VIEW, REVIEWS, AND ARCHIMEDEAN SPIRALS
(Book Reviews)

Five To Twelve, by Edmund Cooper (Putnam; S.F. Book Club Edition).

This is a slim (150 pages), fast-paced novel set against a background of a future world in which women reign supreme and men have been reduced to, at best, second-class citizens. A venerable premise in speculative fiction, to be sure, but Cooper's treatment of it is so memorable that it makes all of the concepts seem somehow original. Five to Twelve is pre-eminently a novel of treatment: premise, plot and denouement are all thoroughly conventional; it is the flesh that the author adds to those ordinary bones that makes the finished product something interesting, alive and exciting. Incisive narrative writing. Excellent portrayal of characters. And, above all, sharp, crackling dialogue.

The principal characters: Dion Quern, poet and male prostitute, a sometime-rebel with a deep death-wish; Juno Locke, a blond amazon of 62, principal Peace Officer of the London Seven apartment tower, who takes Quern on as a squire after he breaks into her apartment; Leander Smith, male nurse at the Trafalgar Square Clinic, squire to its leading female doctor (there are no male doctors, of course), and revolutionist with grandiose plans; and Sylphide, an orphan of no status selected by Juno to bear Dion's and "her" child (the doms, women of status, do not soil themselves by such lowly things as child-bearing). These four characters are drawn well and in depth, and of course in the process of characterizing these individuals Cooper also characterizes the society in which they function.

Five to Twelve is a memorable book because of these characters and their society, but even more because of their language. Author Cooper has created for this novel a hip, bantering patois, employed consistently throughout the book, that is not merely a matter of a few slang terms (though there are some interesting ones here), but rather a subtle dialect consisting of a certain rhythm and pattern of speech combined with and complementing a cynical-sardonic attitude. In order to illustrate this use of language, it is necessary to quote a passage of some length. (By way of explanation, Quern is compelled to obey Leander Smith because the latter has a remote control device with which he can kill Dion Quern at will.) Quern and Smith are talking on the view-phone:

> "Hi, savior," said Leander cherrily.
> "Good night, bastard," retorted Dion, reaching for the cut stud. "You have a facility for being totally uunloved and unwanted. I'm going through hell on the Western Front, and I require no assistance from anyone. How the Stopes do you always manage to plug in to my dried-up thought-stream?"
> "Hold it," said Leander as he saw Dion move toward the stud. He held up the snuff box with his finger delicately poised over the button. "You wouldn't cut me dead, old sport, would you?"
> "Yes, joker. If you were unable to cut me dead also."
> Leander smiled. "Esprit de corps. I like it. There's not enough of it in the world these days. ... You are alone, I trust?"
> "Your trust is not unfounded. The good dom dallies briefly in Europe. Now state your sentiments and return to limbo."
> "We have a rendezvous, brother ghost."
> "I have not forgotten your foggy humor in the park."
> "It is well. The assignment has been advanced one day."
> "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses ... Who is playing games with what's left of my life?"
> "The High Command, dear sibling. They move in somewhat mysterious ways."

"Their nonhappenings to perform," added Dion. "So I live less and laugh louder. Very interesting. Now let me return to my little fairy tale, and I will bid you a very good night."

"Not so fast, friend of my youth. There are details to arrange."

"So arrange them, and stop wasting the valuable twilight of my life."

"You know a bar, the Vive le Sport?"

"I know a bar, the Vive le Sport."

"I'll meet you there, midnight tomorrow."

"You may be exceedingly lucky."

Leander beamed. "I hope so. Otherwise, you may be exceedingly dead."

I could have quoted many other segments; this kind of crisp, sparkling dialogue runs through every chapter.

Dion, Juno and Sylphide establish a fairly workable three-cornered relationship until the baby is born. Juno, who is legally entitled to it, takes possession of the infant, named Jubal, and Dion leaves her and takes Sylphide to live in a country retreat (belonging to Juno). Eventually she gets pregnant again, but miscarries when Dion is arrested for assassinating the Queen and incarcerated in a Center for Disoriented and Asocial Persons. Sylphide mutilates herself in a suicide attempt and can have no more babies, but Dion, as a last favor to Juno, allows his semen to be used to artificially inseminate other women chosen by Juno before he is subjected to analysis/treatment that leaves him a feeble-minded sheep. In this state, he is eventually released and returns to live out his life as a recluse at Juno's country estate. At the end of the novel, she comes to Dion there and informs him that he is a genetic mutation who produces only sons, that this trait is dominant in some of his offspring, and that therefore his seed will eventually reestablish the male-female balance (the ratio then being 12 to 5 in favor of females) and thus end the female dominance of the world.

In plot summary, that sounds uninspired, to say the least, and it is. That doesn't matter when you read the novel, however. Five to Twelve is so well done that it quite transcends the stolid conventionality of its plot.

-- Ted Pauls

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Kings of Infinite Space, by Nigel Balchin (Curtis 123-07019; 75¢).

With that title and a blurb calling it a "supercharged novel", and the fact that it dealt with the American space race, I fully expected a real slam-bang-sockdologer-gee-gosh-golly-gee-whiz space opera.

It isn't.

It's the story of the formation of an international group of astronauts as seen through the eyes of the English candidate, and is primarily concerned with the personal aspects of the training program and the personality clashes that occur between the very different people who were chosen. The English guy, as it turns out, doesn't even get off the ground, at least not very far.

There are no space battles, as might have been expected from the cover illustration. There are no great strivings, no personal dedications, no real stirring action. There is a lot of talk, and philosophizing.

It's not badly written. I can find no real flaws with it. In fact, I will readily concede that it is a pretty good book. #nr# But the package is terribly disappointing.

-- David Halterman

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Podkayne of Mars, by Robert A. Heinlein (Ace; copyright 1963).

This is one of the least of Heinlein's works. In SFREVIEW #35, it is noted that RAH had an alternate ending in which Poddy was killed off. Since she is an insipid, priggish teen-ager, inspiring neither interest nor sympathy, it is a pity he didn't use it.

The book is a condescending and preachy juvenile, with all of the Heinlein weaknesses (banal dialogue, stock characters, etc.) and few of the Heinlein strengths (sketched-in background; careful plotting; fast, gripping action).

One is mildly interested in whether Poddy's younger brother Clark, a brattish genius but otherwise a cipher, has managed to acquire an atom bomb. One is puzzled/put off by the good ol' darkie named Uncle Tom who makes, at one point, a cannibal joke. ("I won't tell you what he was pretending to pick out of his teeth.")

The way you know our side is the good guys is by the villainous behavior of the other side. The issues are barely identified, and never discussed.

It is reliably reported that F&SF refused Podkayne of Mars, thereby ending Heinlein's contract with them. It is my express belief that RAH wrote Podkayne with the express intention of terminating that contract. And then, being a thrifty Scot, he sold it anyway.

-- Alexis Gilliland

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Double, Double, by John Brunner (Ballantine 72019; 75¢).

John Brunner has written what could easily be a very good horror movie; he has not, however, written a new and original type of story.

The monster in this story is a life form that can take the form and some of the intelligence of its prey. Born of atomic radiations (John Brunner seems to have had some last-minute doubts on the logic of a perfect mutation, and hedges this a bit at the end), it swims the sea, innocently, until it finds the drowned body of a pilot. Drawn to land by the memories of the pilot, it finds new prey, and multiplies, until scientists figure out what's happening, and take action.

There is considerable scope here for another American International happening: a rock group, Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, a crazy little old lady, a nasty reporter, a monster that will usually require no special effects at all-- just weird dialog, stock camera tricks, and a large serving of Jell-o.

I am not suggesting that the story is unreadable; Brunner rarely writes an unreadable story. In fact, it's better by far than "Who Goes There", its nearest relation as far as the type of creature goes, and should come out a hell of a lot better than The Thing when it goes to Hollywood.

-- David Halterman

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Nova 1, edited by Harry Harrison (Delacorte; S.F. Book Club edition).

In his introduction to this volume, Harrison, following a brief dissertation on SF as the last refuge of the short story, notes the proliferation of anthologies and collections in the field. He then sets about justifying his decision to add yet another to the shelves. He has noticed, observes editor Harrison, that "the material tends to be a little thin on the ground after it has been picked over a few times" by anthologists. "There are only so many magazines, therefore just so many stories to be chosen from." A profound observation, indeed. "What else can

be done?" he asks rhetorically, and promptly supplies the answer with a portentious, "You hold the answer to that question in your hand." An anthology of new stories, rather than a collection culled from already-published work. Well, gee, folks, how about that? Harry Harrison may go down in history right alongside Oliver Wendall Freen, who invented the cotton gin in 1947, or Niles Lishness, who discovered Uranus last month.

Harrison then asserts that the SF magazines have taboos (in a paragraph beginning, "I shall not say that the science fiction magazines have taboos"), whereas the fact that the stories in Nova 1 were written for book publication "seems to have had a freeing affect (sic) on the contributors' powers". Finally, he gets down to the real nitty-gritty, the only raison d'être of any collection of stories anywhere worth a farthing: he claims that they are "excellent stories by the best science fiction writers around". Several are, actually. Most, however, are not, and that--rather than the platitudinous tedium of the introduction--is what is certainly wrong with Nova 1.

For example, the book opens with "The Big Connection", by Robin Scott, a piece of piffle that would be an unfortunate beginning for any collection. It concerns two caricature-hippies who get involved in a modern version of the "Three Wishes" fable through a pop-art sculpture made out of surplus electrical parts. It's the sort of thing Ron Goulart used to write for F&SF. Scott is the organizer of the Clarion College SF Writers Workshop, and Harrison cites this story in his introduction as demolishing once and for all the old canard about "those who can, do, those who can't, teach". If this story is the best Robin Scott can do, it might better be cited in support of the cliche. Then there are two second-rate Barry Malzburg stories, one under the pseudonym of K.M. O'Donnell, which at least have the merit of being short but neither of which remotely qualify under the banner of "excellence". This anthology also sees the resurrection by J.R. Pierce of the Stanley G. Weinbaum character, Haskel van Manderpootz. He shouldn't have bothered. The story, "The Higher Things", contains one interesting idea about the possible future evolution of man, but is otherwise distinguished only by an incredibly cloying cuteness that makes it read like a refugee from mid-1950's AMAZING STORIES. Rounding out the roster of losers are "Faces and Hands", one of James Sallis' patented excursions into obscurity and ambiguity, and "Mary and Joe", a rather poor story by Naomi Mitchison whose gimmick is perfectly obvious from the very first line.

In addition, there are several selections which, while not objectionable on any major ground and reasonably competently written, are essentially mediocre. This is true of "Hexamnion", which represents Chan Davis' return to SF writing after more than a decade's absence, David Gerrold's utterly predictable "Love Story in Three Acts", and Piers Anthony's "The Whole Truth", which is another of those is-this-person-really-human-or-an-alien-infiltrator-in-a-clever-plastic-disguise? stories. Ray Bradbury's poem, "And This Did Dante Do", might also fit in the same category, though I've never felt particularly competent to criticize poetry.

That leaves five of the anthology's fifteen selections which are, in fact, excellent stories. Robert Silverberg's "A Happy Day in 2381" is a brilliant handling of an extremely venerable theme, the utopian society that is perhaps not quite so perfect as its smiling, contented inhabitants joyfully proclaim it to be. I should imagine that this story will be a strong candidate for a Nebula award. Brian Aldiss contributes "Swastika!", a splendidly droll little piece that consists of a conversation between the author and Adolf Hitler on some of the events of the day. This is black humor at its best. "The Horars of War", by Gene Wolfe, combines an excellent if not altogether new idea with some very fine treatment. It takes place in the fairly near future, when the United States has developed androids to be the main cannon fodder in its continuing war to prevent Indo-China

from being overrun by the Indo-Chinese, Gene Wolfe is a name new to me, but if this is a fair sample of his talent he will not remain little-known for long. The longest story in Nova 1 is "Jean Duprès", by Gordon R. Dickson, an excellent novelette that, while containing elements of dressed-up mundania, nevertheless in its total impact impresses the reader with both its sensitivity and originality. It is one of Dickson's finest efforts. And, last but certainly not least, Donald E. Westlake's ingenious "The Winner" is a story of the indomitable human spirit's reaction to repression. It concerns a political prisoner in a future detention camp where bars have been replaced by a surgically-implanted device which causes extreme pain to a prisoner should he move beyond the radius of a transmitter. There is no way to actually escape this system; but a sufficiently-determined man can defy it and, through defiance, retain and enhance his dignity as an individual human being, thereby defeating the existential if not the practical function of the system. "The Winner" is not the sort of story likely to be very widely applauded, but it is a superb little gem.

Nova 1 is worth borrowing for those five excellent stories, but I wouldn't recommend paying for it. A ratio of two second-rate stories to every first-rate one is simply too high to make it worth purchasing unless you have nothing else to do with your money.

-- Ted Pauls

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Daughters of the Dolphin, by Roy Meyers (Ballantine 72001).

Take Burroughs--Edgar Rice, that is; for the African Jungle, read the ocean; for Cheetah, read Flipper; for Tantor, read assorted sperm whales; and so on.

Burroughs pastiches are in. They must be. ~~####~~ Meyers' first book, Dolphin Boy, was written in such a close parallel to Tarzan of the Apes that it was bound to be good. This, the second book in what appears to be a very long series, attempts to strike out on its own; the author, however, in attempting to leave the way open for a sequel, has left his reader with a loose-ended incomplete story that is largely unsatisfying. Never, since Burroughs and his imitators, has a story been written which was so blatently a preface.

-- David Halterman

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Starmind, by Dave Van Arnam (Ballantine Books 01626; 75¢; 216 pp.).

Starmind starts off with an accident that results in the hero and heroine being cut-down to the right and left hemispheres of their respective cerebrums, and the delicate surgical brain transplant operation that puts them in the same donor body. Dr. John Brian, the master surgeon in charge, is more interested in the experiment than in the patient/patients, and it turns out that both he and Nurse Kim have a connection with the sinister Dr. ~~Fa Nancha~~ Boardman, who was murdered by "deaders" for the somewhat similar research he was doing.

This premise is original and interesting, and it generates good ideas and good situations. But while Van Arnam writes adequately, his plotting is undisciplined. He has so much undifferentiated idea content that the book seems cluttered and busy and lacking coherence. Thus the book divides into segments having rather little to do with each other, much in the manner of Heinlein's unfortunate Farnham's Freehold.

Also, Van Arnam doesn't pace his action as well as he might. The fornication scene with Nurse Kim is immediately followed by the big (and unconnected) escape scene. The reporter who engineers the escape has no other function in the story, and no motivation for doing what he does, beyone the humanistic nobility common to all reporters in fiction. Had he interrupted, maybe both scenes would have been improved.

This escape immediately solves the problems which the compound hero faced about getting out of the hospital, and which were potentially more interesting than the running around which he/she/they do when he/she/they get out. Of course, THEY are now doing what the author had in mind.

Another difficulty is that mechanics, like getting money, are handled in a cumbersome and time-consuming manner. Why not just have a numbered Swiss bank account?

For one thing Van Arnam deserves credit, however. The interior monolog is an old, old device; he has produced an interior dialog. What's more, the two separate hemispheres of the brain are in communication by telepathy.

As I said, lots of good ideas here, all jumbled together. Starmind could have used a firm editorial hand and a good deal of rewriting. It gets a fair or fair-to-middling rating.

An afterthought: up to the escape scene, Starmind was going extremely well. Then, it's almost as if Van Arnam went down somebody's checklist and ticked off the "essential elements of the science fiction novel". (Probably he had the final "trip" by his "trinity" written up, and had to get there somehow.)

There is an "Afterword" which should be skipped.

-- Alexis Gilliland

Sex '99, by Gyle Davis (?) (Classic Publications NT 867; $1.75).

There's a question mark after the author because he's called "J.L. Kullinger" inside. In fact, the whole book has a false front. It starts off with a three-page introduction that tries to convey the idea that the whole book is a scientific treatise on future morality. It's not. Really, it's not.

The idea of the story is that, after a somewhat messy nuclear war, the remnants of the U.S, government are trying to gather the rest of the people together under its aegis. A small group is sent to California, where someone else has decided to form a state of his own. They are, of course, well-armed, as their three mules are carrying, among other things, mortars, hand grenades. and bazookas enough to take over Cuba.

As they travel, they seem to pick up a large and varied army, including, among others, a Mexican girl with a slight overdose of Cantharides. Yes, sir, this book really starts off with a bang.

After a lot of shooting, they discover that the Emperor of California has salvaged a few nuclear missiles, and is using them to coerce support for a very large army, to attack the Federation, which is slowly reforming back east. So the heroes take on stupendous odds to destroy the missiles, kill the villain, and restore peace to the Western Frontier. There is, of course, a considerable loss of life, which will probably be made up rather handily by the spate of births that will probably take place about nine months after the story ends.

On the average, there's about one gunfight and one pillow fight per chapter, and there are fifteen chapters. If they left out the pillow fights, they wouldn't have enough story to make a novelette.

Recommended for all clean-minded fans. You've been out of touch too long anyway.

-- David Halterman

Breakthrough, by Richard Cowper (Ballantine 01653; 75¢).

"In its penetrating and fascinating exploration of the twilit hinterland of E.S.P. and Psi," the blurb proclaims, "'Breakthrough' makes a unique contribution to the literature of science fiction..." "Unique" may not be quite the proper term, and "penetrating" doesn't seem very apt in view of the fact that Cowper chooses to illuminate the twilit hinterland with a beam of second-rate mysticism; but I will concede that Breakthrough is fascinating. It is utterly fascinating to me that so little can happen in the opening 161 (one-hundred-and-sixty-one--count 'em) pages of a novel.

The explanation for this appears to be that, as the blurb continues, this book "introduces a writer who has already made his name in more orthodox fields." Mainstream writers dabbling in the SF-fantasy field for the first time (or first couple of times, though they usually don't repeat) have an unfortunate habit of writing mainstream novels with science fiction or fantasy themes. It may seem like a distinction without substance, but there is a good deal of difference between a science fiction novel and a mainstream novel with an SF theme. The difference that is important to us for purposes of this discussion involves the complex of common premises and ideas between virtually all SF writers and their audience, which permits the author to employ a sort of conceptual shorthand; whereas the mainstream writer new to the field, not sharing these ideas and therefore not being conversant with the short-cuts, almost invariably wastes a large chunk of his book over-explaining the obvious. The result is novels like Crichton's The Andromeda Strain and Caidin's The Mendelov Conspiracy, which are dreadfully dull to SF fans who do not need 18 pages of explanation/justification for an idea which they accept automatically at its first mention.

In the case of Breakthrough, Cowper basically has two related ideas to communicate. The first, that the leading female character, Rachel Bernstein, has psi powers, is clear enough by the middle of Chapter Two, but the first eight chapters are devoted almost exclusively to establishing that fact. The second idea--that Rachel Bernstein and the hero, Jim Haverill, are bound together in what is an attempt to communicate from either the distant past or an alternate universe--is perfectly obvious by the middle of Chapter Nine, and Cowper does nothing more than confirm it over and over again for the next ninety pages. Indeed, it is fair to say that the total content of this novel could easily be accomodated in a seven-page short story by Robert Silverberg.

(Parenthetically, it might be noted that Cowper further displays his ignorance of and condescension toward science fiction by beginning Chapter Eleven with the idiotic statement that

> "If this were a work of Science-Fiction I daresay events would at this point begin to move towards a rapid and theatrical climax in which Miss Bernstein, Doctor Dumpkenhoffer and I all found ourselves abducted, dragged on board an interstellar cruiser and winging our way via a hyper-space timewarp en route for Alpha Centauri or the Andromeda nebula.",

but this grotesquerie is a minor irritation, and the least of the reasons for finding Breakthrough wanting.)

Finally, around the beginning of Chapter Twenty-Two, the pace of the novel picks up--it does seem a little late, doesn't it?--but unfortunately it is also at this point that the plot begins to unravel and we have an excursion into vagueness and mysticism. Haverill rushes Rachel, with whom he is by this time in love, to Dr. Dumpkenhoffer's laboratory, because the good doctor, a psi researcher, says she is in imminent danger of dying (why or how we do not know). Through a device

he has invented which turns thought into visual images, she communicates the message from the mysterious Kroton. Don't ask me what the message is: Haverill sees the temple he has seen in his psi-dreams; Klorner, the doctor's assistant and resident electronics genius, sees a set of equations, which presumably incorporate some new and exciting scientific principle; Dumpkenhoffer himself claims to see in the screen the face of God. Shortly thereafter, Dr. D. vanishes while using his machine--presumably (one must presume practically everything since Cowper chooses not to say) into the past or alternate universe (that still isn't clear, either) of Kroton. On that note, the novel sort of peters out.

The writing is generally good, and occasionally quite effective, and there is some fairly strong characterization. Breakthrough is not, technically speaking, a bad book, but it is a bad science fiction novel. When Cowper learns the difference, perhaps he will write a good one.

-- Ted Pauls

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The Palace of Eternity, by Bob Shaw (Ace Special 65050; 75¢).

Mnomosyne is a world of artists. It is also a strategic point in a very nasty interstellar war, which Earth is losing. When the military moves in and disrupts the planetary culture, Mack Taverner, a veteran, decides to do something about it. he gets killed.

Unfortunately, that is not the end of the story. His resident egon (Read soul) ascends to the mother-mass (Read All-soul or God) where he is informed that Earth's ships are destroying the souls of space. He is reincarnated, with the mission of putting a stop to the Earth ships, and preparing the Way, though he doesn't know it.

The prime concept of this story, of the world-soul and the space-dwelling soul of man, is not new. It is reminiscent of Stapledon's Star Maker, and London's Star Rover. More recently, the same theme was utilized by Clarke, in Childhood's End, and by Eric Frank Russell, in Sentinels of Space. The book in question could be described as an amalgam of the last-named with Stranger in a Strange Land. It certainly makes as much of a right-angle turn in the middle as did the Heinlein.

Unfortunately, the story comes off second-best in any comparison.

-- David Halterman

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Flame Winds, by Norvell W. Page (Berkley Book X1741; 60¢; 139 pp.).

The cover by Jeff Jones is more of a pastiche than an illustration, catching the mood rather well. Muted browns and oranges.

The story is an old one, taken from UNKNOWN WORLDS in 1939, and as a result, the barbarian hero has a rather curious purity about him. This may or may not be what barbarian heroes were like, but it is a refreshing change from 1969.

Prester John (the legendary(?) Christian(?) conqueror of the steppes of Central Asia) here sets out to take over Turgohl, city of wizards. Single-Handed, except for his buddy who smuggles him in.

The local establishment consists of seven mutually distrusting wizards and the rightful ruler, an enchanted princess who, evidently, is also a considerable sorceress when not flattened out by the collective spells of the seven. Classically, oligarchal rule, such as Venice practiced, was stabilized by each oligarch

having a separate constituency. Here, it is every wizard for himself and let the shaved-head priests of Ahriman take the hindmost.

One wonders how Turgohl's civil service, police and sanitation were organized. The army, at any rate, was divided into seven mutually antagonistic units, wearing seven colors for seven wizards.

Anyway, Prester (Prester being derived from the Greek word for hurricane rather than Presbyter, according to the author; I am not convinced) John enters upon this urban idyll hell-bent upon conquest. He is mentally a bit more alert than Conan, but every bit as muscular. ##### In his final dealings with the Princess he uses his intelligence to come up with an answer which I have not been able to improve upon. His post-victory situation is simply untenable, and he has the wit to realize it..

Flame Winds is short, but excellent light entertainment, for all that. Get it.

-- Alexis Gilliland

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the pollinators of eden
john boyd
weybright and talley
sf book club edition

this is yngvi again
yngvi the cockroach
who is not a louse
and my friend sam
sam mouser
who is a flower child
cat
hes been in the
catnip
and his tail looks like
a clinging arbutus
this book is a mixture
its happy
and sad
like life
but the humor
really grabs
my funnybone
wherever that is
on a cockroach
its a sex story
about flowers
without birds
or bees
just tulips
and orchids
and delphinia
in the oceans
of flora
theres a character
hal polino
who fertilizes flowers
with his pinkie
no pansies though
they are no issue
at all
its all very strange
the leading lady
gets raped
or something
by a flower
and likes it
the scene reminds me
of a date i had once
with a
flycatcher
it was stimulating
but something of a
sticky wicket
i said the book was serious
but its mostly a fun book
especially for those
who like
horticulture
and will be enjoyed by all
that aren't pushing up
daisies
it is a lesson
to us all
it proves
we should never
trust a tulip
or have an
orchidectomy
not even me
yngvi the cockroach
who is not a louse

-- yngvi

Sam Weskit on the Planet Framingham, by William Johnston (Tempo 5335; 75¢).

This is kitsch, a marvelously descriptive Yiddish word whose phonetic properties contribute nearly as much to the definition as do the words in the unabridged dictionary. Even if you come from Eight Trees, Oklahoma, and have never encountered the term, its sound offers a firm clue to its meaning. Kitsch. Empty, insipid garbage. Shirley Temple movies, TV situation comedies, dog novels by Albert Payson Terhune, Spiro Agnew leading a class of mentally retarded children in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Sam Weskit on the Planet Framingham is kitsch. Too low a form to be satire or even pastiche, not sufficiently "in" to qualify as camp, this novel throws together a jumble of absurd characters with absurd names, an improbable spaceship which takes the characters to an even more improbable planet, several ridiculous situations and lots of silly dialogue, and pretends to be clever. It is amusing for a time, like the pie-throwing scenes in dusty Mack Sennett comedies, but it, like them, pales rather quickly. Johnston demonstrates no particular talent as a writer of humor (or of anything else), though he might make it as a script writer for Jerry Lewis movies; characters, background, etc. are primitive, to say the least, and the dialogue which makes up a very large percentage of the verbiage ranges downward from unimaginative.

It's something to read, perhaps, on an extremely boring bus trip, but the only thing that can really be said in its favor is that anybody picking it up should be able to finish it within an hour.

-- Ted Pauls

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The Man Whose Name Wouldn't Fit, by Theodore Tyler (Curtis Books 123-07020; 75¢).

Albert Duane Cartwright-Chickering was retired, by directive, three years early, when his company installed electronic data processing. It seems that it would cost too much to reprogram the machine to handle his rather outsized name. Un-huh.

It also seems that, due to a somewhat unlikely chain of events, Albert,etc. had access to a fungus that attacked the adhesive in magnetic tape, like the stuff memory banks are made of. (Actually, this isn't too fantastic, as anyone who has seen fungi grow in otherwise "sterile" plastic petri dishes will testify.) #### He also had a few allies: his secretary, her mother (who felt she owed the world an ode), and a Negro computer programmer.

After a few minor sorties against IBMdom, Albert strikes a master blow by flying a kite, which proceeds to sporulate over a tank of oil, which is destined to be used to lubricate the computers.

If this sounds like a book that Thorne Smith would write, it isn't coincidence. The book gives me the distinct impression of being patterned after The Bishop's Jaegers and similar stuff. Unfortunately, the potential humor is not quite as fully utilized as I would have liked. I feel that the author tried to tell the story just a little bit too straight.

It's not bad, though.

-- David Halterman

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This Supplement is part of a series published from time to time in order to help THE WSFA JOURNAL keep up to date in its dateable material. It is free to recipients of SON OF THE WSFA JOURNAL (also a TWJ supplement), 15¢ to others. Edited & published by: Don Miller, 12315 Judson Road., Wheaton, Maryland, U.S.A., 20906.

-- DLM