

(General laughter)

TURNER Why were they Americans?

WHITEFORD Well, put it this way... And the other thing is, that it came down in the Pacific. This was all done with logic, more or less.

If you assume that it is America, then Florida is the bit of America closest to the Equator, with the greatest amount of centrifugal spin of the Earth, so that, given the thing was American, this would be the place they'd pick. According to Verne, he was right. The Pacific is the largest ocean to drop back into, and an ocean is a better thing to land in than the dry land.

HARDING You're convincing me.

(Laughter)

WHITEFORD I think it was the Pacific, Lee - he was right there. Again, the three men. Three was about the minimum on

a long journey like that. I think it was an excellent attempt for fiction. You notice he had at least two men awake most of the time. So he was right there.

HARDING You're having me on.

WHITEFORD Another minor thing. He had a Frenchman on the team, but that was primarily because he was French.

Another minor thing. In the film DESTINATION MOON, done about 15 years ago, there were big mistakes, but the date of the flight given there was 1970 - they were out by a year.

BOUTLAND Did it predict that they would all be military men, or was it....?

WHITEFORDprivate enterprise? No, wait a minute. If I remember rightly (it's been years since I saw it) it was primarily a military thing, but I think they had one civilian scientist at least.

BOUTLAND I got the impression in Verne's story that there were fellows in bowler hats who kind of sauntered around....

WHITEFORD Yes. The people of the Baltimore Gun Club, or something like that. There just happened to be a few millionaires around.

BANGSUND If I could just interrupt you here. I think that Phil Farmer's idea on this kind of prediction was that he would concede that, from time to time, s f writers predicted mechanical things. He cites in one part of his speech the typical s f story, which he calls the "Son of Crankshaft". He concedes that this sort of prediction has been made. What his interest is, in that case, is what influence there will be on society by the very fact that we are now shooting any people at all, of whatever nature, at the moon. He says that the s f writer has not attempted to answer this. I don't know if this is entirely right.

WHITEFORD No, I don't think so because most stories of future worlds, Asimov's for example, were mostly extrapolated from Toynbee's STUDY OF HISTORY, but at least Asimov takes these ideas over a hundred thousand years or so. You've got room for almost any sort of big-scale tendencies to happen there.

(Hubbub. Indecipherable)

....One other minor point, while we were on Verne. There is a sort of feedback in some of these things. You notice that his submarine in 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA, his electric submarine that could go around the world without surfacing was called the Nautilus.

(Laughter)

To a certain extent he set a sort of a goal up, so that once somebody started thinking along the lines of an atomic submarine, Nautilus was a natural choice.

HARDING There was an article in GALAXY a couple of years ago called THE WATERY WONDERS OF CAPTAIN NEMO where Ted Thomas drummed every invention that Verne ever made. As George says, the stuff was around. All he had to do was grab it, put it together and get into print first.

BANGSUND Along this line: if we ever get involved in an inter-planetary war with the Chingos, do you think we'll go to it in a spaceship called the CHRISTINE KEELER?
According to Harry Harrison, we will.

WHITEFORD Highly unlikely. By the way, John, what does REAP really stand for?

BANGSUND It doesn't stand for anything in particular at the moment. It stands for the idea that right now we are in a position where we are about to reap either the wisdom of the ages.....

HARDING Gee!!

BANGSUND He'll work out what the initials stand for later on. I know that Lee wants to tackle someone and I can see an anxious hand being waved down there, so after Lee we'll go to the audience.

HARDING David - your two and a half million TV viewers that you mentioned. You were speaking in reference to reaching the widest possible audience if you wanted to present an idea or cause some sort of influence. If I wanted to get some very important idea over to a percentage of the populace who would perhaps understand what I wanted to say, and be capable of either acting on my directives or assisting me, I would think TV would be the last medium I would go to, except if I wanted to start a war. I don't think the percentage of people who watch television.... they're pretty much like the s f fans, I think. They want to be entertained; they want to get away from the office. They don't switch that thing on for big social issues. I think the cinema, and TV in particular, is a fantastic media for influencing people, but the sort of thing Farmer was talking about - can this be done by television?

BOUTLAND I don't think the writer's job is to influence people. The writer's job is to present things as they are.

HARDING Farmer wants to influence people - I'm taking his point of view, not what I write or try - but do you think that if he could utilize TV, if he could get the backing, could get the money, and... say he discovered some great philanthropist in the US of A who said "I'm going to give you so many hundred thousand for an hour on TV" - do you think the chances of Farmer getting what he wants are very high? Do you think that would be the audience he wants? I think this is very important. Is he trying to go underground instead of straight to the mass public?

BOUTLAND I think he's just going about it in an absolutely useless

way because he's only talking to a tiny majority.

HARDING I agree. If he were to go down to Greenwich Village and get himself a soapbox and stand on a corner and get all the gang in the East Village Other behind him, and they can stage massive walkathons to Washington, they might get something done. But I think we agree that s f fans are not the people.

BOUTLAND Wouldn't you agree that....Tell me, the more people that you can say "this exists", say this to, then the more people are going to react. It's no good saying "this exists", writing it down on a bit of paper and throwing it away. If you could control a world-wide television network you could tell people anything.

BANGSUND Precisely. If there was some way of linking REAP with Moral Rearmament then....?

John Foyster, you had something to say.

JOHN FOYSTER It seems to me that first George and then Lee
(AUDIENCE) confused Phil Farmer's point quite considerably. He was suggesting that Phil was requiring authors to initiate things, and George suggested that when we proposed change, that no authors had brought about change, and what really happened was that they just jumped on the band-wagon. This is only what Phil Farmer wanted s f writers to do. He's not saying that he wanted them to think of something new. He was saying: "Well, here's something. It needs a lot of publicity", and, if you like: "Why don't you do it?"

Now, this has been done to a considerable extent. Tolstoy certainly did this in WAR AND PEACE. Freemasonry has become an honourable thing, but the books that he wrote made it respectable, as it were. Furthermore, if you look back to the industrial action at the start of this century, certainly the song-writers of popular songs like THE RED FLAG didn't initiate the action, but they gave some binding force to keep it going.

I think that's what Farmer wants us to do. I don't think he says that s f writers have to be Smart Charlies and have terrific ideas. As a matter of fact, Farmer himself is very poor on this. He has written a novel about racial problems called CRIME IN THE NIGHT, an exceedingly bad portrayal of the racial situation in America. Perhaps this is why he kept quiet about it and perhaps why you've all kept quiet about it.

I don't think that Farmer is saying: "All right, Lee Harding has to think up a way to save the world."

(Laughter)

HARDING I'd love to.

FOYSTER What Farmer wants, it seems to me, is for s f writers to say: "Shit, there's trouble" and do something about it.

BANGSUND Well, yes. That's given us something to discuss.

TOM NEWLYN One thing about this is that the ideas are not all
(AUDIENCE) that new. There are new detergents out which are
bio-dispensable and therefore do not pollute the
water. There are third generation herbicides (which
is a weird name to call them) which are broken down and do not
contaminate the earth. There is even a company bringing out
disposable bottles which disintegrate.

HARDING After you've drunk the contents?

(Laughter)

NEWLYN This has already started. I think they've got the drink
bottles out.

HARDING I don't think it's quite as simple as that. We still
haven't done a thing about the exhaust problem of motor
cars - you know they've been stomping around for that
for about fifteen years or something.

NEWLYN But all these problems are being worked on, aren't they?

HARDING Yes.

NEWLYN If not by science fiction then by proper fiction.

(Uproar)

BANGSUND If I could halt the questions for a minute. Tom Newlyn
speaks as a doctor of medicine. What he has just said
there is rather interesting and authoritative. In the
latest issue of AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, which I was
delighted to read the other day

(Laughter)

not having had a thing to do with its publication, there is a letter
from Sven Dahlskog who is a Swedish... I think it wouldn't be too
far from the truth to say that he's a scientist. He's in particular
an ecologist, and I don't think he's just thumping his own band
wagon when he says the science due to dominate our way of life in the
next twenty years is Ecology, which is fast becoming very technical
indeed. "Air pollution from German industries in the Ruhr is
destroying the productivity of Swedish-Lapland lakes. Look at a
map. Some drastic changes in our customary thinking about private
enterprise and national sovereignty are indicated for the near
future". So there is this aspect, as well. It's not just that
insecticides are doing this or that. It's the fact that German
industrial waste is fouling up Swedish agriculture. This is the
sort of problem that Phil Farmer is trying to get at.

Bill, what was your interruption back there?

BILL WRIGHT I believe the panel seems to want s f to become
(AUDIENCE) involved in social involvement. We've had one
terrible example of that - that was Scientology.
In some ways it started off as people becoming
interested in social involvement, and look where it wound up.

I would have thought that we'd be frightened off for good after that.

BOUTLAND Bill, I think both George and myself made it quite clear that, if a writer wishes to become involved, it should be done in his writing. If he wishes to take it further than that and found religions, that's his affair. I wouldn't lay down rules for writers and what they should do.

WRIGHT Most of the initial recruiting was done from fandom.

HARDING Well, where else?

(Laughter)

BANGSUND Bruce Gillespie.

BRUCE GILLESPIE Surely what Farmer is trying to say is that s f
(AUDIENCE) writers should start talking about important things, whereas for so long they talked about unimportant things. You could say that s f has had a vast influence - the whole route of the space race and all the attitudes toward it originally came from s f - but is the space race the most important thing happening in the world today?

Well, I think I would agree with Farmer that...

(Here the tape had to be turned, or the transcriber's pen ran out, or something: Editor)

In fact, the Civil Rights movement has little or nothing to do with science fiction, and the civil rights movement is infinitely more important to what's happening in America and various other countries than the space race. No matter how much we praise the space race and say 2001 is marvellous because of the publicity it gave the space race, there is still the fact that s f writers know practically nothing of their world and the society around them.

BANGSUND In other words, we should become involved in the Earth Race. Now, Mr Collass would like to say something.

COLLASS I think the main thing, and at this end of the room I think we think this way - the main thing in a science fiction story is that it is a story that people will read. That's the important thing.

Any writer can write some wonderful stories with all these advanced social ideas and various other ideas in but they won't get published. The main thing in a story is to write a readable story, and from a reader's point of view. I was a science fiction writer forty years ago. From a reading point of view - when I read the stories then and when I read a story now I'm out to enjoy the story. If it is a well-written story and will put together, that's the beginning and the end of it, from the viewpoint of the story. Now, the implications as far as Earth-space races or whether social conditions in a future age will be different and whether people have blue or striped skin - all these things may be part of the story content; they may be weaved in, but it has to be remembered that the story is the thing. The people in this club wouldn't be interested in s f unless

they got entertainment from it. If they want to read science fiction and predictions and science, they can go along to McGills and get a lot of science prediction books, which are not s f but are predictions by scientists on what the world will be like in so many years time, and they work on current assumptions and what's being done in various places. The s f writer could do the same thing. If we cared to get the books we could build a story on them, but the average writer doesn't want to do that. He wants to build up a story and feel that it's a story, feel that it's readable and that it's going to interest people.

I think that all these aspects of trying to get the story doing another job are just wishful thinking, and as far as the readers are concerned I think it is also wishful thinking to think that the stories that are puzzles will give them the clues to enable a social revolution to be accomplished.

GILLESPIE I would completely agree with you as far as story writing goes. As far as an s f writer is an author he wants to write a good story. But all I'm saying is that with many sf writers the ideas they've used have been fairly useless ideas, whereas the authors can write stories that are just as good using much more valuable ideas.

COLLASS I would be pleased if an editor - and I'm sure Lee Harding and others would be - let us get a synopsis from an Editor saying, "All right, this is the story I want. This is the skeleton - you fill in the details. That's writing to order.

GILLESPIE That's what John W Campbell does, but the kind of ideas he gets...

COLLASS I know. He gets the authors and sort of ear-bashes them.

HARDING (wistfully?)and gives them money.

COLLASS Most of his time he reads these stories, he writes his editorial but most of the time he is talking to authors and outlining the story that he wants, and they write the story according to order. It's all right if you're working for the government or a newspaper or something like that - you work that way. But where you're not bound by these conventions I don't think the average writer would do it.

Who's to say it's worthwhile? Something that's very worthwhile to my mind may not be worth a cracker in anybody else's mind, but I think it is and that's why I'm able to build something around it.

GILLESPIE Well, I still disagree with you on that because....
Can I go on?

HARDING Sure!!

(Laughter)

BOUTLAND (?) There's still a few awake, Bruce.

GILLESPIE I still say that if an average writer or if a good editor can give him the kind of story he wants to write, he will be called good insofar as he talked about something important. This is a matter of slipping it under the carpet as a story acceptable to American editors. This is the big problem. Most of them won't accept this kind of story anyway. It is up to the writer's integrity to find out something about what he is going to talk about. This is one of the reasons I've never even tried a science fiction story. You'd have to put too much research into it or perhaps too little effort would....

HARDING Rubbish .

GILLESPIE Well, this is the whole point...

TURNER You should be ashamed of yourself. (to Lee Harding).

GILLESPIE Jack Wodhams said here last year that he wouldn't bother to find out about the science.

BOUTLAND But isn't that the point, Bruce? There are two ways of looking at the future: one is the technical way, and we leave that to the technical man. The other is the dreamer's way, and that's what we are. That's what most people in this room are. Science Fiction at the moment isn't the best medium for social criticism, so why use it? Use other methods of social criticism and write science fiction for the people who enjoy reading a story about the future.

BANGSUND(?) From a non-technical man to a non-technical man.

GILLESPIE Right, but we're still going to say that s f is worthy of attention by people outside science fiction, or maybe most of the people here would not say this. I would. I'd like s f to be important to people other than fans. It is only going to be when these people do their homework and look at society as it is. It all goes back to the problem of the writer. Instead of just dealing with society as it is, he can extrapolate from it or do far more than that, and can try to extrapolate the spirit of society.

BANGSUND But you've got to accept, I think, that s f isn't going to become read by a lot of people. It isn't going to be important to a lot of people.

HARDING Why not?

BANGSUND The literature of the future?

HARDING The field is broadening so much at this very moment. The s f writer can command a bigger rate than he has ever done before. He can command more money than he's ever had before. He's reaching a wide audience. We can get films made like 2001 and SECONDS, which you are going to see tonight. Now, I think SECONDS perfectly illustrates the point that Bruce has been putting forward. It wasn't written by a house s f writer; it was written by an s f novelist who may have been influenced by s f writing. I don't know. He's chosen a subject that is very close

to the heart of the better contemporary s f writers, and the film has been made by an extremely gifted director, and he has produced a film which captures the atmosphere of the very best s f writing, in a work that is so much better than any house s f writer could produce. It is an intelligent, well thought-out film and it is as important as a work to our current society as any mainstream work is. It is a superb piece of cinema, and if you could get this sort of writing in s f I don't see how it could hurt it, and... I'm not saying it would make the medium any better, but it would certainly get the writer a lot more money. I don't see how normal literary values can harm s f - there will still be sword-and-sorcery for those who want to read it.

I write s f stories because that is the market I sell to. I'm writing in a sub-literary medium. I haven't the guts or the ability to move in the mainstream, so that any thought or idea I get will be naturally transferred into s f so I can sell the damn thing.

I feel that if you all watch SECONDS tonight you will see an example of how considering important aspects of society can produce an important work of science fiction.

WHITEFORD Lee, can you tell me what is the main stream? PEYTON PLACE? HOMICIDE?

HARDING I don't know. It's like trying to label classical music or pop music.

(Inspired) It's people who don't write s f!

BANGSUND At this stage there are a lot of people who want to ask questions, and I think I'd better get them in the order they put up their hands. The first gentleman was George Turner sitting next to me, and then Dave Sofa (?) and then Diane in the front row. If they can remember what their questions were.....

We'll start off with George.

TURNER At this stage I haven't got a clue what I was thinking about, but there was one thing that arises. I think we've lost track of this bit somewhere along the line, and that is the question: "Should s f writers and fans, in their capacity as such, become actively involved in movements for social change?" My own feeling is that they would be most unsuitable people for it, except those few who are themselves devoted to such considerations. When they are, it will show up in their work, and it shows up very, very rarely. One reason it doesn't show up too much is the nature of the magazines that dominate the field. There is a market for crusading work - after all, Upton Sinclair made a lifetime living out of it - but to crusade in any way takes you very far away from the future. To bring a thing home normally it has to be presented among the things and the settings that a reader knows. You want to hit him in the heart, not in the head. I feel that this is not the business of the s f writer as s f stands today.

There was a question a moment ago about what is the mainstream. Science fiction as a definitive genre of its own is a pretty small thing. The works that get major attention and we still call science fiction are moving further and further towards what we, so foolishly

I think, call the main stream. The real attention will be paid when it can firmly become a part of the mainstream; that their predictive and decorative aspects that form the visionist and escapist part of s f become subordinate to what the writer has to say; in fact, they become used only if they support what he has to say. Nine times out of ten you'll find that if you have such a piece, the first thing you'll get rid of is the decorations. Science fiction isn't the place for it.

VOICE I'd just like to point out that quite often a
(Unidentifiable) science writer can only base his prediction on what is known in fact, but a science fiction writer can base his predictions more on something that is just possible. There is an enormous scope for a science fiction writer to get things before the expert would risk his reputation.

BOUTLAND How can a s f writer hope to keep up with technical advances? It's impossible.

VOICE There are such things as technical magazines.

BOUTLAND Even interpreting technical magazines and so on, can't be done - not in every field, which is what people seem to expect from a science fiction writer.

HARDING I predicted something, you know. I genuinely predicted something in a story. There was this little gadget like a pen, you see, and I thought that if they had a little electrical charges in them you would be able to overcome the difficulty you have in remembering people's names, and such. You'd just go "zoink!" and the electrical charge would shake everything up, and you'd get the name.

Three years later, they'd invented it!

(Laughter)

BANGSUND As a matter of fact, after 27 people had accidentally committed suicide this gadget was withdrawn from the market.

(Laughter)

Diane, what was your question?

DIANE If SECONDS was such a marvellous film, and science fiction
BANGSUND is expanding so much, why did so few people go and see it?

HARDING Purely on the technical judgments we can apply - direction, acting, cinematography, script, production, lighting - it's superb. The way the individual responds to the contents is another thing entirely. What was the second half of the question?

DIANE If s f is expanding so much, why did it only last a
BANGSUND week?

HARDING Rock Hudson was in it. Rock Hudson was excellent.

DIANE (Coyly). I know.
BANGSUND

HARDING His acting ability?

I think some of the best films of the past twelve months have had very short runs in the City.

Any film starring Rock Hudson appealed immediately to what we call the "matinee mums". I went into see SECONDS and I was surrounded by matinee mums. I could hardly hear the sound track for the oohs and ahs of disgust. Word soon gets around that this is a very bad Rock Hudson film because he's not playing around with Doris Day. The film was poorly publicized. The distributors were obviously embarrassed and didn't know what to do with it.

DIANE It had a lot of radio advertisements.
BANGSUND

HARDING Once again, who listens to radio? Matinee mums.

A similar thing happened with the publicity for 2001. They were depending on the school holidays to pick up an audience. And as for SECONDS - it did not have a label, but it was a work of science fiction that found a much larger audience than if it had been restricted to our field.

(**brg** The questions then continued this trend towards interesting red herrings that had nothing to do with the original topic. Mr Harding, meanwhile, jabbed one finger wildly at the watch on his other wrist. The moderator of the panel finally got the message in the following way.....)*

VOICE People who read s f come from every walk of life.
(another one, How are they going to know what to take seriously?
unidentified) If, say, a writer kills off all the blacks in
America - is this science fiction and is this man
to be taken seriously?

BANGSUND The job of science fiction in a case like that is not, "Should we kill all the blacks in America?", but "Just say somebody did kill off all the blacks in America to make things more peaceful, what would America and the world be like?" This is the sort of thing Phil Farmer is getting at, that he wants people to write - the social effects of the future; the things that are going to happen in the future and how they will affect each of us, not how they are going to affect the Son of Crankshaft with his flying cloak and his sword, because he's just a puppet. It's the ordinary Joe we want to know about.

(In answer to the final question, from PETER DARLING : "Surely Farmer is most concerned with social effects in the present rather than the future?"): I think that Farmer is talking about two things. He wants attention drawn to the things that are going on today, and he wants the s f writers and readers as people who are interested in the future to be the leaven in the loaf, so it were, and prepare society in general for what is coming about.

I think that's about it, don't you? Thank you, panellists.

(Applause. The End.)

(RAISON D'ETRE Continued from Page 6)

the end of a long line of surprises whose importance had not yet struck the bedazzled conventioners. In case you missed the Ditmar results in S F COMMENTARY and all the other Australian fanzines (and many of the overseas fanzines): Best Australian Story or Collection: SPARTAN PLANET (FALSE FATHERLAND) by A Bertram Chandler; Best International Story or Collection: CAMP CONCENTRATION by Thomas M Disch; Best Contemporary Author: BRIAN ALDISS; and Best Australian Fanzine: AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW edited by John Bangsund. A special Committee Award, Most Active Australian S F Fan was awarded to LEIGH EDMONDS. We award the Ditmars again this year - Australian fans may find Ballot Forms in this envelope, or with February's ANZAPA. There are several important things to note about the Ditmar Award - (a) This year, because Heicon will award the international Hugo awards, the international section of the Ditmars is a kind of view of what the Hugo might have been if the Worldcon were held in USA this year; (b) We still cannot divide the Australian section into "Novel" and "Short Fiction", because there were no Australian s f novels published for the first time during 1969. (What am I talking about? Bert Chandler published several novels in USA! These are eligible if they appeared for the first time overseas between October 1968 and September 1969). With present developments in Australian s f, we may even be able to make this distinction by 1971. (c) The "Best Contemporary Author" category will not appear this year. Instead an award will go to the "Best International Professional Science Fiction Magazine (or Collection of Original Stories)". With any luck, voters will be so staggered by the sound of this category that my vote will be the only one.

Another tradition established - and I still have not talked a great deal about the Convention. As at any similar gathering, the important thing was not what happened, but who was there. Many Sydney people whom I had never met before were there; many other people had been almost forgotten during the year that separated the 1968 and 1969 conferences. I remember best Ron Clarke standing in the middle of the Club-rooms, surrounded by forty to fifty people, swivelling like a revolving Statue of Liberty, with glaring arc-lights as his torch and a movie camera as his crown. Whether those convention pictures ever appeared, I do not know - in the meantime Ron provided sufficient spectacle in himself. I remember talking to David Penman for several hours - a Matriculation student who had more interesting views and expressed them more forcibly than almost any other person at the Convention. I smile wryly when I remember Mike O'Brien's last attempt to form an Australian Science Fiction Society - he wilted visibly as the tide of indifference swallowed up a suggestion that had already sunk the year before. Australian s f is still Melbourne or Sydney (with a new small group in Brisbane) although recent events may give rise to an informal group that may have all valuable effects that ASFS never looked like emitting.

And I remember the blazing face of Tom Newlyn on the Sunday afternoon as he brought the hall to its feet with his contention that (either) FAHRENHEIT 451 was a lousy film, or it was a marvellous film. I still cannot remember Tom's exact opinions, but I will always remember the impassioned cries with which science fiction fans greeted opinions on their favorite films. Not one opinion about written s f stirred a fraction of the amount of the discussion that we saw that afternoon. I was on the Film Panel, you see.....

Well, that's not the only reason why I thought that the film afternoon

was by far the most successful part of the 1969 Easter Convention. There were many reasons why the afternoon and night at the Capri Cinema, Murrumbena, was the vital key to the success of that Convention, and set the pattern for all later Conventions.

Firstly, we could spread ourselves out. It only took several hours at Murrumbena to realize that no future Melbourne Convention could be held at the clubrooms. Nearly 100 people turned up for the films (which, admittedly did include 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY at night) compared with the average attendance ^{of} forty to fifty at the rest of the proceedings. So, at Easter ¹⁹⁷⁰ in Melbourne the entire four days will take place at the Capri Theatre, Murrumbena. This arrangement gives us a chance to show films when we like, gives plenty of opportunity for the audience to participate in panel discussions or other talks, and, best of all, gives people room to talk to each other. About the only place where you could get a prolonged conversation at either Eastercon 1969 or Syncon were the toilets or the lawn outside.

But I did not out to say why that particular afternoon was a success. The Film Panel helped, for we quickly slipped from a discussion of "New Directions in S F Cinema" (or somesuch) to the all-important problem of Censorship. We had a film company representative with us who carefully showed why the film companies are too chicken to fight Australian censorship. (Perhaps that is why no tape recording was made of the proceedings. If somebody had not forgotten this vital step, the Film Panel would certainly have appeared in SFC 8 instead of the Authors Panel.) We had people nearly at each other's throats on these topics - on the Authors Panel the participants could barely find a point upon which to disagree. The Film Panel members were nearly forgotten in the (friendly) melee.

This last afternoon set the pattern for Syncon, as well - audiences participated in Panel Discussions and question periods far more strongly at New Year than they did last Easter, and the reason can be traced to the success of the Film Panel. Much of the Film Panel's success can be traced to Paul Stevens' ability to put the right people on the right panel in the right circumstances, although Lee Harding should have been up there as well.

How to sum up the Convention? It was Part I of a completely new direction for Australian science fiction activity. John Foyster talked to us brilliantly about the kind of things the s f fan can and should think about, and John Bangsund's panel skirted around Philip Jose Farmer's REAP proposal. There was that kind of seriousness about the Convention; the kind of seriousness that arises when s f fans occasionally face the fact that it might not be all just "a goddam hobby". But neither John nor the panellists could make clear ~~where~~ Australian fandom might really go. The answer hung in the temporal wind between Easter 1969 and Sydney 1970.

* By the time of the Sydney Science Fiction Convention, a partial answer appeared. Few of us imagine ourselves as social actionaries, or even as very good prophets. Many of us wistfully imagine ourselves as s f writers. By Syncon we could see that the active role of the Australian s f fan, among other roles, is to boost and become part of the new Australian professional scene. VISION OF TOMORROW was still only a hope at Easter; by New Year, the magazine had become the centre pin of most Australian s f activity.

Therefore, Syncon had a healthy commercial ring in it. Jack Wodhams, still doing well (I think), made the Convention; Captain Bertram Chandler turned up at the last moment and proved to be one of the stars of the Convention; Robert Bowden, 17 years old author of the lead story for VISION 5 had such a positive attitude to writing and science fiction that all who met him felt that his first sale was no one-shot. The fearsome-sounding Epping Girl Guides Hall proved roomy enough for large displays of artwork (both s f and comics) and hucksters' tables, where people like John Bangsund and Robin Johnson Did Very Well Indeed. Mr Ron E Graham gave us, both in his Guest of Honour's Speech and throughout the Convention, a good idea of the commercially attractive aspects of his magazine, and announced plans for/new reprint magazine and a new fantasy magazine. And Lee Harding, ebullient after recently cracking the American market for the first time, gathered up all the strands of optimism with his semi-permanent Master-of-Ceremonies manner.

The pros were - shall we say? - conspicuous. Equally conspicuous were the ferociously hard-working members of the Syncon Committee: John Brosnan, Ron Clarke, Peter Darling, Robin Johnson, Gary Mason and John Ryan. Never have I seen anyone work quite as hard as Peter Darling, as he had to fill in a few awkward gaps in the program; but the other members of the Committee (and some co-opted Melbourne fans at times) seemed to hold a competition for the honour of Hardest Worker. Peter Darling's parents won that honour easily.

The program of the Convention was packed, and the Committee gained extra kudos by keeping fairly close to time. The first day was fairly quiet, except for all the people I wanted to meet. Tom Newlyn made it from Orange, New South Wales, Paul Anderson flew in from Adelaide, 18 Victorian fans and several pros and non-members of the MSFC tried to take over the Convention from the out-numbered New South Welshmen. However, when Lee Harding asked too many questions, or the tape recorders ran too long, the cry went up: "On with the program!" And on it went.

Why describe each event? If you were there, you smile with pleasure when you think of Syncon; if you were not there, then nothing can capture the euphoria except your presence at Eastercon 1970. And even then we will be struggling to present a program that is as interesting and important as the things we saw and took part in at Syncon.

* One of the major debates that arose during Syncon was: Worldcon or not Worldcon? I will reserve my views at present for the AUSTRALIA IN '75 bulletin which Leigh Edmonds runs for Australian fans from now until Easter. The question might not come up for awhile, but lurking at the back of everybody's mind is the question: "Melbourne or Sydney?" In terms of Australia's total area, the two cities nestle close to each other (i.e. 600 miles apart) but everything that happens in Australia seems to bring some sort of rivalry between them. I live in neutral territory, for this argument's sake. (Ararat is 130 miles West of Melbourne, for all you Geographers who could not find Bacchus Marsh in an atlas.) If Australian fans want to show American fans a remarkable city in '75, then I must plump for Sydney. Perhaps I am jaded with Melbourne... perhaps I have lived too close to it for too long. But there is nothing in Melbourne remotely like Sydney's harbour-front. If you want to see the best of Melbourne, then you must look for it. On the other hand, Sydney parades all its wonders around its bays for all tourists to see from a convenient ferry. Despite Sydney's bridge, hundreds

of miles travelling with Gary Mason during 5 days over New Year seemed to show Sydney as a far easier city in which to travel than is Melbourne. And Sydney's fans can reach each other far more easily than can Melbourne's fans. Sydney itself was one of the best things about Syncon, and only because most of Australia's active fans live in Melbourne does it appear that "Melbourne in '75" is still the rallying cry. Meanwhile, I'm going back to Sydney as soon as possible.

*Where to now? Merv Binns' letter reached me today (24th January - yes, I know this is December's issue) with much of the program for 1970's Eastercon (Friday, March 27 to Monday, March 30). Most of the talks here listed for the Saturday will be designed to win over uncommitted readers of science fiction to fandom (with an eye to 1975, as will everything else that is done in Australian fandom from now on). The Comics people, who provide much of the energy of both the Melbourne and Sydney clubs will have a morning on the Sunday. Since the most successful single event at Syncon was the Comics morning there (at one stage, when the Comics pros were leaving and s f pros were arriving, there were more professionals in the hall than fans), I would suggest that the Melbourne Comics program could be equally successful. The Monday program is devoted to movies - Paul Stevens, who is running this as almost a mini-Film Festival, hopes for 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (we were nearly the World's first s f convention to show this in Cinerama); THIS ISLAND EARTH, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN, THE TENTH VICTIM, which had a short season in the City and which most of us missed, and, perhaps, BARBARELLA and THUNDERBIRDS.

Fees are: \$4 attending, and \$1 non-attending. The non-attending fee is mainly for people who want to vote for the Ditmars but simply cannot make it to Melbourne.

*But that is not the end of it. I told you that Australian fandom was now tumbling along in an avalanche of optimism. Lee Harding, John Foyster and John Bangsund have proposed a completely informal two-day Convention at New Year 1971. The venue will be the Boronia Progress Hall, about 15 miles from Melbourne, where one day of the 1968 Conference was held. These gentlemen feel that the only major fault of Syncon and other Conventions of its type, is that people listen to speakers, panellists and auctioneers, but all they really want to do is to natter to each other. Perhaps they would even join in much more informal activities than simple chatter-- if an informal convention was arranged. Lee promises more news on this one soon. In a sense, Boroniacon (or Harbangstercon, as I prefer to think of it) will be the second half of the Easter Convention. For 100 fans or less, spread over a vast distance (we almost should arrange an internal TAFF to get some of our fans to Conventions) this may seem "too much! too much!"

But our efforts are bent towards a great increase in our numbers during the next couple of years. We need a Convention held in a hotel American-style, within the next two or three years. Perhaps, as John Foyster has suggested, we should try Canberra, where every-body must stay in the Convention hotel. All clear for Australian fandom!

* Very little room left :: The explanations of the photos are contained elsewhere in the magazine :: As many people as possible - please join Heicon and Noreascon. I had my \$3 worth from St Louiscon, and I think we should tie ourselves to other Worldcons as much as possible from now on :: Will review VISIONS 2 and 3 next issue, and No 4 when I receive a copy. Put in your orders now, 41.....S F COMMENTARY VIII....Au revoir....Write soon....24.1.70