

Speculation

VOLUME 2. NO.10

APRIL 1969



DANGEROUS VISIONS; REVIEW
BY PAMELA AND KEN BULMER

Speculation

Vol.2 No.10. (Issue 22)

April/May 1969

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*Cover by Eddie Jones. Interior art by Gaughan (2,4); Latto (8,13); Yates (25). *

SPECULATION-22, edited by Peter R Weston, 81 Trescott Road, Birmingham 31, UK. Assistant editor Bob Rickard. 2/6d per copy, 3 for 7/6d. US readers 35c per copy 3 for \$1.00 (currency not cheques!). Published irregularly, available for trade or contribution. Opinions within are not necessarily those of the editor. Letters will be considered for publication unless noted. Copyright 1969 by Peter R Weston

THE SPECULATOR SCIENCE FICTION DIARY

2nd February 1969

Heard from Harry Harrison with an article for our special Heinlein 30th anniversary issue. I see I'm the third person to suggest Harry as the next editor of Analog. An obvious choice, really - Harry's stories are ideally-suited to the magazine, he seems to have similar outlooks to John Campbell, and of course has already had three jobs as magazine editor. I think Harry is the nearest thing to Heinlein, today; THE ETHICAL ENGINEER is a perfect example of the rational 'Tough Guy' Hero who gets things done - one way or another.

Buz Busby sends another Plough column, also about Heinlein, and mentions the 1962 IPSO organisation published similar material. Must answer Buz's November letter, the one about the canal at the bottom of my garden!

10th February

Dav Garnett sends list of Nebula nominations; BLACK EASTER (Blish); PICNIC ON PARADISE (Russ); DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP (Dick); MASKS OF TIME (Silverberg); PAST MASTER (Lafferty); RITE OF PASSAGE (Panshin); STAND ON ZANZIBAR (Brunner). Personally I think the Russ book should win, but Panshin will take it. Haven't as yet managed to acquire and read the Brunner book.

19th February

Tickled pink to hear from Algis Budrys after all these years. Enclosed an article for the Heinlein thing; must write and thank him. Now have original MSS from Ellison, Harrison, Budrys, Leiber, Aldiss, Mike Harrison, Richard Gordon, Buz, and a fine piece from John Brunner. Should be a good issue - Philip Jose Farmer also promised - wonder who else might contribute?

25th February

Franz Rottensteiner writes again, joins Austrian Army in April. Says that SPECULATION is mentioned in W.H.G. Armytage's YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS. Never heard of the book. Also talks about Polish SF author Stanislaw Lem, who Franz reckons will soon be very well-known, with SOLARIS from Faber and a story in "Phil Harbottle's new magazine, Visions of Tomorrow". Never heard of Lem but sent some copies of SPEC. Must get some details about Phil's magazine, first I've heard.

3rd March

Letter from Joe Patrizio on the Ballard interview last time. Must use it, wish more people had commented. Heard from Daphne Sewell; will I moderate a panel 'Looking Back on SF' at the Easter convention, Sunday afternoon? Wrote accepting, should be fun. Heard from Midlands Association for the Arts, doesn't sound too promising. Haven't got my grant for SPEC, but secretary wrote a very encouraging letter. There aren't any trusts or charities for helping literature, and the Arts Council doesn't want to know amateurs. Must see about forming a limited company, then should be an eligible professional cause!

8th March

Nice letter from Dan Morgan. He says that he thinks SPEC is a very important contribution to SF criticism, and that this opinion is shared by a friend, an Eng/Lit/Philosophy Don. Who am I to disagree? Got married at 12.00.

14th March

Returned from honeymoon, set up business in small flat until house completed. Went back to Northfield and collected huge pile of letters and parcels. Looks as if the US Dock strike is finally over, and two months' post arrived at once. Two issues of SF Times very welcome; also received IPSO FACTO-4 from Ethel Lindsay, very kind of her, good Heinlein material in this. Vector also arrived from Mike Kenward; I see the BSFA isn't dead, then. Noticed a page about Phil Harbottle's Visions; evidently this is to be sponsored by an Australian fan & businessman and will begin publishing in June. Talk about dreams coming true for Phil - as editor he can reprint John Russell Fearn at last!

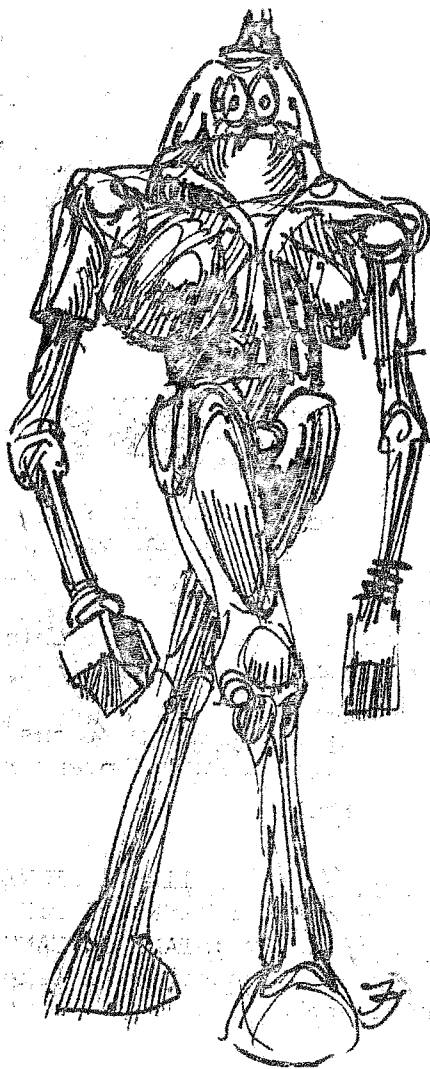
27th March

Nice letter from Chris & Christine Priest. They are living in attic of empty West London house, besieged by squatters downstairs every night. Shouldn't quote from letters, but Chris says he has lead story in NEW WRITINGS-16, called 'The Perihelion Man'; "it's a story of a man who gets in a spaceship to go somewhere to do something - and I've never enjoyed writing a story so much. Farewell, new wave!" Am looking forward to seeing Chris at Easter, Eileen and I both going to enjoy convention.

5th April

Arrived at convention hotel around noon. Immediately overwhelmed by people I wanted to talk to. Saw Tom Claeson and Lars-Olov Strandberg, (magazines Extrapolation & SF Forum). German fandom out in force, met Waldemar again, and then Ken Bulmer, James White and Bob Shaw; saw, but missed talking to Brian Aldiss in bar. Eileen liked James White, she likes tall men! Glad to see GoH Judith Merrill had arrived, but convention committee were pleased, too!

Met Rog & Arline Peyton, also from Birmingham, the four of us staying in the same decaying old hotel up the road. Can't afford prices at The Randolph. Had a meal and came back, met Daphne who said I was 'on' in half an hour. Did double-take, pointed out that panel was arranged for Sunday afternoon, but told imperturbably that programme had been changed. Bit annoyed about this.



Found Donald Wollheim and Mike Rosenblum for panel, saw Bob Rickard and had quick check of his tape-recorder. Checked out own camera and impressive-looking array of BSA gadgets (SPEC covers the convention in sound and pictures - what a team!) Panel was OK in the end, although a bit turgid. Couldn't seem to get on to subject and ended up talking about early British fandom. Couldn't resist the opportunity to ask Donald Wollheim what he thought of New Worlds, was a bit embarrassed at results. Committee bungle rather spoilt afternoon, when I wanted just to meet people and drift around. Eileen enjoyed teasing Graham Boak, "Hi jerk!" Evening fancy-dress ball great fun, although someone knocked out during jousting and taken to hospital with concussion. Talked to Pam Bulmer about STAND ON ZANZIBAR between bouts. Afterwards, turned away from professionals' room-party so went down to lounge and had interesting time with people there.

All in all this was one of the most successful of all British conventions, very professional, with microphones and tape-recorders and spotlights all over the place, partly due to Swedish TV who were filming proceedings. The 2001-back-drop to platform reflected the overall interest in science fiction as a serious subject to talk about, despite J.G. Ballard's experiences, and this was generally very rewarding.

The Banquet (innovation for British conventions) was great success, with formal dress all around giving fine touch of ceremony to weekend. Sat with Dan & Georgie Morgan, but regrettably Guest-of-Honour's speech was appallingly bad. It was recorded but will not be used in SPECULATION, although the next issue will feature a transcript of the 'new wave' discussion panel chaired by Ted Carnell, one of the highlights of the convention.

9th April

Collected another load of post. Some trouble with Inland Revenue. A note from Gerald Bishop on BNebula Awards for 1968; winners are RITE OF PASSAGE, 'Dragon-rider' (Anne McCaffrey): 'Mother to the world' (Richard Wilson): 'The Planners' by Kate Wilhelm. Had very good issues of SF Review (29) and Galaxy, the latter with an interesting article by Larry Niven on teleportation. Some good points I've not seen made before, here. Meanwhile, Eileen decided to become a Big-Name Fan and is hard at it, reading latest issues of Quip, Warhoon, etc!

19th April

Received fanzines Perihelion & Double:Bill, also SF-Times & Locus. Heard from George Hay & Philip Jose Farmer, the latter sending two books THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST and FIRE IN THE NIGHT. The latter is his non-SF novel mentioned in Al Lewis' article on Farmer, scheduled for a future issue of SPEC. Phil Harbottle also writes and says plans have been changed, Visions will now appear as a large-size glossy instead of paperback format. New house about finished - heard nothing yet from solicitors about moving-in.

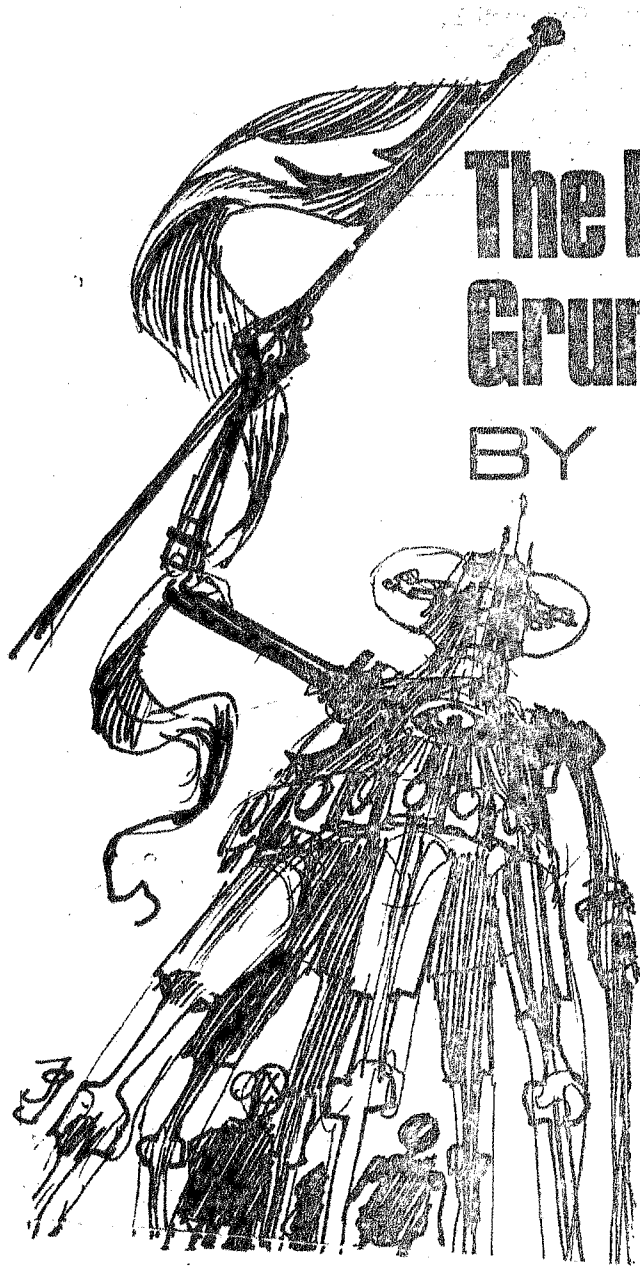
25th April

Received very pleasant letter from Larry Niven commenting on NEUTRON STAR (review: SPEC-19). In same post by coincidence also had copy of Macdonald edition of the collection (25s). Had Cry-178 dated December (must have missed No.177) and a bulletin from the Cryogenics freeze-and-revive people. More new titles from Ace and Ballantine, will have to be reviewed next time around.

Not mentioned above are all sorts of letters and quite a few other fanzines. This diary isn't big enough to mention all my post for the last few months. Had particularly interesting letters from Creath Thorne, Jerry Kaufman and Buck Coulson, for the Melting Pot, along with comments from David Pringle, Pamela Bulmer and Brian Cox. And Pam Yates sends some more fine artwork.

Do keep in touch; chaotic as things are, I'm still here, reading your letters.

Peter Weston.



The Nadge Grummetbogle Story

BY DAVID REDD

THE SPACESHIP was hurtling down out of control! Ace pilot Nadge Grummetbogle triggered the emergency retro switch....

So you know about that sort of opening. You've bought OF WORLDS BEYOND, IN SEARCH OF WONDER, and THE ISSUE AT HAND. You carefully store away each issue of Speculation. You found a John Brunner article in New Worlds which gave you more practical help than all the rest put together. And at the end of it you still haven't sold a story.

Your only encouragement in dozens of rejection slips came from John Carnell: "Sorry, but the story just isn't up to the standard I require. It's a pity because you always have good ideas. I can't quite put my finger on what it is your stories

lack, they certainly have all the right ingredients. Perhaps your next submission may have that extra something." But it didn't.

This is where I come in. Maybe I can pass on a few hints you might not have picked up yet. Even if you don't learn anything new you might start thinking about the way you handle words. I should warn you that there's no formula for instant success; if there was I'd be using it myself. (And I wouldn't be wasting time writing this!) Be that as it may, here we go.

First there's the setting of your story. Have you really worked out the story-framework -- i.e., the cultural background -- in enough detail? In SF you must allow for progress, even though your story is set only a few years in the future. It's always wiser to invent more background details than you think you need. Frantic spur-of-the-moment improvising during the actual writing can ruin the flow of your composition. Besides, these hasty additions usually contradict

SPECULATION

other material, and you suddenly remember the Russian dome city was on the sea bed, not on the moon. Do the groundwork first. Work at the preliminaries for each story, until it becomes a habit.

Now you've done the groundwork. You have a plot. Your characters are based on yourself (the hero) and some lads from the local pub. In your notebook you've roughed out the ending. Right. Start typing.

You've done the first few pages and checked them for spelling, grammar, repetitions, and so on. What else is there to revise? Well, check your description of the setting. Does the reader get all the information in a logical sequence? On page 3 you mention a new character, implying that he's been in the room all the time. Until now the hero appeared to be alone in the room. Go back to Page 1 and mention him near the beginning. That's one way to smoothen the flow of your story. Don't give your reader unnecessary surprises.

You can also examine the sentences themselves. So they sound strained and jerky if you read them aloud? Change a few words with short vowel sounds (sit, put) to words with longer vowel sounds (seated, place). Too pompous? Try simpler words (e.g. change 'interior' to 'inside'). Find yourself losing the thread of a long sentence? Rewrite it as several shorter sentences. In short, use every trick you know to polish up your writing. It could be the extra sparkle your stories need.

Keep every word you write under control. Experiment all you like with unfamiliar words, metaphors, sentence structures and so on -- it's good for you, very good -- but leave them out of the MSS you submit. Don't confuse your reader with words you don't understand yourself. You're still learning, remember? The editor pays for results, not for your training. Use only those resources of the language that you can handle. As you progress, your ability to use your language as a means of communication will increase.

BURNT TO A CINDER - BUT NOBODY NOTICED !

Some people will tell you to encourage a 'suspension of disbelief' in your story. This is the wrong approach. Be positive. You, the author, must encourage belief. At the beginning of a story, the reader accepts certain facts as given. He has to, otherwise he would learn nothing about the story-situation. So he starts by believing. You must make sure he goes on believing.

Do nothing to remind the reader that your story is untrue. This is harder than normal, in SF, but it can be done. It means work, hard work. Everything you put into the story must 'ring true' and form part of a consistent whole. Any slips in science or logic make the reader stumble a little, and if that happens your hold on him is weakened. (In my first published story I made a small arithmetical error. According to the published figure the heroine should have materialised inside a raging inferno and been burnt to a cinder. Fortunately nobody noticed, or if they did they were kind enough to keep quiet about it. But my mistake there could have destroyed somebody's faith in my story.)

You have to keep the reader happy. All events must follow one another naturally and convincingly. One method of tying the story more closely together is to make use of cross-references between scenes. This needs a bit of explanation if you haven't already come across it. Here's an example from your story. Your hero is standing in the bows after the mysterious object has been sighted floating in the distance. 'He stared out to sea at the mysterious object. At this distance he could not make out any details of its shape. If only I had my binoculars, he thought'. Fair enough. You've put our hero in at the beginning of the plot, and you're holding back a full description of the object to create **suspense**. (Cont/d)

You've made this lack of detail plausible, and tied this in to a human emotion (If only...). Nothing much wrong with that... except that you'd better improve it. Here's how. Remember how the hero ~~was~~ in the chart-room when the object was sighted? You don't? Your reader will, if you remind him. Add this sentence to your paragraph: "He remembered he had left his binoculars in the chart room." This sentence ties the scene back to an earlier sequence of events. The reader knows the chart-room. He feels at home in the bows now.

If you have difficulty in keeping to the main subject then cross-references will make the structure of your story a little neater. Once you understand the basic principle you can use it to connect units on several structural levels of your work -- paragraph, scene and chapter. It's worth thinking about this. Strictly speaking your plot should be so neatly designed (with all the details interrelated) that these cross-references will occur naturally. However, as you're a beginner you'll need to do a little patchwork.

Incidentally, these cross-references help in changes of scene. One chapter ends with the hero still on board ship; the next opens with him walking down a **busy** street. If you think this change is too abrupt, add a few sentences here and there. In the first chapter;-- "He decided to go into town and see his old friend Professor MacTavish. Perhaps he could solve the problem...." In the second chapter: "Only an hour before the ship had come into harbour towing the mysterious object. At the first opportunity he had slipped away into town...." You'll find, if you look back at your earlier stories, that you've been doing this sort of thing all the time, in a rather haphazard sort of way. From now on you'll know what you're doing - and why.

We'll look at something else you've been doing without really knowing why. Your stories are all narrated from the viewpoint of one character, as is customary these days (see THE ISSUE AT HAND for the reasons). But why did you pick this character for hero in the first place? Why is he so special that you choose to see everything through his eyes? What makes the hero the most important character? Well, in your story he (1) found the man who first touched the object dying of an unknown disease, (2) helped take the object in tow, (3) called in an expert (4) killed the expert, who turned green and grew 34 tentacles after examining the object; (5) volunteered to tow the object back out to sea with the ship disintegrating around him; and (6) discovered the secret of the object (it was a University rag-stunt).

You get the idea that the hero had a much more interesting time than any other character. That's why your hero is the best person for the reader to identify with, in this particular situation. Putting it into general terms, the most important character is the one who is most involved with the story situation. He is the man to watch. Consider a Hek Belov story. Why bother with Meerschraft when we can watch Belov at work? Choosing the correct viewpoint can be important (See what Heinlein did in THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS.) If you make the wrong choice at the beginning you may find yourself having to rewrite half the story from a new viewpoint - and that could kill the story for you.

All these things are made more complicated by the very nature of science fiction. For instance, how do you make your hero believable if he is the product of an alien society? (Actually, most authors dodge this one by making him a young 20th-century American. This is the lazy way out but it does produce saleable stories.) You can't stop the story for a long lecture on social history; established authors can afford to take chances but you're fighting to bring your story up to standard and you daren't make any slips. Get your story going and forget about the lectures. Insert little explanatory sentences into the action when the need arises.

(Cont/d)...

Just write enough to answer the reader's immediate questions about your hero's behaviour. Here's an example. Narrative: "Dr Spatula refused to shake hands with Crampton. He walked away without a word." Explanation: "Dr Spatula was intensely patriotic and believed Britain should never have surrendered. Since the war he had hated all Frenchmen." In your story the unification of Europe is important. You mentioned "United Europe" at the beginning, and now you can give the rest of the details as they occur in the story. A few explanatory sentences in the right places will put over the changes more effectively than any lecture. If you like, think of an alien civilisation as a foreign country. You can describe life abroad without trouble -I hope- so try developing this technique to suit SF.

You won't find much about the actual mechanics of writing in our critical literature. I suppose the professionals regard it as something too basic to discuss. You can plan the most brilliant story imaginable, a cert for the Hugo, but you still have to put it down on paper. That's the real problem. You have to arrange the story with balanced sections of action and leisure to avoid monotony. You have to cross out all the impersonal constructions such as "There is" and "It was", and replace them with something to increase reader identification. When you find yourself using one particular word too often, you have to grit your teeth and rephrase everything until the word loses its hold on your mind.

As you're writing SF you have to remember all the details of your alien civilisation and keep reminding the reader of them - interestingly. You must keep the invented words to a minimum, yet still refer to alien creatures and future machines by names which are recognisably different. (If your story is in a world with a new language, you daren't make any puns !)

And even when you've absorbed all this, you might still turn out yarns which earn nothing but rejection slips. Dialogue? Listen to people talking. Pace? Build for a climax, but don't make the rise too smooth. Continuity? If you bring in something new at the end, revise the earlier chapters to account for it. Characterisation? Use people you know and describe their reactions. Ideas? The science magazines, especially the New Scientist for the Daedalus technique. Endings? Work these out before the beginnings, and make sure you get to them. Whatever else you foul up, get your endings right.

All the things I've said are merely specific cases, taken from general rules. For instance, I advised you to listen to people talking. The general rule here is to sharpen up your powers of observation. You'll have to train yourself to observe the imaginary world of your alien civilisation in similar detail. After all, if you can't see your creation clearly, how do you expect your reader to see it? Anyway, as you continue writing you'll begin to pick out these basic laws for yourself.

I'll have to finish now otherwise there'll be no room for anything else in the new small-sized SPECULATION. With any luck you'll have learned a few things you hadn't come across before. You should have been doing most of these things already, without realising it. If you can read one of these hints and think, "Why I did that in my last story!" then you're on your way.

The best of luck. You'll need it. As for Nadge Grummetbogle, I hope his retro-rockets are clogged with axle grease. Still, he'll probably survive and land safely in Analog before long. Pleasant dreams!

P.S. If any of you want to complete the Nadge Grummetbogle story, please do. But don't send it to me !

David Redd, 1969

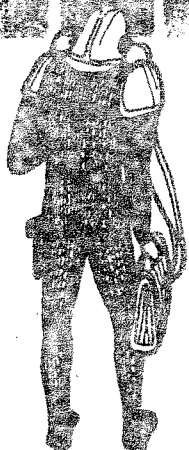
A REVIEW OF **Dangerous Visions**

BY PAMELA & KEN BULMER

DANGEROUS VISIONS is, says its editor, Harlan Ellison, a "revolution." Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this book is that it should have been necessary at all in a field which prides itself on being forward-looking, broad-minded, in short "revolutionary" in itself.

Mr. Ellison seems to work on the assumption that though other editors have taboos and prejudices, he hasn't. Everyone has prejudices of one sort or another, we all at one time or another form opinions on insufficient evidence. Harlan Ellison has made an honest attempt not to apply his own prejudices, although the perceptive reader can find evidence of them, -notably when his professionalism slips and he comments on Spinrad's BUG JACK BARRON, even though he confesses to having read only a part of it and obviously the 'juicy bits'. These comments show a juvenile preoccupation with sex (which does not mean that preoccupation with sex is juvenile...) It does seem just that Harlan should extend to other authors the courtesy of reading their books before commenting publicly on them. Many will consider Spinrad's book is not 'dirty' and this view can be validly upheld whilst others will still insist that it is.

"This book is Harlan Ellison. It is Ellison drenched and Ellison permeated..." says Isaac Asimov in his Foreword 2. "Harlan's Introduction and his thirty two prefaces surround the stories and embrace them and soak them through with the rich flavour of his personality." Normally, it should be possible, and is usually preferable, to comment on and criticise a book objectively as distinct from its author; but this book is an Ellison construct and is therefore unique simply because we are all unique. The book is a kind of Ellison show, wherein he does his patter and brings on a performer for our delight



and then, with an approving pat, packs him off only to bring another one on in time to the music. Someone said that it was like asking thirty-two guests to dinner, each to give a talk, and then talking twice as long between them yourself. The editor is an ebullient effervescent firecracker of a man who knows what superlatives are: the reader may wind up rather more confused, though he may enjoy the semantic contortions.

When we met Harlan in New York he had bulldozed his way to being a BNF and was just taking off into prodrom and we found him electric, galvanic, voltaic and good and ripe for red revolution. (There is no political connotation there, by the way; 'bloody' would have been nice but then you'd lose the tripping alliteration of the three 'r's.)

So here we have the revolution between hard covers.

The extent to which this revolution will be successful will depend on the degree of prejudice amongst its readers. I was reminded while reading this book of the day my daughter Lucy came home and told me one of her friends had used a very, very naughty word. I took a deep breath and prepared not to show my shock.

"Knickers," she said.

In a book so permeated with the editor's personality, even though this is, as with every author, his projected auctorial self, it is inevitable that some of the author's philosophy should seep through despite the facade of the auctorial philosophy he tells you is his. Scepticism of established authority based on a genuine desire to improve society is healthy. The belief that law and order is for the suckers who can't pull enough strings to duck out is corrupt and dangerous. In at least one of the incidents related it could also be suicidal and/or murderous. Very briefly: Harlan was passenger in a car driven at seventy up a dangerous twisty road where the speed limit was twenty, and then at 110 away from a pursuing policeman, finally to stop half into the oncoming lane. The policeman began to explain the folly of this lunatic driving and then recognised the driver and after a 'B' movie would-be-laconic-tough-guy exchange, walked away. We are given to understand that this enhances the reputation of the driver, Joe L. Hensley.

Mr. Ellison's attempt to present Joe L. Hensley as one helluva guy (which he may very well be, and probably is) fails dismally. Adolescent irresponsibility towards the lives of others is neither clever nor amusing. Even if the introduction were based on an exaggerated fantasy, a gigantic leg-pull, it's a sick sell. Fortunately this introduction is an exception and most of the others give a pleasant, jaunty, unique flavour to the book. There are times when the flavour of the introduction smothers that of the stories and when this happens the only solution is to read something else as an aperitif. This is so with the Hensley story which deserved a far more sympathetic introduction.

One of the dangers inherent in reading, writing for or editing a book of this kind is that one may perversely refuse to be shocked and that an author/editor may shock selfconsciously rather than in an attempt to examine taboos and prejudices to see whether they still serve a valid purpose or have become obsolete and consequently cancerous.

In Harlan's introduction he defines taboos in terms of the specialised prejudices of science fiction editors for the SF of their youth. So we must expect this collection to defy those kinds of taboos, and if the stories don't even approach real taboos we must not grouch - Harlan knows what he is doing and must be aware that SF taboos have been akin to dinosaurs, lingering on after all their brother sauropods have long since died. So it is nice that Harlan would like to have SF dispense with its own fetters. This process is worthwhile doing, but it also brings in fresh fetters - one of which, for example, is the inability of many new writers to rise above the allure of four-letter words for their own sake. Someone should have told these amateur four-letter-word-slingers that this battle has been fought and won elsewhere and not on the fields of science fiction.

In the strictest sense our society has very few taboos, that is, there are only a few customs which are forbidden by strong social convention; but even these are not all strictly enforced, in the sense that we may talk about them - at least in intellectual circles if not in the SF magazines.

Explicitly one of the strongest stories in the collection is the tiresomely-titled 'If All Men Were Brothers Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?' the quick answer to which is that if one didn't the race would drop dead. However. Incest is a subject as old as literature; but Sturgeon's treatment is fresh though the story itself is not one of his best, being syrup-sick, and suffers from sentimentality in the writing and an embarrassing foreword.

The attempt to advocate inbreeding as a road to Utopia is itself unconvincing, bearing in mind the evidence provided by primitive tribes. Any objective evaluation of such a theme will, of course, be open to the charge of rationalising out that which we fear to accept, and we should be aware that the onus of proof rests with the advocate for change. It is interesting to speculate on the derivation of tabus: cannibalism and murder had to be outlawed for self preservation, much of our sexual prejudice is rooted in fear of venereal disease; interbreeding may well have been practised in times when natural selection could work, but was then found to be undesirable and as a consequence the taboo was imposed. The point raised that animal inbreeding produces prize specimens is irrelevant insofar as the selecting is done by man. The \$64,000 question which Sturgeon neatly ignores is who would do the selecting and what is a prize human being, admitting the ones presented in this story as being ineligible. The decision itself would be subject to human fallibility and would make an interesting subject for a papal encyclical. The weight of Ted Sturgeon's argument is weakened still further by the idealistic environment. Baby, alas, is no longer three.

Sex also provides the theme for Poul Anderson and Carol Emshwiller, though neither could be described as dangerous. Homosexuality is by no means a taboo subject, though still surrounded by prejudices in these queer days, and the rather coy treatment of 'Eutopia' does obliquely hold existing social morals up to ridicule. The Emshwiller, 'Sex and/or Mr. Morrison' holds a mirror up to the distortion of reality by prejudice and fear, our obsession with the titillation of the unknown, which creates obscenity where none exists.

'Riders of the Purple Wage' deserves a review to itself and is, as Harlan rightly suggests, worthy of re-reading, being the longest and (probably) the

best in the book. Farmer uses humour to codify prejudices by exaggeration and ridicule. He shows a mastery of language using images enjammed in punning and commenting acidly on pseudo-intellectuals, parodying symbolic writers seduced by obscurity, education as a social romp, and much, much more. There is a hilariously funny sex scene, and throughout, as with all successful humour, it kisses truth. Farmer is a pithy writer not to be underestimated and though the reader may not understand all his allusions his obscurity is due to the difficulty of subject matter and not to lack of clarity in style. The chief fault lies in the length of the story which is too condensed and highly concentrated; clearly, the author needed far more room to manoeuvre. ((HKB: I read the 'Purple Wage' immediately after an Anthony Burgess, and as a consequence the Farmer language did not appear anything extraordinary. One could argue this is an unfair comparison to Farmer; but the days have gone when all SF was compared to itself and not to the greater world of writing outside.))

The rapidly changing technology of this century and the ominous cracks in the edifice of civilisation as we know it demand a ruthless analysis of society to enable it to reassess its spiritual orientation so that we are not engulfed in the excreta of our scientific development. Such an analysis, like that of an individual, is likely to be painful; but before making changes we must be sure that we, as a society, know ourselves as fully as possible. Without examination of motives and codification of prejudices we cannot hope to establish a correct diagnosis before prescribing the medicine. Reality is the bogeyman of our day and the dangerous vision of a number of writers in this book.

Philip K. Dick, an uneven writer of considerable depth, gives us, in 'Faith of our Fathers', a penetrating analysis of many aspects of society. Today we are so frightened of facing reality that we have become addicted to the most incidious hallucinogen of all - self-delusion. Now, like an addict, we cannot survive without it. Dick deals uninhibitedly and vigorously with that mesmer of the intellect, religion, the deadly fascination of rebellion against society and mirrors a fear which haunts many SF writers, the raping of individuality by bureaucracy and technology.

It is significant, when the individual is under constant attack from so many 'hidden Persuaders' invading our homes through mass-media, that invasion of privacy should be regarded as a crime in the future. The battle for the preservation of individual identity is, I ((PKB)) think, something which a woman, especially if a wife and mother, can recognise more readily than a man. This struggle for identity is reflected globally in the worldwide desire for self-determination which is one of the hallmarks of the twentieth century.

Fear of the unknown is explored by Fritz Leiber in a gripping and entertaining story 'Gonna Roll them Bones' playing on the fascination of gambling and using the pitch of a game against the devil to take off. Many writers seem concerned over trivia or the wrong things and ideas; Fritz Leiber makes what he touches matter.

The questioning of religion obsesses a number of writers in this anthology as being a dangerous vision, and undoubtedly this was so in medieval times. Today there is widespread discussion of numerous religious beliefs and it would be more accurate to say that it is a taboo to preach religious intolerance, though this is more likely, human nature being what it is, to be rooted in fear of unleashing persecution than in any magnanimous respect for the rights of the individual. The current and latest unrest in Ireland, for example - and

heart-breakingly tragic as it is - serves to show that religion does need to be questioned, even harder and even more severely, as it does in the Middle East and the Kashmir and, even, in Viet Nam, where, in these various parts of the world, reportage tends to emphasize economics, politics, race. Exploring the existence and/or nature of God is another popular theme.

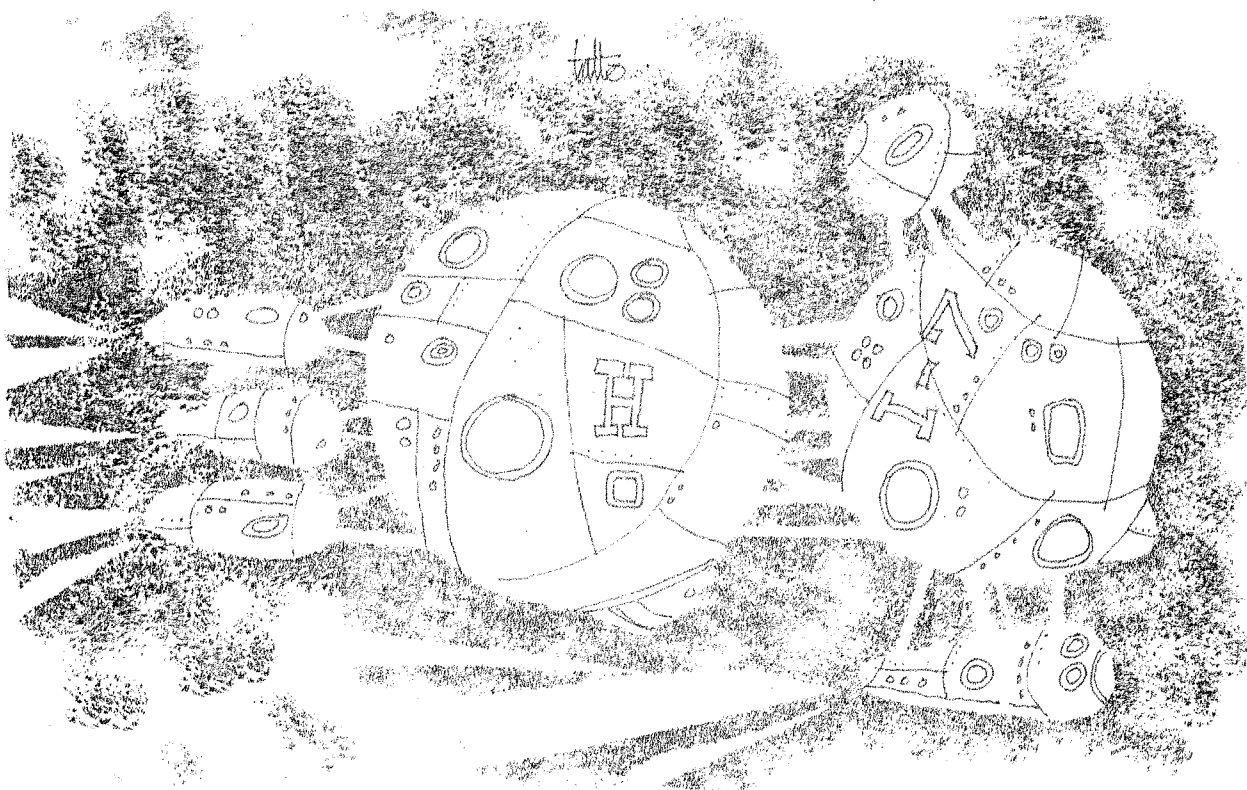
'Flies' is couched in religious symbolism but according to Robert Silverberg is about vampires, and is most entertaining and perceptive. John Brunner shrouds his tilting at the old bogey man of machines in religious symbols, whilst Jonathan Brand wraps the theme up very entertainingly in humour. This one was set where most suited to be told. The Hensley story, whilst steeped in religious connotations, also tinkers uncomfortably with our accepted evaluation of sanity and is vaguely reminiscent of some aspects of Sturgeon's MORE THAN HUMAN. Kris Neville, in 'From the Government Printing Office', takes a shrewd and disturbing look at the way we handle our children, our investment for the future. How can we shape our own future when we are caught up in the chain reaction stretching right back into the past? We were moulded and influenced by our parents, pro or con, who in turn were shaped by theirs and so on - the present is rooted in the past and the future is rooted in the present despite the pressure of potential nuclear destruction, the exponential curve of scientific activity and the presence of the self-proclaimed first 'free' generation.

The two stories dealing with the explosive topic of violence are by Robert Bloch and Harlan Ellison. Both stories suffered by being cluttered up with the editorial matter. Bloch is an expert in the horror story and the terror tale and suffers here a little because the reader has come to expect to be able always to say: "Bloch is Superb."

'A Toy for Juliette' is not vintage Bloch but it is remarkably good of its type. Harlan must be given credit for being sincere and courageous but any author writing the type of story he attempts runs the risk of being self-conscious. Curiously, none of the writers deals directly with the violence of racial conflict, and of fear, simmering beneath the surface of our society. In his own collection, LOVE AIN'T NOTHING BUT A FOUR-LETTER WORD Harlan does deal acutely with a racial confrontation. But in DANGEROUS VISIONS this lack is perhaps understandable in the context of SF's obsession with originality; but there are many basic problems which need restating for each generation in new forms, and we should be wary of using the charge that a theme or idea is old and tired as an excuse for keeping our rose-tinted spectacles on.

This applies very much to the themes of war used by Henry Slesar and David Bunch both of whom are also concerned with the nature of reality and violence. James Cross's traditionally-moulded story 'The Doll-House' depicts another kind of destination for those who cherish their delusions of Nirvana just around the corner and become swept up in today's rat-race of possessions. Miriam Allen de Ford's 'The Malley System' at first glance seems a rather pointless story until one recognises that it does accentuate our impotence in dealing with crime.

Larry Niven's 'The Jigsaw Man' deals with a topic pregnant with danger; but the plotting is incredibly naive, or Niven does not possess the skill to make his basic assumption credible. It would need the competence, skill and resources of a writer like E.C. Tubb to make this one gell. This is a pity, because there are so many first-rate stories to be written on the subject of transplants, a veritable Pandora's Box; but this one seems to have been written off the top of the author's head. The real story, society playing Russian roulette with



'Go, Go, Go, said the Bird' by Sonya Dorman depicts a kind of reality which has often existed, notably in Leningrad during WWII, in which survival depends on adopting cannibalism. Society does not sanction this solution even when to do so might save countless lives, and if it is resorted to, it is covered up by the cosy little euphemism that 'some went mad.' As with so many of our prejudices it is society's adoption of the prejudice and not necessarily the act itself which causes the most harm. As for breaking taboos - even in the SF field - one has but to recall the famous John Wyndham last line: "Food!"

'Test to Destruction' by Keith Laumer seems a strange bedfellow in this book's company.

The 'problem' of Brian W. Aldiss is focussed again by his funny 'The Night that all Time Broke Out.' One can read all kinds of meanings into all kinds of stories and this one is no exception. The comparison with AN AGE or BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD gives an indication of Aldiss's breadth and certainly no work of collected science fiction of today can aspire to serious recognition if it lacks an Aldiss story.

Roger Zelazny miscegenates Vicente Blasco Ibanez with Henry Ford to produce 'Auto-Da-Fe' a nicely atmospheric piece that, whilst perilously skirting the pitfall of a pretty-pretty style without content, remains surprisingly and solidly satisfying.

One thing for Zelazny - his afterword just about rates the best in the book slot.

(Cont/d)...

When reading 'Carcinoma Angels' by Norman Spinrad I was uneasily aware of an extraordinary resemblance - extraordinary because so unexpected - in this story to the stories run in the old Clayton Astoundings. It's in the feel of the story, the way the character reacts, the scenery and bits of science, the all-around ambience of the story. Spinrad has chosen to deal with cancer and in this choice of subject must consider the story to be an SF magazine editor's taboo-buster. It is, as Harlan knows perfectly well, possible to be funny about anything at all, including murder, rape, genocide and terminal illnesses, the type of humour varies with the subject. Spinrad, at the very least, presents a fine story that demands why don't we stop being coy about cancer and take it seriously.

The book is a big package of 520 pages and whilst the illustrations by Leo and Diane Dillon could be regarded as aberrated slices of Rorschach tests they do give an open appearance to the book and fit in a sly comment now and then. Of course Dangerous Visions is an interesting book, and of course it was pretty much hamstrung by too much intemperate propaganda, and of course it cannot hope to do everything it claimed, and of course a gallant failure is of more interest than a resounding success - but still and all, DV is something grand and neo-primeval and loud. One interesting question is to ponder how DV will fare in the next ten years or so. One feels that much of Aldiss, for example, and STAND ON ZANZIBAR by John Brunner, and one or two other books produced today will still be regarded as great over the foreseeable future. Perhaps DANGEROUS VISIONS will join them.

Harlan Ellison has carved himself a landmark in the field of science fiction, and though his verbose editorial comments will not be to everyone's taste, they, and the thirty-three stories, all of which are competent and readable, will give any reader with an active mind a very great deal of food for thought. By those themes which are omitted, as well as those presented, this book does illustrate how reluctant we are to admit to our prejudices and that whilst we persist in deluding ourselves we can never come to grips with many of the problems which beset us today.

Pamela & Ken Bulmer, 1969.

OPINION! SOME VIEWS ON SCIENCE FICTION

OPINION 22: IDEAS ARE THE THING ! (Michael Kenward, editor BSFA Vector)

"...I agree 100% with Spinrad when he says that little mention was made of some of the ideas in BUG JACK BARRON. The most important thing about most SF is the ideas to be found therein. Most of the fanzines have been currently hung-up on this art/non-art thing (including Vector). I feel that this is a false thing, put together by a group of people (living in W11) who have high aspirations and not much else. They get inflated ideas that could be deflated so easily by a reasonably intelligent person from outside the ghetto. Ballard, for example, is still virtually unknown outside SF; but he will continue to try to drop SF. He can't write when he tries anything else. I do wish someone would have the guts to get up and say that (someone who might be listened to, that is). Ideas are the basis of science fiction, and the content is nothing without them. A few exceptions can be found, of people who can write (Disch), but the recent Moorcock -Cornelius things are completely weightless, very funny but full of gas."

SPECULATION

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View of Suburbia

BY CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

****PETER WESTON said: "I've come to the conclusion that what SPECULATION needs is a column of commentary on the whole SF scene." For some reason he asked me to do it, and this is it.

****W.H. SMITH is a name well-known in Britain; there is hardly a High Street in the country without one of their stores, nor a station without a Smith stall.

Walking into one of their shops - take the one in Sutton, for that is the store I know best - one is immediately struck by the fantastic bargain in aluminium cooking foil being offered this week. Next to that, there is a similar snip in kitchen tissues. Also on offer are many hundreds of greetings-cards, rows and rows of pop LPs, boxed games, doilies, graph-paper, table condiments, balls of string, typewriters, womens' magazines, photocopying machines, fountain-pens. If you look hard enough you may even find a counter or two with (excuse the word) books for sale.

It is difficult to believe that W.H. Smith command 25% of the British retail book market, at a time when more books than ever before are being bought.

Two years ago, when I was working for one of those firms making greetings-cards, I had occasion to meet one of the buyers for W.H. Smith and Son, and during the course of our conversation I remarked untactfully that if I wanted to buy a book, the last place I would look for it was in a Smith's. The reply was that this was a 'peasant' attitude and that it was possible for any in-print title to be obtained on request within a week to a fortnight.

The words "on request" are of key importance here, and can be applied to other commodities as well as books. If you wish to pass a fruitless (but amusing) half hour, it is always entertaining to walk into Smiths and ask for a copy of New Worlds. If you will recall, about a year ago there was a certain amount of commotion in the Press because Smiths were exercising a ban on this Arts Council-supported magazine. Mainly because of the newspaper row, Smiths announced that they would continue to sell New Worlds.

However, you go and find one.....

When we moved to Sutton a few months back, one of the first things I did was to ask for New Worlds in Smiths. (It wasn't for the sake of causing trouble, I wanted to read it, for Christsakes....) After being passed from one hapless flunky to another, I eventually attained an interview with the manager. Here the unequivocal answer was: We don't stock it because it doesn't sell.

Apart from the fact that this is irrelevant (New Worlds, like most periodicals is sold to the dealer on a sale-or-return basis) it is also untrue, because it has been found that where New Worlds is displayed it sells well. However, this is not my ax and I'm not grinding it.

Now we're getting down to the guts of it, for the next key Smith-word is "sell".

I saw an item in a recent copy of The Observer (9 March, 1969) in which it was announced that Smiths were to cut back their buying of new paperbacks by about a half. A spokesman was quoted as saying: "There is no question of making moral or literary judgements. We have experts at the centre who can assess which book has the best commercial chance from their experience."

In some ways it would almost be better if the selection of titles were on a "moral or literary" basis; for at least then there would be some recognisable process which may be understood, even if not agreed with. But for the selection to be on a commercial basis is as frankly terrifying in its implications as the present system of film-releases employed in this country. (Would the country as a whole have been shown Lindsay Anderson's 'If...' were it not for the fact that during its London run it showed to packed houses?)

And in the month between that announcement and the time I write this piece, already the first signs are apparent. In Sutton the Denise Robins, Nevil Shutes, Ian Flemings and Georgette Heyers are proliferating...

And the science fiction counter (which Smith-of-Sutton maintained for reasons known only to them) has gone, and Westerns have appeared...

****JOHN WYNDHAM died in March. He was 65 and his last published novel, CHOCKY, was an expanded novelette from Amazing of March 1963. His earlier work had earned him a vast popular audience, making him by far the best-known writer of science fiction, in Britain at least. Almost every home has a battered Penguin edition of THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS tucked away somewhere, and to many people not acquainted with the tight-knit world of SF, John Wyndham was the name synonymous with modern-image Wellsian nightmare.

What is not widely known is that Wyndham (real name: John Beynon Harris) was depressed with his work and had been trying for several years to complete a novel that would better THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. This novel, THE WEB, was never completed to his entire satisfaction and it is doubtful now whether it will ever be published.

My own introduction to SF was via those famous space-critturs under the sea masquerading as Tennyson's awakening Kraken, and I still don't understand why THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS has been a more popular and successful book. There's nothing between the two stylistically, and all the familiar Wyndhamesque imagery of a falling civilisation is there. It would make a better film than TRIFFIDS (the 1963 release just did not do credit to Wyndham) and probably one better than 'Village of the Damned'. It's compulsive old stuff.

****WRITERS of science fiction may be interested to know that I am in a position to buy a limited number of SF short stories in the next couple of months. The rate of payment is good (by British standards) but the stories must be of a certain type only. Don't send any material to me without enquiring first, for one must be in full command of the facts before submitting. If you want to know more about this, contact me via SPECULATION and be prepared for anything...

****NEWS comes from America that Bob Silverberg is to edit an Avon collection of original material called NEW DIMENSIONS which, if it is a success, will become the first of a series. It would seem that the paperback collections of new material are the coming thing (see also: ORBIT and DANGEROUS VISIONS); not that we should forget that it was Ted Carnell who started all this five years ago with NEW WRITINGS IN SF. It is slightly ironical that the British series is having trouble in the States, the reason being that the lead story in NW-6 ("The Inner Wheel" by Keith Roberts) has been expanded into a novel and is soon to be published as such. Until No.6 is sold, the remaining issues will not appear in the U.S., and even if they do start appearing, already Ted Carnell is up to No.16 and still climbing. The success of these collections seems to indicate that the paperback market (in this country at least) likes them. Is there not room for another?

VIEW FROM SUBURBIA

****THE MEANING of the title of this column may not be clear, and perhaps I should explain.

The desk at which I work is next to a window which looks northward across the inner and outer suburbs of London. Because the house we live in is on a hill, and we are in the penthouse flat (euphemism for attic), the view is a splendid distraction from the typewriter. On average days one can see the TV masts at Crystal Palace across the million roofs, and on a clear day (once since we've been here) the GPO tower is just visible on the horizon. I mention all this because such a view imparts a feeling of godliness that cheers when all else is low. It also tends to emphasise the vastness of the London suburbs and the impression of wilderness is very strong.

Thoughts along these lines tend towards the conclusion that science fiction is itself a form of suburbia. Let's not get too metaphorical about it, but if you think of literature as a big messy city, science fiction can be seen as a rather snooty, middle-class residential zone just to the left of centre.

SF exists on negatives; as a general rule it doesn't contain much sex, or at least it isn't sold for its sexual content; it doesn't have the grit or compulsion of a crime-novel; it lacks much of the genre-trappings of such as westerns and romances; it doesn't have the political awareness (in the broadest sense) of the modern mainstream novel. Its writers, too, tend to come from middle-class backgrounds; the great proletarian SF-writer has yet to emerge.

Everything about science fiction at the moment has an aspect of cosiness, conservatism and complacency. The publishing boom is gaining momentum and the only thing of which there is a shortage is good, original novels. So I sit here at my window and reflect that it is now twenty years since Orwell wrote NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, and thus created the only proletarian work in SF. Meanwhile, science fiction begins to stagnate for lack of positive political (broadest sense, again) values. It is curious that at a time when SF is selling better probably than ever before, the standard of creativity in the field gets lower and lower. Perhaps it is no longer new approaches to the writing of SF that are needed but new kinds of writer.

So my view across suburbia is yet a personal one, and perhaps not even a representative one. But let me make it clear that my view is not obscured by a specific desire to criticise, because I like it here as much as anyone. I'm a member of the bourgeoisie like the rest of them. Christopher Priest, 1969.

OPINION 23: DOOMED TO IRRELEVANCE (J.G. Ballard)

Extracted from an article on Salvador Dali, New Worlds, Feb 1969.

"...Already one can see that science fiction, far from being an unimportant minor off-shoot, in fact represents the main literary tradition of the 20th century, and certainly its oldest... The main 'fact' of the 20th century is the concept of the unlimited future. This predicate of science and technology enshrines the notion of a moratorium on the past... In the face of this immense continent of possibility, all literatures other than science fiction are doomed to irrelevance"

(David Pringle)

OPINION 24: PREVIOUS INCARNATION (Roger Waddington)

"...The interview with Ballard was interesting enough but there were one or two things I hoped he might tell us about his previous incarnation, as a science fiction writer. Such as, Why did the ex-Lord of the Jewelled Forest suddenly resurrect his style for 'Tomorrow is a Million Years' and 'The Day of Forever' right in the middle of his series of new-style novels for new-style people? And what prompted him (other than money) to rewrite 'Mobile' (from BILLENITIUM, Berkeley) and sell it to Fred Pohl for publication in If. And why did Fred Pohl accept it?"

The Critical Front

BOOK REVIEWS AT LENGTH

THE TROUBLE with modern science fiction is that there is too much of it - with so many original novels published monthly in both this country and the United States it is no longer possible to read them all, let alone review them properly. And this doesn't even consider collections, anthologies and reprints !

So that the more important books are not overlooked, CRITICAL FRONT aims to present a limited number of longer studies - you may not agree we cover the most significant titles but we think these each add something individual to the field.

We would welcome new reviewers; further titles being reviewed will include STAND ON ZANZIBAR (Brunner); OMNIVORE (Anthony); DIMENSION OF MIRACLES (Sheckley) BO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP (Dick). In addition we would welcome comments and criticism of NOVA (Delany); BLACK ALICE (Disch & Sladek):

UNDER COMPULSION by Thomas M Disch (Hart-Davis 25s)

Reviewed by David Pringle

LIKE ALL really good writers, Thomas M Disch has a style that is unique to himself. His work has a characteristic tone - funny and gloomy, full of ironic quirks, and with a fastidious, almost prissy, kind of clarity. The stories in this collection cannot be taken 'seriously' on the surface at any rate; there is always a comic dimension that relieves the reader from the tragedy or pessimism of the events (and this is something that most reviewers of CAMP CONCENTRATION and THE GENOCIDES seem to have missed; Disch is above all a comic writer). But perhaps it is wrong to imply that the comedy lessens the effect of horror or tragedy; perhaps it does the opposite.

Take the first story, 'The Roaches'. It is about Miss Marcia Kenwell who had "a perfect horror of cockroaches". The poor girl's obsession with the insects gives her telepathic power over them; in the end her hate turns to love and she summons all the roaches in New York to her room. Here, the comedy and the horror are complementary; Disch manages to evoke both, and they heighten each other. There is also a touch of something else, perhaps pathos, which succeeds in making the story not only funny, not only revolting, but also sad.

The famous story 'Descending', probably the best in the book, works in much the same way. It is terrifying (really; it gave me a nightmare) but it is also very funny. I particularly like the quirky humour which Disch displays in causing his character to be so absorbed in reading, of all things, VANITY FAIR, that it is not until he reaches page 55 that he realises he is alone on an endless escalator descending into the bowels of the Earth. There is a similar joke in 'Come to Venus Melancholy', where a lonely computer recites Milton's 'Il Penseroso' over and over again.

There is a dominant theme of loneliness running through many of these stories; it is movingly expressed in the titles mentioned above, and in 'The Squirrel Cage', 'The Number You Have Reached', and 'Linda and Daniel and Spike'. Each story takes a nightmare situation - the man in a locked room, the last girl on Earth, the girl who walks through a park talking to her imaginary friend - and works it, poignantly and wittily, into a powerful image, or analogue, of life.

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There is a sense of control in most of the stories, but it is a self-satirising sort of control which verges sometimes on the neurotic. 'The Squirrel Cage' is the most unrestrained, and the most desperate, of the stories. It is also one of the most powerful. Reminiscent of Samuel Beckett, it is the monologue of a man in captivity; to relieve his boredom, and to try to make sense of his situation, all he can do is hammer away at the typewriter that his captors have thoughtfully provided.

At first the stories in this collection do not appear to have the thematic richness of the work of J.G. Ballard or Philip K Dick, yet their very power convinces the reader that they are relevant, and they do 'mean' something. The elements may be as outlandish and absurd as cockroaches, endless elevators and metastasizing tumours, but they combine to create a poetic and personal imagery which is applicable to the life we are all living. The key may lie in the word 'absurd': Disch owes something to the best French writers of the 1950's - Ionesco, Vian, Genet, and others. He has successfully combined the Absurd vision of these men with the science fiction tradition (he is not alone in this, however; much good modern fiction seems to be moving in this direction). So, if we must categorise, let us call Disch an Absurdist.

UNDER COMPULSION is a good book. There is not much that I could dislike about it, but there are a couple of points that I should bring up. Firstly, I am not very keen on the little stories, the 'squibs', that Disch has included in this collection. Pieces like 'Flight Useless, Inexorable the Pursuit', 'The Contest', and 'The Empty Room' contain some good writing but they are irritatingly slight, a little too glib and 'clever' in the pejorative sense. However, one of the short stories, 'Fun With Your New Head' does have a charming grotesquerie.

Secondly, there is a problem about Disch's writing which is best revealed by a study of the last story, 'Casablanca'. This is by no means a bad story. It has the usual ironic twists and lightness of touch, but there is also a certain staleness, a basic lack of originality (within the terms of Disch's own work, that is). It is the story of a mediocre, middle-aged American couple, holidaying in North Africa, who are cut off from their homeland by the outbreak of a nuclear war. As news of the war trickles in, their condition deteriorates, the natives begin to maltreat them, and so on. As I said, it is not at all a bad story, but there is a detectable tiredness about the satire (the phrase "Goddam dirty reds" palls, for instance).

The grounds for this criticism are slight, but nevertheless they may hint at an important fact; that Disch has now exhausted the basic short-story form employed in this book. It is time he went on to something new; he is capable of it. Indeed, a recent short story, published in New Worlds since this collection appeared, would suggest that Disch is continuing to develop. Meanwhile, read UNDER COMPULSION.

David W Pringle, 1968.

A SPECTER IS HAUNTING TEXAS by Fritz Leiber (Walker, US. \$4.95, April).

Reviewed by Brian Stableford.

SPECTER is something of a new departure in Fritz Leiber's fiction, although this, his latest novel, is not his best. It will inevitably take some hammering from the Critics because it does not measure up to his previous 'classics', and there is already evidence that the novel is being misunderstood. FORECAST in Galaxy magazine, June 1968, for instance, is particularly misleading - whoever wrote it seems to be under the impression that SPECTER is a comic strip.

(Cont/d)....
SPECULATION

Somewhat more justifiable comments were made by Peter Weston when he sent me the story to review. "I felt that the characters were insufficiently motivated", he said, "plotting was full of coincidences, and the novel generally lacked conviction." All this is to some extent true, it seems to me, but is a little unfair. I shall return to these comments later.

SPECTER, essentially, is a satirical novel but is not purely satire. It is not an especially amusing novel, and is far removed from Leiber's earlier SILVER EGGHEADS, for instance, being more open to comparison with THE BIG TIME. Algis Budrys once said that THE BIG TIME was a play and not a novel, although I don't suppose for a moment that anybody really cares whether it is or not. Certainly the story has great affinity for the stage, and the present novel is even more closely-linked, - the hero is an actor forced to play a semi-symbolic role in a revolution.

Where SPECTER differs from THE BIG TIME is that whereas Greta Forzane was essentially an observer, a pair of eyes for the reader to see the play, Christopher Crockett LaCruz is playing the lead. THE BIG TIME takes place on a set, but the set of SPECTER is wherever its hero happens to be.

The story begins when C.C. LaCruz (known more informally as Scully,) a tall, thin, Circum-Lunarian actor who needs a metal exoskeleton to support him under Earth gravity, lands by mistake at Dallas instead of Amarillo Cuchillo. Dallas is capital of Texas, which is all of North America except for California and Florida (the black republics) and a bit belonging to Russia somewhere up in the North-Western corner. Texans are eight feet tall, which gives them an ego-boosting superiority with respect to mexes, injuns, and the poor whites who form the proletariat of Texas.

The plot is a simple interplay of goodies and baddies, rotating about Scully in a nicely-paced sequence of dialogue and action. The important point is not the goodies and baddies but that very rotating itself. As Pete said earlier, the plot is full of coincidences, but this is immaterial, indeed is inevitable. Scully is the novel, and the plot is only the landscape through which he moves.

Fritz Leiber has a background as an actor and it is fairly obvious while reading that Scully is really Fritz Leiber. It is similarly obvious that Fritz isn't taking himself too seriously and this is a very self-indulgent piece of writing. Undoubtedly Fritz enjoyed every minute of it - it's impossible to miss the sheer exultation of the writer when Scully is making a speech of any kind. And he is always playing one role or another - he is a big Ham (in the nicest possible way) Even the "real" Scully is a parody, trapped absurdly in his romantic dilemma or struggling de-skeletonised in the evil grip of his enemies.

This is essentially why I claim that the novel is not pure satire. Leiber's characters are parodies, true enough, but they are not held up to ridicule, they are all actors, costumed with Leiber's typical baroque irony. Scully laughs at them, but his own integrity as an actor forces him to recognise their status and play the script the way it's written, and not strictly for laughs.

Scully is from The Sack, part of an artificial lunar satellite, and has come to Earth to save his father's theatre from financial ruin by asserting an old claim to the Lost Crazy-Russian pitchblende mine near Amarillo Cuchillo. Instead he gets co-opted as a rabble-rouser and mascot for the revolution of the mexes and kindred-sized folk. As El Esqueleto he delivers his greatest speeches (mostly plagiarised) and becomes involved with the daughter of the president, Rachel Vachel, and with the diminutive daughter of the revolution, Rosa Morales, also known as La Cucaracha. (You will undoubtedly remember that "La Cucaracha" was Pancho Villa's marching song, and that in THE TREASURE OF PANCHITO VILLA the hero

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carried a sort of portable Gatling Gun called La Cucaracha. Rosa has a certain resemblance to the latter.)

The novel is magnificently subjective. Fritz Leiber knows the inside of Scully's skull like the inside of his own, and his presentation is - as usual - superb. In consequence, cohesion and control often go astray or at least get faintly cockeyed. Hence characters are occasionally "insufficiently motivated" or the plot seems to "lack conviction". But here is a different type of novel entirely from THE BIG TIME, and so perhaps it's a little unfair to continually draw comparisons, but I think it interesting to see how Leiber has gone from his objectively-drawn canvas to the total reader-participation of putting the audience inside the central character. It must be easy to miss the point for someone who has never acted, but it should be easily appreciated by anyone who has.

There are, in fact, two other Leiber stories "intermediate" between this one and THE BIG TIME, but in both 'No Great Magic' and 'Four Ghosts in Hamlet', he used real plays in real theatres. In SPECTER, all the world becomes his stage and everything a part of the script. In THE SILVER EGGHEADS and 'The Night He Cried', the author used satire to present farce and black comedy. In SPECTER there is little of either, and instead a delightfully personal comedy, only slightly ghoulish and a little ludicrous in places.

This is a novel for Fritz Leiber. I'm sure he likes it, I'm equally sure that a lot of people won't. Some will take exception to its self-indulgence and some will find it impossible to don their exoskeletons and wade in. I couldn't, in all honesty, say this is a great book, nor rhapsodise about its literary merit, nor even champion its cause in the Hugo stakes. A SPECTER IS HAUNTING TEXAS is different. Any book-reviewer so inclined could cut it to pieces in a soulless fashion on superficially reasonable grounds, and no doubt some will. But don't be put off - read it yourself and see if you enjoy it.

Brian M Stableford, 1968

REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN (on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace)
Introduced by Leonard C Lewin (Penguin 4s)

Reviewed by Tony Sudbery

More than anything else, this is a superb satire on human society in general and that of the U.S. today in particular. Its argument is that society depends for its survival and stability upon the existence of a state of war or of preparing for war, and that the function of the military machine is far deeper and more universal than the pretexts of a particular war situation - the defence of a country against external aggression, or the maintenance of its interests abroad.

The idea that war is good for the economy of a country is not new, and the arguments for it are presented again in this "Report". I don't follow them - economics is far greater bunk than history - but anyway the Report lays little stress on them and goes on to more basic functions of war. Political: "The basic authority of a modern state over its people resides in its war powers"; sociological: "The existence of an accepted external menace is essential to social cohesiveness"; ecological: "To forestall the inevitable historical cycles of inadequate food supply, post-Neolithic man destroys surplus members of his own species by organised warfare"; and cultural and scientific: "Aesthetic and moral standards have a common anthropological origin, in... the willingness to kill and risk death in tribal warfare".

The Report goes on to consider possible substitutes for war to fulfill these functions if, catastrophically, peace should break out. The best substitute - the most useless and wasteful activity in sight - is the exploration of space, though even this is not entirely satisfactory.

(Cont/d)....

In all this, with its clear implication that society is rotten and needs to be changed, there is nothing that the most pacifist radical need be ashamed to have written. It is satire in a direct line from, if not so mordant as, Swift's "Modest Proposal". This view of the book, however, ignores its presentation, which places all the emphasis on a second, and more superficial, level of irony.

REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN purports, in fact, to be a real report actually commissioned by the United States government from a group of eminent people from many different academic disciplines and walks of life. It is prefaced by a highly circumstantial account of how the report fell into Leonard Lewin's hands, and vague descriptions of the members of the commission (which, however, seem to me to point libellously close to some well-respected figures - including a Nobel Peace Prize winner!). This has caused a lot of speculation in the National press on both sides of the Atlantic as to whether the Report actually is what it purports to be. It seems to me obvious that it is not - this is a piece of science fiction, and the "introductory material" is just the traditional, indeed archaic device of the tall-story-teller to suspend his audience's disbelief. I may be faint-hearted but I refuse to believe that anybody preparing a report for the U.S. government would dare to include such wicked truths as these; -

War...enables the physically deteriorating older generation to maintain its control of the younger, destroying it if necessary. (P. 86)

As a practical matter, conversion of the code of military discipline to a euphemised form of enslavement would entail surprisingly little revision (P.102)

Space research can be viewed as the nearest modern equivalent yet devised to the pyramid-building and similar ritualistic enterprises of ancient societies. (P. 94)

(Unless, of course, that Nobel Peace Prize winner really was asked to report on the possibility and desirability of peace, and the whole thing is a colossal snook cocked at the White House and the Pentagon!)

The purpose of this deception is to satirise the arguments of the "think-tank" and "war-game" experts. The conclusion drawn is not that society needs changing, but that war is necessary. Any other conclusion is said to be emotional and biased, as opposed to the scientific and objective character of the Report (which even claims to have developed a computer technique in its investigation). The confusion between a judgement and an emotional statement is familiar to most SF readers, (as is the conclusion on the necessity of war, in some of our less intelligent SF writers). But this insistence on attacking Herman Kahn, Walter Rostow and Robert A. Heinlein does rather obscure the more universal satire in the book.

Tony Sudbery, 1969

PAVANE by Keith Roberts (Rupert Hart-Davis, 25s)

Reviewed by Graham Hall

PAVANE is not a novel; it's a love-affair with Corfe Castle. It is the hero, or perhaps the heroine, of the series of novella which appeared originally in Impulse and are now collected together in hardcover by Hart-Davis. It broods over the tales just as it broods in fact over the Isle of Purbeck.

You can't review the book without reviewing, in some way, the castle. And you can no more describe Corfe in words than you could build the castle in concrete. An ideal review would just consist of a good photograph, taken at sunset. It's a place to be seen; and to be seen as the hiker in the Coda to PAVANE sees it:

CRITICAL FRONT

(Cont/d)..... 23

"He saw the place suddenly, looming between the shoulders of two hills. He stopped as if startled, stood staring up at it, lips slightly parted and breath hissing slow between his teeth. Then he walked on toward it. As he moved it seemed the shell of the ruin grew, towering into the sky. He sucked his breath again, wincing against the brilliant sun. Sat on a grass bank noisy with insects and smoked a cigarette. Nothing he'd read had quite prepared him for this...the castle a ragged-crowned skull, a thousand-year anger of stone. Brooding out across heath and sea, ancient, unappeasable."

In the dry, wonderless terms of science fiction, PAVANE is the story of an alternate (or more accurately, cyclic) universe, in which Elizabeth I was assassinated and Philip II of Spain took her throne. The strength of the Catholic Church assured, there is a new Dark Age, haunted by things dead and others best forgotten; bears and catamounts, dire-wolves and Fairies. Science is an occult underground art; and PAVANE is the telling of how the rebellion against the Catholic Church began and how science and light finally triumphed. It is packed with unforgettable images: the networks of semaphore towers, the great steam traction engines plying their trade, the martyrdom of Rother John.

Keith Roberts overwrites. His prose is a stew, as thick and luscious as a Brahms symphony. It makes you think of syrupy colours like umber, emerald, and mulberry. But he writes with the conviction of a lover; and if you too love the names of 'the old places, the proud places,...the words that were like the tinkling of old armour' - Dover, Harlech, Kenilworth, Ludlow, Walmer, York, Lostwithiel, Tintagel, Restormel, Chepstow...Corfe - then you feel that conviction and it makes flaws of technique trivial.

PAVANE isn't for anyone who has never stood in the dusk of a summer's day and looked up at the old walls of a castle and imagined the window slits blazing with light and life, perhaps the smell of roasting venison drifting from the huge kitchens. For those that have, PAVANE will blaze with light and life, too. And if Keith Roberts never writes another word his name will live on in their hearts.

One last word: Go and see Corfe Castle.

Graham M Hall, 1969

OPINION 25: AN AWARD OF SORTS (Jack Marsh)

"...A book which may take an award of sorts next year is Ted White's SPAWN OF THE DEATH MACHINE. The cover illo is pure S&S, with a touch of bondage thrown in; and that title -- like a track from a Bob Newhart album: "Ah, how's that again, 'The Spawn of the..' what? Of the...ah...Death Machine? Say Ted, is this a rib?"

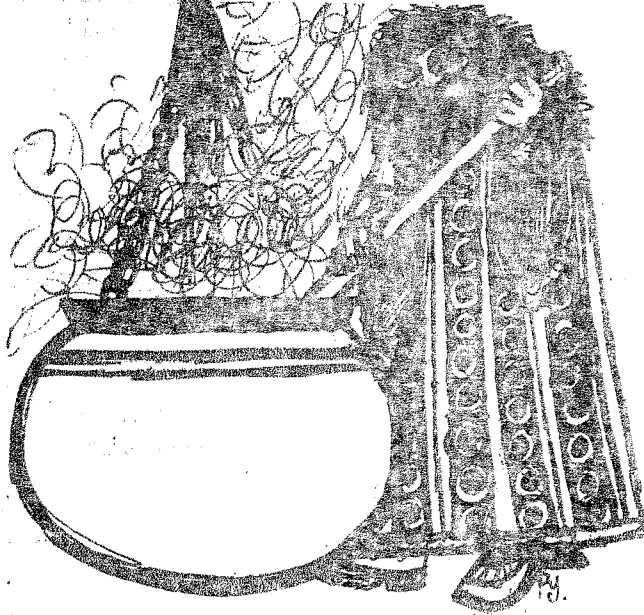
S'no rib... 'tis the sad tale of Tanner, an 'artificially constructed human being, a mobile data-gathering device', whose memories have been wiped clean. Although Tanner has been given human emotions, he's a real mixed-up mock-up. In the first fifty-odd pages he suffers from claustrophobia no less than four times - but he doesn't know what sex is (he learns.. he learns!). He can recognise a fire hydrant or a rifle - but not carrots or onions...

And in the midst of the barbarity of a civilisation in ruins he stumbles across.... a little cottage .. with a fire burning merrily in the fireplace, and an easy chair and a shaded lamp, and a little old man in a tweed suit and slippers. But Tanner is no fool - "you're an anomaly, you don't belong here at all."

The same remarks can be applied to Chapter 16, which is completely pointless and nonsensical ! And in the book, there is even a negro named Delany. This form of 'in-joke' or 'tuckerism' is gaining popularity, 'First Officer Ballard' in 2001; Brian Aldiss and Elric (how 'in' is that?) at Jerry Cornelius' rave-up...."

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Bill Linden, New York.

Dear Peter "...SPECULATION-19 has introduced me to something I had thought impossible — the New Wave displaying even less tolerance than the New Left. On page 8 M. John Harrison claims that Wollheim's criticism of BUG JACK BARRON is directed at Spinrad's person and not the book. There is not one sentence in the Lunacon speech he refers to in which I can detect a personal attack on Spinrad. (By the way, the excerpt he quotes has cured me of any and all desire to read the book.)

Four pages later we find the New Wavists freely tossing around epithets such as "pig-idiot illiterates" and "corpses wired for sound". If those aren't personal attacks, I'm a giraffe.

I would like to present my nomination for the Worst Novelette of 1968, which is H.H. Hollis' 'The Guerilla Trees'.

I read that some misguided people have nominated it for the Nebula. My considered opinion is that said nominators have taken leave of their respective wits. In the first place, 'The Guerilla Trees' is not science fiction. It is a polemic about an extremely unoriginal subject — Vietnam — in a worse-than-transparent disguise as an SF story, which gives the polemicist the advantage that he can stack the deck as heavily as he wants against the horribleterribleawfulimperialist aggressors and ignore any real evidence in their favour.

My loathing for this 'story' is not — repeat NOT — caused by my views on Communism. I hated Saberhagen's 'Brother Berserker', with its Renaissance figures, for the same reason. I have no objection if Hollis wants to bawl his lungs out over Vietnam, but he shouldn't be able to palm it off on Pohl or us as science fiction. If I want to read that sort of thing I turn to the National Guardian ! "

* Michael Moorcock said his 'pigs' remark was misunderstood and misquoted, but no such excuse has come from Tom Disch and his 'corpses'. If you don't read BJB you are missing something — it would be excellent without the swearing! And if polemic gets passed-off as science fiction, whose fault is that;— the editor. *

Charles Platt, London

Dear Pete, "The Ballard interview was excellent, so refreshing with its individuality and conviction. Such awareness of environment and image is rarely seen in fanzine articles. How sadly ironic that Ballard's condemnation of 'almost illiterate' SF fans is followed immediately by F.M. Busby's asinine reviews of mediocre category fiction. This article is typical of the fan's self-indulgent, chummy, chatty, verbose, uninformative and totally unperceptive commentary on that which is interesting to him and his friends. So very dull. I am glad this kind of article doesn't generally appear in your fanzine.

I was also offended by the ludicrous letter from Dan Morgan, that great arbiter of literary affairs, whose condemnation of those who write 'solely for money' puts him in the position of a clear-eyed poet disdaining the plebians who prostitute

their skills for hard cash. Such an image is not entirely appropriate to Morgan, whose atrociously dull books are not widely noted for the fineness of their prose, structure and characterisation. Possessing little talent himself, he is unwise to condemn others for mis-using theirs.

I don't suggest that Phil Harbottle's extravagant claims for John Russell Fearn should be taken too seriously; like any enthusiast, Phil is blind to his idol's faults and over-extravagant with praise of Fearn's virtues. But one can respect and admire the vitality of the melodramatic story blurbs that Morgan takes such pains to scorn. And one can enjoy the wildness and irresponsibility of Fearn's writing techniques, ideas and plots. He wrote professional fantasies, pieces of excellent story-telling, full of imagination and drama. Contrary to Morgan's pretentious assumptions, the worth of a piece of writing isn't proportional to the writer's supposed artistic sincerity. It is the result that counts, not the process by which the result was achieved. And 'literary worth' is only one narrow criterion by which writing can be judged.

The vitality and ideas of Fearn's stories are two qualities which Morgan's own writing sadly lacks. His condemnation of Fearn (written in a laboured style which is to be noted for its use of imprecise words and cliches) would be irritating if it were not so absurd.

* I'm pleased you came back from retirement at my special request to begin a couple of feuds in SPECULATION, Charles, and I'm sure this will liven things up no end. Of course I don't believe a word you say here, because despite our correspondence, anyone who simultaneously can agree with J.G. Ballard's opinions of science fiction and admire Vargo Statton's nonsense is simply pulling a few legs! *

Chris Priest, London

Dear Pete, "As you have mentioned twice in two consecutive issues that I think Keith Laumer is really Robert Heinlein masquerading behind a false beard, do please allow me a tiny bit of space to put the thing straight. This amazing piece of literary insight was based upon the reading of 'A Trace of Memory' when it appeared six years ago in AMAZING. As this was (a) the first time I had encountered Laumer and (b) following on a gloomy reading of GLORY ROAD (whose opening chapters---the only ones I could get through---are remarkably similar in some respects) I naturally exercised the full power of my three months of SF reading experience, and put two and two together. (In fact, there is something of a case to be made out in terms of superficial style, and little plot-devices, such as Heinlein's repeated use of near-human moggies, but now I have read more of both Laumer's work and Heinlein's, things take perspective as being merely circumstantial. One could be similarly excused for thinking Burkett's "Sleeping Planet" was written by Eric Frank Russell, or Keith Robert's "The Furies" by John Wyndham. And a dozen more).

Incidentally, I think it is a very good idea to have a rigid number of pages in each issue, and whatever the reasons behind your doing this in SPEC-20, I think you should consider doing it permanently. If you should ever have a surfeit of material, at least you will have the luxury of producing an issue with ease. Having a fixed number of pages will also lead to more balance (SPEC-20 is remarkably balanced) and also has the advantage over mammoth periodical editions of being a small, but measured, regular dose. I often feel browbeaten by the receipt of a 60+ page SPEC (have you ever got it that big, I wonder now?), as although to you the editor it represents the culmination of a long period of work, to the reader it all comes at once. And it makes writing a letter in reply something of a task.

Spinrad's remark regarding Acapulco Golds was of extreme curiosity. There is something inherently sinister about it, and one awaits developments. I think, by the way, you should change the name of your letter column."

* I remember I visited you at Doddinghurst at the time, and you were going to write a dramatic explanation of your theory that Laumer was Heinlein. Not that I ever believed it, of course - why, everyone knew that Laumer was Pohl! And it wasn't 3 months' reading experience - you had at least four! *

Dan Morgan, Lincs.

Dear Peter, "This letter is prompted by a passage in Franz Rottensteiner's article in SPEC-20. I quote: 'Much of what Moorcock and his associated authors are doing in New Worlds has been done by the dadaists, futurists, surrealists and others, several decades ago, and done better. And even then it wasn't particularly good....'

Exactly! I don't think I'm a reactionary, but I couldn't agree more with what Rottensteiner says here. I find most of New Worlds either completely opaque and chaotic, or so obvious and puerile that it defies belief. I read every new issue in the hope that I'll find something worthwhile, but each time I end up in a state of screaming frustration about the whole thing. Maybe this is the effect that Mike Moorcock is aiming at - if so, he's certainly getting through to me, at least.

I'd like to give you another quote which is worthy of some attention. It comes from Fred Pohl's editorial in the Sept. Galaxy: 'To our way of thinking, science fiction is as inventive a form of literature as any, but unlike most the inventiveness takes place primarily in the subject matter instead of in the treatment. And if the theme is mind-stretching enough, symbols and allusions are only tolerable when the author cannot manage to say what he wants to say in any other form; in that view, the choice of evocative treatment over explicit and literal statement is not a triumph but a surrender.'

Make sense? I think it does. Nobody denies the necessity of using evocative language in the writing of fiction, but what the hell are the New Wavers trying to evoke by their unintelligible 'stories' and 'poems'? I doubt if they are even sure on that point themselves, but if they are, for my money they're not succeeding.

Yet another quote - this time from THE USE OF LATERAL THINKING, by Edward de Bono; 'The trouble with creative thinking in art is that it is so easy to stop halfway. Indeed, the less talented have no choice. Escape from the old ideas becomes a virtue in itself. Originality is all. There is an enthusiasm to step down from the limitations of accepted order into the limitless potential of chaos, but too often this step is regarded as an achievement in itself rather than only the first stage towards achievement... With art, because there is no objective end-point, it seems too easy to stop at the chaos stage and get no further.'

Maybe New Worlds is at the chaos stage - fair enough, but I want to see what comes next, and I'm getting awful tired waiting.

Incidentally, I should think that quite a few people will be up in arms about Ballard's comments on fandom - they bloody well ought to be! Sure we've got a lot of maniacs kicking around - but there are also a large number of serious-minded people, both young and old, involved in fandom. It's interesting to note too, that most of the writers came from fandom in the first place and aren't ashamed of the

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fact - most of the writers that is, except for bloody cultural snobs like Ballard who dropped in via the 'literary' magazines and tried to turn SF into something it isn't."

* From what I hear it looks as if NOTHING comes after the chaos stage with New Worlds, because I gather the magazine has finally fallen apart. This is all at the time of writing, of course, and The Speculator this time around will be making a special effort to look into the position - you should find further details elsewhere in this issue, in the editorial that gets written last of all. Phil Harbottle also creates news on the magazine front since he will be editing a new British magazine - not that this is news to you, Dan, since I know you've sold a couple of stories to Phil. Whether a diet of reprinted John Russell Fearn goes down any better than experimental new-wave pieces remains to be seen. Meanwhile, I'll ask a question: If J.G. Ballard et al write such meaningless nonsense, why does it appear in the US magazines? Bill Linden complains that Fred Pohl prints Vietnam-war stories in If; surely if Ballard is so far removed from what we know as SF, Pohl and the other editors should refuse to accept his stories? *

George Hay, London

Dear Peter, "To Bob Parkinson: The fact, Bob, whether we like it or no, is that most people - maybe all people - drive through life navigating through their rear-view window (Referring to GREATER THAN HEINLEIN). They just want to experience a replay of what made the biggest impact on them early on in life. Thus a lot of Annas - and I'm one of them - really do want to sail with Ulysses, etc. Did you know that one of the biggest classes of sellers in books is the class of nursing romances? Did you know that, right now, sword-and-sorcery novels are going like hot cakes? These awkward people will continue to ask for heroes and heroines. Isn't that naughty and unprogressive of them?

Conversely, there is a -much, much smaller - class of people who see life as a vast confusion, being personally confused themselves. They know that problems are (a) essential, and (b) unsolvable, so what they want is bigger and gloomier problems. Heroes solve problems (Ulysses made a habit of it, you may recall), and so of course these readers abhor heroes. Nor do they want any sweetness-and-light heroines; they know that life is horrible. One could ask these people if, in strict objectivity, there is anything so really terrible about the concept of sweetness and the concept of light - but you'd get a pretty dusty answer.

To Sam Moskowitz: You won't convince an a-historical generation by quoting history. If it happened before 1930 - it didn't happen. Marshall McLuhan thinks that new media are destroying the whole concept of history. And if the histories of Greece, Rome, Egypt, etc, tell us anything, they teach us he's right. If you take the human race as a computer and think of the mass of material - mostly crud - being fed into it, then the present anti-Establishment stirrings simply represent the natural urge of the machine to clear itself of all that jazz: a very sane reaction, really. Pity is, it's a reaction and not a conscious action. But anyway, it's good to know that someone is keeping the record straight. Come the next Renaissance, those records will be needed...."

* Ever think that this might be a Renaissance? Personally I think it's a Golden Age for science fiction, as one example, (not the musty 'Forties) and all the 'new-wave' business is simply the froth. Like pouring Guinness too quickly. If there's one thing Marshall McLuhan teaches, it is that Marshall McLuhan talks a great deal of nonsense, sometimes. *

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Leigh Edmonds, Victoria, Australia.

Dear Peter, "I am not sure I agree with the idea that SF is important enough to warrant serious discussion, but assuming that it is, you are doing a very good job at it. However, more than anything else, SPECULATION reminds me of just how good ASFR was and just what is wrong with it, but here is not the place to go into things like that.

Of particular interest to me was the review of THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM (in SPECULATION-19) as written by Graham Hall (mainly because it is just about the only book which has been reviewed which I have read.) If inept blurb writing has caused Kurt Vonnegut to be mentioned in the blurb, then inept review writing has caused Kurt Vonnegut to be mentioned in the review. Just because the blurb writer mentioned the name Vonnegut, there is no excuse to take time out to detail Vonnegut's stages of development. But if Hall can do it, I can. Vonnegut writes in a style which is similar (if you will forgive the comparison) to 'THE FROST REPORT', with a subtlty and still very humorous style, while Sladek writes in the style of LAUGH-IN, a very burlesque form of humour, but still very funny. Just because I don't like LAUGH-IN doesn't mean that it isn't funny, it's just that Rowan & Martin don't find the same things humorous as I do. Sladek writes the kind of stuff that I think is funny.

Saying Sladek has no control is like saying Burroughs has no control.

Back to Vonnegut. Hall says that Sladek is a long way from the subtlty of Vonnegut; true, but why should all humour be subtle? Why can't some writer with the ability to write a burlesque form of humour be allowed to do so instead of imitating someone else? The manner in which Sladek changes from plot to plot is far removed from tiresome; after the first few times you adjust to it and the effect it gives is to liven the whole book up. What was Hall looking for? Perhaps there should have been some sort of meaning (or room for one) and the fact that Hall has failed to find it caused him to dislike the novel. There was plenty of room for meaning in 'Masterson and the Clerks', as well as humour, so Hall could feel safe in liking that."

Bob Parkinson, Aylesbury, Bucks

Dear Pete, "The Ballard interview in SPECULATION-21 was interesting. I am trying to remember who it was (Aldiss, maybe?) who said that Ballard characters typically stand around giving themselves away. The interview, for those who would read, is a give-away about Ballard himself. But I doubt whether many will see just what it does say. For a while I thought that critical ability in SF was becoming truly literate.

You could write an entire article about Ballard's avowal of the 'analytic' part of human activity, and we do not have to accept as necessary the Gospel according to Freud. Analytic activity can mean two things. First, it can be destructive, "taking things apart to see how they work" sort of thing. And secondly, it can be introspective, navel-watching activity. These, if you like, are its 'Dionysian' and 'Applonian' aspects. Ballard shows a fascination with both sides, but fails to achieve any real degree of insight with either. His questions about "does the angle between two walls have a happy ending" is on the level of the Zen "sound of one hand clapping". If this is maturity, it depends on what you mean by maturity. It certainly mistakes the nature of science. Science is both analytic and synthetic activity. It questions mechanisms and then proposes new situations (experiments) to test insights. And of its very nature it creates new situations, new possibilities, which I would have thought was synthesis if nothing was. Ballard, like Heinlein, is loosing contact with reality. (Cont/d)

(Parkinson) Minor comments:- Well, yes Mr Moskowitz, that's all very well. But the other trouble is that there are people who imagine that bibliography is a satisfactory substitute for insight. Certainly it is an advantage to know what has been going on, but it also helps to realise what is going on. Maybe there is nothing new under the sun, but is that any excuse for churning out the same old stuff? After which, Harlan Ellison's letter is a breath of fresh air. Halleluia for Mr Ellison. If it is egocentric pyrotechnics, maybe we need egos like Mr Ellison's! "

* I'm rather disappointed at the lack of response to Ballard's comments last time around; there was enough there, surely, to provoke more reaction, what with JGB's thoughts on Analog, fandom and so on *

Ivor A Rogers, Wisconsin, USA

Dear Peter, "I found Tim Hildebrand's review of The Secondary Universe Conference (SPEC-19) quite interesting, and I can see why Chip Delany dashed off a letter to you about the whole thing. With three sections going on simultaneously it was very hard for any one individual to get the overall view. I have heard all the tapes of the affair, so I know all the verbal content. I missed the shook fists, raised eyebrows and one particularly intense exchange between Judith Merrill and William Tenn that blew a fuse on the recorder. (At supper that night we had a dramatic re-inactment, but by that time arguments were already setting in as to who said what).

Having heard the whole conference (11 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -hour sessions) I think that we started the process of chipping away at the barrier between Literature and Science Fiction. Much of what Tim was objecting to was the fact that Chip and Judy were aware that they were speaking to "college professors" and were putting on the dog a bit. Not much, to my way of thinking, but then, I'm a professor, aren't I? I loved Chip's wipe-out of the Professors at the MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION conference this winter. Most profs are not familiar with the philosophy of creativity, nor do they deal much with real thought - just 'depth' and 'obscurity', so when Chip gets off on Ludwig Wittgenstein you can see the professorial mind begin to boggle. (These were the casual drop-ins: I don't think that he was leaving Joanna Russ, William Tenn or Tom Clareson behind).

One of the results of this interaction between prof and pro is that we no longer have quite the same image of each other as we did before, and can communicate for the betterment of both. I am not quite as far out as some critics who think that everything Ballard writes is good just because it's obscure, and modern literature is good and obscure; and I don't think that Bugging Jack Whatsisname is any better or worse because of the language used. "I like it therefore it's good" -- if those are the only standards the writer has, his genre will quickly degenerate into coterie criticism and cult worship - and SF has always been close to that end of the critical continuum. At the same time, the professional litterateur can kill a good thing pretty fast."

* One thing that has conspicuously not happened in this country is for there to be an interaction between academics and the SF fan- and pro-world. The Brighton Festival could have begun to overcome this failing, but in the event failed by being too self-consciously 'arty' and overly-broad in conception. One of the developments of future SPECULATIONS will be to explore the academic field in considerable detail.

Other letters on hand include those from David Ward, Jerry Kaufman, Brian Cox and Bill Linden (again). Perhaps next time. We also heard from: George Hay, Dav Garnett, M.A. Bullen, Dennis Lien, Jerry Lapidus, Carl Brandon Jr, Richard Poole, Franz Rottensteiner, Tim Hildebrand, Tony Sudbery, Jannick Storm, Mike Kenward, R. Barycz, Stephen Morris, Phil Harbottle - and others. *PETER WESTON
SPECULATION

SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE

To be reviewed in future issues:

OMNIVORE by Piers Anthony, Ballantine 75c, Faber 25s. STAND ON ZANZIBAR by John Brunner, Macdonald 25s. DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP, by Philip K Dick, Rapp & Whiting 21s. DIMENSION OF MIRACLES by Robert Sheckley, Gollancz 21s. IMAGE OF THE BEAST by Philip Jose Farmer, Essex House \$1.95. THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula K LeGuin, Ace 'special' 95c. THE STILL SMALL VOICE OF TRUMPETS by Lloyd Biggle Jr, Rapp & Whiting 21s.

THREE ADVENTURES

Other reviewers have commented that Harry Harrison in 'The Horse Barbarians' has taken Ghenghis Khan's Mongol hordes and has transplanted them to another planet, which is apparently regarded as some form of cheating. My own objection to DEATHWORLD-3 (Faber, 25s) is its lack of motivation and resolution. When all is said and done and thought about there is really very little reason to settle Felicity other than the author's convenience, and the last third of the book trails through to a conclusion that there can be no easy conclusion. Not so good as its predecessors. VENUS PLUS X by Theodore Sturgeon (Gollancz 25s) appeared as a paperback in 1960 and its faults have subsequently been discussed. For a beginning, it is both plotless and characterless, and - by a trick - is not what it seems. But like one or two other of Sturgeon's recent works it is not a novel but a treatise, an unusual theory of sex and life but not much more. I was somewhat disappointed at first reading this book.

Robert Silverberg's 'Hawksbill Station' won a lot of attention and was almost claimed by some to be his best work. THE ANVIL OF TIME (Sidgwick & Jackson, 21s) is the novel-length expansion with a fuller picture of the Station, its inhabitants and their former lives. One of the 'new wave' authors might have treated the situation as an exercise in unresolved despair, but Silverberg still has old-fashioned ideas about endings. Lovely dust-cover. Recommended.

QUARTET OF PRIZEWINNERS

A recent trend is for Hugo- and Nebula-winning short stories to come from original collections rather than from the magazines. ORBIT-3 (Rapp & Whiting 25s) edited by Damon Knight contains two such winners, 'Mother to the World' by Richard Wilson and 'The Planners' by Kate Wilhelm. Both deserve their awards, and the collection also has excellent pieces by Joanna Russ and Richard McKenna. But 'The Changeling' is self-confessed nonsense, and 'Why They Mobbed The White House' doesn't confess it. Perhaps I missed the point of Farmer's story, but James Sallis is pretentious and John Jakes tries hard with a conventional SF story and only just fails. Average for the course. A BRIAN ALDISS OMNIBUS (Sidgwick & Jackson, 35s) contains the Nebula-winning 'Saliva Tree' and five others ranging from rotten short novels ('The Primal Urge' and 'The Interpreter') to excellent novellas 'Basis for Negotiation', 'The Impossible Star', 'Man In His Time'. All the facets of brilliant Brian Aldiss, from 1960 to date.

We reviewed Larry Niven's NEUTRON STAR collection in SPEC-19, a collection of 8 stories published within 15 months of each other crowned by the title story, a Hugo-winner. This new author, swimming completely against the tide, offers the real, unashamed genre-SF, with a lively style and a fantastic flood of new ideas in material. I think his work is marvellous, and the handsome Macdonald edition of this book (25s) is one for my own bookcase. (See letter, next issue).

BOOK GUIDE

I didn't believe there could be a new collection of Brian Aldiss novelettes I hadn't previously read, but INTANGIBLES INC. & OTHER STORIES (Faber, 25s) is such a book. It has stories from 1959, 1960, 1967 & 1968, all well-told with a touch of humour and very good Aldiss indeed ('Neanderthal Planet', 'Randy's Syndrome', 'Send Her Victorious' 'Intangibles Inc' and 'Since the Assassination') The dust-wrapper mentions the British Science Fiction Writers Association, which is a new one to me!- however, 'they' have voted Aldiss No.1. British SF writer.

THE LAST STARSHIP FROM EARTH, by John Boyd, (Gollancz 25s) is a most unusual book that really can only be appreciated through reading. Worth looking into.

DIGITS AND DASTARDS by Frederik Pohl (Dobson 21s) is a sort of catch-all collection of 6 stories and two articles on the oddities of mathematics. 'The Children of Night' is excellent, the others less so.

THE POWER OF Z is Arthur Sellings last novel before his death, and has some light speculation about matter-duplicators. Fast moving. (Dobson, 18s).

THE ULCER CULTURE by Kenneth Bulmer, (Macdonald 21s). I've tried and failed to take this story seriously, but I don't believe in the bad, bad Upper Classes and the exploited workers! Shades of Marx and Wells! But well-told and exciting.

TIME TO LIVE by John Rackham, 18s; THESE SAVAGE FUTURIANS by Philip E High, 18s; BINARY Z by John Rankine, 21s; TWIN PLANETS by Philip E High, 18s; UNDERSEA CITY by Frederik Pohl & Jack Williamson, 21s. (Dobson Books).

These five books are grouped together because they reveal an alarming trend in science fiction from Dobson Books. From being one of the original publishers of quality SF in this country, Dobson are descending to a very low level. While UNDERSEA CITY was a very good boys' book, in 1958, is it worth offering the adult market today? TWIN PLANETS is so bad that I wouldn't buy it in the paperback edition, and THESE SAVAGE FUTURIANS has the distinction of possessing the worst dust-wrapper of any British hardcover SF book in the last 10 years. And it has a story to match. John Rankine is simply incapable of writing even adequate characterisation, and John Rackham is steadily deteriorating with each new novel, TIME TO LIVE being his worst to date. In appearance and content these latter 4 titles are sadly lacking, and I very much regret that Dobson have slipped so badly from their own former standards.

PAPERBACK PREVIEW

BROTHER ASSASSIN by Fred Saberhagen, 75c; DOUBLE, DOUBLE by John Brunner, 75c; XENOGENESIS by Miriam Allen de Ford, 75c; THE ALIENS AMONG US by James White 75c; THE CAVES OF KARST by Lee Hoffman 75c; (Ballantine). These titles are among the best paperback SF being offered today. They are all good, and particularly so is the deFord and White pair of collections.

TOLKIEN: A LOOK BEHIND THE LORD OF THE RINGS, by Lin Carter 95c; THE LAST UNICORN by Peter S Beagle, 95c; A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE, by Peter S Beagle, 95c; SMITH OF WOOTTON MAJOR & FARMER GILES OF HAM by J.R.R. Tolkien, Ballantine 95c; EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS, MASTER OF ADVENTURE by Richard A Lupoff, Ace Books 95c

THE DEMON BREED by James H Schmitz, Ace 'special' 60c. THE GREEN MILLENNIUM/NIGHT MONSTERS by Fritz Leiber, Ace 60c; BEST FROM F&SF 9th Series, Ace 60c; ENVOY TO NEW WORLDS, by Keith Laumer, Ace 50c; THE SUBSPACE EXPLORERS by E.E. Smith, 60c. THE PLANET WIZARD by John Jakes, Ace 60c; STARWOLF-3 by Edmond Hamilton, Ace 50c; CODE DUELLO by Mack Reynolds/AGE OF RUIN by John M Faucette, Ace 60c.

THE DOUBLE PLANET (nonfiction) by Isaac Asimov, Pyramid 75c; THE UNDERPEOPLE by Cordwainer Smith, Pyramid 60c; SPACE LORDS, 60c; SOS THE ROPE by Piers Antony, Pyramid 60c; THE GOBLIN TOWER by L Sprague deCamp, Pyramid 75c. (fantasy) THE TIN MEN by Michael Frayn, Ace 60c. (not SF, but satire and very good reading)

SPECULATION

Rapp & Whiting

76 New Oxford St, London WC1

ORBIT 3 (Damon Knight, editor).....25s nett

Of the previous book in the series it was said

"...a reflection of the best serious SF being written
today."

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP (Philip K Dick)....21s nett

An unusual and satirically funny tale

THE STILL SMALL VOICE OF TRUMPETS (Lloyd Biggle Jr)....21s nett

The Times Educational Supplement said of his last novel

"a complete success at that most difficult game, susp-
ension of disbelief."

SF ODDITIES (Groff Conklin, editor).....21s nett

The oddest collection of oddities

DRAGONFLIGHT (Anne McCaffrey).....25s nett

By the first woman to win SF's highest award, a Hugo.

THE SECOND IF READER OF SCIENCE FICTION (Frederick Pohl,
editor).....25s nett

A selection from the prize-winning magazine If.

Also Available:

ASIMOV'S MYSTERIES (by Isaac Asimov).....25s nett

APEMAN SPACEMAN (Harry Harrison & L E Stover, editors).30s nett

THE JUDGEMENT OF EVE (Edgar Pangborn).....21s nett

SEARCH THE SKY (Frederick Pohl & C M Kornbluth).....18s nett

ALL JUDGEMENT FLED (James White).....21s nett

ORBIT 2 (Damon Knight, editor).....25s nett

THE TRAPS OF TIME (Michael Moorcock, editor).....25s nett

THE DOLPHIN RIDER (Roy Meyers).....21s nett

PAST MASTER (R A Lafferty).....21s nett

RESTOREE (Anne McCaffrey).....25s nett

WATCHERS OF THE DARK (Lloyd Biggle Jr).....21s nett

RORK! (Avram Davidson).....18s nett
