

S F C  
is  
back!

**The \* genuine \* S F COMMENTARY 40**

September 1 1974

It's not every May issue of a magazine which appears in September. But next time we will do even better - the October 1973 issue will appear in October 1974.

Seriously, though - if anyone can be serious about the ridiculous "schedule" of SFC this year - this magazine has taken more than six months to overcome the obstacles which have stopped it being published. From now until the end of the year, I hope to resume the magazine's regular bi-monthly schedule, starting, as you can see from the contents page, with the May issue.

Meanwhile ... welcome to the NEW S F COMMENTARY TYPEWRITER. Readers, meet typewriter (it's an Olympia with a mini-elite type face). Typewriter, meet readers. ... I did not buy this typewriter to ruin your eyes, although countless readers will probably scrawl agonised notes to tell me that I have done just that. The purpose is to squeeze far more words on a page, reduce the number of pages from this issue's financially ruinous 60 pages, and still charge one (American) dollar per copy. Somebody wrote that no fanzine is worth a dollar a copy. I couldn't agree more. Unfortunately, with the way postage and paper rates are going up, the magazine costs nearly sixty cents Australian (one American dollar) to produce. Also, I'm trying to reduce the print run, but so far, I haven't succeeded. Quite a few people did not renew their subscriptions after No 39, but as many people have subscribed for the first time, even at the new, ruinous rates, as people who dropped out. So SFC 40 has a print run of 400.

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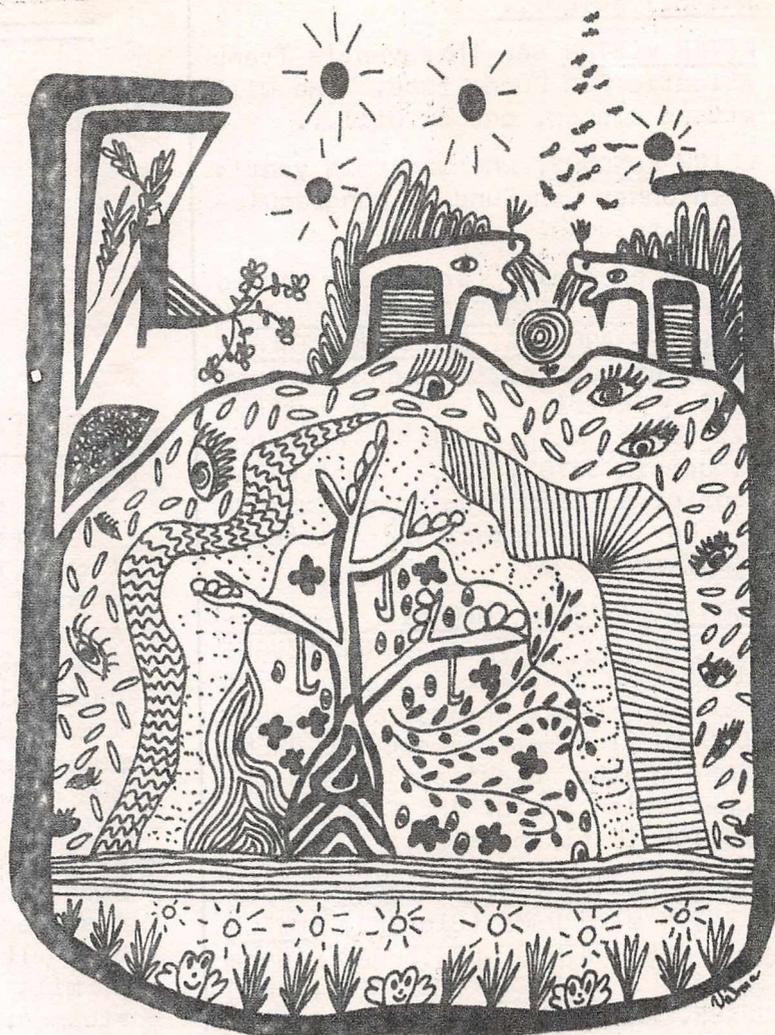
In the S F COMMENTARY CHECKLIST at the end of this magazine, I've committed myself to publicising a few Good Things on this page. So here goes...

THE TUCKER FUND is an effort to ~~debut~~ transport famous author Wilson Tucker - better known as famous fan Bob Tucker - to Australia for the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention, alias AUSSIECON, next year. I am Australian agent for this very worthy effort, but somehow the mail gets stuck between Beecher, Illinois and Melbourne, Australia, so I haven't received the latest Auction List and other information about the fund. I do know that the main organiser of the fund is Jackie Franke, Box 51-A, RR 2, Beecher, Illinois 60401, USA, and that she had raised \$400 in America before the fund opened officially. Bob Tucker is probably as well known to Australian s f fans as he is to Americans, so I would hope that Aussiefans will support this fund. Donations may be sent to me, or to Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776, who may be taking over as Australian agent. I will try to reprint the Auction List as soon as I can get hold of a copy

AUSSIECON 75 is, as I've mentioned already, the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention, and it will be held August 14-17 1975 in the Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne. Pro Guest of Honour is Ursula Le Guin and Fan Guests of Honour are Susan Wood and Michael Glicksohn. Currently rates are \$A2 (\$US3) non-attending membership and \$A7 (\$US10) attending membership. Very shortly (October 1, I think) they go up to \$A3 (\$US4) and \$A10 (\$US12). Address for all Aussiecon correspondence is GPO Box 4039, Melbourne, Victoria 3001. We're hoping that quite a few overseas s f readers and writers will be able to attend, and also that, through the convention, we will be able to make contact with many s f readers throughout Australia. The Chairman of the convention is Robin Johnson, and at the recent Ozcon, he received the Melbourne S F Club's Achievement Award for his extraordinary efforts in keeping the worldcon alive.

Talking of OZCON... When I typed the original stencils for this issue (all finished by June 21, and waiting to be printed since then) I meant to publicise the convention. However, it was held August 16-18 1974 at the Victoria Hotel, so all I can do is present a convention report. It was a very low-keyed convention which everyone seemed to enjoy. Pro Guest of Honour was Mervyn Binns, the proprietor of the Space Age Book Shop, and the Fan Guest of Honour, John Bangsund, noted for more achievements than I have the rest of the page to mention. Both gave excellent, short, well-received Guest of Honour speeches. From all reports, the most successful section of the convention was the Writers Workshop, organised by Lee Harding and attended by (I think) about twelve participants. David Grigg and John Alderson shared the prize for the best story to be presented at the workshop. The rest of the convention was (mainly) organised by Ken Ford (this was only his second convention) and a small committee, and emceed by John Foyster. George Turner stole most of the limelight as star panellist... I've never heard him speak so well before on so many science fictional topics. The most successful panel was that on CHILDREN'S FANTASY, which obviously interests more people than s f these days (perhaps because it's written better). Jenny Wagner, Australia's Children's Book Award winner, Ann Sydenham, and Adrienne Gurteen were joined by antagonist and mere male, George Turner, and Ken Ford, who fielded the questions very well. Most of the other panels were not so successful. The best feature of the convention was the high attendance and especially the number of attendees whom we had never seen before. About eight people attended from Adelaide, and six from Sydney. Ozcon was hardly the curtain-raiser for the worldcon that we had hoped for, but it should keep people interested enough to roll up this time next year.

Not mentioned in the index because it wasn't published then is JOHN W CAMPBELL - AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE, edited and printed by John Bangsund and published by John Bangsund and Ron Graham. A review will appear next issue, but meanwhile buy this very valuable book. \$2 from Space Age Bookshop, 305-307 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000.



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Illustration page 3: Valma Brown. This magazine would not have appeared without the generous financial aid of Ron Graham and the encouragement of Carey Handfield, Robin Johnson, and many others.

NOTABLY NOTED...

PETER WESTON won this year's Trans Atlantic Fan Fund race. He will attend Discon, and so will...

LEIGH EDMONDS, who won this year's Down Under Fan Fund. Congratulations to both.

Still on sale (proceeds to aid DUFF): LESLEIGH'S ADVENTURES DOWN UNDER - AND WHAT SHE FOUND THERE, Lesleigh Luttrell's report on her 1972 DUFF trip. From the author, 525 West Main, Apt 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. Australian reprint edition from Leigh Edmonds PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183. Cost: \$1.

JOHN W CAMPBELL MEMORIAL AWARD - BEST NOVEL 1973. 1 RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA (Arthur Clarke) and MALEVIL (Robert Merle). 2 THE EMBEDDING (Ian Watson) and THE GREEN GENE (Peter Dickinson). Special Non-fiction Award: THE COSMIC CONNECTION (Carl Sagan).

NEBULA AWARDS 1974: NOVEL: RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA (Clarke). NOVELLA: THE DEATH OF DR ISLAND (Gene Wolfe). NOVELET: OF MIST, AND GRASS, AND SAND (Vonda McIntyre). SHORT STORY: LOVE IS THE PLAN, THE PLAN IS DEATH (James Tiptree Jr). DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: SOYLENT GREEN.

HUGO AWARD NOMINATIONS 1974: NOVEL: PEOPLE OF THE WIND (Paul Anderson); RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA (Clarke); MAN WHO FOLDED HIMSELF (David Gerrold); TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE (Robert Heinlein); PROTECTOR (Larry Niven). NOVELLA: DEATH AND DESIGNATION AMONG THE ASADI (Michael Bishop); WHITE OTTERS OF CHILDHOOD (Bishop); CHAINS OF THE SEA (Gardner Dozois); GIRL WHO WAS PLUGGED IN (Tiptree); DEATH OF DR ISLAND (Wolfe). NOVELET: CITY ON THE SAND (Geo. Alec Effinger); THE DEATHBIRD (Harlan Ellison); OF MIST, AND GRASS, AND SAND (McIntyre); HE FELL INTO A DARK HOLE (Jerry Pournelle); LOVE IS THE PLAN, THE PLAN IS DEATH (Tiptree). SHORT STORY: ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS (Ursula Le Guin);  
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I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

NON TRIP REPORT Part 2

\* On the afternoon of November 28, 1973, I arrived at O'Hare Airport, Chicago, from Wichita, Kansas. It was freezing when I walked through the doors from the airport to the pavement outside; nearly freezing point. I was carrying my suit case, black canvas bag, and sleeping bag. I walked fifty yards along the pavement, put down my suit case, and picked it up in the other hand. Neither case nor I were getting anywhere. A free-ride limousine from one of the hotels pulled up at the kerbside. Painfully, I picked up all my cases again, and climbed aboard the minibus. It travelled about three-quarters of a mile to the O'Hare Sheraton. We stopped. I tried to climb out of the limousine and around to the back before the driver could unload my bags... and put out his hand for the tip. He got there first. A bellman from the hotel quickly picked up the bags and took them into the hotel and up to my room, for the price of another tip.

This was to be my last night in America, and the last night of my "wild trip". I celebrated. At that time I still had left quite a few travellers' cheques, so I bought myself an expensive meal in the hotel restaurant. But wasn't there something wrong? The restaurant was in the basement of the hotel, but I could still hear the throb of overhead jets. I soon found out what was wrong. The hotel squatted directly beneath the flight path of nearly every jet approaching or leaving O'Hare Airport. Somebody had forgotten to mention this to the construction engineers who had built the hotel... certainly they had not made it sufficiently sound-proof. I didn't sleep much that night.

But I did wake up quite early. Again I put my arm through the strap of my black  
EDITOR

canvas bag, ~~picked up my sleeping bag with the hand of the same arm,~~ and with the other arm grasped my suit case (which never seemed to weigh less than fifty pounds during the whole trip). And again, I staggered to the hotel limousine, which took me to what I hoped would be my last airport before heading home. I arrived at O'Hare at about 8.10 am, and handed my excursion ticket to the American Airlines ticket clerk. I told him that I needed it altered so that I could travel back to Melbourne from Chicago on the 9 am plane that morning. (Surely, this time, I had allowed enough time to make the necessary alterations.) The airline clerk was most helpful and unflappable, and remained so during the whole ordeal.

At 8.50 am - ten minutes before my flight was due to leave - I could still see no sign of the ticket clerk. An equally affable American Airlines hostess noticed the grim look on my face. "I'll make sure that your bags go safely on board," she said. She placed my case and sleeping bag on the conveyor belt which led to the plane. A minute later, the ticket clerk returned. He didn't look at all flustered as he said, "I've made out a new ticket for you, sir. But - ahem - if you want to convert your excursion fare to a return fare to Australia, it will cost you rather a lot." In front of me he pushed a little piece of paper on which he had calculated the right sums. It said, "\$719."

"You see, sir," he said, in a benign voice which, no doubt, he keeps for all fools and air travellers, "This is an excursion ticket. To get home on that ticket, you must spend forty-five days in England." My first thought was - why didn't Robin Johnson tell me that? I had never realised that I had to spend forty-five days in England. (Later, Robin said that he did tell me; I'll believe him.) I said, very faintly, "But I don't have that much money." This was a lie; I had \$800 left in travellers' cheques - but did I want to spend them all just to get back to Australia at that moment?

I had about one minute to make one of the more important decisions of my life. Go back broke? Keep travelling weary? Fate had intervened rather decisively. Several weeks before, I had made the definite decision to go home. Now, it seemed to me, a decision had been made for me to keep going. Why ignore the sharp celestial dig in the ribs?

"I won't be going on the nine o'clock plane," I said to the ticket clerk. He still looked benign and helpful, even though I had already wasted three-quarters of an hour of his time. "But," I said at about 8.58 am, "the hostess put my bags on the plane..." The clerk phoned the loading bay. No, they could not retrieve my luggage from the plane, which was just about to take off for Sydney. I arranged for the airline to trace my luggage when it reached Sydney, and staggered away from the counter, baffled and stunned. Would I ever see my suit case and sleeping bag again? (Eventually I did. The case and the bag flew to Sydney and flew back to Chicago. By mistake the case went on to Kennedy Airport, New York, while the bag was off-loaded correctly. Next day the case arrived back in Chicago from Kennedy. Nothing was damaged.)

I felt stranded in Chicago. I could have caught a plane straight to London, but since I had to continue the whole journey, I still wanted to meet some more people in America. Also, I had to wait for my luggage. I couldn't afford to stay in a hotel for too long. At that moment I possessed nothing but the clothes I wore and the contents of my trusty black bag. I looked in my diary. Did I know anybody in Chicago? Well, I did, but somehow I had lost their phone numbers. I had only one number: that of somebody I had never spoken to, who had never received my fanzine and with whom I had never corresponded. But Buck Coulson had given me her number at Torcon and had said that she and her family would be willing to put up any travelling Aussies. So I rang Jackie Franke.

Jackie was home; yes, she had heard of me; no, she didn't realise anybody had given me her number; yes, she would be at O'Hare Airport in one and a half hours.

Now that is what fandom is all about. Jackie didn't know me, but she knew that I was another fan, stranded in the second-largest city in America, so she was willing to drop everything and to drive forty miles from Beecher; a small town south of Chicago, to the airport on the other side of the city. She thought she had seen my photo, and would I wait just near the American Airlines desk? But she recognised me mainly because I was reading a science fiction book when she arrived. We said hello and went to the car. On the way to the Frankes' place I was too tired to talk. When I got there, I slept for several hours, and awoke feeling ready for the rest of my journey. My fanish tour had been resurrected.

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\* But why had I cut short my trip in the first place? Basically, because I was sick of the physical act of travelling. Each time I packed my case, stuffed everything into my black bag, picked up my sleeping bag, checked that I had left nothing behind, posted home to myself jiffy bags of books I had bought but had no room to store in my case, wrenched myself away from yet another hospitable family, and made my way to an airport, railway station, or bus station, I lost more of my enthusiasm for travelling. Each time I moved from one place to the next, the nauseating and tiring process snatched another entire day from the trip. I just attempted too much; the combination of over-ambition and my inherent weaknesses threatened to turn the journey into a nightmare. Never again: or only for short, manageable journeys. Worst of all, my travel weariness stopped me from enjoying, during that last, pre-Chicago month, all the people, places, and events that were so obviously enjoyable. I kept mentally kicking myself and thinking, "C'mon mate, you're having a wonderful time, aren't you?", while at the back of my mind someone kept screaming, "I wanna stop!" Beware, friends and prospective DUFF and TAFF candidates - this could happen to you.

\* But meantime here are some of the really enjoyable aspects of my trip. My NON TRIP REPORT Part 1 ended at the New Castle residence of David and Betsey Gorman (and twins) while I was busily typing stencils for S F COMMENTARY 39. After I had typed the stencils, I attempted to run them off on David's drum silk-screen duplicator. No go. The silk screen had dried out or clogged up since David had used it last. (Twins in the family delay fanzine publishing.) The duplicator had gone bung, as Australians say. Certainly it needed cleaning before we could decide whether anything else was wrong with it. Fortunately, David and I went to the right place to ask for advice. The man who ran New Castle's only stationery store had once been a duplicator serviceman. He suggested that we buy a combination of petrol and kerosene from the local service station. The temperature was forty-something Fahrenheit, and it was raining, but David and I bought some kero/petrol, drove back to the Gormans' house, and proceeded to clean the duplicator.

This operation did not succeed. We had forgotten that, although the silk screen would not let through any ink, the ink was still inside the drum. When we took off the silk screen, gooey ink oozed out - all over the duplicator and nearly everything else. We spooned up as much ink as possible, swabbed clean the rest, rinsed the silk screen in our impromptu cleaning fluid, put it back on the machine, and, a day later than planned, I began printing.

And that is the story of S F COMMENTARY 39.

\* On Wednesday, November 7, David and I posted all the copies of SFC 39, and he drove me into Indianapolis, after I had said goodbye to Betsey and the twins. Yet again, I wondered how Betsey and David would survive the next twelve months. (In a recent letter, David said that the whole family was doing all right, and he had even found time to produce some more issues of his fanzine, GORBETT.) In Indianapolis, I boarded a Greyhound bus for St Louis. This was not a good idea. I bunched up my legs in front of me and tried to fold them under the seat in front. Eventually I stuck my legs straight out in the aisle, and tried to fit the rest of my

body into the seat. Nothing worked. If God had meant people of my dimensions to travel, he would have given us more space between the seats of a Greyhound bus.

After six hours, I arrived in St Louis. Fortunately, Railee and Joe Bothman were still at the bus station. They had been waiting for some time, they did not know exactly which bus I was arriving on, and they didn't know whether they would recognise me when I did arrive. Just as they were about to leave, I lurched out to meet them, as usual attempting to carry six months' luggage. Railee and Joe drove me to their place, where I met most of St Louis fandom - the Tiffanys, Donn Brazier - and Leigh Couch.

I don't whether there are gods and goddesses of generosity, but if there are none, I nominate Leigh and Norbert Couch for the posts. As I would all the people with whom I stayed, of course - but somehow the Couches' hospitality was more-than-usually breathtaking, not to mention appetising. On four nights of the week I stayed with the Couches, they took me to different restaurants. So before I tell you about them, let me tell you about the restaurants. Firstly, there was a modest, carpet-and-quietness Chinese restaurant. I'm no connoisseur of Chinese food, but certainly I enjoyed that meal. Two days later, Leigh, Norbert, Mike, and I drove through the foothills of the Ozark mountains. After we had dipped up and down autumn-leaved valleys (where the topography reminded me most of the Otway Ranges), we headed south and rejoined the Mississippi River near Ste Genevieve. At various times, this old French town had been controlled by eight different governments, and it contains the first brick structure built west of the Mississippi. This was the Old Brick House, now a splendid restaurant, where Leigh and Norbert shouted me to yet another splendid meal. On the same day, we looked through an old French-style house which a local resident had restored. It contained furniture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Next night, Railee Bothman, her daughter Stephanie, Leigh, Norbert, Mike, and I went to the most elegant restaurant I entered during my entire trip. Mike and I even wore ties for the occasion. The restaurant was the Becky Thatcher - the interior of a nineteenth-century paddle-wheeler which is moored permanently in the Mississippi near the main roadbridge across the river. When we entered the restaurant, a waiter led us from the door to the table. Another waiter began to take our orders for drinks. Yet another waiter made sure that the table fittings were set properly. It was winter and the middle of the week; I can think of no other reason why our party commanded what seemed like half the staff of the place. Nothing was too good or too prompt for us - the service was even more remarkable than the food. It's quite something to be treated like visiting fan royalty in St Louis. :: A few days later Leigh, Mike, and I went to a less imposing but more relaxing restaurant, Cyranos. Leigh was relieved that Cyranos was not too crowded. Several months before, a newspaper columnist had praised the restaurant, and for awhile it had been crowded every night. Deservedly so. The menu card shows why: Think of all the items which usually fill the menu at any ordinary restaurant; subtract most of the meat, poultry, fish, and salad dishes, and place the few remaining main dishes at the end of the menu; take the items that usually appear at the end of the menu - dessert and drinks; expand their numbers so that they comprise most of the menu; and you have the bill of fare at Cyranos. In other words, when I looked at the card I was faced with a choice from about forty different types of dessert, including about thirty varieties of ice cream, about twenty types of coffee, and about thirty types of tea. If I had stayed in St Louis for a month, I could have tried a different item each night. This is the sort of light-relief restaurant which Melbourne lacks so obviously. On "Cyranos night", as I like to remember it, we went afterwards to see Robert Altman's THE LONG GOODBYE, one of the very best American films for many years.

But why so much? For me? Well, I'm a fan, for a start. For the Couches, that's very important. For them, fandom is truly a way of life. They head one of the most famous fannish families: Lesleigh Luttrell, who visited Australia two years ago, Chris Couch, who lives in New York, and Mike Couch, who lives with his parents.

Leigh, Norbert, and Mike live in a fannish house: spacious, isolated from the mundane world by trees and grass, and filled with books, fanzines, and records, which pile up to the ceiling, spill onto the floor, and almost become part of the air that they breathe. Perhaps the only equivalent, fannishly chock-a-block house is the nine-room farmhouse where Juanita, Buck, and Bruce Coulson live. Leigh has lots of energy, and, as I've said several times, generosity. She spends much time in helping people in fandom, attending conventions, writing letters, publishing fanzines, and earning money as a teacher. Norbert doesn't produce fanzines or write letters of comment; he is one of the sanest, most-enjoyable-to-meet men I've ever encountered. Of course, my view might be prejudiced because he is one of the few people I met during the trip to be genuinely interested in hearing about Australia. (Most Americans are merely ignorant of Australia; they are not ignorantly biased against it, like the English.) Together, Leigh and Norbert form one of those fannish couples who make American fandom the humane, comfortable, and regenerative organism that it is. Long life to them, and to couples like them, such as the Miesels, the Coulsons, the Bushyagers, the Frankes, and many others I met.

In parenthesis: When Lesleigh visited Australia, she said that her parents lived "in the country". They don't anymore. There's a huge school up the hill and around the corner, and allotments of houses are creeping up the hill from the nearby crossroads. No longer in the country, the Couches' house is still sheltered from "progress", but perhaps not for long.

\* I have left little room to mention some other enjoyable aspects of my stay in St Louis:

Marsha Allen, a St Louis fan, offered to drive me around the city. (Leigh and Norbert were both working each week day, so I had not seen much of the city in daylight.) We went to the top of the Arch, the steel monument which has become the symbol of St Louis. It stands on the banks of the Mississippi, a little apart from the city centre. It still looks a bit isolated and forlorn, unless one sees it from underneath, or while crossing the bridge into the city; from those angles, it binds together the whole skyline of St Louis. People visit the Arch to travel up the side in the little "train" which continually compensates for the changing slope of the gradient. The view from the top was wide-ranging, but like the view from the top of New York's Empire State Building, smoggy. Later we walked around downtown, and Marsha took me to her favourite pizza restaurant. We drove to the city's museum and art gallery, which is in the centre of the main park. By contrast, Marsha drove me out along the shining-lights district: another example of that boulevard of motels, hotels, restaurants, and shopping centres, about ten miles from the centre of the city, which in St Louis and most American cities, is where the (affluent) action really is. Most people seem to avoid the centres of large cities; the well-stocked, huge shops have moved to the suburbs, like everything else.

I visited Donn Brazier at his home. As with most of the people I stayed with, the Braziers' home is somewhat more elaborate than the houses of people I know in Australia, but I had no reason to believe that Donn's income was atypical. Donn puts a lot of his time into his fanzine; about forty hours a week. Apart from the enjoyment of working on magazine production, Donn gets much of his fannish enjoyment in the same way I do - from extensive correspondence with, it seems, almost anybody who's anybody in American and overseas fandom. Quite often Donn receives for an issue of TITLE more letters of comment than issues of the magazine sent out! (Very few fanzines receive more than ten per cent response to any issue.)

My stay in St Louis finished in a bit of a rush when I stayed for a few days with Railee and Joe Bothman. Railee B is the "B" of BC, the fanzine which she and Leigh publish at infrequent intervals. Railee takes a lot of interest in fandom in general, and attends as many conventions as possible. Joe has his own fandom: model railways. The impression I got was that Joe was the Bruce Pelz/Ted White of American model-railway fandom. He designed and built the castle-like house in which he, Railee, and their family live.

\* Then onto Kansas. People in the rest of USA have some strange ideas about Kansas. It's not the flattest place on earth. Southern Illinois is much flatter. Around Wichita, Kansas is a long series of low waves of land which, if they do not make the landscape vitally interesting, never let it become monotonous. I had gained the impression that in November Kansas would be colder than anywhere else. This was not so. During the time I was there, the weather was much warmer than it had been in St Louis. (It showed how much my brief time of travelling had changed my perspective when I began to think of 50°F as a warm day; in Melbourne and Sydney, people scamper around looking frozen when it goes below 55°.) Ignorant Easterners think that Kansas is a long, long way from anywhere, and the last word in dullness. People in England say the same thing about Australia - and it's equally untrue for both places. Kansas isn't really too far from anywhere else in USA, as Americans measure distances - by hours of car travel. As soon as I landed, I found that the people have the same kind of good humour and ability to speak their minds as Australians have. In other words, they can be more friendly while being rude than an Easterner can be when scrupulously polite.

Or maybe I just met the right people: Richard Delap, Vicki Wainscott, and Ed Cagle met me at Wichita Airport on the night of Friday, November 16. I stayed with Richard and Vicki during the weekend, and went out to the Cagles' on Monday night.

It will come as some surprise to fandom in general and to readers of his reviews in particular that Richard Delap is one of the most humorous conversationalists I met during my American trip. Or rather, together Richard and Vicki fire jokes at each other so fast and furious that I could scarcely catch any of them. Richard also collects s f books, which nearly fill the cozy flat in Wichita which he and Vicki share. Part of the time I argued about s f with Richard (and we discovered that our views are surprisingly similar, except that Richard is a fan of Harlan Ellison) and the rest of the time Vicki showed me around Wichita.

Of all the cities I visited, Wichita is probably the most comfortable to live in. (Although Toronto is the best combination of size and convenience.) It has a smallish downtown area, with a few large buildings. The streets are wide and lead down to the river, so we could walk right around the place fairly quickly. On the Sunday afternoon Vicki and I went to the only concert I attended during my whole journey (as the musicians in New York were on strike while I was there). The Wichita Symphony Orchestra gave a splendid performance of Stravinsky's RITE OF SPRING in the auditorium of Century II, Wichita's new city centre. I enjoyed that weekend. The sun shone, the temperature rose into the 60s, and the company was most congenial. Anybody want to start a Wichita fandom? Its nucleus is there already.

The Cagles live a long way from anywhere. I discovered that on Monday night when Ed and Sue came to collect me. We drove into the rain (lit by spectacular lightning) due east for forty miles from Wichita. We reached the small town of Leon (population 500), drove north for eight miles, turned onto a waterlogged hush track, and drove precariously for nearly another mile. Finally we stopped in front of a two-storied farmhouse which, in the dark, seemed separate from everything else I had seen and known during my whole trip.

In a way, it was. Sue and Ed are Kansans, rather than fans. They know most of the people in the district, and everybody seems to know and like them. While I was staying there, Ed and Sue introduced me to lots of interesting people who reminded me most of the country people I met when I was staying at Ararat. I ate a real Kansas-style Thanksgiving dinner, and shook hands with three cowboys who were part-Indian. I retain only a haze of memories of my stay in Leon. My main impression is that of Ed himself. While he was publishing it, his fanzine KWALHIOQUA retained a loyal, even fanatical following. John Bangsund contributed to it, as well as many other Australian fans. I saw some of the letters Ed received, letters from people who loved the magazine and the persona of its editor. Yet every fanzine

editor wears a mask in his own publication, and in KWALHIOQUA, Ed's is even more impenetrable than most. Basically, Ed is not a funny man. I won't say that he's sombre: but certainly he likes to stay in the background. He's a fundamentally serious person - raised in, and accustomed to the pleasantly earthy atmosphere of mid-Kansas, a wov with the girls (or so he claims), and once owner of an earthmoving company, after an accident he had to change the entire style of his life. He became a writer, reader, savant, and eventually one of fandom's favourite fanzine editors. As far as I could tell, this process has left him an extremely complex person - somebody who can get along well with all types of people, but who is also an introvert; a person very much part of a culture where, I suspect, people don't read much, but who knows more about American literature than I could ever know about Australian literature; a family man who sometimes gives the impression of being a maverick; somebody who can defend the value of commercial fiction, yet loves the books of Stanley Elkin as much as I do; a humourist who laughs seldom. In other words, he's a combination of John Bangsund and John Litchen, and looks remarkably like the latter.

Who is the real Ed Cagle? Fundamentally, he's a man who is almost obsessively interested in what makes people tick - other people, his family, himself, me. I will never forget the long conversations we had as we drove all over the countryside, and Ed's endless questionings and wisdom which, I suspect, never quite penetrated my foolish skull. Yet - paradox upon paradox - he is a man who, I think, hides from people; a fan who three times nearly went to conventions, and who will probably never reach Australia, although he knows as much about it as I do; somebody who, he confesses, was terrified of meeting the editor of S F COMMENTARY.

Ed has only one fatal flaw: he tends not to finish projects he starts. This is the story of the ill-fated S F COMMENTARY 40/KWALHIOQUA 11 - the fanzine that never was. When I arrived at the Calges', Ed said that he had typed most of the stencils for a fanzine which we had talked about publishing. This was welcome news. Now I would become the first fan to publish two large fanzines during the course of a world trip. In my case, I still carried some articles meant for SFC 35/37. I typed one of these, added an editorial, and together Ed and I hoped to put together the most remarkable fan publication of the year. We stayed optimistic all week. I typed my stencils, Ed duplicated them all, and I collated most of the five hundred copies of the magazine. There was one catch: Richard Delap had designed a cover and an interior illustration to introduce his review of ADV. A few days before I arrived in Wichita, Ed had sent them to the place which usually cuts his electrostencils. Usually they take only a few days to arrive back in the mail. Two days before I was due to leave Leon, and after Ed and I had finished every possible production operation, the electrostencils had still not arrived. One day before my departure, they arrived. Only unalloyed, horrible bad luck had delayed them in the mail. But I still hoped that we could run off the special pages, collate the last section, and prepare most of the copies for mailing. Ed put the first electrostencil on the duplicator. He ran off one copy. He ran off the second copy. Rip! The stencil, which featured heavy, black areas, had been cut on a vinyl stencil. It fell apart. So did the electrostencil for the cover. That day, both of us felt rather disconsolate. Next day, I said goodbye to Sue, Travis, Eric, and Alex, and Ed drove me into Wichita. He dropped me at Richard-and-Vicki's, who took me to the airport. And on the afternoon of November 28, 1973 I travelled from Wichita, Kansas to O'Hare Airport, Chicago. Which is where this story began...

But I haven't finished the sad story of our fanzine. When I arrived back in Australia on February 1 1974, I rather hoped that I might find waiting for me a copy of SFC 40/KWALA 11. With me I had carried one copy, minus cover illustration, but I was hoping to hear that all my subscribers, traders, and other friends had received a copy as well. Nothing in the mail from Ed. I didn't worry too much, as I knew he set out for Oklahoma for two months on the day after I left Leon. Ed had promised to have printed offset the cover and interior illustration, and to publish the

issue as soon as he returned from his trip. About two months ago, I received, within a few days of each other (a) a copy of LOCUS, which reviewed the as-yet-nonexistent SFC 40/KWALA 11, (b) a letter from Dick Geis saying that he had received a copy and had quite enjoyed it, and (c) a letter from Ed Cagle saying that the magazine would never appear, that he had destroyed all remaining copies, and that he had gaffiated! I didn't recover from that blow for weeks. Another letter from Ed said that he had given 100 incomplete copies to Richard Delap to send out to people who would like to see the ADV review. But Richard had given strict instructions for fanzine editors not to review it. But... Well...

### NON TRIP REPORT Part 3

\* Jackie and Wally Franke, their three children, two collie dogs, and three Siamese cats live in a comfortable house on a flat plain near a small town thirty miles south of Chicago. Although they live nearly as far from Chicago as the Cagles live from Wichita, the Frankes find it easier to stay in touch with the nearby metropolis. Therefore I tend to think of my week there as my "Chicago visit".

I felt rather light-hearted while I was staying with the Frankes. I no longer felt a sword of indecision hanging over me. I had had the decision made for me; I had to keep travelling; I had to go to England; therefore I locked in the back of my mind my hatred of travelling, and once again I could enjoy the enjoyable.

During the first weekend I was staying with the Frankes, I had a most notable fan-nish experience. Jackie has sworn never to reveal from which esoteric source she obtained Bob Tucker's phone number. As soon as she rang him, she was supposed to chew the piece of paper and swallow it. Jackie phoned Bob, told him the strange story of my precipitation into Beecher, and he invited us - all six of us - to stay for the weekend. My mind, as they say, boggled. Bob Tucker was one of the people I most wanted to meet during my trip. I shook hands with Bob at Torcon and talked to him briefly, but that was all. Now I had a chance to catch up on conversations missed, and to spend a weekend at one of the hallowed shrines of fandom.

It's not quite true that an armed guard meets you outside the small town where Bob lives, puts a mask over your eyes, and leads you to the Tuckers' house by long and tortuous hyways. But Bob doesn't give away his address too freely, either. All I know is that we set out from Beecher at 3.30 on the Saturday afternoon, and by 4.15 it was nearly dark. For the first time I began to realise what winter means to people who must survive a continental climate. Vegetation disappears altogether in late November and early December; it's strange to see withered grass in winter, instead of in summer. While it was getting dark, we travelled south over a completely flat landscape. The highest point on the plains of southern Illinois is the freeway flyover at Champaign. I have never been able to see so much from a travelling car - the horizon stretches out in front, to the sides, and behind. It is so low that the car seems to fly above the landscape. Car and travellers shrink below the immense luminous sky. The landscape becomes quite alien, cold, and contemptuous of mankind.

The Tuckers made us feel very welcome. Larry Propp was visiting as well - I had heard a bit about him, but had not met him before. (He looks rather like Barry Jones.) The night which began with a tv presentation of part 2 of Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN, ended in convivial contentment at 4 am after endless replays of Bob's Jim Bean smoooooth ceremony and streams of witty fannish talk. Some time earlier in the night, Bob served us an immense meal which he had cooked himself. Also he handed over to Jackie a very old duplicator which he had had himself, on "loan", for about ten years. When we looked at Bob's library of his own novels, he presented all of us with signed copies of different books we did not own already. (One of the great triumphs of my entire journey was obtaining copies of all of Bob's s f books which I did not own already... I bought TIME BOMB at Bakka in Toronto, Jackie gave me WILD TALENT, and Bob gave me two of the mysteries.)

Larry headed off into the night at 4 am, and even Bob gave up the effort to keep the party going. Perhaps he ran out of unlikely convention yarns. Somehow we all found beds in the Tuckers' multi-dimensional house. (How do Australians manage without basements under their houses?) Next morning, it was Bob who looked most awake. He even sang "Good morning" to us while we had breakfast. I guess it was some time that morning when Jackie asked Bob whether he would like to travel to Australia for Aussiecon in 1975, and the idea of the Tucker Fund began.

During most of the rest of the week I relaxed, or Jackie and I had long conversations about matters fannish and personal. I told her my life story and she told me hers. (I'm not quite sure why people kept telling me their life stories, but I appreciate the compliment and respect the confidence. During the five months of my trip I learned more about how people really get along than I could have from living ten years at home.) Jackie is one of the best of the midwestern fans: the greater the physical distance between her and other fans, the more effort she puts into communicating with them. Jackie said that she has had a much more enjoyable life since she discovered fandom. "I was amazed," she said, "when I went to my first convention, and the people there actually wanted to talk to me." (I've heard that line somewhere before.)

Wally does not call himself a "fan", but he has a nice type of dry, fannish wit which, I'm sure, lets him survive well at conventions. He doesn't even enjoy reading - he just likes meeting fans. He seemed to spend most of his time working - admittedly for a salary that would be remarkably high in Australia - but luckily he had the whole weekend free to go to Tuckers'.

As for Kurt and Brian and Sandy - well, I don't understand their brand of football and they still don't understand Aussie rules football, but we had a lot of fun teaching each other. (Actually, the only Americans who gave me the slightest idea of what American football was all about were Ed and Travis Cagle. American football, they said, is the sort of game where the player from one side will send the ball towards the goal of his opponents if he thinks the manoeuvre will fool them; at the same time the opponents are trying similar tricks.) The Franke kids get along as well, or as badly, with each other as any other three brothers and sister. My visit gave them a chance to prove themselves. One night Jackie, Wally, and I went out to dinner. The Frankes could not get a baby-sitter that night, so for the first time ever they let the kids stay at home at night by themselves. No doubt all during dinner Jackie and Wally were imagining unimaginable catastrophes taking place inside their house. When we reached home, it wasn't in flames and the furniture wasn't in sticks, and Brian and Kurt hadn't fought once. General rejoicing all round.

While I was staying at the Frankes' I passed through Chicago several times at 60 mph but inspected it only once. It's not very prepossessing, and completely lacks the exciting atmosphere of such cities as New York and Washington. Perhaps I can understand better why Bob Tucker has obliterated Chicago in several of his novels. I met Ann and Bob Passevoy. One night, Bob took Jackie and I to some interesting book shops and to the only good pizza place I found during the whole trip. Also I met Ann Cass, who is active in the Society for Creative Anachronism, and who has some direct and effective methods of disciplining wayward children (she sits on them... literally). In Beecher I saw the first snow of my American trip, and the first snow of any sort I had seen since 1970. Winter really set in while I was staying with the Frankes. (For most of my journey I had excellent, even miraculous weather. While I was staying with the Cagles, it snowed and froze everywhere else in Kansas but around Wichita; while I was in England, everybody told me how mild was the weather, although for me it was still colder than the equivalent July weather in Melbourne.) One day, Jackie and I visited Gene Wolfe and his family. Before I made the visit, I didn't know much about Gene, except that George Turner almost purrs when he talks about a Gene Wolfe novel. Gene and his family live as far north of Chicago as the Frankes live to the south, so Jackie had to drive about seventy miles

from Beecher to Barrington. It seems typical of s f authors in general, and of Gene in particular, that he didn't want to talk about his own work. Instead, we spent most of the afternoon talking about fandom, conventions, and other enjoyable activities.

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\* "It's just like a Melbourne sky," I thought when I stepped outside London's Heathrow Airport and looked around and up. Shredded clouds flew across the sky, the wind gusted in my face, and, meteorologically at least, I felt almost home when I arrived in London. An English or a Melbourne sky is quite different from an American sky. In Melbourne the weather changes while you watch it; in America clouds, or breaks in clouds, move like purposeful battalions to occupy the sky, not breaking ranks or changing patterns readily.

London is as different from Melbourne as it is from America, and these days most urban areas in Australia look more like America than England. As I flew across London, arriving from New York, the clouds parted and I could see most of the city. The one central fact about London is that none of its roads is straight. All roads, streets, and even alleys wind towards and away from each other. From the air, at 8 pm on a January night, London looked like a jigsaw with its irregular black pieces edged in neon.

The lights weren't out. I had half expected to see a great black space in place of city lights. After reading the American newspapers, I must admit that I was scared of travelling to England. As we were boarding the jumbo jet in New York, someone said that the British army had surrounded Heathrow with tanks and troops after Palestinian guerillas had threatened to blow up a plane or two. I had read that Irish bombs had started exploding again on Euston Station. The trainmen were on strike, although nobody had mentioned that the Underground was still working quite efficiently. I had heard that London had no power or heating. In America, when I had told the Pan Am receptionist that, because of my ticket, I had to travel to England, she had just laughed.

Whatever the power restrictions, they didn't slow down Heathrow. It was Pan Am, not the airport, which lost my sleeping bag somewhere between New York and London. I looked around. No troops, tanks, or even many policemen. When I reached the nearby Sheraton hotel, there were no power restrictions. I found my room, turned down the air-conditioning from its subtropical temperatures, and bought some food at the hotel's twenty-four-hour restaurant. (Only a hotel owned by an American chain would maintain a twenty-four-hour restaurant in London. Unfortunately the same chain charged American prices - plus VAT and room tax. As Pete Weston said later, "Most London fans exist on ten pounds a week.") My only immediate problem, apart from discovering a way to stuff monstrous English bank notes into my wallet, was to get some sleep. Because of the trans-Atlantic time lag, I could not sleep. Eventually, I went to sleep at 3 am London time, and woke at 1 pm the next day. At last I had found a soundproof hotel room when I most needed one. I had three hours of daylight left to take the hotel bus to the airport, conduct a vain search for my missing sleeping bag, and get back to the hotel in time to ring some prominent London fans. George Hay gave me phone numbers of some other people; Chris Priest gave me more. For the first time I talked to such people as George, Chris, Malcolm Edwards, Pete Weston, and Syd Bounds, with whom I had arranged to stay before I left Australia. After I had watched television for several hours, I received a telephone call. "Two gentlemen to see you, Mr Gillespie," said the hotel's desk receptionist. I went downstairs.

Fannish generosity is as common in England as it was in America. When I went downstairs I found that Syd Bounds, after receiving my phone call, had walked around to Gray Boak's flat, collected him, taken the bus from Kingston to the airport, the bus from the airport to the hotel, and had now arrived to welcome me to England. I

talked to Syd and Gray for awhile, collected my bags, and we took a taxi out to Syd's place.

To say the least, English people live in much smaller houses than Australians or Americans. Syd managed to squeeze himself and his books into a small terrace house in Kingston - three rooms downstairs and two upstairs. I was a bit embarrassed that Syd had been so generous as to offer me accommodation. Syd let me sleep in his bed upstairs, while he slept downstairs on the sofa. No man can make a greater sacrifice for another, especially during an English winter. The most comfortable bed I slept in during the trip, too.

Syd had to work most days I was staying there, so I had to explore London by myself. Fortunately, Gray showed me Charing Cross Road (the important one... it has the bookshops) when he took a day off work. However, it was raining heavily that day, so we couldn't see much of London then. The person-who-knows-London - there's always one in every conversation - would say that I didn't see London at all. I didn't go to the Tower, or Westminster Abbey, and I didn't hear Big Ben strike at all. At the same time, I kept having the curious feeling that I was missing some of the things I really wanted to see - the bookshops, the cinemas, the restaurants, the art galleries, museums, and general odd goings-on. I realised just how valuable Barry Gillam had been while I was in New York. By the time I left New York, I felt that I had begun to dip into its treasure chest. When I left London, I still felt a bit baffled, and still in need of a guide who knew London as well as Barry knows New York. Also, the weather was cold, half the stores were blacked out, and I'm not an enterprising character at the best of times. Still, the centre of London retains that same infinite-possibilities feeling New York has. But not quite so infinite. The suburbs of London - and I saw quite a few sections of them during four weeks - just seemed depressing. Elias Canetti has written that the most appropriate national symbol for England is a ship. That's what the suburbs of London seem like - the tiny, compressed, cabins of a vast ship. All the cabins are linked and lined up side by side along infinite, narrow corridors called roads. All the cabins are on the one deck - at least you can't see the other decks or the shape of the ship. In short, after coming directly from America, London was quite claustrophobic. The ceiling came down (because London has no skyline, except from a few vantage points like the Thames and Highgate) and the sides came in (because you can't see past the houses; terraces on both sides of the road snake along for miles). However, one aspect of Greater London cheered me greatly. In all the reams of guff which Australian schoolchildren are forced to read about England, nobody had ever written that London is composed of a series of villages with houses in between them. The "suburbs" are not horrible, functional, suburban centres, as you see everywhere in America and Australia, but organic villages, each with unique patterns of streets, old-fashioned architecture, and invariably helpful shopkeepers. I received the impression that London's most heavily populated commuter suburbs were all country villages, even up to thirty or forty years ago. For that reason, developers have filled up the spaces between villages with suburban houses which make Doveton look palatial - but even developers have not been able to tear down the centres of places like Richmond, Kingston, and Harrow. Still, London brought from me the essential response, "Make room! Make room!"

However - as Peter Darling pointed out to me a few weeks ago - London's public transport system makes it a very accessible city. It's not as accessible as Toronto; more accessible than New York, but the underground doesn't operate for twenty-four hours a day, as in New York; far more accessible than many parts of Melbourne; and infinitely more accessible than most American cities. In London you can go where you like and feel safe to walk the streets (England's entire annual murder rate is one-seventh that of Detroit). That is, London is accessible, except when the trainmen go on strike. During the week I stayed with Syd, to get to London I had to take a genuine British double-decker bus (I thought they had those only in picture books) from Kingston to a tube station, and from there travel to the city itself. That week, with Gray Book as my guide, it was easier to take a bus to

Heathrow. I made a last attempt to find my sleeping bag. (Eventually Pan Am simply gave me the money to buy a new one.)

Most of my stay in London remains in my mind as a collection of exciting, almost unconnected incidents and encounters. George Hay invited me to lunch with him. I enjoyed the lunch and the conversation. George has helped SFC in many ways during the last few years, and I was pleased to swap ideas. I met Chris Priest for the first time when he met me at the Centrepoint. This is one of the few tall buildings in the centre of London; a developer put it up ten years ago, but nobody has ever occupied it; during my stay in London, it proved to be an effective landmark, since I get lost easily. I had been corresponding with Chris for some years, and I was pleased to find that he was as affable as I had always imagined. He is a bit younger than I had imagined; indeed, I was dismayed to find that he is only three years older than I am, and already he's a \*success\*. In conversation, Chris is voluble, acute, and endlessly interesting about everything going on in the s f world. Also, he knows all the interesting gossip. Chris and I had a tasty, but hurried lunch, and then whizzed along to a meeting of the Science Fiction Foundation. That's a remarkable and august organisation which somehow taps the talents of most of the major figures in British science fiction. I suspect that it began as a fraffly academic exercise, and later became the centre of almost any good, serious idea which anybody has to promote science fiction in Britain. At the meeting I met James Blish, for a long time as much a legend as a person for Australian fans. I told Jim that George Turner sent his greetings. I said that George had always had a great admiration for Jim's criticism, reviewing, and fiction. "Oh well," said James Blish. "I'll be happy when I can write reviews as well as George." (Although they have never met, George and Jim are about the same age, have much the same manner, and even resemble each other physically in some ways. I hope they meet some day.) Also I met Peter Nicholls for the first time. Peter is the Australian who answered an advertisement three years ago for an Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation. Peter knew nothing of the Foundation, or even of the British s f world, but he did have an MA, and he did know his science fiction, so he got the job. Then he found the s f world, and somehow he has put himself at the centre of it. Certainly, he seems to be the most highly regarded person there at the moment. He has helped to make the Foundation into a centre of information, ideas, and advice and edits its splendid magazine. A British publisher commissioned him to write a history of science fiction, but Peter hasn't found the time yet. I enjoyed listening to Peter's voice; I hadn't heard an Australian accent for months. I wasn't sure his Scotch College accent was really Australian, but it had to do until I met John Brosnan, who no longer has an Oz accent at all. That night I enjoyed dinner at the Nicholls' place. I admired Peter's still-intact library of Australian literature. I didn't see many Australian books in America.

It has always been one of my ambitions to meet one of my favourite s f writers - Brian Aldiss. Usually it is a mistake to meet one's idols; they are never quite what one expects. However, Brian Aldiss is every bit as remarkable to meet in person as he is to enjoy in print. Originally he had arranged to travel to London so that he could appear on a television program which the Canadian network was recording. However, the power shortage had stopped the interview program. The Canadians had to go home. Brian had already arranged to meet us on the Thursday night, so he took the trouble to travel to London anyway. Brian, his son Clive, Peter Nicholls, Mark and Sheila Adlard, and I met at the Berners Hotel, where Brian was staying the night. They don't have hotels like the Berners in Melbourne anymore: wide hallways, elaborate staircases, and chandeliers everywhere; all very Edwardian and grand. No wonder I was nervous by the time that Brian and the others arrived. However, Brian quickly put me at my ease. The British must have invented the word "ebullient" for Brian Aldiss; he seems to have an endless supply of energy, wit, and wisdom; an ability to make the world more enjoyable just by talking about it. After some conviviality, we set off to find one of Brian's favourite Indian restaurants. Two of the company nearly succeeded in losing the rest of us, but eventually all of us wended our way through the back streets of Soho until we found the restaurant.

After a long, cheery dinner, during which Mark Adlard asked me about Australia (and thus made a friend for life) and Peter and Brian conducted a merry, erudite conversation about literature, some of the party caught their last trains home, and Peter and I went back with Brian to the Berners. I was an appreciative audience of one as Brian and Peter exchanged convention stories, reminiscences, and gossip until three in the morning. Peter and I somehow made our way back to his place, where I stayed the night. It was, as Brian Aldiss might say, a very jolly occasion.

On Saturday, Chris Priest picked up me and my suit case from Syd's, and took me to the house of Christine and Malcolm Edwards. Almost as soon as I arrived, we spent a rather frustrating night of travelling by tube, with two hours of party sandwiched inbetween. Rob Holdstock had invited us to his party, but by the time we walked to the station, changed trains several times, and walked to the Holdstocks', two hours had gone already. For the first time I met Peter Roberts, with whom I had been trading fanzines for years, Andrew Stephenson, who illustrated the special Aldiss issue of VECTOR, and the notorious Greg Pickersgill, to whom I spoke about ten words. And, after four years, I met John Brosnan again. "Hey, John Brosnan!" I called across the smoke-filled room. John looked around. "Bloody hell!" he said, and nearly dropped his glass in fright. Another Australian! John had travelled by double-decker, overland through Asia and Europe, to get away from Australia. And still we hounded him. (But John seemed to enjoy his recent trip back to Australia and was guest of honour at innumerable fannish parties from one end of the continent to the other.) Christine, Malcolm, and I could stay at the party long enough to realise it was a good party, and then we had to catch all the last trains home. That took another two hours.

I knew less about the Edwards before I arrived in England than I did about anybody else I met. Malcolm is one of the world's very best fan writers, and perhaps I kept expecting the trenchant VECTOR-Edwards to appear. But that mythical person didn't. Instead I found that Christine and Malcolm are two very nice people who are trying to survive in the intimidating world of house- and furniture-buying, with a bit of s f reading on the side. Both Christine and Malcolm are librarians, so they have taken a chance on buying a half-house. In England that's a risky and expensive business, and I wish them luck. I spent several days just sitting around talking about matters fannish, science fictional, and personal, and watching British television (which is watchable).

On Monday, January 14, John Brosnan did his expatriate duty and showed me around London - or, a bit of it. John took me to Australia House, which is a monstrous and dingy place. I expected to hear Australian accents all over the place, but the attendants were English. I overheard an Australian girl say, "I wonder where we can buy Vegemite." At least, I could read an Australian newspaper for the first time in four months. This was a disillusioning experience - even THE AGE gave no sign that anything of any importance had taken place while I had been away. Meanwhile, America and England had come near to collapse as soon as I stepped onto their soil. (When I decided to continue my journey, I phoned my parents from Frankes'. Among other things, I asked my mother, "How's the energy crisis affecting Australia?" She said, more or less, "What energy crisis?" Even now, in June 1974, Australian petrol costs less than anywhere else.) John and I met three Australians who were looking rather lost. At last! I thought. Real Australian accents! But to me they sounded just like Londoners. I had been away from Australia much too long. These Aussies had travelled from Australia to Europe, had spent all their money in Spain, and had arrived broke in London. Now they could not find a flat to rent (but neither can any English people), and they were dismayed by the low wages. After this meeting, John and I went across the Thames, looked at the site of the National Film Theatre (which has a malign attraction for expatriate Aussiefans, I'm told), and spent hours in the Hayward Gallery inspecting the exhibition of paintings and lithographs by Edvard Munch. John found the exhibition rather depressing, while I found it exhilarating in a downbeat way. Munch shows that he got to know his women rather well before they treated him like dirt. As a Philip Dick fan and a chronic depressive, I

found Munch's work entirely congenial. John and I went to a small restaurant where the food was agreeable, but the atmosphere wasn't. A narrow staircase led from upstairs to the side of the restaurant near where we were eating. Somewhere upstairs we could hear the voice of some fellow berating his daughter for breaking something-or-other. Then the loud-mouthed character hurtled downstairs and repeated all his complaints to the woman who was running the restaurant. Upstairs again; more imprecations; more complaints downstairs. I thought only Australians did that sort of thing. Perhaps, like Australians, the English confine their violent tendencies to family squabbles. That was not the end of heated discussion for the night. Peter Weston was in London for a few days, so he arrived at the Edwards' place about half an hour after we arrived back. Chris Priest also drove over. After Peter and the Edwards had exchanged house-owners' gossip, somehow the conversation developed into a to-do about the merits or otherwise of academic critics compared with fan critics. Only a few days later did I realise that I had been defending the wrong side against Peter. Maybe I thought he was saying something other than what he did say, or maybe I have an instant impulse to defend Darko Suvin, no matter what. The evening finished amicably enough, when Peter and John had to catch the last train back to London.

While I was staying with the Edwards, I saw a few films (THE HIRELING, which is considerably better than the book and says most of what one would still want to say about England's class system, and the complete SEVEN SAMURAI, which was a Japanese Western all along) and visited John Bush, the managing director of Victor Gollancz. A week later, John took Malcolm and I for lunch. Both times, John told me how much he enjoyed visiting Australia in 1967, when he met the distinguished staff of ASFR, and how determined he was that Gollancz was going to send him back to Melbourne for Aussiecon. I thanked John for still sending me review copies of Gollancz's f. The first time I visited John's office, he had just received a copy of Philip Dick's latest novel, FLOW MY TEARS THE POLICEMAN SAID. I took this for Malcolm to read, but I spent my last day at the Edwards' reading it for myself.

\* On Friday, January 18, I packed my bags yet again, and went to visit the Westons in Birmingham. I caught the train from Euston station, and was suitably impressed by the speed and comfort of British inter-city trains. By contrast, I don't think the Victorian Railways has bought a new country carriage for fifty years. England is still sufficiently civilised that one does not need to buy a car, as in America, or one does not choose to buy a car for convenience, as in Australia; public transport is still adequate for travelling around the country. Before night fell, I tried to see out of the window as much as possible of the English countryside. I had one main impression, which I confirmed during my trip back: that an Englishman must find it hard to get away from his fellow Englishmen. We passed towns, villages, and isolated houses continually. I could see no sign of the endless paddocks of grazing land which line country train routes in Victoria. Fences or hedges surround every piece of English farmland. Two weeks later, when my plane took off from Heathrow, all I could see below was evidence of man's intensive cultivation of the English countryside. When I flew over Australia, I could see no sign that human beings had ever set foot on the continent.

When I arrived in Birmingham, Peter Weston met me and drove me to the house where he, his wife Eileen, and two-year-old daughter Alison live. Peter Weston didn't quite fit my image of him; but during my trip very few people did. I had seen photos of Peter and Eileen, but again I discovered how little information photos convey. Somehow I expected Pete to fit the "typical fanzine editor" image, since he has some claims to be the consistently best fanzine editor of the last ten years. In other words, I expected him to be about my age or a bit younger, a bit shy and introverted, and to talk about nothing but SPECULATION. For a start, Pete no longer talks about his fanzine. He talks about Eileen, Alison, and the house and garden he owns and keeps improving for them. He is not vague like me; for an sf fan, he is disconcertingly efficient. He no longer sees himself as just the editor of SPECULATION - and I suspect that he is no longer interested enough in the magazine

to keep it going. Good luck to him, say I; he has found a whole new, rich, and interesting life, the kind of life which completely eludes me. The magazine that began as ZENITH and became famous as SPECULATION celebrated its tenth anniversary in October 1973, but Peter has still not published the special issue. It's so late that I added my contribution while I was staying there. Peter is a few years older than I am, and has gained a lot from his extra experience - including, perhaps, the wisdom to know when to stop publishing fanzines. Eileen Weston is very easy to talk to, and put up with me admirably; she and Peter have not decided to stop adding new Westons to the family, so I was a bit embarrassed to put Eileen to any trouble, especially since she was going through the stage of morning-sickness-that-lasts-all-day. Both she and Peter enjoyed arguing with me, whether about science fiction (Peter has shelves full of Robert Heinlein books, while I seem to have lost even those few that I once owned) or society in general (I could never convince the Westons that the then-current spate of tv programs about World War II showed that England was living in the past). One thing I did not disagree on: her parents' admiration for Alison, who seems to keep the house running. Like several other children I met during my trip, Alison did me the honour of letting me play with her blocks and read to her.

The night that I arrived in Birmingham, Peter drove me to a meeting of the Birmingham group. Its meetings are very like those of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, when it used to meet at Somerset Place. The group has its joky people, its erudite commentators, its s f polemicists, and its fannish people, much like most s f groups around the world. Like the MSFC, the members of the Birmingham group are sorry that they cannot attract many women members - but a few were there on the night I attended. Next afternoon, Bob Rickard and Vern Brown visited the Westons. For years, Vern has been one of the stalwarts of SPECULATION collating parties. Also he has much to do with organising Birmingham's annual Novacon. He seems like an ever-reliable Carey Handfield of Birmingham fandom. Like me, he seems condemned to perpetual bachelorhood, but he survives the deprivation okay. Bob Rickard is one of the most humorous people I met in England. He has a constant and consistent collection of jokes and good yarns, lives in poverty because he is still paying off debts he incurred years ago, and publishes a very funny magazine based on Fortean phenomena. Perhaps his most notable achievement is that he seems to be one of the few English fans approved by Ratfandom.. Vern and Bob are also devoted admirers of Alison Weston. :: During the rest of my stay in Birmingham, I tried to crowd in as much as possible. I tried, but could not find the time to read all the copies of ZENITH/SPECULATION which appeared before I began trading fanzines with Peter. I spent all day writing my piece for the Tenth Anniversary Issue. I visited Roger and Eileen Peyton twice. The first time, I discovered that Roger has a marvellous collection of fifties and early sixties rock 'n' roll records, so I visited him again to hear some of the best. (During my trip I found quite often that people who were fans of science fiction were also fans of one or other of my other interests. However, Roger was one of the few people I visited who shared any of my musical interests.) :: On Sunday, Stan Ealing, a member of the Birmingham group, phoned the Westons. He offered to take off a day from work on Monday and show me around Birmingham and the surrounding countryside. I was very grateful for this. Peter was working each week day, and usually Eileen needed to stay at home. On Monday morning, Stan picked me up from the Westons' and drove me into the city. We travelled through the steel maze which is Birmingham's answer to an American flyover system. Most Birmingham motorists have never quite been able to work out the maze, but they keep trying. Birmingham is far more spacious and "Americanised" than London; people have more room for their houses, the roads are wider, and the buildings in the city centre are taller. Needless to say, Londoners aren't the least impressed. Stan took me on a tour of the book shops. I visited Roger Peyton's Andromeda Book Shop, which he runs by himself, even though the shop is nearly as large as Space Age, which has had a staff as large as eight at different times. I didn't see the other s f bookshop in Birmingham, Japetus, but local fans seemed to think it was successful as well. After we had lunch at the Ealings' place, Stan took me for a tour of the "countryside". This was difficult to do. We could

not find much uninhabited countryside. We would pass lots of fields, go through a village, travel a few more miles, pass through quite a large town, and so on. Even in farming districts, houses often line the roads, cutting off the view from the road. Finally, we walked to the top of the highest point in the Clent Hills. The mist hid many of the details of the land, but still we had a brisk walk and a good, very Englishy view. Perhaps I should see the whole area again in summer sometime. :: On Thursday, January 24, I waved the soggy hanky to the Westons and headed back to London.

\* Chris Priest gives a clue to his own personality in his latest novel, *INVERTED WORLD*. If you've read the novel and figured out the mathematical world (I haven't, but I was always hopeless at maths), you will remember that the main character ages fast when he moves in one direction from the city, and in the other direction, his time slows down so that he can do a great deal while not much time passes at the city. In other words, Chris is the character who moves a lot faster than most people. He accomplishes more, in less time, and with greater finesse than most people I know. We talked for hour upon hour, about nearly everything, and he always remained interesting. (I hope I did too, but I can't guarantee it.) For a Londoner, Chris has a large and comfortable basement flat in Harrow-on-the-Hill, a village/suburb which is built around the Harrow school. Chris can go walking on the Harrow playing fields, out the back of his flat. Usually Chris spends his time by putting on the record player loud, placing a sheet of paper in the typewriter, and writing novels that already have made him one of the most successful s f novelists in England. That's his usual occupation; I was flattered that he took so much time off from writing while I was visiting. :: On Friday, I put on the overcoat which Wally Franke had given me, and which protected me against English winter weather, boarded the tube train, and went into London. Yet again, I could not face wandering through historical monuments, so I walked down to St James Park and watched the many varieties of birds and people who flock around its pond. From there, I walked past Buckingham Palace, and noticed no unusual activity. I can understand why the English were so taken aback by the attempted kidnapping of Princess Anne. You just don't kidnap people in the Mall; it's unimaginable. It was starting to rain, so I did not enter any of the other nearby parks. Instead, I lost myself on purpose. I knew that no matter where I went, sooner or later I would arrive at somewhere I recognised. So I just wandered down one small street after another, saw lots of interesting things, and reached a tube station near the river. Back from there to the cinema district, and I saw that masterpiece of tricky cinema, Wolf Mankowitz' *SLEUTH*. Later, I met Chris at a rather tumbledown building where the London University conducts its science fiction class. (The two lecturers are Chris, and Philip Strick, often with s f writers with guests. I found it hard to get used to the way s f has become respectable and commonplace in England - s f writers on television all the time, s f courses all over the place, the Foundation, etc.) James Blish was the guest speaker on this particular night. He had spoken for about half an hour when a hulking, rather aggressive-looking individual came in and sat down heavily. At once, all the class became uncomfortably aware of the bloke; he had plagued the class since it had started. For quite awhile Chris and Jim ignored his rather inane questions and concentrated on the very good questions of the other students. Eventually the troublesome character became too much for everybody. Penny Grant, who is Chris' girlfriend, and sometimes attends meetings of the s f class, told the bloke to keep quiet. He, obviously drunk, flicked a piece of paper at her and started to complain loudly. Three of the men in the class leapt to their feet. Before even they knew what they were doing, they had grabbed the troublemaker and had thrown him bodily out of the door. At the time, it seemed the only thing to do. After the class, we all went to a nearby pub, and it was plain that the members of the class felt pleasantly united in a way they had never been before. Somewhere inbetween all the kerfuffle, James Blish gave an engrossing exposition of *BLACK EASTER* and *THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT*, and he enjoyed the celebrations afterwards. :: Chris is the sort of person who can conduct an s f class one day, edit the book review section for *FOUNDATION* on another, and write novels and short stories in

between. In other words, he made me envious as hell. However, he did encourage me to cut loose from the ordinary world, and to try freelance writing. Well, I'm still cutting loose, Chris, although mainly editing rather than writing; we'll see how long it can last. Penny visited at the weekend, and the three of us held long conversations about the state of writing, the place of fandom, and other deep topics. Chris is a British chauvinist in matters science-fictional: for him, the best sff is being written by British writers, and that's that. Admittedly, he has a very good case - but the Americans think the same about their own writing, and Franz Rotensteiner thinks that European's best. All very confusing. Personally, I'm glad that my Australian viewpoint lets me see things in perspective. (In other words, we have few Aussie s f authors about which I can be chauvinistic.) British s f writers are far more fannish than British fans, who seem perpetually divided into warring cliques, except at conventions. Chris asked me to sit down for a few hours and read his latest novel, INVERTED WORLD. I did this, and was very impressed, even though it's disconcerting to know that the author is sitting in the next room, anxiously waiting for a verdict. I'm still not sure that INVERTED WORLD is better than FUGUE FOR A DARKENING ISLAND, but for most readers it will be more approachable, and it has a rousing, helter-skelter ending. It stays in the mind: Chris claims that he has invented the first new s f idea for years, but I claim that his achievement is to invent an ultimately hopeless plight. Probably we will still be arguing about this book the next time I see him... except that by that time he will have written some more.

An unexpected interlude: Nobody in British fandom seems to have met Dave Piper, yet fanzine editors from Kansas to Melbourne treasure his funny letters, which he writes much the way he speaks. Dave objects strongly to most of the stuff I print in SFC, but he still sends me letters whenever he can. Dave wanted to know all about Ed Cagle. Perhaps he should have looked back at himself; Dave Piper and Ed Cagle have very much the same sane, down-to-earth approach to life. Cathy and the two girls welcomed me too, although I'm not sure what they made of a strange, stray Aussie, especially if they had never met an s f fan before. Dave played some good records, including some by Rod Stewart and the Faces. "Now I want you to hear a record by the best solo singer in the world," said Dave, reaching toward his record collection. "John Sebastian?" I said. Sure enough, Dave picked out John Sebastian's first solo record. (I had heard it before, because Mike Couch owned all of Sebastian's records.) We talked about s f and everything else. It's quite an achievement to have met the Pipers.

Chris and I were sitting around, trying to work out some way to waste my last day in England, and - this time for certain - the last day of my journey. The phone rang. Chris answered it, and I could soon tell that Brian Aldiss was on the other end. (Brian had hidden away in an isolated cottage for three weeks so that he could write some fiction. While he is at home, he now finds that letters, phone calls, and the general business of family living have nearly stopped him from creative writing.) Yes, Bruce was still there. Yes, it was a pity he couldn't visit Heath House before he left. Well, why not? By the time that Chris put down the phone, he had arranged an expedition to Oxford. We drove up what must be one of the few straight roads in England, the M highway from London to Oxford. (Chris said that British drivers would be bored to sleep if they had to travel on straight roads.) I had little time to look at the ancient city of Oxford before we drove straight through it towards the Aldisses' famous Heath House. (The most accurate description is in the first chapter of Brian's THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS.) By English standards, it's a large house, but as Peter Darling told me, in England either you live in a large house or a small house. Brian, Margaret, and their two children met us at the door. Margaret is very much an English lady, a splendid hostess who quietly arranges things for the comfort of visitors. I was surprised at how well I knew her already, because of items which Brian had written about her, or other material I had read about Brian and his family. When we arrived, it was already about 1 pm, so we decided to set off straight away for Stonehenge in Brian's car. The sun was out, which was unusual while I was in England; symbolically, it was the warmest day of my

English trip. In England, you do not drive straight to anywhere. If you're lucky, you know which route to take. If you're luckier, you don't, so you stop at a pub every few miles to ask for further instructions. That seemed to be our style: a long, punctuated, ambling trip down narrow roads between neat hedges leading to small, thatched-cottaged villages. Picture postcards don't lie about that part of England. It took us about two hours to travel fifty miles, and finally we reached the Salisbury Plains. From a distance, the rocks of Stonehenge look like pebbles in the middle of a smooth, green, rolling pasture. When we arrived we found that they were rather larger than that. The Druid protectors of Stonehenge weren't very pleased at our arrival - buzz off, iggerant Aussie marauder! The clouds covered the sun, the cold wind blew, and Stonehenge conjured for us an instant storm which drove us away fairly quickly. As soon as we headed north again, the wind stopped, the clouds lurched away, and satisfied, the Druids let us continue the journey in peace and sunshine. Next time I visit Stonehenge I'll take a defending witch doctor, or something. I should mention that Brian and Chris kept up most of the intriguing conversation all this while, although even they were flagging when we sort of lost our way back to Heath House. We made it, however, and Margaret fortified us with a tasty, ample supper. Brian entertained us in the famous Aldiss study; a room in which I never thought I would stand. I suspect that the whole day left me on a plane of euphoria from which I haven't descended yet; the last day of my trip was just about the best.

\* On the morning of Wednesday, January 30, 1974, Chris drove me to Heathrow Airport so that I could start, this time for real, the trek home. At that stage, I did not realise quite how long the trip would be. The week before, I had found that there were no plane seats on flights travelling via Singapore to Australia for at least a fortnight, and possibly longer. To go home, I had to retrace my steps, and travel to Melbourne via Los Angeles. The entire flight took thirty-six hours - from London across the Arctic to Seattle, more than an hour's US-entry customs check there, half an hour's change of planes in Los Angeles, during which I nearly did not get a seat at all, and the endless flight in an aisle seat across the Pacific. All on Pan Am, which is not my favourite airline. (American did a much better job during my flight from Melbourne to Chicago, but American no longer flies the Pacific route.) During the trip, I kept waiting to hear a genuine Australian accent. In an American newspaper, which had run a short article on Australia, I had read that Australians speak "the world's worst English". Pity all the poor people who had to listen to me during five months! Sure enough, this verdict is true. I met a few Australians on the plane, and their accents sounded very dry and lifeless after a few months of American and English accents. However, an Australian does not brand himself only by accent. Three of us were discussing the Brisbane floods - the only piece of news about Australia which had penetrated the screens of British tv viewers. One of the three was an Englishman. "I hear Brisbane has had terrible floods," said the English bloke. "Yeah," said the other Australian, "it's been a bit damp."

\* It was hot when I arrived back in Melbourne. And I didn't like being searched when I went through customs in Melbourne; that didn't happen anywhere else. But apart from that, I was pleased to be home. Apart from the weather, Australia is like a paradise compared with England, and people pay less for their paradise than they do in USA. It was good to have room to breathe again, and to feel that I was not paying too dearly for that room to breathe.

But that's the sort of generalisation I have tried to avoid in this non trip report. I was saving all my generalisations for the complete trip report. And I must still write a more complete account of the first part of my trip; among other things, I haven't paid enough tribute to the people I could mention only briefly in SFC 39. I could fire out generalisations like flak, but I've found that people don't like them much. When, in idle conversation, I compared one country with another, people usually thought I was denigrating their own country, even though usually I wasn't. It didn't occur to some people that I was just indulging the minor intellectual exercise of making interesting comparisons. A dangerous exercise.

So: what have I learned from this journey? John Foyster asked me this question not long after I arrived back. I had no adequate answer then, and I don't now. For one thing, I think that travel broadens the experience, rather than the mind. I was surprised at how many things I saw reinforced my prejudices and justified my opinions. I once wrote that I had three pet hates: noise, cars, and television. They remain, especially the last. American television is even worse than I had been led to believe. I couldn't live in many American cities, because their citizens must rely on cars to travel. On a more positive side: well, I felt much less of a cultural shock to travel from Australia to America, than I would have to travel from Australia to England. American cities look better than Australian cities, but their designers share much the same presuppositions. Australians and Americans share the same cavalier attitudes to money; compared with English people, who don't have much of it. Yet, the English survive okay - very few I met would actually want to move from England. It suits my puritanical bent that a whole nation can live comfortably in a way which most Americans and many Australians would find quite intolerable. In a way, there was not much to "learn" about America and England, because Australia is treated to so much knowledge about the rest of the world. Americans don't know much about the rest of the world, because the media tell them so little. Even the BBC broadcasts a lower percentage of "foreign" news than does the ABC. Anybody who has the stamina to keep up with Australian news-commentary programs receives surely the best international news coverage in the world.

Yet - and this is what I really want to say - the English don't care what happens in Australia, and they still think they are "superior" to the Americans, who hardly ever think about England; the English still hate the Germans; in America the whites and blacks still fear each other, although the whites never admit it, and everywhere the upper middle class hate the middle middle class who in turn hate everybody else. Yet I found that differences between people in different countries are nonexistent compared with similarities between them. But people still think of others as Them, and themselves as somehow Different. Race hatred, class hatred, Us-vs-Them hatred - the most illogical, destructive human emotion, and I found it the most prevalent, and the least justified. My discovery of this was probably the only saddening thing about my whole trip. Human beings don't have other races or classes to fear. They have only themselves. That's a cliché, but quite true. I learned, over and over, that the path to hell leads right to the centre of families, not outward towards Them, whoever They are. I met so many people who felt tortured by relationships within their own families; so many other people who felt they could not escape from close, debilitating human relationships! When I returned here, my own doubts and sufferings seemed negligible compared with many I heard about. During my trip, I found joy, and laughter, and pleasure - but very few people who were happy. And I don't know what to make of that conclusion.

But I'm not trying to be dismal. (It just comes naturally.) There's a bright side, too. Nearly everybody I met had within them the extraordinary resilience to meet the worst conditions of their lives. If you want generalisations: the English have laughter, and the Americans have their own version of the stiff upper lip. All people seem to have empathy and generosity (as long as it's not generosity to Them.) Fans have fandom, which is the link and expression which allows so many people to be so interesting. Particularly in areas where long distances separate people, as in the American midwest, fans use fandom consciously to compensate for the lack of communication which they can detect in their own communities. If only all people would think of others as they would like to be thought of.

#### ON THE ROAD AGAIN

\* Well, sort of. Many interesting things have happened since I arrived back in Australia on February 1. Nearly all of them have stopped me producing another issue of S F COMMENTARY. I've become quite discouraged. Firstly, I learned that SFC 40/KWALA 11 would never appear. Then I learned that SFC 38 had not appeared

while I was away. David Grigg said he would publish it. Promptly he gafiated (or as good as). John Foyster offered to publish the issue. Immediately his place of employment gave him so much work that now John labours seven days a week just to find excuses for the work he hasn't had time to do. Anyway, John has typed quite a few stencils, and I still hope to publish the September '73 issue. I've been discouraged by the existence of SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES (\$5 for 4 from Department of English, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47808, USA) and FOUNDATION (£2 for 4, from Peter Nicholls, The Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Essex RM8 2AS, England), two magazines which make SFC redundant. They have the same concern for literate and sceptical values - and the money and prestige to publish in the way I've always wanted to. In particular, Chris Priest has managed to assemble for FOUNDATION a collection of reviewers, including Ian Watson, Brian Aldiss, Chris himself, Malcolm Edwards, Tom Shippey, Josephine Saxton, and even Samuel Delany, whose collective brilliance makes me beat my head against the typewriter in despair. Why bother to continue my own meagre, poverty-stricken effort? Most of my reviewers have (justifiably) deserted SFC, although I still have a large amount of long articles in the files. However, SFC has suffered mainly because I haven't had time to publish it...

...But that's also the optimistic thing that has happened to me. When I arrived back in Australia, I could either try to get another job, or I could try to become a freelance editor and writer. I began to get jobs as the latter, so I've stayed freelance. However, to work this way, I must hit other people's deadlines fairly regularly. During the last few months, this has meant that I have been working up to seven days a week; or, if I've had a rest, I've taken a proper rest. I haven't had that week of uninterrupted time which I need to publish an issue of SFC. Money has been a problem, too, but for the same optimistic reason. I need \$35-\$40 a week to live - but I need a lot more to publish a fanzine as well. Unless I make SFC pay for itself. Which means putting up the price, and sending out renewal notices. (That process took about three months.) I succeed in one field, but this success begins to destroy another aspect of my life. I never seem to be able to make everything succeed at the same time. At one stage, it seemed that SFC would never appear again: my duplicator was very old and worn, and I couldn't afford another. Fortunately, Ron Graham donated the money for me to buy a new duplicator. Other people, such as Derek Kew and John Litchen, sent encouraging letters. People are resubscribing or sending rescue donations.

So, I don't have the magazine back on the road again, but slowly I'm repairing it, knocking the dents out of the temporarily battered body-work, and trying to find intellectual fuel for its engine. Eventually, SFC will be back in the traffic.

\* While I was away from Australia, readers still sent letters of comment. Two of the best of these, reactions by George Turner and John Foyster to Stanislaw Lem's article in SFC 35/36/37, will appear in a separate fanzine - the legendary SFC 38. Meanwhile, here are some other reactions to the largest fanzine of 1973: \*

JERRY KAUFMAN \*

622 West 114th Street, Apt 52A, New York, New York 10025, USA

I have a few comments about Stanislaw Lem's article, S F: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS. The article as a whole is quite interesting, but I have disagreements with Lem's characterisation of s f as a member of the Lower Realm. Lem is older than I, reads more languages than I, and has practised more of his critical art than I. Yet I have one advantage he hasn't: I have hung around the edges of professional s f writing and publishing for six years. (Every American fan has, to some extent.) So I am aware of a few contradictions to his classifications.

First, Lem says that even the best s f is read once and then buried under newer s f. No. The best s f is not forgotten. It is constantly being reissued and

reprinted. Mysteries are forgotten (and even this is changing). Westerns are forgotten. Nurse-romance stories are forgotten. True, there is new s f all the time, and a demand for novelty. But Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov, Le Guin, and Delany are reprinted and reread. (To be even-handed, the publishers also reprint and present as new the poor, forgotten, early works of now-popular writers. Brunner and Silverberg are two writers of early trash whose worst crap is presented as equal with their current productions.)

As for the communication between reader and writer: Panshin says he has received deep-hearted letters. Ellison has read several such letters aloud at conventions to show the sort of mail he gets. Even Blish, now that he has written so many STAR TREK books, gets such letters.

Lem's metaphor of the promiscuous society ladies and the honest prostitutes is peculiar. It makes the Upper Realm into the realm of hypocrisy. Or it might be that the Upper Realm does only for fun what the Lower does to eat. Of course, many s f writers write s f for fun, not money, and either write something else, or hold some mundane job. Real authors, on the other hand, simply write. And for money, like Joyce, they borrow. How did Thomas Mann live during the fourteen years he was writing that novel? Did his publisher keep sending him advances?

I do not think that the best s f writers are quite as restrained as Lem says. The lesser ones are, but a writer who has established himself under the pressure of the field finds freedom. Delany and Silverberg can write anything and have it published, to name two who seem to write what they want at the lengths they wish to use. The Hugo is now an important enough award to be recognised by anyone who reads s f. Hugo-winning novels are probably read more than Nobel-winning authors in this country. I hope the same cannot be said of other countries. It would be nice if all the dynamite money was really going for lasting literature.

I wish I knew what a PEN meeting was like, and whether the New Yorkers who hosted the first Worldcon (in Newark, NJ) were imitating PEN. Conventions in the US are large parties. That is what they are meant to be, and much of the programming is meant to be either entertaining or a way to keep the neofans busy. Theoretical discussions take place in fanzines, in letters, or through personal contact, except for the academic Secondary Universe Conference. Maybe s f conventions should be serious theoretical forums, but I have been attending them for six years, and they are not.

But Lem is perfectly right when he says that s f is segregated from white fiction. S f = n-----? All we can do is dance and smile. If an s f story is better than most, if it comes close to fulfilling its potential, just slap a bit of whitewash on it, and it is no longer s f.

What Lem describes as "kitsch" is what was known as "camp" here a few years ago. Now most s f is kitsch in the way that Pauline Kael describes it: energetic, brash, tawdry, unselfconscious, and unserious. Not art, not striving to be art, working with stereotypes, but not exhausted ones. Fun, but not forced, like the best of thirties' Hollywood movies. This is the best of Heinlein, this kitsch. Vulgar. Popular.

And Phil Dick uses this background of kitsch to present his ideas, real sense-of-wonder ideas. Which makes him not so different from other s f writers, after all. He works his ideas through, but he ignores most details that don't develop his ideas (except for clothing, which he loves to detail in grotesque combinations). So other writers manage other things well. (Dick is one author who deserves re-reading, and here the US publishers prove against me. MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE is out of print, I believe, as is THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH in USA. Does Lem think that the view of reality in these books shares anything with the view in THE LATHE OF HEAVEN?) (September 26, 1973) \*

What an irritating man Stanislaw Lem is! Ok, I know that's not the best way to catch your attention, so before I describe the general characteristics that irritate me in him, I'll detail the objections I have to particular bits in his article, SCIENCE FICTION: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS.

My irritation starts when Lem exhibits his ability to contradict himself inside a single sentence: "S f... belongs to two distinct spheres of culture that overlap nowhere." A triviality? Yes, but irritants typically are trivial; and there's far worse to come. A translator's error? No, I've had enough of that, and I'm not prepared to let Lem continue to dodge behind his translators whenever things get rough. Hereinafter "Lem" shall mean, "Lem as presented by his translators"; that, after all, is the writer we English readers are asked to admire.

Next: Lem's rule of procedure (98% accurate, he claims) for recognising writers of the Upper Realm gives a positive response if applied to Harold Robbins, Erich Segal, or any writer of trashy best-sellers, I see. What I don't quite see is whether Lem is proposing a necessary or sufficient condition for citizenship of the Upper Realm: does he mean that all Upper Realm authors are world-famous?

Next: Stapledon, we are told, is not accredited with being in the Upper Realm. In that case he must have come crashing through the floor at some time in the last twenty years; but Lem seems to imply that Stapledon never was in the Upper Realm, and if so he is plain wrong. If the man whose name followed that of G B Shaw at the start of the first Pelican list, a contributor to SCRUTINY, known to his contemporaries as an essayist, philosopher, and novelist, does not belong in the Upper Realm, then that term has no meaning - a conclusion that I suspect is probably true anyway.

Next: Lem is horrified to find that the length of James Blish's A CASE OF CONSCIENCE was limited by technical considerations. "Just imagine if we read in the memoirs of Hermann Hesse that his STEPPENWOLF was only so long because his publishers..." I read in W J Harvey's introduction to MIDDLEMARCH that "this technique (i.e. George Eliot's narrative technique) was demanded by the method of publishing MIDDLEMARCH in bi-monthly parts." No hint of the "shout of wrath" Lem expects such a disclosure to wring from critics - and what an extraordinarily naive expectation that is!

Next: more naivety, issuing in another self-contradiction: "the authors... display an abundant ignorance of the grammar and syntax... of their mother tongue" - which is a logical impossibility.

Can I stop now? Have I given enough evidence to show that I have a right to be irritated? Because I want to go on to my more substantial, less local objections to Lem's article. Or perhaps I should say my objections to Lem himself, since the qualities displayed in the article - the lack of logic, the general intellectual feebleness, the arrogance, the quite unjustified conviction of his own superiority - are also present in SOLARIS, though there, of course, they're mitigated by his gifts as a novelist.

The first half of the article is devoted to Lem's notion of the two realms of literature, the Upper and the Lower - which, on examination, turns out to be nothing but the naive, conventional notion, which we all absorbed on Aunt Edna's knee, that on the one hand there is Culture (which we put in museums, take off our hats and speak in low voices for) and on the other hand there is nasty rough trash (which, it should be pointed out, is a time-dependent category: in Elizabethan times it included all stage plays, in the late eighteenth century all novels, in the 1920's all jazz, and in the 1930's all commercial cinema).

My description of the notion of the Upper and Lower Realms as one of Aunt Edna's concepts is justified by the fact that Lem does not propose to define these Realms by any intrinsic properties of the literature involved, but only by considering what it looks like. Thus, on page 11 we find him classifying books according to the blurbs on their jackets. Actually, he gets it all wrong: "Although instant coffee or cigarettes of every brand are always praised as the best in the world," he says, "Michelangelo's frescoes and Tolstoy's WAR AND PEACE are not offered with the same advertising expenditure as the best artwork possible." In fact, of course, this is precisely how they are offered (do you have Heron Books in Australia?); and even if we restrict ourselves to new books, there is very little difference between the styles of the blurbs put out by any given publisher on science fiction and those put on any other kind of literature.

Though he fails in his attempt, the fact remains that what Lem is trying to do here is to judge a book by its cover. He dignifies this process by the name of "sociocultural analysis", but in fact it is no more than a rehash of the method proposed in C S Lewis' unpleasantly snobbish EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM, as is indicated by the fact that the first of Lem's criteria for belonging to the Lower Realm - "its works are read only once" - comes straight out of Lewis' book. The purpose of that experiment, if I remember rightly, was to eliminate the irksome labour of actually reading the books one wants to criticise, and some similar motive seems to animate Lem.

The rest of Lem's attempt to set up a demarcation between the Upper and Lower Realms suffers just as badly if it is compared with the facts. It seems to me that what Lem is describing is not a sociocultural fact but merely his own prejudice. Obviously the s f ghetto does exist as a sociocultural fact, and obviously most s f does deserve Lem's scorn on aesthetic or intellectual grounds; but Lem falls foul of fact or logic every time he tries to use his sociocultural description to support his scorn. (Incidentally, it's amusing to see him describe the s f establishment, which he is trying to contrast with the mainstream literary establishment, in almost exactly the same terms as Leavis uses to describe the latter.)

All this sociocultural nonsense is a prelude to Lem's views on Philip K Dick, which I think I'd better refrain from commenting on. At least you and I can agree that Lem's liking for Dick reveals the true level of his taste, even though we will mean opposite things by that. I must say I'm rather surprised to find that Dick's meretricious appeal travels as far as Poland. But I don't know what basis Lem supposes he has for his assumption of superiority over all of Dick's other champions; his article seems to belong to the same dreary line as scores of others. Insofar as he says anything coherent, he repeats the same praise as was given long ago by Michael Moorcock in VECTOR. Moorcock, at least, has grown out of his immature enthusiasm; no doubt Lem will also do so eventually.

I think I must be going off Mitteleuropeans. I'm also irritated by the sloppy writing of Darko Suvin, who uses words like "paradigm" and "parameter" in ways which have only the vaguest relation to their actual meanings. I'm glad to see him recommending Kuhn's STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS, but I'm puzzled to know what relation he thinks it has to the methodology he sketches.

All right, I'm sorry; I'm being pedantic and nit-picking. I'm off to read THE INVINCIBLE and UBIK. Let me just say how much I liked George Turner's pieces - both the review, or re-review, of SOLARIS, which I think gets the balance just right, and the letter, whose observations on jargon I recommend to Darko Suvin.  
(October 14, 1973)\*

\* I enjoyed Tony's letter very much, and disagreed with much of it. More on that later. A few points just puzzled me. I wrote back to Tony and here, in part, is his reply: \*

"S f... belongs to two distinct spheres of culture that overlap nowhere." I'm surprised that you had difficulty with this one. No, it's not the word "spheres" I object to; it makes just as much, or as little, sense as "planes". The point is that if s f belongs to both spheres, then they must overlap, mustn't they? With s f (to make it quite clear) lying in the overlap. Right?

The point about being ignorant of the grammar and syntax of your mother tongue is a bit subtler, perhaps. Since your mother tongue is the language you yourself speak, and its grammar is the set of rules you follow in speaking it, it follows that you cannot be ignorant of that grammar. Or rather, to be absolutely precise, you may be ignorant of it, in the sense that you may not be able to formulate the rules in abstract terms, but you cannot display ignorance of it, since every deliberate utterance of yours must by definition conform to the grammar of your language.

I'm beginning to think that this is just a quibble; what Lem is really complaining about is real enough, but it's carelessness rather than ignorance of grammar. But from your remarks, it sounds as if both you and Lem think there is a single English language with a unique grammar (laid down by God, presumably). It's the naivety of this that I object to. I know it's irritating when a writer doesn't conform to your grammar, and it's tempting to say that he's wrong and you're right; but what basis is there for deciding who is right? For example, I always am irritated by Clifford Simak, who invariably will put his adverbs before his auxiliary verbs even when no emphasis is intended (as I've done in this sentence - does it sound as odd to you as it does to me?). For me, this is ungrammatical, and when I first noticed it I thought Simak had made a mistake - it's the sort of mistake that can easily creep in through careless rewriting. But he does it so consistently that I must conclude that it's grammatical for him and that he really does speak this way... I must apologise for having got on to a hobby horse. Evidently your own position is not the rigid authoritarian one that I've been attacking, since on page 18 of SFC 39 you commend as "very nice" a splendid example of a dangling participle (Gardner Dozois' sitting grass) - though I'm not entirely sure what to make of this. (March 23, 1974) \*

\* I'm beginning to think that in a few years time I might be one of the few people in the country who can still remember the grammatical rules as I learned them at school. And still I break them when I think that it is necessary. For some time, I worked for the Publications Branch of the Education Department of Victoria. Among other duties, the Branch decided which spelling and grammar would be correct for all departmental offices and publications. (And, by implication, changes which teachers would convey to students.) A few years ago, dangling prepositions came "in" as a reaction to "up with which I will not put" sentences. So I no longer notice some "mistakes", even though they must give acute pain to some people. Because I worked for the Branch, I do notice all sorts of other things - for instance, I will try to avoid split infinitives if I can. Most people don't these days, so when I'm editing someone else's manuscripts, I can only judge by the sense of the sentence whether or not to heal the infinitive. All I'm saying is that Lem might work on the same principle as I do: grammar is not really an absolute, and of course we are part of a living language, but in practical terms I must act as if one word or phrase is wrong and another is right, because that's what my current occupation is all about.

I'm tempted to say here what I think of Lem's long article. I have a considerable emotional stake in it. I asked Werner Koopmann to translate it more than a year and a half before it appeared in print. I wanted it particularly because Franz Rottensteiner had told me that it contained a long section on Philip Dick, but that Franz did not have time to do the translation. Werner went to considerable trouble to carry out the translation. When I received it, I thought it was marvellous, but it needed "anglification"... So - I've read it once when I received it; again, in close detail, while I did the editing work; again when I typed the layout sheets; again

when I typed the stencils; and yet again when I proofread the stencils. Lem's argument is very simple, I feel, and for that reason probably he did not need to write quite so much. His argument is that s f authors want to have it both ways. On the one hand, they want the litcritics (or, the watchdogs of the Upper Realm, if you like) to recognise science fiction as art. At the same time, they don't want to act like artists - they want to be recognised by the fans and given Hugos, they want to continue writing poorly and without the kind of literary qualities which mark a writer as somebody from the Upper Realm. As I read Lem's article, he praises Dick because he doesn't waste his energy in trying to ride the elevator into the Upper Realm. Dick is one of the few writers who recognises the cliches (my word for Lem's "trash") of s f as cliches, enjoys them as cliches and not because they hold the secret to the universe, and can build something from the cliches which transcends the building-blocks entirely. I'd agree with Jerry Kaufman that one could add the names of other authors - except that those authors are always whinging about how s f is much better than "mainstream" (a paranoid term which doesn't exist outside the s f field), and why don't They notice Us? If s f writers want to be recognised as artists, then they will need to write like artists. Few of them do. If they want to be s f writers, why can't they work as ably within the strictures of the field as Philip Dick does? I disagree with Lem on details - but nearly all of them are details which Lem himself would correct if he spent a week in New York s f publishing circles or attended an American convention or two. Personally, I think he would be as dismayed the the low quality of discussion of s f as I was at Torcon; but he might find some pleasant surprises, like some of the speeches at the Secondary Universe Convention I attended last year. (But nothing gave the flavour of what science fiction is really all about better than Ted Sturgeon's recounting of some good yarns about John Campbell, Tony Boucher, and H L Gold.) The level of discussion about s f at any Australian convention is much higher than any I heard while in America. \*

\* CY CHAUVIN  
17829 Peters, Roseville, Michigan 48066, USA

SCIENCE FICTION: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS - the title is enough to send you screaming, until you realise that Sturgeon said it all before: "Ninety per cent of everything is crud." The only trouble is that we can never seem to agree just what authors and stories constitute that remaining ten per cent - the "exceptions" that Lem mentions.

I'm not sure whether Lem's article is meant for the general s f reader or for fandom (or both, or neither). I'll assume that it's meant for fandom, since it's published in a fanzine. Lem says that "trivial literature" (by implication, including s f) is read only once. That is true of ninety per cent of s f, but the upper ten per cent is reread often. At least, I reread favourite s f stories and books often, and so do some of my fan friends. Therefore, I assume it's true for a large portion of fandom. Lem says that the back-cover blurbs on s f books claim each as "a masterpiece of s f, the greatest ever". I must admit that I agreed this was largely true, but when I looked through some s f books to confirm this, I found that the "inflated" blurb is not as common as I thought. These inflated blurbs are simply the result of the way US paperbacks are sold, since they appear on US paperback editions of works by mainstream and classic authors as often as on s f works. Hardcover books seem to be entirely different - but then in USA, the hardcover books are sold almost entirely to libraries, not to individuals.

Lem mentions that Blish says that he only received some dozens of letters from readers during his whole lifetime. Blish made this remark in 1964, in THE ISSUE AT HAND. I note that in his introduction to a recent STAR TREK book, Blish mentions that he has received over 8,000 letters, with more pouring in. Of course, even Blish would admit that STAR TREK is probably trivial literature, but this only undercuts Lem's argument further: it seems that even readers of this type of

literature don't simply see it as a "product" to be "consumed". And for that matter (to add to my argument above), why do people even bother wanting to read the STAR TREK books, when they've already seen the program? Why do they flock to see reruns of the STAR TREK programs they've already seen? Isn't that the equivalent of "rereading" a book?

Lem mentions earlier that, despite what authors and readers have claimed, s f has not really changed in recent years. Then he mentions Blish's *A CASE OF CONSCIENCE*, and says that its length was determined by the publisher. This is odd, because this sort of circumstance is no longer true in s f. Nor are many of the taboos in subject matter. Lem also says that "in the Upper Realm one always strives at least to keep alive the appearance of intact virtue..." (my emphasis). It seems that because writers of the Lower Realm, people such as Blish, are simply more honest, and do not care so much about appearances, they should be put down. Personally, I don't think a good critic should consider whether Blish was working under a commercial limitation (or that Kafka died before he completed *THE TRIAL*): what's important are the words on the page before him.

Lem mentions that "S f conventions are intended ((my emphasis)) to form a kind of match for the meetings of the PEN club and other similar gatherings." This is simply false; s f cons have been around so long (since 1937) that it is rather silly to think that they are patterned after anything. They have evolved their own traditions. "At conventions, theoretical reflections are nothing but seasoning." Of course; both fans and pros go to cons to meet people, make friends, and the like. They want to see what their authors/readers look like, and talk to them. This has always been the motivating factor behind cons: I'm sure you, Bruce, and a large percentage of your other readers, would agree with this. If Lem does not think this is a worthwhile reason for an s f convention, well, so be it. But it seems pointless of him to criticise s f conventions for what they were never intended to be. ((\*brg\* I think we would both agree that the serious business of Torcon began when the room parties began. Certainly, I enjoy spending conventions that way.\*))

Lem says that in s f the worst and the best never drift apart, but are forced together. I don't think this is as absolutely true as Lem seems to think; after all, the dime novels from the turn of the century, and most of the stories from the early pulps are no longer reprinted. Nor is *THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT*, which won the second Hugo in 1954 - although the novel which won the first Hugo, *THE DEMOLISHED MAN*, and other books of the period, are still well known. Lem says that the general s f reading public does not pay any attention to the voices of the s f critics; are circumstances really better in the Upper Realm? Lem says that the Upper Realm critics have only a "long-range" influence, that the results of their efforts take a long time to be felt. Lem seems to forget that s f has been around less than fifty years: is this enough time for a thorough selection process to take place? I really don't understand Lem: is he saying that the good in s f is reprinted along with the bad, without distinction? But that happens in the mainstream, too. Is he saying that the general s f public can't tell the good from the bad? But that's true elsewhere as well. Is he saying that there is a group in the mainstream which can tell the difference between the two, while in s f there is not? I couldn't agree here, either: I'm sure a large number of fans and authors can tell the difference between the two. Of course, there is not a hundred per cent agreement, but the critics in the Upper Realm have their battles as well.

Lem seems to miss the point entirely of Philip Dick's *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?* (which I regard as one of Dick's best), but then goes on to make several comments in defence of Dick's *UBIK* which could apply equally to *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?* Lem says that the idea of the Penfield apparatus in *DADOES* is a brilliant one, but it does not play role in that novel. He is wrong; it simply reinforces the contradiction that Dick sets up in his novel

between "reality" and "appearance" (and Dick batters away at the two until it seems nonsensical to insist that there is any difference between the one and the other). The Penfield apparatus is a device for altering one's emotions. In one of the novel's first chapters, the protagonist's wife says that she doesn't feel like turning on the device, and the protagonist suggests that he should push one button on her device, so that she will feel like using the machine. Then they begin an argument. So, is there any difference between the artificial appearance of the wife who wants to use the device (or any of her other emotions), and the true emotions themselves? If we can duplicate androids artificially so well that we can no longer really tell the difference between the real and the unreal, why continue to make the distinction? Dick's novel seems to chronicle one man's attempt to make this distinction, and his final realisation that the attempt is silly. To quote Lem on UBIK - but apply it to DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?: "The 'contradictions' form a mode of expression that serves to expose to full daylight the messages that are stressed by affection and a special philosophy of life. In a word, they are metaphors that should not be examined for empirical content."  
(December 11, 1973) \*

\* PERRY CHAPDELAINE

Route 4, Box 137, Franklin, Tennessee 37064, USA

Dear Stanislaw Lem

Congratulations on some brilliant analysis, especially on the state and art of s f. In particular, on this latest instance, thanks, too, for S F: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS.

You, sir, are probably the only super-critic on the s f horizon, and certainly the only one in my reading memory, which stretches back to my age of fifteen, thirty-four years ago.

I was about to write some snide remarks entitled THE SLIPPERY THREE SIDES OF S F, but you, sir, have said it better, and in more ways and in more detail.

On page 14 of SFC 35/36/37, you mention a long article by me which, I suppose, was my report on the treatment under the "Milford Mafia", a facetious term not coined by me, and referring to my experiences at Damon Knight's school or symposium for writers. I think it somewhat unfair to classify the whole experience as oriented toward the commercial. My memory is quite clear that I was the person who was commercially oriented, having been trained briefly by Fred Pohl and John Campbell, having already sold something like eleven of my first sixteen stories. In gestalt, I had just broken a serious writing block that had kept me from the pleasures of writing for something like thirty-two years - without that block, I would have been a writer since early childhood. My writing did stink; I knew it; but I'd sold! What else could be important about writing?

During the short period with the Knights, it became evident to me that writing can also be reaching, personal, even mystical, and again I began to grow.

Now here's the thing that disturbed me the most. Almost no one in s f fandom, or among s f writers, is willing to credit the skill and art of writing as simply a complex human association of skills that follows all the laws of psychology that fit the learning patterns of any complex association of skills. Such curves have long plateau periods, sharp rises, and long plateau periods. To hear s f writers pat themselves on the back, they were born with vital messages in their writing hands, and it simply took the natural course of physical maturation before they could get the message out. Or, if self-honest (or they kid themselves that they are), it appears as though they are the only ones who have gone through the long self-discipline and training curves. (I don't mean that this applies to all writers. I'm referring to the impression that seems to spill over

into fandom, rightly or wrongly.) In short, most writers I met at the Milford Conference really had no patience with or understanding of the natural learning curves to which subjects called humans are exposed.

Therefore, it followed that I was at an exceptionally low plateau compared with those present, but because of my professional background in other fields, probably I had more understanding of my own limitations and the phenomenon of learning. After serious critiques of stories, I began to sense that there was more to writing than crass materialism, though here and now I confess that probably I brought up the subject more than the others. Nonetheless, those who squealed the loudest about the independence of literature from the commercial market, I can now see, were actually the ones who best fit your description of those who work in the lower realm, for money. On looking back, only one among the group was not commercially oriented. She had published some strange experimental material in a small literary magazine, and she was also the one who triggered me to learn again. (That is not to say that I did not appreciate comments from others, for I did then; furthermore, I needed those comments for my own growth at that time.)

There is an overriding factor in American life which forms the problem you have analysed, and actually it is part of the basic feedback cycle that creates trash literature. That overriding factor is: both music and "literature" must resonate with the juvenile fantasies of the moment.

My family and I own and operate a record store; we are personal friends with one of the hottest acoustic/electronic engineers in the business. We sell primarily pop and soul music. The pop music is either "bubble gum" music, or "rock". Soul is - well, it's about happy times, not the ghetto. "Country" music is usually pitched at the grief or sympathy level, and it tells a story. Rock is beat, complex, physical, without deep thought or complex narrative. Bubble gum? Well, this little boy has puppy love, and the girls wants him to sing about his puppy love. Guess who buys the record? The boy? Wrong. Thirteen-year-old girls - that's the bubble-gum trade,

The analogy between the American commercial exploitation of records and the American commercial exploitation of literature is virtually an isomorphism in all respects. So, it follows that s f is a manufactured product that appeals primarily to adolescent fantasies: Superman, Batman, unlimited powers (if I had one wish I'd wish for all the wishes in the world - hah!) and so on. It is also the Tarzan image, the super-strong hero who always wins, no matter the odds. To win, therefore, one must have obstacles, and what better ways to have obstacles than to invent weird neverwas worlds with made-to-order obstacles? And so forth. This is analogous to the "physical" effects of rock music. As a matter of fact, it would be quite embarrassing to fandom, and publishers, and writers, if someone made a study of exactly which current "action" books on the paperback market have been copied isomorphically from which other paperback "action" books, now off the market. Personally, I've known successful and acclaimed writers who have filled their time contracts by buying an "action" book from the bookstands, have typed their own version, page for page, and have submitted the first draft to the publisher, at least on time.

Another neat gimmick is to "mine" other fields. I've heard our great writers say, "Gosh, I hope nobody else mines this field," (Greek heroes, or a rare Jewish collection, or this or that from past literature, philosophy, or history.) I suppose one ought to mine. Frankly, I was aghast when first I heard that this was a common and accepted practice. I was so naive about writing that I thought the author simply worked everything out for himself without referring to the works of others, or mimicking them. Now that I know better, I can absolutely guarantee any editor who wants to try it, that I can write one of the finest original s f novels



# RICHARD DELAP

## The Original Fiction Anthologies

### Again, Dangerous Visions?

In his introduction, "An Assault of New Dreamers", there appears the flat statement, "I did not want to edit another DANGEROUS VISIONS," groans editor Harlan Ellison.

Richard Delap discusses

AGAIN DANGEROUS VISIONS

edited by Harlan Ellison

For those who may have been away during the last five years, in outer space or other odd places, DANGEROUS VISIONS was the giant volume of original science fiction stories published in 1967 that became the cause celebre of the much-discussed "New Wave" of

Doubleday :: 1972

760 pages :: \$12.95

Signet :: 1973

J5672 (Vol 1), J5673 (Vol 2)

\$1.95 each

of s f circles. The book sold extremely well and enhanced Ellison's already notable

reputation as the enfant terrible of writers who, with all time and space in which to roam, were nevertheless becoming a little too stodgy for their own good. DANGEROUS VISIONS changed all that in no time flat. I liked the book, at least in part, though to this day I fail to see why it became the centre of the tremendous controversy that ensued. With a few isolated exceptions the book was never really as "dangerous" as the advance publicity would have you believe, and somehow I could not see the point of flaying the radicals of the s f right and left through another volume calculated to prolong a war which didn't make any sense to begin with.

So Ellison didn't want to edit and I didn't want to read another book of trend-setting stories; and while he was obviously excited about the results of this new work, I could easily ignore all his editorial "curlicues and gingerbread", however entertaining they might be in themselves, as so much hard sell.

But if my prefabricated wall of resistance was moulded already into place, the onslaught of forty-two furiously inventive writers crumbled it almost instantly, and AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS emerges as the definitive volume of new, quality science fiction on the rampantly expanding horizons of the genre.

The taboos and restrictions which were prodded and pinched but seldom truly deflated in DV are now just nonexistent. The writers here don't seem to know that they exist! Readers with preconceived notions of what "safe" and "dangerous" themes in s f are advised to squelch such notions before even opening this book, for Ellison and his brigand band have turned such concepts into mere words of folly as they sneak up behind you and shove stilettos into your back (or, as is sometimes the case, up your ass).

Not all the stories are good, to be sure, and a few are unqualified disasters. But even the disasters are for the most part attempts to do something different, to break away from the predigested mulch that keeps s f nestled in a barricaded corner, where it can be controlled by editors who feel that they have a duty to hold the ends of the universe within easy reach.

It's difficult to make up my mind how to group the stories for discussion. I had

first thought to take the best stories together, discuss them at length, and relegate the less successful works into paragraphs of short-shrift dismissal. Often I work this way (over the screams of the dying), but ADV demands something more, a sense of progression, the flow of stories as they are ordered in the book itself. So I've settled with the idea of starting with the first story and moving straight through to the last. This means a long, possibly too tiresome review that may smack of rote method, but it's a chance I'm willing to take in the hope that I can convey the ups and downs of this ultimately progressive and tremendously exciting trip.

Ellison covers himself protectively - for all his bravura he still shows those traces of insecurity, poor fellow - by mentioning that his approximately 40,000 words of introductions "come free", and if you don't like them you've no reason to complain because they can be skipped. This is true, but I think any reader who does so is a fool, for Ellison's super-hype gives the book an additional mettle that, however you react to it, is an important aspect of the total unity - I mean, what's a stormcloud without a little thunder and lightning? Ellison has a tendency to litter his opinions with minor factual errors - Asimov's SENSUOUS DIRTY OLD MAN comes out as SENSUAL; a grade-Z horror flick, I DRINK YOUR BLOOD, becomes a trifle more vivid as I SUCK YOUR BLOOD; and Ellison, surprisingly for someone in the film business, doesn't seem to know the difference between the Motion Picture Code's "R" and "GP" ratings - but I have the suspicion that he might just be throwing out bones for the nitpickers to gnaw on. Take them or leave them, as Harlan says, but I suggest you take them. With salt. And good humour. As intended.

Ellison says that John Heidenry's THE COUNTERPOINT OF VIEW is a "keynote entry... intended to set the tone and mood for what is to follow... a surreal setpiece that somewhichway cornerstones the intent and attitude of the book." Some will find it intellectual nonsense (which, of course, it is) and others will find its two pages a crafty bit of intellectualism (which, of course, it is too). But anyone who can begin his second paragraph with a subtlety like this - "Shakespeare was introducing cryptography into English letters (having earlier practised with fictional fiction in THE COMEDY OF ERRORS and other plays)" - and travels from there along a helix that refutes every theorem we accept while concurrently refuting the refutation deserves our respect for more than mere cleverness. He neatly exemplifies the adage, "Science fiction is what we mean when we point to it," and beyond that any definition brings in a margin of error. It's a delightful work, and truly does "set the tone and mood".

I would have thought a story opening with the destruction of the entire Earth in a great "blow-up" would be asking for anticlimactic troubles ever afterward. Rather than going for an excess of pyrotechnic extragalactics in CHING WITCH!, however, Ross Rocklynn sticks it out on a personal level with his physically half-human (yet mentally entirely human) survivor of Earth's destruction, Captain Ratch Chug. Chug becomes a hero of the youth culture on Zephyrus and his ego trip takes him a very strange journey with an even stranger conclusion. Rocklynn explains that the story's inception comes from his brush with the Haight-Ashbury hippie culture, but adds, "I tried not to make it timely." If the story's origins are clear enough in themselves, even without the author's explanation, the story is certainly not one of those cash-in-on-the-current-craze fluffs milking the public interest of late; and though Rocklynn states the story is "not supposed to have any theme", there are many throughout, all of them interacting in a current of the give-and-take of life. It's a fine, fast story which leaves the reader begging Rocklynn to continue writing and not to make this delightful work a final bullet.

Wasting no time, Ellison places next one of the book's nuclear explosions of s f art, Ursula K. Le Guin's THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST, a superb novella-length example of the breadth possible only in the finest of science fiction. Le Guin's themes are many-coloured and fragmented, as are the occurrences of day-to-day living, yet they are not unpatterned. Like a kaleidoscope they form many patterns of conflict and merge within a contained sphere of reference. The author admits that her tale is a

moralising one but adds, "I am not very fond of moralistic tales, for they often lack charity. I hope this one does not." She succeeds completely, and while not lacking charity her story does not whimper. Neither does it barkingly proselytise. It offers the pros and cons that confront its basic moral question, and offers them with little fear of the harsh conflict that is necessarily involved. One may resent or cherish the obvious parallels to the problems in today's world - segregation, Vietnam, corporate shepherding, etc - but none of them, fortunately, are honed so as to be applicable only to our time. The problems are inherent and everlasting human ones to which Le Guin insistently points out that there are no answers forthcoming until we understand exactly what the difficulties really are.

There are no villains among her characters. The situation itself is the villain, and it is predominantly reflected through the vision of three persons: Captain Davidson, who is unable to accept the natives of Athshe (small, furred humans, called "creechies" by the offworlders) as human beings and cannot adjust his mode of thought to embrace any way of life different from his own; Captain Raj Lyubov, the only man to have made an effort to unravel the customs of the natives, including a half-realised understanding of a culture which thrives primitively on a planet of world-spanning forest, yet has attained a state of existence which involves an ability to pass between a state of reality (world-time) and something beyond (dream-time); and Selver, a native whose forest world undergoes a systematic annihilation by the visiting "giants" but whose comprehension of the destruction comes only through a personal involvement with something previously unknown to his society, the art of murder.

The innocent civilisation is beautiful, but its unsullied beauty survives only in isolation and Le Guin does not believe that such isolation can long exist in a universe of interdependents. We are faced with our power to alter the balance at whim, and to bear the guilt of error. The tendrils of reaction spread in all directions, and even in the far future it seems probable that we will still be unable to detect and control them all. They branch rapaciously into a network of miasma and eden, hope and despair, sparking the questions that have, do, and surely will plague us for many more years. Le Guin's story is dangerous because it leaves us to shoulder our own burden of responsibility. For all the care and concern we show, there are still more mistakes to be made, more guilt to be borne - and that is what makes her story the most uncompromising, painful, and welcomingly honest work you can find in fourteen tomes of speculative fiction. It is brave, and the reader must have courage to stare directly into its objective face. With such courage you will find not avarice and bitterness but naturalism and beauty (and, yes, Mrs Le Guin, charity). Such a reward is very much worth looking for.

After the excellence of the Le Guin story, almost anything would have trouble emerging from its shadow, so Ellison follows it with something light and, unfortunately for Andrew J Offutt, not very good. Offutt admits that FOR VALUE RECEIVED results from a clash with a hospital cashier regarding the balance of a debt, and proposes that "this is a dangerous vision" on the grounds that his (former) agent told him, "it's against the rules to spoof the medical profession." First, the story is much too obviously a fantasy spun out to cotton-candy consistency from a common and cheaply-flavoured base ingredient. Secondly, it isn't a spoof of the medical profession at all, no matter what Offutt's (former) agent tells him. The idea of leaving a child in the hospital because one refuses to pay the bill immediately strikes me as a hypocritical situation, a tactical refusal to face the inherent horror of the individual's loss in the iron grip of Big Business. Even played for laughs, it's much too thin, too indecisive, and too desperate to wring out the needed irony.

Gene Wolfe's three little mood pieces - 1. ROBOT'S STORY, 2. AGAINST THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE, and 3. LOCO PARENTIS - under the cover title, MATHOMS FROM THE TIME CLOSET, are what Wolfe calls "my hangups", and adds that "many of the things you thought I said, you said." Apparently, his hangups aren't in the same closet as mine and I found it difficult to relate to the first and last stories. However the middle

one gave me a slight tingle, but whether from a simple hookup to my own hangups or from a true artistry on Wolfe's part I'm not really sure. They're all short pieces and should be read if you're curious to know if Wolfe, toggling psyche switches, has the good fortune to toggle one of yours.

In this age of porno shops and clinical sex studies, it's hard for many young people to believe that some of the Old Guard, the Puritans, so to speak, still cringe at the mere mention of subjects like masturbation, which is the central hinge of Ray Nelson's brilliant fantasy, TIME TRAVEL FOR PEDESTRIANS. Those who might damn the story for its method of approach shouldn't be reading this book in the first place (unless they're seeking to "broaden their horizons", as the saying goes), but if they can make it over that initial hurdle they'll find the story is surprisingly one of the most moral stories in the book. Those looking for what Nelson calls "some real guts and glory" in their fiction will find it in abundance in this ballsy look at time-travel embarked upon by a man who sprinkles a dish of ice cream with an organic (hallucinogenic?) drug and masturbates his way to other times and places to the insistent tape-recorded chant of "Ego-death". The situation becomes a philosophic duel, a study of excess and contrasts. Beginning with a graphic, startling, soul-searing experience in transsexualism, Nelson grips the reader by the crotch and hauls him through a series of violent deaths stemming from both love (or whatever passes for love at the time) and hate. And following each death is a rebirth, a lively cycle through which religion dances a frighteningly confused harmony around the brave traveller, with a special accent on the contrasts between western and eastern religions. But how can such an adventure end - in the courage of convictions? in the hands of a capricious Fate? The contrasts persist and anyone who reaches the end of this superb story without copping out in disgust or horror has already won his half of the battle with the dark angel. Nelson has given the s f reader exactly what he needs, mind-bending surprise and challenge, an era-spanning drama of discovery in the depths of human consciousness.

Religion is seen from a different point of view in Ray Bradbury's verse, CHRIST, OLD STUDENT IN A NEW SCHOOL. Those of the Christian faith might find in this Christ-poem the "promise of new opportunities" that Bradbury sees in the future, but it might also confuse those who have held the notion that Bradbury is anti-technology, since his verse suggests fulfillment in "rockets through the roofs/To night and stars and space." Neither Christian nor anti-technology, I am left contemplating the spirit of the author's beliefs as an expression in style, with such as this: "Man warring on himself an old tale is;/But Man discovering the source of all his sorrow/In himself,/Finding his left hand and his right/Are similar sons, are children fighting/In the porchyards of the void?" And somehow, sad to say, the spark is not there; the subject is too great, the words too small, the mesh confusing.

Like me, you might be finding ecology stories a little hard to swallow these days; their taste is overfamiliar. After all, our newsstands are loaded with dozens of books and magazines, a seemingly endless stream of scream and rant and rave... and profit. It has become the new profession, to be "aware", to be concerned, but it is a profession almost totally ignorant of priority - and the decimation continues. Does Chad Oliver's KING OF THE HILL, a fantasy of a billionaire with a plan to save the worthwhile denizens of Earth from the yawning grave, do anything more than the reams of serious and pseudo-serious essays? Probably not, but if it fails to move us to action it is at least a story with a reasonable sense of humour and drama, which makes it worth more than many times its length in ecology scare sheets.

THE 10.00 REPORT IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY.. is a message story, but in it Edward Bryant fails to see the cant of his work, for this story of the exploitation of violence and sensational subject matters in the television newscasts exploits its own subject. There is no real point in telling us we are voyeurs (and hypocrites about being so) without at least trying to tell us what we might do, if not to change, then at least to understand why we allow ourselves to be used so blatantly. Although the year is 1980, it's obvious that Bryant is writing about Now, extrapolating nothing but

an increase in the size of today's worryrags. As science fiction it's uninteresting; as message it's as familiar as a tv jingle, without even an annoying, lilting melody to stick in your brain.

And speaking of familiar messages, you wouldn't think that there was much left at this date to say about the so-called generation gap, after all the thousands of pages of factual material on the "youth revolt" and innumerable silly stories of LSD in the water supply, adults incarcerated in prison camps, etc, etc. This dreamworld of youthful hopes seems to have convinced the majority that the world will somehow soon miraculously embody all these idealisms - or at the very least change the status quo enough to see their possible realisation. It takes an author with guts to dissolve the sugarcoating and project a different, more horribly probable culmination of today's trends, and Kate Wilhelm is not just parroting a trite diatribe when she states worriedly, "I think this is a demented society." She's willing and supremely able to show us why, in a projected future where the establishment of the adults has calcified into such a rigid structure that rebellious discontent is on its deathbed and youngsters will never know dissent because it will not exist. Sound impossible? Look around you, then, look closely at the young people (and if you're young, rip off your mask and really look at yourself for a moment), examine the pretences and the fears (especially the fears) that prompt conformities. Wilhelm's startling X-ray vision alone is enough to make THE FUNERAL thoughtful reading; but even more compelling, more nerve-wracking, are the black and grisly undercurrents churning beneath, shifting to reveal brief flashes of vivid colours we're so afraid to glimpse, rivulets of sadistic scarlet, pulsing violets of repressed sex. The story is so unbelievably intense that, as at a horrible accident, one doesn't want to look but cannot turn away. As with her brilliant novel, LET THE FIRE FALL, the story runs the risk of being overlooked because so much of its stinging bite is in the undercurrents, not spread over the surface with screaming, flashing-neon tastelessness. Read it slowly and with passion; you'll feel the needles sink in painfully and the resultant deflation will not be pleasant. But, by damn, you'll remember it. Bravo!!

James B Hemesath's HARRY THE HARE is a quick bit of nostalgia about a popular cartoon character who has reached the end of his reign with the advent of tightened Hollywood budgets and the lack of interest of new audiences. He gives himself to his remaining fans, snipping himself into pieces in a surreal homage to the style and humour of animation when it was an art rather than an empty technological profession. The story lacks the sharp edges of a clean cut and isn't really very successful, but Hemesath seems to have talent and possibly might do some better things in the future.

In introducing Joanna Russ' story, WHEN IT CHANGED, Ellison has the courage (gall?) to state forthrightly, "...as far as I'm concerned, the best writers in s f today are the women", and I'm not afraid to stand beside him and second the assertion. I found myself more fascinated by Russ' two-page afterword than by her six-page story - not her best effort, although the first and last page contain some exquisite philosophical imagery - and I wonder if perhaps I wouldn't have been happier just bouncing the author's conjectures against those of Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, and Germaine Greer, counting the places where they merge and dissent. Russ' story is not a Women's Lib essay-in-disguise, but it does offer some valuable speculations re the alleged difference between the sexes, posing questions which cannot be dissected truthfully with assumptions. If sexual preference is so easily adjusted to an atypical situation (isolation or limited indulgence or both), then can any preference really be a perversion? Is it then a perversion in a typical situation? Does sexual perversion even exist? Her thoughts seem to have advanced a great deal since the losing battle she wages with sexuality in her colourful but confused novel, AND CHAOS DIED, and the intrinsic nature of the story might help the reader to overlook the rather lacklustre development of the plot. It's a flawed but still good story, with little meat but lots of interesting clackety bones.

Those familiar with Kurt Vonnegut Jr's previous work (and today who isn't?) might find THE BIG SPACE FUCK very much off his usual form. It is surely one of the most

cruel things that Vonnegut has ever turned out, even in its obvious self-satire. It is despairing, and perhaps somewhat evil, in its depiction of a plan to fire a rocket of frozen sperm to the Andromeda Galaxy, to assure the continuance of the human race which is dying in the earthly wastes of its lusting greed. It is heartless in its accusations directed toward the excesses and ignorance of the individuals who make up a sheep society, yet it is cynically, wickedly funny about the sickness behind the termination of a world. Schizophrenic, humorous yet joyless, it is an insane story of graveside manners which readers will likely categorise as madness and/or sadism for months to come. Personally I don't think it quite deserves the attention that it is bound to catch, considering the often-superior company in which it stands, but there's no doubt that the story is an attention-getter.

With a very limited production, T L Sherred has still become one of s f's most respected authors, and BOUNTY will reveal to the uninitiated precisely why. In two pages he takes an idea, a chillingly plausible idea, and lets it turn our concepts of justice, law, and order, into an upside-down cake laced with pretty poison, as a violent society re-adopts the old western code and citizens find the lure of a cash reward for killing armed robbers a satisfying control. It's a striking, pungent, subtly acid vision that pointedly condenses more about the violent nature of man than a library of sociological and Federal reports. It's not a smidgen less than excellent and one of the book's stellar achievements.

Surely all of us have wondered what it's like to be an astronaut, but how many of us have succeeded in pulling the figure down from the plastic, public pedestal to the sweat and smell and fragments of capricious thinking that keeps us, the rest of humanity, somehow "different" from the famed and adored/hated? K M O'Donnell's STILL-LIFE seeks to make us alter our perceptions of such a figure to fall more in line with ourselves, the real human beings. And if a nagging feeling in the back of your head insists that, of course, such men don't really react so humanly to a reality that holds to a fantastic experience like space travel - hmmm, then maybe you'd better check again your own concepts of reality and humanity?

I wish I could say that I liked H H Hollis' STONED COUNSEL. It is neatly written and has a clever idea to play around with - namely, the use of drugs to fight out court battles. Clients have a choice but lawyers are required to undergo drug sessions during which the facts and supposed facts are bandied about in hallucinogenic trips until the deduced truth is revealed, at least as far as can be ascertained by the computerised legal system. Yet Hollis concentrates so heavily on the kinky visual images of the drugged lawyers, images somehow pulled from the two minds and projected onto a screen, that the actual story becomes secondary to the Wham-Pop-Zowie display and is never more than a thin excuse for the stylistic method. While some of the descriptions are quite vivid and little of the story is actually dull, one merges from it all feeling that the dangerous vision has been sidestepped behind an extravagant facade.

According to the critic Damon Knight, Bernard Wolfe's s f novel, LIMBO, was "full of gallows humour... lavish, intricate masses of philosophical apology and analysis, as luminous as anything in Koestler... thoroughly peppered with puns... poetic and penetrating... a great achievement." Then, just to confuse us it seems, he also said, "it falls (far) short of perfection" and that the novel's central character is "never believable". Such strange comments are what prompted me to read the novel and it was only then that I grasped exactly what he meant. In the twenty years since the novel was first published, Wolfe has scrupulously avoided genre classification and now, like Vonnegut, can afford to piss off with "finger exercises" (as Wolfe calls them) in "the irrelevant, muzzy junk of s f" (again, Wolfe's phraseology).

I think that the two stories here, under the umbrella term, MONITORED DREAMS AND STRATEGIC CREMATIONS, show that Wolfe hasn't changed an iota in twenty years; he is far short of perfection yet still produces a great achievement. THE BISQUIT POSITION is literary napalm aimed at those who insist that such atrocities as Vietnam are

necessary to world peace, while THE GIRL WITH RAPID EYE MOVEMENTS tangles with the application of science on the home front, namely the scientific invasion of privacy. Ideas are hurled to and fro with orgiastic abandon, many of them flying out the window with the force of uncontrollable radicalism, never to be seen or heard from again; others are hounded and cornered, probable rabbits at the mercy of slaving hounds. Wolfe's characters, for all their engaging puns and disarmingly literate chatter, are still only mouthpieces who seldom confront their philosophical problems with anything resembling real sweat, dodging all issues with remarkable ease and dextrous fluid motions. I suppose that this, too, is part of Wolfe's condemnatory assessment of the current human condition, but it does keep the reader at a distance from the source of, and personal relationship to the challenge at hand. Yet in spite of such dazzling, if slightly annoying cleverness - including a bristling, razor-toothed afterword which concludes that "Humanism... is incompatible with scientism" and will leave romantic s f lovers screaming and drooling with shock and gross mental pains - Wolfe's ideas are not just the familiar no-nos and do-not-opens that we usually find in the popular versions of controversy examined through milk-glass. No, the stories are not, in the usual sense, s f - but I agree with Ellison, "Damn the rules." Read them!

Ellison tries to sustain the fake charisma about David Gerrold - whose only (and questionable) claim to fame thus far is a silly STAR TREK script and a few negligible stories<sup>1</sup> - and it's one of the few times I balk at the editor's super-hype method. WITH A FINGER IN MY I is as littered with hazy thinking as the author's concluding comments about definitions of sanity and public tolerance of antisocial behaviour. The story tells of a man whose "reality" is constantly shifting and changing in response to others' reality, but tells it in such a muddled and eventually nonsensical way that it never does more than flounder in silly syrup. The allusion to Lewis Carroll in a Cheshire-cat psychiatrist, along with an unending stream of dullard humour, pointedly reveals how far Gerrold must go before he can understand the levels of Carroll humour, much less emulate them.

Piers Anthony's IN THE BARN is flawed seriously by a contrived and preposterous framework, by needless and artificial detail of the protagonist's personal lusts (detailed in a too-willing compliance to Ellison's suggestion, as outlined in the introduction), and by a conclusion which is much too indecisive dramatically. Yet the story works in many ways, dealing as it does in shock value and quite ably doling out some eyebrow-lifting scenes in profusion. It takes place on an alternate Earth where domesticated mammals are nonexistent and women are bred, milked, and stocked like cattle. While Anthony can never quite provide Hitch, the investigator sent from our Earth to check out preliminary reports on Counter-Earth No 772, with a reasonable explanation for his (or Earth's) involvement in the alternate world(s), he succeeds very well once the preliminaries have been arranged and readers are likely to find themselves involved despite the dubious setup. Chop off the opening and closing paraphernalia and there is a sustained mood of horror, something very akin to the humanitarian urge to put one's self in the other's place before deciding to throw stones... then recoiling violently when the stones come anyway. The unresolved questions and suppositions lead one to suspect that Anthony could wrest a good novel from this if he could create a logical whole, but meanwhile the reader can ignore the cursory frills and enjoy the sustained unease which makes the heart of this story so disturbing.

Lee Hoffman's SOUNDLESS EVENING tells of the world of tomorrow - and, as the author states, "concerns now" - with no room for children except as one-for-one replacements in a stable population, but is so emotional that it neglects common sense. Infanticide is so irrational an act in all but the most primitive or unusual circumstances that its acceptance as an answer to population control must have more than the placid

1 Since this was written two years ago, I have had reason to soften somewhat my criticisms of Gerrold, mainly because of his well-done, if unexceptional novel, WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE; however, often he still displays an annoying and pretentious ego that makes me bristle when it creeps into his fiction.

acceptance that Hoffman projects here if it is to have some recognisable vision of terror. The only threat offered is overpopulation, and this speculation concocts tear-jerking as a fake rabbit out of a suspect hat. Nice ruse for a magic act, maybe, but quickly boring and quite untenable on any larger scale.

Next comes an innovation, a "viewword" story. This is a nonsense term devised by Ellison to describe Gahan Wilson's combination of the written word and drawings titled (SPOT) - actually written/drawn as a literal "spot" that I won't reproduce here for fear of giving the overworked editor of this magazine a heart attack. There is some light entertainment in reading/watching the spot expand until by story's end it consumes half a page, and like a mild but clever joke it works well as a one-time item. It doesn't have the power to amuse over and over like Wilson's cartoons or more complex literary humour, but the initial reading is funny and I think that's probably enough.

Joan Bernott's THE TEST-TUBE CREATURE, AFTERWARD is a thoughtful item about a man and his "pet", Hillary, an intelligent animal mutation which (who?) assumes a place in the man's life that, according to the author, should be filled by a human being. There's no armtwisting method to push the reader into thoughts of inverted, misguided, or disproportionate love; yet these are the thoughts inspired and implied by the story's conceptual eddies of perversion, eddies which draw up something buried deep within us all, I think, and might well reveal through this one interpretation the many substitutes that we accept in our emotional outlets, often without recognising their nature.

After the sinking of their ship, an engineer and woman journalist drift for days on a makeshift raft, the man racking his brain for methods to keep them alive while the woman slips irretrievably into madness. A study in isolation, Gregory Benford's AND THE SEA LIKE MIRRORS is made even more intriguing by the presence of aquatic aliens who leave cryptic messages for the humans and who seem to be manipulating a plan to take over, or at least to inhabit fully, the Earth. Benford slips occasionally into an annoyingly artsy-craftsy tone that makes his allusions to bigger-than-life sociology sound pretentious, but the story is reasonably successful in dealing with the isolation of individuals as a spearhead of drama.

Evelyn Lief's BED SHEETS ARE WHITE is a hate-letter to the general acceptance of hypocrisy in the American Way of Life, a projection showing the lack of response which is condemning us to a hell of our own making. Lief tells us that just around the corner are laws against true understanding, laws against honesty, laws against nature - i.e. a horrible and horrifyingly intense effort to shape us into schizo-perverts in the holy name of prejudice. The fact that I like the style in which Lief writes, as well as what she has to say, does not keep me from disliking this story very much. It loses all its dramatic impact in a simplification that assumes the reader will succumb to fright tactics for their own sake. Ms Lief, you assume too much.

Ellison speaks of various writers who are doomed to be crushed by fame, in his introduction to two stories by James Sallis, AT THE FITTING SHOP and 53RD AMERICAN DREAM, with the over-title, TISSUE. I find that one of the mentioned authors, Horace McCoy, is one I had previously thought about when reading Sallis' works, which often reflect the fatalistic, microcosmic vision that McCoy employed so accurately in his classic short novel, THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY? Trying to explain Sallis' stories in plot synopses is not unlike trying to embrace geophysics with apples and oranges - the medium simply is not the message. The reader is invited to bring his own interpretations to Sallis. I will say only that the stories reflect forms of fear ("New York terrifies me... and... is somehow what it's all about," says Sallis) which humanity has spawned in a world of sophistication and rampant null values. You might or might not like Sallis - I like him - but it's impossible to just ignore him. He knows the nerve centres.

Elouise, a human specimen of perfect health on a world where such perfection is an exception in a populace that suffers from almost every conceivable malady, is examined by the planet's Council of Doctors, who conclude that she is indeed disgustingly healthy. What is compelling about Josephine Saxton's ELOUISE AND THE DOCTORS OF THE PLANET PERGAMON is the fact that Elouise's plight is not the only issue of the story, the usual overinflated method of half-wit writers who facetiously bet moral points only when playing with a stacked deck. Saxton uses Elouise as both a character study and as a mirror, detailing her desire to find a place for herself where the only acceptance she has is in her own head - a head subjected to cultural pressures, a head primed to explode in new (yet quite old) directions. I have not always agreed with Saxton's fictional psychological analyses, yet my objections often seem more instinctual than rational and I have trouble refuting her completely. This time I agree with her - which, sigh, means someone out there will be screaming: No, no! - but however one reacts to her ideas it's a sure bet that she can trap both the wary and unwary, the believers and unbelievers, in her skilful spell. A good story.

Ken McCullough's CHUCK BERRY, WON'T YOU PLEASE COME HOME is a tall tale about a tick which grows to monstrous proportions, fed on blood stolen from a laboratory and cared for by humans who find in him a special rapport. Ellison gives the author a super-super-hype for "writing mad things with the pen of a poet", and while the story is mildly amusing and very hip, I will say only that it seems to require a special taste that I don't seem to have developed fully. However, McCullough seems to be another new writer who merits a careful watch.

The discovery of a small group of Neanderthals living in mountain caves in Europe sounds like something that even the <sup>most</sup> hackish of s f writers would regard as foolish in this day and age. What a delight to find David Kerr's EPIPHANY FOR ALIENS treating it with a respect that has no relation to maudlin sympathy or contrived adventure or to any of the funny-looking hybrids. With clean and polished prose Kerr creates a fertile psychological probe that involves the reader personally, while concurrently revealing a socio-cultural overview as closely examined as the characters who reflect it. This one is wonderfully fresh and seems to prove that even the oldest cliché is never quite dead.

The gap between art and science has usually been considered an unbridgable one, and while scientific gadgets have come into play already in the creation of art, the purposes and quality of the two fields are held as opposite. In EYE OF THE BEHOLDER Burt K Filer sees the possibility of union, and finds that the "romantics among us" are possibly a deadly anchor in humanity's progressive march. Can instinctive artistic genius uncover an applicable method to find a pathway to the stars? Incredible as it might seem, Filer presents a theory which seems both scientifically (in a speculative way) and psychologically sound and provides a solid foundation for a stimulating, very well-done short story.

Richard Hill's MOTH RACE is so much a story for our time that it is difficult to classify it within the broad spectrum of s f, since that tends to lessen the immediacy of its important message. Hill says that it is a "conspiracy story and it is not pleasant" - a mild way of phrasing it since this is surely one of the most unpleasant and shuddersome stories in all of ADV. We are shown a world kept under remarkable control through the use of "easypills" and the excitement of a yearly Race - the lucky spectators, randomly (?) chosen, get to watch from raceside bleachers - where a few brave souls gamble with their lives, racing around a two-mile track in cars likely to smash at any moment against randomly (?) rising and falling metal walls. The Champion, the only man ever to have won this race, watches from the trackside, looking and acting bored though his unique status entitles him to limitless material wealth. Yet we do not get the story from the Champion but instead from a trackside viewer, John Van Dorn, a nonentity who embodies not only the mindless emotion of the masses but also the nagging queries which seize the reader from beginning to end - who controls the race? how? why? Such questions cannot help but be coupled with the ones we ask today - who? how? why? What is really shocking is

our own uncertainty; if we truly believe that we have grasped the Truth, how must we react when we discover that we are irrevocably wrong? Hill is not an answer man. He seeks only to make us aware of how unaware we might be of the formulae at the base of reality. Must we be as gods even to attempt an answer? The paradox and terror of Hill's memorable story dumps it all into the reader's lap; he might jump and run or stare and puzzle over it, so at least we have that choice, don't we?... or do we? (Brrr, even thinking about it scares me all over again...)

The notable thing about Leonard Tushnet's IN RE GLOVER is that it reads like sharp, stinging black humour - involving the voluminous legal tangles that arise when a rich man with terminal cancer decides to have himself frozen, to be revived when a cure is found - yet in spite of the humour of heirs, lawyers, corporations, and hangers-on who hassle definitions in a series of courtrooms, which is very funny, the story stems from the sober theme of a morality dependent on a confused society's confused concept of morality. I fear only that some readers will accept the humour and ignore the gravity, but I will not blame Tushnet if that happens. He's written a fine story that deserves to be read, and it's very possible that his humorous technique will work to impress rather than depress the message. I hope so.

Ben Bova, editor of ANALOG magazine, homefront of the "hard" s f tales, writes a Women's Lib s f story? Well, ZERO GEE certainly reads that way, like something meant to follow up a Cosmo centrefold. The story involves three people orbiting the Earth: an Air Force astronaut, a pretty young female photographer for LIFE - well, pretend it's been revived - and a woman scientist whose primary duty seems to be to chaperone the other two. The unexpected thing about Bova's approach is the lack of a technical mishap or somesuch thing to provide drama; instead he concentrates on the astronaut's effort to seduce the young lady, fully convinced that his masculine charms and the excitement of zero-gae copulation will turn the lady into a willing sex toy. There are surprises in store for the astronaut, but the reader will find that even off the Earth the psychological territory is overfamiliar, with the offensively dominant male receiving his just desserts and the submissive female revealed (surprise?) to have her own cleverly disguised dominant nature. All in all it's just plain silly.

Dean R Koontz's A MOUSE IN THE WALLS OF THE GLOBAL VILLAGE is a ruthlessly horror-filled story of the danger to the individual in a McLuhanised future. Koontz plucks the emotional strings of a "Stunted", a man who is immune to the procedure which has turned most of the world's population into Empathists who are able to communicate in direct mind-to-mind contact, and shows us a fate perhaps even more disturbing than that of the present-day Negro or homosexual (both diverse minority groups who are granted only a limited amount of tolerance and/or acceptance). The story is well-written and effective if one wishes to become involved with the protagonist only on an emotional level; but on close examination the logic gets very shaky as social extrapolation, and Koontz has obviously avoided the more serious problem of attempting to explain an outcast who has chosen his way of life. Koontz encapsulates the content very well in the story's closing scene: "But sorrow, after all, does absolutely nothing. It is much like holy water. It is not even used to quench the thirst." This is the sort of comment which reveals the tunnel-vision directed upon the story's unwilling victim of chance; yet even a limited viewpoint might be channelled in meaningful directions and I think that the story is worth reading, flaws and all.

GETTING ALONG by James Blish and Judith Ann Lawrence is a parody of various s f/fantasy writers (with one exception, unless Blish considers a certain Victorian sex novel a fantasy) that is so studded with "in" jokes and puns of a quasi-fannish slant that the uninitiated are doomed to miss much of the humour, some of which centres on reader reaction to the authors parodied as much as to the authors themselves. I won't spoil the fun of the guessing game for those who want to check out their own knowledge of the genre, but I admit that the whole effect seems to me awfully flat and uninspired, even for a story which, the authors say, is "only a game". The best moments are ones of criticism - Blish, ignoring his critical bent seeping through,

claims that "the story isn't literary criticism" - for example, his casual slash at an author whose repeated conflict with English prose was often a losing battle: "What sort of creature could make so magical a sound?... scaly and winged, in some parts of the valley they dangled from every participle." (Now if that isn't literary criticism, I'd like to know exactly what the hell it is!) There are moments here and there that might coax up a few chuckles, but with twenty pages it isn't sustained enough to be very successful.

The really striking thing about TOTENBUCH by A Parra (y Figuerado) is that it is an experiment which might or might not work as intended by the author. Going by Parra's concluding explanation of what he tried to do, I found it interesting to observe, retrospectively, that it worked for me - but exactly the reverse of the way intended. I experienced the sense of helplessness that he wanted, but for reasons other than those he mentions. I felt no response to his "promise of sado-masochism" and no disappointment in that he delivered "nothing"; yet Parra says that his attempt at ambiguity is the remarkable strength behind what he set out to convey, "the real experience of frustration". In places the technique is brilliant, and however it works with each reader seems less important than the likelihood that, by hook or by crook, it works. If it is beyond some readers' "powers of comprehension", as Ellison warns, it is probable that even those readers will not fail to detect the integrity and craft in this fine bit of fiction. I am impressed. More, please, Mr Parra.

Written as entries in the journal of Oliver Wendall Regan, a geneticist whose Nobel-prize-winning "complete genetic map of the mouse" lends his fellow travellers to dub him "The Star Mouse", Thomas M Disch's THINGS LOST takes a delightful turn by saying much more in innuendo than it says in Regan's attempts at straightforward reportage. As with much of Disch's work, most notably the strange novel, CAMP CONCENTRATION, it is touched with bits of genuine excellence that, in the end, fall just short of the elan which graces truly memorable work. It is a very fine story with telling (read: depressing) insights into dark corridors between human immortality and death; yet when all's said and done, one looks back at the characters and their day-by-day, desperation-posing-as-fey-psychological-games chatter with the same eye that Disch uses - clinical, watchful, and very dispassionate, removed to a distance by the vacuum of a lens, the same kind which bridges the technologist and the microbe yet keeps them on two very separate planes. Disch tries to close this gap, most noticeably with an early reference to an anonymous child silently watching the immortals take to the stars, but his caste of "stable solids" (as Regan calls them) are just too stable and too stolid to involve the reader on any level other than intellectual curiosity. Disch is playing a game of solitaire. I'm fascinated watching him, but just never quite involved.

Small or no, a mouse giving birth to a mouse is wondrous; a writer at the same feat, huffing, puffing, blowing, and groaning, is wondrous too. Also embarrassing and tiresome. Richard A Lupoff's WITH THE BENTFIN BOOMER BOYS ON LITTLE OLD NEW ALABAMA is a laborious effort to produce a mouse, and the work involved for the reader (and, presumably, the writer) to get through such tribulations just doesn't seem worth the effort once the feat is accomplished. Lupoff has taken pains to involve quite a group in the birth process: the white race of N'Alabama is described in a slangy, short-cut prose which is an obvious culture-satire of the Negro ghetto language (with nods to Joyce for word (dis)array and puns); the blacks of N'Haiti, at war with the whites, are progressive, ordered, and terribly sane, but have trouble maintaining their "good" life as the war effort drains their supplies and productive balance; and the S'tscha on N'Yu-Atlanchi, diminutive human zygotes adapted to live in the saline oceans, cannot even contemplate their impending fate as instruments of desperate measure in the black-white war. All the stylistic extravagances aside - some quite good, others less so - the story is basically nonsensical space-opera, complete with an outer-space battle that owes more to the early pulps and comics than to the "new wave" which permeates the style. And if that isn't enough, Lupoff has done his research on voodoo - he even lists his source books, fer Gawd's sake - and

has decided apparently that if Richard Matheson could provide a pseudo-scientific explanation for vampires (in I AM LEGEND), it sure as hell can't be too difficult to give a pseudo-rationale for a futuristic version of zombies. And, heavens, it just goes on and on like this, scabbled and scrambled from here and there, occasionally amusing, often boring, never succeeding in getting it all together. And after all that labour, all that work - squeek! a mouse! Through a character at story's end, Lupoff excuses himself: "...but what the hell, the boy hasta earn a living." With the help of his diarrhetic typewriter, Richard A Lupcff earns his living. Hoo-hc---hum-ray.

M John Harrison, who self-admittedly once wrote "veiled sexual allegories", has apparently not given them up, and in LAMIA MUTABLE the veils are so patchwork that no connections with Keats and medieval superstition can upgrade the paucity of imagination in this jigsaw tale. For one thing, the author simply puts too many irons in a very small fire (which goes out long before we reach the ironic climax of transmutation), and while his trio of grotesque characters invade the "ash flats of Wisdom", the reader begins to realise that Harrison's effort "to pose as many unanswered questions as possible" is the sheerest and unworthiest effrontery. A very unsatisfying effort, I'm afraid.

As Robin Scott related the sad, empty life of con-man Sidney Becket in LAST TRAIN TO KANKAKEE, I kept thinking - oh, yes, I've read this sort of thing before. When Sidney dies of heart failure during a Tiajuana lust tryst and his wife stores his body in a secluded freezer, I thought - oh, no, not another cyronics/revival story. And when Sidney awakens in the future and finds all his wants satisfied but boredom driving him toward suicide, I thought - what else can he do, it's all so familiar? And when he finds that death isn't exactly what he'd expected and that man's relationship with God is - well, do you see? Scott kept telling more, I kept saying it's all been done, and damn if I didn't keep reading and wondering what could possibly come next. Scott led me to believe that he couldn't surprise me, yet in the end he did just that, and I think his story's a good one.

"Kaheris, the unknown astronaut, existential hero" is described by Andrew Weiner in EMPIRE OF THE SUN as "an animated shadow in a sequence of disasters", his adventures admittedly "a kind of tribute to the comic books". What I want to know is why should Weiner try so hard to create this comic-book schema of s f cliches - War with Mars, government wheels within wheels, the mysterious ever-present Man in the Mask, the concluding nova of the sun - when the comics relay the feeling of pure exploding colour in an exaggerated admixture of fantasies with a much truer sense of absurd excitement. The story seems well enough done for what it has to say, but it seems too much a personal literary exercise to have much interest for anyone other than the author.

Terry Carr is another fine writer who can use well-worn material yet give it that excellent imagery which flashes so brightly that one hardly notices the familiarity of the plot. In OZYMANDIAS, the mutants have inherited the world following an atomic war, grouping into two clans, the robbers and the thinkers. The latter have been destroyed by the former who, like all groups seeking to retain tradition and fearful of true knowledge, obtain their power by stealing it from the past, in this case by rapping the vaults of materials left from the pre-war world. The vaults are not only storage bins for supplies but also contain the bodies of cyronic subjects who await revival. The old and the new can be a dangerous mix, as the robbers know from past experience with hidden bombs, deadly gases, etc, yet the danger is more than unidirectional, as Carr shows in a dramatic conclusion in which, if it wasn't already clear, everyone has lost. Not a remarkably original story, to be sure, but handled slickly and quite readable.

As with the first volume, Ellison closes ADV with something he calls a "smasher". In the first book it was a sex story by Samuel R Delany, AYE, AND GOMORRAH.., about a new perversion spawned as a byproduct of the technological age. James Tiptree Jr's

THE MILK OF PARADISE is quite similar to Delany's in that it too deals with perversion, but it is a far more disquieting story in that the sex is also inexplicit in detail but much more explicit in suggestion. What is so weird about this story is that what Tiptree says might not have nearly the impact of what one thinks he says. His reality of human sexual fulfillment has the diamond-hard glitter of all facets trained on a single objective - sexual perversion is relative. In a society that is conditioned to "missionary" sex, anything done only for pleasure is perverse; so in a human society, where is the place for one who has been conditioned since birth to respond to a non-human form of love? Imagine such a person being used by humans, curious as to his response. (This concept explodes in some of the story's most horrifying moments, on a par with a detailed description of the sexual molestation of a child, a confusion of innocence with sophistication.) Ellison is understandably enthused with this story and I think he's right to be; but if it turns out to be the award-winner he suggests, one has to give the common readership more credit for intelligence than has been granted so far. To be honest, I don't think that this story will be very popular - but then, I'm brutally cynical - for it's much too close to the orgasmic core of sexuality and most people will be prone to reject it out of disgust and fear. Such reaction should only demonstrate how good the story really is, however, and I'm convinced that everyone should at least try to contemplate and face up to the bitter forthrightness that Tiptree has brought to this remarkable story.

Finally, Ellison gratefully gives a page-length credit at book's end to Ed Emshwiller, who did the fine illustrations which form an integral part of Doubleday's excellent packaging.

And so, 760 pages later, AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS reaches its conclusion. To those curious and patient readers who have travelled the length of the book with me here, it will seem that in quality the book is inconsistent and loaded with the ups and downs which seem to mark the majority of the original anthologies. True, true, but in looking back I find that even many of the least impressive stories are ones that I can remember clearly and which have an identity of their own, giving the book a sandpaper-abrasive texture that is far more appealing than the sad bland puddings so common to the genre. And the best stories - well, nothing more need be said except that 1973's awards list will surely be sagging with the weight of nominations from this remarkable collection.

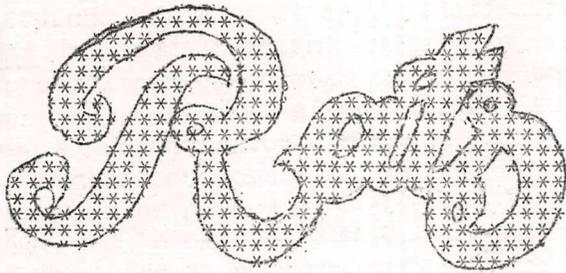
AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS is a sizzling book. Take it slowly, savour it, cherish it. To read it is to assimilate the microcosm and macrocosm in one heady gulp - and if that doesn't blow your mind, brother, you must be dead. It'll be a year or more before Ellison gets the final, massive DV volume to us, so I'll leave you, readers, with bated breath. And you, Harlan baby, get your ass in gear. We wait...

- Richard Delap 1972

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NOTABLY NOTED - continued from page 4

WINGS (McIntyre); WITH MORNING COMES MISTFALL (George R R Martin); CONSTRUCTION SHACK (Clifford Simak), EDITOR: Ben Bova; Terry Carr; Ed Ferman; Robert Silverberg; Ted White; Donald A Wolheim. DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: GENESIS II; SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN; SLEEPER; SOYLENT GREEN; WESTWORLD. PRO ARTIST: Vincent DiFate; Frank Frazetta; Kelly Freas; Jack Gaughan; John Schoenherr. FANZINE: ALGOL (Andy Porter); ALIEN CRITIC (Richard E Geis); LOCUS (Charlie and Dena Brown); OUTWORLDS (Bill and Joan Bowers). FAN ARTIST: Alicia Austin; Grant Canfield; Tim Kirk; Bill Rotsler; Arthur Thomson (ATom). FAN WRITER: Laura Basta; Richard E Geis; Susan Glicksohn; Jacqueline Lichtenberg; Sandra Miesel. CAMPBELL AWARD - NEW WRITER: Jesse Miller; Thomas Monteleone; Spider Robinson; Guy Snider; Lisa Tuttle. GANDALF AWARD - FANTASY: Poul Anderson; L Sprague de Camp; Fritz Leiber; J R R Tolkien. (Details from LOCUS.)



## R E V I E W S

BRUCE GILLESPIE

Every amateur book reviewer really wants to be paid for his efforts, and allowed to reach the wide world Out There. Last year it was my turn. Soon after Peter and Laurel Olszewski began to publish that scurrilous, blasphemous journal RATS (banned in every parochial school in Australia) they asked me to write book reviews for the magazine. I was a professional at last.

Well, not quite. RATS' rates put me only just inside the "professional" category, and I'm fairly sure that only about two of the magazine's readers ever read my reviews (and I'm not sure who the other person was). However, the following reviews make up a very high proportion of all the writing that I did during 1973; besides, the column gave me a reason for writing at least 1,200 words of properly thought-out prose every month. With a few exceptions, here are the RATS REVIEWS I did before RATS ceased publication abruptly after the July issue. You will notice that in some of these reviews I have adopted a style that is quite different from my usual brand of inspired rambling. I tried to write "for the audience", although not even the magazine's editors were quite sure who made up the audience. I tried to adopt a style that put over an opinion in the least words possible, and packed the maximum meaning into those few words, without losing basic lucidity.

I had a completely free choice of books to review, so I tried to make a mixture of books I wanted to push (such as s f and Auslit) and generally available books that I thought would appeal to the audience. I hope that s f readers enjoy the reviews of non-s f as much as I enjoyed writing them. I've left out some reviews: those of DESCHOOLING SOCIETY (discussed much better in SFC 31), SO (it deserves much more than 600 words), and THE DEATH OF THE FAMILY (since I have a much better review on file). In some of the following reviews, I have added paragraphs which did not appear in RATS.

Finally: RATS succumbed to the economic forces which operate the newspaper and magazine industry in this country. One last edition appeared while I was overseas, the Olszewskis found the financial support they needed... and then the independent newspaper chain which had been distributing RATS changed its outlets from milk bars to conventional newsagents. As I heard the story, the newsagents would not distribute RATS. The Olszewskis have survived, but not their unique publication; thanks, Peter and Laurel, for including me in the fun while it lasted.

"Among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present, and the future."

Billy Pilgrim was born in Ilium, New York, grew up there, was drafted into the US army during World War II, was captured by the Germans, transported across Germany to the city of Dresden, became one of the few people living there who survived the American fire-bombing in 1945, escaped from Germany, returned to USA, married a rich girl who was so ugly that nobody else would marry her, lost his wife in a car accident, was captured by a Tralfamadorian flying saucer in 1967, and because of his experiences on the planet of Tralfamadore, spent the rest of his life trying to convince people that they should not worry about dying. Also, Billy Pilgrim becomes "unstuck in time" so that all these events seem to be happening to him simultaneously all his life.

That's a plot?

Well, try this for a plot.

The American science fiction writer Kurt Vonnegut Jr (who doesn't like to be called a science fiction writer these days) was one of a small group of American soldiers who survived the fire-bombing of Dresden, during which more people were killed in one night by conventional bombs than during the atomic-bomb attack on Hiroshima in 1945. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Vonnegut tried to work out a way in which he could tell the story of his experiences adequately. In the first chapter of his book he tells how he finally got around to it. Finally he adopted what I call the "Looking Glass Effect". You will remember that in Lewis Carroll's THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, Alice found that the only way she could get to the top of Looking Glass Hill was to walk in the opposite direction. In the same way, Kurt Vonnegut could only bring himself to write about Dresden when he abandoned his original intention to write a bitter, factual account.

So the "plot" of the book is really made up from all the crazy, funny people and inventions from his other five novels (including Mr Rosewater and Kilgore Trout from GOD BLESS YOU, MR ROSEWATER, and the Tralfamadorians from THE SIRENS OF TITAN) mixed with the sad, entirely believable life of Billy Pilgrim, and Kurt Vonnegut's own observations about life in the twentieth century. Billy Pilgrim stands firm as a symbol of all the harm that war can do to people. He and the other characters remain human despite the strenuous efforts of strange outer-space creatures and American bomber pilots to destroy their humanity.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE has many depths to it: for instance, Vonnegut claims in the first chapter that he has never written a story with a villain in it. But he comes very close to making the zany Tralfamadorians into his villains. They tell Billy Pilgrim that all moments in time are of equal value, that death does not matter. Vonnegut sets out to show what death really means. (Each time anything dies in the novel, Vonnegut adds the phrase, "So it goes." "Body lice and bacteria and fleas were dying by the billions. So it goes." Or, "'How does the universe end?' said Billy. 'We blow it up, experimenting with a new fuel for our flying saucers. A Tralfamadorian test pilot presses a starter button, and the whole Universe disappears.' So it goes.") Billy ends up brushing aside thoughts of death; Vonnegut shows us why we must be angry about every death.

In one passage Vonnegut writes that "the German reserves were violent, windburned, bristly men. They had teeth like piano keys." In another passage Billy Pilgrim leans over his decrepit mother to catch what he thinks are her last words. "At last she accumulated enough energy to whisper this complete sentence: 'How did I get so old?'"

And what was it really like to live through the fire-bombing of Dresden? "There were sounds like giant footsteps above. Those were sticks of high-explosive bombs. The giants walked and walked."

If these random quotations don't send you running to buy a copy of this book, nothing will. It's one of the best American novels for many years.

(RATS, No 4, February 1973)

Peter Mathers

THE WORT PAPERS (Cassell Australia, 1972, 282 pages, \$5.50)

Is it possible to live in Australia and stay sane? Is it possible to write good novels in Australia and still eat three good meals a day? In his latest novel, THE WORT PAPERS, Peter Mathers asks the first question; after having read the book and found out something about its genesis, I'm asking the second question.

According to the Average Glen-Monash-cream-brick-veneered-8.15-train-commuter Australian, all of the characters in THE WORT PAPERS are mad. Yet most readers would find something of themselves in the people of this book. So who is trusting whose definition of madness, and who is wrong?

Thomas Wort represents one kind of madness. He lives one kind of life but believes in another. He is an executive for Mediums Limited, has a nice wife and several nice children, and travels the jet routes around Australia. But he sees that Mediums Limited and its controllers are engaged only in futile and absurd activities. Thomas betrays himself because he doesn't get out of the company. He tries to put up and shut up, but slowly he is going mad.

THE WORT PAPERS also tells the story of William Wort, who is Thomas' father. William has the madness of false expectations. He lets his very woolly ideas push aside his love for his family, so he and they wander around from one poor farm to another. After one extraordinary adventure in the Kimberley Ranges and several years spent overseas during World War II, he begins to find some sort of balance in his life.

But already he has passed on his madness to his son Percy, who is supposed to have written THE WORT PAPERS and handed them on posthumously to his "big bro" Thomas. Percy is a person To Whom Things Happen. Percy and his father attempt to help an old tramp who drops a match which begins a bushfire in which Percy narrowly escapes from being burned to death. Peter Mathers calls this section, "Journey and Employers (& obligatory bushfire)". Percy buys a jeep; a woman tries to steal spare parts from the jeep; when Percy catches her, she invites him home, lets him sleep under her bed for the night, and next day sets out with him to drive to Alice Springs. Percy is always poor, always in trouble, and always funny. After reading THE WORT PAPERS, the reader must admit that Percy is not mad. He just thinks, acts, loves, rides motor cycles, and loses jobs much faster than anybody else he meets.

Percy Wort is a visionary, not a madman. But Australians often mistake the one type of person for the other. He is a visionary because the author, Peter Mathers, is a visionary. Few Australian writers of any type enjoy the exciting qualities of words as much as Mathers does; almost no others can use them in such a dazzling way. Time and again the reader might think that Mathers plays with words just for the hell of it - until suddenly we realise that every page must have been sweated over, line by line, word by word. We read the book for the first time and it doesn't seem to have a shape; it seems to be only brilliant yarns connected to surrealistic stories, decorated with puns, jokes, and rambling asides. But Mathers writes, "Caves have so far featured several times in this series of recollections. (Caves of recollections joined with one another by passages long and narrow.)" "Caves" like the story of Percy's frenetic motor-bike ride down the southern coast of NSW; "passages" like

Percy's "stories for children", which are really great short stories contained within the larger framework of the novel.

If THE WORT PAPERS is "about" anything, it is "about" the experience of seeing clearly in a country whose people are committed to closing their eyes.

All of this answers the second question that I asked at the beginning of this review. No, it is not possible to write good novels in Australia and still eat well; not if you're Peter Mathers, that is.<sup>1</sup> So far the book has been nearly ignored, although the author has worked for five years on it. The rumour is that Mathers lives in a real garret; just like all those poor, starving, nineteenth-century writers you used to hear about. In another country, in another era, where and when good novels had the buyers they deserved, Mathers would have made his name and his fortune with this book. In hardback, THE WORT PAPERS costs \$5.50, three dollars less than a recent (paperback!) book about the Rolling Stones. With all due deference to Mick and the boys, you'll still have THE WORT PAPERS on the shelf thirty years after the Stones have been forgotten. And you'll enjoy its lunatic sanity just as much then as now.

(RATS, No 5)

Hermann Hesse  
STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER STAR (Noonday Press N432, \$2.10)  
JOURNEY TO THE EAST (Noonday Press N109, \$1.70)

Noonday Press has recently released STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER STAR, by Hermann Hesse. It is a collection of short stories originally published, misleadingly, as a collection of children's stories.

One of the best stories in the book is FLUTE DREAM. The unnamed story-teller's father gives him a flute and sends him off into the world, saying, "It is now high time for you to see the world and gain knowledge." Playing his flute, the story-teller charms a girl, Brigitte, whom he meets by the side of a river, and they spend an idyllic day together. Brigitte must leave him; he wanders on. By the seaside he meets an old man who invites him to get into his boat. They sail away from the shore and the sky darkens. When the story-teller protests that he wants to turn back, the old man says, "There is no way back. One must continue to go forward if one wants to fathom the world. Sail on, wherever you wish." The story-teller takes the helm and keeps on sailing into the unknown. The old man disappears. The story-teller stares at his own reflection in the water; the face that looks back at him is that of the old man.

The story that began as a children's tale has transformed itself into a penetrating parable about the whole of human existence. The young man meets "himself" in another physical form, but he must agree to venture on into a new kind of spiritual world before he can "become" himself. The two opposites - the young, innocent traveller and the wise, old philosopher - have always been possible parts of the same character. Now they have become joined into one.

In this and all the other stories of STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER STAR, the reader meets simple words, simple ideas (especially Romantic ideas of the nineteenth century), and a simple structure (that of the fairy tale). The reader follows a story with some interest and gradually begins to read faster and faster, sensing that the writer is performing some unexpected, mysterious tricks. Then, the end! and a burst of some kind of revelation. Hesse has changed all the elements of his story into something new. And often the reader is left scratching his head, wondering just what happened.

The same thing happens in JOURNEY TO THE EAST, which is a short novelette, although Noonday Press pretends that it is a novel. JOURNEY TO THE EAST shows Hesse's interest in Eastern culture far more obviously than the early stories do. In part 1 of JOURNEY TO THE EAST the story-teller, H H, tells how he joined a mysterious group of

<sup>1</sup> However, Mr Mathers received a grant from the Literature Board in 1973.

people called the League. Priest-like, the brothers of the League set out on a pilgrimage that they call the Journey to the East. But nobody has a clear idea of the direction of the journey, which becomes complex and even magical. Members of the League travel all over the world, and even through all time. The members of the League must renounce all worldly pursuits and perform many esoteric religious ceremonies.

One of the brothers disappears from the group; the story-teller says that the disappearing brother must have been the person who seems to have stolen from every other member of the band. The story-teller becomes dissatisfied with the quest, and soon leaves the League. At this stage, the "plot" of the book seems to have finished at the end of part 1. But, as in many of the STRANGE NEWS stories, Hesse gently and firmly leads the story-teller (and the reader) back to the "real" plot of the story. Hesse shows how his story-teller tries to rediscover the League and his own sense of purpose. The ending of JOURNEY TO THE EAST is breathtaking; it is one of the finest examples of Hesse's own version of "heightened awareness".

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Only a few years ago, the readers of Hermann Hesse rightly regarded themselves as members of a small minority among readers. They were lucky if they could buy translations of any of Hesse's books in Australia (although STEPPENWOLF has been available for some years from Penguin, and there was an early American paperback edition of MAGISTER LUDI). Yet, by 1973 Hermann Hesse has become one of the best-selling writers in university campus bookstores in USA, Europe, and now in Australia. Why?

Probably brilliant sociologists would take millions of words to answer this question. The simple answer is that Hesse was forty years ahead of his time. Also he was reviled in his native Germany because he hated war. He had a passion for Eastern culture when most Europeans still regarded the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese cultures as the uncivilised products of "natives from the colonies". Hesse explored the idea of existentialism before the word was invented. His ideas about self-discovery sound very like the anti-psychiatry methods of Laing and Cooper. Hesse showed new possibilities of religious experience when sophisticated Europeans were still trying to forget about old forms of religion, and hadn't yet discovered that they might need something to put in its place.

And, more than anything else, Hesse realised forty years ago that modern technological civilisation would betray its admirers. In his work, Hesse reaches towards a "heightened awareness" of spiritual existence; this kind of quest has become fashionable again only recently.

#### Anna Kavan

ICE (Picador 330 23442, \$1.40)

In her novel ICE, Anna Kavan also uses simple words, simple structures, and simple concepts - and ends up with something that is just too simple altogether. Anna Kavan is not a word-magician like Hermann Hesse, although she does try very hard.

In his introduction to the novel, Brian Aldiss is more complimentary than I can be. According to Aldiss the "walls of ice" that the novel describes "represent more than the mysterious evils closing in on the author. They have a universal application." Unfortunately, they don't.

Aldiss also says that Anna Kavan was a "born writer" and that the whole novel "is as alert and lively and mobile as a good spy thriller." Unfortunately, neither statement is true.

Many readers will not worry whether ICE is a "good novel" or not. They will remain fascinated by the way in which this book describes some of the visions of a woman who was slowly dying of heroin poisoning. For instance, Brian Aldiss, England's best science fiction writer, thought that ICE was the best s f novel of 1965, although the publisher had not labelled it as such. Aldiss wrote to Anna Kavan, expressing his admiration for the book. She wrote back, was very surprised to discover that ICE might be science fiction, and met Aldiss. A year after their meeting, Aldiss read that Anna Kavan had died.

So ICE is interesting mainly because of the circumstances in which it was written. Unfortunately it holds more interest for a psychiatrist or a student of abnormal psychology than for someone who wants to read a good novel.

In ICE, Kavan's hero chases the heroine endlessly from one snowy country to another while walls of ice gradually cover the earth. Endlessly the hero describes his quarry as "silver-haired", a very thin girl with "big eyes" and "long lashes". Sometimes the walls of ice advance and sometimes they retreat far from the scene of the action. On a surface level, the story makes sense. On an emotional level, it makes little sense. It is just flat and trivial. ICE is a recurrent hallucination, almost certainly drug-induced, but the author does not have the verbal powers to make the reader share the hallucination.

But many readers will remain fascinated by the way that ICE reveals a mind disintegrating under intolerable stress. As for Brian Aldiss - just this once, he made an error of judgment.

Peter McCabe & Robert D Schonfeld

APPLE TO THE CORE: THE UNMAKING OF THE BEATLES (Pocket Books 78172, \$1.50)

This book will be bought by anyone who is interested in the career of the Beatles, or in the development of pop music during the last decade. Crisply and succinctly APPLE TO THE CORE describes how Brian Epstein discovered the Beatles, what his discovery did to the Beatles, how the Beatles behaved after Epstein died, how the Beatles established Apple Corps and declared, "All you need is love", and how other people picked up the pieces after the Beatles found that they needed something more.

The hero of this book is the Beatles' first manager, Brian Epstein. Its villains include almost everyone else, including the foolish Beatles themselves. The subtitle of the book is "The Unmaking of the Beatles", and McCabe and Schonfeld show what a desperately miserable business Apple Corps became during its final stages.

Although I admire the huge amount of research that the authors must have undertaken, I still have two bones to pick with them about APPLE TO THE CORE. Why must they make the second part of the book almost as detailed and boring as a stockbroker's report?

And why don't the authors connect the Beatles' personal difficulties more closely with the variations in their music? It's true that they give a good account of why the making of SERGEANT PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND coincided with their abandonment of concert tours - but there are many musical details that they might have discussed more fully.

My guess is that McCabe and Schonfeld know far more about company finance than they do about pop music.

(RATS, No 6, April 1973)

Norman Spinrad

THE IRON DREAM (Avon N448, 255 pages, \$1.25)

Adolf Hitler?

You've probably heard the name. Saw it in a science fiction magazine, perhaps. He emigrated to USA from Germany in 1919 after dabbling briefly in right-wing politics. While learning English in New York, he became a sidewalk artist, an illustrator for science fiction magazines, and in 1935 he made his debut as a science fiction writer. In 1955 he won a posthumous Hugo Award (the Oscar of the s f world) for his final novel.

Now, after many years out of print, you can read LORD OF THE SWASTIKA, Adolf Hitler's last and most popular book, and only Hugo winner.

It's an exciting yarn. The hero is Feric Jagger, who is a genotypically pure human, "a figure of startling and unexpected nobility". At last, a real s f hero you can admire! In the country where he is living temporarily, Feric is surrounded by horrible, roughly humanoid creatures. Feric wants to migrate to Heldon, where only true men live. At the border into Heldon Feric outwits the guards who are under the influence of the utterly evil Dominators. Feric is horrified when he finds that the only true nation on earth is also riddled by the Dominators and mutant tribes. You should read how Feric lets loose the pure psychic energy of his genes to make everybody obey him. Talk about exciting! Then there's the scene where the people finally get rid of the Dominators. And during the biggest scene of all Adolf Hitler really makes your hair curl when he shows Feric Jagger's army blowing up the entire Empire of Zind!

They don't write science-fiction like that any more.

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But Adolf Hitler didn't emigrate to America in 1919, did he? And Russia and China are not the sole dominant powers on our world. And in that other universe, Adolf Hitler confined his fantasies to words that became the wish dreams of s f readers.

That other universe is the invention of Norman Spinrad, author of EUG JACK BARRON, and of one of the funniest s f stories ever written, THE LAST HURRAH OF THE GOLDEN HORDE. Spinrad writes just the book that Hitler would have written if he hadn't become dictator of Germany. The curious thing is that LORD OF THE SWASTIKA (disguised as THE IRON DREAM) reads very much like half the serials that still appear in the s f magazines. Read any Keith Laumer or Gordon Dickson (in ANALOG mood) recently? Spinrad might be making fun of Hitler, but he is merciless towards his fellow s f and sword-and-sorcery writers. Spinrad litters his pages with long-familiar words like "stimuli" and "psychic response", "gleaming", "grand", and "dazzling" -- the stock-in-trade of the panderers to adolescent fascist wish dreams. We happen to live in a world where Hitler's fantasies came true and caused the deaths of more than twenty million people. Yet, it seems, people still dream of killing other people in their millions, and still nurse secret desires to wipe out Them.

Spinrad would have really laughed if THE IRON DREAM had won a real Hugo Award -- because he would suspect that many of his readers had not caught the joke. People who do get the joke will also be entertained by Spinrad's brilliant analysis of the fascist mentality.

Richard Brautigan

TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA (Picador 330 23346, \$1.40)

IN WATERMELON SUGAR (Picador 330 23443, \$1.40)

Trout fishing in America is an activity. Trout fishing in America is a person. Trout

fishing in America is a place. And somehow Richard Brautigan makes us believe that this magical phrase represents all the activities, people, and places that he discovers during his travels around America.

TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA is a group of forty-seven short episodes, none of them longer than eight pages. The publishers say that this is a novel. It isn't, but it is more than a collection of short stories. The book describes some events and observations that occurred to the narrator while he and his woman and child and friends wandered around rural America. The publishers say that Richard Brautigan has become "a cult among the young". Well, he's over thirty (born in 1935), and he's not a cult with me, but like many of America's young people he and his friends are interested in living a free, non-urban, non-technological life close to nature.

The narrator of TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA says that when he was a child his grandfather told him about trout fishing. "He had a way of describing trout as if they were a precious and intelligent metal." When the narrator sets out on his travels, he spends much of his time looking for good trout streams. He investigates many other long-forgotten delights of rural America - although most of these bits of paradise are never quite what they seem.

"One spring afternoon as a child in the strange town of Portland," he writes, "at a distance I saw a waterfall come pouring down off the hill. It was long and white and I could almost feel its cold spray." Even as a child he was always looking for the perfect spot to go trout fishing. At that age he thought he had found it. Next morning he got up early, took slices of white bread to make into doughballs for bait, and set off. As he approached the creek he saw that it did not look right. When he came close enough, he found that it wasn't the trout stream he had been looking for. It wasn't even a stream. "The waterfall was just a flight of white wooden stairs leading up to a house in the trees... I knocked on my creek and heard the sound of wood."

In TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA most of the ideal trout streams seem to turn into pieces of wood. Brautigan writes about Cleveland Wrecking Yard, where, he says, anybody can buy cheaply a used trout stream - all divided into bits. "We're selling it by the foot length," says the salesman at the Cleveland Wrecking Yard. "You can buy as little as you want or you can buy all we've got left. A man came in here this morning and bought 563 feet." The waterfalls sell for \$19 a foot. The birds, fish, flowers, and insects come in separate lots.

Like many people today, the narrator tries to live a truly free life. But to live off the land, he must fish for trout. But to eat the trout, he must kill them. So what's the difference between industrial polluters killing trout and fishermen killing trout?

Brautigan shows that he realises this paradox. The narrator and his friend catch a trout and lay it on a rock. Instead of breaking its neck, the narrator's friend pours port wine down the trout's throat. "The trout went into a spasm. Its body shook very rapidly like a telescope during an earthquake... Some of the wine trickled out of its mouth and made a stain on the rock. The trout was laying very still now. 'It died happy,' he said." The narrator says that it is all right for a trout to have its neck broken by a fisherman but "It is against the natural order of death for a trout to die by having a drink of port wine." Why?

One of the best episodes in TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA makes a hero out of a man who had gone fishing for seven years and hadn't caught a single trout. The narrator admires this man just as much as he admires people with the ability to catch trout.

One of the most likable characters in the book is an old man whose name is Trout Fishing in America. But before the novel ends, he dies.

This book has page after page of brilliantly epigrammatic prose, witty observations, funny stories, and meanings that might or might not be wise or terrifying. Somehow, all the pieces do form an entire jigsaw puzzle. Americans seem to love trout fishing - "this land is your land", and all that. But soon they'll destroy all their trout streams, all their sources of life. Even the people who celebrate nature, like the hippies who live in independent rural communities, help to destroy life. In Brautigan's song to freedom, there are many sour, funny notes of disappointment and death. But he sings so well that the tune comes out right anyhow.

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The tune of IN WATERMELON SUGAR, however, does not come out right. It just comes out - sugary.

IN WATERMELON SUGAR is the story of an ideal counter-culture community, somehow existing in peace and contentment after the rest of industrial society has disappeared. (Presumably it wiped itself out.) "No one ever wrote a true novel about happiness," wrote Joseph Hone, and Richard Brautigan does his best to prove this right. This little heaven, IDEATH, is a dull place where most of the people we meet don't do much, and where even the most complicated conversations read like this: "'That was a wonderful dinner,' Bill said. 'Yeah, that was really fine,' Charlie said. 'Good stew.' 'Thank you.' 'See you tomorrow,' I said." And so on.

IN WATERMELON SUGAR becomes slightly more interesting when a group of rebels tries to ruin the community. However, the rebels must have been wrong all along, for eventually they end their rebellion by committing suicide without anybody doing very much to oppose them.

This is a fable that is written very simply, but it's duller than a sermon. How could the man who wrote this also have written TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA? Will the real Richard Brautigan please stand up?

(RATS No 7, May 1973)

Joseph Johnson

WOMB TO LET (National Press Pty Ltd, 34 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. \$5)

WOMB TO LET is one of the best Australian novels to appear for years - yet Joseph Johnson, the author, took six years to get it published.

"Both Australian and British publishing is in a bad way," Joe Johnson said recently. "For instance, Australian publishers did only seventeen novels in 1972. WOMB TO LET wasn't one of them. After all the other publishers had rejected it, Bob Cugley of the National Press agreed to take a risk on WOMB TO LET and he published it himself. He has printed 500 copies, selling at \$5 each." (Bob Cugley is the famous printer, now in his seventies, who has published such "risky" Australian novels as Frank Dalby Davison's THE WHITE THORNTREE.)

Needless to say, Joe Johnson does not earn his living by writing novels. He grew up in Gippsland, became one of the most successful students ever at St Patrick's College, Sale, dropped out from Melbourne University, and now survives on odd jobs<sup>1</sup> and with much help from his wife Merrill and four-year-old daughter Hildegaard. Joseph Johnson, a friendly, soft-spoken man in his early thirties, is a real veteran of the ways in which Australian society insults its best writers.

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Not that WOMB TO LET is the sort of book that Australian publishers or audiences jump at. In its 177 pages it ranges from incest to buggery, mysticism to realism, and

1. The Labor Government has been somewhat kinder: Mr Johnson now has a CLF grant.

through almost every type of prose available to the modern writer. It's not a "nice" book, and even for reviewers who are supposed to nut out such things, it's just a bit confusing.

But that doesn't matter. For anyone who can read, this is one of the most excitingly written books ever to appear in Australia. For instance the book's first scene takes place inside the womb of Elendhof's mother. Elendhof is the book's pushy little hero who insists on waging war on his twin sister while both of them are waiting to be born. "His cyst-a, Elendhof discovered as he examined her for the nth time, lacked more than three teeth. And as he probed around her tiny cunt, he noticed that she responded, not much more than an almost imperceptible shiver, but something, perhaps. He persisted in the experiment and found that if he rubbed her up the right way he could work wonders with her, could make her change position, could park her anywhere in the womb he chose and could even stand her on her head... and he knew how uncomfortable that could be."

And when Elendhof's mother (to be) insists on lying down, getting up, and walking around, making things uncomfortable for her son (to be), he gives her so much pain that she is forced to retire to bed during most of her pregnancy.

Elendhof is not exactly "born" - he escapes from the womb. He pushes out by himself, and while his mother is still asleep, lowers himself to the floor by his umbilical cord. When it breaks, he crawls halfway across the floor. His father, asleep near by, wakes up, takes one disbelieving look at his newly born son, and runs out of the house, never to be seen again. Before escaping the womb, Elendhof had knocked the daylights out of his sister, who then had to be born by Caesarian operation.

After that, the lives of both Jay Elendhof and his sister Catherine are a bit of an anticlimax. Jay has escaped from the womb into what he calls the Second Womb (the world in which he grows up) and ceaselessly he searches for an escape route into a Third Womb. When he finds it, during the eery last part of the book, he is not very happy with what he finds. Meanwhile, in the Second Womb, his sister Catherine and he are bound together in a relationship of extreme loves and hates; in different sections of the book they feel driven both towards and away from each other.

The first part of WOMB TO LET is a grotesque joke that reminds me of Gunter Grass' THE TIN DRUM. The rest of the book is more confusing. In part 1 Johnson writes from the viewpoint of Jay. Abruptly, without introduction, he changes to the viewpoint of Catherine. When later in the novel Johnson re-introduces Jay, the reader must get used to two completely different ways of looking at things. As I see it, Johnson has tried to show that although Jay and Catherine lead fundamentally opposite types of lives, between them their lives make up a totality which neither of them could express alone - like the two halves of a ying-yang symbol. Jay is a hedonist and dropout, searching for disaster, disdaining security, who turns out to be more conformist and less sensitive than his sister. Catherine searches through security through religion, "falls in love" with God, and becomes a nun. When she feels that God has rejected her, she becomes a prostitute.

Johnson changes his prose style in each section of the book to reflect the changes in the lives of his main characters. So readers who enjoy the lusty story-telling and funny philosophical speculations of part 1 might find it difficult to read the fractured, concrete-poetry style of the middle section as Catherine falls into madness. Readers who can accept that Elendhof can remember his time in the womb might find it difficult to accept the fantasy-like episode at the end of the book.

Buy this book anyway. In WOMB TO LET you won't find the expected, the mundane, or the dull. If Joseph Johnson had written just another Australian novel, full of sheep and swaggies, or penthouses and pickled party-goers, he would have had it published seven years ago. But one of the best things to say about WOMB TO LET is that you can't spot it as an "Australian novel" as soon as you open it. It owes a lot to

the European tradition of Grass, Kafka, and Canetti, and much more to the richness of Joseph Johnson's own imagination. In other words, it has just that spark of life that Australian publishers most like to snuff out.

(RATS No 8, June 1973)

John Sladek

THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT (Panther 586 03651, 224 pages, \$1.10)

RATS INTERVIEWER: Mr John Sladek is sitting beside me tonight, waiting to tell us about his latest novel, THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT. But first a few words of introduction. Mr Sladek told us that he left school in 1960 and took up a series of jobs including short-order cook, technical writer, railroad switchman, cowboy, and President of the United States. Um - later I must ask you about that last job, Mr Sladek.

Tell me, Mr Sladek, why did you write THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT?

JOHN SLADEK: To make money. You see, the FBI had just discovered that I had been posing as Richard Nixon for two years, and...

RATS: Um, I see. Now, in your book, you write about the Muller-Fokker tapes, which can carry so much electronic information that a man's personality can be inscribed onto them. What gave you the idea for the book?

SLADEK: One night I broke into Richard Nixon's office. I needed some small change to feed the parking meter outside, and his office was the nearest. I had started to open the desk drawers when I looked up to see the figure of the President himself looking at me. But the President wasn't moving. All the lights were off. He was sitting straight up, looking dead. But he wasn't dead. The "President" was made of plastic, and he was operated by a computer tape plugged into the back of his head. I disconnected the tape, put the plastic man in a corner, and took over the US government for a couple of years. And got the idea for my book.

RATS: Mr Sladek, you seem to be saying that the wild, zany events in THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT are based on fact. I'd better tell the readers that in the book, four Muller-Fokker tapes are sold by mistake from an Army surplus store. They get into the wrong hands, and all of America starts to fall apart. Mr Sladek, how much of the book is based on fact?

SLADEK: Some of it has already come true. In THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT I wrote about a religious Disneyland called Bibleland. It's divided into Old Testament Land, New Testament Land, Heaven Land, and Hades Land. Visitors take the Garden of Eden boat ride and visit the Noah's Ark zoo and buy rubber crowns of thorns, chocolate nails, apostle haloes, and Eden apples. It's my best idea for years - and now some American businessmen have actually gone ahead and built Bibleland!

RATS: You certainly show that it's impossible to exaggerate anything that happens in the USA today. But, Mr Sladek, do you really think that the US Army will ever form a unit of soldiers, disguised in drag, called the Pink Barrettes? And is that man of that magazine - you call him "Glen Dale" of "STAGMAN" magazine - is he really still a virgin? And is the evangelist Billy Grah - er, Billy Koch - really a robot controlled by computer tapes?

SLADEK: That's not what's worrying me. THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT first appeared in hardback three years ago. Now that the paperback's come out, America has become twice as mad as in my book. You just can't write satire anymore!

RATS: No less a critic than Grendel Twitterton has described THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT

as "ersatz satire and elephantine non-humour combined with the minimum of inter-personal confrontation between its leading characters." How do you reply to such criticism?

SLADEK: I have nothing to say.

RATŞ: And that's how I would describe the book.

Now, before we finish...

SLADEK: No more questions, please. Is there a computer expert in the office? My Muller-Fokker tape is running doooooowwwwwnnnnnnn... Click!

(RATS No 9, July 1973)

John C Lilly  
THE CENTRE OF THE CYCLONE (Paladin 586 08121, 220 pages, \$1.55)

"I took 100 micrograms (of LSD) and got into the water tank. I spent about an hour in the tank working on whether or not my heart and respiration would continue if I did leave my body. I quickly learned that under LSD, if one can relax and enjoy it, one's heart and respiration do become automatic and one does not have to worry about them... I quickly found that it was very easy to leave the body and go into new spaces. One could go anywhere that one could imagine one could go."

Dr John C Lilly was one of the first US experimenters with LSD. He began to use it in 1954, and scientifically studied its effects on the minds of himself and fellow-workers during the 1960s. One of his most interesting experiments was taking LSD while suspended in a "sensory deprivation" water tank. THE CENTRE OF THE CYCLONE tells the story of his own trip and his personal journey. Eventually he could reach heightened perceptions without using drugs or any other external aids, and his work is still continuing.

Unfortunately THE CENTRE OF THE CYCLONE, which sets out to describe some of the world's most exciting scientific work, makes an unexciting book. John Lilly is not a good writer, and he cannot tell about the changes in his own mind so that other people might follow him. People who have travelled already a fair way along the same road might enjoy the book. For me the most splendid thing about the Paladin edition was the cover.

Philip Jose Farmer  
TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO (Berkeley, 220 pages, \$1.20)  
THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT (Berkeley, 256 pages, \$1.20)

In TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO and THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT Philip Jose Farmer has invented an almost perfect science fiction idea. An unknown race of people (called "Ethicals" in the second book) resurrect all the people who have ever lived on Earth. All these people find themselves on the banks of a three-million-mile-long river which winds around the surface of an unknown planet in an unknown solar system. All of the resurrected people wake at the same time. All of them are naked, hairless, and without the physical disabilities that killed them in the first place. Mysterious devices called "grails" provide them with all the food that they need.

In other words, Philip Jose Farmer creates a physical heaven. It's a heaven which shocks Victorian middle-class Christians as much as it shocks tenth-century Buddhists or twentieth-century atheists. But the creators of this heaven have stocked it so well that every person who ever lived should be able to pursue a life of complete ease and pleasure as long as the creators of this world allow him or her to do so.

But - surprise! - heaven quickly turns into hell. In TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO Farmer "resurrects" Sir Richard Burton (the nineteenth-century explorer) as the main character. (Sam Clemens is the main character in THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT.) Only a few hours after Burton awakens, he sees a man murdered by a frightened mob. The group of people who become Burton's party arm themselves with chipped pieces of heavy stone that lies in the ground. The creators of the unknown planet have placed people along the river roughly according to the times and places of their deaths. Soon people begin to form national groups and to set up boundaries along the river. When Burton's people build a boat to travel along the river, they are constantly attacked by these "nationalist" groups.

Do you see what I mean by "the perfect plot"? Farmer creates his world, fills it with real people, and describes the process by which they gradually destroy heaven and re-create the various hells of which the world has always been made. TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO and THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT reflect a grim view of humanity, but Farmer is such a splendid, clear-sighted writer that he makes us believe entirely that human beings are capable of ruining this "perfect" world just because of their own humanity.

TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO is filled with savage and often funny religious and cultural ironies, and its sequel, THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT, is even more ferocious and coldly brilliant.

We hope that Farmer is currently at work on the third of this series... I'm one of many people waiting to buy it.

(The above two reviews eventually did not appear in RATS.)

(All these books can be bought or ordered from The Space Age Book Shop, 317 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia - except for WOMB TO LET, which should be purchased from the publisher.)

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#### MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE - S F COMMENTARY 40 CHECKLIST

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--- GPO BOX 5195AA  
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AUSTRALIA

TO

J D SICLARI  
1607  
~~MCCASKILL AVE~~  
APT 3  
TALLAHASSEE  
FLA 32304  
U S A

4304 Richmond Ave.  
Staten Island, NY 10312

