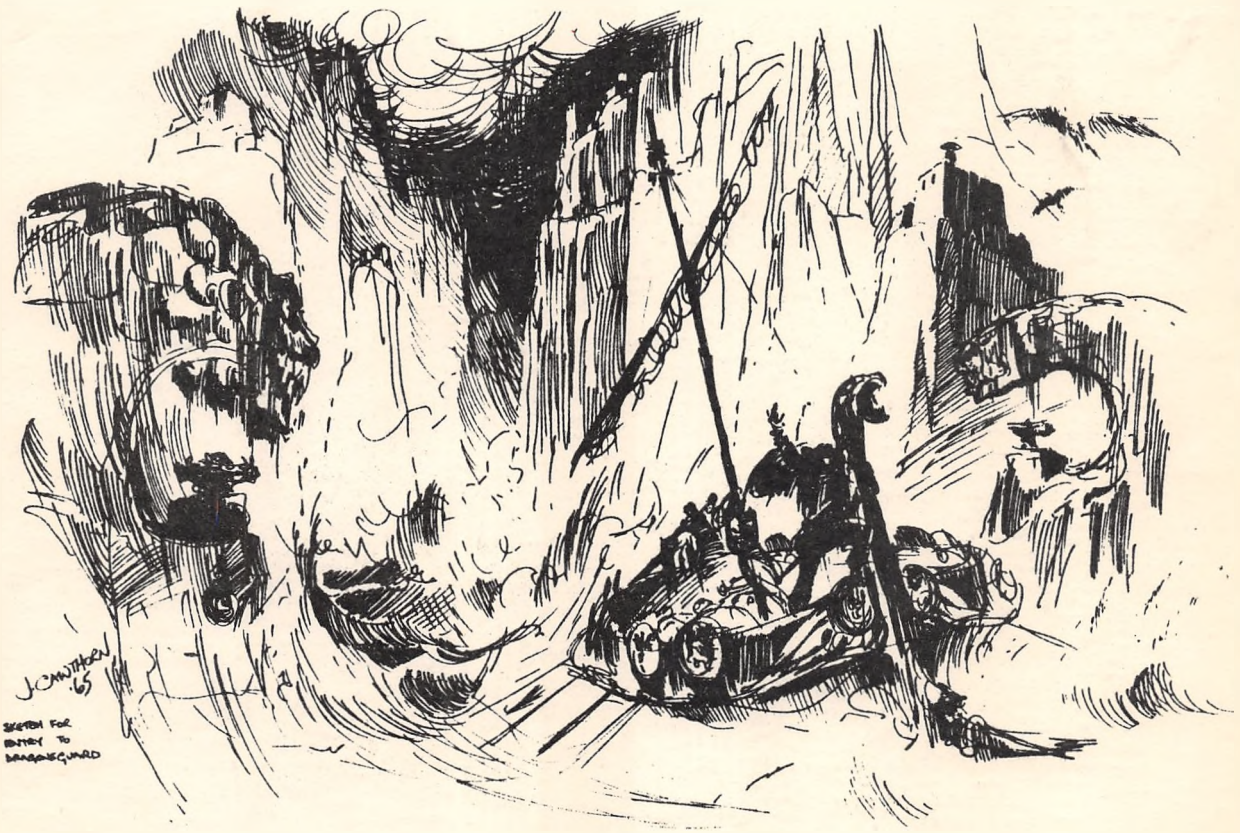
ZENITH

SPECULATION

october 1965 2/-



ZENITH

SPECULATION

October 1965 2/- (30¢)

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EDITORIAL

A peculiar characteristic of the science fiction reader is his urge to collect.

For many, science fiction is more than a minor branch branch of literature, to be read on the way to work in the morning. It is a hobby, more, an obsession. A book is bought and read, is never discarded, is carefully and lovingly stored away as yet another unit of an ever-growing collection. As the addiction grows, it becomes necessary to obtain not only all of the newly-realeased books, but to obtain back issues of the various magazines, and obscure novels of an earlier decade.

The stage is reached when the collector is reading little of his vast accumulation of material. The sheer volume of the science fiction produced throughout the years becomes a burden rather than a joy. The size of a collection is such that much of it must often be stored out of reach. The urge to obtain a complete file of this magazine, and a complete set of this author's works pays very little regard to the quality of either.

I know personally of one 'SF reader' who once stated, quite seriously, that he aimed to get at least four copies of every book -- the US bound & paper editions, and the UK bound & paper editions. I know of another who has over the past 18 months spent his entire earnings on books, and who has read little more than some works of a few favourite authors. I know of still another, who has had a very extensive collection for six years at least, yet who has read very little of it; - who even stated on one occasion that he read almost nothing except the works of a few favourites, -- over and over again -- because he 'knew they were good'.

It is at this stage that the science fiction reader is likely to find that he has made a fundamental mistake.

He is quite liable to have retired from life into the dusty world of his books. He may have expended most of his income on a wealth of bulky material of little real value. And to complete his misfortunes, he has made his pleasure into a burden and his recreation into a chore.

Is such behaviour exhibited by readers of other branches of literature ? Is there a vociferous 'Detective Fiction' fandom, with its member's vast collections of Ellery Queen and Earle Stanley Gardener ? I doubt it.

At the World Convention I discovered that the average first printing of an SF hard cover book in the UK is some 4000-5000 copies. Of these, a large number are ordered by libraries, which is usual practice with fiction (itself a major victory for SF!), but a surprisingly large number are sold privately. Any given SF novel published by Faber, Dobson or Gollancz is guaranteed a sale of a dozen or so copies at my local bookshop alone. Yet what other fiction sells in hardcovers ? Almost none. Fiction is avoided like the plague by most booksellers. They will not touch it, save for the works of a very few well-known authors. Nearly all sales of general fiction are made as paperbacks. Only science fiction sells in bound form.

The explanation for this is rather bovious. Science fiction readers are strange enough to consider the regular expenditure of 16/- or so without a qualm. Who else buys books on such a scale ? Only SF readers accumulate material with such single-mindedness. And why do they do it ? Is the collecting urge borne of the SF-reading habit, or vice-versa. What is the nature of the beast ?

Having suffered a mild, if prolonged case of the ailment, I can advance an opinion on this habit, so well-known to SF fandom that is has been termed the 'collecting bug'. In my estimation, science fiction readers are such because they are often a little dissociated from the everyday world. They tend to cluster on the fringes of life in many cases, which not only feeds their enthusiasm for SF as a recreation, it fosters a need for security and reassurance. Holding this amateur psychoanalysis together for a moment more, I'll say that the possession of a vast pile of books takes the place of more usual accomplishments, and that a wide knowledge of a limited field makes one an expert in that field, with consequent reassurance to the ego.

Does this make us -- all of us SF readers -- crackpots ? misfits ? neurotics ?

Well no, not necessarily. It is possible to read SF for pleasure. Even to comment on it for pleasure. Perhaps I could stretch a point a little further than truth and say that a small, restricted collection of favourite works can be accumulated for the pleasure of re-reading them. Perhaps I could say that there is nothing whatsoever abnormal in the possession of a hundred or so books, mixed bound & PB, and a file of the one great magazine, Astounding/Analog, complete back to 1944.

Ah for that suggestion expressed in Fritz Leiber's Silver Eggheads..." the paper darkens and disintegrates a month after the book is purchased and unsealed.."

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DOUBLE BOOKING

ARCHIE MERCER

BERYL HENLEY

The Planet Buyer. Cordwainer Smith. Pyramid PB, 156 pages, 50¢ (3/6d).
Space Lords. Cordwainer Smith. Pyramid PB, 206 pages, 50¢ (3/6d).

Cordwainer Smith is something of a "mystery man" of SF. Tantalising little snippets of information about him are allowed to filter through to his readership. He is, we are told, a Doctor both of Philosophy and of Literature, a consultant to the U.S. State Department, a university professor, a psychiatrist. He is an American, living sometimes in America, sometimes in Australia, and sometimes still elsewhere. He has written any amount of stuff under various names, none of them necessarily his own, and has ghost-written at least one best-seller under somebody else's byline.

He is in fact, they would have us believe, in his own right far from being a common-or-garden sort of individual. And it is clear from his stories that his mind is very far indeed from being a common-or-garden sort of mind. Himself larger than life, he writes about a future where life itself is larger than life, and can hobnob on an almost equal footing with space and time themselves. The man of mystery tells of a universe of wonder.

The period with which he deals is a remote one from our 20th-Century-of-the-Christian-era standpoint, existing some thirteen thousand years in the future. This is, of course, approximately three times as far into the future as the earliest records lie in the past - a mighty time-span indeed. If one considers what a temporally-transplanted Sumerian might make of our era, it is understandable that the universe of c.15,000 A.D. as seen through the eyes of Cordwainer Smith bears very little inward resemblance to the human universe as we know it. So remote is it -- and so poetic is the unique, roaming mind of its chronicler -- that the surface impression conveyed to the reader tends at times to resemble free fantasy rather than straight SF. It is probably this remoteness which causes many readers -- including both of your present reviewers -- to react with bewilderment on first encountering his stories. Their effect is cumulative, however, the beauty of the writing combining with the soaring imagination of concept to draw one on to further sessions at the Cordwainer last, until suddenly things begin to fall into place, -- and Cordwainer Smith has another fan.

Here are two of his books, one a novel, the other a collection of five stories of varying lengths. All tell of the same future -- a wild, poetic, dreamlike future of Go-Captains and peasant millionaires; of animal-derived underpeople and utterly puissant Lords (including Ladies) of the Instrumentality; of horror that is beautiful and compassion that is triumphant; of C'Mell the cat-girl (surely Mr Smith's own favourite underperson) and the wise Doctor Vomact, either of whom wander at will from story to story in manner uncannily reminiscent of that of some of the personnel of Classical Myth. In fact, one suspects that this is by no means mere coincidence. These stories, like the old myths, are peopled not so much by characters as by ideas rendered incarnate. The stories are themselves the myths of an era even remoter than that of which they tell.

The Planet Buyer is the novel, and to both of us it comes as something of a disappointment.

To go back a bit, in 1964 there appeared in the SF magazines two long Cordwainer Smith stories; the first of these, The Boy Who Bought Old Earth, in Galaxy for April. The Store Of Heart's Desire, which followed it in If for May, was so close a sequel that the two together read as if they were two halves of one original. One tended to assume that Editor Pohl had arbitrarily chopped it into two "independant" pieces simply in order that he could legitimately run what was virtually a continuous serial between two alternating bi-monthly magazines.

The Planet Buyer is the first story, The Boy.., padded out to full novel length and again marketed independantly. It has not gained much in the expansion, apart from words -- and those are not for the most part of such quality as one has come to expect from this particular (mot juste) author. As a result, much of the first 2/3 of the book falls on the mind of the Cordwainerphile with an entirely uncharacteristic tedium. Only in the last third is any substantial amount of new and interesting material introduced -- and one is still left with the abrupt mid-story ending found in the magazine version.

The two magazine stories, taken together, added up to a complete and satisfying whole, satisfying both in that it had engrossed the reader's attention all the way through, and in that it came to a definite conclusion. The Planet Buyer is in neither way satisfactory. One feels that if the narrative had to be split irrevocably into two parts it would at least have been less frustrating for the reader had the publisher issued both parts at the same time, and announced a definite connection between the two.

Space Lords, the collection of shorter stories, is a very different proposition, and much more to both our personal tastes. In addition to five enjoyable stories, there is half a page of mouth-watering information about Mr Smith himself; a moving and beautifully worded dedication; a prologue which is not so much written for you to read as "spoken" for you to "hear"; and an epilogue in the same style.

" Space Lords "

The stories are :- Mother Hittons Littul Kittons (24pages)
The Dead Lady Of Clown Town (79 pages)
Drunkboat (32 pages)
The Ballard Of Lost C'Mell (21pages)
and A Planet Named Shayol (38pages)

The book has its high and low points, of course. Nowhere are the low points untowardly so, however, and such high points as Rambo's answer to the question "Where did you go ?" represent imaginative writing at its brilliant best. Other high points are emotional rather than literary -- though naturally it is difficult to disentangle the two elements. Such is the power of the Cordwainer pen, and the compassion of the Cordwainer mind, that he can transmute the starkest horror into splendour and loveliness. A.M. is unable to call to mind any other writer who could describe (for instance) the bloody martyrdom of a child in such a way as to make him want to reread the story.

Space Lords, then, is something special, from an author who is the same. Although The Planet Buyer fails to reach the same standard, it is still part of the same continuum. We want both books anyway, -- we're Cordwainer Smith completeists.

Sleeping Planet. William R Burkett. Gollancz 1965, 297 pages, 18/-.

(AM) I don't normally care for stories about World War II. I care even less for stories about World War II carried forward to an interstellar future. Therefore as soon as I'd read far enough to see that this story fitted the latter category, my inclination was to leave the remainder of it happily unread and turn to something more pleasant. Only a sense of duty kept me grimly at my post. To begin with, about all I could have said in the book's favour was that it was certainly swift and full of excitement. Imagine my surprise then, when by about halfway through I realised that it was also highly interesting; and I actually looked forward to continuing it, after that.

Superficially the book is simply a re-treading of the well-known path taken on too many occasions already by Eric Frank Russell. Only superficially, though. As one reads on, it becomes apparent that "World War II in Space" is only the jumping-off point, and that the author has considerably more to say on the subject than might appear. In effect, he is demonstrating how much can be derived from Mr Russell's theme when it is handled by somebody other than Mr Russell. Russaliens are poor creatures at the best of times - bumbling, pompous, credulous -- an absolute push-over for the sharp-witted humans that he pits against them. In fact, one tends to wonder how his enemy races ever became so powerful as to constitute a threat to humanity. Not so Mr Burkett's aliens. These are definitely people. They're alive. They have their loyalties, their heroisms, their hopes, dreams, fears and appetites, the same as we do. And far from being bumblers, their sharp-wits are every bit a match for ours. Thus the two sides are, on the whole, pretty evenly matched -- the invading aliens have numbers, but the humans have invaluable local knowledge on which they can and do call. This, incidentally, is another point of difference between Messrs. Russell and Burkett -- the latter (advisedly, in view of the foregoing), keeps the scene of the action strictly on and around Earth itself.

(BH) , I've a few holes to pick in the above, but first a word of agreement. I, too, found the opening chapters of the book off-putting, but for different reasons. The main one is that the author employs the gimmick of devoting one chapter at a time to the doings of one or another of the leading characters. Some of these chapters have decidedly "cliff-hanger" endings, and the reader, eager to discover how the protagonist concerned is going to "get out of this one", is frustrated to find his attention

jerked backwards to the earlier predicament of a different protagonist. Or worse -- to the machinations, mental and otherwise, of the alien invaders. Consequently the story maintains a jerky, broken sequence, a lack of continuity, right to the end.

If it were not for the story's undoubtedly high qualities of excitement, fast action and characterisation, I, too, would have given up. In addition to the patchiness of the story, the first "hero" we meet is Bradford Donovan -- and apart from a physical disability and a few other, minor differences, one could label him "Leeming" and hardly notice the difference. Except for one very important factor; Leeming's activities, though basically serious, were reported in such a way as to evoke near-hysterical mirth. Which, to my way of thinking, renders AM's criticisms of Mr Russell's aliens invalid. "Next Of Kin" was humourous SF -- or was meant to be. "Sleeping Planet" is not.

As for Mr Burkett's aliens having"their loyalties, heroisms,....appetites, the same as we do," true enough. They also have their racial superstitions, the same as we do, -- and it is upon the weak points of these superstitions that Donovan plays so effectively.

"The invading aliens have the numbers, but the humans have invaluable local knowledge..." They sure do. All two of 'em....and one of the pair a prisoner of the Llralans from P.29....

The other one -- well, he provides yet another niggle from me. His story begins very much like that of Isherwood Williams in George R. Stewart's Earth Abides. However, the comparison gradually fades; Rierson has something against which he can and does fight back. Williams simply had to adjust to the new status quo.

(AM) There's more to it than this, too. Underlying the whole story is a strong streak of tragedy. There are the two races, Llralan and human, locked in the throes of a galaxy-wide war for no particular reason except that each is following a sort of "racial destiny" -- the former to be strong lest a stronger race should crush them, the latter to retain their racial independence. The Llralans are clearly the aggressors -- yet the reader sees almost as much of them as of the human characters, and they are certainly no unmitigated villains. It's hard not to sympathise with their viewpoint as well as with that of our own local side.

(BH) I didn't find it hard at all. The Llralan philosophy of war (if I may use such a contradictory phrase) smacks of Naziism to me. They had not been threatened or provoked in any way by the "Rekks" (Terrans); the behaviour of the occupying troops was definitely that of licentious soldiery" in many instances; and the wiping out of an entire Martian village of some two thousand souls as a reprisal -- all these testify to the Hitler-like qualities of the Llralan megalomaniac Sarno. Doubtless the actual perpetrators of the last-named atrocity would, if called to account, have pleaded that they were only obeying orders...

(AM) A very good parallel -- but so what ? The Nazis -- leaders and followers -- were/are humans too. The same qualities that go to make a militarist, or a blindly unthinking soldier are present in varying degrees among all peoples. The baddies, as well as the goodies, have their endearing traits.

(BH) The operative word in my disagreement was "megalomaniac", my point being that a normal, reasonably civilised nation does not take up aggressive arms unless half-hypnotically led into such dark madness by a power-crazy man, or junta of men. These can, do and will blind a whole otherwise peaceful nation with such specious reasoning, whipping-up mob hysteria. The (usually quite groundless) fear thus engendered is later

masked by an unholy fervour which seems to censor conscience in many decent people. Having led reasonably blameless lives until so monstrously duped, they find themselves able to order or perpetrate atrocities in the name of their cause.

(AM) Even so, to my mind the characterisation of the Llralans is handled somewhat more satisfactorily than is that of the humans.

(BH) Again, I don't agree. Take the Intelligence Chief Sjilla, for instance. He is a clever man, a brave man, -- but in his position he cannot afford the luxury of too much imagination, or the questioning of his own and his races' motives. Yet he gives way to just such introspective musings when he is sifting through records in an attempt to identify the so-called "Spook of Baxter" (p.127). And I contend that this is completely out of character, and cannot be reconciled with his later brutality towards Donovan.

(AM) But I said that the Llralans did not appear as unmitigated villains. The one named Sjilla strikes me as an eminently believable character. And I, too, sometimes have trouble controlling my temper!

(BH) That isn't the point I'm trying to make. Certainly it is understandable for a man to lose his temper. It is equally understandable for a loss of temper to descend to a display of physical ferocity from a brutal type. Sjilla's troubled musings on the reasons (or lack of them) for the war show him to be basically a sensitive, thoughtful person. And I maintain that such a person would not, however badly provoked descend to the kind of brutality described.

(AM) Nevertheless, the author does seem to have taken more care with his characterisation of the aliens than with that of the humans. This may be because the latter (all male -- as are all the on-stage characters throughout, apart from some robots) are cast from fictionally stereotyped moulds. Part of my difficulty with the beginning of the story was that there was nobody around with whom I felt like identifying more than momentarily. As the picture began to round out, however, I found myself following the events with an increasing fascination -- it was more like reading a history book or a newspaper than a novel.

(BH) The most commendable thing about this book is, I contend, the author's meticulous attention to detail. Some of the situations in which he embroils his characters are incredibly complicated, -- yet the reader is never allowed to lose the thread, or to lose track of each character, and what he is doing. Mr Burkett is also entirely consistent in maintaining such alien factors as he has to invent. Unfortunately, the skilful guidance employed to lead the reader through military, strategic and guerrillla complexities is strictly confined to each individual chapter; as I said, the book as a whole seems to lack continuity and coherence.

(AM) One further matter is to be commended. 297-page novels are not very often to be found these days. This is a great pity. For writing so effectively to that length, I definitely approve of Mr Burkett -- of whom, incidentally, I do not recall having heard before.

(BH) I hadn't "met" Mr Burkett before either, -- but at the World SF Convention in London (August 1965), J.W.Campbell revealed that Mr Burkett was a 20-year-old copy-boy on a small American newspaper when he submitted Sleeping Planet to Analog. Mr Campbell published the story (1964). Mr Burkett was promptly promoted to the position of Sunday features editor....

Somewhere A Voice. Eric Frank Russell. Dennis Dobson 184 pages, 16/-.

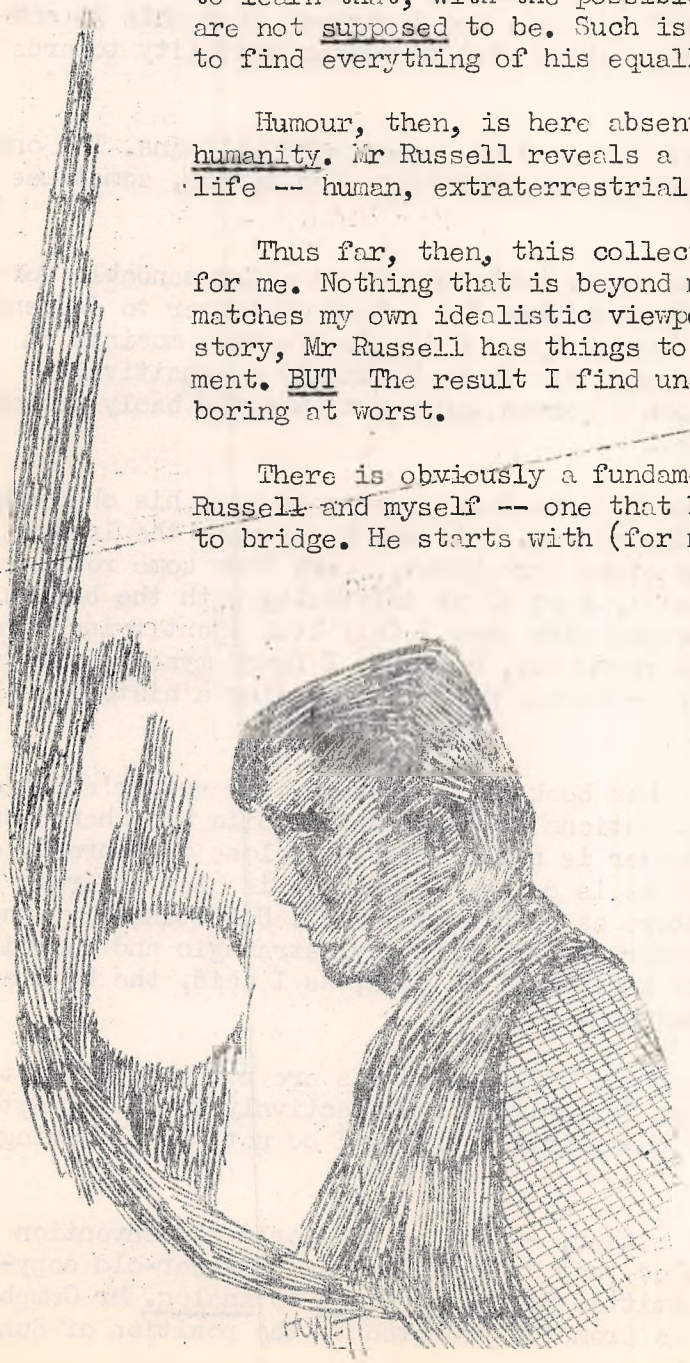
(AM) The writings of Eric Frank Russell are about as scientifically non-technical as it is possible to get. He, more than the vast majority, writes not about science but about people. The people may, indeed, be reacting to science. Frequently they're not, doing in fact nothing but people-type things in an environment that belongs to the future only because the author says so. Such stories hardly qualify as more than very marginal SF -- except perhaps to the extent that it is legitimate to make the point that however we may progress, some things are timeless.

Mr Russell is of course best-known as a humourist. None of these seven stories strikes me as being humourous in the least. I'm relieved to learn that, with the possible exception of "Seat Of Oblivion", they are not supposed to be. Such is my reaction to this author that I tend to find everything of his equally unfunny.

Humour, then, is here absent. Indeed, these stories abound with humanity. Mr Russell reveals a deep and compassionate love for animate life -- human, extraterrestrial, and dumb-animal alike.

Thus far, then, this collection would seem to have been tailor-made for me. Nothing that is beyond my comprehension, and much that closely matches my own idealistic viewpoint. Time and again, in story after story, Mr Russell has things to say with which I am entirely in agreement. BUT The result I find unsatisfactory at best, excruciatingly boring at worst.

There is obviously a fundamental difference of approach between Mr. Russell and myself -- one that has thus far stoutly resisted all efforts to bridge. He starts with (for me) the right ingredients -- or some of them. But there always seems to be something missing, or if all are there then he hasn't bothered to mix them properly and the end product is still deficient. If the characters are to my taste the theme is sour. If the theme is satisfactory, then the characters tend to be stodgy and flavourless. And when for once in a while he comes up with an inspiring theme and some characters which seem to match it, then that is all he comes up with in that particular story.



The title story is one of those which qualifies only as borderline SF, containing nothing the direct equivalent of which could not have happened at any time from the remotest days of antiquity.

onwards. The fact that it can happen in the future as it has undoubtedly happened in the past is of course relevant. Apart from this, the story has two themes. One of them is that of a man finding his soul. The way in which he finds it is perhaps somewhat too facile to ring entirely true -- but find it he does, and I am duly gladdened. Not, however, for long -- because of the other theme, the first is rendered devoid of meaning. The story need never have been told. The entire 54 pages stand ultimately revealed as a complete waste of time.

(BH) This first appeared in Other Worlds, January 1953. It opens with a stock situation; seven men, one woman and one dog escape in a lifeboat from a meteorite-wrecked space-liner, and land on a hostile planet bearing inimical plant-life and predatory beasts. There's a rescue-dome some 2,000 miles to the north, with every kind of difficult terrain to be negotiated on the way. The party sets out to walk to the dome.

So far you've heard/read it all before -- but EFR's story develops (for me) into a psychological study of deep insight and surprising tenderness. As for the second theme rendering the story "a waste of time" -- the mood of the ending is at first somewhat unexpected, even disappointing. Yet on reflection, it seemed to me to be entirely fitting. It depicts the way things happen -- not the way one would like them to happen. "The proper thing is to live in tolerance and die with dignity."

U-Turn (ASF April 1950, 14 pages). (AM) In this, too, the central character has a change-of-heart, and again it seems to come too easily. But then, at this length it is necessary to rush things overmuch if one wants to get anywhere. This one I therefore find unsatisfactory because of its brevity. (I suspect nevertheless that were it to be written-out to a reasonable length something else would go wrong with it. It occurs to me here that after this time I simply can't trust Mr Russell to write a story that I'd enjoy -- therefore I could never enjoy such a one even if he did. This is probably at least as comic as anything about which he has ever written....)
(BH) I found this one to be stock situation all through, so it's rather difficult to comment on it without giving the game away. Let's just say that said game is literally a matter of life and death, with some interesting sidelights on possible reasons for one or t'other.

Seat Of Oblivion (ASF November 1941. 24 pages) (BH) A murderer breaks out of the death cell, and takes temporary refuge in the house of a scientist. I'm rather puzzled as to what he was doing there in the first place; was it sheer chance that made him pick that particular house, or had he gone there with some definite purpose in mind? If the latter, we are not told what it was. However, he stumbles across the ultimate dream of every criminal -- a machine which ensures that other people will always be blamed for his crimes. The manner in which he gets his final come-uppance led me to echo the words of a famous fictional hero. "So perish all the ungodly.."
(AM) So far as I can see, the villain does not get his final come-uppance. The ending, to me, remains very much an unresolved enigma. I'm tempted to be pejorative and call it frankly a mess -- but that is probably the author's intention.
(BH) Remind me to explain it to you sometime -- I can't do it here or I shall get clobbered for bawling the equivalent of "It was the butler wot done it..."

Tieline (ASF, July 1955, 9 pages) (AM) A story with theme but no particular characterisation -- nor room for any.
(BH) It's a "mood-story", the mood in question being skilfully created, and I thought the finale was warmly lyrical.

Displaced Person (Weird Tales, September 1948 4 pages) (BH) A vignette which succeeded in misleading me completely, so that the ending was quite unexpected. (I'd been suffering from a case of mistaken identity...)
(AM) I found no particular trouble in correctly forecasting the punch-line. However this is immaterial. It was obvious that there would be a punch-line, that being in fact all that the story had to justify its existence. At the risk of uttering a generalisation, I would like to formulate a Law -- or at least to express admiration of and support for James Blish, who formulated it first : "if one knows or suspects that a punch-line is coming, then that punch-line can never be fully effective. The best punch-line is the one you didn't know would be there until it hits you."
(BH) Yes, but that doesn't allow for the kind of reaction that I got from this story. I knew there was a punch-line coming, so I expected to be hit -- but I read all the clues wrong, and so got hit from a totally unexpected direction. How does that fit in with Mr Blish's and your corollary to the literay Queensberry Rules ?

Dear Devil (Other Worlds, May 1950, 42 pages) (AM) This has a beautiful theme, and characters with definite possibilities. So satisfactory does Mr Russell find this combination that he simply sits and gazes enraptured at it for 42 pages. Only devotion to duty kept me there beside him for that long.
(BH) I agree that it is beautiful; it concerns my kind of alien, one who comes to help humanity, not to ravage and conquer it. As for EFR "sitting and gazing enraptured at it" -- I don't agree. I consider that his handling of the story's undoubted emotionalism is masterly and deeply moving. This also applies to the final story:

I Am Nothing. (ASF, July 1952. 24 pages) (BH) Another emotionally satisfying story, in which a "man of iron" discovers the truth of the apparent paradox; unconditional surrender can mean unqualified victory. Especially when, as here, one's own worst enemy is oneself.
(AM) In other words, the story shows us yet another man who finds his soul. I thought him more believable without one.

.....

(BH) AM and I have always been at cross-purposes about the writings of Eric Frank Russell. I did hope that this collection might at last strike a sympathetic spark from the Mercatorial mind, but it seems that we must continue to differ.

I consider the first story, and the last two, to be of better writing quality than the others, though I found all of them readable and entertaining. There are two possible reasons for this preference; firstly, these three are the longest of the collection, and secondly, they are of later dates than the others (with the exception of Tickline which, being so short, may be likened to a pencil-sketch as compared with oil-paintings). And this makes me curious about the phrases through which a writer's mind develops. I must say that I like this emotional, idealistic mood of EFR at least as much as his rip-roaring, rollicking, fast-paced stories such as Nuisance Value and Plus X. Are they two different but concurrent aspects of the one mind, I wonder ? Or did something happen which caused EFR to effect such a drastic change in style ? Intriguing ....

(AM) There is a lot of good -- of excellent, in fact, -- in Eric Frank Russell when he's in this compassionate mood. So far as I'm concerned, he falls down flat in that he simply fails to entertain me. Sorry.

We do not have space in which to successfully review every book received; We have chosen to publish a few lengthy (and adequate) reviews rather than many more scrappy ones.

New Writings In SF 5. edited by John Carnell. Dobson 1965, 190 pages, 16/-

Contains seven original stories by as many different writers, plus a brief introduction by the editor.

(AM) The "New Writings in SF" series is essentially a science fiction magazine depersonalised and clapped between (to start with) hard covers. The contents are liable to resemble those of the average SF magazine, with the difference that because of the depersonalised atmosphere -- not to mention the very much higher price charged for a copy, -- there is a greater feeling of disappointment when the contents fail to come up to one's expectations, or hopes.

(BH) I've read and reviewed the first three in this series, and I think No.5 is not the best of Mr Carnell's collections. Of all the stories in the first three books only three have stayed in my memory with any vividness: "The Sea's Furthest End", by Damien Broderick (see ZENITH 6); "Night Flame" by Colin Kapp(Z-7) and John Kingston's "Manipulation" (reviewed in ZENITH 8)

Potential. by Donald Malcolm. 35 pages. (AM) This story contains an interesting central idea embedded in a heap of alleged fact (which may or may not be apocryphal --I wouldn't know) concerning dreams, together with a praiseworthy attempt to present scientists and technicians trying to talk like human beings. Whilst the dialogue does not always ring entirely true, it does help to carry one along. This I consider to be the most worthwhile story in the book, being long enough to be marginally enjoyable.

(BH) The background details were interesting, certainly, but I was left with a vague feeling of the story having been oddly pointless. Also, the story is set in 1979, and by that time I'd imagine there would be space-stations carrying their own computers. In which case, McLean would surely have gained more information and assistance from any one of those ?

(AM) Possibly, but that's the sort of detail I'm only too happy to leave to the man who's telling the story.

The Liberators by Lee Harding. 19 pages. (AM) This story is full of excellent writing -- poetic writing, even -- which is cancelled out by utterly ham-fisted plotting. A situation that in itself could be full of interest is threatened by a counter-situation dedicated to wiping it out. The denouement, however, depends on an extraneous factor the utter irrelevance of which can only be compared to the US Cavalry at its most coincidental.

(BH) It left me cold -- there were far too many unexplained factors.

Takeover Bid by John Baxter. 23 pages. (AM) Interdepartmental rivalry in the Australian outback. The story seems to be based on a scientific idea -- one which is, however, lost on me. A slight human-interest situation is thrown in for good measure, but it's not enough to justify the rest of the story.

(BH) I thought the whole thing was madly far-fetched. This applies in particular to the ending, in which a research-station puts itself under voluntary siege, and its head threatens murder and mayhem if not allowed to conduct matters in his own way.

The Expanding Man by R.W.Mackelworth. 11 pages. (AM) A wry little vignette for those who like wry little vignettes like this. (BH) Crazy, man, crazy !

Acclimatisation by David Stringer. 26 pages. (AM) Come to think of it, this would-not have been a bad story if it'd been long enough for one to get to know the characters a bit better. Strictly a human-interest situation this, though.

(BH) I liked this one -- especially the oddly-incisive style of writing. A very close approximation to the "shorthand" of actual, un-dressed-up human thought-processes.

Treasure Hunt by Joseph Green. 16 pages. This reads as if it's part of a series that is liable someday to accumulate into an episodic novel. An interesting alien life-cycle is introduced, -- but the whole thing is too rushed, and out of the apparent series-context the piece is a somewhat forlorn little thing.

Sunout by Eric C Williams. 34 pages. (AM) The sun being about to go out merits rather more pages than 34 -- and much more interesting characters than the group of scientists through whose various eyes we follow the sequence of events.

(BH) I thought the handling of characters was sympathetic and perceptive. After all, none of us knows what he or she would do if we were suddenly faced with incontrovertible proof that the sun was due to disappear in 48 hours. It takes time to shift the scope of one's living from one-day-at-a-time to a-whole-lifetime-in-two-days. Personally, I think it would take me longer than two days even to believe it was going to happen !

(AM) Certainly it would take time; it also needs space in which to describe it !

Other Books Received. Farnham's Freehold. by Robert A Heinlein. Dobson, 18/- The author's latest novel, guaranteed to provoke thought. Recommended (see the critique of the book in ZENITH 7)

The View From The Stars by Walter M Miller. Gollancz 16/-, 192 pages. Nine stories, all well above average. Recommended.

Analog Anthology. ed J.W.Campbell. The three US anthologies combined into the one monster volume of 800 pages at the remarkably low price of 30/-.

The Reefs Of Space. by Frederik Pohl & Jack Williamson. Dobson, 188 pages, 15/-. The expanded novel from Worlds Of If Magazine.

The Dragon Masters. by Jack Vance. The Hugo-winning short novel, from Dobson at 13/6.

Raiders From The Rings. by Alan E Nourse. Faber & Faber, 16/-, 205 pages. Although published here as a 'juvenile', this novel appeared in ACE books a short while ago, and is eminently readable for adults.

From Pyramid Books:
Triplanetary, by E.E.Smith. 50¢, 240 pages. Masters Of The Maze, by Avram Davidson. a short novel. 156 pages, 50¢. Mutiny In Space by Avram Davidson, expanded version of Valentines Planet, from Worlds of Tomorrow. Rulers Of Men. anthology edited by Hans Stefan Santesson, 173 pages, 50¢.
Three very interesting-looking, excellently-illustrated non-fiction paperbacks have arrived from Pyramid. These are, Living Treasure, by Ivan T Sanderson (Natural History) 300 pages at 75¢; New Worlds of Oceanography by Capt. E. John Long, USNR. 220 pages, 75¢, ill. New Frontiers In Medicine, Stanley Englebardt, 160 pages, 75¢.

THE NEW ESTABLISHMENT

IAN R. McAULAY

Practically everywhere you turn, lately, there are people fighting to be first to throw the science out of science fiction. Science Fiction Horizons runs articles stressing the lack of literary values of once (?) popular authors; New Worlds has editorials which claim that science fiction must comment on the "human condition" if it is to be good entertainment; Dr Peristyle's column in New Worlds grumpily advises readers who would like scientific accuracy in their reading to go and read the "Scientific American"; and even ZENITH (that hotbed of reaction) has Joe Patrizio who wants to throw out the science from the stories and from the name.

For years now, fans have been complaining that science fiction ain't what it used to be, but it seems to be a new departure when the blame for the lack of enjoyment in much current science fiction is beginning to be laid at the door of science. A lot of the current furore is coming from a small group of professional writers and critics, most of whom have never been exactly noted for their regard for scientific accuracy. This snug little coterie is plugging the "inner-space" jazz for all its worth, and a story apparently has to be obscure to the point of unreadability before it receives the accolade of the group's approval. To name a few names; we have Ballard reviewing books for the Guardian, and in the process sniping at "scientific" science fiction; Moorcock, who is no slouchbwhen it comes to obscure writing, accepting and publishing in New Worlds stories so heavily allegorical that their symbolism must be explained to us poor ignorant slobs in an editorial; and Aldiss (regrettably, from the author of a fine story like Greybeard) producing a rambling story about a science fiction author not writing a story ! This pre-occupation with "the human condition" is not of course confined to science fiction, but it seems to have begun to seep in like sewage from other parts of the literary scene.

As far as I can see, when literary critics talk about the human condition, they mean the most unpleasant attributes of the most unpleasant people, and never the nobler ideals of humanity. For the critics, the ideal hero seems to be a treacherous, thieving, homosexual drug addict -- just look at the critical adulation of Genet and you will see what I mean. It'll be a pity if science fiction follows the trend of peering into other peoples moral lavatories which now seems to be a pre-requisite for successful contemporary literature.

Even a few years ago, there would have been good old reliable Astounding to fall back on, but we no longer have this consolation. The only bright spots on the horizon seem to be If and Worlds of Tomorrow which, even if not as exciting as some of the SF we have all read at one time or another, are at least largely without pretentiousness.

To a certain degree, the present situation seems to have arisen from the desire to be "with it" on the cultural scene on the part of editors, without having to have any actual understanding of the different branches of literature. Science fiction yearned for years to be accepted as a literary form; this has been achieved now by the writing of people like Amis (who does have some critical standards even if he doesn't really

(Continued on Page 18)

BRICKBATS AND ROSES

TERRY JEEVES

Having long expressed the view that this column merely expresses MY opinion, and has no value other than the entertainment it may offer the gentle reader, I am constantly croggled by the dogmatic assertions of the ungentle ones to the effect that (a) I am totally wrong in my opinions; (b) I have no right to them anyway, (c) Even if I had, they are not objective, and (d) I'm a nut.

In the same order, (a) could be, (b) Yes Fuehrer, (c) I never claimed they were... are their's any better ? (d) Could be.

However, ignoring the idiot fringe, I see that more and more would-be commentators on the current scene are prefacing their remarks with... "In my opinion", or "I think", so that it seems I'm getting across to the more open minds anyway.

My general complaint with current SF has often been its complete lack of an ending. A well-written story will trail away into nothing after holding the attention for many pages. Since I decry this, I get the label 'old-fashioned', and the story is referred to as an example of the grand new style.... If this is the current style then it can be put with the current 'modern' paintings and burnt.

Since my recent reviews have been based on Galaxy and Analog, Pete has asked me to tackle 'Worlds of If' magazine, to see if I thought it better in any way. When 'If' first appeared, I welcomed it; then after several years it dropped a shade, then even further until it equalled Palmer's dero trash. It was in this frame of mind that I approached the current issues. I'm pleased to report that If has climbed out of the dustbin. It is not yet a challenge to Analog, but is distinctly better than Amazing, New Worlds, Science Fantasy, and possibly Galaxy. This is not because of any outstanding stories, but because of far fewer utter stinkers. So with that, let's have a look at the latest issues.

If. July 1965.

Research Alpha (vanVogt & Schmitz) A scientist uses two unwitting victims as 'guinea-pigs' to try out his evolutionary serum. One responds well, and tension mounts as development takes place. As one expects from two such masters, a fascinating yarn ! Rating B.

The Last Earthman (delRey) Barbaric 'last-earthman' routine. (New York is flooded again, only the 'Ember Stake' having its top above water), Nothing new in an oft-told tale. Rating D.

In Our Block (Lafferty) At first, you're gripped by this account of shanty shacks with unusual services available... one can supply ANY quantities of ANYthing. Another, any drink you may choose. A third offers instant typing...without a typewriter; and at others you can buy a luxury auto for $100, or bald men can grow a head of hair. By now you're drooling to find out how come. Sorry, but you've been hooked on the half-story routine. They're just queer people on our block... Rating D.

The Fur People (Melton) Martian moss-hunters chase Earth girl. Rescue comes through the aid of the little furry animals the baddies use for target practice. Naturally, they're intelligent, isn't that original ? Rating D.

If. August 1965.

Patron of the Arts (Saberhagen) Space battle survivor tries to explain art to robot guard and is finally set free. Rating E.

Trick or Treaty (Laumer) Every so-often, If boasts a Reteif story. Reteif being the opposite of Wodehouse's 'Man With Two Left Feet'. He can do no wrong, though he is allowed an occasional lapse in order to get him in a sticky situation which he then solves in some highly implausible way. This time he uses four circus acts (and their abilities) to subdue some stroppy aliens who could have been culled direct from a Russell yarn. Poor stuff. Rating D.

Against the Odds (Brunner) An archaelogist has discovered that certain people have manipulated chance to work themselves into important positions. He takes his figures to the top man in Galactic Co-ordination... who, of course, is one of them. Rating C.

We Hunters of Men (McAllister) Aliens isolate planet under force screen, and introduce highly efficient (and original) way of decimating the humans there. They are finally defeated....Good story but suffering from cardboard characters. Rating High C.

The Crater (McFadden) Insurance investigator solves space-freight hi-jacking, and sabotages the culprits. Poor stuff. Rating D.

If. September 1965

Under Two Moons (Pohl) Delightful satire of espionage and intrigue on Mars. A trifle too slapdash in parts, and too straight in others, but a refreshing change from common thud and blunder. Rating B.

Moon Duel (Leiber) Highly improbable fight between man and alien. Once the basic (farcical) premise is accepted, the story moves along well to a logical climax. Rating High C.

Planet Player (McCarty) Discovery of a civilisation killed by its own music and which left the instruments and recordings behind. Rating C.

M'Lord Is The Shepherd (W & L Richmond) A Galactic watcher starts us on evolutionary progress, and then can't stop us, so we become a threat to the Galaxy. Interesting but slow-moving.. and inaccurate, as it implies that the U.S.A. is the source of all scientific progress to date Rating D.

Alien Artifact (Plachta) Lovely little short concerning the discovery of a deserted spaceship and star maps which aren't. Rating B.

Gree's Damned Ones (MacApp) Spy leads scout party on a strange world against strange defences. Highly interesting, and some good ideas, but leans rather heavily on the assumption that you will have read earlier stories in the series, and whimpers-off badly because of this. With more background and a better ending, would have rated B. Rating C.

Skylark's DuQuesne (Smith) Serial, not yet concluded.

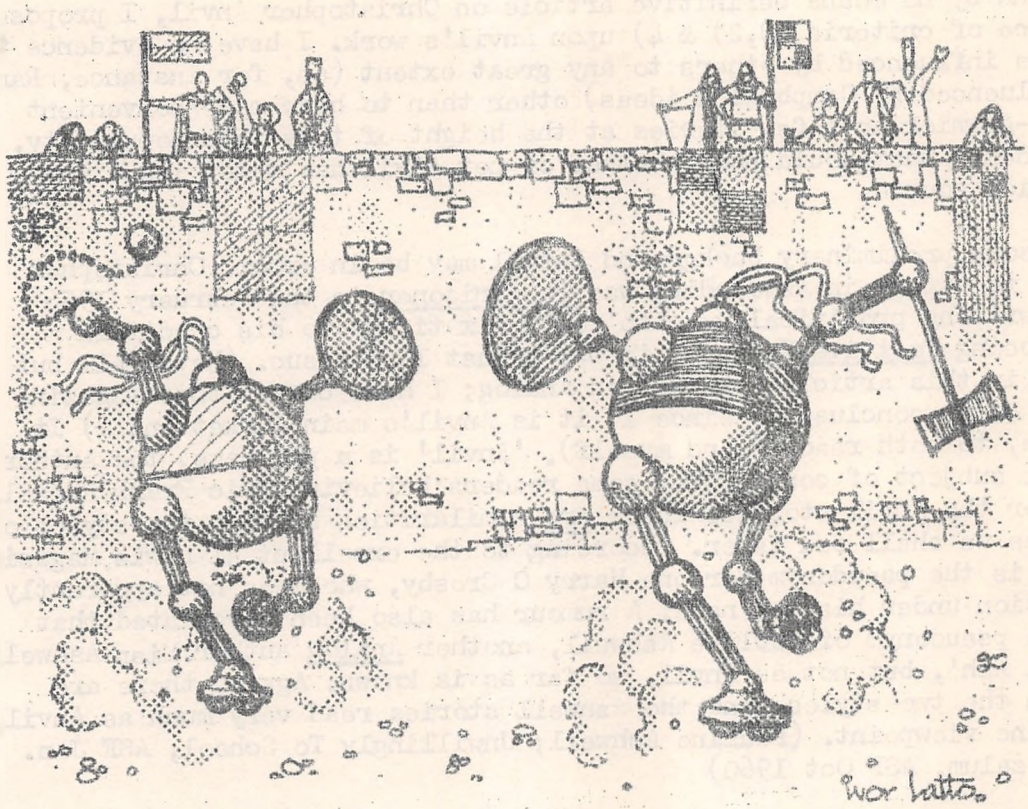
Despite the preponderance of fighting themes... and a surprising proportion of them on a sword, spear, bow and arrow level, If shows a greater level of writing consistency than the earlier-mentioned magazines. No highly technical or literary gems perhaps, but also no laboured pages of sociological theories or wandering words in search of fifty million monkeys to put them into story form. A worthy counterpoint to Analog.

With the September issue, If increased its size to 160 pages, with no rise in price. With the October issue, If re-introduced wrap-around cover paintings, not seen since the magazines early issues circa. 1953. An uncut, five-part serial by Robert A Heinlein begins in the December issue, followed by a new Budrys novel.

THE NEW ESTABLISHMENT. (Continued from Page 15.)

understand much about science fiction unless it is by a few of his pet authors. After this, the trend-hounds took up the scent and now we have the position where an editor can publish an eighteen year old reprint from Astounding (without acknowledgements !) in a much-vaunted special issue, without apparently being able to distinguish between it and the contemporary inner-space format. Presumably Moorcock, the editor in question must have thought that it was as valuable in its comment on the human condition as the rest of the stuff in the issue. Mind you, I agree with this estimate, though not for the same reasons; the story, Time Trap by Charles Harness was trivial, and even in 1948 wasn't good for much but passing a wet half-hour. Part of the blame, too, must be attributed to the authors, many of whom seem to be too lazy to do anything but cash their cheques. They don't give a damn if their facts are wrong and of those I've asked at Conventions and elsewhere, most make no secret of the fact that they never even bother to look at the popular science journals to see what the latest developments are. In no other branch of literature would an author get away with blatant disregard of facts, yet Aldiss can write about cobwebs to the moon and actually get praise for the story.

Until a few years ago, Science Fiction may have been poor, but at least it was honest. Nowadays, it is not worth the effort to plough through thousands of words of obscurity in search of a worthwhile idea which usually isn't there anyway.



PETER R WESTON

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL, COMPETENT HACK

No consideration of the past decade's science fiction would be complete without some mention of Christopher Anvil. Writing mainly for Astounding/Analog, this author has produced a phenomenal output of material, rivalled only by such as Robert Silverberg, Randall Garrett, and Poul Anderson. For a time, circa 1957-59, Messrs Anvil and Silverberg seemed almost to be competing for 'most appearances', with a story written by one or the other (and sometimes both !) appearing in almost every issue of ASF. There are other similarities than this, between the two authors, but perhaps the most important one is common to many other writers of science fiction; they are hacks.

A precise definition of a 'hack writer' is a subjective matter that I do not propose to investigate within the space of this short essay. I will be content to mention some of the more obvious criteria of the hack:

1) Repetition.
2) 'Padding'
3) Reliance upon the ideas of another person (editor ?).
4) Deliberate u e of predictable auctorial 'gimmicks' to attract and hold the reader's attention.

In this short and by no means definitive article on Christopher Anvil, I propose to show the influence of criteria 1),2) & 4) upon Anvil's work. I have no evidence to show that Anvil is influenced by others to any great extent (as, for instance, Randall Garrett is influenced by Campbell's ideas) other than to have made convenient use of the psionics-gimmick in a few stories at the height of this fads popularity. I would welcome evidence that would show whether or not Anvil has taken ideas from any particular outside source.

At this stage, some preliminary background detail may be in order. Christopher Anvil's first story to appear in Astounding was The Prisoner in the February 1956 issue. He is still writing prolifically, with forty six titles to his credit in Analog, the latest being Positive Feedback in the August 1965 issue. (Note; all but one story discussed in this article appeared in Analog; I have chosen this magazine for the foundation of my conclusions since 1) it is Anvil's main market and 2) It is easily accessible, to both readers and myself). 'Anvil' is a pen name, the author himself has been the subject of conjecture, some readers believing Eric Frank Russell to be responsible for the Anvil stories. There are similarities between the styles of these two authors, as we shall see later. According to the excellent Al Lewis Magazine Checklists, 'Anvil' is the pseudonym for one Harry C Crosby, who does not apparently write (science) fiction under his own name. A rumour has also been circulated that 'Anvil' is in fact a pseudonym of Pauline Ashwell, another Analog author. Miss Ashwell has written as 'Paul Ash', but not as Anvil, so far as is known. Again, there are similarities between the two styles, and the Ashwell stories read very much as Anvil, told from the feminine viewpoint. (Pauline Ashwell; Unwillingly To School, ASF Jan. 1958; The Lost Kafoozalum, ASF Oct 1960)

Anvil's stories cover a wide and varied territory, though much of it is by no means virgin ground. The bulk of his output can be more-or-less divided into three main streams, each category of stories containing repetitions and close-relatives. Some other themes have been used, and a few of these are good examples of science fictional storytelling in its conventional meaning. (Of late there seems to have been less repetition and more use of individual intelligent plots than was formerly the case. Whether this is a trend, and whether or not it is deliberate on the author's part, will not be known for some time.)

I. The 'Colonist' Theme.

The first of the three categories we have chosen to study I have titled the 'colonist' theme, for that is all it is. Briefly, a story of this type is produced by placing a small group of colonists on an untamed planet, and then adding a problem. The story is the solving of the problem -- usually by means of (improbable) inspiration within the last few pages. These stories are usually short, and are humourous in a superficial, slapstick manner. They lack more than tissue-paper characters, (as does nearly all of Anvil's work) and are related to each other by no more than their similarities. Common Anvil characteristics are the free use of coincidence (of which more later), and the 'punchy' style of action-narrative; short sentences meant to show that things are happening fast -- often too fast for the lead character (or the reader, sometimes,) to cope with. This latter technique is exemplified by a passage taken from Leverage (ASF July 1959):

' There was a whistling shriek and a booming clap, as of huge leathery wings abruptly filled with air. The door jumped as if struck by a club. It jumped and jumped again. The pole at the top clattered down. Light rapping sounds pattered on the door. There was a high-pitched scream close by.
The door jolted. The hinge at the top wrenched loose. The bar bent back. One of its brackets snapped off. The bar fell down. The door jerked inward. The bottom hinge squealed. '

Editors probably welcome these short stories as useful 'fillers', especially since they all have the none-too-common virtue of being, at least, entertaining. There is but one example of this type of story carried to longer length, and that is Star Tiger, (ASF June 1960), which is some 34 pages long. It is somewhat atypical in that the hero is not a colonist, but is a fleet-general. Since the story proper takes place on the colony planet, and is otherwise of this class, I have chosen it as an example for brief analysis. Its length will allow several Anvil narrative habits to make their appearance with the inevitable comment.

The story begins as the lead character, Wilforce, (with whom the reader is to identify), is renewing his battle forces after a previous engagement. Wilforce is, by example, efficient, fast-thinking, and possessed of an ironic sense of humour. Above all, he is powerful. In this instance his power is of rank; he is, as mentioned above, a lieutenant General. In other stories, the same characteristics will be found, save that the all-important power may be of a different nature. -- it may manifest itself as intellectual, commercial, or political power, or merely as strength of character.

The ingredients above are essential for a successful, saleable story of the Christopher Anvil type. And make no mistake, these are successful stories. They have sold, (which is one expression of success); and they make for enjoyable (if light and easily-forgotten) reading. Reader-identification is always based in a dominant character, so that the reader will enjoy the various situations encountered, as his personification triumphs over opposition. It feeds the ego. (a very basic point to remember.) Later, we will see how Anvil reinforces this identification at a suitable point. But back now to the story.

Wilforce is summoned to an emergency. Something has wiped out every colony on a nearby planet, settled without any troubles for the preceding ten years. There is no sign of life, and no sign of the attackers. A detector system, apparently based on and around the planet, has seen nothing approaching or leaving the system. The tragedy has been discovered by the crew of a destroyer which has crashed on to the planet. It crashed because.... "We were making a routine sweep through this part of the sector... Then something hit the ship like a hundred tons of lead.." This is another mystery, though as yet an incidental one. Why did the ship crash ?

A small force is despatched, the remainder of the fleet to refit and follow within the week. There is apparently no harmful life on the planet, but the colonists have fortified their settlements (and not notified their home base why it was necessary to do so ?) Meanwhile, the destroyer has apparently been taken by surprise, and its crew killed and eaten by a large, unknown, carnivorous animal. (despite the fact that this crew is in constant communication with the fleet, the attacker(s) are still a mystery.) The task force can still find no trace of any carnivore bigger than a mouse.

A day out from the planet, the fleet is contacted by the task force's commander. "Our detectors have picked up an object roughly the size of a destroyer... it stayed on the detectors a little under three seconds and then it vanished. We can't locate it. There was no sign of it before and no sign of it since.." It seems that there is an invisible (most of the time) object in orbit. It is now obvious that the destroyer hit this object. Presumably the shock damaged its camouflage equipment, causing it to be visible at random intervals.(why camouflage equipment should be needed is unknown, and is never explained. One good reason comes to mind;it was camouflaged so that it would not be found in the ten years before the story began, and thus spoil the story's plot.) But coincidence must be strained past its limit to account for a collision between two objects, mutually unaware of each other. Space is larger than Anvil realises.

It is now halfway through the story, and time to reinforce the reader's identification with Wilforce. This can best be done by the lead character acting positively, and displaying his power, thus feeding the reader's ego once more. In this story, an ideal situation is manufactured, wherein a subordinate who is persecuting his troops gets his come-uppance. The situation is actually unlikely in the extreme; -- the major in command is drunk and/or under drugs, has forced his troops to dig trenches by hand, hunt for their own food in the forest; and has taken their ammunition away from them. This, mind you, is a task force, on a highly dangerous planet! There is no reason for an officer to issue such instructions other than that of insanity, and task force commanding officers are not usually insane.

Naturally, our man, Gen. Wilforce, takes command by proxy through a convenient 'battle-transceiver' that is set up in nothing flat. Listen to the way in which the erring officer is addressed.

' ....then Wilforce saw a faint glimmer in the major's eyes. He started to speak.
Before he could get the words out, a pudgy captain wearing the bright emblem of the Medical Corps stepped forward.
"General, this man is ill. As a physician, I must forbid -- "
Wilforce glanced at the captain, as a soldier looks at a blood-sucking bug in the bedding, just before he squashes it.

In this way is the culprits downfall brought about. The deliberate use of unfavourable adjectives and comparisons makes opponents appear in a very bad light. (Some of the only descriptive adjectives for people in the story, incidentally). The force of Wilforce's personality is attested to in that his looks alone cause ~~strong~~ men to quail. It is a pleasure to identify with such a man who gets things done at his command. (The eventual fate of the miscreants is never mentioned; this may either be a loose end or a deliberate omission, so that the hero's image may not be tarnished with vindictive measures.)

It is a pleasure to keep reading such a story, even though the past six pages of wordage have been used without advancing the plot by one iota. This gambit is really an author's delight; padding that actually improves the story's appeal !

About this time, the mystery object begins appearing at more frequent intervals. Orders are issued for it to be boarded. On the planet there appears to be a vague mystery, and an even vaguer connection between the planet's herbivores and its carnivores. The general goes to sleep. He wakes up with the answer to the problem. But, being careful, he does nothing to tie up the loose ends immediately. He merely asks questions, and gives baffling instructions, which he does not explain to his subordinates. He orders three 'subnuclear triggers' checked out. (for the planet's destruction if necessary). Then, he is given a report on the mystery cylinder in orbit. It is a launcher for a subnuclear trigger, set to fire if anything came up from the planet. Since ships have been coming up from the planet for a minimum of ten years, and have not caused the planet to be destroyed, the firing mechanism has not worked. Luckily said mechanism is o-l-d, from a pre-human alien culture, and will not work. Nor will the two companion cylinders, later discovered, fire as programmed. More coincidence. And incidentally, Wilforce is such a single-minded individual that he is not in the least impressed with the knowledge that there has been a previous interstellar culture, although there is every evidence that this discovery is the first sign of this race. Anvil's people just don't get excited at such philosophical thoughts, and besides, the alien race has only been introduced to explain the destroyer's smash-up, and that

was only necessary to introduce the mystery in the first place. The story is superficially tight-plotted, even logical, but each expediency seems to lead to another.

The mystery is now solved in Wilforce's mind. Only now does any biological information arrive (from four different sources at once). It seems that when harmless herbivores on the planet are killed, the carcasses regenerate into murderous carnivores. The problem now is to prevent the smallest form -- a shrewlike creature -- from getting back to Earth and other planets, where it could grow into dangerously-large beasts. Complications are that in the last ten years, some of the pests have certainly boarded ships and have reached the Earth. This could almost be another problem -- but an answer is at hand. (and it would not, I submit, work out as simply as suggested.)

The ending gives us a note of philosophy and a clue as to Anvil's method of story writing;

"Well, that problem seems to be solved -- but who knows what may happen next ?"
"That's right. Man's special skill is solving problems. But the one he can't solve -- is the problem of having problems."

And Anvil's way of writing a story is, evidently, to set up a problem and then solve it. (by hook or by crook, fair means or foul, with the seasoning of standardised gambits and mass-produced characters.) In passing we should note that in 34 pages we have had seven characters mentioned by name. Only one of the seven had a given name, and that wasn't the hero. About our lead character we know nothing. His appearance is not mentioned or described. His character is implied only indirectly, through his actions. He is a label only, a convenient cut-out able to interest the reader only through skilfully 'rigged' situations. There is no mention of any member of the female sex in the entire story, nor of anything not relating to the mechanics of the story.

This is not a story at all. It is a mechanical situation, set in motion by the Omnipotent Power and kept spinning by off-stage trickery. It could have been written out in perhaps 1000 words, and the expansion has added nothing beyond readability. It is fairly typical of Anvil in this vein, and in this category of plotting.

II The Wonderful Invention.

Stories of this category can in many ways be regarded as 'old time' science fiction, since the early Gersbackian Amazings contained little but marvelous inventions described in fictional form. Anvil's stories differ only in their superior story-telling to these early tales, otherwise the resemblance is very strong. Usually there is no real plot -- merely the fact of the invention itself and the effects caused by its use. Characterisation is of a minimum, consisting only of the stereotypes absolutely necessary for the continuance of the action. The story is told from the viewpoint of the one lead character, who is pretty much the standard Anvil figure first introduced above. He is, as before, strong-willed, powerful (in some sense), intelligent, and possessed of a wry humour. He usually has an inspiration towards the end

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ARTIST

....ZENITH is in constant need of illustrations. We are especially interested in ink drawings for the moment; when ZENITH is printed in litho, we shall be glad to use wash, water-coloured, charcoal drawings scraper-board & experimental ideas.

of the story, which solves the problem(s). Anvil's characters frequently get carried away with such inspiration. They are visibly taken aback at the appearance of an idea. A character will suddenly gaze into space with unfocussed eyes, or stop talking and look intent. Few real people behave in this manner, and it is a sign of the naivety and simplicity of the writing that this long outmoded gambit is used.

Coincidence again abounds in these stories, from the opening fact of the invention's existence (which can be accepted as the necessary 'premise' on which an SF story is built) to the very ending. These coincidences are presented in a metter-of-fact, never-surprised manner, which dissuades the reader from realising just how unlikely certain events are. The basic invention is usually a new discovery in gadgetry or the physical sciences, but occasionally a variant appears in which the 'invention' is a new social or philosophical concept. Philosopher's Stone (ASF Jan 63) and Positive Feedback (ASF Aug 65) are two examples of this variant. Sometimes a story will overlap into our third theme, of which more later. Although I have somewhat arbitrarily broken Anvil's stories into three main plot-themes, there is no evidence whatsoever that Anvil himself has consciously differentiated in this manner. Overlap is certain to occur in many instances.

Once again, there is no direct connection between stories of the Wonderful Invention type. It would be comparatively easy for the author to establish consistent names and backgrounds, if he so desired. These are, after all, the only differences in setting between the various stories. Some stories do bear close relations with another, and may even utilise the very same 'gimmick', written out in a slightly different manner. For example, both Identification (ASF May 1961) and Captive Leaven, (ASF Sept 1959) contain precisely the same theme. There are other examples, but let us now consider the story No Small Enemy (ASF Nov 1961);

The hero of the story is one James Cardan. The 'James' is the first word of the story, and is not used again. With very few exceptions, Anvils world is of surnames alone, though the leading character is nearly always introduced by name in the first paragraph. But with this convenient tag, we must be content. There is not one whit more of direct descriptive detail about the hero. Expectedly, he is in a position where he can make himself heard -- 'chief' of an unspecified plant at Milford, Penn., and has a useful contact in a General Whitely, a boyhood friend.

Coincidence strikes out of the blue; and it is not the only thing. Cardan is driving to work one Monday morning in an 'experimental steam car'. An unidentified flying object passes over him, and (evidently) lands. It puts out a 'field', which damps out the ignition of engines. Any engines, except steam engines, with which his car is fitted, purely by coincidence. So, unaffected by whatever it is that has caused the cars of half a county to stall, Cardan drives to his plant, where his engineers, just that weekend, have built and modified, of all things, a psionic machine. As he arrives, two engineers are using the machine, and are observing what are obviously aliens, from the strange object which has landed. It is important to realise that forty-eight hours ago, the machine was giving results as; "...seemed to be looking at a light through a grey blanket". The machine has now reached such an advanced stage of development that it can be focussed to give a clear picture. And quite by chance, that picture is of the alien landing site. (Just imagine how many millions of square miles there are of the Earth's surface, and then consider that at first attempt, quite by chance, the machine picked these particular square feet.) What Anvil could have done would have been to suggest that the alien's landing produced waves..or something -- which attracted the 'focus of attention' of the machine. This would be a way of explaining the incident. But the author leaves any reasoning up in the air, which

is no way to please those damnably particular science fiction readers.

Then, to cap it all, one of Cardan's men, Maclane, says, "You may think I'm nuts, Don, but I can influence this picture."

Immediately afterwards, General Whitely telephones Cardan for information on the morning's happenings. (Why Cardan ?). Anvil's usual subtlety is manifested as:-
"Hello Bugs"
"Right here Tarface, what do you want ?"

As the aliens begin to attack, Anvil's characters react with characteristicly overdone reactions;

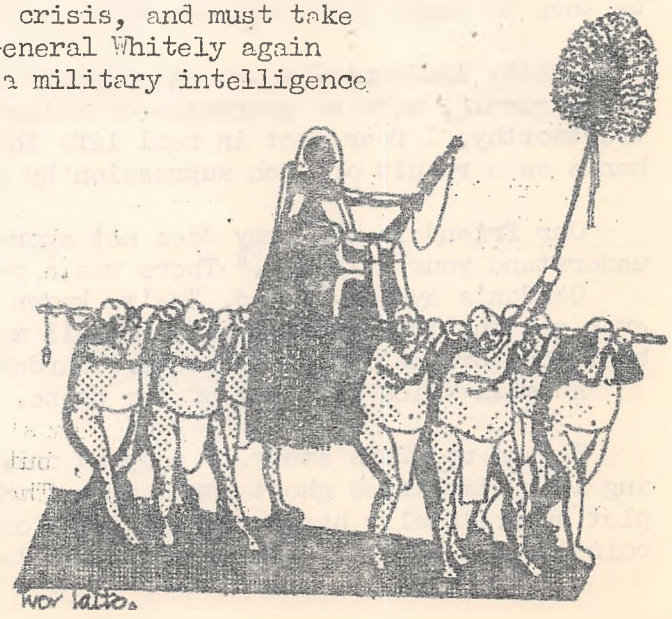
"A cold, hard expression passed over Donovan's face,..."

This is an expression I should really like to see. Can it be done, I wonder ?

Anvil's captive Generalissimo again phones for information, and Cardan carefully provides painstakingly exact measurements of all the alien's equipment (down to the very last inch). He will not reveal the source of this useless information other than that it is a "kind of long range viewer with a very narrow fixed field of view overlooking what I think is the spot where the trouble is."

By now the aliens are attacking vigourously, though fortunately there is still only the one local landing. Matters are so serious that now, twelve pages after we l learnt that objects could be mentally influenced at a distance, by the all-purpose machine, something is done with that fact. Van Vogt's characters are notorious for their habit of the 'double-take'. Anvil's are even thicker. Nobody bothered to follow up the discovery of telekinesis five thousand words back, and the innovator himself obviously had a convenient brainstorm and forgot the incident.

Things are pretty bad by now. A couple of paratroop divisions have been wiped out because the 'damper field' prevented their weapons from firing; a nuclear device has been set off, and has failed to explode. The leaders of the military are faced with a desperate crisis, and must take immediate and drastic action. What happens ? General Whitely again telephones Cardan. (What does the fellow have a military intelligence section for ?). He is advised to get hold of steam trains, in order to bring in troops armed with non-explosive weapons (gas, etc.) Pretty obvious advice maybe, but for which the general is appropriately grateful.



Now it is time to demonstrate our hero's personality, in order to reinforce reader identification. His men, being top-flight engineers, but thick, want to run off and fight the aliens with bare hands. Cardan is suitably contemptous, and tells them how they can really cause trouble to the aliens, blowing cigar smoke in their (the engineers) faces all the while. (Important bibliographical detail; hero smokes cigars.)

Cardan lectures his men in military philosophy;'"It isn't just how much power a man has that counts. A lot depends on how he uses it, and where he brings it to bear, The armed forces have the power to flatten the opposition down at that highway, but they can't bring their power to bear. They're tied up. They've been hit by devices they can't strike back at. Now, what do you think that circuit there represents for our side ?"

"Sure, but you said yourself, akl you can do is move a little light object with it."

Cardan grinned. "That's all."

"But look chief --"

"Benjamin Franklin said, a couple of hundred years ago, there is no little enemy."

The men all looked thoughtful. Smitty was massaging his chin with his hand.' (Perhaps they count on their fingers as well ?!)

The aliens are now building a large enigmatic structure of metal poles. What this might be is uncertain, but the outlook is grim. Macalane says, "It's now or never chief. That Lawrence of Arabia stuff sounded good upstairs, but we're up against trouble now. I've got an awful hunch that if they once get that grid completed, we a aren't going to stop them, ever."

So, all the aliens had to do, apparently, was to build this one machine to make it possible to conquer the Earth. In which case, the obvious question is; Why not build the grid immediately after landing, instead of losing the advantage of supprise in what are successful, but limited, attacks ?

Their telekinetic power well under control, Cardan and Maclane procede to sabotage the aliens on every front, interupted only by a telephone call from General Whitely. Their sabotage is so effective that the alien landing is effectively routed. Now one problem remains, as the Allies found after their victory in 1945: what to do with the machinery of war ? In this case the omnipotent device. If the goverment gets the circuit, Cardan knows they will 'sit on it'. And if & when the aliens returned, "with twenty times the force" -- there will not be anything to oppose them. This argument is so effective that Maclane immediately agrres; "Maybe we'd better keep it quiet, develop it ourselves, and not be too anxious to hand it over till we know what we're doing. So far as defence is concerned, we've tied a crew of aliens in knots, just on the spur of the moment. If sixteen times as many come down on us in half a year, well, by then we ought to be sixteen times as tough, provided we keep working on it."

Which, incidentally, is an argument to keep the newly-granted Godlike powers to a small circle, with no guarantee of integrity. Even though Anvils people are 100% trustworthy, I fear that in real life this devise would dpeedily get into the wrong hands as a result of such supression by private individuals.

Our friend in the army does not approve of being denied the device. ' "...I don't understand your attitude." There was a pause."And I don't think I like it."

Cardan's eyes narrowed. "We've known each other a long time, Tarface, But don't ever get the idea you're going to tell me what to do, or I'll tie you up in knots and beat your brains into your boots." Cardan sat up, warming to the subject.

A small voice came out of the phone. "I'm sorry Bugs. I got carried away." '

To sum up. This story is peopled only with insubstantially-seen inhabitants, moving in a simplified ghost world almost wholly lacking in atmosphere and colour. The plot superficially hangs together, but on consideration is seen to be a tangle of coincidences and very little more. The level of writing and description is quite low,

Continued on Page 36.

UNSUITED TO THE MEDIUM

J P PATRIZIO

It's surprising that there is so little humour in science fiction, and that what there is has generally such a low standard.

Now, by saying this I know that I immediately lay myself open to the charge that just because I don't laugh at a particular story, it doesn't mean to say that it's not funny. Well, yes, this is true; many a time I have sat and wondered while others have gurgled away merrily, and conversely, more than once my voice has laughed alone in the wilderness. But here, I am talking not about humour in general, but about humour in science fiction, and if a funny story is aimed at a particular audience it should make the majority of that audience laugh -- or at least, let's be charitable, smile. However, delving into the depths of my science fiction reading past, I can remember only a few smiles, a couple of laughs, and but one howl of delight. Of these stories, few have stood the test of a second reading.

The type of story I have in mind is that often written by Eric Frank Russell, and which, I feel, can be aptly named slapstick SF. Virtually all of Russell's humourous SF, (though it can raise a laugh on first reading), is not worth a second glance. Compare this with his more serious work and you will see that this lack of quality is not due to lack of ability on the author's part -- it is merely that Russell's serious SF is several orders above his humourous works.

This, of course, is true not only of EFR, it is true of almost every other writer who has tried his hand at humour. Asimov has written some amusing stories, Kuttner and Frederic Brown too, have made us laugh (and these tend to be more subtle than most), Harrison has shown himself to be quite an exponent of slapstickn SF, but these and all the others you can name write memorably only when they are being serious. So, in general, any worth in humourous SF is purely transitory.

Perhaps, then, we can say that it is not the author but SF itself which is at fault. And this in fact is the contention of many people who have vociferously claimed that humour has no place in science fiction. "Science fictional subjects should be treated in depth in serious stories, not used as vehicles to get a superficial laugh,' they say. It may well be true that serious stories are better than flippant stories, but this is only a general rule, and the implication that there is no SF subject which can be adequately treated with a humourous approach is ludicrous. It is no more true to say this about science fiction than it is to say it about any other branch of literature, and anyone who does say it is being pompous and imposing on SF a restriction it doesn't need.

The type of humour which I feel is very well suited to SF, and which is unfortunately sadly lacking, is satire. Much SF deals with excesses, particularly sociological excesses in various forms -- e.g., effects of over-automation, the extrapolation of various political systems, particular, human traits let loose on aliens and alien planets, etc. It is with excesses that satire deals, and deals most sharply, so why do we see so very little of it in SF ? True, satire is a very difficult literary form in which tosuccceed, but granting this, I would still expect more attempts to have been made.

Of course, there have been some quite good, mildly satirical short science fiction stories -- The Man Who Could Work Miracles, by H.G. Wells; one or two of Asimov's robotic stories, Frederic Brown occasionally, -- but I can think of only one, really good, biting satire which has been produced in science fiction short story, and that is Robert Sheckley's The Battle. This was a gem of a story, one which could be treated in no other way, and which makes SF worth reading. And here I would like to say that Sheckley is, for mynmoney, the best humourist that science fiction has produced.

It is when he go to the novel that this sparseness of humour is forced upon us (sparseness nothing, it is all but non-existent !) If we leave out Gulliver's Travels, we are left with one humourous novel, written by a non-science fiction author, and that is The Big Ball Of Wax, by Shepherd Mead. This is a satirical novel, not a novel with satirical content, and has such has yet to be surpassed. The humour holds up on each re-reading, and the world portrayed therin is seen to be just a little nearer. Eventually, one can see, Big Ball Of Wax will be a novel which shows things as they are, and not as they might be. While I admit this claim can be made for other science fiction stories, it cannot be made for other humourous ones.

I can't see any valid argument against science fiction as a valid medium for humour, and particularly for satire, to which it seems eminently suited, so why don't we get any ? Are the writers incompetent ? Satire is difficult, yes, but I feel sure it is not beyond the capabilities of every SF author. Are the writers humourless ? This really doesn't deserve a serious answer. It may be that the authors take serious subjects too seriously, and don't realise the added power of satire. Or it may be that when they approach a serious subject they are afraid to satirise it for fear of being accused of flippancy about something which stirs great emotions. I don't know what the reason is, but I can't help feeling that as a reader, I'm losing out somewhere.

J.P.Patrizio, 1965.

THE CHECKLIST TO ASTOUNDING: PART II. Now available from B.T.Jeeves, 30 Thompson Road, Sheffield, 11. Price 4/6. The listing covers years 1940-50, by author, title, issue, etc.

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY, issue No.4, contains chapter I of the Alex Panshin. Available at 35¢ per copy from Leland Sapiro, Box 82, University Station, Saskatoon, Canada

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Just received from Panther books are new issues of the Asimov books, END OF ETERNITY, STARS LIKE DUST, NAKED SUN.

The new Heinlein serial to begin in IF, Dec 1965 is THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS.

ZENITH BACK ISSUES

A very limited number of copies remain of issues 5,6,8,9. 2/- each, postpaid.

THE MELTING POT

READERS LETTERS

Mike Moorcock.

....I, of course, disagree entirely with what you think is good SF. To me the sort of thing you are enthusiastic about is sensational, juvenile, and -- as I well know from talking to people who've told me this -- repellant to any intelligent and literate adult who happens to pick up a book or magazine containing this sort of rubbish. Secondly, of course, it has only a minority appeal, and sells primarily to the market at which it is tacitly aimed -- the teenage market. Many more people are repelled by the stuff you mention SF fans to be 'hooked' on, of course, than are attracted by it. The fact that SF is published much more frequently than it was is a reflection on the improvement of the field away from the material that could be found, and can be found, in the magazines you mention.

From what I can see the contents of WORLDS OF TOMORROW and its like are barely above the level of the stuff found in the SUPERMAN comic stable (there is, as you probably know, a strong overlap in the readership of both). I'm sorry to say that I'm increasingly feeling the impossibility of discussing anything with the majority of fans of your persuasion since there is no common starting point, little common ground in reading tastes, etc. There exists a great gulf between the fan who thinks Ballard obscure and the critic (as Wordsworth in a recent GUARDIAN review) who felt THE DROUGHT to be somewhat over-explicit. As I've said somewhere, the stories that seem obscure to fans are by no means obscure to me -- otherwise I wouldn't publish them or enthuse over them as much as I do. What it boils down to is that some of us get our enjoyment from reading stories that have a sophisticated approach to their subject matter, whereas others prefer the direct -- and to my mind crude and sensational -- approach. To me the difference between a writer like Aldiss and a writer like Anderson is the difference between good drama and bad melodrama, controlled emotionalism and cheap sentimentality. I admire a precise style capable of producing powerful imagery and characterisation without use of cheap stylistic tricks such as are found constantly in SF. Liking precision, (and I don't mean austerity, necessarily,) I find the quasi-poeticism of Bradbury as off-putting as the pseudo-Hemingwayesque

of Anderson and Heinlein. While I am forced to print a certain proportion of both kinds, I am constantly striving to find stories which are neither, avoiding at the same time the whimsy of, say, the Anita stories. And I still feel that writers who have read little fiction but SF cannot begin to produce decent SF, just as readers who have read little fiction but SF cannot afford to criticise writers like Ballard for being obscure. The deficiency lies with them, not with Ballard.

/ To insult is not to argue. And while the 'action school' of SF may have only a minority appeal, that minority is larger than the 'sophisticated' school's following. (Not that fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong.) Always beware of that term 'sophistication' - it walks a narrow path between pretentiousness and with-it snobbery.

In actuality I didn't pass completely favourable judgement on the Galaxy trio. There is a lot of rubbish printed therein, -- especially in Galaxy itself, -- but there is a freshness and pace that has not been seen in the magazine field for some time. If the trio were to gain some of the polished maturity (and true sophistication) of Analog, they would be unbeatable. But such sophistication does not come overnight -- it is a fruit of many year's growth on truly science fictional roots. /

John Boston.

....On your "Golden Age of 1965": every cat his own rat. Right now, British SF seems to be undergoing a resurgence. (merican SF might be, but it's too early to tell.) What we are getting over here, what I have time to read, that is, seems to be a crop of very clever stories on completely hackneyed themes. There are exceptions; Galouye can usually be counted on for a new slant on something, and I guess Brunner can be counted as about half-American by the appearance of his fiction.

/ There are, now, no new themes. True that U.K. science fiction is treating old themes in novel ways -- my point was that science fictional ideas are best treated in a science fictional way.

Being a close correspondent of yours gives me some background on your letter. One thing I've noticed is that despite your approval of the 'British renaissance', you find,(by your own confession,) the British magazines to be unreadable.

Considering my recent arguments in favour of the 'action' school led me to believe that by my own criteria I should enjoy John Brunner's works. I've read little of his fiction for some reason, and so I gave my theory a field test. Result : I do like Brunner's books (though find some of them over-gimmicky). Which proves something or other. Now to try Ken Bulmer's books - another author I've 'missed'. /

Robert Coulson.

...."There are more good books than there is time to read them." -- Yes, but there are not more good original books than there is time to read them. In fact there are damned few good original SF books. (There are more than there were a few years ago, of course, but there are not enough to take up the slack if and when the magazines are mined out. And judging by some of Ace's recent 'Classics', the magazine reprinters are scraping the bottom of the barrel.)

/ You agree with me in your words despite your contradiction. There are now, more original SF books than there has ever been before. There still aren't all that many, and whether they're good or not is a matter of personal opinion. Let's say the average standard is higher than during the last boom. (in the UK at any rate.) /

Harry Warner Jr.

....Richard Gordon's article on Edmund Cooper provided a lot of new information, to me. But I'll wager that it draws very little comment, and this is a built-in problem with a fanzine like ZENITH, that seeks to cover both the familiar and the less-trumpeted stories and writers. How many of your readers have already read all six Cooper books ? How many have read even one or two Cooper works recently enough to recall vividly what was in them ? There is so much science fiction appearing these days that a new book by someone other than a dozen extremely popular authors will be overlooked by the great majority of science fiction readers. Inevitably, a lot of work by the writer, and great hopes by the editor for interesting reactions will be partly in vain. I don't see any solution to this situation; we can't reasonably expect even avid fans to buy and read everything that is published, and it would be foolish to restrict the contents of fanzines to material about the works of Heinlein, Sturgeon, Bradbury, and the others in the Big Dozen.

/ I've read all of Cooper's books. Only TRANSIT stuck vividly in my mind. Which tends to prove your (as usual) very good point. /

Edmund Cooper.

.... part from the fact that I thought the article was most generous and perceptive, I was quite amazed to discover that Richard Gordon knows so much about my literary career. Although I am prepared to quarrel with him over a few details, I would be most grateful if you would pass on to him my appreciation of what is certainly the most intelligent comment on my work that has been written so far.

Robert Coulson.

....I am appalled at Richard Gordon's statement that TRANSIT "shows a degree of professionalism not generally apparent in SF." (Technically he is correct; the degree of professionalism shown is more often associated with U.S. "confession" magazines and the lower grades of popular novels than it is with SF. But his tone of approval of this aspect bothers me.) He mentions the "characterisation" favourably -- when the characterisation is about on a par with that of television "soap operas". (And yes, I've watched TV soap operas - has Richard ?) Everyone on a soap opera is neurotic to about the same extent as Cooper's characters; it makes the presentation of conflicts easier for the author. It doesn't tell anything about how real people behave, but it can pass, at a superficial glance, for "modern", psychoanalytical fiction. I think quite possibly Cooper has been overlooked by fandom for just this reason; his books a are superficial. (This presupposes that fans are capable of judging superficiality, which I'm not altogether sure about, but it's a theory.) Cooper's depth is about equivalent to that of Charles Eric Maine, though Cooper is a somewhat superior word-juggler than is Maine.

/ If Mr. Cooper is superficial, then we must concede, (to Mike Moorcock's delight) that science fiction is a superficial field. His characterisation may not have been excellent (and I'm not necessarily agreeing with you), but was certainly better than that found in most SF novels. And I'd be interested to see any analysis that would prove me wrong.

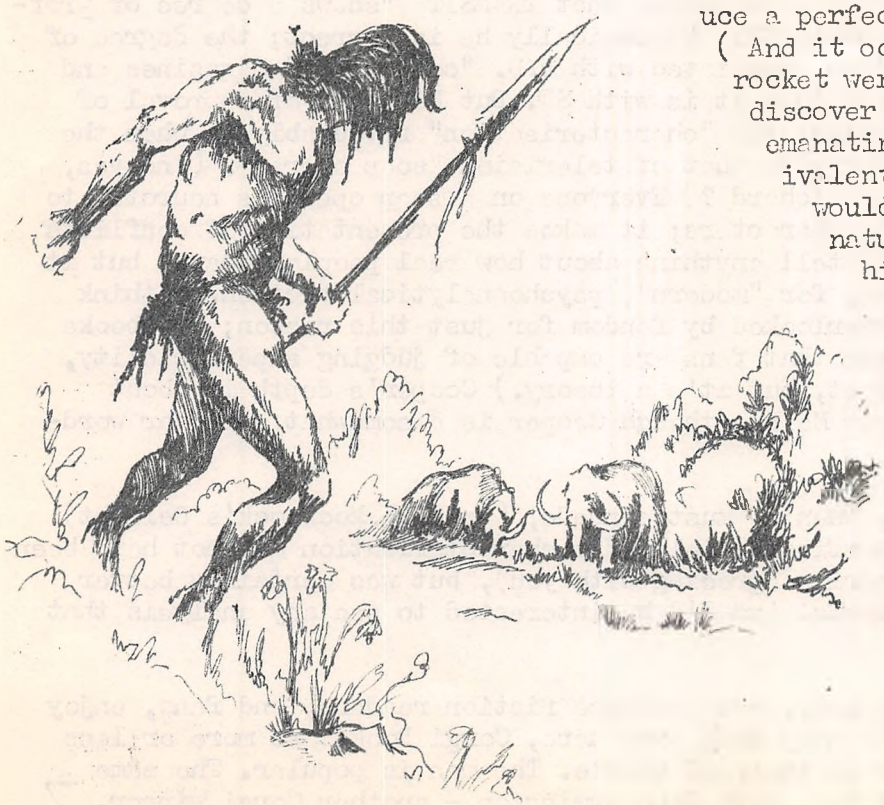
It is a sobering thought that many, many science fiction readers, and fans, enjoy Charles Eric Maine's books. So many that over here, Corgi Books are more or less relying on him as star runner of their SF stable. The man is popular. The same holds true, even more regrettably, with John Lymington - another Corgi winner. /

Mike Moorcock.

....I find Cooper's high-flown prose a bit daunting, and haven't yet managed to finish one of his novels -- which may sound like the pot calling the kettle black, but I'm equally put-off by my own high-flown overblown prose, and haven't yet managed to re-read one of my own books. The comparison of passages from SEED OF LIGHT and VOICES OF TIME doesn't convince me of the point that the "idealistic and philosophical jargon' is the direct equivalent of Ballard's metaphysical jargon ", for whereas Ballard's writing has strength, obsessive commitment to a view of the universe, is economical and makes its point quite clearly, Cooper's is fuzzy rather incoherent emotionalism of the type too often found in SF. I find myself questioning such statements as 'And mind is so fashioned that it can never renounce the pursuit of meaning', I know a great many intelligent people who have renounced the pursuit of meaning -- the existentialists spring to mind as an obvious example of a lot of people who've done just that. I'd be inclined to call Cooper's stuff pseudo-philosophy rather than anything else.

Fritz Leiber.

....Agree with Patrizio that Speculative Fiction (term used by Heinlein, Merril, and several others,) is better than Science Fiction as a general designation for the sort of stuff we like, but disagree hotly with the notion that science is an unimportant element in these stories -- that's like saying, "Let's get the Law and the police out of detective stories." The real guts of the best of SF is extrapolation from new scientific discoveries and concepts, the visualising of materials most scientists can express only in technical and mathematical language, the sort of thing that makes SF a real inspiration to potential young scientists, the kind of thinking and imagining that even scientists must use sometimes -- as Einstein did with his imaginary windowless rocket accelerating at a rate to produce a perfect illusion of Earth gravity. (And it occurs to me here that if the rocket were wide enough, the man could discover that the force he felt wasn't emanating from a point, or point-equivalent, as G-forces do, and this w would give him a clue to the true nature of the force acting upon him...and right here, now, we have a good example of the way the SF mind works.) No, speculative fiction is a good and perhaps literarily respectable term for science fiction, science fantasy, etc, For that matter, Imaginative Fiction and Speculative Fiction are both satisfactory terms to me. But let's not, for goodness sake, forget the part science fiction has played in the development of rocketry, from Verne and Tsiolkovsky on, and in many other fields of technology.



/ So what else do you do in your spare time besides disproving the Postulate of Equivalence ? Your plea seems to be to save the scientific method of storytelling (see Sven Eklund's letter), and you, also, (as did Joe Patrizio) appear to consider "Science" to mean "gadgetry." I doubt that SF has played such a significant a part in the development of technology as we'd like to think. /

Harry Warner Jr.

....The Patrizio Plaint against science fiction as a name is one that I've made from time to time in a slightly different form. I'd rather see the name applied only to the stories that really qualify for it. My preference for the new name would not be speculative fiction but future fiction. Speculative fiction would define more accurately the stories that are known to be contrary to fact; BRING THE JUBILEE, for instance, based on the assumption that the South had won this nations Civil War. Future fiction would be a good term for the great majority of stories that now appear in the prozines, although there would admittedly be embarrassing mavericks such as stories in which BEMs have an adventure on Earth in prehistoric times. Eliminating science fiction as a general term for all the stories that it now covers is more urgent business than ever befofe because of the increased usage of that unspeakable abbreviation, sci-fi.

/ I must disagree with you for once. Your scheme would not work because as a rule the public abhors complexity. More than one name for a fairly similar range of stories would be far too much for the average man to bother with. Also, we 're looking for a general term, while future fiction is not only horrible, but is specific. Too specific. Sci-fi as a term is an obvious attempt to to associate SF with the same snabbery that made a god out of hi-fi. /

John Boston.

....It seems to me that Terry Jeeves is looking at things a bit one-sidedly; there are many, many things a story may be evaluated in terms of, and he is taking only one of them. Joe Patrizio seems to be suffering from a very mild case of the same ailment in Change But The Name. There is an excellent argument for having a solid scientific base for science fiction stories; many readers of SF enjoy it. I'll have to admit that Childhood's End and City And The Stars impress me much more than Clarke's excellent documentary SF; however, I also enjoy books like Mission Of Gravity and Sands Of Mars. A story may be appreciated for its development of character or of a sociological theme; it may also be appreciated for adroit development of a technical situation. Incidentally, Joe seems to have taken a somewhat limited view of "science", considering gadgetry only, in his essay. What about a book such as Earth Abides, which is among other things an excellent development of the ecological consequences of man's near extermination ? Science is more than spaceships and zap-guns.

Sven Eklund.

....I can't really accept the article Change But The Name. Perhaps you could call the genre speculative fiction, or exrapolative fiction, the one as good as the other. The matter is; you couldn't speculate or extrapolate satisfactory in fiction without science. Besides, the important factor in most SF stories is the change in something, societies, people, and so on. How could you understand physical, technical, sociological, biological or psychological changes without knowledge ?

The word "science" in science fiction may not be related to the subject being treated, but to the method which the author uses in his treatment. That is, the scientific method. / See next page for comments. /

/ Your points in the original letter seemed to suffer in translation, but this short excerpt has some valid ideas. Especially so in your last paragraph. /

George W Price.

....I feel obliged to tear a strip off J.P.Patrizio. While I must agree with him that "There is little evidence that science itself necessarily breeds good SF writers," it must also be said that grossly faulty science can injure the readability as well as the credibility, of an otherwise good story. It is one thing to invent theories or postulates with no known basis, such as hyperdrive. It is quite something else to disregard what is already known, especially if it appears to be a case of ignorance rather than deliberate auctorial license.

For example, it is generally accepted that the speed of light is the limiting velocity; while this theory may be wrong, it should not be ignored. If the author wants to bring in faster-than-light travel, he should employ a "hyperdrive", or "space-warp", etc., to show that he recognises that the Einsteinian limit exists, and must be gotten round. Or he can even say that Einstein had been proven wrong, although this is becoming less and less credible, now that experiments with nuclear particles have shown the predicted changes in mass and time-rate at near light-speeds. But the one thing the author must not do is to simply have his ship continue acceleration in normal space until it passes the speed of light. That smacks of ignorance.

Possibly this is mere nit-picking. But when I come across one of these easily-avoidable blunders it breaks the thread of the story, so that I must consciously force myself back into that "willing suspension of disbelief". Perhaps it will be more easily understood if I drew an analogy with historical novels. How would Mr. Patrizio feel if he were reading a story of Victorian England, in which, though it has nothing to do with the basic plot, Queen Victoria is represented as tall and slender ? Or how about a story about the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, superlatively written with characters in depth and realistic motivation -- and in which the Mutiny is suppressed by paratroops ?

I do not mind when an author, with due notice to the reader, deliberately assumes something contrary to fact, as a take-off point for speculation or fantasy. I am spe speaking of the all-too-numerous cases where the author drops a clanger which has nothing to do with the central story, and which only shows that he hasn't bothered to do his homework. Even worse is the case where the author apparently does know the facts, but ignores them in order to simplify his writing problems, assuming that the readers will be too stupid or ignorant to know the difference. This of course, is not only distracting, but is insulting.

/ If I may break in before you go on to the next point; One example of an author who must obviously know the facts, yet who lets his spaceships accelerate in normal space with no mention of limiting velocity, is Eric Frank Russell

That is just one of the reasons why I found the (earlier) part) of that novel to be very poor.....You are putting words into Joe Patrizios mouth, and have no call to tear a strip off him. You agree in your second sentence with his theme; then you have apparently understood Joe to be advocating carelessness in SF writing. Which is not true. He advocated the use of no science, not incorrect science. Joe would be as ready as yourself, or myself, to condemn careless handling of scientific facts. Your points are correct and valid, and have been published for that reason, and as useful side-arguments on Patrizio's theme. /

George W Price. (cont'd.)

In the discussion on The Ethical Engineer, Ted Tubb asks "How does anyone know that it is better to die free than to live in chains ?" While I personally incline to the belief that it is better to accept temporary slavery in the hope of eventual liberation, it must be said that the other philosophy can be socially successful. I have read of a certain African tribe which could not be enslaved, I think it was the Masai, but I don't have the reference to hand. When slavers attacked a Masai, he fought to the death. If overpowered by main force, as soon as he was loosed he attacked his captors until they were forced to kill him. A few of the more cunning pretended to accept slavery, until they had a good chance to kill their masters and as many more slaveholders and overseers as possible. It is reported that one Masai was knocked out and woke up on a slaveship bound for America. He led a slave revolt, took over the ship, and forced the few remaining survivors to turn back to Africa. The point of all this is that such refractory behaviour was almost invariably fatal to the individual Masai, but it was beneficial to the tribe, because after a number of such unpleasant experiences the slave-raiders left the Masai alone. It just was not worth the trouble to collect slaves who were certain to kill their masters at the first opportunity. So to people whose individual self-consciousness is low and whose group-solidarity is high, it may very well be better to die free, so that the group will not have to live in chains.

Ivor Latto.

....I think my main annoyance with the theme of THE ETHICAL ENGINEER arose from the way in which the argument was presented; Harry Harrison was presenting a case for a specific idea.... as he has every right to do.... and was presenting it in the most powerful, and most entertaining, manner possible. An almost entirely sympathetic character gave the pros, an almost entirely unsympathetic character gave the cons. This is most effective, but gives a black-and-white view of the case, and makes for shallow argument. It also means that when you label one protagonist "baddie","fool", "fanatic", everything he says becomes suspect, regardless of its worth.

To take one example, the apparently ludicrous ideal that death is preferable to slavery. On the one hand, this precept is held by the better-dead-than-red school, but on the other, it has been held by numberless groups of people throughout history, moreover, by people who have demonstrated their belief; the Spartans at Thermopylae; the American indians, time and again; the Jews at Warsaw in 1944. Their actions may have been suicidal, wasted, mistaken, "unrealistic", but surely not ludicrous. Surely there is something admirable in placing some ideal above mere existence ?

It is this kind of biased argument which makes many people feel distaste for Campbell's editorials and Heinlein's latest books. The trouble is that Campbell and Heinlein, when writing in this vein, do anything but argue, a word which implies two conflicting points of view. Their Good/Bad polemics can't be aimed at those who agree with them, (which would be a waste of time) nor at those who violently oppose them (an equal waste of time), nor yet at the moderate middle-of-the-roaders, who would not respond to such unbalanced propaganda.

Another question arises from all this, from the ZENITH-9 letter-column. To quote Harry Harrison; "Why do some people hate John Campbell and his editorials so ?" The above is my idea of why some people find Campbell's editorials hateful, I can't think of anyone who has professed hatred for John Campbell. It seems to me that, especially with such people as JWC and RAH, fans are incapable of expressing their dislike for what they say in any sort of objective way; it appears to be accepted that to consis-

tently criticise a writer's politics or philosophy automatically means that you consider him to be incompetent in his profession, suspect him in his morals, and a White Slaver to boot. Why should distaste for what he writes have any bearing at all upon the way he writes (which might be exquisite), upon his character, (which might be impeccable), or upon his right to say what he thinks...which is undeniable ? And why, in relation to Heinlein's books, should Robert Coulson think that "....liberals ..are all for freedom of speech and of the press, as long as only their side takes advantage of it" ? Off-hand, I can't recall any 'liberals' stating that Heinlein should be prevented from publishing his novels, or that he should be prevented from expressing his views. In recent American history, I thought that this sort of thing was a product of others than the hypocritical liberals. If criticism in fandom is really a blanket condemnation of a man's whole character, or even if it's regarded as such...as it apparently is, it is a waste of time for anyone to make any sort of adverse comment on any aspect of a writer's work at all, if they don't wish to be regarded as a saboteur of free speech, or a purveyor of hatred.

/ I couldn't agree more with the sentiments expressed in your last paragraph. However I must regretfully remember some of your comments on earlier issues (quoted and not quoted,) which were not in accord with your present feelings on criticism. Some people certainly equate a distaste for JWC's editorials with a hatred of JWC's person. I know; I received at least one letter justifying such a hatred. Being consistently fascinated by both JWC and RAH, and considering them possessed of something suspiciously akin to common sense, I must share Harry Harrison's bewilderment at attacks on JWC. No more persecution, gentlemen please ! (Though neither subject cares the slightest for adverse comment). And the above does not mean that I find all Heinlein's and Campbell's writings to be acceptable in content. /

Comments on this current issue of ZENITH must be received before December 12th at the absolute latest, in order to be considered for inclusion in the next issue.

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL - COMPETENT HACK (Continued from Page 26)

cliche and clumsiness being naively used instead of real dialogue or characterisation. Yet, the story has its virtues. On the technical level, it does have better descriptive passages than almost any Anvil piece. It does have a female in the story (not that this alone is any great virtue; it show however that the author has at last noticed the existence of women.

The usual Anvil gambits are employed to gain the reader's approval, as mentioned earlier, but less use of them is made in this story than is usually the case. In addition, there is almost none of the usually-prevalent slapstick humour favoured by Anvil. Inm many ways this is one of the author's best efforts. though so many things are amiss on inspection, there is present a quality which makes for easy reading, and in all, the story is extremely enjoyable.

The above criticisms should not be taken as a too-harsh judgement on Anvil. It is so very easy to poke fun at Anvil's plots and developments that his one very great virtue may be overlooked. This has as yet been only touched upon. It will be stated clearly, we hope, in the conclusion of this article.

--- Part II; The third theme; 'Man v. Alien", and some conclusions on all. ---