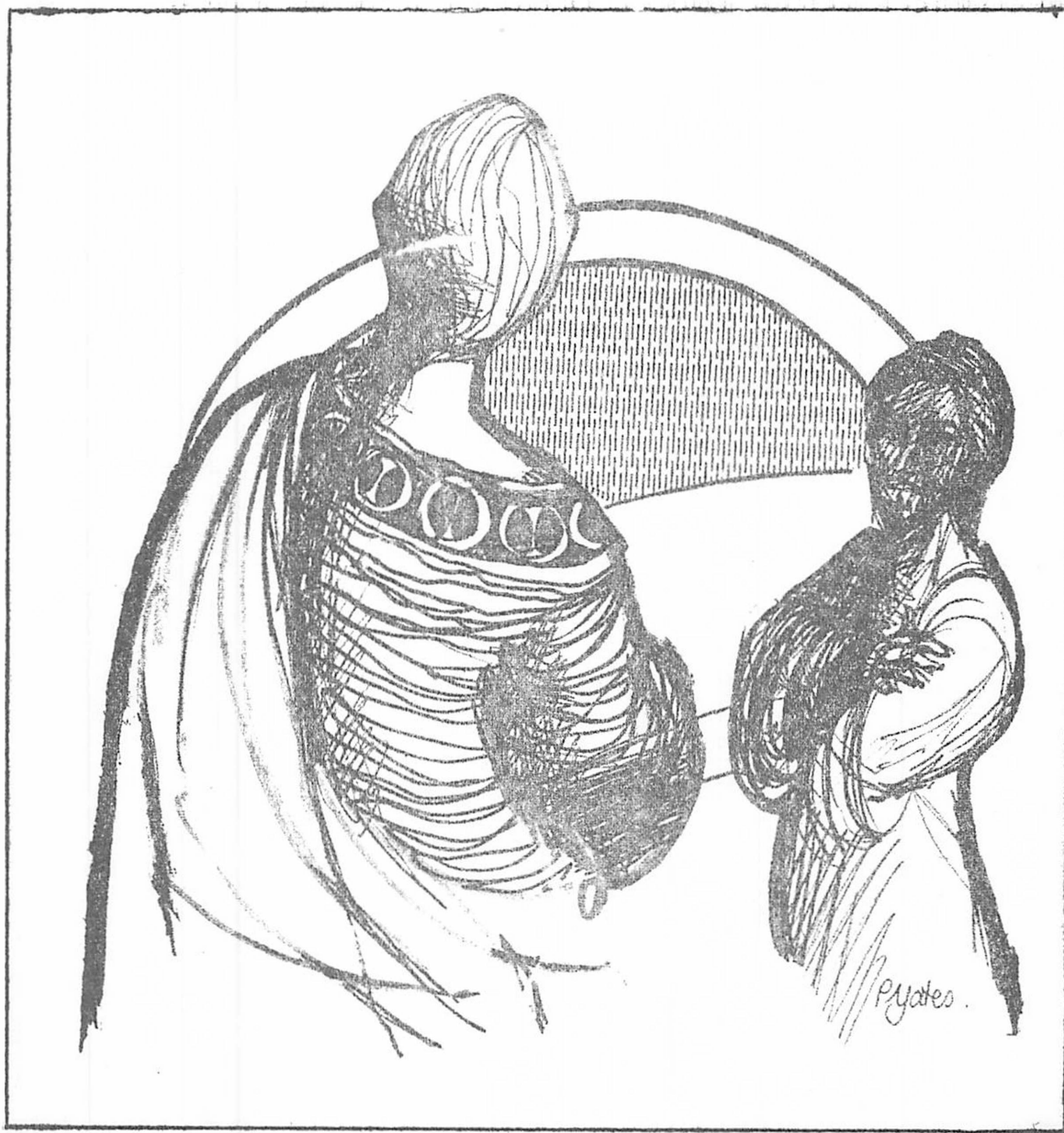


Speculation

EASTER 1968
CONVENTION. ISSUE.

THE SPECULATOR AT LARGE



A special issue of THE SPECULATOR AT LARGE, produced
by Peter Weston for the Thirdmancon, 1968, Combozine.

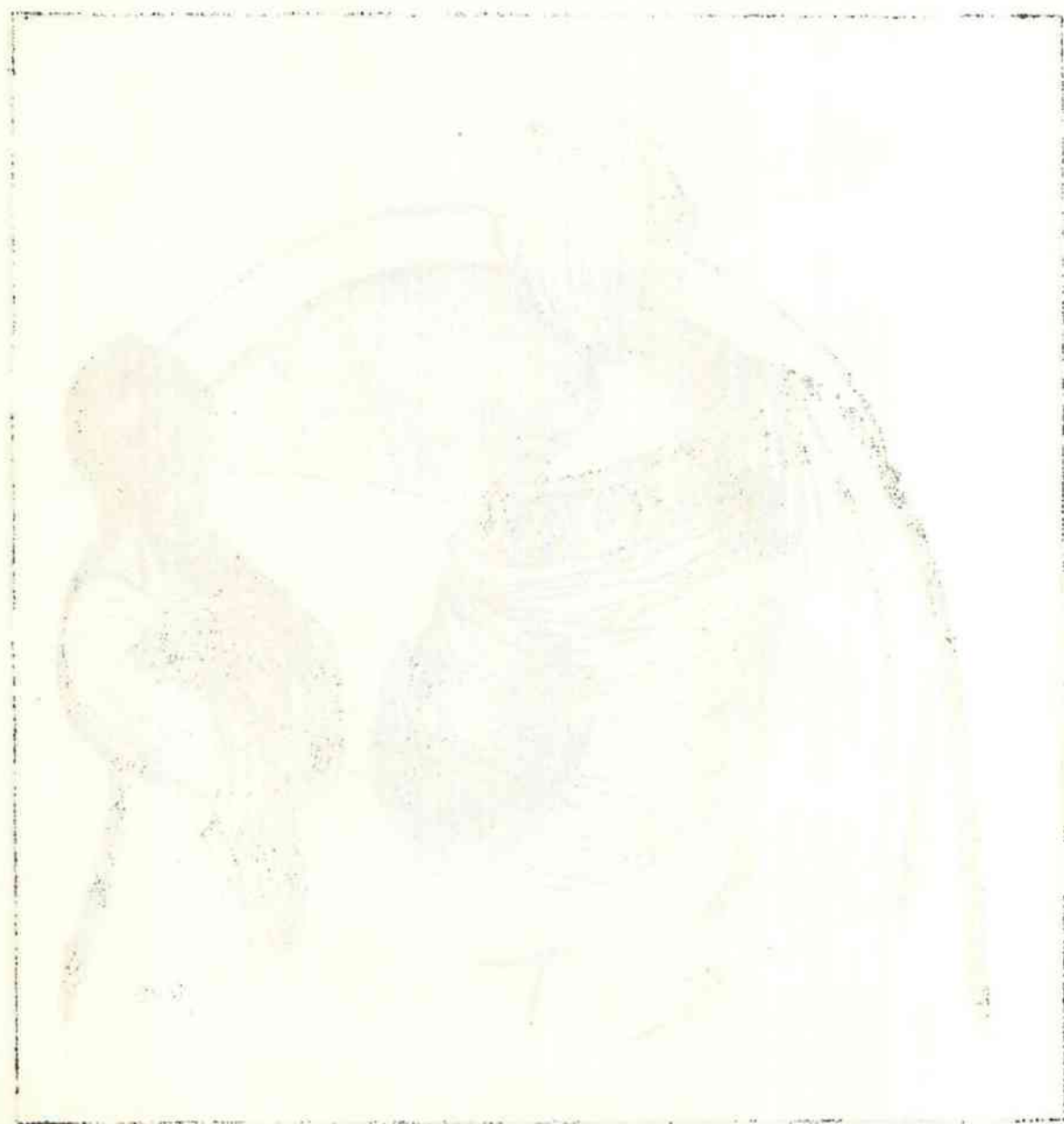
Cover illustration by Pamela Yates, illustrating DUNE (from SPECULATION-12)

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THE SPECULATOR AT LARGE (EASTER ISSUE) by Peter Weston.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT !

Today is Saturday the 30th March, the day before I'll have to get some new tyres for my car. It's also just 13 days to the Easter convention, if my mental arithmetic is correct. What is more natural than to receive a letter from Harry Nadler asking whether my entry for the convention Combozine can be received by April 5th ?

No, Harry, it can't!

A long time ago, it seems, I queried whether the THIRDMANCON committee would like me to put something into this revolutionary sort of programme book/souvenir magazine. And not hearing anything further, I promptly forgot all about the idea. It would now appear that, to meet commitments, I have exactly five days to produce this little epic (if that's not a complete contradiction of terms!).

That's all right. you see, because I'm backed by the vast resources of SPECULATION.

* pause for subdued laughter*

But seriously, there are a few bits and pieces I'd like to publish and a few events I've meant to talk about for the last month or more. First, for the benefit of any new people who may attend the convention, just who am I ? :-

No-one important, for a start. If your ceiling leaks when you're finally installed in a room at the St. Anne's, then don't come looking for me. I also have no idea of what's due to be on the programme, who is running what or whatever is going on with the BSFA. But I do edit this magazine called SPECULATION.

If you're interested in something that tries to review new books, print detailed critiques and evaluations of authors, and occasionally publishes little tit-bits of information from writers themselves, then you really ought to come looking for me. It won't even cost you anything - I'm giving away a special 16-page complimentary issue this year, FREE OF ANY CHARGE to whoever's interested. (Of course, you do have to sign your soul away forever, but that's a different matter....)

But enough of that. I've more interesting things to say, and stories of tell such as the TRUTH about the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, and about my CAR ACCIDENT last month, and about the wonderful things we've been doing at the YOUNG CONSERVATIVES recently. I can also hear Joe Patrizio in the background, with a review of something called VOICES PROPHESYING WAR. Perhaps Joe can take over.....

VOICES PROPHECYING WAR: 1763-1984,
By I. F. Clarke, Oxford University Press, 1966, 42s.

Review by Joe Patrizio.

"This one seems to have slipped through without reaching any reviewer," says Joe, "and I didn't even know of the book's existence until I saw it in the library."

Writers of the 'Glory of War' stories must accept a great deal of the responsibility for forming the attitudes that lead to the 1914-18 War. Is that a valid opinion? - it's one of those discussed in the book.

Because the book is an examination of that literature which deals with the whys and hows of future wars; the events causing them and the methods used in fighting them. The author shows how the pre-1914 stories emphasised the glory and righteousness of wars to come, while post-1918 stories are mainly anti-war, emphasising the stupidity and inhumanity.

Speaking of stupidity, some of the attitudes of the time almost approach this level on looking back at them. For instance, two ideas seriously presented by early 20th Century writers were that Britain was riddled with German spies, in the guise of waiters, and (even more mind-boggling) that German military bands were touring this country and between engagements, were laying secret concrete foundations for siege guns in the London suburbs.

"Personally," says Joe, "I was only vaguely familiar with a few of the earlier references, so what will probably be of interest to others like myself is the pretty comprehensive bibliography of 'future-war' books published between 1770 and 1964. The post-1945 books examined here will be familiar to most of us - those looked at most deeply include 198 & APE AND ESSENCE, although both DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS and THE DEATH OF GRASS are well thought of, and A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ and many others are mentioned."

Joe Patrizio, 1968.

That's Joe's opinion of a book related to our science fiction field of interest. He didn't say whether STARSHIP TROOPERS, for instance, was mentioned anywhere. I would certainly pick this as a title most worthy of inclusion, especially since, as both Brian Aldiss and Alex Panshin have suggested elsewhere, that it is a book which almost glorifies the idea of war. Come to think of it, there are a considerable number of Heinlein books which could be eligible. MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS is nothing more (or less) than the story of the plotting of revolutionary war. So is SIXTH COLUMN and REVOLT IN 2100 ("If this Goes On") in their individual ways. But these observations aren't original - I'm cribbing heavily from Buz Busby in the current (No.17) issue of SPECULATION.

AND NOW, a special feature, rejected by VECTOR, SPECULATION and many other magazines. Only I can tell the inside story of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group;-

" CONTEMPT FOR THE OLD CONTEMPTIBLES ? "

I WAS JOKING, when I said somewhere or other that Bob Rickard was the man who would one day revive the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. Bob is the highly-dynamic individual who co-edits my fanzine, draws pretty pictures, collects Marvel comics and gets so disgustingly drunk that he walks into walls and smashes both his glasses and (by the look of him the day after) his face as well. But he's a great chap.

Anyway, Bob invited me along to a meeting at the University of Aston, which was very different from an fan-activity formerly taking place in the city. It's not the old BSFG under new management, not by any means. There's no sitting around in the lounge of a noisy pub, wondering when the landlord will get sufficiently annoyed to throw you out. (And do you remember, Rog, that night Alan Roblin made headlines in our Bulletin because he'd complained about flat beer and was subsequently ejected?) No, there's no more sessions at the Old Contemptibles - this new crowd have all the advantages...They meet in a warm, comfortable private lounge at the Students Union, have a bar, and will even be paid £50 per annum for doing so, if their Treasurer can ever get along to the Council meetings at the right time.

Bob is a post-grad. student in Industrial Design, at the Gosta Green University of Aston. At the last count he had roped in about 20 students, fringe-type readers of SF most of them, although there are a few potential fans. There's a library of sorts already, books and magazines mostly, although I've been unloading all my rubbishy old fanzines on to them. Yes, I've been doing my bit to introduce them to SF fandom, what with selling them lots of books and magazines I don't want, and introducing some of the others to the delights of fanzine production. (Translated, that means making them spend half the night collating issues of SPECULATION. Just you try handling 22 sheets of 300-off each !)

But really, the Birmingham people don't need my help. I'm an outsider, a kind of nut who gives away loads of peculiar duplicated bits of paper.

I'd thought SF Groups were a thing of the past, but perhaps they have merely 'gone underground' instead? Certainly the Delta people in Manchester are active, but otherwise all the old fan-circles seem to have died a death. In an old Operation Fantast (I think), and that's going back a bit by itself, there were mentions of at least a dozen Groups in England alone, and a rather touching little plea for a 'really big recruiting drive'.

Things have changed - but even now there are some centre of interest. Chairman Jim Metcalf (whom I know not) runs the Oxford University Speculative Fiction Group; there's the Birmingham people; Martin Pitt of

medieval Handsworth fandom has organised a Group up at Nottingham University. Tony Sudbery said something about a circle at Cambridge, while Hartley Patterson (who is at the con, I hear) is Secretary/Treasurer and guiding light of a society in Manchester College/University (?)

Hartley wrote recently; "This is a Union-supported Group which meets on Union premises where we also keep our library. I suppose the difference between us and the normal fan group is that to obtain a Union grant we have to cater for the casual reader as well. Which gives a membership of 80 and about 10 addicts. There are no fans as such in the group, if you define a fan as a contributor to fanzines. I am the only person with any contact with the fan world, and that has been for about a year to date."

Looking at all this activity, I'm almost tempted to take up a suggestion made by Geoff Winterman of the old Cheltenham circle. Geoff finally married his Helen, and they're established in a large empty house near Sutton Coldfield. Who better to fill the house than fans? Or possibly Tony Walsh can offer a different opinion?

A LAST WORD FROM YOUR SPONSOR

I did hope to print an excerpt from our Quinton Young Conservatives Magazine, but on re-reading through it, I can see that the article is pretty turgid and not really worth the trouble. I will mention briefly that Rog Peyton (anyone remember him - editor of VECTOR for 2 years, Poul Anderson fan extraordinary, etc.) is chairman of our branch, and is getting married in July. Goodbye, Rog, it was nice to know you!

Anyway, I did promise to bore you with a note about my car crash recently. It wasn't my car, or even me driving. No, I was but an innocent passenger in an 1100 works car, being driven up to Leeds with a load of display items and castings for a small conference.

Bang! A tyre blew. We were doing 70 mph at the time, and what with the weight and the speed, the driver had no control at all. First we headed for the central reservation. I shut my eyes and then we were heading for the embankment. Crunch and we were driving sideways down the M1; Lurch and we were heading up the embankment, Bang and little bright lights spinning around... and I was lying on my stomach on the grass, a gentle rain of castings falling from the skies, the car a wreck with nose dug into the bank, glass everywhere, the driver climbing out of the shattered windscreen, lorry-drivers topping in great multitudes to pick up the pieces. I had been flung through the door on the first spin - on the second the roof caved in on my side (thank god I'd taken off my seat-belt just 5 minutes before). So the police came, and an ambulance, took us both to Mansfield Gen. Hospital and kept me in for nearly a week with shock, bruises on the chest and a great many aches, which still twinge now. I recommend the hospital, incidentally, nice nurses, but I don't recommend the experience. AND THAT is why SPECULATION was late, again.