

# Speculation

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SEPTEMBER 1968



**BRIAN W ALDISS: A MAN IN  
HIS TIME** BY RICHARD GORDON

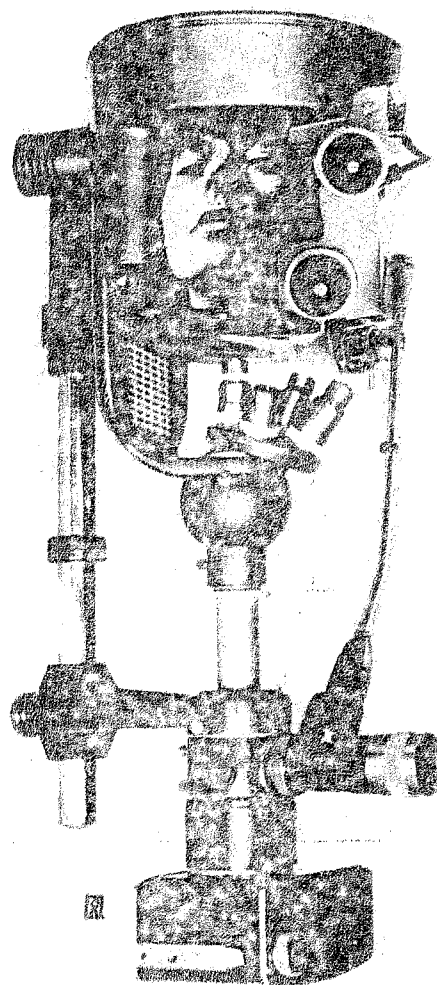


# Speculation

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WHAT IS IT ? This odd object is explained on Page 2

CREDITS FOR THIS ISSUE: Cover and interior artwork by Bob Rickard, with art by Pamela Yates on Page 42. Assistance during production by the SF Group of the University of Aston in Birmingham. Stencilling of Pages 15-32 by Eileen Trueman. The editor wishes to thank Brian Aldiss for his kindness & help.

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# THE SPECULATOR 5 YEARS AFTER...

Much to my surprise, we made it ! Here we are, five years after I published the very first issue of Zenith, the little magazine which became the slightly pretentious SPECULATION you hold in your hands today.

You know, I recently read through some of our back-issues, and was pleasantly surprised to discover they weren't quite as bad as I'd expected ! In some of them I even found some interesting things I'd completely forgotten. For instance, do you remember the Willis column in the old Zenith? I hope Harry Warner will mention 'Panorama' in the bibliography he's writing, since it is the only attempt I know of that The Man made to get to grips with the then-current British fandom.

And Fritz Leiber - he used to write to us, and in Issue 8 explained how he wrote THE WANDERER. The late H.Beam Piper had previously written-up his 'Future History' series in Issue 4, as did Poul Anderson in Issue 6. But the real take-off point for us, I feel, came with Zenith 7, which brought to a head certain little differences of opinion between Terry Jeeves (remember his 'Brickbats and Roses' column ?) and Michael Moorcock. After this, a furious debate boiled up in the lettercolumn, one which eventually dragged in discussions of the stories of Cordwainer Smith and Harry Harrison, Michael Moorcock and Brian Aldiss, and **finally** the Great J.G. Ballard ! Yes, those early days were in some ways a good deal more lively than SPECULATION is today!

I've been waiting a long time for someone to say that we were first to discover the 'New Wave' vs. 'Old Guard' argument, but nobody has ever done so. So I'll say it myself; SPECULATION was the first, I think, to begin the serious discussions about the nature of SF which have taken place in the last few years, before the recent incarnation of Warhoon, before Psychotic, Habbakuk or Riverside Quarterly, Australian SF Review or Algol.

It was Brian Aldiss who said in Issue 8, March 1955: "Although you devote overmuch space to that arch lowbrow Heinlein, you more than recompense your readers by the thrilling spectacle of Moorcock and Jeeves bleeding and dying for their beliefs." Brian continued, "the spectacle is all the more thrilling since their attitudes are perfectly respectable in each case --- so for the first time we have a genuine controversy in science fiction that hinges on style rather than content."

Michael Moorcock figured pretty prominently in our first five years, and to begin our second half-decade we asked Mike if he would contribute a column to SPECULATION. In this issue Bob and I are pleased to publish his first installment, the inside - and remarkable - story behind New Worlds. Elsewhere you'll find Buz Busby's irregular Plough column and a full bag of long reviews. Richard Gordon's exhaustive study of Brian Aldiss finally sees light, along with various other features and a fine little piece by Tim Hildebrand.

In the future ? Bob will have a lot to do with SPEC., of course, but we will be continuing the 'Opinion' column, and have long articles by Franz Rottensteiner and Al Lewis. Bob Parkinson's notes on Dick are to appear, and hopefully Ken and Pamela Bulmer's review of DANGEROUS VISIONS.

That horrible object on the Contents Page ? Bob Rickard loves montages, and this one is a microscope, upside-down, with a record player pickup arm fixed on. I don't know how that face got in there !

Peter Weston, 1968



Hi there ! You've probably seen my name bandied around in the last few issues of SPECULATION, so I guess it's about time I made a proper introduction.

I've been lurking in the scenery since Issue 16, mainly taking care of the artwork stencils, contributing some of my own artwork, and manning the duplicator at appropriate times; occasionally, true to my artistic calling, painting the air blue and sculpting ten-ton blocks of curses to be dropped on Pete Weston, without whom I could be gloriously idle.

But really, the work of an editor of a magazine such as this is an unsung saga of heroism in the face of tremendous odds. It is really a miracle that each succeeding issue eventually gets published. Pete has weathered... years at the helm, through calm and storm, and remains standing, somehow. Much to the disgust of everybody concerned he has recently shown himself to be human and has acquired a rival interest (Eileen) which may mean that I shall be caught for even more editing work in the future.

But this is supposed to be about me! ... where was I? ... ah yes! All this work on SPECULATION doesn't much help Pete's digestion, so he is going to have his revenge and the first victim is me. With a hearty shove, I come stumbling onto the stage and here I stand exposed, embarrassed and with much trepidation. The somewhat doubtful honour bestowed upon me by being billed as Assistant Editor is about to be completed in fact.

Seriously, Pete Weston is proud of SPECULATION, and I am proud to be associated with it. A magazine produced by fans carries the 'amateur' tag, but this is no excuse for low standards, we feel. I think the standards we have achieved with SPECULATION are good, and will improve still further; perhaps more important, both Pete and I are trying to give reader satisfaction and good value.

It is because you are important to us that we insist on trying just that little bit harder, and are very receptive to your point of view, in criticism or praise. SPECULATION is not a crutch for our sagging egos, it is meant to be a genuine magazine of criticism and review, and there is no point at all in achieving this goal if we don't hear from you.

We have experimented a little with recent issues, and received a number of letters and reviews commenting upon the 'seriousness' of Issues 17 & 18. On reflection, these had a lot of truth to them, but they raised the question of whether humorous writing and glib asides can actually be used in serious criticism and review. Everything doesn't have to be entertaining in the 'ha-ha' sense, although our view is that SPECULATION should be enjoyable to read. In the limited time available before this was published, we have tried to make this current issue a little 'lighter' in tone without losing any effect. In the main, it probably means that we will go on regarding a large number of reviews and critiques as a virtue rather than a fault.

Meanwhile, Pete and I have been kicking some ideas around about how to brighten our fare. Much depends on what we can get from contributors, of course, but there are one or two exciting and new (to us) forms of criticism coming up soon, along with other experiments. On a larger scale, we are planning an editorial experiment in which Pete and myself will edit alternate issues of SPECULATION. Let's see how it works out !

Bob Rickard, 1968

# THE CRITICAL FRONT

I've recently been told both that this is a good disguise for a gaggle of individual opinions, and that calling book reviews the 'critical front' is a rather intimidating gesture. Neither impressions were intentional - this is meant as a front-line column discussing new SF, reviews pepped-up with the occasional relevant comment. As before, you're welcome to take pot-shots from the gallery!

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A TORRENT OF FACES by James Blish & Norman L. Knight. (Faber & Faber, 25s)

Reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Although described as a "sort of sequel" to Norman Knight's 'Crisis in Utopia', twenty-eight years and the addition of James Blish make the present novel a very different proposition from its spiritual ancestor. For the benefit of those lucky enough to have missed it, 'Crisis in Utopia' was a rather appalling melodrama of the type which ran riot in the late Thirties, dealing with idealistic scientists, noble tritons, and a hero who got the girl. The sequel is rather more seriously orientated, dealing with the population problem and how not to solve it. Hacked-up sections were published in Galaxy and Analog as 'The Shipwrecked Hotel'; 'The Piper of Dis'; and 'To Love Another'.

As the basic premise of the novel, the authors assume that by 2794 the population of the World will be one trillion ( $10^{12}$  or one million million). This estimate, incidentally, is considerably below current estimates if the present rate of increase were to continue for that length of time. Blish and Knight then claim in their preface that a Utopia is the only feasible system by which such a horde could be sustained. They further hypothesize ten thousand cities on land, between which is a vast World Forest providing food for the masses. The picture is very simple and all the sums involve nice round figures.

The plot of the novel is fragmentary, as might be expected in view of its various origins. Its 'hero' is Biond Smith, chief of the Disaster Plans Board, who splits his time evenly between coveting his boss's wife, and getting poor Jothan Kent (senior water engineer) into various tight situations.

First of all, the Barrier Hilthion floating hotel is cast adrift and sunk by bugs in the computers, (literally!) and Triton help has to be enlisted in a massive rescue operation. The Tritons of this book are lineal descendants of those in the earlier story, but behave in a far more reasonable fashion. This, I presume, is the influence of James Blish. Tritons are also far more important in A TORRENT OF FACES, to fill in for the cliches which have been scrapped from the revised work.

(Cont/d)  
SPECULATION

Then like a rabbit from a hat, asteroid Flavia comes hurtling out of deep space towards poor, overcrowded Earth. Jothan Kent is posed with the preliminary problem of evacuating many thousands of Joneses from the city of Gitler, where they had been holding a family convention. Gitler will be needed later in the plot to take evacuees from Flavia's target area, but in order to make things more difficult, vast quantities of radioactive gallium are heading toward the city, with nowhere to put it !

Meanwhile, a romance is progressing between Dorthy Sumter (chairwoman of Submarine Products) and Tioru (a Triton). Tioru is introduced to life on land and humanity en masse, and understandably doesn't altogether find it too pleasant. The only completely new part of the book is the account of Biond's activities just before and just after Flavia strikes, during which time he loses his job, meets an unsung genius who can save humanity, and joins up with Jothan again to tie up some of the loose ends of the plot.

Taken as a whole, this book is not a good one. It is enjoyable and smoothly-written, but it falls down woefully in its pretensions to create a realistic society dealing with real problems. As is typical of the works of James Blish, the first chapters are planned like a tactical campaign, getting the maximum amount of information across to the reader without boring him. But as soon as he knows what it's all about and the authors have to get on with it, the logic begins to crumble and the plotting begins to flag.

I find it very hard to believe in the sinking of the Barrier Hilthon by wayward Thysanurans, and also in the incredible bungling which threatens to flood Gitler with hot gallium. But these details pale into insignificance alongside the greater mess of the concluding chapters. By this time the megapoli in their vast forest have abandoned all semblance of reality and have become farcical. One is tired of the characters being dumb and wooden, when they are supposed to be the best brains of Earth. (Only geniuses are employed at all, let alone in cushy executive jobs like those held by Biond and his colleagues at Prime Centre).

#### JUST TALKING ABOUT LARGE NUMBERS ?

The novel fails completely to visualise its own population problem. It does indeed talk about large numbers, but all Blish and Knight have done is to write about the commonplace and then tack a string of zeroes on to all the figures. We are informed that the shipwrecked Hilthon contains a million people but apart from the fact that it takes a long time to rescue them, they might just as well be a hundred. The same applies to Gitler's plague of Joneses; the only sign that there are so many is that Jothan Kent groans when told to get rid of them.

Perhaps all this criticism is a little harsh, because it concerns what should be in the book and isn't. When all its false claims are swept aside, what is left is very readable. The best part of the novel concerns Tioru's abortive attempt to live in a human city, and possibly this outlines the weakness of the story. The effective moments arise when Blish and Knight are inside the cities, looking through Tioru's eyes, not sitting juggling numbers on the roof of the world. Had the authors concerned themselves more with the personal element and less with the control of the revolting surplus of useless humanity which lurks like a bloated ogre ever out of sight, they might have written a far better book. I say "might", because waiting at the end is a telegraphed cliché which weaves Dorthy and Tioru clumsily into the dying plot. (Cont/d)

The faults of this book are ably summed-up by the dust-cover, which portrays a torrent of faces which are all the same. Humanity, in A TORRENT OF FACES, is all one face, made by multiplication to appear a lot. I think that Blish and Knight must be fond of their ideas, to have cherished them so lovingly for the duration of this book, which shows them in a somewhat wan flattering light. If so, I wonder why they did not use a little more imagination than can be found here in presentation? It would have been easier, more convincing, and altogether less honest if they had not stated their principles so starkly at the beginning. Perhaps it was honesty which inspired Blish and Knight to write A TORRENT OF FACES the way they did, and make a mess of it!

I can respect their honesty, but good writers should be shameless liars. As Kurt Vonnegut once wrote; "All the true things I am about to tell you are shameful lies." A TORRENT OF FACES has so many dicey premises that it needs far better lies to support them.

Brian Stableford 1968

(Before receiving this review we had asked James Blish for further details of how this novel came to be written, beginning with my own observation that "I feel sorry for any administration which is faced with so many disasters all at once!" Mr Blish replies below:--)

"I don't think it's unrealistic to expect the administration (that is, Prime Centre) to encounter such a spate of difficulties over a short time. After all, with a population that size, anything that goes wrong can become a disaster in short order. In any event, we were writing essentially about the fall of that civilisation, which would necessarily be a little out of the ordinary.

About the genesis of the book: In 1948, both Norman and I were members of a small group called the Vanguard Amateur Press Association. Norman, whom I had never met, circulated in VAPA a magazine called Knight's Mare, and in that year became intrigued with the quotation from Henry George which is used as the epigraph for TORRENT. Going on from there, he published an essay called "Henry George Slipped Here", in which he tried to imagine the circumstances under which George's dictum could be made to work.

This essay was so detailed that I wrote to Norman suggesting that he make it into a novel. He replied that he had no plot or characters and didn't feel up to the job. I then proposed that he continue to do all of the hard work on the background, and I would come up with the plot.

As it eventually worked out, Norman directly wrote about half the novel, and supplied a number of characters and situations. The shipwrecked hotel was his idea; so was the episode about Fongavaro Jones, and the love story between Dorothy and Tioru. Norman also wrote the "Walk Through the Paradise Gardens" at the end.

Throughout most of this, I was living in various parts of New York, and he first in Chicago and then in Washington. (I met him briefly in Chicago on a business trip in 1950, I think it was.) So we had to work entirely by mail. When I moved to the Washington area two years ago, it became possible for us to work together in person, but although we met fairly frequently, we continued to write mostly by mail (and sometimes by telephone) -- we just had the habit, I suppose. We had agreed that I would be the senior author (somebody has to have final say or you just go around rewriting each other forever). In general my procedure was to try to write my sections in a style as much like his as possible, and edit his sections to make them read as much like my style as possible." (James Blish, 1968)

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THE FINAL PROGRAMME by Michael Moorcock. (Avon, 60£)

Reviewed by Graham Charnock, comments by Dav Garnett (see Pages 49-50)

THE FINAL PROGRAMME is unquestionably Mike Moorcock's best book to date. His previous novels, (and Mike would be the first to admit, I think, that he's written some stinkers) have all been typical examples of formulae-written genre-fiction. His books have been so despairingly pointless that I've been inclined to write him off, as someone with a striking and original narrative ability who has never found a subject he could treat seriously. Not so much a 'Burnt Out' case, as an unrealised one.

This novel hopefully marks the beginning of that 'realisation', and the Second Coming of Christ in the Age of Science is the subject. It seems to have caught Mike's imagination and produced in this novel something far better than we had reason to hope for. "In your terms it is time for a new Messiah -- a Messiah of the Age of Science...Has the Genius been born yet?" asks one of the minor characters.

The 'final programme' is the programme to produce this Messiah, and it is designed by the book's sinister and absorbing (in the literal sense of the word - if you don't see how that can be, read the book) heroine, Miss Brunner. To finance the programme she draws upon the resources of Jerry Cornelius, an anti-hero cast in Moorcock's typical mould. Jerry holds the key to practically unlimited wealth, but is motivated only by remorse and revenge. His vendetta against his brother Frank and his aimless wanderings in Europe and Great Britain chart a pathological case-history of the decay of the present day.

Too self-involved and self-indulgent to succeed as satire, the book is nevertheless intense black-comedy. There is something intrinsically disturbing in the juxtaposition of farce and fright, and the novel capitalises on this to sustain its essential mood of psychoses-in-the-ascendancy.

For the Age of Science is also the Age of Pop and Psychedelia, of a sexual multivalency, and the plot takes pains to show that its Messiah must be made, not born. "Every Age gets the Messiah it deserves" is the seminal idea of THE FINAL PROGRAMME, and the Messiah of the Age of Science is the ultimate blasphemy; God produced by Man in his own sadly-distorted image.

Graham Charnock, 1968

- \* Dav Garnett comments that "'THE FINAL PROGRAMME' can be compared with \*
- \* THE DREAMING CITY, the first of the 'Elric' stories. The plot of the\*
- \* latter is almost identical to that of the first third of the novel, \*
- \* even down to details. Chunks of dialogue are very similar; so who is\*
- \* Moorcock kidding, you, me, himself or Elric? (But for all that, THE\*
- \* FINAL PROGRAMME is still a pretty good book!)" :- \*

Elric/Jerry goes alone to Imrryr/Normandy, and is admitted into the palace/house by Tanglebones/John Gnatbeelson. He goes to see Cymoril/Catherine and finds her in a sleep induced by the sorcery/drugs of his cousin/brother Yrkoon/Francis. (To get into the room, a guard had to be eliminated, a eunuch, by use of a bow; but the guard moved and had to be killed with Stormbringer/a knife). The guards arrive and Elric/Jerry escapes by calling on the powers of darkness/using a nerve grenade. Before leaving, Elric/Jerry tells Tanglebones/John Gnatbeelson to have his cousin/sister ready to escape when the attack comes.

(Cont/d)

He returns with a reaver fleet/hoverlaunch, and battles with his cousin/brother using Stormbringer/a needle gun. In the duel Cymoril/Catherine is slain by Stormbringer/one of Jerry's pellets.

Here, however, Elric kills his brother, but Jerry is stunned by a doped pellet and so his brother escapes. Another triumph for schizophrenia!

Dav Garnett, 1968

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BUG JACK BARRON by Norman Spinrad. (New Worlds 178-183)

Reviewed by M. John Harrison.

Like Tom Disch's CAMP CONCENTRATION, Norman Spinrad's second novel represents an adult intrusion into areas of stylistic approach and moral stance previously ignored or glossed-over by writers of science fiction. Spinrad has the courage to record personal and sexual relationships in the way they happen, and to take a candid look at the euphoria of power. That the result should arouse controversy is in no way surprising. I hoped to begin this article by presenting some of that controversy; however, I find that the majority of comment in my possession runs along the same rails as the puritanical and Absolutist attack - aimed more, I feel, at Spinrad's person than at his book - contained in Donald A. Wollheim's recent LUNACON speech; that is to say, it is irrelevant, subjective, and entirely unrelated to honest literary criticism.

Before considering the butt of all this moral indignation, it might be well to bear in mind that, apart from Spinrad's approach to certain elements of his subject matter, BUG JACK BARRON is a perfectly ordinary piece of SF, a simple narrative concerning American politics in the quite-near future.

Jack Barron, ex-idealist and compere of a politically powerful but unaffiliated TV show, comes into direct conflict with Benedict Howards, key-figure of the mercenary 'Foundation for Human Immortality'. Howards - who promises to freeze upon his clinical death any man who can meet the steep fee, and to store the body until some cure for death is discovered - is prepared to go to any lengths to maintain his monopoly of human cryogenics; and to keep secret his already-discovered immortality treatment. During the resultant in-fighting, he attempts to bribe Barron with the offer of a free treatment, using Barron's estranged wife as an emotional lever. There is a powerful ending to this compulsive and extremely truthful story, hard-driving and reflecting well the power-motives of its characters.

Set mainly in New York, the narrative is thoroughly involved in the Hippy milieu; a frenetic, blow-your-mind-baby vortex of electric art, legal pot and bad trips. Utilising flamboyant descriptions, key words from the West Coast thing, and the occasional line lifted from a pop song - 'like a one-eyed cat peeping in a sea-food store', - Spinrad draws the reader in, fascinated. This involvement with the California scene is something of a two-edged sword; at times it becomes intrusive. The concept of Acapulco Gold sold in twenty-packs loses its whimsy on the fourth time round.....

Spinrad matches his style very neatly to his subject; it is high-powered and the images are brutally evocative - a brutality pushed, on occasion, ever-so-slightly over the edge, where it begins to resemble the blatant histrionics of Spillane. Like the Beat Generation, he tends to outline his subject (Cont/d)

in adjectives, kicking up a wild storm of words and yet indicating only generally the shape of a mood, the emotional peripheries of a particular situation:

'Emerging from the studio was a birth and a death; kick 'em in ass plugged-in image of power phosphordot Jack Barron, died then, cut off from his electronic senses and circuitries of power and softflesh, bellyhunger, womanhunger, scratch-itch Jack Barron, the Kid, the Boy Desperado, Jack and Sara (cool it!) Jack was born again. '

There is an unfortunate side-effect to all these spot-constructed adjectives - strung together here in typical Beat fashion - that has worried me since Kerouac's *ON THE ROAD*; one gets the impression that Spinrad suspected one of them of being his mot juste: but he used them all, just to be sure....

Adjectival, lysergic, sometimes boring, sometimes poetic, he alternates clarity of description with poor, fuzzy definition. Heavy use of the thought-stream technique allows him one or two flights of 500-horse lyricism which, sadly, turn out a shade phony: he hasn't yet developed the kind of word-control possessed by Brian Aldiss, whose handling of similar head-sequences in pieces such as 'Shards' and 'Auto-Ancestral Fracture' is quite beautiful.

It is the process of characterisation that really scores for Spinrad. He delineates every muscle, every surge of emotion; his characters sweat, love and bleed; they live. They are huge. And it is here too that his commendable honesty begins to operate, particularly in the relationship between Barron and his wife. These two are real. Warmth, vitality, independence and interdependence, lust and love; here are all the facets of human inter-relationships, all the things that add up to two human beings matching each other surface-to-surface. With power and skill, Spinrad explores the 'pleasure interface' of emotional and sexual response, 'telling it like it is', and thus creating a completely realistic basis for the novel, rendering believable even the less convincing elements of the plot.

The Barron/Howards conflict is complex and ambivalent, because both men wallow in the pleasure of power. Barron is no puling damp-eared idealist - he knows (and loves) his limitations and revels in The Big Kick. When he makes the decision to smash Howards, that decision is an utterly personal thing, a satisfaction. He is a man with mixed (and not often very pleasant) motives. Clock up another point for an adult approach to SF: who isn't?

Howards himself is an archetype of megalomania, devoted in reptilian fashion to the 'air-cooled vaults of power'. With him, there is no middle way: own the man, buy him out - or wipe him out. Keeping in mind of course, that he is always more useful in the vertical state..... Howards is possibly a little too huge, trembling on the verge of melodrama and caricature. His final descent into insanity is, in fact, rather implausible. But this is an unavoidable risk for anyone portraying a man who has no life other than in his daylight dreams of power. Spinrad might have produced a better characterisation had he contrasted the man's overt power-machinations with some sort of close personal relationship - but this would have faced him with the equal risk of moderating the impact of Howard's close-to-psychotic fixation which is vital during the opening stages of the book.

In *BUG JACK BARRON*, Spinrad has produced an indictment of TransAtlantic political method and the manipulation of the admass, couched in fast, energetic prose and cast in the febrile terms of the '60's. Using the images of the (Cont/d)



present, he has made a genuine attempt to outline the near future. Above all, he has been truthful. Man is a sexual animal: it would be naive and a bit pointless to suppose he will become any the less sexually-oriented merely because a few years have passed, because a few machines have become more complex and glossy. The present is not a sweet bank of violets, and there is absolutely no justification for assuming a pleasant smelling future, immortality or no. Science fiction has deliberately blinded itself to the realities of being human; this book is a refreshing and very readable return to honesty.

It is rumoured that Leslie Frewin are shortly to publish a UK hard-cover edition of the novel. If you are at all interested in genuine extrapolative fiction, buy it.

M. John Harrison, 1968.

\* Donald Wollheim's comments about BUG JACK BARRON were made in his Lunacon speech, and were reported in Scottische, June 1968. This key paragraph below is taken from the speech:-

'A couple of months ago Terry Carr asked me to read the first installments of a novel entitled BUG JACK BARRON. I read them and the outline of the rest of the novel and sent Terry a memo, as follows:- "There isn't a nice thing I can say about this depraved, cynical, utterly repulsive and thoroughly degenerate parody of what was once a real SF theme.. except that it is a shoo-in to be the 'in' thing with the so-called science fiction literati, and may very well stand a good chance of being the 'in' thing with the college crowd and would-be intelligenzia. If that happens we may make a lot of money with this packet and you may even be right about it as a candidate for a Hugo or Nebula..." '

And so what do YOU think of this novel? At the time of writing the complete magazine text is available to British readers, and presumably a US paperback publisher will print it shortly. SPECULATION will present a discussion feature, for and against the book, in the next issue and I would very much like to receive your comments. PRW

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THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM by John Sladek. (Gollancz, 21s).

Reviewed by Graham M. Hall.

For some reason - probably because of an inept blurb-writer - John Thomas Sladek has, largely on the strength of his novel THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM, been hailed as a new Kurt Vonnegut Jnr.

Apart from the slight of being hailed as a new anybody else, rather than of the first John T. Sladek; apart from damning with faint praise (Vonnegut is after all only a minor writer), the comparison is as false as can be. The mistake seems to have arisen on purely superficial grounds, as elementary an error as hailing William Burroughs as a new Enid Blyton because they both use words of four letters.

Vonnegut began his career as a novelist with two books whose outstanding virtue was control. MOTHER NIGHT - neglected by fandom because 'it isn't science fiction' - is a subdued and brilliant story on the same theme as Robert Shaw's THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH. And PLAYER PIANO, which is science fiction of the best kind, has also been largely ignored. It is a finely-structured men-against-machines novel which, by contrast, demonstrates how feeble is the SF of the Pohl school.

(Cont/d)

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It was from this solid base that Vonnegut went on to the pyrotechnics of SIRENS OF TITAN, CAT'S CRADLE and GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER. Tracing his development up through these novels and his short stories, you can see Vonnegut gradually broadening his scope, choosing a wider canvas each time, and always increasing its size in exact proportion with his increase in technical skill. He knows what he is doing and he is always in control of the whole process.

Sladek is very different. He has the same elan and exuberance as Vonnegut - this is the similarity that has led to the comparison. But with the younger man you can see that although he knows what he wants to do he is not able to control the way he does it. THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM is a sprawl of a novel with a cast of thousands. It is like a bucket of paint tipped from a height on to a concrete pavement. The book is about the development of a self-reproducing machine by a run-down Baby Doll factory, a grey box which can feed itself, breed itself, and modify its own functions. Masterminded by the evil Dr Smilax, the grey boxes gain control of our world as Sladek loses control of his creation.

Sladek's shorter pieces in New Worlds and Ambit, particularly the brilliant novelette 'Masterson and the Clerks' have an almost obsessively fastidious level of control. This has been lost somewhere in the transition from short story to novel, and gone too is any subtlety in his humour. Here, this is a kind of grisly farce, a far cry from the quiet wit of Vonnegut.

On his showing so far, Sladek appears to be a batural, if involuted short story writer. As a possible result THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM has the appearance of being hammered into the required length by welding together a handful of short stories. These are interconnected - I suspect that in his own mind Sladek can see an infinitely-complex geometric web of interconnection. But the switching from scene to scene, and from continent to continent, often abandoning one thread of the plot for chapters on end, is finally just tiresome. If any one particular character was sufficiently attractive or had been well-enough defined to grasp your attention, the reader might have had the perseverance to pick his way through the maze.

As it is, lacking Sladek's own inspired insight into the complexity, this is an unruly, untidy book. If this is a Sladek symphony, give me his chamber music any day !

Graham M. Hall, 1968

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THE CRITICAL FRONT continues on Page 37 with long reviews of NEUTRON STAR by Larry Niven and Alexei Panshin's critical volume, HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION.

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The Brighton Festival of the Arts sponsored a science fiction weekend this year, which is probably the closest English parallel with the 'Secondary Universe' conference, reported upon on the opposite page. Below are two short quotes, taken out of context from the BSFA's Vector, July 1968:-

'....there was a general rejection of the old school (by the panel). In the words of Tom Disch, "The old-liners have had their say and now they are saying it again. They're like corpses wired for sound.".....Michael Moorcock demanded that there should at least be some literary standards. When considering some of the work of the old school, he said, "These writers had subject matter that was interesting, but their writing was appalling. Somehow, a story by, for instance, VanVogt, would be written, read, processed and appear with sentences that were totally incomprehensible. This was due to the fact that writers and editors were pig-idiot illiterates." ' The only 'old-guard' members present were Ted Tubb & Ken Bulmer, who came down for the day at their own expense, not having been invited as delegates. We understand from various sources that Tubb's speech from the floor was probably the best one made during the conference.

THE SECONDARY UNIVERSE was a conference held on May 10-11 1968 by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It featured guest speakers such as Judith Merrill and Samuel Delany, and a number of panel discussions on subjects related to science fiction and fantasy. Tim Hildebrand has here written a report on the conference, compiled from notes and memories of some of the more interesting items on the programme. In his own words, "...not only what went on, but also reactions to the ideas, people and situations that the conference afforded; a mixture of objective and subjective..."

## TIM HILDEBRAND **THE SECONDARY UNIVERSE**

ON THE ORIGINS OF THE SECONDARY UNIVERSE CONFERENCE: In 1965 I organised the University of Wisconsin Fantasy and Science Fiction Society; I didn't like that title but at least it was descriptive. One of the first to become a regular at our meetings was Ivor Rogers, a graduate student in speech who was a film buff, SF fan, and involved in Theatre. A year later he formed the local Tolkien Society, and talk was in the air soon after of holding a Tolkien conference at the University in Madison. Upon getting a teaching position at the Milwaukee branch of the University of Wisconsin, he made plans for the Secondary Universe conference, sponsored by the Theatre and Literary Committees at the University. Tapes of each speech/discussion were made and broadcast over the University Educational Radio Station. Also, some of the articles will be published early next year in an issue of ARTS IN SOCIETY, a professional magazine sponsored by the University Extension. A second conference is being planned for next year.

"On the Saturday morning there was a panel discussion entitled "The New Thing in Science Fiction, with Me, Samuel Delany and Lawrence Yep.

I walked into the room where the discussion was to be held. There were about twenty people in the audience. I didn't know any of them, but later they were identified as people like Judith Merrill, Thomas Claeson (editor of the scholarly Extrapolation, a publication of the Modern Language Society), Leland Sapiro, editor of The Riverside Quarterly, and some others I never identified. Also there were about a dozen other people, just plain old people, perhaps they had wandered in right off the street?

I was there as a fan, a friend of Ivor's, and as an editor of a magazine, Mandala, which is more a literary one than a fanzine, but which is still on the fringe of the SF field. Larry Yep had just had a story published in If, 'The Selchy Kids', - he was a sophomore at Marquette University. Delany, of course, was a young, very successful author and Nebula Award winner, who had been published in New Worlds, a magazine associated with experimental SF.

Walking into the room, I was introduced to Samuel 'Chip' Delany, and Larry Yep. Delany lessened my nervousness a bit; wild shock of long, black hair, a gross, heavy, ugly gold ring on his finger, boots on his feet, and a gold ear-ring in one ear. And a tie, too. He looked very hip, obviously from New York, and started things off by reading a page and a half essay he'd written. He used the wrong words, so I don't think anyone understodd what he was saying, at least I didn't - the idea occurred to me that he was doing a parody of a scholarly lecture on Literature - after all, this was being held in a classroom. But I put that thought out of my head when he kept on reading and didn't smile. He's very erudite, don't you know? I wondered why the hell he was an SF writer if he knew that much about literature.

Well, he must have said something because later on in the discussion Merrill and others would refer to something he had said in his monologue.

The discussion moved on to other things, and I made a few points, agreeing with the aptness of Merrill's term "ghetto" for SF writing. We talked about the mainstream joining the SF field (Merrill's pet theory) versus SF's New Wave joining the Mainstream of literature. Nobody seemed to be able to respond very well to the moderator's call for a definition of what the New Wave of SF involved, other than phrases like "new techniques", "existential themes", and the like. So we moved on to other questions.

The moderator asked a very good question "How the topic and the relationships between the races had been treated in SF?" Underlying it was the question of whether SF is Reactionary or Liberal. Nobody could think offhand of any specific stories which had dealt with human races; I mentioned a few Ray Bradbury plots about the Negroes going to Mars, etc, and brought the discussion over to how alien races had been treated by SF writers. Very few treatments were anything but superficial, it was decided, the exceptions being stories by Sturgeon and Farmer. (It's hard to talk seriously about SF, since so much of it is superficial - when a writer gets in over his head he either ends the book or has a Martian beast with ESP lumber on to the scene.)

Larry Yep said that SF was the easiest kind of writing with which to begin a writing career, because "they don't ask for much". Read the 'Selchy Kids', and you'll find out what he meant. If SF is the literature of ideas, it would fall flat on its face. Luckily, it's also the literature of adventure and melodrama.

The New Wave: how does it stand in the ghetto? Somebody, perhaps Merrill or the moderator, asked how the fans and the old school SF writers felt about it. Delany mentioned that the more experimental pieces were not being published by any of the American magazines, and that the New Wave could probably be contained in the issues of New Worlds and in DANGEROUS VISIONS. I mentioned that the fans really haven't rallied around the New Wave, perhaps because it is so close to the Mainstream. A lot of fans are adventure story fans - they prefer the old SF. Delany then spoke a few more complicated sentences.

The luncheon speaker was Judith Merrill, and I consider her talk a real disaster. She started off by informing the audience that a strict dichotomy existed between the scholars of literature, and people like herself, who are more amateurish. There were a lot of professors there, it's true. Miss Merrill continued talking, with sidelong glances at Prof. Kilby and Prof. Clareson, and informed us that her prepared speech was being junked. She was junking it

(Cont/d)

because she had spent several hours the night before, arguing with the professors, and had decided that instead of making negative comments about scholars of literature, she had better start suggesting some positive things that could help the situation.

So she rambled on and on, not talking about SF at all, really. This was a few days after the riots at Columbia University in New York, and she was very concerned about what our educational systems were doing or not doing. She made a plea, not as a critic but as a mother, to the professors and educators to teach her daughter some honest and good things about life. (That this was her responsibility as a mother, not the duty of the professors, did not seem to occur to her. Besides, how do you teach someone to be a good person? ) Towards the end of this speech she brought in SF, and mentioned her optimism for its future. SF, according to Miss Merrill, is the literature that unites romantic idealism, humanism, and at the same time can, will and must deal with topics such as alienation, God, and Evil. She feels that SF will play an important role in the future of literature; also, she believes that literature in general plays an important role in the future of the world. Both of these are highly debatable. I sympathise with her, but cannot share her seemingly blind faith and woman-motherly attitudes.

Miss Merrill looked very frumpy in her black dress and she was just a mother talking about the future and what she believed in. I had come to hear more than a personal statement of faith, however, and was disappointed at her reluctance to discuss SF realistically.

The last discussion group of the conference was one of the most interesting. William Tenn, (Philip Klass) told the audience that he too had scrapped his prepared speech, due to arguments with Judith Merrill the night before. Tenn was very frank, calm, and adamant at the same time. His main thesis was that SF has been ruined by the rise of criticism. He stated that SF authors are now aware that when they sit down and write they are going to write SF, and that this label was destroying some freedoms the writer might have had. He yearned for the days when people like Miss Merrill didn't write criticism, and people like Mr Claeson didn't write scholarly articles and compile meticulous bibliographies. He said that he has stopped writing SF - it's no fun any more. He's switched over to a new form, which might be termed a "speculative essay". However he said with a sigh that his essays were soon to be published and would come to the attention of the critics and he would just have to move on to something new, different, and exciting.

I thought this was all very interesting and I half agreed with him. But later I started to think the ideas out a little and I think he's wrong about critics spoiling the writer's craft. I agree with him that labels are created and that these make the writer self-conscious; I think that his speculative essays are a great idea but are not SF and not fiction; and I am interested as to where he will go next when the critics discover his newest trick.

Tim Hildebrand, 1968.

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SPECULATION

Over a decade ago, SPACE TIME AND NATHANIEL was published as the first science fiction collection from a young British author named Brian W. Aldiss. Soon after called 'a promising newcomer', and later to hear disapproving cries of "Cobwebs to the Moon!", Mr Aldiss is now thought of as possibly this country's leading SF writer. Something over one dozen of his books are on the market, specialising in the unpredictable, presenting a bewildering variety of theme and even of writing style. What is Brian Aldiss attempting to achieve? His stories have drawn surprisingly little attention from the SF press, and so now Richard Gordon has prepared this article concentrating on later works from THE DARK LIGHT YEARS onwards. We would like to thank Mr Aldiss himself for the considerable assistance he has given during preparation of this article.

## **BRIAN W. ALDISS: A MAN IN HIS TIME**

**BY RICHARD GORDON**

Broadly divided to deal with areas of specific interest, this article contains the following parts: (1) A Cerebral Obsession; (2) Leading Up - Three Novels; (3) The Problems of our Time; (4) Other Facets of Ability; (5) At A Crossroads? (Some Conclusions).

ONCE UPON a time, Brian Aldiss called science fiction a 'vile medium' in which to work, but then he added that it was the only one in which he could express what he wanted to his own satisfaction. Many of his earlier stories, for instance, were written at least partly with an emotional basis, as the author has said, they acted to some extent as an expression of his own phobias.

But this was some time ago, before publication of the novel GREYBEARD which in many ways marked the beginning of a new attitude by Aldiss towards the writing of science fiction. This attitude appears to be 'intellectual' rather than 'emotional', in its general form, and can also be noted in such short stories as 'Man in his Time' and 'Man on Bridge'. Certainly, recent stories have varied in style to such an extent that they seem to indicate the abandonment of writing purely as entertainment and for self-analysis.

## 1: A. CEREBRAL OBSESSION

(The novels AN AGE: REPORT ON PROBABILITY A. )

"My belief is that I produce as great a variety of plot and style as anyone; but that there is a unifying philosophical theme running willy-nilly through everything. One aspect of this theme is the tragedy of time. I took a long while to mature, and so am keenly aware of time. There is a suspicion too that time somehow became out-of-joint last century, with the result - one result - that we have a madness for progress; the progress that brings the situations in NON-STOP and DARK LIGHT YEARS and GREYBEARD. It affects men more than women; it is the men who are remote from the women, to their mutual detriment." (Brian Aldiss)

I have made a somewhat arbitrary choice of the stories which seem to epitomise the 'new' Aldiss. The earliest mentioned is 'Shards', from 1961, but obviously, signs of future interests can be detected even further back. Aldiss himself mentions 'The Failed Men' (1956) and 'Poor Little Warrior' (1957) as the most "obvious and notable predecessors" to his later stories. The introductions to the stories in the U.S. collection GALAXIES LIKE GRAINS OF SAND (1960) reveal specific interest in the metaphysical nature of Time and Reality, while a 1958 story from the same collection, 'Incentive', displays what almost amounts to a post-Ballardian interest in the racial subconscious.

The concepts and problems of Time and Reality which are handled in recent stories (the first important example of which was probably 'Man in his Time') are fast becoming an Aldiss trademark, a cerebral obsession reflected to greater or lesser extent in all his current writing.

Together with this interest in the nature of time Aldiss is concerned with its effect upon man, and concerned with the dissociating effect upon man caused by both time and civilisation. 'Man on Bridge' shows Adam, the first totally cerebral man, free from emotional connection with the physical world. He is the forerunner of Bush in AN AGE, just as Westermarck of 'Man in his Time' is Bush's lineal descendant in his pleasurable acceptance of the physical dissociation caused by his living three minutes ahead of everyone else.

But it's not altogether clear what role this obsession is intended to play in a story. Both Aldiss's subject matter and his manner of writing are still firmly connected with the traditional requirements and problems of storytelling, whereas other 'obsessional' writers usually allow their subject matter to dominate the construction of their work, since it is in fact their reason and basis for writing. Entertainment is continually present in Aldiss stories to the extent where I wonder how much of the intellectual matter is merely plot-device. In other words, in recent stories it's difficult to decide whether the speculation is meant to be more important than the story, or even whether the speculation is of only a nominal depth of thought.



The latter view might seem likely, but since a particular group of stories all exhibit the same mental hang-ups, we can assume that Aldiss is now writing science fiction as a vehicle for his ideas. The different variations of literary style he has employed support this view; they exhibit the signs of a writer trying to find the ideal medium for self-expression of a complex nature. So, whereas Brian Aldiss was once engaged in spring-cleaning his subconscious, as it were, he is now working out specific ideas and literary possibilities.

#### AN AGE: 3-CORNERED FIGHT?

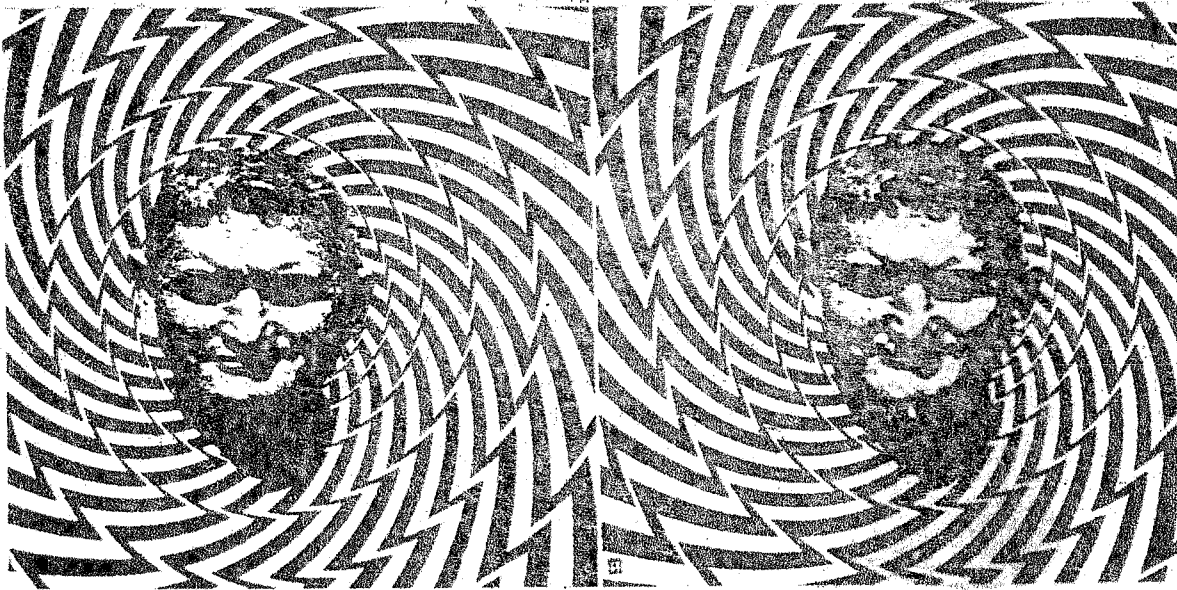
The author's recurring pessimism for the human race, (although tempered by a good deal of affection,) is seen particularly well in his recent novel, AN AGE. This rather neatly demonstrates Aldiss's obsession with time versus his ability to produce entertainment of the traditional variety; and it also reveals some of the author's faults as a novelist. Whereas Aldiss has by-and-large mastered the art of the short story, his novels still seem to be compartmentalised and over-structured in their composition.

Obviously a book like AN AGE, dealing with a vast number of years, cannot adhere to the three Unities and it isn't even desirable that it should do so. But the story reads jerkily; perhaps, given the basic premise, this is inevitable.

Bush, the failed artist, has a character which is another imponderable. Far from being the gutless anti-hero pastiche traditionally employed by so many science fiction writers, Bush acts and thinks surprisingly like a human being and this reality gives meat to his neuroses. Thus there is a three-cornered fight in terms of the story as a whole; speculation of some depth versus entertainment versus a character study. (in this context I am considering 'entertainment' in the mass-media sense, although interesting speculation is of course entertaining in itself.) All three are very much mixed-up together, and so it is difficult to know how seriously to take the suggestions about reverse-entropy!

In terms of plot, the entire presentation of this idea is extremely ambiguous in AN AGE. Bush ends up inside an asylum, apparently victim to his delusions that the future is the past, and there are only a few casually-dropped clues to suggest that he might be correct and that it is society (and, by extension, us) which has the wrong idea about the nature of time. Perhaps Aldiss didn't so much intend readers of AN AGE to accept seriously the idea of reversed time, but wanted them to question the validity of our society's arbitrary ways of measuring time and regarding it as an immutable flow in a forward direction.

After all, there is some subjective evidence which suggests that our habit of fracturing time into arbitrary splinters is based on a false premise; namely, that nature's laws are subject to human control and distortion. Everyone experiences things in a subjective manner, especially the passing of Time. And yet we have managed to persuade ourselves into accepting a common system which forces the individual to bow his subjective understanding to the objective order.



In itself the idea of reversed-time is not new to science fiction, (it has been used less skillfully by Philip K Dick in one of his innumerable pulp novels, complete with the notion of people being 'Born' from the grave, and returning to the womb at the end of their existence). In any case, Aldiss tends to diminish his own speculation by confusing the philosophic import of the idea with an Arthur Clarke-like vision of the stellar empire of the people of the 'past' (our objective future). Probably the picture is confused further by his suggestion that God is the disembodied racial consciousness of the human race of the very far past/future, depending on how you look at it. But I don't really think it matters how you look at it, because by that point the message of the book has been hammered home rather frequently; that perhaps Time isn't what we think it is.

#### A VAST, IMPERSONAL WOMB

While successfully presenting the idea of the ambiguous nature of time, Aldiss makes the reader rather more interested in the fate of the defeatist, Bush, which is as ambiguous as the nature of the time in which he travels.

Bush has a curiously personal relationship with Time, regarding it as a kind of vast impersonal womb where he can curl up and hide. Impotent to impose himself on the present because of his own inadequacy, he mind-travels the past. He prefers the different impotence of being unable to change that, because the restriction is imposed from outside and is therefore not his personal fault. This impotence isn't sexual by the way, and in fact the sexual interludes are presented as a direct contrast to the impersonality of Time; - '... his gratitude that up and down the howling gulf of centuries there was this sweet hole to go to.' But Bush feels no love, except at one point in Buckingham Palace where he comes face to face with himself, and realises; - 'what a crazy dark unknown incest this was, to be clutching himself in love'.

But although his woman returns to him and is hanging around outside the Sanatorium at the end, Bush is emotionally more involved with Time than with her. (It is typical of this 'hero' that he should feel no love except in meeting himself, and this is an astute bit of writing.) So, unable to accept his own environment, unable to find solace in his art or to understand that which his friend Borrow finds, it is perfectly acceptable that Bush should go mad rather than adapt. My only quarrel about Bush as a character is that he is perhaps an over-compensation for cardboard, but he perfectly fits the ambiguity of the ending. He is also the archetype of Aldiss' protagonists to date, a dissociated introvert with more character and ability than he cares to credit to himself.

The following brief quote from Mr. Aldiss serves to reinforce these conclusions about AN AGE:-

'...my attempt to persuade readers that neither sanity or time may run quite as they think is perhaps a non-starter; as compensation, the onion has quite a few layers.... Bush's problem is self-control, which he could find through his art; instead he falls between the self-indulgence of the opening and the totalitarian control of the closing chapters. The schematic parallel to this is the time-thing; whether Bush's vision should be regarded as infantile or godlike; the artists' vision retains elements of both.'

And yet, in the long run the overall strength of characterisation detracts from the book. Although the rival themes of temporal paradox and Bush's neurosis complement each other at the end, they also fight each other for the reader's interest, so that neither conflict is ultimately resolved.

#### NOT A PLOT BUT A TAUTOLOGY

Brian Aldiss' other recent novel, REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, is more experimental in form, more one-track in theme, and altogether less interesting. It presents many of the same characteristics as AN AGE; especially the dissociation and the complete impotence of the Watchers to physically affect the worlds they are watching. Perhaps this similarity is all the more surprising since the most part of the novel was written early in 1962.

'In the period before I wrote THE DARK LIGHT YEARS', says Mr. Aldiss, 'I had a bout of love-hate for the French new writers, in particular Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor, (author of that amazing book PASSING TIME). Their sparse bare style made me feel that my writing was like a sloppy Victorian fruit-cake; to remedy the matter, I wrote a sparse bare novel called GARDEN WITH FIGURES. It was (let's not mince matters) an anti-novel.'

(Cont/d)

'It was beautiful, mysterious, enchanting. No publisher would look at it. My agent refused even to offer it in the States. So it lay about. All one could say of it was that it was a throat-clearing exercise before DARK LIGHT YEARS.

'When Mike Moorcock started to become more adventurous with New Worlds, I felt there was hope for GARDEN WITH FIGURES. I inserted into it a few passages, - in italics in the novel - retitled it REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, and sent it to Mike. As soon as he had printed it, Faber over here and Doubleday in the States were glad to accept it for publication as an example of avant-garde SF.'

But where in AN AGE even Bush and Westermarck are able to glean at least some satisfaction from their powerless roles, the Watchers in REPORT are by their very situation bound to be emotionless and objective to the utmost degree. This objectivity becomes both strained and tedious, whatever the justification. REPORT ON PROBABILITY A deals with dummies in clinical fashion and any attempts to humanise them appear to have been eliminated.

This is especially true of the Faber version of the book, which is considerably expanded from the New Worlds story. A different and more metaphysical emphasis is laid upon it by the author's concern with the pre-Raphaelite painting by William Holman Hunt, 'The Hireling Shepherd', (frontspiece), with which Aldiss expresses his feelings on the fracture of time and also his interest in all things Victorian.

#### SHEER MEANINGLESS REPETITION ?

Unfortunately, as I see it the book has a basic fault. (I stress the personal aspect of this criticism because the innately subjective quality means that any number of people could interpret it in different ways). This underlying flaw is that the plot, as it finally stands revealed at the end, is not a plot but a tautology - an expression of sheer meaningless repetition.

The idea of Mrs Mary (dummy A) watching dummies Z through B as they in turn watch the three ex-employees watching her, is of esoteric interest only, as an expression of Aldiss' apparent conception of the anti-teleological nature of the universe. This latter concern is heightened by the obsessional interest of the three ex-employees in the Holman Hunt painting, in which the shepherd and the girl are forever on the point of performing a significant action, but never actually do it. They are suspended out of time, frozen in stasis, and this applies to the characters in REPORT, as well.

To digress for a while, I recently obtained a copy of JEALOUSY, one of the accepted masterpieces of Alain Robbe-Grillet, who is mentioned by Mr. Aldiss as a source of influence, particularly as far as REPORT ON PROBABILITY A is concerned. Some idea of how much he has influenced Brian Aldiss can be seen in this selection from the back-cover blurb on JEALOUSY:-

'In JEALOUSY, the author's most famous and perhaps most typical novel, he explores his principal preoccupation, the meaning of contemporary reality. The novel is set on a tropical banana plantation, and the action is seen through the eyes of a narrator who never appears in person, never speaks, and never acts. He is a point of observation, his personality only to be guessed at, watching every movement of the other two characters, the wife and the neighbour, deducing, remembering, interpreting actions and events as they flash like moving pictures across the distorting scene of a jealous mind.'

This extract shows that there is a considerable degree of conceptual parallel with the subject-matter of REPORT. Mr. Aldiss also adopts much the same literary style, although this may be inevitable given the nature of the subject matter. For example, Robbe-Grillet employs the depersonalisation later used by Aldiss, in styling characters 'A'...etc., instead of giving them names with which one may identify. Then again, Robbe-Grillet obviously drew some of his inspiration from Beckett who does the same things in an even more abstracted manner.

In fact, at least one other Aldiss story, 'Shards', shows some degree of correlation with Beckett's work, with for example the story 'The Unnameable'. In 'Shards' the hero, Double-A, is immersed in mud and darkness and ignorance, an almost definitive Beckett condition. In 'The Unnameable' the narrator has lost his limbs and is aware only of his head protruding from a jar.

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SECOND OPINIONS are valuable to give perspective. Here are two reviews:-

"Aldiss has a name as a science fiction writer. REPORT ON PROBABILITY A is too variously disturbing to be filed under any such classification. An exuberant imagination meets a passionate intelligence in this text, and the result is very nearly a work of art. It only fails, perhaps, because the author still feels a vulgar need to stop now and then and explain his explanations, in case we have not understood. If Aldiss could trust his readers to respond to his versions of the world as to another lived experience he would be at least as convincing as, say, Robbe-Grillet: his ambiguities are already as accurate as can be, possessing an emotional response clearer and richer than the arbitrary and somewhat unworkable logic he applied to them... Devilishly clever..." Robert Nye, The Guardian, 26 April 1968.

"...Nothing much happens, just occasional sudden outbursts of activity. Most of the time is spent in examining the physical surroundings of the watchers in minute detail. Every now and again, one becomes irritated as the narrative, turning in yet another circle, swings back to point A yet again, but one never loses interest. Mr Aldiss has brought off a most unusual performance." David Holloway, Daily Telegraph, 25 April 1968.

+ Possibly the 'most unusual performance' referred to is that REPORT ON PROBABILITY A is only the second book, to my knowledge, to be reviewed in the 'new fiction' column rather than in the usual SF 'ghetto' in the Telegraph.+



Beckett reduces life to essentials which are in themselves pointless. His vision of humanity is degraded and desperate, lightened only by the faintest ray of hope and the necessity to continue living even when the struggle appears lost. His characters lack any humanity even to themselves; they are incapable and disgusting; and tragically see themselves as outcasts. In creating a literature of despair, Beckett strips life bare of illusion or compromise. Reducing life to the barest three-dimensional geometry as he does, it is surprising and illogical that he should find any hope of future, or necessity for living at all.

#### A LABYRINTHINE GAME

This pessimism is seen in second-generation hints in REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, but from what Aldiss himself says it seems that the influence came first from Robbe-Grillet, therefore indirectly from Beckett who has in any case influenced to some degree most major western writers since the War. (This game of discovering literary influences is labyrinthine and perhaps of neither value nor significance, but I find it interesting!)

In REPORT ON PROBABILITY A ex-employees G.S. and C retain only the slightest human contact through the cafe-owner and through Mrs Mary's maid; their emotions are suspended in their abstracted and obsessional interest in Mrs Mary's actions. As with all the continua full of Watchers, they are impotent to do anything but Watch, they are suspended in stasis.

To me REPORT is a fine evocation of pointlessness; the pointlessness of myriads of Probability worlds watching each other. But in expressing this tautology Aldiss has himself reverted to tautology, and this seems to me a defect in construction rather than a legitimate artistic device; an expression of repetition by its glorification. It is a fine description of complete negativity, a wasteland of lost souls involved in action demonstrably unimportant and lifeless; lost souls who regulate their lives according to a painting which contains characters as frozen as themselves.

SPECULATION

Time has failed; the characters are frozen because of their inability to move from one instant to the next, and in common with the author's other recent writing, this is REPORT's most valuable notion. Time and reality has fractured, and the inhabitants have consequently withdrawn into introspection.

In REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, Brian Aldiss was recrossing in a semi-science fiction manner, and with slightly different purpose and viewpoint, land already covered several times over by other authors. The value of this recrossing lies, I imagine, in what science-fictional idiosyncrasy he managed to inject into REPORT: and so perhaps one may conclude (rather confusingly) that the science fiction element in the book, far from being incidental, is in fact absolutely essential to the final version of the novel.

## 2: LEADING UP -- THREE NOVELS

(THE DARK LIGHT YEARS: GREYBEARD: EARTHWORKS.)

Three novels in particular lead up to Mr. Aldiss' present pre-occupations and specific interests. These are THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, GREYBEARD, and EARTHWORKS. Both the first and last have been badly slated by various critics; I personally found THE DARK LIGHT YEARS to be immensely enjoyable but am not very enthusiastic about GREYBEARD.

On the surface the earliest novel appears a fairly straightforward treatment of the man-versus-alien theme, but in retrospect it can be seen to embody in embryonic form many of the characteristics of Brian Aldiss' more recent fiction. (It is probably worth noting again here that REPORT ON PROBABILITY A was written at just about the same time as this novel.) It makes its points splendidly in its anti-human identification; the amiably cold-blooded vivisection sequence brings to mind both actual experiments on dolphins, for example, and also demonstrates vividly that (a) our side is always right, and (b) that we've got God on our side and therefore (c) that anyone and everything else must by definition be wrong, evil, and changed to fit human conceptions.

The author says of this book, "...I do believe that the style of the volume, style which resides not only in the words and sentences but in the things left unsaid, is my best..." It was intellectually conceived on the strength of two books, Lilley's MAN AND DOLPHIN and MADKIND, by Charles Berg. The former presents its author's odious treatment of dolphins in the cause of science, and the other is a philosophy of man, holding as its basic postulate that mankind may in fact be mad; that his social divorce from nature entails madness.

This philosophy finds its echoes in Mrs Warhoon's view that 'the trouble with our culture is that it is based on a fear of dirt, of poison, of excreta. You think excreta's bad, but it's the fear of it that's bad.'

The chief charge made by Mr. Aldiss in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS is similarly that this fear of excreta hides genuine madness, the divorce from nature that has already been mentioned. Humanity meets an intelligent race with habits and morality intolerable to human standards, and the book makes its point with considerable force.



GREYBEARD cannot be taken on such black-and-white terms, but is 'fuzzier' and almost pastoral in outlook. In fact I don't see it as one of Aldiss' better novels; one might almost call it his attempt to do a Thomas Hardy except that the disaster is offstage and seen through flashback, and there is hope injected all through, to be finally confirmed at the end. It has some sharp remarks to make about human madness, but there is nothing here that Aldiss has not done better elsewhere.

However, the novel has received a considerable amount of praise. It postulates a world where irradiation from The Bomb has ended human and much animal reproduction, and it follows Greybeard and his wife Martha on their symbolic journey down the Thames as they seek the children which they cannot believe will never again be born. The strongest point of this story is the depiction of characters, a series of fine vignettes portraying people removed from the usual Aldiss archetypes of domineering women and introverted men.

Some of the author's subsequent interest in the metaphysics of time are visible in this book, but it does not compare with THE DARK LIGHT YEARS as far as I am concerned, and indeed it is only really of interest by itself, without relation to the overall scheme of Aldiss' works. THE DARK LIGHT YEARS and EARTHWORKS, whatever their flaws, are of linear interest in the development of his intellectual 'obsessions', even if not directly concerned with the specific interests of his recent writing.

The last novel of this phase, EARTHWORKS, has received more than its fair share of vituperation. It is a message-novel; a cri-de-coeur against overbreeding, a demand for desperate measures to be taken to reduce human fertility. The heroine Justine (echoes of Lawrence Durrell?) persuades Knowle, the archetypal Aldiss introvert anti-hero, to commit tyrannicide in order to begin a world war and reduce the world's population of 24 thousand million inhabitants. She is a member of the Abstainers sect, and explains her aims: 'To us (loving) is deeply significant, and a thing of deep disgust, for from it comes the propagation of the human race, and that is already out of hand enough.'

The book is message first and foremost, and thus inevitably suffers as a novel. Not that this invalidates the message, of course. Whether or not tyrannicide and World War could be justified is another matter, even to rid the world of its zombie population of mindlessly breeding consumers. Justine cries 'human life is no longer sacred', and perhaps in such a situation she might be right.

### 3: THE PROBLEMS OF OUR TIME

(The 'Charteris' Stories & related material.)

Any writer regarding his work at all seriously has to take the present day into account, and this Aldiss is doing. Currently one of the worst of our social malaises is the increasing number of people driven by the pressures of our civilisation into seeking some kind of an escape from reality, usually through mental withdrawal facilitated by drugs or mental illness. Thus we are becoming drug-oriented; 1964 saw 16.1 million barbiturate prescriptions, which was 7.1% of all prescriptions dispensed, and the number has presumably since risen.

# BRIAN W. ALDISS:

## REPORT ON PROBABILITY A

Brian Aldiss's new novel, published in May, is a tense and engrossing study of relative phenomena, in which his wit, intelligence and invention are at full stretch. 21s

## AN AGE

"Well-written, evocative and disturbing...His atmosphere is excellent - particularly when he allows his mind/time travelling protagonist to frolic in prehistory."

- Edmund Cooper, Sunday Times 21s

## BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF BRIAN W ALDISS

"A testimony of the author's range and ability"

- Kingsley Amis, Observer 21s

## THE SALIVA TREE and other strange growths

"Immaculately written, with a sensitive appreciation of the gossamer fabric of human frailty."

- Books and Bookmen. 18s

## THE CANOPY OF TIME

"Devilishly clever and compulsive science fiction collection" - Kenneth Allsop, Daily Mail

18s

## EARTHWORKS

"The technical ingenuity is always strong and just weird enough to keep one hovering between reality and fantasy!"

- The Guardian 16s

## NON-STOP

"Fascinating reading up to the end, and then, when you discover what it was all about, you start again at the beginning." - The Observer

18s

## GREYBEARD

"How good Brian Aldiss can be! ...A gripping imaginative story." - Anthony Haden-Guest, Sunday Telegraph

18s

## THE DARK LIGHT YEARS

"Masterly stealth and insistence...There is an amiable coldness about the whole thing that made me believe in it." - Kingsley Amis, Observer.

18s

## THE AIRS OF EARTH

"Displays his usual exuberance in exploring human reactions to new ideas, new advances in technology."

- Daily Telegraph 18s

Write for catalogue & lists Available to overseas readers

Dissociation from the world is reflected in AN AGE and REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, although very much as an undercurrent in these books, but more openly in Aldiss' recent stories in New Worlds, the best of which is 'Auto-Ancestral Fracture'. These, the 'Charteris' stories, have in a sense been led up to by the two novels mentioned above, and are concerned with basic themes which they have only hinted at, or dealt with in passing.

Postulate a world where to a greater or lesser degree the population has been exposed to bombardments of psychedelic drugs. It's then basic to the series that with a few exceptions the characters are constantly and completely stoned, with the specific mental effects caused by LSD. In other words the characters undergo complete dissociation, their perceptions are awry, and they are not bound to normal objective conceptions of time and space.

In MAN IN HIS TIME, Westermarck says that Time is a product of the psyche. This being the case, when the psyche is deranged then multiple interpretations of the flow and being of time and space will be possible. Western Man is coupled to the straightforward concept of one-way, one-stream time only when a sufficiently high proportion of his society is working within its own arbitrary limits, fracturing time and space and packaging both neatly into understandable fragments. We are geared to thinking of time as immutable.

Although the background to the series is that of a freaked-out community, apparently totally unlike ours, the rat-like progress of our civilisation makes it an extremely valid exploration of the possible results of our overcrowded and unreal society. Rats overbred in enclosed environments retreat into catatonia and die; so too, the evidence suggests, do human beings.

"Our experience of time is altering over this compressive century," says Mr. Aldiss. "When animals or birds become too crowded in any particular ecological situation, many undergo anoestrus and the birth process is inhibited - in some cases the embryonic material is actually reabsorbed into the uterus walls. Maybe this is because some obscure circadian rhythm is set awry. Maybe the same process is setting-in in humanity; first we experience time-disorders, then, in a generation or two, involuntary contraception starts.... You know I'm not serious, am I?"

It is interesting to note that Mr. Aldiss has written a story to explore just this sort of situation, namely 'Total Environment' in Galaxy, February 1968. The premise to this story is that a research project is begun in India, a huge 60-storey closed concrete building into which a group of selected people are introduced and left to breed and breed. There is no communication with the outside world except for periodic feeding. Told in a straight-forward manner 'Total Environment' is a fascinating exploration into the problems of humanity, and could be expanded into a fine novel.

## OUSPENSKY INFLUENCES

Much of the 'Acidhead' series of stories is directly influenced by the works of two Russian mystical philosophers; George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff and his disciple, P.D. Ouspensky. The works of both these men permeate the stories; and indeed, several passages come straight from the works of the latter while both are frequently mentioned by name.

Gurdjieff, born probably some time in the late 1860's in Armenia, wandered the world in search of the answers he wanted concerning the limitations and possibilities of the human personality. Often compared to Rasputin, he seems to have had considerable mental powers. Ouspensky recalls in his book *IN SEARCH OF THE MIRACULOUS*, instances where he heard Gurdjieff's voice 'inside his chest' and replied mentally to problems that were put to him. Gurdjieff had not been in the same room at the time.

Materialistic and prone to using his hypnotic powers to his own ends, Gurdjieff conducted a wholly conscious battle against what he called the 'sleep of the mind'. Unlike Ouspensky, he was religious; unlike Rasputin, he was apolitical; and he lived until after World War II. In an earlier age he would have been regarded as a saint rather than a philosopher.

Charteris in the Acidhead stories of Aldiss has a touch of the Gurdjieff personality; he seeks to shed responsibility and yet is singled out by destiny to be a figurehead. Gurdjieff once said that most men have no destiny; since they have no inner-reality, they are subject to the laws of chance.

Brian Aldiss says of the scientific yet occult Ouspensky that "He's the perfect acid-head visionary, who counselled meditation without withdrawal from society." As with earlier Christian philosophers and to some extent with acidheads today, he counselled introspection as a means of self-preservation.

## MANIAC SORT OF LOGIC...

If the premise to this series of stories is good, so is the writing. The economy and double-meaning of the many puns is clever and pertinent to the theme; specifically where Aldiss manages to present alternative courses of action through the double-meaning of one word. The basic theme of the multiplicity of reality is emphasised by the characters themselves; and a yardstick of their behaviour is provided by Angeline, immune to the psychedelics, and thus 'normal' by objective standards.

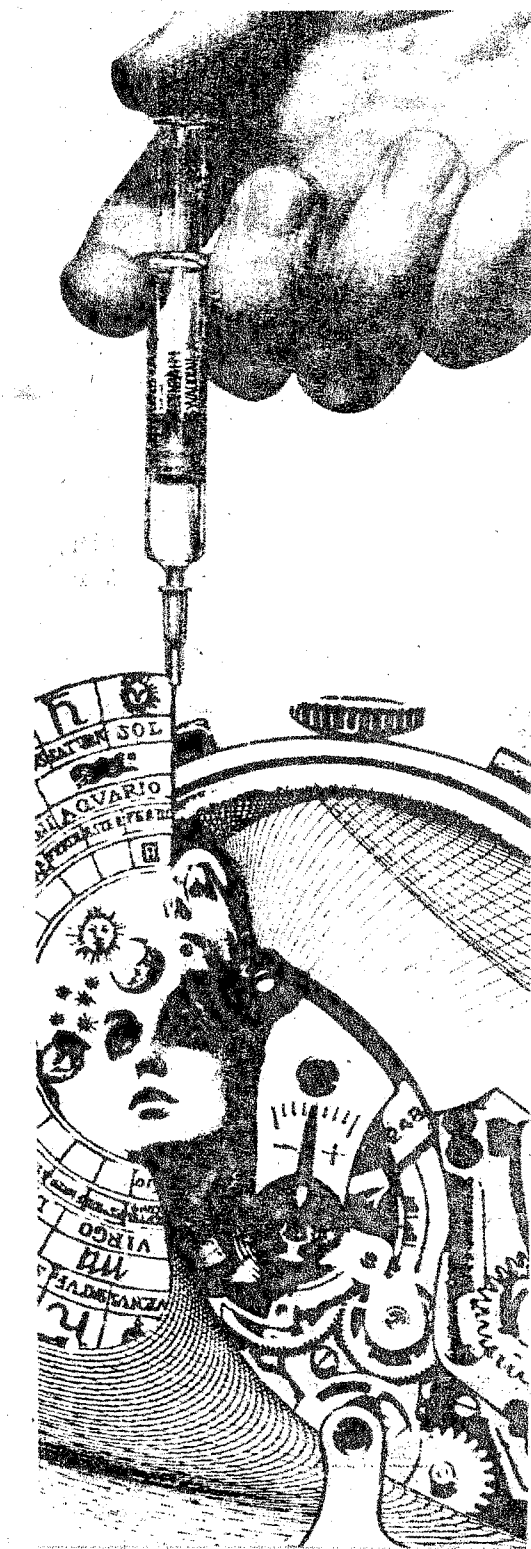
While considering this current 'acid' writing it is perhaps worth comparing Aldiss' writing in the Charteris series to the lyrics of some of the songs written by The Doors, who exhibit in 'The End' and in 'When the Music's Over' what might be called unconscious Ouspenskyism. They are powerful, vicious, American West Coast acid-rock group. Beyond mentioning that in these long 12-minute songs I see similarities to the Charteris series, any expansion of this theme is perhaps irrelevant.

Unlike IN AGE, the characters who inhabit the Charteris series combine with their theme, and complement it to a considerable extent. They present a maniac sort of logic, as in the recreation of the motorcade smash-up in 'High Point Y', the cinematic masterpiece of Nicholas Boreas, a character sufficiently flamboyant in the pre-Acid world, and more so in the emotionally super-charged new era. The smash-up, replete with perishing human dummies and specific sexual significance, is shown in a theatre in which the 'wet-mouthed awedience watched expectorately.'

These inhabitants are very aware of the nature of the world they are living in, and of its effect on them. Maggie tells Boreas he must show people the value of the pre-acid world, '...in only a few months everything will drop apart from lack of care. People who can must save the old order for better times before we're all psychedelic savages, and you in your film can show them how to keep a grip..'

Boreas disagrees categorically, seeing little of value in the old (our) world:- '... the old technological odour... was only built up by repression, and maintained by everybody's anxiety, or dummied into inhabitation. Okay so it all go and no worries.' He explains to her why he is making a film of her husband, the Saint, Charteris - 'You husbind is a saviour man for lead us to a greater distance away from old and a new belief in the immaterial. So I picture him.'

Maggie maintains that at least the old order provided a general standard of comfort, that now people are dying of plague and starvation; and in any case, why does Boreas bother to make films with no-one to watch them? Boreas answers that they are made for his satisfaction and his alone. The subjective is all that matters. The skull is the universe.



This story is a sign that at last Aldiss is coming to grips with concepts that appear to have plagued him for over two years. The marriage of language with plot-concept is particularly important, giving form which they previously lacked to these ideas. To some extent the Charteris stories present the same as REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, but more effectively. The multitude of alternatives and possibilities which are available only make the ultimate pointlessness more poignant; and there is sufficient relation to our world to make the effect somewhat more than academic.

"I loved the hippy scene and the flower people," says Mr. Aldiss. "How it brightened the stodgy British scene, if briefly! It's a thing of the past already. Although it was the direct inspiration of the Charteris series, I believe that these will not be too dated - people are always on drugs of some sort, even if only on romantic novels (or SF!) or adding up figures in a bank. And the basic question is not unlike the one in AN AGE: how much personal responsibility can one shuffle-off without damaging oneself or others? I suppose anyone knowing me will guess my answer, but I am trying not to be too heavy-handedly moral." "I adore writing these Charteris stories and shall be really sad when the whole matter is played out. The real "hero" is not that displaced man Charteris but Angeline; women have a better grip on reality than men. Some episodes are meant to be scary ('Serpent of Kundalini'), some lyrical ('Still Trajectories'), some mainly farcical ('Auto-Ancestral Fracture')."

#### 4: OTHER FACETS OF ABILITY

( The collected stories, -- THE SALIVA TREE.)

Far removed from the predominantly metaphysical nature of these introverted works are the short stories displayed in the collection THE SALIVA TREE AND OTHER STRANGE GROWTHS, and these are worth examining as another facet of Aldiss' ability and interests.

The title story is a fine period piece which tied for the Nebula Award a year ago. It skilfully manages to attain the timelessness of late Victorian England and of Wells' fiction. Some of the jocularities at the beginning seems forced, perhaps in an over-anxious attempt to immediately establish a Wellsian atmosphere, but thereafter the tale moves well and the off-stage presence of Wells himself is pleasantly handled. Above all, 'The Saliva Tree' shows the author's ability to spin a good story.

The rest of the stories here are a very mixed bag, both in form and treatment. Mild moralising is present in 'Danger: Religion', an inter-continuum story which lacks over-deep speculation without ill-effect; and also in Aldiss' Jungian fable, 'The Source'.

Of the other stories I personally found 'Day of the Doomed King' most to my liking. There is a fine sense of the might-have-been about the Serbian Empire, and the historical era is sufficiently little-known to make it semi-mythological in nature. The lack of exact definition of the time (presumably late fourteenth or early fifteenth century) adds to this feeling. It may be historically dubious whether the Serbs ever had the stuff in them to build empires, but this is scarcely important. As a study of a failed emperor it is very effective, and it demonstrates the ability of the writer to turn a slight theme into an emotionally effective tale. (This story may have been prompted by the author's visit to Yugoslavia in 1966 and his resulting book, 'Of Cities and Stones' (Faber 1966)).

This is also true, if to a lesser extent, with 'The Girl and the Robot with Flowers'; the skilful creation of a story where none exists and what could have been an embarrassingly-close glimpse of the author's private life.

The three straight crime stories, 'The Lonely Habit', 'A Pleasure Shared' and 'One Role with Relish' are excellent examples of the short story. They are in no way spectacular, but are efficient and professional pieces of writing which show fine insight into the petty morality of the man, perhaps willing to commit murder, but able to feel moral indignation at crimes other than those he commits.

This collection as a whole represents the work of a writer who has mastered the short story form, being able to twist it to suit his requirements; whereas Brian Aldiss' novels tend to the opposite - his control over the plot almost varying inversely with the length.

#### 5: AT A CROSSROADS ?

(Some conclusions)

At this point in his writing career, I think Brian Aldiss is at a literary crossroads. He has of course written other books and stories which could have been considered besides those above, but I believe that those mentioned particularly represent his interests and his changing attitude towards writing; towards a particularly cerebral attitude to the world's problems, viewed in a generally pessimistic fashion.

This casting-about for style has caused a few mistakes, most notably in REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, and while AN AGE was both interesting and entertaining, it did have a number of flaws. "Of course," says Mr. Aldiss, "I did start quite well with NON-STOP: I had a good structure for that novel. And if I had been content to go on repeating that structure then I might well be accepted now as a 'born novelist'. But the problems of writing interest me, and in pursuing them I sometimes commit errors."

Some of these faults have been eradicated in the Charteris stories, especially so in the multi-value language of 'Auto-Ancestral Fracture' (despite its occasional over-cleverness, resulting in irrelevance.)



There are signs that Brian Aldiss may produce something really fine in the near future, something with a different complexion to the generally-parochial level of 'mainstream' fiction because he is writing from the science fiction tradition. Certainly I feel that Aldiss has a better chance of doing this than his chief rival in these stakes, J.G. Ballard, if only because the latter seems to be completely bound up with truly internal obsessions interspersed with interludes of shocking the Arts Council! Thus, while Ballard has talent, any 'masterpiece' he produces will doubtless be positively Joycean both in obscurity and totally degraded pessimism.

In answer to query on this subject, Mr. Aldiss replied:-

"You ask me if I couldn't put my ideas over better without SF. The short answer is that I could. In the Acidhead series, I am. At least, it could hardly be called science fiction by any very rigorous standard, could it? But some ideas, the best, most deeply-rooted ideas, defy any categorisation. Take this idea: 'We may enjoy the present while we are insensible of infinity and decay; but the present, like a note in music, is nothing but as it appertains to what is past and what is to come'. The grand cadence is Walter Savaga Landor's (I quoted a fragment of the passage on the title page of my first book, in 1955). An idea is not an idea until it finds suitable expression, science fictional or otherwise. What you say of me is just but does not bite deep enough. Behind all theories of time lies our unappeasable disgust over that brutally brief three score years and ten."

But unlike Joyce, while often pessimistic about the human race, Brian Aldiss seems to be pessimistic on behalf of the people he writes about; to sorrow for them out of affection. You can identify with his characters, and therefore can empathise with the author's message because of this identification. His writing never lacks a certain degree of human warmth, either in the characters or by implication. It is perhaps this warmth, this humanity, which will ultimately be of greater importance to his writing than any desire to produce work of an intellectually speculative value.

"I wouldn't deny that my view of the future is dark," says Mr. Aldiss, "my view of the conditions of life is dark, but I believe you can set against that a certain sort of reserved love I have for human beings, with all their faults. You know, when I read science fiction as a kid in the thirties, the promised future was going to be more hygienic, more clean, more ordered, more happy, more rational; it was going to offer more opportunities for the individual to contribute to the general good,....etc. Well, here is that golden future, complete with fantastic weapons, fantastic materials, fantastic buildings,... and alongside them the fantastic disappointments that, for all I know, are the inescapable accompaniments of technology. Take a ride by rail from Oxford to London some day, along the beautiful Thames, and see the complete cock-up of everything, with all the wastage of life it entails - porters mournfully sweeping-up disused platforms, etc....

That miserable prospect is yesterday's golden future! So I'm not a pessimist: I'm a realist! (Oddly enough, Arthur C Clarke claims he's a realist, too!)"

I hope that Brian Aldiss doesn't abandon entertainment to the somewhat esoteric ideal of literary cleverness, as he did to some extent in REPORT ON PROBABILITY A. Because as he has already shown before, a book can be entertaining as well as intelligent, and is preferably so. I also hope the author doesn't fall into the trap of pursuing obscurity for its own sake, (not that this seems likely, for even in the more way-out sections of the Charteris stories he seems to be at pains to explain the motives of his writing and of his character's actions).

So there we have it, the new Brian Aldiss, committed to writing as a form of self-expression; or at least, committed to a form of self-expression which is more valuable than the old. With one or two exceptions, his journey into the cerebral seems more happily married to conventional techniques than that of some other authors who have allowed obscurantism to become an end in itself. This compromise, as much as anything else, seems to show that Aldiss might well be on the verge of producing writing of truly major and lasting value - if he isn't actually in the process of doing so at the moment.

Richard Gordon, 1968

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+ In his Galaxy review column for August 1968, Algis Budrys mounts an attack on AN AGE which is about as savage as I've ever seen against any book. And this time, (in my personal opinion for whatever it matters) I think he is right. This is by no means a good science fiction novel. You should read the review in its entirety; the brief excerpt below is intended only to indicate the 'other side of the story'. PRW +

"...in all this book there is not one person who enjoys life, makes life better for anyone, says anything worth remembering or accomplishes a clear-cut triumph. Which is odd, because in this book a man proves conclusively that time runs exactly in reverse of how we think it does; when he dies, the very ages mourn at his incandescent pyre. Another man becomes the creator of immortal works of art. A third man overcomes great psychological odds in straining very close to love. But these occurrences, toward which the story seems to point, or on which it appears to pivot, are spoken of, or reported, or lectured upon. When shown at all, they are shown as if in coarse-grained silent black and white. A vision on a 1935 Agfacolour underground movie about desolation."

"...But this is a useless book. It tells us that the writer thinks he's clever. It even proves that he is, indeed, notionally facile and perhaps admirable for not having gone into doing advertising. Really, this is what it tells us, when all the words are gone by. What a pity."

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Now that Richard Gordon's article is at last published, with one or two brief comments in accompaniment, I hope this will stir various readers into letting us know what they think of Brian Aldiss' fiction. I already have some pre-publication reactions; whatever your opinions please write and tell us! PRW

## WARHOON SAMPLER

.....  
I have concluded it would be impossible to mail a sample copy of the revived Warhoon, a magazine devoted to SF and fandom but otherwise completely sane, to every one of the hundreds of brilliant and witty readers of SPECULATION. It seems that the next best thing would be to present a page of quotes from the latest issues and suggest you try a copy. :: Richard Bergeron, 11 East 68th St  
..... NYC, N.Y. 10021, USA .....

ROBERT A.W.LOWNDES: In awarding this novel /BABEL-17/ a Nebula in 1967, the Science Fiction Writers of America showed their majority incompetence to distinguish between good and bad (for even if this was, as it might well have been, the best of a poor lot, then competent judges would have declined to give any award at all) and thus displayed that they are no better than any of the other author's leagues; their considered judgement on excellence is to be looked upon, at the very best, with grave suspicion. (Evaluating BABEL-17 and THE CRYSTAL WORLD, in Wrhn.)

JOHN W. CAMPBELL JR: All professional authors of fiction are professional liars, who's business is making their lies plausible and convincing ( Wrhn 24)

WALT WILLIS: I'm reminded of the time when Bill Rotsler used to write and ask for Baquotes and Interlineations, and sell them to Pageant, promising immortality on their account. We thought the originators of the sayings should get at least a couple of cents a word as well, and when I sent the last batch I scrawled on the sheet; "After immortality, what?" ('The Harp That Once Or Twice' in Wrhn 23.)

WILLIAM ATHELING; JR: I have dissected A CASE OF CONSCIENCE at some length elsewhere, and in any event what I am concerned with here is not the individual novels, but the totality. 'After Such Knowledge' as a single work - which is now how we are being asked to look at it - has flaws of its own, some of which I think serious. (On Blish's DOCTOR MIRABILIS, BLACK EASTER, and A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, in Wrhn 23.)

TED WHITE: The trouble with SF short stories is that it is almost impossible to write a good one... Most of the good stories in DANGEROUS VISIONS are the longer ones, the novelettes. There are a number of reasons why this should be true, but the one I like best is the fact that the SF short story is an inter-section wherein the worst faults of both short stories and of SF collide. ("Reflections on DANGEROUS VISIONS" - Part I of a 16 page article. Wrhn 24.)

BOB SHAW: Looking back on the teenage Bob Shaw, I see him reeling back in dismay from the demanding intricacies of the engineering industry in which he found himself, yet deriving the utmost satisfaction from reading about vanVogt's production line for starships in which it took two hundred years for the first vessel to be produced but in which the subsequent ships came off the line at the rate of one every thirty seconds. ("The Cosy Universe" in Wrhn 24.)

JAMES BLISH: The Clarke-Kubrick motion picture is, to the best of my knowledge the first "talking SF movie" to appear without music specially composed for it. ("2001: A Note on the Music" in Wrhn 24.)

Wrhn 23, 40 pgs, 35¢, also includes a lengthy analysis of Philip K Dick by Walter Breen and editorials. Wrhn 24, 64 pgs, 60¢, also features Breen's penetrating elucidation of "2001", Willis' 'Harp', Lowdnes' column and Part One of "A Wealth of Fable", Harry Warner Jr's biography of Walt Willis.

# THE PLOUGH PLOUGHED UNDER F.M. BUSBY.

THE PLOUGH PLOUGHED UNDER.... It is, you know!

Because of personal circumstances of the time-limiting and interest-shifting type, the Plough is hard put to show its share above ground of late. Yet the Kindly Editor (our own Kindly Editor, Mr Pete Weston) insists that we should be able to Plough up an angleworm or two, now and then. Well, maybe. Just don't hold your breath, is all. (I knew you wouldn't...)

"...make some sarcastic remarks about current prozines! " That is one request received recently from an anonymous source. A hard request to answer, that one is. I do not feel sarcastic about the prozines. Like the fella who climbs the mountains, I read the prozines Because They Are THERE.

There are prozines and prozines, of course. I can't comment on the New Writings and ORBIT paperback-size 'zines' because their newsstand distribution is so lousy around here that I may have (say) No.1,2 and 5 of either, appearing out of order and the latest a year or two ago. Then there are the several all-reprint magazines, which are instantly identifiable by having "BEST" or "FAMOUS" or both in their titles on the logo. These are relatively new: I bought one about 2 years ago and that was enough of that. To dust returneth....

Intermediate between the aforesaid 'milk-the-mummy' zines and actual current science fiction magazines are Amazing and Fantastic. I continue to think of these as 'Ziff-Davis magazines' in the same way I continue to say Astounding rather than Analog, even though some years ago one Sol Cohen took over from Z-D and adopted a policy of one new story and mining the tombs for the rest of the issue. (Recently Harry Harrison had the editor's chair and some leeway in having more new stories but not over 50%, I think.) It bugs me to be taken by a cynical publisher who figures to get me on one or a few new stories that just might be good. OK, colour me pliable, but how much junk do you accept from your book club: hey ?

I've seen 2 issues of International Science Fiction: it does not thrill me but it has an odd bite to it: I'll buy at least one more issue just for the flavour.

The so-called hard core of magazine-form SF in the U S & A consists of (Good LORD!) just 4 titles; Analog, Galaxy, If, and F&SF. I'm croggled to contrast this with the 20-odd titles current in the Early Pemberton era, circa 1955. And I actually used to review all that mess! Every month.....

SPECULATION

(It's not all that mysterious. I read a lot. I read most SF that comes out, except more and more now I omit that which is obviously junk and can be identified as such by the cover. Now that there is less SF around, I read more other-stuff and my interests shift correspondingly, is all. And I was never an all-SF reader, no matter how it may have looked in the fanzines.)

Well, let's look at the current crop; a little fertiliser never hurt.....

Analog, July 1968: I like anything that Poul Anderson puts his mind to seriously. This issue includes Part 3 of 4 of Poul's 'Satan's World', which does not let me down. Along with Dean McLaughlin's 'Hawk among the Sparrows' .... The short stories are something else and are perhaps more representative of Analog in recent years. That is to say, seldom very surprising, deep, thought-provoking or meaningful. Don't worry about being swamped with the New Wave in Analog: it is hard put to keep up with the Old Wave !

Galaxy, September 1968: I remember Fritz Leiber when he used to write so it grabbed you by the guts. His current 'A Specter is Haunting Texas' may tickle your navel, but hardly more than that. This one is written much more suavely than, say, CONJURE WIFE, or GATHER DARKNESS, but the old Leiber whammy is noticeably missing. (Anybody-else remember his 'You're All Alone' ? That one had it. This one doesn't.) Nextwise in this issue we have Bob Silverberg's 'Nightwings': this is beautifully written and would have been even better as a plotted-story instead of a mere extended episode. Brian Aldiss' 'When I Was Very Jung' is a quick cop-out: he's expert at that. 'The Listeners' by James Gunn is realistic on the scientific side (not a putdown) but a little short on the build-up for the humanism, which is the main strength of the story. I liked it but the wife was too cardboard to shed any blood, really. I'm too glad to see Ross Rocklynne back after all this time to carp at him very much: I think he'll catch up to events Real Soon Now.

How to put it ? OK, I find Galaxy uneven but generally enjoyable.

If, August 1968 (multiple Hugo-winner and probably deserves it): the Pohl-Williamson serial 'Rogue Star', like its predecessors, is not quite my sort of thing. Just too much Scope without enough solid background, I guess. There is the business of what we might call the Aftertaste - my disbelief does not stay suspended long enough, or something, after the story is done. But perhaps this is only a personal twist ?

Piers Anthony's 'Getting Through University' is a good new treatment of a good old gimmick - I saw it coming but enjoyed it anyway. ABChandler's 'Last Dreamer' is a freak-out on the Rim Worlds theme, and if you don't enjoy that you and I are on different wavelengths. 'What the Old Aliens Left' by D.M. Melton is a good adventure-puzzle, nothing to keep you awake at night, but fun.

There are four shorts in this issue of If; one of them is good, a neat puzzle-piece. The other 3 include a trite farce, a double-dream bit, and a fullfledged New Wave baffler. Sort 'em out for yourselves, please...

If is usually better than this issue would indicate. That's the breaks.

Cont/d

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We are always interested in purchasing large collections of science-fantasy books and magazines. We pay extremely well for collections we can use.  
COLLECTORS BOOK STORE, 1717 Wilcox, Hollywood, California 90028, USA

F&SF, August 1968: Piers Anthony has a good thing going with his middle (of 3) installment of 'SOS the Rope'; this sumbidge can write when he puts his mind to it. I've been looking through the rest of the material in this issue before commenting, and I'm afraid it's all too typical.

There is frustration and obscurity and Cute Stuff and all sorts of beautiful crap like that. Lovely writing a lot of the time, LOVELY. But very little that is really worth saying, and in this instance, a number of things not worth saying at all.

Brian Cleeve has a deal-with-the-devil story in shanty-Irish dialect: need I say more? Dean Koontz' aspect of Dystopia is the computers-don't-LISTEN thing applied to a robot hospital from which there is (if you haven't guessed) No Escape. Robert Taylor does a short remake of 'Vintage Season', entitled 'A Sense of Beauty'; his visitor has perhaps more stirrings of conscience than Kuttner's, but not enough where it counts. K.M. O'Donnell is definitely paddling after the New Wave - his 'Death to the Keeper' is quite vague about What Happened and exceedingly murky as to Why (Chock-Full of Symbolism, though, if that is your bag). Apparently this nut took a shot at the President...

Sterling Lanier's 'Soldier Key' is a big buildup followed by an equally big letdown, a 1928 story dressed up in a 1968 writing style. There's this Giant CRAB, see, and the kooky natives on this island WORSHIP it, see, and so...! (I wonder if Mr Lanier ever in his life heard of the square-cube law as applied to critters with exoskeletons. For that matter I wonder if he ever heard of 1928 !)

This is not a fair appraisal of the issue, you understand, but I feel that either most of the writers in this issue of F&SF are in love with death or they feel that the editor is. Well, I'm not; like it or not, life intrigues me a lot more.

Which is why it's tough to take time for reviewing lately, perhaps!

F.M. Busby, 1968.

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A GUIDE TO PUBLISHERS, with other useful addresses:-

Faber & Faber Ltd, 24 Russell Square, London. Victor Gollancz Ltd, 14 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2. Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, 1 Tavistock Chambers, Bloomsbury Way, London WC1. Dobson Books Ltd, 80 Kensington Church Street, London W8. Rapp & Whiting Ltd, 76 New Oxford Street, London WC1. ACE BOOKS, INC. 1120 Avenue of the Americas, New York 10036, USA. BALLANTINE BOOKS INC, 101 Fifth Avenue, New York 10003, USA. // Science Fiction Book Club, 10-13 Bedford Street, London WC2. // :- these companies will be pleased to send details of titles available, on request:- //

FANZINES: Recommended fanzines are mainly concerned with review and criticism of science fiction. Others are available of somewhat wider range of contents. Riverside Quarterly, PO Box 40, University Station, Regina, CANADA, 4 for \$1.50. AUSTRALIAN SF REVIEW, c/o John Bangsund, 3/12 Redan Street, St. Kilda, Victoria 3182, AUSTRALIA. 6 for 18s. SCIENCE FICTION TIMES, P.O. Box 216, Syracuse, N.Y. 13209. 12 for \$5.00. WARHOON, 11 East 68th Street, NY 10021, USA. PSYCHOTIC, P.O. Box 3116, Santa Monica, California 90403, USA, 50¢ per copy. ALGOL, Box 367, New York, 10028, USA. 5 for £1, (\$2.50). //

Advent:Publishers, Inc. P.O. Box 9228, Chicago, Illinois 60690, USA

THE CRITICAL FRONT.  
continued from Page 11

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\* On the recent visit to Birmingham of Albert J Lewis, SPECULATION's US Agent for 4 years, we alternated trips to Stratford and Coventry Cathedral with long sessions of talking about SF. The first of these discussions degenerated rather speedily into our mutual praises of Larry Niven, "One of the very best new SF writers," said Al, "and one of the best of all time". I thoroughly agree - Larry Niven is a first-class science fiction writer after just a couple of year's professional writing. The review below shares our enthusiasm.\*

NEUTRON STAR by Larry Niven (Ballantine, 75¢)

Reviewed by Rick Norwood.

There is more than one way to enjoy a book. For instance, I read Ballard for the beauty of language, forcing myself past the crudities of plotting. Samuel R Delany somehow tweaks my strongest emotions while insulting my intelligence. And Larry Niven appeals to the mind more than to the emotions or the esthetic sense. I like his stories, look forward to reading them, but there is an emptiness about them.

Niven's literary ancestors in SF are Heinlein for style and Clement for content. His prose is casual, fannish, often funny and always exceptionally readable. Niven himself is always the story-teller even in first-person stories, although he does have a tendency to ramble on about whatever comes to mind. Far from being poetic, he writes with an enviable ease and an occasional clever turn of phrase.

But Niven's chief virtue as a writer is his inventiveness. One doesn't mind that there is repetition from story to story, because one wants to learn, not just what hear, what Niven has to say. It is that interesting.

He speculates on known scientific facts to come up with ideas like those in 'Neutron Star'. Next, he uses pure ingenuity to concoct aliens, societies and settings, all within the limits of his own internal logic. Thirdly, his inventions interact on all levels, finding ramifications in economics, physics, sociology, psychology... you name it. Occasionally he gives an idea more attention than it deserves, but many of his creations are memorable. The 'puppeteers' in particular are a permanent addition to the literature.

The stories in NEUTRON STAR are all set in the same imaginary cosmos, but one of them is way out of chronological order. In relation to the stories around it, 'The Ethics of Madness' is ancient history, set "back" in the 26th century. The best story, 'Neutron Star', which won a Hugo, is first in the book. The worst story, 'Grendel', written especially for this edition rather than reprinted from a magazine as were the other stories, is last.

Someday a publisher will bring out Larry Niven's Future History, arranged in chronological order. If there aren't stories left out, others included that don't belong, and if the title isn't something stupid like THE PAST THROUGH TOMORROW, we will have an edition of Niven as he should be read.

Do you want to hear some of the things that go wrong with his plots? Every story in the present collection is either a problem story, usually involving a voyage; or is a capture/escape/chase story. Niven is overly enamoured with the pursuit and his hero is always the pursued, never the pursuer. (Cont/d)

Niven writes action well enough, though it tends to come in bursts, preceded and followed by long periods of talking about it, but Keith Laumer does that sort of thing much better. Niven's 'problem' stories are far more successful. - melodrama only takes you away from what his stories are really about.

Frequently Niven's plots get out of hand - he takes fifteen pages (albeit interesting pages) to get 'Flatlander' started. In 'Relic of Empire' and 'Grendel' he relies heavily on some almost unforgiveable coincidences to wind up his plot, while the hero does nothing but sit tight and luck out.

But all of these points are important only when they make a story less effective, and the damage they cause is minor. It is easy to forgive Niven his jury-rigging when it saves a story worth saving. Craftsmanship will come if Niven continues to work at it, genius is already there.

The only thing seriously wrong with Larry Niven's writing is the lack of emotional impact. The strongest emotions any one of these stories arouses are interest, amusement and mild excitement. The reader is made to feel no love, no hate, no real fear or desire. Protagonists and antagonists alike are too carefully motivated to arouse empathy, they are more like case-studies than characters in fiction. Beowulf Shaeffer in particular, in spite of being a seven-foot tall albino is a very nondescript sort of person with no real passions or humanity.

Niven seems embarrassed at the idea that his characters should be outstandingly moral or heroic, but he appears too squeamish to make them really immoral or cowardly. They are not stereotypes but they are types: of his own creation, hence of interest but not alive. The strongest emotion to stain the pages of Niven's fiction is a detestation for the idea of organ banks, a rather impersonal thing to get worked-up about. For as long as Niven does not put more feeling into his writing, there will be something missing from even his most entertaining stories.

Rick Norwood, 1968.

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HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION by Alexei Panshin (Advent: Publishers, \$6. 0)

Reviewed by Richard Tiedman.

No writer of modern science fiction has been a source of greater controversy than Robert Heinlein. For nearly thirty years the merits of his stories have been discussed, yet when all the pros and cons have been thoroughly sifted, James Blish's judgement that Heinlein is "plainly the best all-round science fiction writer of the modern era", is no more than the simple truth. Now Alexei Panshin has written what is, in so far as I know, the first full-length critical study of a modern author of speculative fiction.

That he should do a critical study of Heinlein for Advent was suggested by Earl Kemp; Panshin agreed and wrote to Heinlein asking for "suggestions, comments, and criticisms". Unfortunately Panshin had previously complied with a request for an article on STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND for Shangri L'Affaires, which somehow transmuted itself into an "article on the subject of sex in Heinlein's writing". This was accepted and appeared as 'Heinlein: By His Jockstrap' a title which was editor Redd Boggs' invention, so Panshin claims. Heinlein was apparently mightily displeased with the sartorial allusion of the title and the conclusions of the article itself. As a result he did not deem to reply to Panshin's letter and set up a blanket designed to discourage the gathering of information. The result: Panshin found his sources drying up like a dew-drop in

(Cont/d)



the desert. Further developments resulted in registered letters from Heinlein to Advent and others, the gist of which, according to Panshin, accused him of "ungentlemanly, unethical and in one case dishonourable and illegal methods of gathering material", and concluded with threats of legal action should the book ever be published. With this, Advent's feet grew understandably cold and they withdrew plans to publish. Apparently the difficulties have now been overcome or set aside; we now have the book.

I have detailed the circumstances of its writing because I believe they have had a definite result upon the critical tone of the volume. While quite praiseful at times, this is more often antagonistic, sometimes extremely so. Would the book have been less stringently negative in its conclusions had Heinlein co-operated in its writing? After the disaster of the book's inception, the suspicion hangs in the air of expressed animosity on Panshin's part. It's all very regrettable, and at least one reader feels the book's worth is diminished by the circumstances under which it was written.

Yet, despite this, Panshin has many interesting insights to offer. He writes well, if not superbly. And if Heinlein's ideas are often clay pigeons to his critical guns, he gives a comprehensive review of them that is not to be found elsewhere. If Panshin's reactions to these ideas is sometimes unreasoned and flip ("Starship troopers are not half so glorious sitting on their butts polishing their weapons for the tenth time for lack of anything else to do."), it may be because there is no end to the negative judgements that may be discovered if one begins with a predisposition to be critical.

Panshin discusses Heinlein's work in terms of its success as fiction, with only passing reference to its moral, ethical or philosophical substructure. And to me his judgement appears to be eminently right. He maintains that Heinlein's period of greatest influence with other writers came in the first period, 1940-1942. (Somehow, even in 1968, it seems amazing that a man with no previous writing experience could produce such classic mainstays as SIXTH COLUMN, UNIVERSE, BEYOND THIS HORIZON, METHUSELAH'S CHILDREN and a host of lesser but still excellent stories within two years of his first sale.)

But the highest praise is reserved for the superb series of juvenile novels which Heinlein wrote for Scribners between 1947 and 1958. As Panshin points out, these books are only nominally juveniles, and while not of uniform excellence at least seven of them stand so far above any rivals in their class as to render comparisons unfair. THE ROLLING STONES and THE STAR BEAST especially, are perhaps the lightest (though the former has its tense periods), the gayest, the most charming novels in the genre. The casts of characters are wonderfully diverse, the action engrossing and Heinlein's power of writing and sense of transition little short of miraculous.

Heinlein's last phase is called the 'period of Alienation' by Panshin, and he develops at length the reasons for the alteration in the nature of the novels written between 1959 and 1966.

Panshin really lets fly in commenting upon Heinlein's last four novels - and with good reason, I think. How could a writer of Heinlein's stature produce PODKAYNE OF MARS, an inchoate fragment instead of a novel, and FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD a book that invited satirical mirth from readers familiar with Heinlein's burgeoning obsessiveness? As for GLORY ROAD, Panshin's remark that it is "sans climax, sans sights, sans sound", could not be bettered; and THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS is called a 'dramatised lecture'.

These novels are curiously lifeless; not without occasional moments of the old vitality, but these are like nuggets rolling around in a vast barrel of ennui. Panshin feels that with comparative financial security, Heinlein has indulged himself at the reader's expense, with the themes of his earlier work assuming a paramount, disproportionate importance.

There is apparently a last phase which many writers pass through in their fiction:- Tolstoy and his social schemes; Conan Doyle championing ectoplasmic stuff; Wells and utopian World-States: Wylie and animal psychology and so on. In each case the author's fiction shows a decline in creative and literary power, the world does not heed their 'message', and things go on, more or less as before.

Reviewing the book in Galaxy, Algis Budrys apparently feels that while Panshin has been a persistent and diligent researcher, he has not presented the reader with a comprehensive final statement of Heinlein's intentions. Panshin devotes the last third of his volume to the attempt; yet the final picture is elusive.

I'm not sure Panshin is to be faulted for this. Heinlein's speculations are not so much digs or exercises in philosophical systems as a gathering of precepts and moral assertions. The critics, I think, are often misled in reading underlying implications into Heinlein's fiction, where none are intended. They cannot believe in his absolute literalism. The result is a curious confusion as to actual intents and beliefs. My point is that only a few Heinlein novels, STARSHIP TROOPERS for example, attempt a thorough rationalisation of ideas. The rest for the most part are a grab-bag of miscellany. Panshin has done his best to extract the important factors and present a generalisation of intent, but while all the parts seem to be there, the sum is still doubtful.

Perhaps one reason is a fundamental clash of outlook between Heinlein and his interpreter. Panshin admires Heinlein as a writer but his negative reaction to the author's philosophy is everywhere obvious. From Heinlein's point of view there is a difference between the thinker and the doer. (Heinlein is not, it must be remembered, a writer by first choice. Moskowitz has made the point that Heinlein feels a writer, unlike the scientist or military man, needs to justify himself.) The latter books, in fact, may be interpreted as an attempt to bridge the gap between the two.

Now Heinlein is if nothing else a 'fact-man', and his severe reaction to Panshin's book may in part be a distaste for being considered merely an ideologue. It is certainly going far, as Panshin does, to call Heinlein an emotional sophist.

Heinlein's outlook is impervious to Panshin's point of view; so implacably incisive that it disturbs thinker Panshin's yen for theoretical discussion. This becomes most apparent in Heinlein's military polemics (It is interesting to note that Panshin and Heinlein have signed statements respectively opposing and supporting the war in Vietnam). But the inexorable quality in Heinlein books is everywhere manifest. Where the hero of, say, a Jack Vance novel often shows the utmost reluctance in killing an antagonist in the hope that events will make this unnecessary, (THE DRAGON MASTERS, THE BLUE WORLD, for example) Heinlein extinguishes villains with an almost bloodthirsty glee. There is no doubt - he means it !

In this brief summary there is no space to discuss Panshin's analysis of other aspects of Heinlein's thought. Enough to say it is thorough, if not always convincing, provocative, and sometimes inflammable.

Richard Tiedman, 1968

Although more for light relief than anything else, this feature is a useful way to hurl abuse at stories that really deserve it. I'm interested in your choice of last year's worst story - why not do the demolition job for our next issue? This time, LEO DOROSCHENKO sends his nominees for our consideration.

## THE WORLD'S WORST S.F. - 1967

WORST NOVEL: I nominate COMPUTER WAR, by Mack Reynolds. (Analog, June-July 1967, reprinted as an Ace paperback). The reasons? Right here:-

a) Plot: how original! The illogical defeats the logical. That gambit hasn't been used for at least five minutes, even by Mack Reynolds.

b) Characters: the name of the heroine is Tilly, so you just gotta love her. The villain No.1. (Ye gads! How often do we see a No.1. in Reynolds' stories?) is "gross". Come to think of it, aren't gross characters an essential part of his stories? Then there's the inevitable karate expert, and of course the man, in this case 'Pater Riggins', who is never what he seems to be.

c) Dialogue: when I entered those pages I was prepared for the usual flood of "cloddy", "Holy Ultimate", "By Zen", "drivel-happy".... But the thing that got me was on Page 137 (Analog, July 67), the sure-fire dialogue in history that began:

' "...Rossie, what is the best defence against a mechanised army?..."  
He was still blank.....'

To make a nice long and lethargic dialogue short, they say that a man with a knife can defeat a mechanised army for it will run down, blah blah blah. Then they cite the success of Tito's guerillas against the Nazis. Well, on Page 138 of Analog, August 1962, in a story called 'Border, Breed nor Birth', also by Mack Reynolds, a group of guerillas in hiding talk :-

' "...Tell me, what is the single most fearsome enemy of an  
ultramechanised soldier?...."  
Jimmy Peters was blank. '

Well, the answer is that a man with a knife, because the mechanised army will run down, blah blah blah. Then they cite the success of Tito's guerillas against the Nazis.

d) Conclusion: Is there any truth to the rumour that Mack Reynolds reshuffles the pages of his old stories and then sells randomly selected pages as a new story?

WORST NOVELETTE: 'The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World', by Harlan Ellison. (DANGEROUS VISIONS collection) Why? That's a good question. Despite all the baloney Ellison gives out in the afterword, the story has but one purpose; to nauseate. Why all the loving details on the gore? (Page 142, "He drove the living blade into the lower rounded surface of her belly, piercing her sex organs as she rode astride the old man. She decamped blood and viscous fluids over the prostrate body of the old man, who also died, for Jack's blade had severed the penis within the young woman." This story drove me closer to vomiting than any other trash. Pornography has no place in our genre - let's keep it out.) There is elation over the style of this 'New Wave' writing, although not in my book. "I have no talent. And I must write."

MELTING POT:-- A sort of safety valve for SPECULATION ! Letters and comments on this issue will be welcomed - but do write as early as you can !



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Philip Jose Farmer, Los Angeles.

Dear Mr Weston,

"...As for Algis Budrys' review of 'Riders of the Purple Wage', first, let me say that I admire Budrys as a writer of fiction and I think his ROGUE MOON should have gotten the Hugo. He was cheated. Also, as a critic who can detect contradictions and lapses in the books he reviews, he is excellent. And I found him to be, personally, very charming and impressive.

However, I think that 'Riders of the Purple Wage' was just too much for him. That is, he failed as a critic. In this case, he doesn't have the perception. (Galaxy, April 1968) Perhaps he read it too fast. 'Riders' is a complex story, as complex in structure and concept as the multilevel paintings of the protagonist, it has a definite story, and, I like to think, very good characterisations, vivid, of Grampa Winnegan and Chib. Ted Sturgeon, who has recently written a profile of me to be used in the final Baycon Progress Report, says it better than I can, and also, it is more fitting that someone else defend me.

In short, whatever Budrys' merits, and Merrill's, and Blish's as critics, they reacted to the story as someone who hears the footsteps of an ogre. They had to cover up their real reactions with different sorts of gobbledygook, of course. That is what I believe. Also, I had the testimony of three people who were at the Milford convention, testimony unsolicited by me and given independently, that Merrill read my story last when she was reading the galleys of DANGEROUS VISIONS, that it was late and she was tired, so she read only the first 10,000 words and then looked through the last few pages and concluded, mistakenly of course, as anyone who has read the complete story knows, that the story hinged on the final pun. So much for integrity and honesty. I believe that she should resign as the reviewer of The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction.

+ Most fan-reviews, on the other hand, have been enthusiastic about 'Riders of the Purple Wage', and it will be interesting to see the Speculation review feature on DANGEROUS VISIONS, to appear in the next issue. Also scheduled soon is Albert J Lewis' mammoth article on Philip Jose Farmer, evaluating all of this author's work including this controversial story. PRW +

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Franz Rottensteiner, Austria.

Dear Pete,

"...Harlan Ellison is without doubt a good journalist who knows how to make people talk about him, and I hope he'll make much money from TV, but as a writer of SF he seems to me about as important as Robert Bloch, another successful

writer who cannot write very well. He would appear to be a formula writer, his formula being ugliness applied in not-too-small doses. I have reasons to believe that Ellison thinks of himself as a daring writer: and while a liberal use of words such as "shit" may appear daring to the adolescents between 9 and 90, I don't find his stories more daring than I do the enterprise of any man "daring" to write bad stories. His would appear to be a new Victorianism, an American Victorianism of our times. I am told that in Victorian novels, children weren't born but were found on doorsteps or in garbage cans. Ellison of course knows perfectly well how children are born, but what unites him with the Victorians is still the doorstep and the garbage can; he thinks that children land there as soon as they are born. The message of I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM is hammered home in asthmatic sentences, including that "Sweet, sweet little Jesus". And in 'Pretty Maggot Moneyeyes', the reader is drowned in waves of sentimentality. Ellison is never able to rise above the occasion; like the books of Upton Sinclair, his work is as mediocre as the things he writes about. I like the work of Dick, Spinrad or Disch, who also write about conditions that aren't exactly pleasant, but I would gladly trade Ellison's whole output for the first three chapters of BUG JACK BARRON!

+ Lest anyone should think Franz Rottensteiner has a particular ax to grind at Harlan Ellison's expense, I ought to point out that Franz is noted for his desire for perfection in SF. Promised for the immediate future is a long article from Fritz, with similar irreverent comments about Gordon R. Dickson's SOLDIER, ASK NOT and Blish & Knight's TORRENT OF FACES. PRW +

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David Redd, Haverfordwest (Wales)

Dear Pete,

"...Harlan Ellison is right: new readers often are disappointed when they read SF 'classics' such as THE WORLD OF NULL-A and WAR OF THE WING-MEN. (see Speculation:Data 'What's New', itself reprinted from Psychotic, Jan 68). I've had this experience myself. I don't know if he offered an explanation, not having seen the original article, but I have one if anybody is interested.

WAR OF THE WING-MEN and the rest were good for their time. (At least I assume they were.) In later years, their innovations were picked up and used by other authors, while their deficiencies were forgotten. New readers pick up one of these trail-blazers and find that its only virtue is something which has been done better in any number of later books. In short, the new readers consider the 'classic' is dated and has nothing fresh to offer them.

This problem has appeared elsewhere. For example, the novels of Virginia Woolf are landmarks in the history of fiction, but they too have their flaws. The modern reader encountering TO THE LIGHTHOUSE lives in a world forty years further on than the world of the novel. The innovations are not new to him, and the flaws are only too noticeable. And this is the problem we face with our SF 'classics'.

I am not suggesting that TO THE LIGHTHOUSE and WAR OF THE WING-MEN should be judged by the same critical standards; I am simply pointing out that the same historical process has caught up with them both. Because they are relatively recent the reader can only appreciate them by reminding himself, "Yes, it was new in those days." Older works obviously belong to a different society and the reader adjusts to them more or less automatically. In SF, the classics

(Cont/d)

were written on such a low level of literary development that the effort of making allowances ruins all enjoyment of the story. The reader is particularly disappointed because novels which he heard were brilliant turn out to be actually below the standard of the average modern hackwork. Which is what Harlan Ellison was saying in the first place. "

+ Well, he wasn't, really ! Ellison's conclusions in Psychotic were somewhat different, but of course I outlined your argument last issue (THE SPECULATOR third paragraph). You're right though, if we grant that literary progress is continually made with each successive year. Brian Aldiss said that the SF of the 'Forties was substantially different from SF of the 'Sixties, way back in SPECULATION-13. And he was howled down for his trouble ! PRW +

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Eric Bentcliffe, Cheshire.

Dear Peter,

"...Frankly I find most of your contributors far too critical of SF... naturally, SPECULATION is a magazine of criticism of the SF field and your contributors probably feel they won't get published if they do not criticise.... but I wish that more of their reaction to SF was from the 'heart' rather than from the 'head'. It all depends, I suppose, on why you read SF; I read it for entertainment and I'm far more concerned that a story tells a rattling good yarn and hangs together enough to make it convincing, than that it be scientifically accurate or told in impeccable English.

Harlan Ellison's (Psychotic) comment on VanVogt's NULL A, Doc Smith's LENSMAN series, et al, seems indicative of the attitude, the critical attitude, of SPEC towards SF.... it's clever, coherent, and convincing, but it isn't always carried far enough. These stories are now somewhat dated in style and content but any story has to be read when it is first published if its impact is to be measured against the (then) current standard! "

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David Pringle, Sutton Coldfield.

Dear Pete,

"...Tony Sudbery makes a good point on Philip K Dick in the OPINION column, No.8 (SPECULATION-18). Dick's style is weird and clumsy, particularly in THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH. But then perhaps he is only writing in a certain idiom - because people in the Los Angeles area of California really do talk like that ! A witness was interviewed on television the other day about the arrest of Sirhan Sirhan. Instead of saying "he was caught immediately", he said "he was right away apprehended." And that's exactly the kind of phraseology Philip K Dick would use!

I certainly agree that THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH reads like a first draft. It has a most unfinished feel, and therefore I'm surprised that Cape published it over here. It's a let-down after THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH and can only harm Dick's reputation with the critics. Dick is puzzling; he dances around the borders of interesting themes, then gets involved in a load of matter-of-fact plot-lines and unnecessarily-complex clutter. He is good at characterisation; he can often make his 'people' come alive, if strangely. He seems to be very much concerned with pragmatic living, and his characters rarely act from any overall moral sense - the exigencies of the moment control all their doings. His books are certainly intriguing. (Cont/d)

Michael Harrison gives us an ecstatic review of Delany's THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION... A reviewer in the Times Lit. Supp. a week or two ago described the book as 'pretentious'. It's unfair the way people lash around with words like that; if an SF work is at all ambitious, it is automatically labelled 'pretentious' and 'affected'. But I'm sure Delany is sincere; he's not 'pretending' anything... He is an intelligent and talented man, by all appearances, and therefore he has the right to aim high. The people who try to drag him down are those who don't want SF to get anywhere. THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION is not pretentious - whether it is entirely successful is another matter. I think Delany still leans too heavily on Zelazny and Sturgeon; the tough-poetic style has been somewhat overdone - it's time he cooled it down, took a leaf out of Tom Disch's book.

It looks as if Disch and Spinrad are definitely in the lead of the young American group now. Of course, Spinrad's style is wild in BUG JACK BARRON - but legitimately so. He's writing in a certain idiom, not in a synthetic style like that evolved by Zelazny and Delany. When Spinrad is not using the BUG JACK BARRON idiom he writes in a fairly-formal manner, like Disch. Also, Disch and Spinrad show no signs of the sickly, tough-guy, slangy sentimentality that chokes Sturgeon, Zelazny and even Delany occasionally. A tendency to lapse into an uneasy mixture of American slang and formal prose has spoiled the style of too many writers, from Robert Heinlein, through Sturgeon (and Dick ?) to many others. The Zelazny stories I like best are those with a clean, almost Biblical prose, such as 'For a Breath I Tarry' and 'The Keys to December'. His style, as Sturgeon's, sometimes touches greatness when it is divested of the cloying slang"

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David I Masson, Yorks.

Dear Mr Weston,

"...The special article on CAMP CONCENTRATION was interesting. What had struck me about that story (in the magazine form) was the brilliance of its ideas and the power of its basic notion, marred by a slick and imperfectly motivated final surprise up on the surface. (I speak from memory, and may be doing it less than justice - a confession I wish all reviewers would utter.) Also, "Adrienne Leverkdhm" is rather like a TV actor in a tragedy suddenly winking at the audience." +(see 'Disch & the Faustus Theme', SPECULATION-18). +

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Rick Norwood, Louisiana.

Dear Pete,

"...I suspect that A GIFT FROM EARTH (Ballantine, forthcoming) will differ sufficiently from SLOWBOAT CARGO so that reviewing the former on the basis of having read the latter would be a mistake. I hope A GIFT FROM EARTH will be an improved version - I did not like the magazine story. I did not see any point to it. It was a Superman adventure story. There was lots of action to very little purpose and only sporadic glimmers of Niven's usual originality.

I'm afraid I stuffily disapprove of your "World's Worst SF" feature. Anything really bad isn't worth reviewing, so people will probably use this section to insult writers closer to best than to worst. The title "World's Worst" invites name-calling rather than reasoned criticism. I'm sure someone will step forward and call Heinlein "world's worst SF writer", for example. Maybe you can get Michael Moorcock to call Tolkien "World's Worst", or who was it that Ted White said in Yandro had planned to use Larry Niven as a bad example in a projected book on SF? If one group builds anything up, you can be sure there will be another group ready to tear it down.



"(C.S.Lewis).. was too hung up on the theological kick." Good grief !

I think you are underestimating THE IRON THORN. It is, I believe, a subtle book with a message. Much as I distrust this sort of thing, I am going to attempt to explain the message. Of course, the fact that any sort of explanation is necessary means that it is not as good a book as I thought it was.

Step One; observe that a creative artist is often dissatisfied with his society, chafing at social and cultural limitations and restrictions. Step Two: What If ? If he were transported to Utopia where anything is possible and all artists received instant uncritical appreciation. Step Three: Build a primitive, restrictive society, a permissive Utopia, a means of transportation/education. Step Four, of course, is to write the story.

4 And the conclusion is that the artist is dissatisfied even in Utopia. He is dissatisfied because of what he is, not where he is. Honor Jackson is left with a choice between embarking on another quest for Utopia or settling down to work. And here the book ends, abruptly enough to make you think, because Budrys has the sense not to do what I have just done, to tell you what the book 'means' and what the choice must be.

One last point - from your letter-column last issue:- "Heinlein has never had the slightest notion of how to represent human beings who convince you that they could actually walk and breathe and so forth." Argggghhhhhh !!!!!

+ Lots of answers here - 'World's Worst' will encourage name-calling, but I hope the abuse will be heaped at those who for some reason deserve it! As far as THE IRON THORN is concerned, I saw the message you spell out - saw it immediately. The reason I wondered if I'd missed something was that this seems such a worthless message to spend 200 pages-odd in writing about ! You are the only one to seize that comment about Heinlein's writing from the last MELTING POT - I had hoped scores of outraged readers would protest at Richard Gordon's remark. SPECULATION is like that, a treacherous maze of hooks and traps to get you writing! +

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Piers Anthony, Florida

Dear Pete Weston,

!...I see you requesting comment on such novels as Spinrad's THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE and Delany's NOVA, and am tempted: but I remember that I wrote to Spinrad to tell him that obviously his novel did not reflect on the Vietnam situation... and learned from him that it did. I condemned the excessive and repetitious bloodshed in it.. and learned that that was part of the point; to make it show up for what it is, for what war itself is: horrible. I suggested that his novel was a good one for me to recommend to friends who accused my work of being too sexy.. and learned that he was using my novel CHTHON for his refutations in that regard!

Which brings us to Brian Stableford's review of CHTHON. I have said elsewhere that I knew of no-one, fan, pro or critic, who really understood this novel. I have also said that no person of normal character could comprehend it and actually like it. CHTHON is a novel by a sick mind, for sick minds, involving a really sick mind... Be all that as it may, I find Mr Stableford's analysis the most penetrating yet, and I believe he has understood as much of the novel as anybody has. Certain critics notable for espousing the so-called 'New Wave' material have stayed scrupulously away from CHTHON: I'm not certain whether they didn't realise how more insidious the ramifications were than,



say, those of Mr Delany, or whether they did realise... Anyway, I congratulate this reviewer for apparently understanding the novel better than most, and still having the nerve to discuss it frankly in print.

For those not familiar with CHTHON (and this includes a number who have read it) I'll say briefly that it centres around the Oedipus theme: that is, the protagonist falls in love with his mother and has sexual congress with her (graphically, if figuratively, described through the sexual climax, pages 187-191, Ballantine edition), after which he symbolically blinds himself while his mother commits suicide. There is much else in it, of course, and my main effort did go into the complex structure, but this may explain why certain people find the novel so annoying yet are unable to understand why. Certainly no empathy with the protagonist dare be admitted...

Oddly, however, I have received some very enthusiastic fan letters expressing empathy with the hero. One professional, an MD, suggested that there was greater sexual-psychological relevance to common attitudes than most would care to admit, and I think that is true. Why is the Oedipus myth itself so fascinating? Is it not because many men secretly desire their mothers? This, incidentally, is the main reason I carefully stated in my author's note that it was not autobiographical. I do have parents, they are living, and I do not wish to have them wronged by people's insistence that a novel be interpreted in terms of its author's life. I assure you that had there been anything like this in my family, I would never have had the nerve to display it in print. In any event, I have several other novels scheduled for publication soon. One involves adultery, another had bestiality (woman and dog, if you must know) before the editor insisted on revision, a third has a twisted love triangle. So take your pick, if you want to read the author into his work; I assure you impartially that my own sex life is boringly normal, and always has been. My sentiments do appear in my work - but so do my violent antipathies, if you have the wit to distinguish them.

Everyone makes so much of that seven years it took to finish CHTHON. Look, people: it took seven years of extremely part-time labour. You try turning out a complex novel while walking guard duty in the army or working overtime for industry or taking full-time teacher-training courses! Once I had some time free I wrapped it up fairly expeditiously, and since then have worked considerably faster.

All this to clarify that I do find places where Mr Stableford's analysis of CHTHON differs from my intent - but upon reconsideration, I have to confess that I like his as well as I do mine, so have no need to take exception. All in all, a very thoughtful review, and I appreciate it."

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John Foyster, Victoria, Australia.

Dear Peter,

!...I'm a bit flummoxed by a para in your editorial. 'Looking back', you say, 'almost all science fiction written before - arbitrarily say 1955 - seems shallow, lacking in literary values, and even sadly short on speculation....' I cannot follow this at all. If 1955 is an arbitrary choice, then so would be 1969 (that's my choice!) or 1939. But quite aside from this arbitrary choice which obviously isn't arbitrary, I don't see that what you say follows. The implication is obviously that things are getting better, unquestionably. This may well be so, but in the field of science fiction I cannot see that the improvement is so marked that a statement of this kind can be made. Perhaps we

need a Blindfold Test, after the style of the Leonard Feather column in Down Beat. 'Now, Pete, what do you think of this story?' 'Hmm, rather like a Carter Sprague III, perhaps with Winston K. Marks overtones - no, I'd say Carter Sprague III, 1952'. When this sort of thing can be done, or if a story can even be placed near its correct year, then the sort of thing you seem to have in mind will have become possible. Science fiction changed far more between 1939 and 1951, I suspect, than it did between 1951 and the present day (an observation borne out by the dates printed in anthologies). Basically, my position is with Ken Bulmer, I suppose.

I leap with some vigour to the defence of your countryman (though presently he resides in Australia) Jack Wodhams, who is so foully manhandled by David Redd in your WORLD'S WORST SF feature. I even thought of leaping before reading the story, but to make things fair, I did read it. Maybe it isn't as great as some, but it isn't nauseatingly bad either. The introduction may have been a textbook hooker, as David Redd puts it, but it is also essential to the plot. The irony (I admit the word is a trifle strong) of the final scenes would be meaningless without this introduction.

Personally I found the dialogue relatively easy to follow; if David Redd found it hard to remember who is who, then that is his problem (though admittedly a serious problem when it occurs). Not only was the dialogue attached to names, but each name actually said different words, used different arguments and even used slightly different language. (Not very different perhaps, but better than you'll find in most science fiction stories.) Had Jack wanted to differentiate the characters more clearly, he would surely have expanded the piece - but David Redd claims that this was his major aim - to get the maximum number of 36 words out of the plot....

Franz Rottensteiner's letter on LORD OF LIGHT so accurately describes my own feelings that I'd be wasting time if I made further comment."

+ Jack Wodhams wrote in about last issue's WORLD'S WORST feature, and I have a feeling that I owe some sort of apology. David Redd was not being particularly critical by any rigorous standards, and he did not expect me to give such a prominent position to his comments. At the risk of putting words into David's mouth, I'll say that WHOSAWHATSA was slated for its flimsy pointlessness more than for anything else. I agreed completely with David that the story was by no means what I expect from Analog, although admittedly the author was concerned to write a humorous, lightweight piece.

So far as my editorial comments go, the vintage of SF stories has been mentioned in David Redd's letter on Pages 43-44 of this issue, and also in Brian Aldiss' review of THE WATCH BELOW (SPECULATION-13). +

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Bob Parkinson, Aylesbury

Dear Pete,

"...I hesitate to disagree with a good friend like Graham Hall, but I feel that he puts down THE HOLE IN THE ZERO just a little too firmly. As it happens, I read this and Sheckley's MINDSWAP consecutively, and the parallels are too good to be missed, so perhaps I might add a few comments of my own.

Has anybody noticed how much Sheckley has improved recently, incidentally? There was a time when he was noted for writing 'comic inferno' dialogue-problem short stories which were amusing and satirical but little else. And now suddenly Sheckley seems to have learnt a whole lot of new techniques. Each new story is a surprise. MINDSWAP is a novel of chaos, with at times a biting wit,

but the sudden discovery of the stylistic parodies and pastiche that it goes through in its course comes as a surprise, even after JOURNEY BEYOND TOMORROW. The interesting thing is that Sheckley the SF writer chooses to parody non-SF styles, while Joseph, the English Lit. Prof., takes off specific SF styles, time and again. Isn't this Anderson?

"...sunset. To right and left, as far as eye could see, the main squadrons stretched in level flight, until they disappeared into the twilight haze on each flank."

Graham even says '...ZERO is hardly comparable with the ordinary run-of-the-mill publisher's list-filler novel.' I feel here that he has just not been watching what is produced in the mundane field. But it seems to me that Graham has failed to see that there is a dramatic and thematic consistency through the book. It is no use asking whether this failure isn't more the author's fault than the readers: Joseph communicated this unity to me and to that extent he was successful. And the critics job is not primarily to make nominations for the Nobel Literature Prize, but to open up insights into the literary world - to reveal depth where there is depth.

The dramatic theme of HOLE IN THE ZERO is, I think, metamorphosis, and human attempts to come to terms with a world in constant change. There is sequence - at first the chaos seems to be random unconnected events, but slowly the characters choose forms that enable a sequence to be laid down. The world continues to shift but extended episodes become possible. And eventually, having wrested a sort of power and ascendancy over the shifting scene, the characters attempt to dominate one another, and that growing battle will destroy the order produced, but never entirely. Joseph, it seems to me, is asking in part: 'what is chaos anyway? How do you handle mere probability?'

The first 30 pages of the book are more than mere introduction, they are also the overture. In some ways the book has the structure of a fugue; the first 30 pages are the theme(s); later comes the dialogue and the variations. Already it shows us the characters, trying to dominate their world, and trying to dominate one another. Then they dive through the hole in the zero....

At which point it occurs to me that what Graham left out, what I left out, what no reader could guess unless he knew the book, and yet what is important - the damn thing is meant to be funny! (Plaintively) Isn't it?"

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Michael Moorcock, London.

Dear Pete,

(see Pages 7 & 8)

'...A lot of people hate the book (THE FINAL PROGRAMME), - I got one letter from Dallas, Texas, in which the reader asked for her money back, saying that my mind was so sick it made her want to puke - and it has only recently found an English publisher. It is the first volume of a tetralogy about Jerry Cornelius and there will also, ultimately, be a collection of short stories about him - one is appearing in New Worlds 185, 'The Delhi Division', and another has been taken for the anthology of original SF that Lang Jones is editing for Hutchinson, called 'The Peking Junction'. It's my hope that the short stories will help make the concerns of the novels a little more plain to people who have been puzzled by THE FINAL PROGRAMME.

I'd like to point out that the book has no explicit 'message'. It was written three and a half years ago, though revised about a year later, and I got very gloomy about it since I was convinced it was the only decent book I'd ever written, and for some time (until, in fact, January 1967) I gave up hope of

being able to do anything that was what I thought was good and what the public (or, essentially of course, the publishers) enjoyed. I've always written for an audience and would probably stop writing altogether if I didn't have one (for all the nasty things said about me, I do believe that a writer's first job is to entertain). Ron Whiting asked to see the book soon after it was written, then sent me a patronising letter telling me I'd plainly set out to write a negative book intended merely to shock, that I had some talent but I really should learn to write before I attempted a novel. For a long time it was admired only by a handful of fellow writers who had read it in manuscript - and hated by Judy Merrill who'd also read it in manuscript! - and had, I flatter myself, a peculiar sort of underground influence, in that work which had in some way been inspired by it was appearing before the book itself actually appeared.

Even now Jim Sallis has written two Jerry Cornelius stories of his own, inspired by the short stories I've written. I've been told that the book was ahead of its time. It's the sort of thing any hard writer will say to explain why his work hasn't sold, but in this case I believe there's a small degree of truth in the idea and I've been very pleased at the reviews I've so far seen of the book, since every reviewer has praised it. I'm inclined to believe that most publishers are always somewhat behind public taste. If the public dislikes a book that's fair enough, but half the time the publishers are so moribund that they will refuse to publish a book that, unknown to them, has a large potential public.

I've had some strange reactions from publishers with FINAL PROGRAMME, (some stranger even than Spinrad's with his 'difficult' book, BUG JACK BARRON), many of whom have decided that the book was sloppily written. It was, in fact, very carefully written (though I can see improvements I could make now) in a somewhat laconic vernacular style. Just as people don't really look at paintings they don't seem to read books, either. I am exceptionally grateful to George Ernsberger at Avon Books who published FP and contracted for the remaining three novels in the set, and who will also publish BUG JACK BARRON in the U.S. As a matter of interest Ernsberger will also publish the novel version of BEHOLD THE MAN, and has commissioned a series of novels from Delany. He's building an excellent list for Avon, covering the spectrum of modern imaginative writing."

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WE ALSO HEARD FROM: A great many other people. Last issue pulled more response than ever before - do keep up writing! Letters were received from Michael Kenward, Brian Aldiss, B.J. Cox, Graham Hall, David Piper, Colin Steele, Frank Wyers, Ron Haycock, Ray Fawcett, David I Masson, Robert Bloch, Jack Williamson, Tony Wilson, Chris Priest, John Bush, John Foyster, L. Sprague de Camp, Graham Charnock, Mike Harrison, George Hay, Jack Wodhams, Dan Morgan, Gerald Bishop, Franz Rottensteiner, Sam Moskowitz, Joseph Green, Gregory Pickersgill, Alexis Gilliland, Terry Carr, Philip Jose Farmer, D.G. Bishop, Leo Doroschenko, Phil Harbottle, John Hall, Joe Patrizio, Richard Gordon, Peter White, Langdon Jones, Archie Mercér, Roy Kettle, Riccardo Valla, Dav Garnett, M.A. Bullen, Ken Bulmer, Vic Curtis, Phil Muldowney and Tony Sudbery. \*Phew!\* That's 47 WAHF's, most of which have been answered. A word or two here, since there's a little space remaining - I do try and answer the letters I receive, but it often appears an impossible task. Please be patient if you are expecting a reply, and don't think your letters aren't appreciated. I enjoy hearing from everybody and welcome even an occasional postcard that says 'I enjoyed SPECULATION'. PRW.

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# Speculation BOOK GUIDE

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SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE is a very brief potted summary of the books published in the months since the last issue. Some of these titles undoubtedly deserve more complete attention, and we will be glad to receive any opinions or comments prompted by these mentions.

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THE DOLPHIN AND THE DEEP, by Thomas Burnett Swann, Ace, 50¢.

The writing of Thomas Burnett Swann somehow evokes a nostalgic response - there is something of childhood in his fantasies, the same wrapt involvement in the dream, the same escapism. He sets his stories far from the here-and-now, in classical times in the Mediterranean countries. But instead of writing historical novels he blends myth with history and inventions of his own. In his world men mix with Centaurs and friendly dolphins, Tritons and wood-nymphs. A certain suspension of disbelief is essential - adults cannot easily accept the conventions of the fairy-tale world Swann creates. But a little effort is worthwhile for behind the apparently childish themes there is an adult intellect at work: less adult and less of an intellect than Peake or Tolkein, but enough to boost the power of Swann's writing above that of any other fantasy writers working for the magazines, with the exception of the late Cordwainer Smith.

'The Dolphin and the Deep' is a collection of three stories, two of which are set in Swann's usual Mediterranean landscape, and one in England in the Middle Ages. 'The Murex' is one of his best stories and both of the others are good.

Peter White, 1968

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WILLIAM TENN - SIX VOLUME COLLECTED WORKS (Ballantine, each 75¢)

As we said in the last issues, when a writer reaches a certain degree of fame, he is likely to find his early, and often embarrassing, stories dug up for publishing in collections. William Tenn has built a reputation for quality which is seemingly based on the limited number of his stories in accessible volumes. Ballantine have shown in their six-volume set of his works, that even William Tenn had early days and clumsily-handled stories. Of the 6 books, THE HUMAN ANGLE and OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS can safely be recommended as choice collections of a dry wit. Likewise, THE WOODEN STAR contains 11 stories with only three 'duds' and some classics like 'Eastward Ho!' and 'Null-P'. But so far as THE SQUARE ROOT OF MAN is concerned the 9 items are very poor, and THE SEVEN SEXES has a erratic level of quality dipping frequently into the weak. OF MEN AND MONSTERS, sixth volume in the set, and Tenn's first novel, is a delightful expansion of his Galaxy serial of 1963, in which he demonstrates beautifully that man is the perfect domestic pest. A wry humour is present all through, which is not spoilt by any contrived 'happy ending'.

#### SOME RECENT ACE RELEASES:

THE KEY TO VENUDINE by Kenneth Bulmer/MERCENARY FROM TOMORROW, Mack Reynolds 60¢  
ACROSS TIME by David Grinnell, 50¢: STAR HUNTER & VOODOO PLANET, 2 novels by Andre Norton, 50¢: STAR QUEST by Dean R Koontz/DOOM OF THE GREEN PLANET, by Emil Petaja, 60¢: PSI HIGH by Alan E Nourse (& other stories) 50¢: ANTHROPOL by Louis Trimble/THE TIME MERCENARIES by Philip E. High, 60¢.

THE OTHER SIDE OF TIME, by Keith Laumer. Dobson SF, 18s.

Much though I admire Keith Laumer's rapid, action-packed style of storytelling, I do wish that he would be more careful with his plotting and with the small, important details! Almost all of his novels have fallen apart plotwise at about their mid-point (notably THE HOUNDS OF HELL, WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM and that long rambling thing in Amazing which started under Stonehenge!) In this case, Laumer only succeeds in finishing his plot by piling complication on top of complication. His hero here finally resolves a conflict by travelling backwards in time, while crossing 'paratime' dimensions, and at the same instant being in a peculiarly unlikely state of 'null time'. That is three realms of impossibility, rather like pulling a rabbit out of a magician's hat inside a magician's hat inside a magician's hat. On top of that, note that on Page 15 Laumer says... 'not one blade of grass, not a tree or flowering shrub...' ... no sign of life. On Page 17 he writes .... 'I was watching from the shelter of a massive oak...'

In other words, slapdash writing. I like Laumer, very much enjoyed the first half of EARTHBLOOD, for instance. Although Chris Priest thought he was a pen-name for Heinlein, once upon a time, he is obviously a very talented writer who is in too much of a hurry to do the job he should.

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THE WITCHES OF KARRES, by James H Schmitz. Ace, 75¢

"Widescreen baroque" is a critical term coined by Brian Aldiss. Originally applied to the novels of Charles Harness, it might equally well have been tailored for THE WITCHES OF KARRES. This is an adventure story on a grand scale, pure, undiluted, unashamed space-opera, full of atmosphere and wonderfully evoked visual images, ornamenting a plot which manages, somehow, to avoid the manic plunges into bathos which are the constant pitfall of this kind of novel. But for all its ingenuity, the plot is an artificial construction. Like a playground, it is merely an excuse to give the characters somewhere to romp. And it's the romp, not the romping-place, which makes this mammoth novel so enjoyable.

Graham Charnock, 1968

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ACE BOOKS - MORE RECENT RELEASES

THE LINCOLN HUNTERS by Wilson Tucker, 'Special' series, 60¢: NEW LANDS by Charles Fort, 60¢: CARPATHIAN CASTLE by Jules Verne, 60¢: THE VILLAGE IN THE TREETOPS, by Jules Verne, 60¢. ('Fitzroy' editions, ed. I.O. Evans).

A PRIVATE COSMOS by Philip Jose Farmer, 50¢ - this is a further sequel to the novel THE MAKER OF UNIVERSES, and it tells of the further adventures of Kick-aha and - at the end - the Lord Wolff-Jadawin. Like Laumer, Farmer confuses his plotting in order to get the right answer, but the book is a lively action story even so. See Al Lewis' forthcoming evaluation of Philip Farmer.

SWORDS AGAINST WIZARDRY by Fritz Leiber, 60¢, follows up the adventures of the Gray Mouser & Fafhrd after THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR, also from Ace. Unlike the previous book, this is not a novel but three spliced-together stories which do not quite jell. Good reading but I prefer the earlier TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE.

RITE OF PASSAGE by Alexei Panshin (75¢). This huge 250-page novel is the author's first, although he is well-known due to his volume on Robert A. Heinlein, HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION (see Page 38). Reviews so far have indicated that this is a major work, and it should be reviewed at length in the next issue.

PICNIC ON PARADISE, by Joanna Russ, (60¢). Like the Panshin novel, this is an Ace SF 'Special' title and it looks interesting. It should also be reviewed at length in the next issue of SPECULATION.

LOGAN'S RUN by William F. Nolan & George Clayton Johnson (Gollancz 21s)

A natural consequence of overpopulation would be intolerance, and intolerance is never more marked than in areas in which the young confront the old. This is the social background to LOGAN'S RUN; a worldwide, automated, fascist society composed entirely of people under 21 (an interesting proposition in these days of defiance and youth-revolt). Logan is a Sandman, whose job it is to hunt down those who have not volunteered for Deepsleep on Lastday, the day when the flower-shaped age-indicator turns black in their hands. This is the story of how his own flower blackens during his search for the mythical Sanctuary, and of the hunt that follows to venues all over the planet.

The action is compact: the language creative: and the pursuit alternately frantic and leisurely - but sadly the end seems hurriedly inconclusive. In this predictable, classic SF manhunt it is not the major characters who are the most interesting. For instance, there is Francis the dedicated Hunter of Logan, whose character is suggested by what is not written about him; there is Rutago, the 16-year-old leader of a wild gypsy gang with a groovy language and a fatal, reckless philosophy of pleasure: and Box, a cyborg Fury embodying the most dangerous and psychotic elements of artist and computer. It is a book worth reading for a fresh treatment of old SF ideas; and the authors' own ideas are mind-watering enough to justify more detailed use.

Bob Rickard, 1968

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NEW PAPERBACKS: A WAY HOME by Theodore Sturgeon (Pyramid 60c): DRAGONFLIGHT by Anne McCaffrey (Ballantine 75c): THE MASKS OF TIME by Robert Silverberg, (Ballantine 75c): DAUGHTERS OF THE DOLPHIN by Roy Meyers (Ballantine 75c).

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THE JUDGEMENT OF EVE by Edgar Pangborn. Rapp & Whiting 21s.

With this novel the author appears to have attempted a repeat of some of the more successful tricks he used in the highly-acclaimed DAVY; unfortunately they have not stood a further airing. For a start, the author creates yet another Post-Atomic World of desolation, and then becomes almost unbearably coy. DAVY was supposedly the written account of the main character, after the events had happened - a good trick. Here, the frequent references to future generations which supposedly remember Eve's choice are nothing more than annoying. All of the main characters burst into speeches at a moments notice, invariably about the wickedness of the Old World. Spots of nice writing (Bellamy's meeting with Mrs Newman in the deserted city) are wasted on the book, which reads more like a moral analogy than anything else. But perhaps this is what the author intended.

THE TRAPS OF TIME edited by Michael Moorcock. Rapp & Whiting 25s.

This is another of this publishers excellent new SF series. The ten stories contained in the book are all on the theme of Time, and are an excellent choice. Aldiss opens with 'Man in his Time', which is deservedly famous, followed by 'Time Trap' by Charles Harness, which I didn't like. Lang Jones' 'The Great Clock' is a fascinating episode, and also fascinating is J.G. Ballard, making sense for once with 'Mr F is Mr F'. 'Traveller's Rest' by David Masson is a must for the collection, although I didn't like 'The Garden of Forking Paths' by Jorge Luis Borges nor 'Unification Day' by George Collyn, which is another good episode of a missing story. 'Now is Forever' is Thomas Disch at his best, Roger Zelazny's 'Divine Madness' is absolutely perfect. I've run out of superlatives and this book would be a really excellent collection for anyone, even with the last few pages wasted on 'How to Construct a Time Machine' by Alfred Jarry, which takes a long time to say nothing. But a fine volume, even so!



THE TIME-HOPPERS by Robert Silverberg. Sidgwick & Jackson, 18s.

To me, this book represents a wasted 2 hours. Not that I didn't get through the story fairly easily, but because it was so instantly forgettable. I'm reminded of the time when Walt Willis said this so much better than I could, in Oops! 26, March 1959. "In the old days," said Walt, there used to be good authors and bad authors, and you could get through the entire monthly output of SF in a few hours. But nowadays, when most of it is written by Bob Silverberg, it's a much more tedious and frustrating operation. You can't get through Bob Silverberg boilerplate that fast." Walt went on, "...I imagine the average editor, faced with a twenty-three page gap in his magazine falls back thankfully on a handy Silverberg story, available in all stock sizes. He knows it will be competently written, with unexceptional syntax and spelling, it will hold the reader's attention sufficiently to lead him on to the next story, and no-one will fling the magazine away in shock or anger. The fact that nobody will remember the story the next day is not important." Walt Willis went on to conclude that the too-competent specialist is a menace to science fiction, because they know the field inside-out and create a mechanical simulacrum that walks and talks and fills up space and yet does not have the true flame of life inside it.

This is not being altogether fair to THE TIME-HOPPERS. But this novel says nothing, really, and I was completely unmoved and uninterested in the whole plot. It even sounds all right in theory, until you have the author describing the 25th Century in a standard manner which might just as well describe 1984. The book is very readable, but contains nothing more than passing interest.

A word or two here about this publishers new SF series. Sidgwick & Jackson were one of the first UK publishers of SF, and printed many novels by Clarke, Heinlein, etc. They are now bringing out an extensive 'Omnibus' series, which is very good value for money, and many new titles (see back cover advertisement). Other new titles this quarter include:- THE WORLD JONES MADE by Philip K Dick, at 18s; CAVIAR by Theodore Sturgeon (21s); and THE FUTURE MAKERS edited by Peter Haining, also 18s. The eight stories in the last-mentioned are all early efforts by top SF authors; hence they are not as good as they might have been.

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#### MORE ACE RELEASES:

PICNIC ON PARADISE by Joanna Russ, 'Special', 60p; TWO-TIMERS by Bob Shaw, 'Special' at 60p. Both of these look extremely interesting, and together with Panshin's RITE OF PASSAGE show that the Ace 'Special' series is leading the paperback field in bringing out original titles. This must reflect on Terry Carr and on the guidance and assistance of Donald Wollheim who have now succeeded in getting away from the old 'image' of the space-opera Ace title. These two editors confirm their partnership by bringing out WORLD'S BEST SF 1968, which is just what it says it is. A quick listing of contents:- 'See me Not' by Richard Wilson; 'Driftglass' by Samuel Delany; 'Ambassador to Verdamm't' by Colin Kapp; 'The Man Who Never Was' by R.A. Lafferty; 'The Billiard Ball' by Isaac Asimov; 'Hawksbill Station' by Robert Silverberg; 'The Number You Have Reached' by Thomas M. Disch; 'The Man Who Loved the Faioli' by Roger Zelazny; 'Population Implosion' by Andrew J. Offutt; 'I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream' by Harlan Ellison; 'The Sword Swallow' by Ron Goulart; 'Coranda' by Keith Roberts; 'Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne' by R.A. Lafferty; 'Handicap' by Larry Niven; 'Full Sun' by Brian W. Aldiss; 'It's Smart to Have An English Address' by D.G. Compton. I didn't make myself too clear the last time I reviewed one of these collections - they are most certainly the best of all the 'Year's Best' collections now available. Ace seem to pick those stories which really do epitomise a year of magazine SF.

SPECULATION



## TWO FROM MOSKOWITZ

"Farmer spent every working hour for thirty days producing a 100,000 word novel, I OWE FOR THE FLESH. The plot dealt with all humanity being resurrected along the banks of a river ten million miles long..." This is only one of the fascinating bits of information to be found in Sam Moskowitz's book SEEKERS OF TOMORROW, published by Ballantine at 95¢. The 450 pages are literally crammed with every biographical and bibliographical detail about some twenty-two science fiction authors, some of the most important of the last 25 years. As the author says in his Introduction, "Quite literally, it took thirty years of reading and collecting to make the writing of this book possible."

To me this is the most valuable of all of the editor's biographical/historical volumes, since it refers to currently-producing authors whose fiction has very largely been accessible during the time I have been reading SF. On the level of pure information and for fascination, SEEKERS OF TOMORROW is a 'must' for the reference shelf. It is extremely readable, absorbingly factual, and it is full of surprises. Did you know that 'Edson McCann' was Frederik Pohl and Lester del Rey, in collaboration to win the Galaxy \$6,500 prize in 1955?

I'm not too happy about some of Moskowitz's value-judgements, because I suspect he is judging from a much more 'old-fashioned' standpoint than is today popular. For instance, on Van Vogt's EMPIRE OF THE ATOM, he says "Individually the stories were mediocre, but collectively they made an entertaining book, distinguished by truly superior characterisation." (!) Fortunately, Moskowitz is eminently fair and states facts without prejudice or much personal opinion. A very valuable book.

In SCIENCE FICTION BY GASLIGHT, Moskowitz has turned to an altogether different subject. This book is a collection from the earliest days of science fiction, before it became a 'genre' in its own specialised magazines. To me the field covered in the book is completely new and unknown, and I read the volume with fascination.

But it is more than a collection - Moskowitz has laboured once more for love, and has included a mammoth history of the popular magazines of the time. It is an extensive survey of the history of SF during the quality popular magazines of the 'Gaslight Era'. These include The Strand, The Argosy, The Red Book, Black Cat, among others. The public mood at the time must have been akin to that ten years ago, just after the first Sputnik. In the period 1891-1911 during which the stories are set, the world experienced the discoveries of Edison, Marconi, Orville Wright and powered flight, and many more. Writers of the era were preoccupied with science and wrote their stories deliberately with this as a foundation. H.G. Wells is the prime example who has come down to us, but there were many other widely-read authors writing the same material.

What of the 26 stories in this book? As might be expected, they are not 'commercial' fiction of today, and are hemmed-in with 'viz.' and 'singular phenomenon', etc. Turn-of-the-century writers must have had plums permanently in their mouths! However, it is true to say that a good many of these stories remain fascinating because of the different mental attitudes and assumptions in the writing, attitudes which today are dead, or have been overtaken by events. To some extent we are reading from a position where we can see why these early SF writers went wrong. Will our own SF be so far from truth?

Stories like 'The Thames Valley Catastrophe' by Grant Allen (first in the book) are excellent period pieces - the Victorians were obsessed with catastrophes! In addition, Moskowitz has prefaced each story with a biographical note about its authors. A rewarding book. (SCIENCE FICTION BY GASLIGHT, edited by Sam Moskowitz, \$6.95, World Publishing Co., 119 W. 57th St, N.Y. 19, USA.)

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When I got back, the third was in print. I'd smashed up my office at Fleetway before I left, was told, on my return, that I was blacklisted from doing freelance work for the firm, had virtually no other source of income, so started doing more work for Ted Carnell. It seems incredible now that I was almost wholly dependent for my income on the Nova Magazines and their very low rates.

I turned out a lot of novelettes for Science Fantasy and Science Fiction Adventures, and a few short stories for New Worlds, became engaged while on the dole, had to get a job to look respectable, started working as a broadsheet writer for the Liberal Party, began to pick up work under a pseudonym at Fleetway, and my fortunes gradually began to improve. Our honeymoon was two weeks spent in our first flat at the top of 100 stairs in fashionable Lancaster Gate, opposite a church bell-tower. I wrote two novelettes and read my way through a run of Astoundings from 1937 to 1953 which I had bought for 6d a copy in a second-hand bookshop.

I read a lot more science fiction, at last beginning to understand, as far as I was concerned, what its strengths and weaknesses were. I decided, after this crash course, that SF had a lot of potential but was hampered by traditional structures and often incredibly bad writing (those who say that New Worlds is incomprehensible ought to try picking their way through some of those old VanVogt and Ron Hubbard paragraphs which are literally nothing more than jumbles of words — one gathers they wrote hoping to clear up the mess they'd made in the previous paragraph by writing the next and hoping something sorted itself out by the end of the chapter).

In conversations with Jimmy Ballard and Brian Aldiss I began to discuss ideas for a different sort of SF magazine that was at once forward-looking and not in the pulp tradition. The Nova Magazines were still one of my main sources of income. Then they began to fold. Science Fiction Adventures was the first to go, and a little later Ted Carnell announced that the other two would fold. By this time I'd sold my first book and sent a novelette to Fantastic, which they'd accepted, but I found it hard to imagine earning a living (we had a baby by this time) without the magazines.

Later Ted told me they'd sold the titles to Roberts and Vinter and he'd recommended me as editor. I accepted the news with mixed feelings. In the last few issues of Science Fantasy I'd written some essays on SF and fantasy called 'Aspects of Fantasy' in which I'd listed some of the limitations of SF. The series was to be in eight parts but I was forced to cut it to four because of the closure of SF. I'd pretty much decided that there wasn't much future in SF as it stood. I needed the money, I felt a responsibility to other writers to try to keep the market alive, but I decided that if I was to edit New Worlds, then I would do my best to shake up the SF scene, encourage new approaches and in general see what could be done to improve things, as I saw them.

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Probably the most rapid item ever to be produced in SPECULATION, the Michael Moorcock Column was arranged far past the issue-deadline, arrived after everything else was printed, and has been stencilled just before the magazine has been finally published. Six days is something of a record, and I'm sure you'll now understand why this feature is so loosely bolted on to the rear-end of SPECULATION. Reading this column myself, I was seized with a very great guilt, for wasting Mike Moorcock's energies, and a very great admiration for the way in which he has carried on through all obstacles!

\* THE MICHAEL MOORCOCK COLUMN \*

--" NOW IT CAN BE TOLD "--

The truth behind those stories you read in your newspapers and the allegations made in Parliament. Was Charles Platt the mysterious 'Second Man'? Why did James Sallis suddenly leave his home in Iowa to take a German boat to London and join New Worlds? What were the secret discussions held in the notorious 'Goodge Street Office'? STARTLING BEHIND-THE-SCENES REVELATIONS OF A SELF-CONFESSED 'NEW WORLDS' EDITOR'. Michael Moorcock reveals all in this amazing article smuggled from Brixton Prison only two days before he vanished completely into the Notting Hill Inland Revenue Office.

Pete asked if I'd do a column for SPECULATION. I said yes, so long as I could be as self-indulgent as I liked. I thought I'd start with a very self-indulgent piece indeed.

I've never been able to work out whether I am possessed of a driving, insatiable ambition, or whether I'm the sort of person who just drifts into situations of power, responsibility, or what-have-you. For instance, I don't recall ever really wanting to be a publisher.

I began life as a simple-minded Edgar Rice Burroughs fan, doing my fanzines in ignorance of both fandom, and for that matter, of most science fiction. My fanzines introduced me to fandom; fandom, more or less, introduced me to SF. I never really liked most of it, though I appreciated its virtues. Somehow, I started writing imitation ERB stories for Tarzan Adventures, somehow I became editor, at 17, of Tarzan Adventures, and gradually I began to lose interest in Burroughs and gain interest in general fiction. My interest in SF remained faint for some time, though I was inclined to promote it and fandom in the pages of TA. I liked Mervyn Peake, Ronald Firbank and Franz Kafka, as well as other writers who I suppose Sam Moskowitz would call 'marginal fantasy writers'. I developed a taste for Brian Aldiss stories and, later, for Ballard stories. I'd read, at 15 or so, a bit of Asimov, VanVogt and E.E. Smith, and I used to like Weird Tales and Conan, the Grey Mouser and Poul Anderson's BROKEN SWORD. I preferred 'straight' fantasy and what might be called the more philosophical or atmospheric kinds of SF.

After I left TA I stayed in publishing and freelance writing because it was really all I was good for, worked for Fleetway Publications, doing Sexton Blake Library and earning a great deal of money writing comic strips, got bored with this and started fighting Fleetway after they'd decided I was a Communist because I'd been one of the first people trying to establish the National Union of Journalists in the firm, and might never have started working for the SF

magazines if I hadn't bumped into Ted Carnell in a pub opposite Fleetway one evening where he was meeting Andy Vincent of Fleetway and Andy Vincent's old friend Harry Harrison. Ted asked me to write a sword and sorcery series for Science Fantasy, so I did, and the Elric stories started appearing. Only the first one was in print the month I threw everything up and went to Sweden.

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tried to make them different, to expand the limitations of the genre as much as I could. At Sexton Blake Library I'd found myself arguing with the management all the time for improved quality in the various publications I was peripherally connected with (the quality of SBL had already been much improved by W. Howard Baker who had previously worked a short spell as editor of Authentic).

I don't know why one has an impatience with existing conventions, save that they tend to get a bit boring after a while. As editor of New Worlds I started off with the intention of producing an SF magazine that interested me and that would interest a new and growing readership. A lot of the articles we ran were unfair to established SF writers, some were almost manic in their attacks, others were downright inaccurate, but we did whip up some enthusiasm and new writers began to take an interest in NW, while more established ones began to feel their way to doing something they had wanted to do for some time but had had no market that would encourage them. It took a while. It was only towards the end of the paperback phase that, in my opinion, we were beginning to achieve what we had set out to do initially, and that took 3 years !

Then Thorpe & Porter, who owed the firm around £50,000, went bankrupt. The magazines were to close because they were not making the kind of money the firm needed to recover from this blow. The whole Compact firm which had built up an SF list, mainly under my editorship, and was planning to go into general fiction and classics in decent editions, reverted to being the firm that published Hank Janson. That was that.

We had built up a good working team with me as managing editor and Keith Roberts and Lang Jones as editors of the Compact series of books and magazines, and everything was beginning to work smoothly. Keith Roberts joined the firm as permanent staff on the very day the news came through. For a few more months the magazines ran on, folding in the early part of 1967. By this time, however, I was convinced that we were on to something really worthwhile and I couldn't bear the idea of folding when we seemed in sight of our real goal. I began looking for publishers.

Brian Aldiss contacted the Arts Council, who eventually agreed to give us a grant of £150 per issue. David Warburton (of Compact) and I went into partnership to publish the magazine I had planned several years before in Lancaster Gate while reading all those old copies of Astounding. We published two 'interim' issues in the old format, to keep continuity with readers and the trade, and began contacting printers to get an estimate for printing the magazine by litho. We had a number of setbacks, being let down badly by two printers, and discovered just how high the costs were going to be -- all in all the magazine would cost about £1000 an issue to produce halfway decently. Originally I had agreed with David Warburton that I would put in time and labour for nothing if he would put in capital. But now I had to agree to put in capital which I had to earn, since I had no cash in the bank. I did this by producing anthologies and Sword & Sorcery novels for Lancer Books.

It then began to emerge that David, who was idealistic, had been over-optimistic in expecting to raise capital for the magazine. He had raised £400. I was already committed to almost £1000. David wished to retain the old distributor, in whom I had little faith, and the old distributor, it appeared, had little enthusiasm for the magazine. I went to the States, chiefly on business, and when I returned it was to discover that David had left for Scotland saying he could no longer continue the magazine. Under-financing and bad distribution

might have meant us folding with the fourth issue, particularly since the printer was refusing to print the fifth until he was paid and he had not been paid something like £900 by David. The worry and uncertainty I'd experienced since July 1966 seemed to come to a head then and I began to have the serious symptoms of a nervous breakdown, though I'd been in pretty bad shape most of that year.

Brian Aldiss got a piece into The Times that announced we needed a new publisher, and a man contacted me the same day. I pulled myself together long enough to see him, telling him that I couldn't undertake any further financial responsibility for the magazine, but would still put in my labour for nothing. He said that this was all right by him, that we'd form a partnership and a company to run New Worlds and that he could, if necessary, sustain a loss of around £200 an issue for a year or so to see how the magazine was going. Various other verbal agreements were made, and things seemed set.

However, he took his time coming to a final decision and it wasn't until the end of October 1967 that he said he would go ahead. Even from the first he began to show signs of uncertainty and by this time I was on tranquillisers, seeing psychiatrists and the rest, and the whole staff was confused as the new man made what seemed to be random decisions about publication schedules, advertising and distribution arrangements and so forth. Morale began to slip, payments were not made as agreed; I found myself still committed to paying large amounts of money out for material, running costs, staff costs and the like, and I was falling heavily into debt, particularly since I wasn't capable of working at my old speed because of my illness.

Jim Sallis came from the States to join us at the end of December and found us in despair. We kept going as best we could, but publishing schedules had been completely thrown out by the new man and we didn't know from issue to issue which would be our last. Things were in a bad way by the time the March issue appeared and Smiths banned it. For a while, seeing his name in print in the newspapers seemed to encourage the new man, but he wouldn't actually give the go-ahead for the issue in hand to be printed. He had changed his mind about every aspect of publishing the magazine several times a day. The April issue was delayed and finally appeared in May. The May issue became the June issue, and the July issue was delayed, appearing in August.

About this point the publisher announced that he felt 'out of sympathy' with the concerns of the magazine and unless I found more money to put into it, he would fold it. I said I would find more money. Already he had refused to pay contributors - sending back my list of payments with a note scrawled across it 'these were your responsibility' - and owed the printer something like £2000 (after he had originally agreed on the prime necessity of paying the printer on time and had assured me that he would do so).

We worked out the income of New Worlds and no matter how we looked at it could not see that he was losing money. Indeed, it appeared that by not paying contributors he had made a small profit. He insisted that this wasn't so, but would not show us his books. Every time we came down to discussing figures he would invent an arbitrary figure that suited him. We decided he was using New Worlds income to finance his other business interests and even if we looked at it charitably and saw him as doing this without realising it, it became clear that he was not being honest with us, that he was not only giving us a bad time, he was actually cheating us financially.

I raised the money and then decided that since this would disappear into his bank I might just as well have a go at publishing the magazine myself. This was agreed: he agreed to hand over all outstanding income — such as subscription income and so forth — and I became publisher in August 1968. To date he has not handed over any of the money owed to us, nor has he supplied an audited account, nor has he paid out the money given him by the Arts Council (who are also asking for an audited account). He has confirmed our suspicions but we appear to be poorer for it !

He's a great 'I'll put a cheque in the post' man who never puts them in the post. At one point after the printer was demanding payment, we got a cheque from our distributor for almost £1000 and handed it to the man saying — now you can pay the printer. Instead he sent him a cheque for £750 which was then returned by the bank because it had been wrongly dated. When this happened, we were certain that this was not a legitimate mistake — things like it had happened too often before. The last time I saw him, he was trying to quibble about paying our advertising and promotion manager Diane Lambert £10 of the fee he owed her and she has still not received her commission on various advertisements she obtained for the magazine and for which he was paid.

I sent the printer half of his bill in advance to ensure that we should get back onto a decent relationship with him (of prime importance if a good job is to be done and copies are to be delivered on time) and when Charles Platt, Graham Hall and I went down to see him a little later, I took bottles of whisky for all key staff. Now at last, I thought, we could get back on schedule and having missed our August issue could come out on time with our September issue. But now it was the printer's turn. He was beset with staff shortages, strike threats and various other problems just as we were ready to start. The August issue will now be the October issue. With luck — because at time of writing the printer is in incredible confusion, having farmed out our typesetting to three different setters, who have done it in three different styles (none of them ours!) — we should have our November issue out on time at the end of October and be back to regular publication from thereon.

I have gone into association with another publisher who has loaned me some capital (which I'll have to pay back if the magazine doesn't pick up) and by early next year either NW will be back on its feet or I shall be bankrupt. I have sold a number of books quickly and cheaply in order to raise the capital, but simply can't sell many more, partly because I can't afford to (I'm still heavily in debt on the earlier issues) and partly because I cannot write the books I have to write at speed; they are too important to me. With luck, a few anthologies should help finance the magazine. One such, with stories contributed free by Brian Aldiss, J.C. Ballard and myself, will appear next year and the Best of New Worlds anthologies continue to finance the magazine.

Currently we are facing renewed distribution difficulties owing to the irregular schedules we have been keeping lately, and the fact that Smiths appear to have some kind of secret ban on displaying New Worlds, even though interest in the magazine has grown enormously since we began last year. Where we do sell, we sell very well. I hope we can survive long enough to get back to our old circulation and that our current efforts to find distribution in the USA are successful



I have still not worked out whether this wish to keep New Worlds going at all costs has been one of ambition or of idealism. I am suspicious of idealism and yet I do know that every time I have felt like giving up I have read a new story or two that I've liked and felt a great responsibility to publish it. Our November 'new authors' issue is a result of this feeling -- at one time I thought it might be our last and wanted to give as many new authors a chance as possible. We do feel that the magazine we are running is one of the very best in the world at present (it's all a question of comparison, I know) and we do enjoy great prestige in publishing and literary circles here, in the States and on the Continent. But we're not running the thing for glory, either, because there are easier ways of getting glory and being paid for it at the same time. We say we do it because we are convinced that New Worlds is one of the seminal influences in developing a new and enriching area of literature, but perhaps we say that just to keep our spirits up.

I've been doing this editing job for five years now, on a very low salary initially, then on no salary, and now I'm paying for the privilege. I do it because only New Worlds publishes so much of the kind of thing I like to read: because it offers an opportunity for young writers who are not particularly encouraged either by the commercial magazines or the literary magazines; because I want to produce a magazine of fiction that bows neither to commercial dictates nor to the pretentious; because I feel the conventions of fiction need a bit of re-thinking; because authors I admire are not given, in my opinion, enough attention; because most publishing of any sort seems to me to be either stupid or cynical; because I believe that there is a market of ordinary readers who'll enjoy what we publish; because I had faith that something really important could come out of SF and have reason to believe now that I was right; because occasionally I feel it's been worth it when Tom Disch tells me he wouldn't have written CAMP CONCENTRATION 'as well' if he hadn't thought it would appear in New Worlds, or Jimmy Ballard wouldn't have begun his new pieces, or Brian Aluiss wouldn't have produced his Charteris stories when he did, or various books wouldn't have been published at all if they hadn't first appeared in New Worlds, or when authors tell me that they'd despaired of ever being published until they discovered the magazine, or when stories are anthologised many times after being turned down by other magazines, or stories that we've encouraged their authors to write are received enthusiastically by a wide audience, or when an author prefers to send a story or poem or article to New Worlds rather than to a better paying market or an established literary magazine, because he'd prefer it to appear in New Worlds. That makes us feel that we have not been deceiving ourselves or our public by pursuing the policy we have.

It's also nice when people say 'I always disliked SF before I saw New Worlds' and one feels that however much some die-hard fans accuse us of having 'betrayed' SF, we have put in as much as we have rejected. It's also oddly satisfying that the Panther collections of the BEST OF NW go out of print almost as soon as they're published -- selling infinitely more copies than the magazine -- and it's oddly niggling when reviewers praise books that perhaps would never have been written or published if we hadn't encouraged the writers, and no acknowledgement appears to the magazine in the book or the review. But you can't have everything. It's also niggling to be accused of producing stories of pessimism and despair when all we aim for is objectivity and entertainment, but refuse, as most popular fiction does not, to hand back people's opinions to them in a slightly disguised package, particularly since an attitude of pessimism and despair would have made us give up producing New Worlds long ago.



We also like to feel we're opening new horizons for readers and are always pleased when readers write and tell us this. We're frustrated when people ask what we're trying to do -- we can only answer that we're trying to run good, modern fiction -- and we're puzzled when people give us tags like 'New Thing'. It's a strange, complicated operation that aims at broadening the dimensions of fiction, not narrowing them, that is not so much to do with stylistic experiment but with an interest in new kinds of subject matter.

And yet I still can't tell you why we do it, save that it's better to do something fresh than to continue doing the same old thing. I can supply any number of rationales, certainly, deal confidently with particular aspects, tell you why I think one thing is good and another bad and feel fairly sure that my judgement is sounder than other people's. Yet egotism hardly seems to be the answer, because I'm suspicious of my own pronouncements and motives quite as much as I am of other people's.

We did it because it had to be done, but will it matter what we did in ten years' time? Does writing fiction matter? Does reading it matter? Does any human activity 'matter'? The only fact is that we do it. Interpretations and observations are always partial. I'd be healthier, perhaps happier, certainly richer if I concentrated entirely on writing exactly what I wanted to write all the time, but perhaps it's a puritan element in me that says this would be self-indulgence, that I must do something 'useful' to help other people. Perhaps my energies would be better devoted to helping the starving peoples of the world, entering politics as my ancestors did (to be accused, naturally, of purely self-interested motivations) or forming a writer's union to protect authors against the rapacious natures of most publishers, of giving my family a life in the sun rather than in a battered apartment in Ladbroke Grove.

We select our responsibilities, I suppose, depending on what grabs our imagination most, and feel hurt and martyred when other people don't regard our choices as worthwhile. We're judged, finally, by our actions, not our motivations, by the result of what we do, not by the spirit in which we produced the result. We are all fools, we are all shits, we are all parts of a larger and perhaps equally meaningless ebb and flow. When I was eighteen, shortly after I'd left Tarzan Adventures, it came to me that it was foolish to despair of life being meaningless, that since we had life we might just as well enjoy it as not, do what we thought best, try to produce a little equilibrium, a little justice, a little pleasure to the limits of what our characters allow us.

And that's ultimately why I took on New Worlds, I suppose, not because I had any great ambition to be editor of an SF magazine, but simply because it was there and I might just as well do as decent a job as I could as not.

And yet as I sit here, writing this column instead of earning the money that might just keep me solvent, faced with writs and bills that now appear to be delivered in bundles at regular intervals during the day, I wonder if the whole thing isn't a monstrous piece of self-indulgence, for I certainly can't trace a death-wish impulse in myself, which is the only other gloomy interpretation. I suppose it doesn't matter in the long-run.

Well, I warned you that this column would be self-indulgent. I've promised fans for some time that I would fill them in on the background details of how New Worlds has been produced, and I hope it hasn't proved too boring. If I've given you something of an insight into the complications of producing the

magazine, of the complicated motives that led me to suffer those complications, I might have given you something of an insight also into why I've always felt that most 'Golden Age' SF doesn't satisfy me — that life isn't as simple as the old SF seemed to suggest, that easy answers aren't possible, although simple answers are often arrived at after a considerable time spent investigating the complications. I've tried to produce this hasty piece with as much perspective as I try to give my fiction and my editorial policy. It wasn't written in the spirit of defending myself against my critics, because I feel that people have a perfect right not to like what New Worlds produces, since we aim chiefly to add to people's enjoyment of life and to demand that they see virtues in NW if they see none would be a bit ludicrous. How's that for syntax?

History, after all, will be my judge and history, of course, is bunk.

Mike Moorcock  
14 September 1968

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#### SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE (continued from Page 56)

THE RING OF RITORNEL by Charles L. Harness. Gollancz, 21s. new novel.  
THE ROSE, by Charles L. Harness. Sidgwick & Jackson, 18s (long novelette;  
the volume also contains 'The Chessplayers' and 'The New Reality'.  
THE MAKING OF STAR TREK, by Stephen E. Whitfield & Gene Roddenberry. The story  
behind the making of the successful US TV series, Ballantine 95p  
A GIFT FROM EARTH, by Larry Niven. The author's second published novel, fast-  
paced and imaginative, to be reviewed in later issues. Ballantine 75p  
AN ARTHUR C. CLARKE SECOND OMNIBUS, from Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd. 30s.  
This contains THE SANDS OF MARS: EARTHLIGHT: & A FALL OF MOONDUST. (The first  
Clarke Omnibus contained CHILDHOOD'S END: PRELUDE TO SPACE: EXPEDITION TO EARTH)

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#### THE HUGO AWARDS, 1968 (for stories, etc, published during 1967)

BEST NOVEL: LORD OF LIGHT, by Roger Zelazny. BEST NOVELLA: 'Weyr Search' by  
Anne McCaffrey & 'Riders of the Purple Wage' by Philip Jose Farmer.  
BEST NOVELETTE: 'Gonna Roll the Bones' by Fritz Leiber.  
BEST SHORT STORY: 'I Have No Mouth and I must Scream' by Harlan Ellison.  
BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: 'City on the Edge of Forever' (Star Trek episode)  
Award presented to Author: Harlan Ellison.  
BEST PROFESSIONAL MAGAZINE: If, accepted by Frederick Pohl (3<sup>rd</sup> consec. year)  
BEST AMATEUR MAGAZINE: Amra, accepted for Scithers by Dick Eney.  
BEST FAN WRITER: Ted White. BEST FAN ARTIST: George Barr, accepted by Bjo  
Trimble. BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST: Jack Gaughan, accepted by Elsie Wollheim.

1969 Convention site: St Louis. (Information supplied by Gerald Bishop).

(The NEBULA Awards for the year 1967 were: BEST NOVEL: THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION  
by Samuel R Delany: BEST NOVELLA: 'Behold The Man' by Michael Moorcock: BEST  
NOVELETTE: 'Gonna Roll the Bones': BEST SHORT STORY 'Aye, and Gomorrah' by  
Samuel R. Delany.)

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THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION 1969 : Registration 10/—, to Anne  
Keylock, 67 Shakespeare Road, Hanwell, London W7. Overseas \$1.00. Guest of  
Honour Judith Merril, the convention will take place at The Randolph Hotel,  
Beaumont Street, Oxford. The registration fee will ensure that news bulletins  
and any other literature is sent to you on publication



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