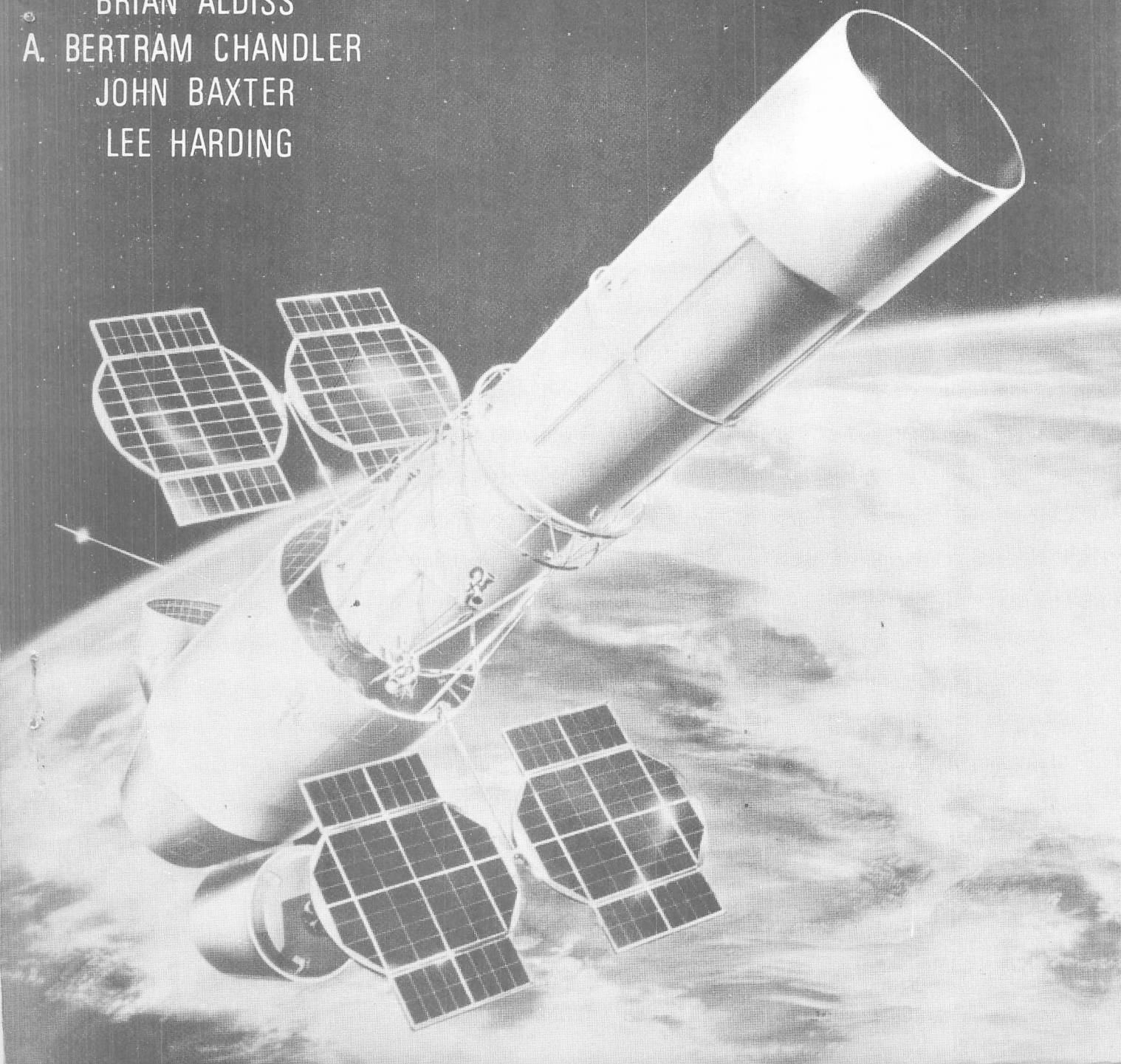
australian

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

BRIAN ALDISS
A. BERTRAM CHANDLER
JOHN BAXTER
LEE HARDING



AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW Editor: JOHN BANGSUND

September 1966 Number 3 Associate: Lee Harding

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EDITORIAL

If this is the first time you've seen this magazine, you may be wondering what it's all about. Like a chap I met last week when my typewriter was on the blink. I called into the shop at Carlton where I bought it, and, discovering that the mechanic lived in my suburb, he accompanied me home to have a look at the thing. He was a Yugoslavian, who'd been only six months in Australia, and his mates called him Tom. As I threaded my diminutive car through the tangled skein of peak-hour traffic, he looked at a copy of ASFR #2 and asked me - what it was all about.

'It's about science fiction.'

'What is this thing then - I do not know word?'

'Science fiction? Oh - space ships - you know? - stories about other planets - things like that.'

He was smiling, but I knew I had him baffled. He pointed at the title page of ASFR, the one with Jim Ellis's drawing.

'Is about - how you say - kunst?'

'Art? No. Oh, you mean sculpture?'

He nodded. I racked my brains.

'Do you read at all?'

'No, my English no good enough. I watch television, you know? I learn - I know eighty per cent words on television.'

'Well, did you read much before you came to Australia?'

'Oh yes, I read in Yugoslavia.'

'Did you ever read anything by Karel Capek?' I was proud of my pronunciation, for his eyes lit up and he repeated the name almost as I had said it.

'Karel Capek! Ah yes - Krakatit!'

At last, I thought, we were on the right wavelength.

'This book then is, what you say? - critic?'

'Criticism. Yes, that's right!'

'Ah.' He settled back with a pleased grin on his face. 'Is critic of Karel Capek. Ah. Is very interesting.'

I gave up, and concentrated on my driving.

ASFR is, simply, an amateur magazine devoted to the discussion of science fiction. And Australian sf in particular. It grew out of discussions at the Melbourne Easter SF Convention: we felt there was a need for a magazine to continue these discussions, to preserve contacts made at the Convention, and perhaps to do a bit of public relations work for sf amongst the intelligent reading public. Our first two issues were hand-duplicated and have already become just about collectors' items. With this issue we take the plunge and go offset.

Need I stress how expensive this move is? More than ever we need your subscription to keep going. And to encourage you, we are offering a reduced rate until October 1st - $2.40 per 12 issues.

As further encouragement, all registered subscribers will receive with their December issue a copy of Lee Harding's CANTO TWO - a superb collection of amateur writing, almost worth the subscription by itself. So, if you like what you see here, please give us your support. Don't let it be said of us, in the words of Robert Graves -

'Aye, Scroll Shall Fall and Laurels Fade
Long, Long before his Debts are Pay'd.'

John Bangsund

A L I E N S I N T H E S P I N I F E X

australian science fiction writers of the sixties

L E E H A R D I N G &
J O H N B A N G S U N D

The simultaneous publication by Ace Books in America and New Worlds in England of John Baxter's first novel is a major event in the short history of Australian science fiction. In this article we will attempt a brief survey of this history, concentrating on writers who have been published during the last few years.

Australian writers have been slow to make any move towards sf writing, and it is only during the last few years that they have begun to make any impression on the overseas markets. And, as tradition seems to demand, most of the writers who have done so have come from the ranks of fandom.

The years between 1940 and 1960 saw a revolution in sf, a growth to a higher level of maturity, and a consequent widespread acceptance by serious writers - and readers - of sf as a form of literature worthy of intelligent consideration. This revolution - or evolution, if you like - took place primarily in the American magazines. However, during that period there was no distribution of American magazines in Australia. The British edition of Astounding Science Fiction (now Analog) had a small circulation here, and in the fifties the British magazines, New Worlds, Science Fantasy, and Authentic, were made available by a few specialist bookshops which made it their business to cater for minority interests. But during those twenty years the only people in Australia who had access to American sf were the pre-war fans who had managed to ensure the supply of magazines through the agencies of friends in America, and those fortunate enough to share their booty. So for all that time Australia was virtually isolated from the exciting developments in the field overseas; hence it is not to be wondered at that local writers have only recently begun to appreciate the possibilities of the medium.

It is too soon yet to ascertain the effect of the sudden deluge of American magazines and paperbacks upon Australian readers. One or two writers from other fields have sold solitary stories to magazines like If and Fantasy & Science Fiction, but so far the really prolific writers have been, as we mentioned above, fans. Or ex-fans.

* * *

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER has been writing sf for over twenty years, under his own name and his pseudonym, George Whitley. An Englishman, Chandler migrated to Australia in the mid-fifties after serving as chief officer on the England-Australia run for some time. Previously he had spent many years in the British Merchant Navy and made his first sale, a 3000-word short, to John Campbell at Astounding in 1941. He continued writing for Campbell throughout

the war years, gaining a reputation as a reliable but not outstanding contributor to a magazine which featured regularly such writers as Isaac Asimov, Lewis Padgett, Robert Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard and Theodore Sturgeon. During those years Chandler was content to take it easy, learning his craft, whipping off the occasional cadenza to let the competition see he was no sleeper. Three stories from that period, all long novelettes, survive the test of time: SECOND DAWN, DEAD KNOWLEDGE, and GIANT KILLER. To our knowledge only SECOND DAWN has been anthologised, and is no longer available.

GIANT KILLER should have been reprinted many times. Quite apart from its value as a superior example of sf of that period, it is something of a curiosity. The plot concerns a star-ship on a long voyage. There is an accident. The engines are damaged and deadly radiation seeps through the ship. Hordes of rats aboard breed and mutate and breed again - eventually declaring war on the ship's human occupants. According to Chandler, he had written the story three times and three times had it rejected by Campbell. Disgruntled, he discussed it with a fellow writer in New York. This writer took the manuscript and re-wrote the story from the viewpoint of the rats. This time Campbell not only bought it, but in addition gave it the distinction of a cover illustration. However, due to some confusion, the story appeared under Chandler's name alone. The other writer? - a chap named Sturgeon.

After the war Chandler steadily increased his output. His stories still appeared in Astounding, but he now branched out into the rest of the pulp magazine market. His writing improved, and about this time we begin to see emerge and solidify an area of sf writing which Chandler has made particularly his own: the visualisation of future space-faring as a marine or navy orientated venture - as opposed to ideas such as Arthur Clarke's that space-ships will be operated like airliners and crewed by airmen. In his stories then and now, one can readily see how Chandler, spending most of his life on the sea, has transposed and extrapolated his thoughts and feelings about ships and the sea to the vaster oceans of the future.

Some writers leap to prominence overnight, or shall we say, more realistically, in a year or two. Others slug away happily for perhaps a quarter of a century before they begin to be noticed. Bertram Chandler falls into the latter category. His stories of the fifties were all competently written, but always overshadowed by his more spectacular contemporaries. Only a handful of his stories have appeared in anthologies - notably JETSAM, which has been reprinted many times, and CASTAWAY, which appeared under the George Whitley by-line.

Since his arrival in Australia, Chandler has written a number of novels. Ace Books in America have published a good half-dozen or more of his titles, and there are more to come. One element of his writing which becomes more apparent with each new story is his sense of humour. (THE HAMELIN PLAGUE, a novel describing an Australia over-run by gigantic rats, is respectfully dedicated 'To My Fat Cat.') Allied to a smooth and seemingly effortless style, cultivated over his twenty-five years of writing sf exclusively, this makes him certainly one of the most readable of current sf writers. In England, Dobson have published hard-cover editions of THE RIM OF SPACE and THE DEEP REACHES OF SPACE. One hopes that more will be forthcoming. Such is the degree of his identification with this country that for some years overseas editors

have been referring to him as an Australian writer. Because of this, and in terms of seniority, A. Bertram Chandler must be regarded as our most successful exponent of the sf medium.

* * *

FRANK BRYNING was the first man to achieve success both in Australia and overseas as an sf specialist. Bryning grew up with the early American pulps and kept pace with the developments in a growing field. His master was obviously Robert Heinlein: the first of his stories which appeared in the local slicks* all centred around the near future and space technology. One, for example, had the self-explanatory title OPERATION IN FREE FALL. A later story entitled ON THE AVERAGE was concerned with the billion-to-one chance of a meteorite hitting a space station. Almost without exception his stories have a solid scientific background, and like the majority of sf writers he eschews stylism.

After his initial success with the Australian slicks, Bryning sent a number of stories to Leo Margulies at Fantastic Universe in New York, who snapped them up. Thus began a long association with that magazine - and the first major break-through for an Australian writer in the overseas field. (A year or so earlier, DOUG NICHOLSON - a Sydney fan - achieved a minor immortality by selling Galaxy a novelette. But Doug has not since written for the professional magazines.) From 1956 to 1958 he had several stories published in New Worlds, but nothing of his has appeared in any magazine since then.

Frank Bryning was Guest of Honour at the Fifth Australian Science Fiction Convention, held in Melbourne in 1956. Throughout his sf-writing years he contributed regularly to the Australian fan magazines, and to occasional abortive professional ventures. In 1952 he founded the Brisbane SF Group, now disbanded. As a writer he has done extensive work outside the sf field, which probably accounts for his long silence - a silence we hope will some day be broken.

His best-known story, at least in Australia, is the one referred to by John Baxter in ASFR #1. PLACE OF THE THROWING-STICK is an evocative piece of fiction. Included in one of the COAST TO COAST anthologies, it deserves reprinting.

* * *

WYNNE WHITEFORD got his start a year or so after Frank Bryning. By that time there were no Australian slicks left partial to printing sf, so Whiteford made a specialty of the 'thriller' type of sf and found a moderate success with the men's magazines of the time. During the fifties he wrote for the local motoring magazine Wheels until 1957 when he moved to America. Here he began selling adventure-sf to magazines like If, Amazing and Super Science. Later he went to London, where he wrote several long novelettes for Science Fiction Adventures and short stories for New Worlds. Since returning to Melbourne he has worked in public relations. To our knowledge he has written no more sf.

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* For the uninitiated: slicks are glossy magazines, as distinct from pulps.

At his peak Whiteford could write adventurous sf with the best of them. Perhaps his relatively slight output in a field dominated by more experienced men, such as Poul Anderson, Randall Garrett, Robert Silverberg, has limited his appeal. Science fiction has changed remarkably in the last few years. The standards of 1960 even no longer apply, and perhaps writers like Bryning and Whiteford feel unsure of themselves in this 'new' field. Frank Bryning has been silent for some time. But Wynne Whiteford made a surprise appearance at the Melbourne Convention last Easter, and from what he said on that occasion it is obvious that he is far from being 'written out.' Pressure of work has eclipsed his writing for the time being, but we would like to feel that some time in the near future he will see his way clear to once more produce the kind of fiction he has proved he does so well.

* * *

Now we move properly into the sixties - and as we do so Mr. Harding retires modestly while I write about him.

* * *

Before the dawn of this decade Australian sf writers were disciples of the American school. Their roots were in the pulp stories of another era, their models the great American masters of the medium from the thirties and forties. Other schools, with different outlooks, were evolving. In the United Kingdom there were writers like Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard...

LEE HARDING, like his predecessors, loves the pulps and their colourful history, but instead of reflecting the accepted tenets of the genre his first published stories (in John Carnell's New Worlds, Science Fantasy, and Science Fiction Adventures) indicate a highly personal approach. Harding admits that he writes sf not primarily to entertain, but as a medium for the expression of his own thoughts and ideas. He admires the old space operas but realises he has nothing to say in that medium. Long before the term became popular his interest centred in the 'world of inner space.'

His first story, DISPLACED PERSON, deals with a man who, like some celestial filing card, has been temporarily mislaid by the Great Filing Clerk. The man wanders in search of himself through a grey limbo of conscious non-being. There is very little visual colour in the story: it represents a first tentative step into a murky land of the mind which has become a familiar Harding landscape. Lee, of course, has worked for years as a black-and-white photographer. He professes little interest in 'colour' in the visual sense: what does have meaning for him is allegory and symbolism, and his work is obsessed with them.

He followed his initial success with a steady stream of stories in the three magazines. The readers apparently liked them; they were sold to foreign publishers in translation. (One very popular one was QUEST, which has bobbed up in all kinds of places. A memorable story of one person's search for 'something real' in an artificial world, its most recent appearance is in the Penguin anthology LAMBDA ONE & OTHER STORIES. Harding doesn't like it, incidentally.) There was a period from 1961 to 1963 when hardly a month went by without a Harding story in one or other of Carnell's magazines; when Lee and John Baxter seemed to

hold a monopoly on New Worlds' letter column. And then, silence. In the last two years only two Harding stories have appeared, THE EVIDENCE in Michael Moorcock's New Worlds, and THE LIBERATORS in New Writings in SF #5.

Lee Harding has not given up writing. But he does seem to have given up writing the kind of story which earned for him his not inconsiderable reputation. There is ample evidence of real and original talent in stories like TERMINAL, QUEST, and THE LIBERATORS. It will be most interesting to see the result of his present hard (and top secret) work.

I have a theory. I don't wish to compare Lee's writing with that of J.G. Ballard - but I feel that he was heading where Ballard's already been. And perhaps he has felt this too, and has decided to attempt to forge a new 'image.' There are elements in THE LIBERATORS which suggest that he is farewelling his ambient cities and metaphysical abstracts and trying to write about people. If this is the case he may find it hard going, since people are pretty rare critters in sf. If he's still trying to write sf, that is - and I'm fairly sure he is. Anyway, whatever he's up to, I'm confident it will prove worth waiting for.

* * *

At which point Mr. Harding emerges from the sound-proof room, with that I-don't-trust-you-Bangsund smile on his face, and we proceed.

* * *

JOHN BAXTER made his first professional appearance in 1962, with a story called VENDETTA'S END in Science Fiction Adventures. From the first he set out to write hard-driving stories after the American style, taking as his models such writers as James Blish, Theodore Sturgeon and Frederik Pohl. It took him a little while to settle in, but when he did his stories began to exhibit a formidable degree of professionalism.

EVICTION, his first story in New Worlds, was followed by TOYS, INTERLUDE, and THE TRAPS OF TIME. The latter, since reprinted in the paperback anthology THE BEST OF NEW WORLDS, marks the end of Baxter's apprenticeship, and his emergence as a highly promising writer. Since then his stories have appeared in almost every issue of New Writings in SF, and occasionally in New Worlds. One little-known story called THE NEW COUNTRY - referred to in disparaging terms by John himself in ASFR #1 - is a really delightful piece, and represents his solitary venture away from the 'hard' school he currently favours.

Highlights from his recent productivity include HANDS, TRYST, and TAKE-OVER BID, all published in New Writings. (Leadlights include SKIRMISH, in New Worlds, which we rather hoped had been written, in Mark Twain's words, 'by another fellow of the same name.') Recently, in collaboration with RON SMITH (an expatriated American ex-fan, now resident in Sydney and Assistant Editor of Squire) he has written, and sold under a pseudonym to Analog, three novelettes in a series loosely adapted from Murray Leinster's 'Med Service' stories. This time it's a galactic library service. A more significant achievement is that referred to in our opening paragraph. New Worlds, in their June and July issues this year, have published John's first novel. We're a bit embarrassed about its

title: the American edition is called GODS IN DARKNESS, the English THE GOD KILLERS. We'd be interested to know what John thinks about this; personally, we prefer the American title.

Since only the first half of THE GOD KILLERS is so far available in Australia, we can't comment on it at this stage. However, no matter what the reviewers decide about it, the novel represents a landmark in Australian sf. It is the first major sale by an Australian sf specialist.

John Baxter's writing is in its formative stage. His powers are growing, but it is too early yet to evaluate his contribution to the international field of science fiction. As yet he remains heavily influenced by the commercial American writers, but he has a rich experience of his own to draw upon. His article in the first issue of this magazine revealed his awareness of himself as an Australian writer, and he has - perhaps more than any other local writer to date - attempted in some of his work to say something about Australia. Another interesting element in his work is his penchant for grisly Bloch-like flights of horror. In a Baxter story you can never be sure if the hero will kiss the girl or cut her head off.

John returned to Sydney from the Easter Convention with the avowed intention of turning to full-time writing. He has since been published in The Bulletin and elsewhere, and is now working with the Commonwealth Film Unit. The fact that he writes prolifically in other and equally remunerative fields is heartening, but it is to be hoped that this activity will not diminish his contributions to sf. He has much to offer - more, it would seem, than any other writer currently working in sf in this country - and we predict a great future for him in the field.

* * *

DAMIEN BRODERICK is a writer whose talent is difficult to evaluate. Talent he certainly has, but the market he writes for is not conducive to its development. His first story, THE SEA'S FURTHEST END, appeared in New Writings in SF #1, and he seemed set for a meteoric ascent into the sf Top 40. But something went wrong. His next half-dozen or so stories didn't sell. So he adapted his style and began supplying the local men's magazines with a stream of slick, clever fantasies and borderline sf. A collection of these stories was issued in paperback by Horwitz last year, entitled A MAN RETURNED.

Perhaps he has something up his sleeve. We don't know. But we do feel that if he were to return to writing for the overseas markets, and really let himself swing, he might very well dislodge the competition.

* * *

STEPHEN COOK is better known as the creator of Porous Pasternak, an amiable amorph who infests the Melbourne University's newspaper Farrago. We refer of course to the Pasternak: there is nothing amorphous about Stephen or the two stories he has published to date. The stories are SERPENT IN PARADISE (published under the pseudonym Morris Nagel in New Worlds #122) and LOVE IS A RELATIVE THING (in Science Fantasy #55). These appeared towards the end of 1962. He assures us he has not given up writing sf, and we are glad to hear

that. On the strength of his two stories he appears to have something to offer the field. We hope that he too may have something up his sleeve to startle us with.

* * *

KIT DENTON, a Sydney journalist who has a column in The Australian, had a story called BURNING SPEAR published in F & SF in 1964. And about the same time someone whose name we can't recall sold a story to If. Then an ABC script writer, COLIN FREE, had a solid but derivative short story in Squire, which subsequently found its way into THE WORLD'S FINEST SF FOR 1965, published by Ace Books.

* * *

What comes next? Well, there are a number of people writing that we know about, and no doubt Somewhere Out There are others that we don't. We know of a brilliant young man who has lately been forwarding material to London, and we expect to become very excited about him in due course. No naming names at this stage. And half of this collaboration - the bulkier half - has shown an inclination to write sf; indeed claims to have invented a new medium called 'medieval science fiction', but is too lazy to exploit it.

We have the feeling that in the next few years we will see emerge a number of new names and new reputations, and not all of them will come from fandom. It will take time for would-be writers to absorb this 'new' literature which only began, as far as most Australians are concerned, about 1960.

Science fiction is, of course, still a bit of a joke in Australia. More people are reading it, but there are still plenty of otherwise intelligent folk who haven't got the message. And of course the inevitable multitude who class it indiscriminately with long hair, modern music, non-representational art, anti-war demonstrations, mods, and other deplorable idiocies.

We have our allies. Only a few weeks ago, at a meeting of young booksellers during a weekend conference somewhere pleasant in the Victorian countryside, Dr. Stephen Murray-Smith talked about sf as a worthwhile medium for Australian writers.

Which brings us, in conclusion, to our title...

Science fiction, as we commonly understand the term, is largely an American invention. In recent years writers have emerged who have brought to their work a distinctively national outlook. In Australia, by and large, our writers have written American sf - or if they have set their stories in Australia the backgrounds have been of the same quality cardboard as most characters in sf stories. Please don't misinterpret us: we're not indulging in flag-waving, Australia is not a special place because we live here. But because we live here we have the opportunity - some would say the responsibility - to convey to the rest of the world in our writing something of the feeling of this special place.

Aliens in the spinifex? There are none. Except, perhaps, us.

Postscript:

We now learn that John Baxter's title for his novel, GODS IN DARKNESS, has been discarded by Ace Books. The American edition will be called THE OUT-WORLDERS.

On re-reading our article, we find that we have not perhaps made it clear enough that we are discussing the professional writers, people who have specialised in the science fiction field. We are aware that there are several writers who have ventured into the field from outside at times. Leslie Greener, for example, Neville Shute, and Jack Danvers. These writers may be the subject of a further article at some time.

Select Reading List:

A. Bertram Chandler:	The rim of space.	(Dobson)
	The deep reaches of space.	(Dobson)
(as George Whitley)	All laced up.	(Lambda One - Penguin)
Frank Bryning:	Place of the throwing stick. (Coast to coast, 1961 - Angus & Robertson)	
Lee Harding:	The evidence.	(New Worlds #143)
	The liberators.	(New Writings in SF #5)
	Quest.	(Lambda One - Penguin)
John Baxter:	The god killers.	(New Worlds #163 #164)
	The new country.	(Science Fantasy #64)
	Takeover bid.	(New Writings in SF #5)
	The hands.	(New Writings in SF #6)
	Tryst.	(New Writings in SF #8)
Damien Broderick:	The sea's furthest end.	(New Writings in SF #1)
	A man returned.	(Horwitz)
Stephen Cook:	Love is a relative thing.	(Science Fantasy #55)
(as Morris Nagel)	Serpent in paradise.	(New Worlds #122)

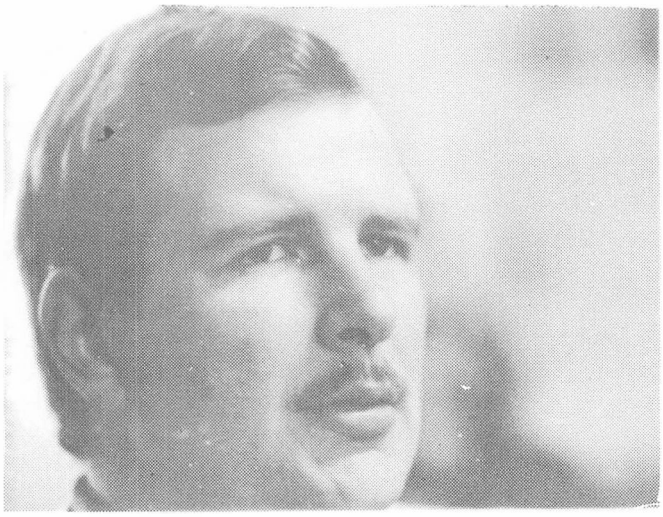
* * *

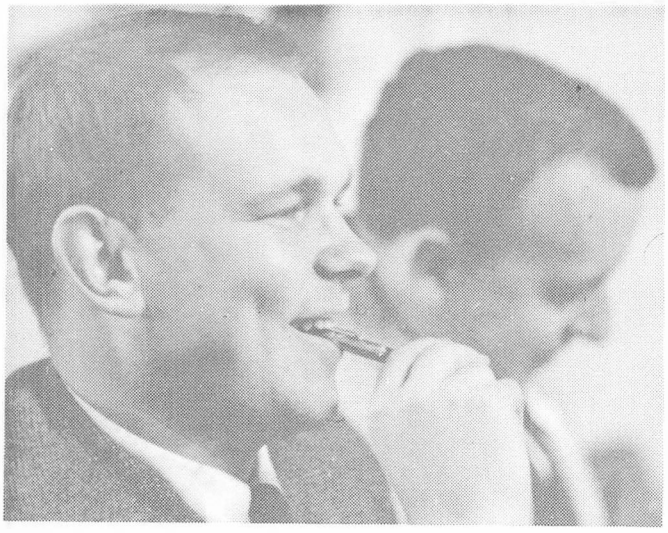
FACES AT THE EASTER CONVENTION

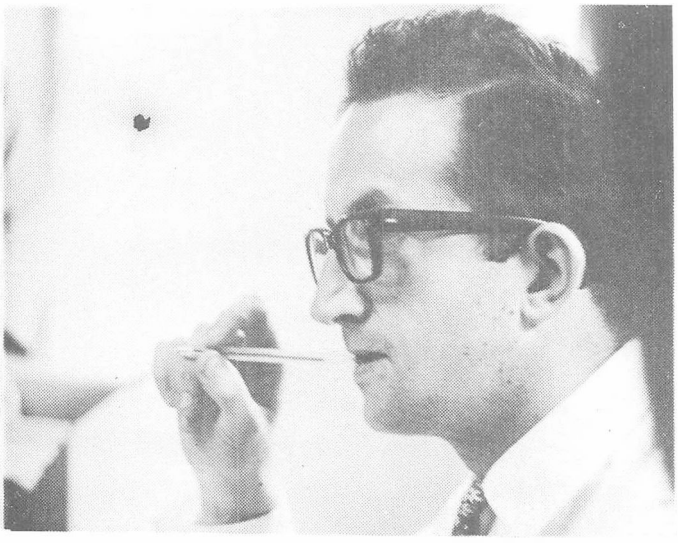
On the following page, reading from left to right, top to bottom, we see:

1. John Bangsund.
2. Dr. Dick Jenssen, auctioneer, with an exquisite painting by Margaret Duce.
3. John Baxter and, behind him, Charles Higham.
4. John Foyster, organiser, secretary, treasurer and chairman.
5. Stephen Cook, Wynne Whiteford and Damien Broderick.
6. Lee and Erik Harding. The beardless one is Erik. Although this photo was not taken at the Convention, we have evidence on tape that both were there.

(Photos by Lee Harding, Dick Jenssen and Carla Harding.)





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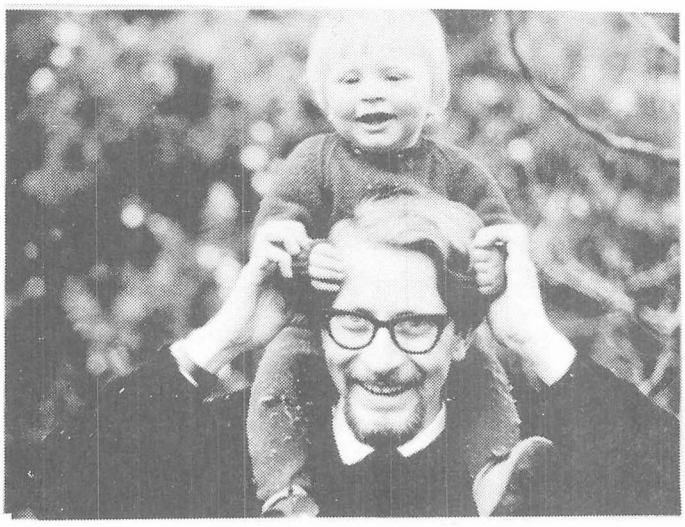

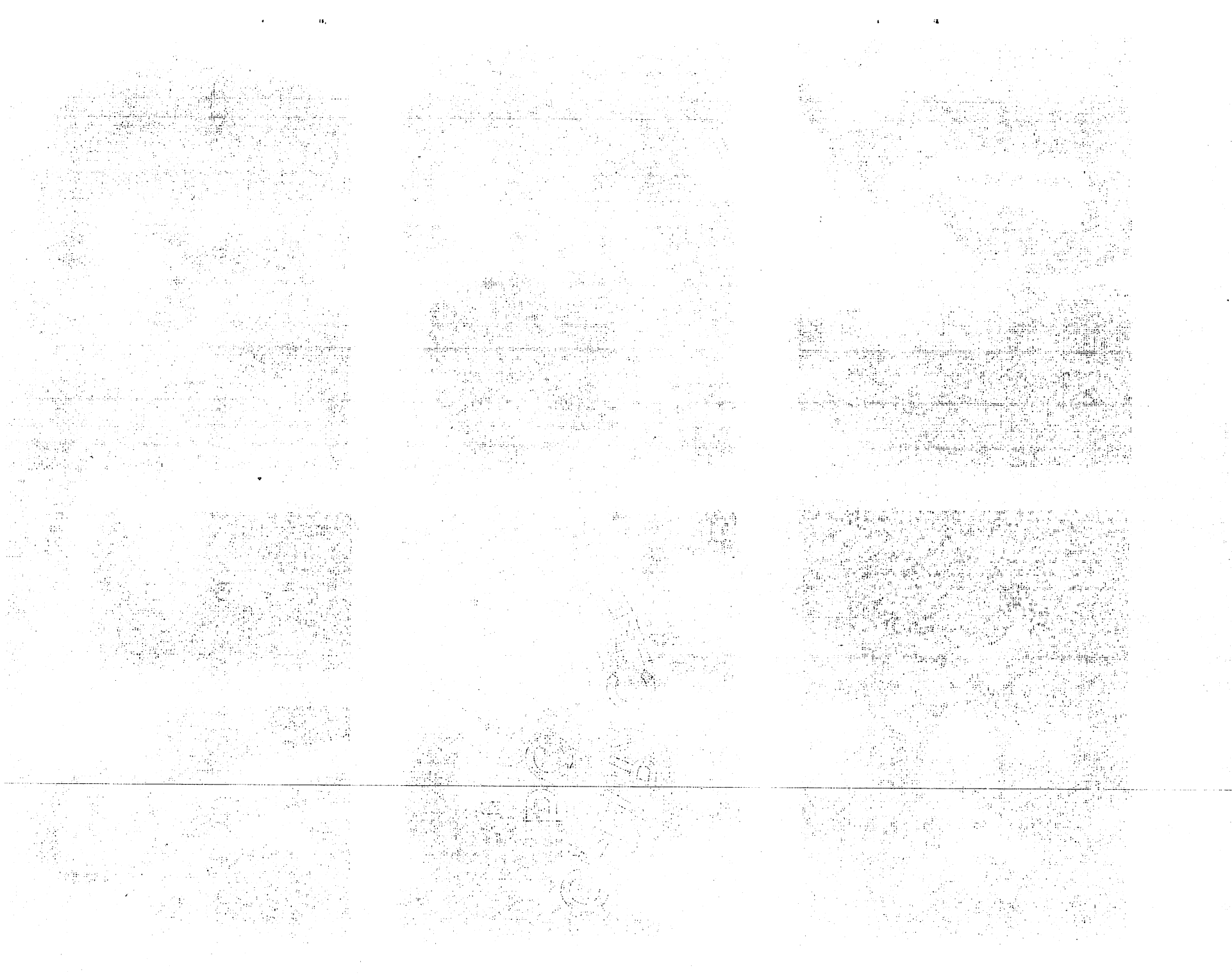

T O R U N T H E R I M

A. B E R T R A M C H A N D L E R

No, I'm not writing the thing a third time. Twice was ample. (The first shorter version appeared in Astounding Science Fiction; the second novel-length version, retitled THE RIM OF SPACE, has been published by Avalon in America and by Dobson in Britain.) But, having been asked to write an article on the Rim Worlds, this title is as good as any.

Once upon a time I could really have spread myself. Once upon a time I was the official chronicler of the Rim Worlds and, I suppose, something of a cartographer as well. (And what's the astronautical equivalent of hydrographer?) But that was before I lost my Rim World citizenship, when my state of mind was such that I just naturally gravitated to the bleak cold edge of the Galaxy and, masochistically, derived a perverse pleasure from living there.

The first Rim World story was Edge of Night, written in January 1958. It sold to Venture - and Venture promptly folded. (Retitled The Man Who Couldn't Stop, the story finally appeared in F & SF.) When I wrote it I didn't realise what I had started - but the idea of the Rim, the last frontier, stuck in my mind, as did the names of the planets, Lorn, Faraway, Ultimo and Thule. Wet Paint followed - it was published in one of the Ziff-Davis magazines - but it wasn't a proper Rim World story, being more concerned with the wet paint gimmick than with the Rim mythology.

It was with To Run The Rim that I really emigrated to the Rim Worlds. I suppose it was, like so much of my stuff, really a disguised sea story. And Rim Runners, too, bear a certain resemblance to my present employers. Just as their ships are officered by refugees from the Interstellar Transport Commission, Trans-Galactic Clippers, the Waverley Royal Mail and so on, so are the vessels of the Union Steam Ship Company officered by refugees from Shaw Savill, Port Line, Royal Mail, and even Cunard White Star. Come to that, some of the Union Company's services are as near Rim Running as dammit. The Strahan trade, for example - with Strahan at one end and Yarraville at the other...

Then came The Outsiders, a follow-up to To Run The Rim, also published in Astounding. The Key followed, and was purchased by Ziff-Davis. And there was Chance Encounter, published both by New Worlds and Satellite. And Rimghost, still unpublished. And To Hell For A Pastime, which appeared in Fantastic Universe. Then, for a while, I got away from the Rim and worked on a series of long novelettes, the IF stories, in which I played around with the ideas of an interstellar drive, utilising the propulsive force of light, and alternative time tracks. Somehow these stories never caught on. Several editors have nibbled at them and then, eventually, turned them down. And there was a run of 'Lost Colony' stories, said lost colonies having been founded by the crews and passengers of gaussjammers, the Ehrenhaft Drive ships, which got themselves

mislaid in space. (The Mannschenn Drive ships, of course, got themselves mislaid in time...) There were a few stories about the Beacon Keepers, the men and women who tended the Carlotti Beacons, the time-twisting radio-direction-finding and communications device which simplified the navigation of the time-jammers and put the unreliable temperamental telepaths, with their dogs' brains in aspic, out of a job. They never sold. And there were a few more stories, combining odd interstellar drives with alternative time tracks, which appeared both in New Worlds and the Ziff-Davis magazines.

But I couldn't keep away from the Rim. In December 1959 I wrote WHEN THE DREAMS DIE. The first version was a 17,500 word novelette. I sent it off to my agent in New York and heard nothing further about it for a while. I wrote a novel, VOYAGE, which my wife said was 'too highbrow for the smut market, too pornographic for the highbrow market, and too lacking in action for the thriller market.' (I fear she was right.) And then, for lack of anything better to do, I turned to a novel-length expansion of To Run The Rim. New incidents were invented and other material borrowed from Rim World stories such as Rimghost and from some of the Lost Colony yarns. And of course the mild pornography expunged by John Campbell was re-inserted, and a bit extra thrown in. The magnum opus finished, it was posted to New York.

Then once again I was out of inspiration, but the novel-writing bug had bitten me. Having heard nothing further about WHEN THE DREAMS DIE, I decided to expand it to novel length. The expansion was coming on nicely when I heard from my agent, who enclosed a photostat copy of a letter from Cele Goldsmith, Ziff-Davis's editor. She liked the story, but... Her main complaint was that it was soap opera rather than space opera. The expansion was brought to a hasty conclusion and sent off. Miss Goldsmith liked it. (It was still soap opera, but I had made the characters a little more credible.)

Suddenly things seemed to be moving quite fast on the literary front. Avalon wanted To Run The Rim still further expanded, and this was done - by way of borrowing rather than inventing. And the last of all the Rim World stories - Bring Back Yesterday - was written. WHEN THE DREAMS DIE suffered its final expansion, and has recently been published by Ace, retitled EMPRESS OF OUTER SPACE.

You may have read Bring Back Yesterday and wonder why I class it as a Rim World story. In the original version it was. The protagonist finished up on the Rim, a drunken Second Mate of one of the Rim Runners' more decrepit interstellar rustbuckets. But Ace Books didn't like the ending - which at the time I thought was the only possible one. However, dollars are dollars, and the majority of wordsmiths are prostitutes at heart, and so... Anyhow, I've decided now that I prefer the revised ending.

Even so, it was the last of the Rim Runner stories. The Galactic Rim was real enough to me when I lived there: it was a state of mind that lasted rather too long for the comfort of myself and those around me. Yet I was lucky enough to be able to make capital of it and, even now, I feel a certain nostalgia for Lorn, Faraway, Ultimo, Thule, and the queer outlandish planets of the Eastern Circuit.

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THE GHOST OF MONSTERS PAST

JOHN BAXTER

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the current intellectual renaissance in science fiction is the degree to which it is dependent on the continued popularity of the straight-plotted and scientifically specious pulp-type story. J.G. Ballard, the St. George who seems heaven-sent to rescue sf from the dragon of mediocrity, is unquestionably a man of considerable intellect, but his stories for the most part rely on an immensely colourful imaginative background for their impact, just as the novels of Merrit, Vance and Kuttner did in the thirties and forties. Brian Aldiss is John Wyndham with a university education - Edgar Pangborn a humanist Poul Anderson - Philip K. Dick a sort of literary Van Vogt. Science fiction has seldom been more interesting than it is today; yet, paradoxically, it has seldom been more derivative, both of other fields and of its own past.

Have we gone wrong somewhere? Is sf headed for some sort of intellectual dead-end or, worse still, for a new meeting with its own tail and a return to the vapid fantasies of Merrit, Burroughs and Rider Haggard? It is possible for the critic to see such a trend in modern sf. On the other hand, it is equally reasonable to read the current fascination with involved but basically simple plots, rich backgrounds, and bizarre names pasted on dull characters, as signs of a growing interest in the stories which made sf popular in the first place - the long novelettes from Planet, Startling, and the other pulps which for the first time illustrated what sf was capable of. It is this attitude which seems to me most reasonable.

There are dissenters. Most of these come from the sociology camp - the people who were stunned by THE SPACE MERCHANTS and haven't thought coherently since. They make up the current popular following of Heinlein, the Analog writers, and authors like Laumer and Schmitz. If the fan press is any indication, they are shortly to attempt a takeover bid on the person of Philip K. Dick, a writer who has left action-sf and is tinkering with the complex plots of Pohl/Kornbluth and Van Vogt. His supporters judge sf not by its style or its approach to ideas, but by its moral tone. It is one thing to have ideas, they seem to say, but if the ideas don't have any relevance to modern problems the story is worthless. Heinlein of course swims in this water very well: his stories are nothing if not moralist. But the very virulence of his recent rightist novels points out the fatal error of the Heinleinist approach to sf. To preach, one must be morally impeccable. Heinlein however is a bigger sinner than any of us.

The roots of this sociological approach lie in the middle fifties. Pohl and Kornbluth are largely responsible for its growth. The enchanting credibility of their Galaxy novels pulled most of us into their camp, at least for a while. There were no other writers of the period who came near

them for sheer accuracy of theme, for the ability to dramatise social conflicts in fiction. Perhaps more influential were the excursions of outside writers into the field. Books like Gore Vidal's MESSIAH and Bernard Wolfe's LIMBO 90 supported the theory that sf could only gain respectability by dealing with serious social questions. The pulp tradition was totally renounced. Style lapsed, backgrounds paled into pastels. Vance, Kuttner, Anderson, pulpsters all, gave up the ghost and went serious.

We are now, I think, seeing a complete reversal of this process. Symptoms of the change are everywhere, but an overall reason is hard to find. If it is true that sf mirrors trends in mainstream fiction, then the change is probably due to the decline of the serious novel and the extension into literature of mass-media standards. Many modern novels have some of the immediacy of television, the brilliant imagery of the cinema, the garish appeal of pop art. Science fiction is ideally suited to respond to this stimulus. It has always - let us be honest - been a vulgar field; its vulgarity in fact is its greatest asset. Society and its literature have given us the green light to return to our origins, and the really progressive writers are responding.

It may seem perverse to describe Ballard as a pulp-type writer, but the portentous nonsense written about him and about other new writers in the field has blinded many people to the basis of their talent. Ballard, more than most other writers, knows what makes for colourful sf. His backgrounds are rich, varied, often physically impossible, but always striking. The same was true of Jack Vance's novels for Planet. His plots are not plots in the real sense of the word. Like the plan for a piece of serial music, it is possible to begin reading them at any place and work either forwards or backwards without losing sense. L. Ron Hubbard is often the same. TERMINAL BEACH especially illustrates the idea-less anarchy of Ballard's approach with its total reliance on a series of rich images to sustain interest. His work is closer to Antonioni's films or Tanguy's paintings than it is to modern literature, but its background comes direct from the dream worlds of Thrilling Wonder Stories.

Ballard's response to the sf tradition is one possible reaction out of many. There are others. Brian Aldiss has taken a great deal from mainstream writers of his and earlier generations - Huxley, Waugh, Burgess, Powell - but his roots lie deep in the compelling if pedestrian work of Wells and, perhaps more influential, John Wyndham. GREYBEARD is an intellectual's response to the challenge of the End-Of-The-World theme, an old pulp stand-by, just as Ballard's THE WIND FROM NOWHERE is that of a surrealist, and Wyndham's THE KRAKEN WAKES that of a humanist. Each response is personal and different, but the stimulus has been around in sf since the turn of the century.

Perhaps there are some basic sf themes which have the same infinite richness and fathomless complexity that make the stories of Oedipus and Orpheus such gold-mines for the poet and serious novelist. The indications are that no matter how far sf writers try to diverge from the basic plots they always return to them. Critics and writers deny it vehemently: one can see why. The ghost of Startling Stories haunts even the poet in his ivory tower, reminding him of the days when those basic myths first found concrete form and became established in the public mind. It is not to be wondered at that it makes him jumpy.

A D R I F T   I N   T H E   C R Y P T O Z O I C

B R I A N   A L D I S S

Quote Anderson & Filler
Quote Atheling
A good wine needs no bush.

This article, being written at a moment of disillusion, is probably ill-advised. So I address it only to other writers, Lee, John, et al, who will sympathise.

I am writing a novel, my first since GREYBEARD in 1963 (for I don't count EARTHWORKS, which was simply an extension of a novelette written some while before.) The omens seemed to be set fair for this one. The theme is not well-trodden; indeed, I would say it was pretty original as themes go these days; and, even better, I have mulled it over for a long time and let it gather body in whatever obscure cellar the wines of imagination mature. The characters seemed clear in my head, particularly the central figure, Bush, who is an artist in the depths of an uncreative period after some years when his name was well-known. He is by no means the typical hero of an sf novel. Then the girl chiefly involved with him, Ann, interested me a lot. She's a dirty, scruffy character, not much of a looker, untrustworthy, but good in bed and sharp as a knife.

I really enjoyed writing about these two people and their goings on. The result is more fornication and beating up than I generally allow myself, but no more than necessary.

But something has gone wrong. The situation at present is this. I have a title for the book; it was UNDERMIND, currently it's THE WALKERS OF THE CRYPTOZOIC. I have written the first draft, some 50,000 words. Now I'm doing the second. In fact, I have done the first three chapters, rewriting painstakingly where necessary. And it feels as if I am putting cosmetics on a corpse to try and make it look like a living thing. I'm bogged down. The thing doesn't live.

It's possible, even probable, that I can take care of that when I have gone through the whole thing again. It is possible that the way I feel at present is not so much the result of shrewd judgement as a simple failure of confidence. All writers will surely know what I mean there. Always during the writing of a novel comes the time when you groan and die and know you should have a more congenial job, like muck-shifting or road-mending.

The trouble is partly in my way of working, although I can work no other way. I write my novels slowly and carefully, doing as well as I can (although knowing extensive revision will most likely be needed later), and never look back at what I have written until the end. In this fashion I am carried along not only by the interest of planning the next paragraph, revealing what comes next and so on, but with the feeling of contentment for the

wonder of what I have already written; the past supports me, as well as the future. The let-down comes when I have finished that draft and go back. The wonder has evaporated!

There on the page lie poor limping words, only words. It's the old trouble: of all that was in my head, only ten per cent has leaked through on to the paper. The chunks of fine writing lie like pools of mud, while the rest is too thin for words; the characters are inarticulate; an air of stale contrivance hangs over all.

A further difficulty presents itself with CRYPTOZOIC. I'm a critic as well as a story-teller, and the one gets in the way of the other. I shall never be a 'born story-teller' for this reason (and if any ignoble reader thinks this article is a camouflaged attempt to boost my own wares, let him now get stuffed, for I have never said anything so appalling about myself in print before!) I have theories. One theory I had was that the aura of tiredness which hangs over much contemporary sf is caused by us writers clinging to the notion of a closed, over-plotted novel - an idea taken over, I suppose, from the thrillers and detective novels of the thirties. I thought, Get away from that, write an open-ended novel that relies more on delights, surprises, conceits, characters' sensations, and so on, rather than plot twists, and you should have something fresh.

Here I sit with the results of my theory on my hands: a novel that does not even begin till half-way through. The plot commenced on page eighty and is shot by about page one-thirty-five!

This may only mean that I should have had the courage of my convictions and have abandoned plot altogether. What seems more likely is that my type of writing is most suitably supported by the structuring a plot gives, though I believe I need an endo-skeleton rather than an exo-skeleton that encases the whole thing. (To illustrate: EARTHWORKS was all exo-skeleton, concealed by a few frills; GREYBEARD was endo-skeleton - in fact, the passing of time carried much of the burden of plot.) This is the way you learn; <u>next</u> novel, I should have the plot proportions right, only to have something else go awry!

Anyhow, here we are with the first three chapters. Not only have they no forward momentum, but each seems disconnected from the other. And I know there is worse to come. And yet, the trouble is that I have saddled myself with this structure because in fact the meaning of the book demands this sort of fragmentation. I can see that what should hold it together despite all this is the interest in Bush, who sails through it all in his own way, snapping and being snapped at, suffering and hoping. But unfortunately, Bush too has to change considerably (since another tiresome belief of mine is that a novel is not a novel unless its characters are seen to alter and develop). He falls in love, has a punch-up, hobnobs with his old father, gets conscripted into a private army, goes off on a sulk to a private corner of the world. He makes it very difficult for a writer.

I have handicapped myself further by trying to demonstrate, inter alia, that the art of every age must reflect that age. Bush being an artist, there is a fair bit of material about the art of his future age (end of next century). I became very engrossed inventing it first time round, but now that I'm

correcting I ask myself if readers will be particularly interested - and once you let that sort of cold wind blow in from outside you are done. It's the critic and the story-teller struggling for the upper hand again.

Well, some bits of the future you can predict. I predict that having blown off steam with this article, I shall return to CRYPTOZOIC and plod slowly through it, improving it as I go along, and then, when I reach the end, feel strong enough to heave the beginning into a better structure. I shall be encouraged on my way by the thought that the last few chapters are utterly terrific, amazing, transcendental. I should have written them in verse rather than prose (now there's an idea). And I just hope they won't seem too lame when I reach them.

A few paragraphs back, I mentioned the meaning of the book. I hope CRYPTOZOIC has a meaning; I think you get to it the way you get to the heart of an onion, by peeling off layer after layer. With that analogy in mind, I hope to repair the sad thing I have on my hands at the moment. I must get it into working order, because I still feel I have something potentially great on my hands, the theme of which (I will not be more specific) stands all human life upside down to reveal its god-like nature.

Working order... That at least is not beyond me. But I see I have here another case of the writer's old trouble. You begin with a masterpiece; you write it down; you are left with something merely - marketable...

* * *

S I C I L Y, A F T E R

A fire of orchard woods, of plum for heat,
Apple for sweet smoke, fractured limb of quince
And twisted olive; stony grounded goats
Above the house and evening cooking smells.
A heavy cartwheel, decorated once,
Fallen in rank weed; one late, bird pecked fig,
Purple blue and fat, falls by a window
Into a broken crock which holds some rain
In which three leaves float. One late scratching hen
Peers at the yard floor in the deeper shade;
Roasting meat, smelt thickly in still air,
Contracts the stomach, while within the house
The southward migrants, seated on the floor,
Tear at the meat with nuclear branded hands.

R. D. S Y M O N S

T H E C O S M O L O G I C A L E Y E

the death of dr. kildare

L E E H A R D I N G

A pox upon all labellers! Are we never to escape such well-meaning fiends? Why, the very month these pages report Keith Roberts's grumblings about editors who seek to 'pigeon-hole the infinite' we find his Chief, Harry Harrison, bursting into print in the editorial pages of Impulse with an offer of a year's free subscription for the first reader to come up with a new and fresh term to replace the archaic 'science fiction.'

There's been a lot of dust kicked up about this problem for a number of years, this necessity to find a more suitable label than the one we grew up with. But is it really all that important? One label's as bad as the next, and if some bright charlie does come up with a nice portentous phrase we'll probably be scrambling like mad to escape from it a decade or so hence. But only magazine editors seem unduly concerned about this matter. Publishers have accepted the term 'sf' to denote a particular product; so has the public. Why mess about with different labels? If we mean something more by 'sf' than the publishers and the public understand, let's not change the name to accomodate them - let them catch up.

Harry's also been noisy lately about the need for stronger characterisation in sf - and in Impulse no.4 even goes so far as to exhort all sf writers to read nothing but 'mainstream' fiction (another label) for a year before they write another sf story. A few years ago he was advising aspiring writers to read 'nothing but sf,' not to crib but to 'study the market.' Times have changed, I guess, and some of us have become more sensitive than ever to the growing status of sf. A few years ago, feeling the sf field in general to be in the doldrums, and fearing impending gafia*, I did just what Harry now advises - I read nothing but 'mainstream' writing for almost a year. And I've not written an sf story since.

At the Easter Convention here in Melbourne my good friend John Baxter took time out to pillory me for my defection, holding that two short magazine stories in two years was hardly representative of the Grand Old Man of the current generation of Australian sf writers, and implied that I was dodging some sort of issue by deserting the scene of my former triumphs for fields of creativity he thought hardly worthy of my singular talent.

Now I can't recall exactly what my excuses were - I do know that one is apt to put forward some rather hasty and only half-considered opinions at these informal functions (and I have taped evidence to prove it!) - but I do remember

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* Gafia: a disease peculiar to sf addicts too long exposed to the medium; takes its name from the term getting-away-from-it-all; various symptoms, including reading mysteries, Greek tragedies, &c., amateur theatricals, having children, &c.

feeling that an Authors' Panel seemed hardly the occasion to announce that my brief honeymoon with the writing of a simple form of sf narrative had been over for some time; that, quite frankly, I couldn't see much hope of my returning to the field with a style I had found uncomfortable and restrictive - but which I had so far been unable to replace with anything better.

We like to kid ourselves and our critics that sf is a more difficult medium than other contemporary forms of fiction since we have to create our own imaginary backgrounds to our fanciful stories - and, more often than not, it is the backgrounds that we're primarily concerned with, not the people involved. (Usually about this point we hold up Hal Clement's MISSION OF GRAVITY as a Good Example, and Robert Heinlein as the Master Of The Integrated Background.) Now I'm not so sure that this is necessarily true. It seems to me that it is much easier to write about things than about people, about vast concepts than about the complexities of human relationships. If one of the distinguishing accomplishments of the better sf writer is his ability to create drama out of inanimate objects and metaphysical abstracts, then these very qualities would seem to inhibit his chances of success in any other field. The more one wishes to write about human beings and their problems, the less attractive becomes the sf medium. Although I still remain unconvinced that characterisation is all that important in sf, I nevertheless find the most satisfying writing in those stories wherein the scientific background has been plausibly allied to the people in the foreground.

The best examples of this kind of writing are Brian Aldiss's Circulation of the Blood, the recent novelettes of Roger Zelazny, just about anything by J.G. Ballard - but particularly THE CRYSTAL WORLD - and Edgar Pangborn's DAVY. To this short list I will add another new and, I think, significant title later on in this article.

I would like to stress that all this is a personal attitude and I have no intention of forcing it down anyone's throat. Harry Harrison, being an editor, is in the position to impose his views on his writers and, obliquely I suppose, on his readers as well. If he thinks that more and better characterisation will save sf from the yawning pit, then he's entitled to his opinion. But I think that the most that can be expected of any writer is for him to ignore individual editorial platforms and just try to write better. And if Harry believes that sf writers can improve themselves by reading 'nothing but mainstream' for twelve months, then good luck to him. But look what happened to me...

On my bookshelf stands a neat row of Nova magazines and odd paperbacks, wherein rest the products of my first try at writing magazine sf. All are a source of acute embarrassment. When stripped of their adolescent day-dreaming and tepid sense of wonderment they are woefully inadequate pieces of fiction, yet they were well-liked when they originally appeared. But they'll hardly stand up to re-reading a decade from now. The stories in, say, SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL, will. Not simply because Aldiss is such an immeasurably better writer, but because his knowledge of character and his observation of people is integrated so well into even those early stories, whereas Harding's metaphysical abstracts have nothing to offer other than novelty.

In the last two years my concept of writing has changed considerably,

and I can no longer write in my old style. That I've probably done more thinking about my change of attitude than any concrete work on the matter is what, I imagine, prompted John Baxter's concern. The fact that I attempted to dramatise my dilemma in The Liberators seems to have escaped notice; having done so I have yet to find the fresh direction my writing needs to recover.

In short, an enforced absence from the field made me aware of my limitations. And I didn't like them at all. And because writing is for me an avocation and not a professional necessity, it seemed a good idea to rest a while and think things over. After all, mine wouldn't be the first name to disappear unsung from the New Worlds contents page: whatever happened to F.G. Rayer, Alan Barclay and John Ashcroft, to name but a few? And if the legendary Charles Harness has just returned to the field after a ten-year absence, perhaps there is hope yet for Harding's brief candle.

Happily, not all of us become so disgruntled. Some have learned to accept limitations and to write consistently well within them. James White is one of them.

* * *

JAMES WHITE is a Carnell-nurtured writer whose first published story is more than fourteen years old. Most of his fiction has been published in the British magazines, although recent years have seen his novel-length works appearing regularly in American paperbacks, and a whole clutch of his early stories have been collected in two volumes by Ballantine.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of White's work has been a stylistic consistency which has remained for more than a decade. His closest parallel is the American veteran Murray Leinster; both belong to that increasingly rare breed, the writer of 'hard' sf. Nearly all of White's stories have been well-plotted around a neat scientific gimmick. Characterisation has always been clean if primitive. With White the story has always been the thing, and while he has never been able to muster more than a competent manner of story-telling his fiction, at least in the heyday of Carnell's New Worlds, was always well received for its ingenuity if not for its poetic splendour.

Science fiction has changed a lot in the past decade and, as I mentioned, a number of writers have vanished without trace. Why has White remained popular when many of his contemporaries have withered away? Well, for one thing, he has been prolific. Most of his output has been in the ten to twenty thousand word category, and readers always seem to have a weakness for this length. And for another, there has been his great success with a series of stories built around a sort of Galactic Dr. Kildare who runs a gigantic interstellar hospital 'somewhere out on the galactic rim.' I've lost count of the number of novelettes White has written around the Sector General idea, but Ballantine have already published the best of them under the title of HOSPITAL STATION, and the one novel in the series - FIELD HOSPITAL - was serialised in New Worlds before being published by Ballantine (as STAR SURGEON), so the series must be called a distinct success.

The trouble with series stories is that they either run out of ideas and become stale and uninspired, or they place an increasing strain on the author's

inventiveness - or, worst of all, they keep him occupied in a rut when he could be exploring his talent elsewhere. I lost interest in the Sector General long before FIELD HOSPITAL began plodding its weary course through the pages of New Worlds. I can take so much of this Emergency-Ward-10-in-outer-space... But many readers still enjoy them and Carnell has comissioned the first of a new series of the stories for New Writings. The first of these has already appeared in Volume 8. I didn't read it. It is the 'other' James White I wish to bring to your attention.

THE WATCH BELOW (Whiting & Wheaton, U.K.) is White's latest novel, and his first in hard covers. It is the most original sf novel I've come across for ages - and also the most distressing and frustrating book I've ever read.

Brian Aldiss has mentioned that the images produced in some sf stories have a way of outlasting the often crude pulp writing, and the images supplied by White in this remarkable little book are certainly enough to make one think - to use a much-abused but applicable phrase - and to keep one thinking for some time. I couldn't get the book out of my mind for several weeks. But I was as much preoccupied with what White had neglected to say as with what he had said.

THE WATCH BELOW is great in concept but only conventional in treatment, and only marginally better written than White's previous books. He is a writer steeped in the magazine tradition of the forties - and John Campbell's magazine in particular. His straight narrative, his penchant for understatement, too often rob his fiction of vital dramatic sense. Characters and story proceed on the one dynamic level throughout. The result may be pleasant, but hardly calculated to lift you out of your seat. But here he has taken his theme and, working carefully within the limitations of his style, has managed to produce what I think is the most important book to come from a British writer since Ballard's DROWNED WORLD. THE WATCH BELOW boasts no radical innovations in this age of inner space: no tricks, no gimmicks, no aggressive characterisations or verbal pyrotechnics. It is a powerful tale extremely well told. And yet it fails. White may have achieved what he set out to do, but what he has left undone stops the book from being great. But let's look at what we have:

Two plots for the price of one - and both necessary if White is to make his philosophical point. Two groups of people - because it is they who tell the stories. The first group is human - trapped in a sunken tanker and doomed to live out their lives beneath the waves in a rigid ecological cycle set up and maintained by the original Five. The second group is alien - en route to Earth from a distant galaxy on a voyage of many generations. (This is Heinlein's UNIVERSE twisted with a vengeance...) Both groups share a common plight - their lives are sealed up for the duration.

The early chapters concerning the sinking of the tanker and the beginnings of the strange life for the survivors are engrossing. It is only when the story begins to whip back and forth between the troubles that beset them and the troubles that beset the aliens that the book begins to go to pieces. There is just too much to be told. Generations are born, live briefly, and give way to the next, within the space of a few short pages. Preoccupied with the grand design of his story, White has lost sight of the vast allegory within his grasp - the real horror of people forced to live in such an appalling way - and he has been understandably eager to have his travellers reach their destination so

that he can prove his Point. Fair enough. Perhaps it's the old problem again - you start out with a cathedral and end up with a mud hut. White knows his limitations and has written within them, but just this once I find myself wishing he had pulled the stops out a little, risked a few pitfalls here and there, and perhaps produced a really great narrative of human endurance.

Just what has haunted me about this book you must read it yourself to find out. I have hinted at enough here to indicate what awaits you. For all my cavilling at what it might have been, you will find it much better reading than most of the sf you buy. And I recommend that you read it at one sitting to experience the full impact of his images. That shouldn't be difficult: it's a very short novel - which, of course, is one of my complaints.

Another complaint is that his humans are a little too good to be true. Their problems are solved with the very minimum of strife and disagreement - they are the very model of the school of British upperlipmanship I had begun to despair had disappeared for ever. They give us the feeling that things have gone a little too smoothly. But this comes after. After the book has been read and the incredible images begin to distil in one's mind.

I am reminded again of a quality in White's work which I had almost forgotten; it is so long since one of his stories appeared. And this is his optimism. I thank him for it. It is worlds away from the virulent pessimism of my next book:

* * *

Thomas Disch's THE GENOCIDES (Berkley, U.S.A.) has been extravagantly praised by Judith Merril in the June 1966 Fantasy & Science Fiction. Mr. Disch is a new writer. The publishers give no clue to his age. This is his first novel. Some of my own early stories were concerned with the futility of the human condition, but I have never read a work of sf so hopelessly downbeat as this one. Evil is always conveniently at hand; the good not easily come by. To a writer the latter provides a challenge and the worthier cause. Recently sf has managed to exchange the pessimism of the bomb-scared fifties for a more bland attitude. In the face of this trend Disch seems a throwback to a cheerless age when the world seemed about to end at any moment.

His style may be superior to James White's, his novel a better work of fiction, his characterisation more vivid, his plot better dramatised - but he has chosen to record for us human degradation under stress, and this in itself is sufficiently violent to draw out the dark ichor in any writer's blood. White, on the other hand, has given himself a more difficult task - that of exploring the essential dignity of man under similar nightmarish conditions - and in his careful, competent way has made our lives a little better for his effort. Thomas Disch has a right to his own personal philosophy, but it seems such a miserable waste of time and effort to spend six or twelve months writing a book and not find one damn thing worthwhile about the human race. Do you really think, Mr. Disch, that we are only worms? And if so, why waste your talent on such an unworthy task as you have set yourself here? Why bother to write this book at all if you have nothing else to say?

Ideally, no good book records only the all-bad side of human nature, or

the all-good. Surely the truth lies somewhere in between - where most people are. Perhaps Disch will outgrow his misanthropy and give us something really worth reading: he can certainly write very well. For the moment I prefer the gentle images of James White, rough-tinged with tragedy as they are. They provide hope - and for that I sincerely thank him.

* * *

Reverting, THE WATCH BELOW marks a significant departure in the work of James White. Here he demonstrates a dependency on the people in his narrative which goes far beyond anything in his previous stories. Dare I hope that he has finally shaken off the restrictions of his apprenticeship, Dr. Kildare and all? I certainly hope so. And I look forward anxiously to his next novel.

THE WATCH BELOW, like all the important novels of the last few years, depends on good characterisation as well as a finely imagined background for its success. And this seems to be the upgrade trend of all good sf at the moment.

Which is just about where you, and Harry Harrison, came in.

* * *

'ALIEN WORLDS' - A NEW MAGAZINE — J.G. Maxwell

It is, let's be frank, an overgrown fanzine. It's a standard size magazine of 64 pages, printed photo-offset - a process with some advantages others don't have, such as colour illustrations. Apart from the cover, six pages have colour, five of them full colour - not at all like the single colour illustrations which have appeared in various magazines. And these are not by amateurs, though the artists are fans. The artwork is in fact far better than some which appears in American magazines. And Harry Harrison and Kenneth Bulmer are not exactly unknown writers. Stories by these two appear, together with one by John Ramsey Campbell, fairly well known in fantasy circles. There's also a book review column and articles on three movies, well illustrated with photographs. The movies are 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, ONE MILLION YEARS B.C., and, retrospectively, FLASH GORDON. In all some eleven stills.

I think ALIEN WORLDS could be successful. It's cheaper than other sf magazines. The colour and film articles will appeal to a large audience, a predominantly juvenile one perhaps, but a large audience - which will have the forty or so cents the magazine will cost in Australia.

Only one thing will hold editors Partington and Nadler back - an old problem which has troubled so many sf magazines: distribution. All that supporters of the magazine can do is buy it.

Now it won't reach Australia at all for a few months. My copy came by airmail. But you could order a copy from Mervyn Binns at McGill's - the address is in this issue - or your usual suppliers, if they're on the ball. Considering what you spend on sf which you don't really enjoy, you haven't much to lose, have you? And you just might like this; I do. And you can help a promising magazine get a good start.

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R E V I E W S

JOHN FOYSTER, JOHN BANGSUND, ALAN REYNARD, K.U.F. WIDDERSHINS

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A. BERTRAM CHANDLER: GLORY PLANET (Avalon)

GLORY PLANET makes quite plain just why Chandler is the great writer of sf he is. It parades most of his virtues, at the same time revealing none of his (few) weaknesses.

The story line in a Chandler novel, or short, is always fairly simple and direct. Basically he writes stories of adventure, and at this he is perhaps the most skilled practitioner in the sf field. He writes about circumstances he understands, so that this novel for example, set on a panthalassan Venus (almost) has the reality which only an experienced seaman and lover of the sea could give to a novel. Chandler's characters, though not always outstanding, are solid types, never very intellectual, but consistent and appealing to the reader. There's no character in this book who didn't interest me intensely.

But there are weaknesses in the Chandler makeup, as there are weaknesses in all writers. Chandler is not an adjective man (in the best modernist manner) and sometimes this makes his narratives sparse, two dimensional. But he does achieve considerable colouration by his skillful interplay of character. I can't recall a really intellectual Chandler character, but they are rare in sf, so it probably doesn't matter.

Perhaps the most obvious thing one could say, and in some ways the most descriptive at the same time, would be that Bert Chandler's current work would have fitted very well into the better issues of Startling Stories.

Now GLORY PLANET suffers from the defect of most Avalon books - it must be 190 pages or bust. In this case it is both. The story has bust and half of it washed down the river with the SYLVIA PANKHURST and the EVE CURIE. Pieces have been cut from the story at random, and the reader will find that in places the plot is somewhat hard to follow. But it must be clearly understood that this is the fault of the editors, not of the writer.

Perhaps the best thing that one can say about GLORY PLANET is that it was hard to put down. In days such as these, surrounded as we are by lacklustre novels by the nonentities of yesteryear, it is refreshing to come across a genuinely appealing story. There's no intellectual hogwash about the nature of reality, on a level which would be boring to an 8-year-old child (with due apologies to Moorcock and Dick, one must try to be serious about such matters), no political ideology (dating back to years B.C., as in the case of Heinlein), nor sexual irregularity (dating somewhat further back again, courtesy once more Heinlein), nor to the dark side of reality (courtesy Charles Harness and that old fraud, John W. Campbell). Chandler tells a story, dammit, and nothing gets

in his way. Of course he thinks about his future before he writes the story, but it never intrudes.

GLORY PLANET reveals a world in which women have taken over Earth, with just the consequences that a misogynist might expect. On Venus the colonists are ruled by medieval methods which come into conflict with those of Earth. The superiority of the medievals is made clear by the action of this story. It's told in the first person, but this is handled very well.

Buy it, under any title.

(J.F.)

DAMIEN BRODERICK: A MAN RETURNED (Horwitz)

Damien Broderick's collection of short stories not only gives him an important first, in that this is the first such collection published in Australia, but also reveals a great deal about Damien himself.

Those who know Damien fairly well, and I refer here to those who know him from their mutual interest in sf, consider him to be a man of considerable talent. They also consider that this positive mine of ability is not being worked at all efficiently. It is possible even to consider, on the evidence available, that Broderick is almost the ultimate hack, a writer who turns out a story only when he needs money, caring little for the quality of his yarn, only for its saleability. (The story goes that Damien was once in Sydney on a brief trip and managed to crack up his car. He had to get it repaired for the journey back to Melbourne, but didn't have the money. So he sat down and wrote a story which he sold next morning to Everybody's for twenty quid.) This idea, as it happens, is only a half-truth.

Certainly, for Broderick, selling is important. He definitely needs money most of the time and cannot wait for the slow answering and paying market overseas. He can be well paid for his locally-published material. Therefore there is often a rushed quality about his work, which might not be present if he had more time. But there's another factor, too. Damien grew up in the same town as John Baxter, or at least lived there for some time. The two of them did not, it seems to me, click as well as they might have, though as acquaintances they got on quite well. This was possibly because of a slight similarity in their characters: both have had similar experiences with religion, both are very much individuals. Now it seems to me that back in the early days Damien was treated very much as the junior partner. Which was probably quite reasonable. But now he is trying to get ahead. I'm sure that John Baxter has put down Damien's stories, as I have myself. I can recall saying quite unpleasant things about a plot outline which Damien showed me in 1961. But now he is competing. He can say - look, look what I've done. Yet he is afraid to write at his best because here he may not measure up to John Baxter when the latter is at his best. As I have suggested this is mostly supposition, but must be considered. The writers in Australia who sell consistently are a close-knit bunch, and one of the most obvious reasons for Lee Harding's lack of production in recent years would be his temporary disaffiliation with John Baxter. They're an incestuous little group.

So we might find two simple motives for Broderick's present writing - he

needs money and he needs to feel secure amongst other writers. But he is more complex than this. He is obsessed with words, as no other Australian sf writer is. Chandler, Baxter, Harding - all have limited vocabularies and make no effort to create verbal pyrotechnics on the printed page. Broderick is always searching for the right word, the attention-grabbing word. This constant struggle for expression often overcomes any other motivation.

These three causes of Damien Broderick have a fairly obvious result. Other writers, less pressed by money matters, secure in their own reputations, can write within their own limitations, exploring the wealth of their own minds, giving attention to the development of a limited style. Broderick, pressed by external and internal needs and desires, scatters his words over the page in a frantic attempt to capture the scene, the object. The style he uses does resemble, in some ways, that of the purple pulp writers of the past, but at the same time owes something to better writers, It owes something to the over-rich writers, unfortunately, rather than to those who choose their words with great care. For the terrible thing is that his words are so often wrong.

> 'Ackroyd crawled on the rock, transfixed like a fly under the baleful stars.'
> 'The drums were wailing their wild monotonous beat into the hot air outside the roofed palisade.'
> 'The thick smell of the ship had been in McNaughton's nostrils so long he hardly noticed it.'
> 'She was beautiful, in the fleeting light when he could glimpse her face.'
> 'The city was a filigree of light and shade, a leaping cadence of whiteness, a dream of gentle towering strength and the deep of quiet darkness.'

These sentences have been chosen from a rather limited field - they are all opening sentences of Broderick stories. And there are only twelve stories in the collection. I have chosen from this set deliberately so that the problem of context will be minimal. Had I chosen sentences from the midst of stories I could have selected many more examples, most of them more maladroit than these. His words are simply out of place, poorly chosen. The impression that Broderick gives both here and in his story for New Writings is of an illiterate child who has gotten hold of a thesaurus. He rings the changes on words, playing with them, often quite obviously meaning something other than that which he has written, piling incongruity upon absurdity. The result is that his stories, in this collection, are far from pleasant reading.

But this is due to a large extent to the markets for which he writes. If Damien is to refine his prose, to press towards the things he desires so ardently, he must work in a more realistic manner; he must discipline himself. While he writes for local markets it is possible to get away with the most execrable style. But overseas the story would be rather different.

Damien piles words upon each other, trying to create a cage from which the image cannot escape. But Ezra Pound and others would not like these stories - Damien fails so miserably.

But please buy this book, if you can find a copy. You will have purchased

the first work of a writer who could become a great talent. And hope, with me, that Damien finds the discipline which he must have - the discipline which will make him the great writer he so desperately wants to become.

(J.F.)

BRIAN ALDISS: THE SALIVA TREE, AND OTHER STRANGE GROWTHS (Faber)

I have a photographic memory. If you could see the photos I take you would know what I mean: most of them blurred, under- over- or double-exposed - and now and then a clear picture. Unlike my fellow reviewers I can read a story today and this time next week I've forgotten perhaps everything about it except the images and emotions it evoked in the reading.

Now when I was about twelve, my father (a good man, who not only did good things but read good things) told me I should read H.G. Wells, and - I'm not sure how typical this sort of thing is - I steadfastly refused to do so for several years, simply because he insisted. Eventually he gave up, and I started reading Wells with enthusiasm. In the space of a year or so, when I was about fifteen, I think I read just about everything he ever wrote - including such momentously influential books for a young mind as GOD THE INVISIBLE KING.

And now I have little more than a few names, incidents, mental pictures, atmospheres, to show for my reading of Wells. So much has gurgled through the capacious plug-hole of my mind. I recall reading THE BULPINGTON OF BLUP, THE KING WHO WAS A KING, MR. BLETTWORTHY ON RAMPOLE ISLAND - and apart from the titles can't remember a thing about them.

All this by way of introduction and apology, since I have it on good authority that Brian Aldiss uses in THE SALIVA TREE - the novelette which is the major work in the collection under review - many of Wells's plots and gimmicks, and that an awareness of these gives the story an additional dimension as a tour de force of literary allusion. Or gigantic in-joke. It is a writer's story, as the SF Writers Of America must have recognised when they awarded it a joint First Prize. However it is much more than a brilliant piece of esotericism: it's a darn good story.

It is written in an Edwardian style which, on the whole, sounds authentic. It may take a few pages to get into the swing of it, but from there on the period style becomes quite natural and the reader soon finds himself swept away with the story. In a way, the atmosphere of terror is heightened by the style. Truly memorable scenes of horror are scored even more vividly on the mind by the cool dignified prose in which they are couched...

> 'We stood staring at the water for an instant, and then with common accord ran back to Grubby. He was dead. He lay face up and was no longer recognizable. The Aurigan must have struck him with its poisoned fangs as soon as he attacked. Grubby's skin was stretched tight and glistened oddly. He had turned a dull crimson. All his internal substance had been transformed to liquid by the rapid-working venoms of the Aurigan; he was like a sort of giant man-shaped rotten haggis.'

There are two scenes which for sheer terror surpass anything I've read lately.

In one, Gregory (the protagonist) and his associates have laid a trap designed to render an invisible alien visible. They are successful - so successful that the alien comes leaping out of the page at you, shocking you at least as much as it shocked the erstwhile trappers. The other scene concerns Gregory's rescue of his sweetheart from a ghastly fate in a sty full of gigantic swine.

The story has a moral. Gregory's head is full of those idealistic 'progressive' views which led Europe blindly into two wars, and which led Wells himself to the tragic bewilderment of his later years. These views take a frightful battering when they have to somehow account for the aliens' thoughtless vicious inhuman behaviour. At one stage, Gregory's mind is

> '...overpowered with a vast diseased vision of the universe, where such races as dealt in love and kindness and intellect cowered forever on their little globes, while all about them went the slayers of the universe, sailing where they would to satisfy their cruelties and their endless appetites.'

But there is still the realisation that the aliens are not acting cruelly according to their own lights. The dilemma is not resolved, nor can it be, except on paper - and Aldiss is too realistic to do that.

THE SALIVA TREE takes up eighty of the 230 pages in this collection. The 'other strange growths' are nine stories, four of them not sf (three are delightfully gruesome little psycho crime stories, the fourth a charming variation on the theme 'love knows no frontiers') - all four eminently readable, but I will not mention them further here.

Danger: Religion! is an interesting enough story of a parallel world dominated by the church. Some good action, a tremendous opening scene, and another moral dilemma. The Source, set unimaginable years into the future, has a party of humans on an expedition to almost-forgotten Earth. Some beautiful writing, but I'm afraid the point eluded me. (Not Aldiss's fault by any means: I can be awfully dense at times.) Day Of The Doomed King is not sf, but is a moving story, set in old Serbia, where a wounded king and his loyal followers allow the future history of Europe to be altered through their indulgence in the national pastime of procrastination. This one reminded me somewhat of Stefan Zweig's THE TIDES OF FORTUNE - and anything that reminds me of that writer is welcome on my shelves.

Legends of Smith's Burst is a thoroughly delightful Baron Münchhausen-type romp set on a planet called Glumpalt, way way out in the Smith's Burst nebula, a planet populated with as motley a crew of miscegenated aliens as ever infested a Bosch canvas. Here the dreaded Black Sun rises on a brief episode in the adventurous career of one Jamie Lancelot Lowther, con-man extraordinary. Great fun this, with each succeeding hilarious situation and character absurder than the last. We've all, I'm sure, read stories like this before - just as absurd, but long and serious. We'll never keep a straight face through one of those again. Which just might have been Aldiss's purpose. At one point, Lowther comments: 'I might have spent some while observing them had I not lost my sense of wonder by this time.' There is also the matter of that title... Looked at another way it reads 'Smith's Legends Burst.' Just wondering, that's all.

The Girl and The Robot with Flowers is the last story in the book, a

gentle little piece taking up only seven pages. When I first read it in New Worlds a few months ago I had not read many of Aldiss's stories, but I decided that this one was far and away my favourite. Immediately after reading THE SALIVA TREE I plunged into an Aldiss World, emerging from four novels and a pile of stories a week later dazed by the man's brilliance - but with The Girl and the Robot with Flowers still my favourite story. Review it? - don't be silly. I'd as soòn review Thomas Love Peacock, or one of Sonya's Holstein Schnitzels, or my old Alvis. Let me just say that it is not so much sf as about sf, that it is quite the most charming story of any kind I've read in a long time, and that as an examination of the psychology of sf and its writers - and as a manifesto for sf-writing in the future - it deserves to be read and re-read often.

THE SALIVA TREE, AND OTHER STRANGE GROWTHS, for its title story, for its many strikingly beautiful images, for the Glumpalt divertimento, and, above all, for the concluding story, is a book to buy, to read, and to treasure.

(J.B.)

FRANK HERBERT: DUNE (Gollancz)

The hero is a young lad (but the novel covers five years or so) who has a Superhuman Power which he doesn't quite understand. He battles against his father's foes and finally, after coming to understand his Power a little better, he overcomes them and becomes tantamount Ruler of the Universe.

Old-fashioned the plot may be, but that didn't stop John Campbell from serving it up again in an eight-part serial in Analog. Since then DUNE has acquired a hard-cover publisher and a number of appendices (the removal of which might have thrust the novel into life).

There is very little to distinguish this novel from the lowest forms which appeared in Amazing Stories or even the large-size Fantastic Science Fiction. Nor does it seem to be very different from the works of Dwight V. Swain, discussed in ASFR #2.

It is longer. This is, most certainly, a guide to worth in sf. The most notable characteristic of amateur fiction is surely its brevity, and this does not apply only to sf - I have recently had the experience of reading amateur fiction which was not sf. Actually that isn't really fair, because although it wasn't sf it wasn't much else either. I can recall reading reviews in various fan columns which referred to '5000-word novels.' The amateur writer simply can't sustain a living plot for any great length, unless that most appalling of alternatives is clung to and the work becomes interminable. But such a writer needs to have some kink, and fortunately such are few and far between. The professional writer, or perhaps, rather, the experienced writer, has learned to drag out a given plot without it becoming too creaky: the amateur is either too lazy or mildly insane.

Of course Frank Herbert is not an amateur writer - even the dust-jacket says as much - nor are Dwight V. Swain, Alexander Blade, ad nauseum. Bad writers, yes, but amateurs, never. They wrote 20,000-word novels with just about as much plot as Herbert has here. Herbert's secret lies in the padding. Any one of, say, Dwight Swain's novels could have been lengthened four- or

five-fold simply by putting the hero into more and more complex situations, but eventually the reader becomes bored. So what Herbert did was to play more lengthily with each episode, trying to give it more meaning and reality.

This is not an approach to be recommended to any but the best of writers. Considering a different plane, we can see the same thing occurring in Proust or Joyce. Proust's JEAN SANTEUIL, written before REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, contains many of the elements of that latter masterpiece. But then even Proust was unable to control adequately his writing, his description of miniscule detail. Similarly, Joyce's expansion of event (or time) was only possible late in life.

Now in the case of Herbert we have a writer attempting to make a simple narrative relatively profound. He fails because he does not yet know enough of the stuff of writing. He uses the wrong mechanism of padding. We can read Cordwainer Smith or Phillip Jose Farmer and be entranced by a story we do not completely understand, to the extent that there are terms whose meaning is unclear; there are (or may be) philosophies which are unclear; there are societies whose laws are unclear. For an example written by one who has not published much sf, we could consider here Anthony Burgess's THE CLOCKWORK ORANGE. Now in all these no overt attempt is made to <u>explain</u> the society. Similarly, and on a different plane, Van Vogt and Dick never try to <u>inform</u> the reader about the society they may create. This is either unnecessary or is made plain by very indirect methods.

Swain & Co. don't try to tell you about the society (because there isn't a coherent explanation) and those listed above don't bother because it is made plain in what they write. Frank Herbert falls between these stools and, falling, fails.

Early in the work we are lectured unmercifully on the scientific reasons for the apparatus described, and on their workings. Doubtless this was required by the editor of <u>Analog</u>. And there are the appendices aforementioned. A glossary is mistermed a 'Terminology.' It contains potted definitions which firstly add nothing to information already available in the novel, secondly lend a verisimilitude to the novel, (for those persons who need a firmer hold on reality), and thirdly give a secret language to those faddists who are easily impressed by nonsense words.

There's an appendix which purports to describe the Ecology of Dune, but which merely manages to give a little past history of the world of Dune. The remaining appendices are boring re-echoes of the story. These appendices must raise in the mind of the reader the question as to whether Herbert has written DUNE as an historical novel. The quotations at the head of each chapter are fairly obviously influenced by Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shonagon, and the structure of the society is clearly feudal. But on the other hand all novels are in this sense historical, and only those who have been incapable are inclined to re-explain what they have done. (This is obvious, for instance, in the case of J.R.R. Tolkien.)

Thus we are left with a novel which must be admitted to be quite reasonable as a tale of adventure, as a mildly interesting yarn. But it has no existence in any other way - no existence worthy of our attention.

(J.F.)

FRANK HERBERT: THE GREEN BRAIN (Ace)

Frank Herbert has never been a favourite writer of mine. I have found his occasional magazine stories competent but uninspired, the DUNE series unreadable because of their padded pretentiousness. But of late he's begun to burst out all over the magazine and paperback field. I found THE GREEN BRAIN by far the most exciting thriller I have read in a long time, and I willingly doff my hat to a writer I had begun to suspect had become all swollen and serious in a field which really can't take too much of that sort of thing. It does, however, suffer from one serious defect.

Unlike DUNE, where the narrative was swamped by a burden of portentous quasi-historical and ecological background, THE GREEN BRAIN is severely damaged by the omission of a great deal of the entomological theory upon which he has based his book. And great slabs seem to be missing from the main narrative as well. There are so many abrupt shifts in plot, and so many loose ends, that I am tempted to wonder if the fault is so much Herbert's as Wolheim's. Ace Books have a reputation for cutting a work to fit a pre-determined format. Perhaps either Herbert or his editor has sought to expunge some of the overburden that marred DUNE and in the process has destroyed the coherency of the narrative.

Otherwise, THE GREEN BRAIN entertains on a high level of scientific adventure. Herbert has extrapolated contemporary mankind's extermination of various insect species - the 'silent spring' plot - and has built up the idea to nightmarish proportions. Choosing a suitably exotic background, South America, his ideas seem to ring fresh and exciting, even if they are just about as old as sf itself. And, apart from some awkward moments of three's-a-crowd fornication inside a section of a disabled 'flyer' drifting down a South American river - and the abrupt shifts of viewpoint here may be a result of rigid censorship rather than any incompetence on Wolheim's part - the characterisation is nicely aggressive for this sort of work, and a notch above most magazine sf. A pity about the editing, though. Although the novel has been 'blown up' from an Amazing novelette, it could certainly have benefited from another few thousand words. Perhaps there will be a British edition, and maybe that will let us have the complete text.

(A.R.)

MICHAEL MOORCOCK (ed): THE BEST FROM NEW WORLDS (Compact)

I don't know that this is the best, but certainly it is quite good. New Worlds may not have been the greatest magazine ever published, but these stories are typical of the readable material selected by editors Carnell and Moorcock from stories rejected by U.S. magazines. The only criticism might be that too often one can tell from which magazine(s) they were rejected.

I thought Brunner's The Last Lonely Man to be far and away the best of these yarns, but perhaps this is only because, reading other stories in the collection, my mind was drawn to reading better stories by the writers concerned. The anthology is more readable than the magazine, and the weak stories here are not really bad. But Harry Harrison, how could you?

Probably you won't be able to buy this at the newsstand, but specialist dealers will have it.

(K.U.F.W.)

JACK VANCE: THE BRAINS OF EARTH
and THE MANY WORLDS OF MAGNUS RIDOLPH (Ace Double)

Fortunately for those fans who occasionally like their sf reading light and entertaining - and I am one of them - the pulp tradition didn't disappear with the magazines. Don Wolheim at Ace Books has ensured the survival of the genre for a number of years with his careful - and sometimes not so careful - selection of some of the better material from the pages of Startling and Thrilling Wonder and a few others for resurrection in paperback, and has encouraged a whole new generation of writers in this slightly old-fashioned style. The only trouble with the Ace Doubles is that occasionally you will get two titles by a single author, and maybe twenty years separates the writing of the two.

Something like this has happened with the Vance issue. THE BRAINS OF EARTH is very early Vance indeed, often crude and embarrassingly naive, but with suggestions of the talent to come. Entertaining enough but hardly worthy of the attention of Vance fans who favour his recent works. On the other hand I had never expected the MAGNUS RIDOLPH stories to stand up so astonishingly well. BRAINS OF EARTH first appeared in Thrilling Wonder in the late forties; the RIDOLPH series began in the early fifties. I suppose that for their time they were remarkably advanced, and would certainly not be out of place in the pages of Moorcock's New Worlds today.

Ridolph is a sort of galactic adventurer with a difference. Middle-aged, cultured, the prey of confidence men on every planet, and always looking for a fast buck, his very special brand of humour is warmly welcome. There are six stories here, of which my own personal favourite would be The Kokod Warriors or The Spa of the Stars. All of the familiar Vance trademarks are here: exotic, colourful backgrounds, and a wealth of inventiveness. Buy it. You don't have to read the flip side.

(A.R.)

KEITH ROBERTS: THE FURIES (Berkley)

If a story of giants, bees or lichens is written today, it is generally written as a light comedy. THE FURIES, however, takes itself very seriously. And frankly I can't see that it was worth it. This is pretty much the standard English 'invasion by giant whatsits' plot, with no additions. It has been done as well, or better, by Wyndham, Mantley, Ballard, and probably lots of others. Roberts's novel adds nothing to what has gone before.

The man and the girl, with a few others, battle the invaders until they - the invaders - are suddenly and unexpectedly defeated. Much of the action would not bear close examination, but I guess Roberts would attribute any errors to the madness of his wasps. This is a totally unsatisfactory novel, and one is led to wonder why it was published.

There seems to be far more of a market for sf nowadays. Readers will buy almost anything, and so publishers can afford to produce it. It has few virtues but it whiles the hours away. This will, naturally, be the end of sf - unless some daring publisher breaks out contrary to the general trend and publishes good material.

(K.U.F.W.)

RAVES, RASPBERRIES, AND REJOINDERS

John Blattman, 14 Andreas Street, Petersham, N.S.W.

I shall start this letter the way you like: 'Please find enclosed subscription for 12 issues.' (I know you won't be able to manage monthly issues.) I intended to write a long screed but I don't think I will have enough time before the subscription rate goes up.

We're aiming at monthly issues, John, though we'll probably have a break in January to recuperate after our fabulous December issue. It depends a lot on finance. A few more practical letters like yours will help us keep our schedule. And I look forward to your long screed.

Robert Gerrand, 25 Kerferd Street, East Malvern SE5, Vic.

I have a bone to pick with Alan Reynard about Frederik Pohl. Surely ALTERNATING CURRENTS was one of the first Pohl collections (if not the first) and not his second last? To whom is it becoming 'increasingly obvious that Pohl solo produces lukewarm fiction'? Not to me! SLAVE SHIP, WHAT TO DO UNTIL THE ANALYST COMES, DRUNKARD'S WALK, THE TUNNEL UNDER THE WORLD, THE MIDAS PLAGUE, THE ABOMINABLE EARTHMAN, THE WIZARDS OF PUNG'S CORNERS, THE BITTEREST PILL, THE... Hell, these are all good stories. Pohl writes about people, and realistically, as well as about ideas. Only two of his stories I've read have been poor: FATHER OF THE STARS and UNDER TWO MOONS - and the latter probably because I've read little E.R. Burroughs. All his other stories have been average to excellent. Lukewarm? Never!

Alan Reynard comments: Mr. Gerrand is right - ALTERNATING CURRENTS was one of the first, if not the first, collection of Pohl stories. My fault was in confusing the fifth-rate products of a second-rate writer with barrel-scrapings. Apparently Mr. Pohl wrote as badly early in his career as he did towards the end of his Gold period. Most of the stories Mr. Gerrand refers to came somewhere in between, and I will admit I enjoyed some of them. (Particularly THE...) But I repeat that the stories in ALTERNATING CURRENTS are not very good and represent a style on the wane: even Mr. Pohl doesn't write like this any more. A swift comparison with the work of C.M. Kornbluth reveals the deficiencies in Pohl's style: he is an efficient wordsmith with a very limited range. Kornbluth, on the other hand, was a very skilled craftsman: I mourn his loss from the field. I admire Pohl as an editor and as an influence. And I wonder what sort of people Mr. Gerrand mixes with if he thinks that Pohl writes realistically about people? Pohl's characters are polished and sophisticated pulp stereotypes and fit his fiction well. And I will admit that Pohl is, next to Heinlein, the most skilled practitioner at mixing scientific concepts with entertaining fiction. Okay?

John Carnell, London, U.K.

ASFR #2 thudded in this morning. I found #1 very pleasant and interesting, but #2...! This is one of the freshest and most entertaining magazine issues I have read for several years. Apart from my own annotated tape comments, I found the rest of the contributors' comments of great interest. Somehow, down under, you have managed to produce a different

feeling and insight into what must, of necessity, be a prosaic subject to anyone who has been connected with it as long as I have. Perhaps some of the critical comments agreed closely with my own feelings, but I am no longer in a position to be hyper-critical. Sufficient to say that the criticism which was levelled showed a healthy tendency and I welcome it. I particularly liked John Bangsund's humorous intro lines and comments in his article. Hope he continues to develop this brand of humour.

Blush! And I haven't written my editorial for this issue yet, Ted. Hope you haven't mozzed me! - your praise is something to live up to! Mind you, with the brilliant crew I've got, I think we can do it.

Brian Aldiss, Oxford, U.K.

Margaret and I are off to the Continent on holiday on Monday. We shall be going down to Milan to see some of the sf fraternity there. Italy is becoming one of the world centres of sf - 'fantascienza,' in their beautiful word. They have the annual sf film festival in Trieste and an Academy of Fantastic Arts in Milan, and several flourishing publishing series and magazines. They don't pay badly. All they lack is local talent. It's been every country's problem bar America's, and I hope that now countries like Italy, Australia, England and maybe Japan will repay that debt. You have a very good thing with ASFR. Thanks for no.2, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The only thing that worries me is that you have so many English chipping in; I look forward to the day when you have so much local material there is no room for us.

You're welcome aboard any time, Brian! If we ever make a policy of publishing only local material, then we'll present you with a plastic replica of the Ulverstone War Memorial, two cheap imported Japanese toy koalas, and a certificate of honorary Australian citizenship inscribed on synthetic kangaroomerang hide, to keep you on our pages. A rivederci!

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REPORT TO MEMBERS OF THE SEVENTH AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

The Secretary-Treasurer of the convention regrets his inability to produce a report which he would consider at all satisfactory. This notice is intended to inform members that something is forthcoming, and to perform several other small tasks.

The convention was a financial success, in that a small profit of about $40 was made. However, this is only a paper profit, and after writing off bad debts this had best be reduced to $35. The Treasurer begs to report that this is about as accurate as his accounting can be at this time, as his house and all contents were destroyed by fire in early May. However, this profit was only possible through the selling of space in the convention booklet, and through commissions on the Auction, these bringing in $40 and $30 respectively. Total income, aside from the Auction, is around $180 and expenditure a trifle more. Ten to fifteen dollars was spent on food for convention attendees, fifty dollars plus on films, and the remaining expenses were involved with production and mailing of leaflets and booklets, and the purchase of materials for display. Basically, it might be said that the Treasurer had to hustle to keep the Con out of the red. Until the Sunday, in fact, the convention was running at a loss.

The average attendance was 45 per gathering, with very little dispersion. Publicity was very good, as has already been mentioned in these pages.

The Secretary intends to donate $20 to the AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (with which he has no connection other than that he writes half of it, and pays for his copies like anyone else). This advertisement is also being bought out of convention profits. In addition, some money has been spent on the preparation of a report which was initially to be rather ambitious, involving the transcription of tapes. To date this work has been slow but sure, with those involved spending a great deal of time on it. Transcriptions have been released to the REVIEW in the belief that this would be of the greatest possible benefit. However, much has still to be done, and neither of the two people involved in the work can see any possibility of its completion this year. For this reason they plan to bring out a small report in the near future.

To this end, the Secretary requests your assistance. All convention papers were destroyed, and although those who were at the con were consulted, some fifteen names seem to be missing from our lists. Would those reading this who were at the convention please supply the Secretary with the names and if possible the addresses of others they know to have been at the con, so that everyone will receive this report. Address below.

PLANS FOR A FUTURE CONVENTION. The present Secretary wishes it to be clearly understood that he cannot do anything at all about future conventions. Many people have asked him just what is happening and the answer has been and will be that he knows as much as they do. The last con agreed IN PRINCIPLE to the holding of a future convention, and at that time it was made quite clear that NO-ONE was obligated to put on a convention at any time. This can be extracted from the con tapes if anyone so desires. The simple fact is that the Secretary will have left the country by Easter of next year, and does not intend returning for some time. There are many fans who will still be here, and it must be their duty to run a convention if they want one.

From where I sit, it's easier to talk than to do anything.

JOHN FOYSTER, P.O. BOX 57, DROUIN, VICTORIA

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