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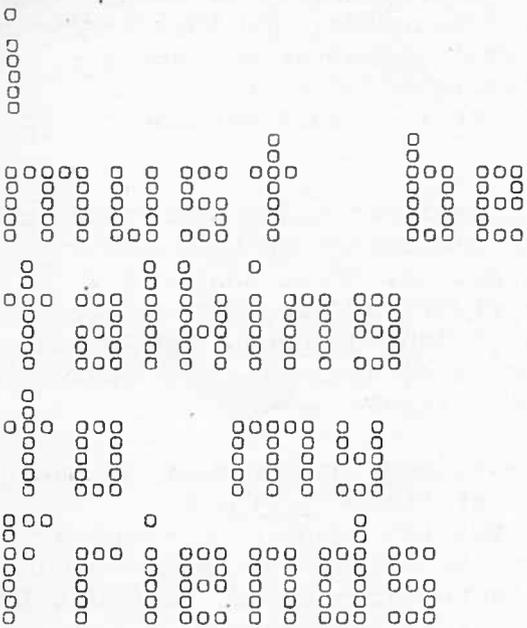
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* I must be talking to my friends. The cupboard (marked "reviews and articles") was bare, and now it is overflowing. No news had leaked from Melbourne to Ararat - now the latest NORSTRILIAN NEWS has arrived, and I am fully informed. Well, I think so. After starring as Karl the Robot in a children's s f show, Stuart Leslie is now appearing in a play in Melbourne. John Foyster didn't have room to tell me that. And there are other items of news more interesting than that, which are not yet, so to speak, in the public domain. But somehow the audience, and especially those who pay their subscriptions, keep this enterprise going without too much fuss and bother from the editor.

* The most interesting piece of news in NORSTRILIAN NEWS No 10 (5c a copy; 30c a copy in USA from Leigh Edmonds, P O Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3184) is that the long-projected Melbourne Science Fiction Society has been formed. The first meeting will be August 7, 1970 at the home of Tony Thomas, Flat 1, 108A Millswyn Street, South Yarra, at 8 pm. The aim of this society is - believe it or not - to discuss science fiction. Lee Harding has talked about such an enterprise for years, feeling that the MSFC was good for playing table tennis games and buying books and seeing films, but not really devoted to the earnest discussion of science fiction. I shouldn't think that there will be much earnest discussion among the members of the new society, either, but it's worth trying. The first meeting will discuss Ditmar winner Italo Calvino. A pity I can't be there, since I've actually read COSMICOMICS.

* Many correspondents have asked me to list the names, addresses and significance of my fellow madmen, the fanzine editors. I haven't room, but if you listen very closely now, you might just catch the names of a few favourites of mine. This will imply that those fanzines I leave out are not my favourites, and that isn't true. Also, I won't list favourites of mine that haven't appeared in over a year, such as WARHOON, ALGOL and NIEKAS, and magazines like ODD whose qualities are well-known, but copies are scarce. And most I won't mention because I will have run out of room.

* By far the best issue of an Australian fanzine to appear for quite some time is THE SOMERSET GAZETTE No 2, edited by Noel Kerr for the Melbourne SF Club and Melbourne Fantasy Film Group, 19 Somerset Place, Melbourne, 3000, Australia. Superbly typed and duplicated, Number 2 features the artwork of Daryl Lindquist and Stephen Campbell (from Ararat) and the cartoons of John Bangsund and Gerald Carr, plus latest Melbourne club reports, and a roundup of news of the Easter Convention. A good introduction to Australian fan activity in general.

* Most regular major fanzines are the four serious contenders on the Hugo ballot (details of which you may find later in the issue). Details of LOCUS and SPECULATION can be found on Page 2, as I am their Australian agent. Issues of LOCUS are airmailed to Australia and distributed from the agent, and it has been appearing fortnightly (or even more frequently) for quite some time. SPECULATION has been less frequent during the last year, but the quality increases each issue. Where else can you find reviews by Brian Aldiss, columns by Chris Priest and Fred Pohl, and letters from Gillespie and Foyster, in the one issue of a magazine? RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY (Leland Sapiro, Box 40, University Station, Regina, Canada) hasn't been quite so quarterly recently. The last one I had was January's, and it contained serious articles on Poul Anderson, J G Ballard and ERB. Interesting, in its way, but not in the main current of s f criticism. Offset production is first class. (\$2 per year; send cash). The other major fanzine on the Hugo poll comes out every six weeks, runs to over 50 pages, and has about 1000 circulation. It's almost certain to win the Hugo, although my personal vote was torn between LOCUS and SPECULATION. Yo' friend and mine is, of course, Richard Geis, with his star attraction, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (P O Box 3116, Santa Monica, California, 90403). John Foyster is the new Australian agent, and I suggest you pay your 50c per copy to him. For better or worse, SFR is where American s f is at - letters from nearly everybody in the business, plus regular columns from people like John Brunner and Poul Anderson.

* You might also try LUNA MONTHLY (Ann Dietz, 655 Orchard Street, Oradell, New Jersey 07649, USA) which is not as interesting as LOCUS but still contains many important features, such as S F IN THE CINEMA and complete listings of new books. The easiest way to get LUNA MONTHLY is to pay your \$5.25 per annum to the Aussie agent, Peter Darling, P O Box A215, Sydney South, NSW, 2000. Offset. * YANDRO (12 for \$4 from Robert and Juanita Coulson, Route 3, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA) must have set all sorts of endurance records, and must surely be many people's second nomination on the Hugo ballot after the magazine they actually pick. It's not offset or printed and has ferocious arguments, but the last one I received was Number 197 and it was just as entertaining as the others. Bob Coulson currently features one of the best new fan writers around, Elizabeth Fishman. * OUTWORLDS (Bill and Joan Bowers, P O Box 87, Barberton, Ohio 44203, USA) is much more than a sequel to DOUBLE BILL from one half of that team. Slickly edited, well-illustrated and -printed, OUTWORLDS perhaps leads a trend back to frequent, small fanzines that get under your skin before you realize you've read them. I can't find a price-tag, so I presume you must write Letters of Comment to receive this one. * Last in a short list is a fanzine I received yesterday, ENERGUMEN from Mike Glicksohn, 35 Willard St, Ottawa I, Canada, until September. First class production; 50c an issue; thick.

* And a few special items with which to finish. Apart from SPECULATION the most interesting fanzine from any source that I have received recently is SCOTTISHE 55 from Ethel Lindsay, Courage House, 6 Langley Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey, UK; 4 for \$1.50. This is the 15th Anniversary issue, containing consistently good material from people like John Bangsund ("oosee?") Dick Geis, John Brunner, etc, etc, with particularly good articles by Roy Tackett (on Thorne Smith) and Richard Eney (on Chinese "escapist trash" and other types of literature resembling s f). Ethel still may have copies left, but at least you can get the next issue. * Ethel's other main fanzine is HAVERINGS (\$1 for 6) which reviews fanzines. She always does a good job - well, at least she always praises SFC. If all my Australian readers subscribed to HAVERINGS, then I wouldn't have to review fanzines, would I? * And, finally from England, and also in yesterday's mail is a copy of VECTOR, the journal of the British S F Association. The editor, Michael Kenward, c/o 28 Bedfordbury, London, WC 2, England, announces that this magazine, formerly only available to members of the BSFA, is now available for general subscription - \$1 for 2, \$2 for 4, etc. Offset, this magazine is a model of British restraint and careful editing. Articles are by Willis McNelly and John Brunner, with very short reviews which make some attempt to cover the field. A useful companion to SPECULATION.

* I can imagine fanzine editors cursing me in their thousands. I should have mentioned for instance, YGGDRASIL, edited by David R Grigg for the Melbourne University S F Association; 20c each to 1556 Main Rd, Research, Victoria 3085, Australia. Not a particularly good-looking magazine (et) but promising. I'm still supposed to write an article for it, but somehow Pete Weston asked first. You never know. * I should have mentioned Gary Mason's THE NEW FORERUNNER (10c plus postage per copy from Warili Road, French's Forest, NSW 2086) and Alex Robb's WINDUS which hasn't appeared for ages, and our local apa, and.... why don't you just sub to LOCUS or HAVERINGS in the first place and save me the trouble?

* While you're recovering, here's a letter from:

STANISLAW LEM

KRAKOW
POLAND

It was with satisfaction that I read in your Australian zine two letters from your readers. Re. my essay about some general patterns in the s f narrative:

As an author of a very high-level monograph about s f and fantasy, I have surely done something new in this theoretical, "metaSF" field. This I have done from a true interest in s f, as well as my own writing. But this whole problem has its other, dark side.

Firstly, one should ask, who in the world needs such a theoretical treatise? Secondly, are there really men, say fans, who would read a very high-brow, scientifically perfect s f? Are not some men, writing critically in this field, a marginal, irrelevant minority, whose opinions and anticipations do not count in the publishing houses nor among the whole mass of average s f readers?

And now, referring to John Foyster's essay about the basic education of an s f author: It is possible that this kind of education could harm his literary efforts and work. Take a very simple example. I have this education, and its results have not, on the whole, been only beneficial for my writing. Firstly, this education gives only a general background: the whole of contemporary science cannot automatically provide a method for futurological prognoses, especially if one extrapolates into the very distant future. And it is certain that much of today's science will be

rubbish by the year 3000. So one should learn to extrapolate from the general scientific method of theory-building, and not simply from the facts and theories, as they appear today. One should be, in a word, a super-genius. A super-Einstein, say, crossed with a super-Dostoyevsky. But that surely is already a reductio ad absurdum.

Secondly, a very high-levelled work from such a genius (let us say, that he is among us) would not be palatable to the s f fan, nor for the cultivated connoisseur of "Great and True Literature". He could count on some hundred to two hundred readers on the whole - first class scientists themselves, Nobel Prize winners, etc. But that would only close this poor and low-situated ghetto of s f to open another, on the very peak of human thought. In a Platonic utopia, or another kind of highly stratified society, there could be this "superwriting" for the top men of the whole society. But in a mass culture, this would be a crazy experiment.

Then, thirdly, my example. I have a nuclear plot for a story or a novel, which tells of a foreign planet where men cannot land (the requisite physical conditions could have a variety of forms). There is a man-made satellite or orbital station circulating over this planet and on the surface there are landed specially built automata, coupled electromagnetically to the scientists in the station. The man in the station can now see the landscape, and he can work there, but he sees through the eyes or lenses of this automaton, and every movement of his hand or leg is coupled through feedback with the apparatus or machine below him.

From the literary viewpoint, there now materializes a very interesting situation. Say, on this planet are very humanlike beings with two sexes, and visualize the kind of conflict that occurs when the man is enchanted by a female from this alien species and loves this "woman". As the man can only be there in the form of the automaton, the situation is like the well-known fable of the king's son who is transformed into a beast, with this distinction: that in my novel there could be no happy ending, as the man cannot land there, and the aliens could not live in earthly conditions. Of course I am very much simplifying the manner of this whole plot - this could be, in the long run, an s f variation on the Tristan and Isolde theme, with Faustian elements included.

Now, very good and fine - but a superficial analysis of the premises annihilates the plot. The probability of an ideally parallel evolution of two humanlike species in the Galaxy or in the Universe is practically zero. Of course, a whole bulk of s f authors have neglected this simple barrier; but, then, what do I do with my scientific background? To force my better knowledge into silence is not the best way of using this knowledge as a wise adviser. And if the alien creatures are not humanlike, the plot degenerates into a story about the breadth of the spectrum of possible human perversions: the scientist or the explorer must then love a fishlike, or reptilian, or tentacled creature, etc. So my background works as a brake, not as an amplifier of my literary production. I hope I can now find another solution: but that is not the point. The point is, that the average reader does not give a damn about all my better knowledge of species or the galactic variety of forms of intelligent beings. My better knowledge is for him nothing - nay, he could tell me, this problem is highly improbable or impossible to occur (as the wise men, theorizing about galactic civilizations, say to us: a voyage to the stars is a kind of trisection of the triangle. There will never be this rocketship to Arcturus or to Magellan, and so discrimination of possible plots, based on scientific

(NOW TURN TO PAGE 20)

Lorq von Ray and Prince Red are the scions of two of the most powerful families of NOVA's time. The two houses, and the two men, are rivals, not the least because Prince Red has a sister, Ruby, whom Lorq loves. The happening world: Transportation is the most important make-up of NOVA's society. The basis of transportation is Illyrion, which is extremely rare. The Reds deal widely in transport: the rarity of Illyrion raises prices and this is in their favour. Lorq thinks he can change the relative supply. Lorq is one voice in the novel. The Mouse, another voice, plays the syrynx. Katin, a third voice, writes a novel. Tyÿ reads the Tarot. Sebastian is golden and his pets shadows. Dan is blind. Idas is black, Lynceos white; they are twins. And most of these characters are on a ship called the Roc, flying to what will soon be a nova, flying, quite literally, into the eye of the storm.

To get down to cases, what NOVA is doing is examining the point at which a man meets his environment. (Watch the development of this theme in his more recent, equally brilliant TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES.) The tale is an updated Grail myth, but the theme is equivalent to that of Wallace Stevens' THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR:

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."

The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."

And they said then, "But play, you must
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are."

NOVA is about a man writing a novel in a time when there are no novels; it is about the sensory-syrynx (a spatial sitar) which can project visual, aural, olfactory and all but solid creation; it is about how the Mouse uses the syrynx as a substitute for his ruined vocal chords; it is about the sockets through which a man's limbs become the machine he has plugged into; it is about bliss, a hallucinogen, the ecstasy and bane of Lynceos and Idas; it is about the Tarot, here read by a quiet willowy woman called Tyÿ; it is about psychorama, via which a billion people are subjected to all the emotions of a politician, about to be sworn into office, suddenly attacked by a madman and killed; it is about Dan's eyes (blind) and the Mouse's voice (a rasp) and Prince Red's hand (metal) and Lorq von Ray's face (scarred) and. . . : The poem may use "the blue guitar": in poetry such an image is viable enough; not in a novel though. Here many changes and points of contact and creation between intelligence and environment must, and yes, do, exist.

Much in the novel parallels Stevens' poem. I will list several instances here. The central figure, the man with the blue guitar, has three corresponding figures in NOVA: Mouse, Katin and Lorq. Each uses his resources to respond to his dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Mouse is closest, with his syrynx, but one must not forget that Katin also synthesizes his experience into art. Lorq is the case of intelligence moving on another level entirely. He seeks to change the world, not just perception of the world. "Poetry is the subject of the

poem: just as NOVA is about writing a novel: it is an ongoing experience like the Revolution and artistic creation in Godard's ONE PLUS ONE. "A million people on one string?" corresponds to the psychorama participation of the inhabitants of many worlds in the assassination. Stevens and Delany are also akin in the tactile quality of their colours, in the palpability of their images. Stevens identifies the sun with life and work, "The moon shares nothing. . . . (It is) Detached from us, from things as they are." As is Katin, with his cool moons. Of the blue guitar: "its claws... its fangs" as of Mouse's axe. Stevens worried about the changing society: "Is this picture of Picasso's, this 'hoard/Of destructions,' a picture of ourselves,/Now, an image of our society?" His answer was: "Poetry/Exceeding music must take the place/Of empty heaven and its hymns." There is much more and it goes much deeper. A paper awaits some interested critic.

In Antonioni's BLOW-UP the photographer (David Hemmings) tells his agent that he (Hemmings) wants to get away from London; it weighs on him. A girl who sells Hemmings her antique shop tells him she wants to get away from antiques, go to Nepal. He tells her Nepal is all antiques. Maybe Morocco, she says. And Verushka is angry with him for being late to a modelling session; she has to catch a plane to Paris. That evening Hemmings sees her at a party (still in London), joint in hand. "I thought you were supposed to be in Paris." "I am." Joke - but pointed. Place is a state of mind. Delany considers place so important that the titles at the top of the pages give Federation, planet, city and year rather than book title or author. The settings are emphasized and vividly described, from the sinking, multi-textured, colour-splashed alleys of Istanbul to rocky, foggy Vorpis. A dead planet, "referred to as the other world, without pomp, circumstance, or capitals," and its oldest city, the City of Dreadful Night, are further indicative. The names and their accompanying images are Dunsanyesque in their evocation of place.

One of Delany's most outstanding successes is his use of structure. In a series of flashbacks he draws in the characters and their world. Especially effective are the sequences dealing with Lorq, Prince and Ruby, which delineate their particular relationship. From these long stories within the story, NOVA via the Roc lifts off on a journey that takes it forward on a quest through a vast area of space, where the crew encounters much of the material of their time. NOVA has a kind of 20-20 peripheral vision: the sheer amount of invention in this novel is amazing (as in a Lafferty novel). But nothing is loose: it is as if the structure were inherent in the nucleic acid of the material.

Nabokov says that there is one wrong word in ULYSSES: there is a slip of memory in NOVA, when it is assumed that the crew of the Roc knows the substance of a conversation between Lorq and his father. They can't possibly, but this doesn't hurt the book any more than (as Delany himself pointed out) Flaubert's error in having a four legged platform on one page become six legged on the next. The only other problem in NOVA that could possibly be made into a criticism of the book is its use of metaphors: the spaceship for inconceivable movement between locales, Illyrion as impossibly desirable source of wealth and power. Delany is aware, as most s f writers are not, of this surface-substance duality. I would suggest, though, that this weakness lies as much in the readers as in the novel. People who make a steady diet of s f are not usually prepared for metaphor. Not being able here to ring their knuckles on the titanium surface of the spaceship, they feel a dislocation that they attribute to the book and not to themselves. S f is a genre that usually works on one tangible level. I only realized why fans were let down by the work after reading the fanzine reviews. They could not accept the concept of metaphor and called it a failing of NOVA.

As far as the science of the book is concerned, Illyrion and the dive through the torus nova are better than many contemporary extrapolations or "gimmicks".

Compare it with that of Norman Spinrad's florid melodrama, BUG JACK BARRON, or of John Brunner's decked out (should I say, trussed up) STAND ON ZANZIBAR, or Piers Anthony's over-written, over-long MACROSCOPE. The only authors with hardware as good as Delany's, in fact, are Panshin, Leiber and Silverberg, all playing it carefully, keeping science, characters and writing under intelligent control. In any case, the verisimilitude of Delany's science is quite acceptable.

In Norman Spinrad's otherwise perceptive review (SF TIMES No 459), he takes Delany to task for what he considers meaningless impressionistic passages. He cites this: "Colours sluiced the air with fugal patterns as a shape subsumed the breeze and fell, to form further on, a brighter emerald, a duller amethyst." Delany, he says, may see the world this way, but all his characters cannot. The point is: Yes, Delany sees the world differently from us. It is our great fortune to be allowed a view of this world. And anyhow, I can visualise that. It creates a very definite image. It is as in BLOW-UP where everything is seen through the photographer's eyes (Antonioni's) even when we are not looking through the photographer's eyes. Or in literature, FINNEGANS WAKE is dreamed by Joyce and the Alice books by Lewis Carroll, not HCE or Alice. I do not see this as a failing, but quite the opposite. NOVA is a novel "where flash becomes word" (WAKE 267.16). The scheme of the book is, after all, "lead us seek, love us see, light us find." (WAKE 267.01). That is to say, lead us in our search, illuminate our sight with memory, light us to our goal. The goals are Illyrion and self-knowledge and both are achieved.

It is reported that Delany is now working on a non-s f novel. NOVA and TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES may be the last s f we will get from him. But in these two works he has accomplished all that an s f writer could ever hope to accomplish. Each stands as one of the best works of its length ever written.

- Barry Gillam 1970

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AND SOME THOUGHTS OF S R D . . .

"At a Milford Conference, I once astounded Jim Blish, who was talking about writing, ^{and} went on to say: "Of course, no writer considers every word and what it means to the reader," by saying: "Gee, I do," in all innocence. But that's why I average one novel a year.

"Image: I sit dropping word after word into the tide pools of the reader's consciousness: I'm very much aware of how I want them to splash. But this may mean that readers have to approach my work more calmly and with few preconceptions (waves, if you would) of what they're in for, if they want to fully experience the patterns. But this is the way I try to approach any piece of art.

"I'm working very hard on a long book project - have been for the last two and a half years - that may terminate around spring. S f? Not s f? Frankly I don't care ... It doesn't take place in the future, and except for a few very small sections, it isn't a fantasy. Among the characters are at least two engineers and an astronaut. You figure it out."

(San Francisco, California. January 26, 1970)

when Bob Shaw asked himself how it would be possible for a man to be born, and yet not to be born because he had killed his grandmother. His solution was that the man is both born and not born, in two universes diverging from the critical point. The idea of parallel universes is not new. It has been used - and misused - often. What is good about the scientific framework of the book is that the two ideas of time travel and parallel universes are merged into a plausible explanation of each other.

More specifically, Jack Breton quarrels with his wife, Kate, and leaves her to walk to a party alone. On the way she is clubbed, raped and strangled by a psychopathic killer, leaving Jack with a deep sense of loss and an even deeper one of guilt. Driven by this he discovers how to utilize a "chronomatic force" inside his head with the aid of a machine, and is thus able to go back in time and blow the head off the killer before he can act. And now he can go back home and enjoy life with the wife he never lost.

But of course he can't. His wife was killed, and he is still the lonely, embittered man who spent eight years trying to save her. The Jack, known as John, who never lost his wife is still living with her in another universe. To get back his wife, Jack must cross into the other universe and take her from his other self. He achieves the crossover with minimum difficulty, and thus the story is set.

John is sitting with his wife one evening when Jack, just arrived, rings him on the phone. Jack comes over, proves his identity, and sets out to win Kate to him. There follows the conflict between two men, one comfortable and at loggerheads with a wife he never lost (but sometimes wishes he had), the other earnest and lean and in love with the wife he has just refound. As the story progresses John finds that his wife still means a lot to him, and Kate, at first attracted to Jack, becomes less and less certain. The conflict is made more urgent because of the gradual break-up of the universe because of Jack's presence in it.

The science is used as a device, to form a basis for the fiction. The book is about people first and foremost, and must be judged as such. What, then, is the verdict?

Bob Shaw is a journalist and knows his trade. He writes smoothly, competently, and his characters have real life. THE TWO TIMERS is not a deep study of human character, but it nevertheless manages to give the impression of real people acting in a real manner in a given set of circumstances. The showdown between the two versions of the same man is interesting. It is an opportunity rarely available in fiction, and for which the plot is carefully tailored. Perhaps the only weakness in the story is the typical and unfortunate s f cliché, the disintegration of the universe. The fiction becomes subservient to the science and the book suffers.

But what of the science? How plausible is the story's base? The matter of time travel has been discussed; that part at least is reasonable thinking. But what about the crossover between the two universes? Here the science is much thinner.

Shaw explains this as a travelling backwards in time of one millionth of a second which causes a "temporal ricochet". The idea is that time travel does not make sense in the normal universe, and this is what happens when you try it. It is glossed over in the book in half a paragraph, but the idea deserves consideration. For one thing, why when he goes back eight years does he form a new universe where he is not included, while if he goes back a millionth of a second he is immediately shoved into that other universe? Surely one time journey is much like another.

To be consistent, the second short journey should create another universe as the first long one did. It would have been rather difficult to explain away any direct cross between universes in any case, since the original idea creates them inviolate, but the idea of a temporal ricochet is worse than nothing at all. Perhaps the point is not important; Bob Shaw seems to think that, but it is the basis for the story.

In the end you get a problem as bad as that of time paradox, and cannot really be excused, except to say that THE TWO TIMERS is primarily a work of fiction. Bob Shaw's ideas on time travel are not infallible, but they are good enough to form at least an outwardly plausible background to the story. And this is really all that is needed to make THE TWO TIMERS, as Lester Del Rey says, "a damned fine book".

SHADOW OF HEAVEN

Avon S398 :: 1969

175 pages :: 60c

Reviewed by Bruce R Gillespie

The main snag with this science fiction novel is that it purports to give a picture of the future. In the first chapter of SHADOW OF HEAVEN, Victor Stirling fronts up to the daily grind of his job as a reporter:

Stirling had wasted thirty minutes on futile phone calls when one of the copy girls dropped a note from the news editor, Sam McLeod, onto his desk. McLeod was a gloomy little man who, in a lifetime in the newspaper business, had put a million slips of copy through his hands, yet never failed to summon up a fresh look of savage hatred for each new sheet that was handed to him.

It sounds familiar. (A familiar future?). What is not quite so familiar are the conditions of employment:

Stirling savoured the spaciousness of the RECORD's editorial offices. The room was about one-hundred-foot-by-forty and housed a staff of two hundred - which meant that each member of the editorial team had a five-foot-by-four space to himself. He guessed that a hundred years earlier, in the twentieth century, that area would have seemed impossibly cramped....

This is economical writing. Bob Shaw sets us down in a world crowded around the individual reader but does not indulge in lectures. Within a few swift pages Bob Shaw sketches an American continent partially obliterated by a series of disasters, with all its people encased in the continuous cities called the Compression. It's an uncomfortable picture which should worry us with its likelihood.

But look again at the editorial office of the RECORD. Bob Shaw gets over the message that everything is crowded (Shaw's emphasis, not mine) but the rest of the detail drops straight from a 1940s B-Grade movie. You know the ones where Edward G Robinson says "Kill that story!" and an unrecognisably young Henry Fonda snarls "Justice will be done!" or something equally unlikely. Perhaps it is just an ordinary newspaper office from anywhere in today's world. But shouldn't it be very different towards the end of the twenty-first century?

The forties mood never disappears from this novel. The novel's hero, Victor Stirling discovers the card of his brother in the missing-person files, while he investigates a routine case of suicide. Memories flood back (now that's a sub-title from a Chaplin movie; let's not get our periods mixed):

He kept seeing (his brother) as the fair-haired, gap-toothed kid with whom

he had shared not only the same bed, but the same pillow, during the timeless dream years of childhood. At night they had lain in the tiny room, imagining they could feel the two-thousand-foot tower rocking in the night winds outside and telling stories about how they would grow up tall some day and go off in search of their fathers. Sometimes they would imagine discovering them at the North Pole or in Africa, but the usual climax to the boyish fantasies was the finding of their fathers in Heaven.

Heaven is a suspended island in the air above the blighted ground. It supplies the only fresh food available to the Compression below, and all people are kept off it. Obviously it forms a symbol of all those aspects of comfortable living missing in the world of this book. It could have been an interesting idea; unfortunately the main character's motives never progress beyond those "boyish fantasies", and he spends the rest of the novel acting out variations on them.

Not surprisingly the novel itself, summarized baldly, is little more than a childish whim. Stirling's half brother, Johnny Considine, has disappeared. Where could he have gone? You need only one guess. The only person who does not realize how juvenile are Stirling's preoccupations and methods is the author himself. He reports page after page of Stirling's earnest worries and so neglects those aspects of the book that might interest the reader.

For instance, Stirling reaches "Heaven" (think what psychologists could do with the novel if they could be bothered reading it), discovers all sorts of duplicity in the running of the establishment, and also encounters his brother, now head of a small band of dropouts from the society below. Stirling sickens of the group very quickly and makes two abortive attempts to escape from the green prison. In the first attempt, Shaw's writing is terse, well-observed and engages the reader like the best of thrillers:

The rail under his left foot began to vibrate. Stirling frowned as he tried to quicken his pace. The robot which had passed him was coming back, still moving at top-speed. There was no denying that this was an unusual amount of activity for one of the big machines; but, perhaps his presence was upsetting some receptor network... The vibrations coming up through the soil reached their climax, and his green cave darkened momentarily as the robot's super-structure blotted out the light.

"There he is!" The voice seemed to come from the sky.

Stirling barely had time to glimpse the black, tattered, flying silhouettes against the sky's blue canopy. Something hard and heavy smashed down on him with irresistible force. His face was driven down into the dark soil, in which he had once found a human skull.

The writing is melodramatic, it is true - simple words for a simple adventure. But the sense of impending, unexpected danger is well sustained, set against the feeling of safety which was guaranteed by the main character's hiding place. However trivial this example might seem in isolation, stretch it into an entire adventure novel and you have a good example of the genre.

But if you add Stirling's inane self commentary (much of which a real character could not have thought of at the time and in the situation described) then you have this short passage from Stirling's second attempt to escape:

As geysers of dismay and anger fountained through his system, Stirling called upon suddenly available reserves of energy and discovered what it was like really to run.... He tried to run faster, but his body had reached realms

of exhaustion in which adrenalin was unable to perform its ancient duties. He heard his breath come and go in guttural shouts; his mouth filled with salt froth; and the horizons rocked uncontrollably about him.

We are given a glimpse into Stirling's "mind", filled as it is with cliches from all those other s f novels. Shaw tries to write "realistic" and "psychological" fiction - it shows the reality and psychology of a completely uninteresting character.

This all begs the question of the book's purpose and centre of interest. What is Shaw himself most concerned with? It is difficult to answer that. He invents "Heaven" as a little made-up world in which to romp, but then concentrates on Stirling's many troubles. He could have written a Heinlein novel of people obsessed with the bits and pieces of the environment, but instead describes the environment sketchily and inadequately.

At another stage it looks as if Shaw realizes the possible metaphysical significance of his little "Heaven" - I was reminded of Aldiss' NON STOP for whole sentences at a time. But Shaw insists on cramming his most important chapters with some of the worst dialogue I have read for some time as he tries to develop the relationship between the two half brothers. Unfortunately both characters are poorly imagined grownup kids who interest us at no time, the conflict between them does not connect with the interesting passages of the book, and their last Big Scene reads something like this:

Stirling looked squarely into Johnny's eyes. For a few seconds there was absolute silence; then he saw that Johnny was twisting his body slightly, so that the muzzle of the rad-rifle - which had been pointing past him - was moving in almost imperceptible arc into line with Stirling's stomach. He put his hand out with studied casualness and grasped the muzzle. Johnny smiled with one side of his mouth and began to apply pressure.

"Johnny," Stirling said desperately. "What are we doing?"

"Anybody who isn't for me is against me,"

"'Jaycee' speaking again, Johnny?"

"I told you before - I don't like that stuff."

"But what can you do?" ...

Clipped, terse dialogue; tense situation; the lot. It would be fine if the reader was not by this time desperate for a robot or two to make the narrative interesting.

Shaw intends fairly simple surface situations and symbols to stand for complex situations. The only problem is that the situations are not complex, and so the words are robbed of meaning. There are some good scenes: the breakdown of 'Heaven' and the restless descriptions of city life come to mind. But they are only scenery. We cannot feel for the hero just because the author spares so much fuss and bother trying to make us feel for the hero. I'm not sure what Bob Shaw can do to improve novels like this: write novels about robots, add a touch of humour, or get a good editor. Or just write better books.

THE PALACE OF ETERNITY

Academy of Science Fiction Special 65050 :: 1969

222 pages :: 75c

Victor Gollancz :: 1969

stg. 30/-

Reviewed by Ted Pauls

With the publication of this novel, Bob Shaw has moved decisively into the ranks of the major science fiction authors of the decade. THE PALACE OF ETERNITY is a probable Hugo nominee which, but for its flawed ending, would have been the finest, most electrifying book of the year (and that is saying a good deal in a year which saw the appearance of LeGuin's THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS and Zelazny's ISLE OF THE

DEAD.) The reviewer can find no fault whatever from the technical standpoint: writing, construction, pacing, characterization - all are superb. And ideas abound, such an integrated complexity of ideas that the following review is the most difficult I have ever attempted to write.

The Earth Federation, spread over more than a hundred inhabited planets through a wide sector of the galaxy, is at war with the alien Pythysccans, the only other intelligent life-form thus far encountered. The loathsome-appearing Pythysccans are so completely alien that not one word of communication has passed between the two races during the 45 years in which the conflict has been raging, at the opening of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY. The aliens take no prisoners and show no interest in the conquest of land or the capture of material things; their driving purpose is apparently nothing less - or more - than the utter extermination of mankind. And in 45 years not a single Pythysccan has allowed itself to fall into human hands alive. The Federation is slowly losing the war, as it is out-thought and out-fought consistently. The only area in which the humans have an edge is with their interstellar ships. The Federation uses light "butterfly ships", with tenuous wings hundreds of miles wide which capture loose ions and turn them into fuel. The Pythysccans employ a more primitive drive in which the ship must carry its own fuel (reaction mass), with the result that alien ships are massive, unwieldy, and of finite range.

Mack Tavernor, the novel's central character, is a complex, fully three dimensional person. His first contact with the Pythysccans was early in the war when, as a child of eight, he was the sole survivor of a raid on his home planet. His father and mother were killed saving him, and the guilt that he feels over their death troubles him throughout his life. Tavernor, as one of the rare survivors of a Pythysccan attack, was featured prominently in Federation propaganda until he was in his teens. At the first opportunity he joined the army, seeking revenge on the aliens - and, subconsciously, seeking his own death - and in the process becomes the most decorated combat officer in the war. Transferred to a position in the weapons development section, he devised and lent his name to an effective infantry weapon for use in the long war. Growing dissatisfied with a desk job, Tavernor returned to combat assignment, but instead of fighting Pythysccans he found himself involved in a series of police actions against dissident groups within the Federation. In the course of one of these actions, insurgents on (now Colonel) Tavernor's home world are subdued, and when he returns to it and sees what the Federation forces have done to his quiet little planet he is disgusted enough to resign. He cashes in his pension and blows all of the money in a two-year spree.

Eventually, when his money runs out, Tavernor settles down on Mnemosyne, a quiet little planet many light-years from the war front, which is known throughout the Federation for its orbiting curtain of moon fragments, the result of a long-gone collision of the planet's two satellites. The reason Mnemosyne is so quiet is that, due to the fragments, the butterfly ships cannot approach its gravity field, and it must depend upon the vastly more expensive conventional rocketships for external trade, etc. Because of its comparative isolation, and because of the

incomparable beauty of its night sky, Mnemosyne has attracted a large artists' colony. Tavernor lives a quiet life, supporting himself by repairing machinery and spending his leisure time raising leather-wings, telepathic bat-like creatures of the Mnemosynian forest. He is in love with Melissa Grenoble, the daughter of the planetary administrator, who is almost 30 years his junior.

Tavernor's quiet existence is shattered when the Federation suddenly announces that its supreme military headquarters is being moved to Mnemosyne. Soldiers and engineers with heavy equipment move in at once and, with the state of Federation technology, begin transforming the planet overnight. Tavernor's home is demolished, his pets killed. The army compensates him financially for the loss but he is bitter and manages to get into a fight with a group of sentries who won't let him pass through a gate near what used to be his land. One of the artists who resists eviction is shot and killed (and the relocation of the headquarters has such a priority that any person who delays it for even one minute may be summarily executed), and his friends stage a protest demonstration, which the military quickly quells. Lt Col Gervaise Farrell, the ambitious son of the Federation's president, arrives to take command under a decree of martial law, and a crack-down begins against the dissidents. They flee into the forest to resist as partisans, and Tavernor, following his death-wish, joins them although he believes their efforts to be hopeless.

In two months of hiding and running in the hinterland, the veteran Tavernor manages to turn his band of soft artists and poets into a tightly-knit group capable of surviving in a primitive environment but prevented by an almost complete lack of weapons from becoming effective guerillas. Meanwhile, the army relentlessly hunts them down with all the technology at its disposal, until finally the band is fenced in a relatively small area, with the end in sight. Tavernor leads them in breaking them out of the cordon to safety, but is wounded and slowed down in the process. He sends the others on ahead, reaches a highway and breaks into an empty house, and while attending to his wound he hears on the radio the announcement of Melissa's engagement to Farrell.

Throwing caution to the winds (he has this death-wish, remember), Tavernor proceeds to the administrator's residence to say a few final words to Melissa. He hides until the house is dark and silent, hiding in the room of Melissa's cousin, Bethia, a three-year-old child with astonishing poise and wisdom and a mystical aura. In the early hours of the morning, he leaves Bethia's room, but before he can reach Melissa he is discovered and captured by Federation guards. Tavernor is taken into the presence of Gervaise Farrell, who plans to interrogate him to discover the hiding place of the rebels. Before this can happen, Tavernor launches himself at the officer, sinking his teeth into Farrell's throat. Farrell shoots him with his side-arm, and Mack Tavernor dies. Thus ends Part One of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY.

Part Two opens with Tavernor's disembodied consciousness finding itself alive somewhere in space, surrounded by other such entities. He learns about the egons, self-sustaining energy patterns which are the most basic unit of life. Egons are immortal, changeless lifeforms which, in order to grow and develop, attach themselves to any creature with a sufficiently complex central nervous system. When the individual's body dies, its mind lives on as the egon. The egons collectively comprise a world-mind, incorporating every intelligence from Aristotle to Lassie, from Moses to the Marquis de Sade. It is this world-mind which is responsible for creative inspiration, although under most circumstances communication between egons and the host-creatures is impossible. The egons are naturally immortal, but there is one thing which can and does snuff out their existence: the energy drive of the butterfly ships. Thus, since the invention of these ships, man has unknowingly been cutting great swathes through the clouds

of the countless millions of egons, gradually destroying his own world-mind. The surviving egons have fled to Mnemosyne because it is the one planet near which the butterfly ships do not operate, but with the transfer of Federation military headquarters there, even Mnemosyne is no longer safe. The presence of the egons there also explains why artists and poets are drawn to the planet.

Tavernor is selected by the egon mother-mass to return to the physical plane, ostensibly to convince the authorities to abandon the butterfly ships which are slaughtering mankind's egons. The only circumstance in which a return is possible is when the secondary host is a direct descendant of the primary host. In this way, Tavernor learns that Melissa is pregnant, and that is why she agreed to marry Farrell. The Tavernor consciousness is implanted in the mind of Hal Farrell at the moment of his birth, and resides there as a subdued alter ego during Hal's miserable childhood. His childhood is miserable because Gervaise Farrell, knowing who the real father of "his" boy was, torments him. His mother, Melissa, withdraws into a sort of semi-vegetable existence, and ultimately commits suicide.

Nineteen years pass, during which the military situation continues to deteriorate. The end is clearly in sight for the human race when the egons, convinced that they can wait no longer, bring the Tavernor consciousness to the surface. Tavernor/Hal Farrell sets off to explain the situation to Bethia, the only person he can think of who might listen to him and believe, but before he can discuss it with her the Pythysccans sweep down and capture Mnemosyne, the nerve centre of the Federation. Instead of being killed, Bethia and Tavernor/Farrell are taken prisoner, and transported to one of the Pythysccan planets. Tavernor/Farrell escapes from his cell and frees Bethia, who promptly commits suicide by diving off a high fence into a concrete pit. Fighting the Pythysccans near her body, Tavernor/Farrell is knocked unconscious by a gas grenade.

Now comes the denouement: While he sleeps, Tavernor/Farrell is contacted by the egons, who congratulate him on a job well done and explain that the war is over, with the Pythysccans in full retreat. They, it is explained, had captured Bethia in order to keep her alive, because they were aware that she was a new kind of human being, whose egon, freed by her physical death, is capable of full and direct communication with other human beings. The Pythysccans, as the reader has by this time surmised, also have egons, but unlike humans are aware of their existence and in contact with their world-mind. The reason for their unremitting genocidal war against the Federation is that they consider humans, whose butterfly ships destroy their egons too, as robbers of their immortality - a monstrous, murderous life-form. Now that humans, too, have access to their mother-mass of egons, and understand the situation, it will be a simple matter to send butterfly ships into the Pythysccan home system, destroying their egons and so defeating them. Recognizing this, the Pythysccans have evacuated the entire sector of the galaxy once and for all. Humanity, left in peace and now with the world-mind behind it, will proceed to flower beyond all imagination.

Only that ending - five and a half pages out of more than 220 - prevents THE PALACE OF ETERNITY from being one of the greatest science fiction novels ever written. It is objectionable on two grounds. First of all, it is not credible; Shaw fails to satisfy with his explanation for the sudden Pythysccan retreat at the very brink of total victory. Humans in contact with their egon mother-mass are, at best, only on equal terms with Pythysccans in contact with theirs; and the Pythysccans, after 65 years on the winning side of the war, are in a hell of a lot better position militarily. If you consider that the aliens have just managed without much difficulty to overrun the Federation's military nexus and most strongly protected base, you must wonder whether the humans any longer have the capacity to counter-attack into the Pythysccans' centre of strength. Besides, if Federation ships begin to wipe out the Pythysccan egons, the aliens can build

their own butterfly ships - they have the technological know-how - and return the favour. And as the humans have already wiped out a good percentage of their own egos unintentionally, they are in a poor position for this kind of war of attrition. By any standards, the Pythysccans still have a big edge.

More importantly, the ending is artistically objectionable. Admittedly it is not customary or popular to end such a novel with the extermination of Our Side by the vile-looking, smelly aliens, but in this particular instance such an ending was so obviously right, from an artistic viewpoint. The entire book, up to the end, is a magnificently constructed symphony of brooding doom, moving inevitably to the ultimate climax, The End. The deus ex machina reversal in the final chapter is totally out of place; it resounds with the clunk of a lead gong.

Although Bob Shaw is not a superlative stylist such as Roger Zelazny or Chip Dolany, the prose of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY is imbued with a quiet, simple beauty that is all the more impressive for its simplicity. Most of the passages that particularly impressed me are too lengthy to quote in the body of this review, but the following description of the effect on a quiet night of the arrival of the light from a neighboring star that has gone nova is a fair example of the quality of the writing:

The forest lay still for a disbelieving moment, as though stunned by the nova's intangible hammer-blow, then it erupted in protest against this supremely unnatural event. A billion wings beat the air in a kind of diffused explosion. The flood of light pouring from the transformed sky was dimmed momentarily as every creature capable of flight projected itself into the air, wheeled and darted for safety. Their concerted defiance of gravity gave Tavernor the fleeting sensation that it was he who was sinking; and then the sound reached him. Screams, squawks, whistles, whimpers, roars, clicks, hisses, combined with the flurry of wings, clatter of dry leaves, scampering of feet, followed by...

Utter silence.

The chapters dealing with Tavernor's time among the would-be partisans in the forest are vaguely reminiscent of THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE. It is almost as if Shaw were saying: "Now here, Norman, is how such a story ought to be told, with depth and sensitivity and subtle shadings, rather than carved in black and white block letters with a blunt axe". Shaw's Mack Tavernor, like Spinrad's Bart Fraden, is tough, cynical, pragmatic and ruthless when necessary. But there the resemblance ends. Tavernor is a real person, in three dimensions, with a complex make up, while Fraden is a grotesque caricature of an adolescent's dream hero. Where THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE presents rivers of blood and gore and detached limbs, the "jungle" section of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY has one scene, brief but meaningful, in which five of the partisans are killed during the escape from the cordon. The deaths mean something, as opposed to simply being comic book slaughters like Spinrad's excesses.

THE PALACE OF ETERNITY is a brilliant novel, which is likely to be discussed for years to come. The ending hurts, but even with that dubious conclusion it remains one of the best books of 1969, and a must for every science fiction fan.

- Ted Pauls 1969
- David Penman, Bruce Gillespie 1970

statements, is a stupid waste of time).

Well then, what can one do about this whole question? The typical s f story is a fable, encrusted with pseudoscientific terms and names, so as to produce a "contemporary" effect, and at the same time it is an adventure story, and sometimes a projection of sadomasochistical (conscious or unconscious) tendencies of the author. The literary level and the scientific level are two separate things, and after writing 28 books, I am for putting literary qualities in first place. And I do this because the raped science can sometimes be highly palatable, while violated and tortured literary qualities can lead to the hack who cannot feed a mature mind. I think that s f, on the whole, cannot be perfected, as there are no observable trends in the field that would reinforce the production of better s f. And so only an author, separated from the fan-public and the editors - working in an isolated spot of this earth - can do something that deviates from the s f mainstream. (24th June 1970)

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* In conclusion, Stanislaw Lem reminds me that "the man who has written this letter has never in his life spoken a single English sentence, as he can only read English". Not bad going - I doubt if I will ever be able to say the same about the Polish language. I leave this latest letter in the hands of you, the readers.

*And as a sharp reminder of how far down the ladder sf stands from any ideals held up by Stanislaw Lem, Franz Rottensteiner or John Foyster, here are the Hugo nominations, information provided by LOCUS and the Heicon Committee. There's no time to write for an official Hugo form, so I suggest you send your choices (Australian ballot) to the Heicon Committee, D-6272 Niedernhausen, Feldbergstr. 26a, West Germany, along with your 14 DM (a bit under \$4 Australian) non-attending membership fee:

* BEST NOVEL: Choice from MACROSCOPE (Piers Anthony) (Avon); THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (Ursula K Le Guin) (Ace); UP THE LINE (Robert Silverberg) (Ballantine); BUG JACK BARRON (Norman Spinrad) (Avon); SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (Kurt Vonnegut Jr) (Delacorte). I'm voting for Spinrad, probably because I haven't read the Le Guin or the Vonnegut. Not a bad lineup except for MACROSCOPE.

* BEST NOVELLA: Choice from WE ALL DIE NAKED (James Blish) (from THREE FOR TOMORROW, Doubleday, coming from Gollancz); A BOY AND HIS DOG (Harlan Ellison) (NEW WORLD); SHIP OF SHADOWS (Fritz Leiber) (F&SF); DRAMATIC MISSION (Anne McCaffrey) (ANALOG); TO JORSLEM (Robert Silverberg) (GALAXY). Not worth voting.

* BEST SHORT STORY: Choice from DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS (Greg Benford) (F&SF); TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES (Samuel R Delany) (WORLD'S BEST S F 1969); WINTER'S KING (Ursula K Le Guin) (ORBIT 5); NOT LONG BEFORE THE END (Larry Niven) (F&SF); PASSENGERS (Robert Silverberg) (ORBIT 4). An even more worthless bunch, except for the Delany.

* BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: THE BED-SITTING ROOM; ILLUSTRATED MAN; THE IMMORTAL; MARJONED; TV-COVERAGE OF APOLLO XI. Haven't seen any of them. Would expect the Richard Lester film to be the best, but I wouldn't quibble if the last item won.

* PRO ARTIST Choice from: Vaughn Bode; Leo & Diane Dillon; Kelly Freas; Jack Gaughan; Eddie Jones; Jeff Jones. This is the toughest category of all. There are very good reasons for giving the prize to each one - Bode for his originality, the Dillons for originality and consistency in their covers for the Ace S F Specials; Freas for his consistently amazing work in ANALOG; Eddie Jones for his transforming layouts for VISION OF TOMORROW; and Jeff Jones for the variety and quality of his book covers. My choice is Eddie Jones, but mainly because of his work for VISION this year rather than in 1969.

* PRO MAGAZINE Choice from: ANALOG; AMAZING; FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION; GALAXY; NEW WORLDS. My Number 1 goes to NEW WORLDS, but not with the same enthusiasm as last year. Most people will justifiably vote for AMAZING.

* FAN MAGAZINE Choice from: BEABOHEMA (Frank Lunney); LOCUS (Charlie Brown); RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY (Leland Sapiro); SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (Dick Geis); and SPECULATION (Peter R Weston). Again, nearly impossible to make a choice. It's out of LOCUS and SPECULATION for me, but thousands will vote for SFR. In the latest NORSTRILIAN NEWS, John Foyster comments that "BEABOHEMA was, undoubtedly, the worst fanzine to make the list in years". It's not that bad, but it's a bad thing for fandom that it is popular. For those who do not know, the magazine consists of otherwise sane pros making fools of themselves. Strike a blow against stupidity.

* FAN WRITER Choice from: Piers Anthony; Charlie Brown; Richard Delap; Richard E Geis; Bob Tucker. My choice is Geis, or more exactly, Geis's famous "alter ego". Vote out Anthony for the same reason you vote against BEABOHEMA.

* FAN ARTIST Choice from: Alicia Austin; George Barr; Steve Fabian; Tim Kirk; William Rotsler. Steve Fabian by a mile, for his SFR covers, but I won't moan if Rotsler wins.

* And while we're discussing the best-of-that and the worst-of-that and wondering whether any of it's worth the trouble anyway, here's my latest choices for the Ditmar nominations. Leigh Edmonds promises nomination forms by September, by the way, which means he had better have them ready for SFC 15. * From ORBIT 5 come quite a few very good stories: Langdon Jones' THE TIME MACHINE will take a lot of beating. It's a metaphysical (and certainly very physical) love story which has all sorts of brilliant passages about time machines and future cities and corruption and love, and... I enjoyed it too much to be confused. * Kate Wilhelm "does it again" with SOMERSET DREAMS, a very quiet, careful story of a woman who tries to recapture lost memories and instead finds they capture her. It's a gothic story of a type, richly detailed. * Carol Carr's LOOK, YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES is the first Jewish s f story I've read, and it has some good lines. I suppose it's really about all sorts of racism. * Gene Wolfe's PAUL'S TREEHOUSE is as quietly effective as SOMERSET DREAMS. A kid sulks in his treehouse while his airconditioned parents hear about riots in a nearby university. Dad tries to settle things without noticing the Ultimate Significance of it all. There's nothing obvious here - just a splendid last scene. * I find it unbelievable that WINTER'S KING should have appeared on the Hugo list, while Norman Spinrad's THE BIG FLASH did not make it. Or, for that matter, ^{why} none of the rest of my choices did not appear while mainly trivial items scored heavily. THE BIG FLASH is the ultimate heavy-rock song: the Four Horsemen hit the top with the wildest sound (or sight) ever to blow the world's mind. Or should I say, blow it off? Spinrad is now a master of American dialects, or at least the Californian manic language, and I should think we will read more stories of this quality in the next few years. :: ORBIT 5 was published in paperback in December 1969, so you'll let us vote for it, won't you, Leigh? Since it didn't arrive until a couple of months ago, you'd better.

* VISION OF TOMORROW continues to improve issue by issue. As I've already indicated, Eddie Jones' artwork is magnificent and gets better every issue. The first of Stan Pitt's covers adorns VISION No 10, and although I don't like to contradict John Foyster (NORSTRILIAN NEWS again) I don't think it is quite as good as Jones' cover for Number 9. But it would be hard to better it. VISION is obviously a shoo-in for the Best Prozine award if it is given in this year's Ditmars. Then it will be a shoo-in for the Hugo in 1971. Stories I liked in recent issues were * INTO THE UNKNOWN (No 7; April), by John Russell Fearn an extraordinary vividness which is completely missing from contemporary science fiction. A scientific accident sends time backwards and parts of the story are at least as sense-of-wonderful as Brian Aldiss' AN AGE. The natural thing to feel is that Phil Harbottle has not been flogging any dead horses at all - I'll be very interested to see the Fearn revivals that will appear in future Ron Graham magazines. * THE PHOENIX PEOPLE (No 6; March) ^{Richard Gordon} is a quiet story that maintains its tension to the end of the story. It lacks the histrionics of at least two of the other stories in this issue, and gains from the lack. * A Bertram Chandler's THE BITTER PILL (No 9; June) is too episodic for my taste, but apart from that is quite a rare example of Bert Chandler's skill. No Grimes in this one, but just the battered victim of an era that has made age a criminal offence. My first reaction was: "This couldn't happen in Australia", but the current newspapers describe the last evidence in the abortion scandal. We've all met Australians as brutal as those portrayed in this story's future, so why shouldn't we expect the Australia they could bring into existence? * And No 10 contains quite a bit that is worthy of comment: the first part of John Baxter's MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE which deals mainly with THINGS TO COME and METROPOLIS, which I happened to see at the Melbourne SF Club on the day after I read the article. The stills included here are worth the price of the magazine alone, even if you don't take into account some of Eddie Jones' best artwork. Also to be read * The tenth part of Walter Gillings' THE IMPATIENT DREAMERS with some interesting photos of covers of the English war-time magazines * Robert Tilley's THE DARK CORNERS which is a story of telepathy that can be compared with Michael Coney's SIXTH SENSE (and that should have been on the Hugo list, too). This is the LORD OF THE FLIES of telepathy, where a child behaves in the expected way as he exercises his power, and an adult who tries to stop the process is convincingly cut down. A chilling ending. * NOTHING LIKE THE SUN (Christopher Priest) is the best of Harbottle's by now fatiguing "survival" stories. The heroes here are not musclebound yokels, but inadequate explorers who must use their moral as well as physical strength. Sombre, like most of the really good stories Harbottle has printed. * ECHOES OF ARMAGEDDON is nowhere near Lee Harding's best story, but it may interest his many fans (would you believe - a Lee Harding fan club?) and it has some good images. Like THE BITTER PILL, it is far too episodic for its length, so the blistering environment does not work on the reader.

* Harbottle almost exhausts me with the magnitude of his achievement in his first year. I strongly doubt if I will have as much to say about a whole month's American magazines when I get around to reading them. In the meanwhile I've been reading some writers who did not make the Hugo lists in their year - Hermann Hesse, George Orwell and Patrick White for instance. I've also been reading some other books

....But more of that later. Here's

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U S A

I have a suggestion to make which is not necessarily aimed at your magazine but at fan magazines in general. There is a lot of good criticism in the science fiction fan magazines today, probably more reviews of the literature than at any time in its

history and that is good, but! The overwhelming majority of material reviewed is current paperback crud. There is virtually no discrimination exercised in the selection of material to be reviewed. In future years, someone attempting to determine what the magazines thought of books of some importance and significance will find pretty lean pickings.

What do I mean? I mean that books of obvious importance whether hardcover or paperback should be given preference. "Importance" covers various areas:

- 1 A famous author with a record of past masterpieces.
- 2 A new look at a revived masterpiece.
- 3 Books on science fiction.
- 4 Books that are controversial.
- 5 A new author of unusual promise (not a new author just because he is a new author).

This means obtaining reviews of books you do not receive or might not even buy. However, you will find that someone in your audience or among your friends has purchased them.

Take examples: It is almost criminal that I have seen only one or two reviews of the utterly fascinating two volumes of Lovecraft letters, which completely change the picture of the man and provide information never before revealed. Damon Knight's new book on Charles Fort has liberal quotes from an autobiography of Charles Fort which sheds new light on the man. Daniel Keyes who wrote FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON had a new novel, THE TOUCH. We would be interested in whether he showed unusual story value in that one. Tennessee Williams has a science fiction novelette in THE KNIGHTLY QUEST. Three books on science fiction have appeared: THE SHATTERED RING, INTO THE UNKNOWN and THE FANTASTIC MIRROR. Arkham House issues the final volume of Clark Ashton Smith, mostly science fiction, OTHER DIMENSIONS. RED SHADOWS, a collection of Solomon Kane stories by Robert E Howard, are reprinted for the first time by Don Grant. MAX BRAND, THE BIG WESTERNER, a superb biography of a great pulp writer, who also wrote science fiction, has appeared, and what this book reveals of pulp magazine policies, prices and their relationship to science fiction definitely is of interest to science fiction readers.

The foregoing is but a top-of-the-head idea. Most of what is being reviewed is ephemeral. Light, popular literature of which one out of 50 will be remembered ten years from today.... Pick up a copy of THE BRITISH FANTASY REVIEW published by Walter Gillings in the late forties, at random, and find reviewed with considerable cogency: SKYLARK OF SPACE and SPACEHOUNDS OF IPC by E E Smith, DOPPELGANGERS by H F Heard, MEDUSA by E R Visiak, WHO KNOWS, an anthology from WT by August Derleth, THE WEAPON MAKERS by A E Van Vogt, THE TIME STREAM by John Taine, A MEETING OVER TUSCARORA, a collection of Russian s f by I Efremov, etc. These all have significance and reference value today though they were current books at the time. The editor discriminated in what he reviewed. (June 8, 1970) *

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* To read down the book lists in LUNA MONTHLY or LOCUS is to invite despair. Dick Geis tells me has great difficulty printing all the reviews that should be printed. Our cup runneth over and slops on the floor. I agree with you wholeheartedly, Sam, but have all sorts of difficulty, some of them afflicting me just because I live in Australia. At present I have no way of buying critical volumes except by luck. Two book companies have sent me review copies, although more are promised. People who send me reviews look at books they want to look at.

Most of my reviewing has been in the field of anthologies (working on the premise that the best s f is still short fiction) and surveys of a limited number of authors. Robin Johnson occasionally suggests books which I should buy but I never do. Meanwhile, good new authors are being ignored because so much is being published by the old ones. In Walter Gillings' day, the classics were instantly recognizable. Now new classics may be published as Ace S F Specials and still only discovered in passing. On the other hand, the junk or second-class stuff overwhelms us. You might notice the troika article on Bob Shaw - 4 novels published, two in Ace S F Specials, praised by everybody, including David Penman and Ted Pauls. But I think his stuff is terrible. I expected him to be the logical successor to everyone from Gernsback to Ballard, but instead find a second class melodramatist with unflagging ability to stick both feet in his mouth. But I just have to dissent in this matter: because of the way he has been received, Bob Shaw is important in the field. On the other hand, a novel that has been universally canned in American fanzines, and even by the redoubtable Peter Darling is Michael Moorcock's THE BLACK CORRIDOR (Ace S F Special 06530; 1969; 187 pages; 75c) which has come as one of the most pleasant surprises of the year. The humour is sardonic, the description precise and ironic, and the writing reminds me most of all of Philip Dick's. It's one of the best analyses of the moral blues of the twentieth century that I have read. Yet, if I had followed the other fanzines, I would have missed it. Again I throw this right back to the readers. Can people supply a richer diet of books? Could more people review better books for me? Suggestions please.

* Meanwhile, there's the problem of just getting hold of interesting books:

JOHN BRUNNER
53 NASSINGTON ROAD
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ENGLAND

I think you ought to know (re Page 10 of S F COMMENTARY XI) that Doubleday would have been in dead trouble if they had sent copies of their edition of STAND ON ZANZIBAR to Australia. No publisher is interested in a book whose potential markets have already been saturated by someone else; accordingly it's usual to reserve Commonwealth rights to the London publisher. So don't say your trouble is "the fault of Doubleday"; no doubt they send their edition everywhere it's legally entitled to go.
(June 13, 1970) *

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* In reply to a query, Mr Henry Durkin, Director of Publicity for Walker and Company, more or less said the same thing: his sales territory is limited to USA and its possessions, and he does not even have the right to sell his books to Canada, let alone to Australia. All of which relegates Australia, and indeed the whole area of the Bern Convention to a cultural backwater - not because s f books are not being published in London, but because they are being published so infernally late. This practice has almost made the Ditmar "Overseas Fiction" section impossible to run, for instance. And I'm still puzzled to know why we can buy American paperbacks freely in Australia, but not American hardbacks. Anybody who can suggest a legal method of getting hold of good s f books three years ahead of the London publishers deserves a free subscription.

* It must be the cold, or the time of night, or something. Grumbles aside for awhile, and here are some pickings from the recent mail to round off the issue. And, oh yes, before I forget, AND CHAOS DIED (Joanna Russ) is quite an enjoyable book even if it makes little sense. I'm reviewing it for SPECULATION, so would somebody like to review it for SFC? Colin Cooper's OUTCROP is also good fun.(Faber).

* WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

* ROBERT SILVERBERG: (June 20 1970) I think your lengthy Dick piece is an extraordinary job, since it not only analyses Dick brilliantly and sends one back to re-read him in a new light, but by implication suggests a wider range of possibilities for the s f writer, a way of grappling more deeply with the themes of the genre. :: Lem sounds interesting in that steely-minded European way; I'd like a chance to read some of his fiction now. But I gather some will be coming soon. (New York U S A)

* GENE WOLFE: (February 28, 1970): I am completely unfamiliar with Australian conditions, but if yours were an American magazine I would urge you as strongly as I could to adhere resolutely to your policy of running no "art". You would be screamed at, but the screams would draw attention to you. You would miss a great deal but gain more. So many American fanzines are smothering in pictures. (Ohio U S A)

* RICHARD E GEIS (June 28, 1970): John Gibson is a stupid jerk in his review of NOVA because he presumes to know Delany's basic character from a reading of the book. Delany, says Gibson, is a true believer who wants to get easy answers from simple-minded systems like Communism and Fascism... and Christianity, too, I imagine from the context. Has he read Delany's other books? Does he always divine an author's personality from an analysis of the author's latest book? Would he mind if I analysed him from his latest review? But I just did, didn't I? Stupid jerk.

I'm not in love with NOVA myself. Much of what Gibson complains of is true: the book is largely characterless, is pulpish in atmosphere often and in style, but in spots it is brilliant in evoking a mental picture of a scene, a view. The quest structure is strained, I think, by the long flashback to present history and background. It dragged, and I, too, was turned off by the feudal social structure presented in the book.

But Gibson argues that because this social system is distasteful it should not be used by an s f author. That word "should" is distasteful when used by a reviewer... That word betrays more about Gibson than he realizes. (California U S A)

* GEOFF GARDNER: I'm writing to you just having attended the Sydney Film Festival where one of the most remarkable movies screened was a flick called JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME (I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU) directed by Alain Resnais who has previously done HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR, LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, MURIEL and LA GUERRE EST FINIE. Resnais has taken a science fiction subject in his new film. A man tries to commit suicide, he fails, he has nothing to live for and is offered the chance to go back into the past. He accepts somehow hoping not just to relive it but to change it. The experiment runs amok and he is trapped in his own memories as they occur at random. It's a tough movie, a little confusing because it's in French with English subtitles and the multitude of women in his past are not clearly distinguished. Perhaps it can be put on at the next convention. The film is owned by 20th Century Fox and no commercial release is planned for Melbourne. (O' Connor, A C T)

* And umpteen letters left on file and no room for them again. But keep writing as I want to put out September's issue before postage rates go up. I have some good reviews on file, letters from Jack Wodhams, Stuart Leslie, and other celebrities. Lee Harding has stories in NEW WRITINGS Nos 17 and 18. I heard that in NORSTRILIAN NEWS. Goodbye, from the more breathless fanzine. (Last stencil typed July 18, 1970)

MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE : S F COMMENTARY 14 CHECKLIST

michelangelo antonioni: BLOW-UP (page 9) * john baxter: MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE (22) * bill and joan bowers (editors): OUTWORLDS (4) * carol carr: LOOK YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES (21) * a bertram chandler: THE BITTER PILL (22) * robert & juanita coulson (eds): YANDRO (4) * samuel r delany: NOVA (7-10, 25) * ann f dietz (ed): LUNA MONTHLY (4) * DOUBLEDAY & CO (24) * john foyster (ed): NORSTRILIAN NEWS (3) * richard e geis (ed): SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (4) * bruce gillespie: PHILIP K DICK: THE REAL THING (SFC 9) (25) * walter gillings(ed): BRITISH FANTASY REVIEW (23) * walter gillings: THE IMPATIENT DREAMERS (22) * mike glicksohn: ENERGUMEN (4) * richard gordon: THE PHOENIX PEOPLE (22) * david grigg (ed): YGDRASSIL (5) * philip harbottle (ed): VISION OF TOMORROW (22) * lee harding: ECHOES OF ARMAGEDDON (22) * HUGO AWARD NOMINATIONS (20-21) * eddie jones: general (22) * langdon jones: THE TIME MACHINE (21) * michael konward (ed): VECTOR (5) * noel kerr (ed): SOMERSET GAZETTE (4) * demon knight (ed): ORBIT 5 (21) * stanislaw lem: general (5-6, 20, 25) * frank lunney (ed): BEABOHEMA (21) * ethel lindsay (ed): HAVERINGS (5) * ethel lindsay (ed): SCOTTISHE (5) * michael moorcock: THE BLACK CORRIDOR (24) * MELBOURNE S F SOCIETY (3) * sam moskowitz: general (22-23) * christopher priest: NOTHING LIKE THE SUN (22) * alain resnais: JE T'AIME JE T'AIME (25) * joanna russ: AND CHAOS DIED (24) * john russell fearn: INTO THE UNKNOWN (22) * leland sapiro (ed): RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY (4) * bob shaw: general (24) * bob shaw: THE PALANCE OF ETERNITY (16-19) * bob shaw: SHADOW OF HEAVEN (13-15) * bob shaw: THE TWO-TIMERS (11-13) * norman spinrad: THE BIG FLASH (21) * norman spinrad: THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE (19) * wallace stevens: THE BLUE GUITAR (7-8) * robert j tilley: THE DARK CORNER (22) * WALKER & CO (24) * peter r weston (ed): SPECULATION (4) * kate wilhelm: SOMERSET DREAMS (21) * gene wolfe: PAUL'S TREEHOUSE (21).

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