





Australian Science Fiction Review

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"I love a sunburnt country, de-dum de-dum de-dah..." All I remember of it now - that poem every school child in these parts used to learn. Its sentiments are not those of drought-stricken Australians at this moment. For months we've been exhorted from all sides not to waste water - wash your car from a bucket, clean your teeth from a tumbler, bathe with a friend - and restrictions have grown tighter, penalties for wastage more dire. We've imported shiploads of the stuff from Jamaica and elsewhere - curiously, not to drink or use industrially, as one might expect, but to fill the moat at the new Melbourne Cultural Centre. It is, however, possible to exaggerate the hardships caused by our drought. I have yet to receive a letter with its stamp stapled on, for example. And I believe there is no truth in a rumour that Frank Herbert has been retained by the Victorian Government to advise on the manufacture of stillsuits.

However, in the strictly metaphorical sense, much water has flowed under the bridge since the last issue of this journal.

Heaven knows why I ever became a sales representative. I mean, if marriages are made in heaven, then heaven knows; because one of the few worthwhile things that happened during my two-year term as an itinerant book-flogger was my meeting Diane. Luckily, publishing has been to some extent an occupation for gentlemen, even in this country, otherwise I wouldn't have lasted as long as I did. But the book trade is changing rapidly, and I'm quite happy to be out of it. I've been a bookseller, a librarian, and a publisher's rep; I doubt if I could be any of these again. (Though I have a certain hankering to be a librarian again: I must admit that.) To be a bookseller you need to be able to exist on \$45 per week (at least, that's the best offer I've had); to be a librarian you need a degree; to be a publishers rep you need to be a pretty ruthless salesman. I haven't a degree, and I'm the softest salesman you ever met, but if I had the necessary qualifications I doubt if I would waste my commercial sweetness on the book trade's desert air.

So it's farewell to Cassell & Company - with some regret, for they were nice people and a good firm, even if they didn't publish much sf. (I now work for the Shire of Lillydale, as a Senior Administrative Officer - i.e., clerk.) Farewell, also, to dear old Northclump - "called New South Rome by the cynical... home of the illustrious Bernard O'Dowd and the great Joe Fogg", as some obscure scribe has it. My family lived here for nearly thirty years, and for most of that time in the single-fronted weatherboard semi-slum in Gladsome Avenue. I have some vivid early memories of Northclump... hammering nails into a chair in a house in Hunter Street... a fire at the Leader Publishing Company's factory at the top of our street... my first day at school, leaning against the flag-pole, bawling my heart out... air-raid drill in the trenches opposite the school... my father coming home from the war, striding down Gladsome Avenue in his slouch hat, khakis and hobnail boots, with all his kit, a Japanese sword and a kundu drum.

Ghosts from the past cling to an old house like ours, and they can be oppressive. You look at the bricks paving the back yard and remember that they came from the ruins of the Northclump Church of Christ, which burned to the ground fourteen years ago... only that long? - it seems like a lifetime... and flooding back come twenty-one years of joyful and painful church memories, countless memories of moments of pleasure, agony, exaltation, despair, high comedy and confusion. The years in college, and the years after, batching in St. Kilda... the loneliness, the shattering discoveries about oneself.

All exchanged now for the fresh woods and pastures new (though, alas, I have no blue mantle to twitch) of Ferntree Gully, for the fresh air and new problems of a house in the hills. Mortgages, rates, vast lawns to cut, etcetera, etcetera: there'll be little time or incentive to relive the past.

Ferntree Gully, for the benefit of outlanders, lies at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges about twenty miles east of Melbourne. Once regarded as "country" (and the National Park at Upper Gully is still a popular picnic resort), the place is now merely an outer suburb of Melbourne. We're a bit sorry that we didn't find a suitable house in the hills themselves - like Lee and Carla Harding's place, a couple of miles away at The Basin - but the one we've bought has just about everything we were looking for, in fact far more than we expected to find at a price we could afford. The main thing, of course, is the space... the grass and trees and flowers... the open, unpolluted air. Mike Moorcock, in New Worlds 173, talked about modern man being cut off from the seasons - but we'll be watching 'em here.

One of my first concerns on moving into this place was: where to put all my books, where to establish my study? I've had any number of unhelpful suggestions. I still think we should make the smallest room in the house (where I have, in fact, ended up) the bedroom, and convert the 18 x 15 bedroom (what opulence, after the 10 x 12 room at Northclump!) into a study: it's just the right size. But of course the female director of this establishment can't see the logic of this. So we've thought about lining the garage, and we've examined the appalling cost of putting up a small bungalow. Diane's brother, Barry, told me I should go underground - excavate a room in the back yard. He estimated we'd have to dig out, and remove, about sixty cubic yards of dirt. Now I ask you: how do you dig a hole like that without anyone noticing what you are up to? Barry's solution: we put up a tent and carry the dirt out in our pockets. But where do you put it when you've got it out? Maybe if we had a lot of window-boxes...? Okay, I said to Barry, I've finished digging this 18 x 10 x 9 hole: now how do I get in and out of it? Simple, said Barry, we lower all your books and so on down to you, then put a lid on the thing and send you food down through a shaft. I didn't think much of this arrangement, and said so; I mean, they might forget to put that shaft in. Well, said Diane, just so long as we made sure the cat wasn't in there with you, it'd be just fine. Doesn't read all that much, Diane, but she's pretty sharp all the same. Barry's next idea was that we get a couple of those big septic tanks and weld them together. That was the last straw: I'm not taking any notice of his ideas from here on. Blimey, if I agreed to that scheme, every so often I'd have some smart charley knocking at my door and wanting to know if I'd like my study de-sludged!

Moving into a new house, taking on all the myriad financial burdens that this involves, makes you wonder what on earth you have done with your money all these years. And, especially, it makes me wonder how I am to keep this magazine going. That it will in fact keep going, that I assure you: it's far too much fun to scrap. But the going may become difficult, and I hope you will be patient and understanding if I run behind schedule or postpone publication of your letter or article.

Having gone into the matter thoroughly, I find that present subscriptions allow a budget of \$50 per issue. This is ten dollars short of meeting the cost of production and postage of a 44-page issue, using wrappers instead of envelopes, and allowing one electronic stencil for artwork per issue. To get back to 60 pages will require another 50 or 60 subscriptions, and it is quite possible that we might get this money over the next year - after all, we've had 40 new American subscribers over the last six months - but meanwhile we have to cut the cloth to fit the pudding, or whatever it is that they say.

Apart from reduction in size, the most important economy has been the elimination from our mailing-list of a number of, shall we say, freeloaders. Friends, if I were rich you would all be freeloaders: I hate asking for your money. But, I'm sorry, that's the way it has to be. If you get this issue without paying for it, this means either you are a publisher of a fanzine I can't do without, a supplier of review copies, a valued supporter in some other way - or that I am too scared to ask. If you do not receive this issue, there has either been a terrible mistake or, nothing personal, you've been scrubbed.

That last sentence reminds me of a legendary sign-post in, if I remember rightly, Scotland: "(X) miles to (Y): if you can't read this sign, ask the blacksmith." One traveller is reported to have stared, mused a while, then laughed and said, "I get it! The blacksmith can't read, either!"

Strange, Ethel, how certain jokes just have to be about Scotland or the Scottish? There's something in us that seems to demand that we caricaturize races and nationalities. Some months ago I wrote a short piece (which may yet see publication somewhere) in which occurred an innocent pun about "Sikh jokes". Bob Sessions, well-travelled editor at Cassell's, read this and remarked, "I see you know about Indian Sikh jokes, then." I admitted, surprised, that I didn't, and he explained that in India the equivalent of "Once upon a time there was an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotchman" is "Once upon a time there were three Sikhs".

Australians, too, come in for their share of caricaturization. It doesn't often come off, because a successful caricature demands some specialized knowledge of the subject presented, and it certainly hasn't often been done well in sf. But - just take a butchers' at this, sport:

'A tall rangy figure dressed in faded bush-shirt and slacks lounged against the sundial and rolled a cigarette.

"How does it manage the height?" muttered Merganser.

"Telescopic legs," said Paradine. "Self-compensating. And arms. Meet Ron," he added in a louder voice. "He's a bush-pilot - comes over when we need a bit of help. Ron, we're going to take a quick trip otherside."

"G'day," said Ron, his brown leathery face crumpling into a smile as he shook hands all round. "You folks comin' fer a flip? It's a grayday fer it - one outer the box."

Paradine nodded towards the tall lopsided shape of the Kraag ship on the other side of the hedge. "We're going in that one," he said.

"Cripes, yer won't get me in that bus, sport, not fer a walkabout in the never-never. They don't make Heisenbergs that bluddy big. Yer wouldn't stand Buckley's chance."

"It's got two of everything," said Paradine. "It's as safe as - as Sydney Harbour Bridge."

"Ah, goodole Sinney, wish I wuz there now." The robot fell obediently into step beside him. "I mus' be or'f me bluddy rocker to go otherside in a big bluddy can like that jus' fer this crowder bluddy drongoes."

They entered the ship and the airlocks hissed shut behind them. Paradine eased himself into the control-chair and began checking the main board. Seated beside him, Ron unscrewed the covering of his upper left index finger, disclosing a metal jack which he inserted into a socket in the autopilot. The robot became rigid, but the ship's intercom began to address them with a faint trace of Old Orstrilian accent....'

Surely the first honest-to-goodness Strine-speaking robot in sf - or any other field of literature, for that matter - "Ron" makes the above brief but impressive appearance in THE HOLE IN THE ZERO, by M.K. Joseph (Gollancz: \$2.65).

M.K. Joseph is a New Zealander, Professor of English at the University of Auckland, author of two other novels, various critical works and several volumes of poetry. *THE HOLE IN THE ZERO* - well, I'll stick my neck out and say it's a masterpiece, a milestone in sf. It is a book that might possibly have been written by Brian Aldiss, or by J.G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick in collaboration. No, that's not close enough. Try imagining Olaf Stapledon and L. Sprague de Camp writing in collaboration, then. No, dammit, read the book.

It is beautifully, economically written, and highly entertaining. You can read it for the story alone; it's somewhat mystifying, but no more so than, say, Van Vogt's Null-A novels. It is a mine of memorable imagery, of incredibly beautiful evocations of people, places and things. One of the book's special delights for the wideawake reader is its profusion of standard sf plots and ideas, all sent-up in an almost gentle but completely devastating manner. One chapter, for example, containing all the things I've mentioned and some I haven't yet, stands by itself as the logical ultimate in sword-and-sorcery/quest stories. Do you think Heinlein's *GLORY ROAD* said the last word about the quest story? Professor Joseph takes it several steps further on, to its logical conclusion.

Opinions will vary on the point of the book, the message, and I admit that I have not yet thought it out to my own satisfaction, let alone yours. Fundamentally *THE HOLE IN THE ZERO* is a philosophical novel, and as such it reminds me strongly of Stapledon's *STAR-MAKER*; but I hasten to add that it is Stapledonian only in its area of interest and breadth of vision, not in style, nor in philosophy. The author's indebtedness to certain ideas of Jesus, Plotinus and William Blake are made explicit, but there are many other ideas alluded to or glimpsed in passing, which I leave to be identified by those more learned or industrious than myself. I will merely proffer the thought that Nietzsche, with his strange ideas about "eternal recurrence", would probably have heartily approved the whole thing, limited though his taste might have been for extrapolation on so grand a scale as this.

Nietzsche springs to mind in another connection with this book. "Where races are mixed," he wrote (in 'On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life'), "there is the source of great cultures." Narrowing the application of this dictum - intrapolating? - I am inclined to believe that it holds good of literary forms: in short, that where genres are mixed, there is the source of great literature.

Maybe that's a bit far-fetched, and maybe my real motive in using that quotation is to shock anyone reading this who still believes that Nietzsche was a nasty old Nazi racist. But I do think that cross-fertilization with other literary fields is essential to science fiction if it is to continue to have value - as a literary genre. (I do not refer to prophetic, educational, or entertainment values.) This cross-fertilization is going on, of course, all the time - most dramatically, at present, in the so-called "New Wave". But every now and then someone quite outside the field ventures into it, bringing with him ideas, perspectives, values that can only enrich sf - providing his work is noticed.

Another recent book from "outside", rather more modest in scope than Professor Joseph's, but equally worthy of consideration, is Richard Cowper's *BREAKTHROUGH* (Dennis Dobson: \$2.65). A highly literate novel, as one might expect from a son (though disguised by a pseudonym) of John Middleton Murry, it is not quite the "penetrating exploration of the twilight hinterland of ESP and Psi" that the publishers claim, but is nonetheless thoughtful - and thoroughly good entertainment.

In part (though it need not trouble the casual reader) BREAKTHROUGH teaches a lesson from Keats - a lesson expounded, incidentally, in a memorable work of criticism by J.M. Murry - which sounds very similar to the well-known "suspension of disbelief" principle of Coleridge (of which we sf apologists are inordinately fond):

"...the quality which goes to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

I would like to think that Richard Cowper's title is symbolic, prophetic; that, increasingly, intelligent and literate outsiders will break through the cult barrier and, together with the scattered band of like-minded professionals in the field, help to rescue sf and make of it a great and enduring literature.

Young British publisher, Richard Holme, recently in Australia, has thoughts on this subject which are not quite the same as mine. What will take the place of the spy-story in popular (i.e. best-selling) fiction? - he was asked. "My guess is science fiction," answered Mr. Holmes. But, says THE AUSTRALIAN (9.12.67), he "looked along his editorial nose and said in very firm English that this didn't mean publishers were joining the science fiction cult."

Looking down my editorial nose (you can pick 'em a mile off, you know), I ask how Mr. Holmes or anyone else is going to persuade the public that what they are paying through their non-editorial noses for is not "cult" science fiction? And how are we to persuade that same public, ensnared to some extent by fake sf, that the despised cult has more to offer them?

Ah me, after so much serious constructive thinking today, it was a real relief to sit and watch John Lennon and George Harrison on the telly tonight. David Frost was interviewing them about all this Transcendental Meditation jazz, and the audience participated. There was a nasty little fat man (rather like me, I thought) who fought a lone battle for constructive socialistic mechanistic hedonistic nihilism, and a bunch of enthusiastic T-M-ists and Quakers, and a saintly-looking gentleman with the most transcendently-Teutonic accent it's been my pleasure to hear for some time. John denied that TM had anything to do with the hippies, and George insisted that it was no good arguing, that the Universal Laws control everyone, and that all you have to do to achieve Cosmic Consciousness is to sit quietly for twenty minutes before breakfast plumbing the depths of your Inner Being. Or something like that. But John said the best thing of the night: George was earnestly talking about yogis and suchlike in India (where else?) who have plumbed whatever they plumb so deeply that they can go on living indefinitely; "There's this chap in India right now," George said, "who has been living since before the time of Jesus - in the same physical body!" Said John: "Same suit!" and grimaced.

I don't care what he reckons he believes in - I like John Lennon.

"We have art," said Nietzsche (heard of him?), "in order not to die of the truth."

And we have Nietzsche, John Lennon, and science fiction, in order not to die of being a Senior Administrative Officer.

John Bangsund

SCIENCE FICTION IN THE CLASSROOM

JOHN FOYSTER

One of the main problems facing those who wish to evaluate science fiction as a form of literature is that the only critiques available are those of True Believers or, at least, Accessories After The Fact. The comments in the daily press or of casual reviewers are so worthless in their banality and ignorance that nothing can be gained from them either. A captive audience is needed: one which is neutral towards sf, but which will endeavour to carefully criticize any material presented to it. Such an audience is available. I discuss below the answers to two questions given to a class of fifteen-year-olds whose feelings towards sf were neutral. During the year (1967) they had been required to read "several" sf novels: THE BLACK CLOUD by Fred Hoyle, THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS by John Wyndham, and THE TIME MACHINE by H.G. Wells were the volumes mentioned most frequently. Three of the boys preferred THE TIME MACHINE, six THE BLACK CLOUD, and thirteen THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. They were also asked just how they would persuade someone to read sf.

The answers were informative. The reasons given for liking given novels almost invariably are very much to the point, and serve to illuminate just those weaknesses and strengths which these authors do have. Further, it seems to me that the better students gave better reasons for liking better books.

For the record, I would rate the books in the following order: (1) THE TIME MACHINE, (2) THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, (3) THE BLACK CLOUD.

Comments on THE BLACK CLOUD:

"The novel is never boring."

This was presented as one candidate's sole reason for liking the book. Personally I feel that the sentence is one word too long.

"The story fascinates me because of the ways in which the characters think and the unexpected things they do."

In other words, the novel has all the characteristics of a bad pulp novel. This is the best kind of argument against the scientist who writes fiction, and C.P. Snow is, of course, the handy example. In many ways Snow does not know what fiction is about. Neither does Hoyle, and his novels are consequently stilted, artificial and quite false: in other words, just like the stories in the average sf magazine.

"The main characters are vividly described and one could imagine oneself in the situation."

One of the most engaging traits of this group of boys was their ability to lie in their teeth when the occasion demanded it. This could be a quote from a dust-jacket or from a newspaper review, though not, quite, from the prozine operators.

One student gave the lie when he wrote:

"I didn't enjoy this book, and I wouldn't recommend it because the thirty boys in the class didn't like it and not all could be wrong."

Comments on THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS:

The students here explained just why Wyndham is successful. By making the world very simple but believable he is able to attract many readers. The picture may not be a true one, but it is easily assimilable.

"I found THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS fantastic, frightening but entirely plausible."

Observe the horrors and dangers of allowing dust-jackets to carry plugs for their contents. This statement, seemingly from the heart, is of course vacuous.

"For my part, imagining the idea of a totally-blind world, dominated by monstrous stinging plants, was the most enjoyable factor."

Here is another human trait upon which Wyndham relies: the feeling of pleasure on waking from an unpleasant dream.

Some students compared THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS with the other volumes:

"I enjoyed THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS best because it was easier to understand than THE TIME MACHINE."

"THE BLACK CLOUD was very complicated and hard to read, THE TIME MACHINE was too far-fetched and silly, but THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS was simple and very imaginative."

But still they emphasized Wyndham's ability to communicate with them on their own level.

"The story makes me also picture myself as the hero, for he seems to do everything I would do in a similar situation."

Another favoured

"the author's method of conveying complicated, imaginative material in a simple manner."

Whilst another tackled one of the weaknesses of THE BLACK CLOUD indirectly:

"The survivors and heroes in it were not a select group conveniently gathered from all over the world."

One critic spotted something which had never occurred to me:

"Reading between the lines also reveals the moral that man might be hoist by his own petard of nuclear weapons and scientific paraphernalia."

And finally, one student perhaps overpraised the book slightly:

"It seemed to me to be a literary masterpiece (written on a subject which is often outspoken)."

I think those comments make the reasons for John Wyndham's success quite obvious. Readers may not know that Wyndham's books are frequently used in Australian schools as set novels.

Comments on THE TIME MACHINE:

The remarks seemed to be more mature, to me, but then I prefer Wells's book myself.

"Wells' story, which some might think impossible and fantastic, seemed quite credible to me because of the direct, friendly sort of way Wells tells it."

This is not the sort of observation one might expect from reading the earlier comments.

Another boy viewed the novel in an original light:

"It left me with a fresh, calm and sustaining feeling."

That might sound more like an advertisement for toothpaste, but I suspect that the writer's heart was in the right place.

The third of the three who liked this book was also quite observant:

"... seeing he (the Time Traveller) is getting on in years his agility is astounding!"

So it is, but no more astounding than the differences in the quality of criticism which seem to go hand in hand with the reader's choice of favoured reading matter.

Comments on science fiction in general:

The boys were asked to suggest reasons for reading sf. One gave a pretty good reason:

"One can never find anything more exciting than sf."

I should perhaps point out that the boys are students of a Roman Catholic Seminary.

The other boy who preferred THE BLACK CLOUD had this to say:

"There is a certain excitement and apprehension to be gained from a description of the fight of mankind against some alien being or vegetable."

Science fiction fans probably have to battle strange fruit more often than alien vegetables, but this criticism nevertheless hits the spot. I suspect that the percentage of sf which is based upon this idea of Man vs. The Incredible Flying Artichoke is much greater than many of us would imagine.

Those who favoured THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS made generally undistinguished comments, but one boy said:

"Sf writers in my opinion have the most imagination and their writing is quick-flowing and non-technical."

I am afraid that this wealth of imagination is illusory. In fact, sf suffers from a dearth of the same.

Those who favoured THE TIME MACHINE were a little more to the point.

"A good sf book can hold our interest much better than any other kind of book."

This comment came from a boy who had obviously read more than just the required books. A large number of adult readers hold this to be true, demonstrating that they have not read widely outside the field. A good sf novel, or short story, can certainly hold our interest, but it is only by comparison with other mass fiction (at best) that it can do this "much better".

The same boy would upset many readers of this magazine with his comment -

"I would tell them to disregard science fiction comics because they give the wrong idea of sf writing."

As for persuading people to read sf, well...

"I would first ask if they had an imaginative mind."

This is a good point. Too many readers accept immediately the idea that it is the author who has to have the imaginative mind. For several reasons the reader is also required to have an imaginative mind. First, the reader must be able to accept the setting of the story, and to make some attempt at understanding it. The reader must also be able to fill in the gaps in plot and characterization left by a doltish author. Finally the reader must be able to understand the mind of the editor and publisher who produce such trash. There are, of course, some few authors who overcome these problems for the reader.

One boy wanted to rely on the hard sell:

"I would tell them how fantastic, thrilling, breath-taking and how horrifying the science fiction book can be."

Could P. Schuyler Miller ever select such a mounting crescendo of adjectives? Did Floyd C. Gale ever mount such heights of satire?

There was one final, and penetrating, comment:

"A science fiction book is a book based usually on things, not people."

More than anything else, the comments of these boys demonstrate just how poor are the reviews appearing in professional magazines. Even more they indicate the standard at which the fan-reviewer must operate. All too often the sf fan is lower than the newspaper reviewer who copies jacket blurbs, for the fan shows by his review that he is simply incapable of reading the book. I could list many examples, but really one only has to look around.

If the standard of discussion of sf is to improve at all, then the lead must be given in the professional magazines. There has been some improvement in recent years, but it is not nearly enough. Meanwhile, one must look forward to the day when sf fans who have nothing else to say in their fanzines will fill them with book reviews.

On the gloomy side, however, remains the fact that the White Hope of Australian novelists can have plot summaries published regularly - as examples of criticism!

* * *

"ANALOG SCIENCE FACT FICTION, 420 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. John W. Campbell, Editor. Issued monthly; 60c a copy. Uses stories of the future told for scientifically trained, technically employed adults; central theme usually problems of an ordinary technician employed in an industry of 50 to 50,000 years hence. Material is best understood by reading the magazine. Uses shorts, novelettes, and novels, 2,500 to 60,000 words. Serials only on consultation with Editor. Reports are slow here as Campbell reads all mss and there are no first or second readers. Pays 3c to 4c a word, on acceptance."

- WRITER'S DIGEST, February 1967.

THE COSMOLOGICAL EYE

the new sf

LEE HARDING

This has been a very important year for sf, in many respects, and I feel sure that in a decade or so from now some of us will be looking back to 1967 the way we now look back to the early forties and fifties for significant episodes in the development of modern sf. And I think it's about time that I confessed that my disgruntlement with Mike Moorcock and his policies, which I noised in ASFR 2, has given way to awed respect.

Most of this respect stems from the fact that the new NEW WORLDS is so much the sort of magazine I have always imagined the field would one day support that I have a peculiar feeling of living in the best of all possible universes where wishes sometimes materialize. Of course Mike has gone somewhat further in the type of fiction he is encouraging but, aesthetically speaking, the format and uncompromisingly adult presentation of this slick new magazine certainly fulfils what I had in mind.

I have never been an out-and-out Moorcockian and I consider a lot of the stuff Mike has printed in the last few years to be utter rubbish and without any sort of professionalism whatsoever. But that period seems to have passed. In the first three issues of the new NEW WORLDS the material is of a very high level indeed, and the new layout affords Moorcock a great freedom of movement when it comes to the presentation of articles and book reviews.

But is all this really sf? I can hear some of you mumbling, and before you turn the page and move onto something else I think it's about time we took a good hard look at what Moorcock's been doing, and at the generally changing pattern of some of our current sf.

Recently I was discussing sf with a friend and made the admission that I still considered John Campbell, for all his eccentricities, the greatest sf editor alive. My friend considers Moorcock to be better than Campbell, but while I agreed that Mike was possibly a great editor he was not a great sf editor, as I understand the term. Campbell stands for all that has been best in the medium for the past quarter-century; Moorcock shows us the way to a new sf, cross-fertilized with twentieth-century fiction in a way few of us ever thought possible.

I don't think Mike would mind if, for the purposes of this digression, we considered NEW WORLDS as not being a sf magazine at all. This should make it easier for devoted followers of adventure-sf to take in what I have to say.

Magazine sf has been with us for a long time, but the recent impact of developments in science and technology has brought home the possibilities of the future to a much wider audience than we in our comfortable little ghetto had ever hoped to influence. Writers other than sf specialists have become aware of the third stream of literature, and in the last few years we have seen the advent of the sf-orientated novel, developed out of its writer's own needs and not kowtowing to a generation of cheap magazine fiction. Such books

as Anthony Burgess's THE WANTING SEED portray a timeless concept of a possible tomorrow with a deeper intellectual insight than we have ever been likely to encounter in our magazines, and it is not difficult to locate in the works of William Burroughs, Kingsley Amis and, more recently, Colin Wilson, some of the particular imagery of sf. But sf, or rather the specialist sf, has never produced so convincing a future as, say, that of Burgess's CLOCKWORK ORANGE. (Except, perhaps, Cordwainer Smith's work.) We have been for so long the willing slaves of our own cliches that some of us have lost the ability to recognise a Big Change when it comes along. We saw one in the early forties when Campbell set to turning ASTOUNDING into the greatest magazine the field has ever seen, and again in the fifties when Horace Gold was streamlining Campbell-type fiction for a mass audience (and failing), and Tony Boucher was building a new sort of reputation at F&SF. But the developments Mike Moorcock has been associated with cannot be considered with these achievements. NEW WORLDS may be the first of a new type of magazine, a magazine representing for the first time the sort of fiction that talented and deeply committed young men are turning to from the nightmarish possibilities of a real future that now seems howlingly close. These men are not writing sf as we have come to know it, and they might even consider ANALOG the last word in literary low-brow. What they offer is an indication that they are conscious of the fast-changing patterns of today, and that their thoughts are reaching forward into time rather than backwards into a dead and sometimes useless past.

I know that Judith Merrill and some others like to point out that this increasing amount of sf-orientated thinking in today's writing reflects on the influence of magazine sf. I disagree. I think that a great number of contemporary writers have been made aware of the third stream, not by boyhood reading of ASTOUNDING (though this could be possible), but by the overwhelming presence of the future in our daily lives: such things as the Vietnam-type war games; the disappearance of the Great Man and the arrival of the Great Mediocrity - Johnson, Wilson, Kosygin. (When that shot rang out in Dallas there died one of the last Great Men. When de Gaulle goes, we will have to look hard to find another.) Not only Ballard is conscious of the growing mendacity in our world. You will find in the novels of Richard Condon and William Golding, for example, the imagery that magazine sf has shadow-boxed with for two decades, fleshed out and brought to powerful proportions by writers unattuned to the demands of commercial journalism.

I think that Moorcock has devised a magazine in which the independent writer may speak out on these changing patterns. I think that he is right to encourage people like Tom Disch and Brian Aldiss to discard their old magazine images and thrash about for new ones. I think that he is right to encourage the struggling new writer with something new to say. I think perhaps he may have gone too far with his tub-thumping for Ballard - but when all is said and done, the man is a vivid, dynamic editor, and in this day of wishy-washy editing of the sort the Fermans foist upon us, of the Pohls with their happy dependency on past glories, it is stimulating to watch a genuine editor at work, a man with something to say and the will to work with his writers to see that they get their say, also. There has been nothing quite like this since Campbell took over ASTOUNDING and Gold brought out GALAXY. This sort of excitement has been missing from the field for a long time. Moorcock has brought it back, put life back into the corpse, and if the result hardly seems to be sf as we have come to accept it, then it would surely repay our attention to follow what he is doing, even if it seems, at times, ridiculous.

The man is experimenting. How long is it since a sf editor has had the courage, or the ability, to do this? If America could find herself an editor of a similarly determined nature, then perhaps the moribund state of the market there might change. As it is, one hears marvellous things from Europe and can't

help wondering if perhaps it is here that the future of sf lies, rather than in its traditional American home.

Perhaps Mike is right and there will come a time when the sf label will have disappeared, and writers will dabble at will in past, present and future, in false reality, and in the here and now - just wherever their whim takes them; and when that time arrives I feel sure that NEW WORLDS will have done much to bring it all about.

And when that day comes, will America still be turning out the same market-dominated stuff it now favours, or will a few more book editors as enlightened as Damon Knight appear and produce some sort of influence where it is most needed? There are signs that this might already be happening: Doubleday have recently bought Brian Aldiss's REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, and there are rumours of some other radical works being considered. But for today the torch is in Britain, and Mike Moorcock is carrying it.

The wonder of a FANTASTIC VOYAGE works once, and not again. I know, because I tried. And this is true of most magazine sf. Once the initial thrill of discovery has passed, one returns only to discover the tawdry characterizations, the embarrassing dialogue, the shadow of what had been. In SECONDS, John Frankenheimer achieved such a fine synthesis of sf imagery and deep emotional involvement that it is a film one can return to again and again, while the candied prettiness of FANTASTIC VOYAGE has paled.

I am not suggesting that all magazine sf is bad, but only that it seems curiously over-weighted with stale, outdated formulae. I read and adore the antique works of Jack Vance and Hal Clement and A.E. Van Vogt as they are published today; I am dazzled by Farmer and Zelazny and Delany, and wish they were British and had publishers like Faber to keep their better works in print. I look forward to the day when F&SF finds a proper autocrat, when Harry Harrison is editing a magazine unrestrained by publishers' meddling, and when Frederik Pohl lets someone else handle GALAXY while he keeps on publishing delightful old-fashioned sf in IF. But I wouldn't for a moment think of replacing John Campbell. Some things are, of necessity, eternal.

I think we need ANALOG to remind us of our heritage, as some sort of yardstick against which to measure the future. And we need NEW WORLDS just as much, to indicate one possible direction in which our involvement with science and technology is taking us.

I do not suggest that we all turn around and greet Mike Moorcock as a new messiah and the greatest editor the field has known - but I do think it's about time those who do so stopped pointing the finger of scorn at the man and started facing up to what he has accomplished. He may not be editing the best sf magazine in the world today, but he is at least endeavouring to convey some of the better qualities of sf to a different and more appreciative audience than we have had in the past. We may not like his interpretation of sf, but we should at least give him his due, and perhaps thank him for extending our boundaries a little further than we thought possible - particularly when men with more money and talent behind them seem content to wallow in mediocrity and the glory of past achievements.

* * *

GO GO GO BALLARD !

The literary grants bestowed by the Arts Council, which has £60,000 to hand out in this way each year, are supposed to be without strings. But the avant-garde magazine AMBIT is in danger of losing its recently-voted grant of £120.

"It's certainly under review," says Eric White, Lord Goodman's representative on the literary side. "The grant was recommended three weeks ago, but the current issue which came out last week has altered the situation, and we must now look at it with cool consideration."

AMBIT has gone too far by setting a competition in which writers are asked to submit works written under the influence of drugs. Says Mr. White: "This competition may be found in law to constitute a public mischief." The Arts Council doesn't want to back that sort of thing.

AMBIT's editor is a doctor, Martin Bax, who's assured Eric White that the competition is both serious and responsible. Writers, he says, have experimented with drugs for years, and it would be valuable to find out with what results.

The competition was actually set by J.G. Ballard, who also offers a prize of £25 to the winner. "The Arts Council would like Ballard to go," he told Michael Bateman. "Go, go, go, Ballard. Then AMBIT might get big grants like the LONDON MAGAZINE's £2000 a year. There are fat grants for fat Establishment magazines, all of them as dead as dodos."

J.G. Ballard is amiable Jimmy Ballard at home in Middlesex where he lives with his three young children. He is 36, widowed, and has a big reputation in the field of science fiction. He last upset people with a piece in AMBIT called PLAN FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF JACQUELINE KENNEDY. The point, he says, is this: "Jacqueline Kennedy and Elizabeth Taylor are today's fictional characters, like Orpheus and Ulysses in other ages. I exploit these global fictional characters, letting my imagination play over them. These are people who are rich enough to buy mass media, publicity, television, to project themselves as fictional characters, and I try to write about them as such."

Ballard asked the Arts Council for £1,000 to back a personal advertising campaign in which he hopes to feature a nude on Westminster Abbey's high altar, a motor crash, and Princess Margaret's left armpit. "Advertising is the medium that people are tuned into. But they were just considering my application when the Kennedy piece appeared."

It took them a very short time to say no.

- Reprinted from The Sunday Times, 22.10.1967

MELBOURNE'S POST OFFICE FIRE

Several floors of the Mail Exchange, Spencer Street, were burnt out on 27th November. Post Office officials have now established that mail from some sources was affected by fire or water, including AIR MAIL from America and Italy, and SURFACE MAIL from Denmark, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, and Britain. (We mention only countries where ASFR is known to have readers.) Surface mail affected was carried by the following ships: SS BALLARAT, SS HECTOR, SS MARCONI, MS DRESDEN.

PATRICK KAVANAUGH DIES

Dublin, 1.12.67: Patrick Kavanaugh, one of Ireland's leading poets, died in a Dublin nursing home yesterday. He was 62.

R E V I E W S

BRIAN ALDISS: AN AGE (Faber)

SAMUEL BECKETT: HOW IT IS (Calder: \$4.60)

FRANK M. ROBINSON: THE POWER (various publishers)

- reviewed by John Foyster

Receiving books by Mr. Brian Aldiss and Mr. Robert Graves in one day is not an entirely pleasant experience. That is, it is not pleasant if one admires Mr. Graves's writing as much as I do and is required to read Mr. Aldiss's book instead.

However, reading AN AGE makes me uncertain that this feeling is as soundly based as I imagined it to be. There was a terrible moment, just before the end of the novel, when I thought Aldiss had dropped the bundle, but it was an illusion, and the book finished as well as I hoped it would when first I started to read it.

Although REPORT ON PROBABILITY A (see ASFR 11) dealt with the problems of watching and observing in a serious, mildly experimental way, AN AGE, which is rather conventional in some ways, manages to say a great deal more. As an elementary example it would be possible to consider the reactions of the viewers in REPORT with Bush's feelings in AN AGE. Whenever Bush observes the past he is impotent to change it, to correct the wrongs he sees. So he just watches - and goes mad.

Now this is just not science fiction. No matter how much we may like to talk about "serious sf" it is an unpleasant fact of life that sf is as realistic and as strongly written as the ghost of a jellyfish. The obvious example to quote is, perhaps, Tom Godwin's THE COLD EQUATIONS. A few months ago P. Schuyler Miller was holding this up as an example of sf which "separated the sheep from the goats" - the "scientists" from the "liberals". The liberals, says Miller, are upset because they cannot set aside the laws of nature by not wishing them to be so. THE COLD EQUATIONS is, however, a short story which separates different kinds of sheep and goats: those who can read from those who can't. The hero, Barton, (no, he doesn't have any other name) is a cold-blooded creature who imitates the famous actress and runs the gamut of emotions from A to B. Oh yes, Mr. Campbell, Mr. Miller, we all know that the girl has to be ejected, but the fact that it is done by a robot softens the blow somewhat.

That particular criticism could be levelled at just about all of sf, but AN AGE falls outside that classification. As I have indicated above, Bush lives. He feels and needs to weep and finds himself in far more unpleasant positions than Mr. Godwin's little piece of tintype. But he reacts like a human, and perhaps he is the first character in a science fiction novel to do so.

Let me quote a small passage to indicate the things (or some of them)

which Aldiss has done in this novel that no-one else ever seems to have got around to doing.

(Bush was not present at his mother's funeral, and he and his father have a mental scuffle while visiting her grave.)

"So her life ended, not just under that mound where the trickle of water down the hill had already commenced to erode one side of it, but in the exchange of trivialities between her husband and son."

(p.83)

In science fiction, no-one bothers with such minor details: the details which give a book breath.

Writing a novel well does not ensure, of course, that it is worth reading for entertainment. Well-written novels exist which very few readers can enjoy. J.G. Ballard writes well (or has written well) but this is no guarantee of the readability of his next work. Aldiss, however, is sufficiently skilled to have written a modestly original novel which should entertain a fair number of regular readers of sf. I say "modestly original" only because I felt that I knew what was coming at times, and it did. This I can attribute only to a lifetime's bad reading habits. The doubly-twisted ending, which I did not entirely expect, left me uncertain as to which thimble covered the pea, or whether there was a thimble or a pea at all. But thinking the novel over, it seems as though that is just the way it should seem.

Aldiss has taken Ballard's theme, time, and written, quite as well as Ballard, a novel which manages to say something as well as tell a story. In places the strain shows a little - mainly in those parts of Book One in which Bush is musing. On the other hand, Bush is rather like Ballard's heroes in that odd trilogy: he is quite as solitary, but motivated, and believable.

Aldiss is certainly the best English writer of sf today. And because so much of the talent has left the room, he may be the best in the world.

(Note to the Editor: Look, John, I've had a gutful of reviews which Tell All. Especially reviews which fire all an author's guns for him. So you'll find no giveaways here. On the other hand, I suppose I'm open to the criticism that I don't actually say much about the novel. Tough: if anyone wants to find out what is in the novel, let 'em pay royalties to Brian.

On the other hand, I'd like to come back to the novel in a year or so, when everyone's had time to invest, and say a good deal more about it.

Nor have I included any statements of the type "this is the 84th best sf novel I have ever read, and is just better than Vance's BIG PLANET and a little worse than Van Vogt's THE HOUSE THAT STOOD STILL." Bob Smith used to come at me with the "comparisons are odious" bit, as you may remember. This was partly zen-bull, of course, and some comparisons are necessary. But let's not compare AN AGE with anything right now?)

If REPORT ON PROBABILITY A is science fiction, and if the same is being said of Harry Mathews's TLOOTH, and if CAMP CONCENTRATION can be published in a science fiction magazine, then Beckett's HOW IT IS must be included with them.

Beckett's IMAGINATION DEAD IMAGINE, which was published a year or so ago by Calder & Boyars as a booklet, almost lived up to its sf blurb. But HOW IT IS, I think, does not need much defence. It is, in one sense, sf of the purest kind.

In the October 1967 GALAXY, Algis Budrys reflects that Harlan Ellison is "a suddenly remote ancestor". He refers to Ellison's "stylistic revolution", one presumes, which in fact was simply an attempt to convince sf readers that hackneyed pulp style was an "in" thing, and that it did not matter how defective a science fiction writer's head is, his heart is in the right place. Because the writing of sf is generally at an appallingly low level (Budrys happens to be an exception) anyone who is nearly mediocre must stand out in the crowd. Which is why, presumably, Budrys lost his head over THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION.

But if this group of writers wishes to crow about its greatness, then we must surely expect it to remove the blindfolds as well, and try to grasp just where it stands (or lies) with respect to some of the better writing of today.

Because the play-form, as used by Beckett, is more readily assimilable to the man in the street, there has been relatively little interest in his novels. This is unfortunate, because Beckett's novels are probably more important. Anyway, I find them more enjoyable.

Beckett writes extremely precisely, and consequently his later novels seem rather unapproachable, rather as FINNEGAN'S WAKE is unapproachable. This is hardly surprising, this similarity, since Beckett was a hanger-on of Joyce's during the 1930s, when much of the fancy stuff with WORK IN PROGRESS was going on. In the early novels, WATT and MURPHY, Beckett has a fairly straight-forward yarn to tell, and he does it finely and humorously. Then, in his trilogy (MOLLOY, MALONE DIES, THE UNNAMABLE), Beckett began waltzing with language (French, as it happens), and his writing became more convoluted. I must admit that a part of THE UNNAMABLE remains, for me, the unreadable.

But HOW IT IS (also written initially in French), though making even less concessions to conventional language (omission of punctuation and no interest in the concept of sentences) is very easy to read. And it is perhaps one of the best novels written since World War II. And it is sf.

HOW IT IS starts on page 118 of the Calder edition. Idem est:

try and hear a few old words on and off string them
together in a phrase a few phrases try and see how it
can possibly have been not before Pim that's done part
one before that again vast stretch of time

So Beckett's narrator describes his world. His narration is divided into three parts, like Gaul, "the journey the couple the abandon".

In "the journey" the narrator describes the state of his own existence, but it is a state he remembers as being far in the past. He is aware of what lies, for the reader, in the future.

In "the couple" he discovers another being who, like himself, has a sack, but who is unable to crawl through the mud. The narrator, who now calls himself Bom in order to be distinguished from the other (Pim), establishes communication with this creature and also what a VILLAGE VOICE critic of obscene movies called a "tender relationship".

In "the abandon" Pim-that-was becomes mobile and Bom-that-was is no longer able to move. He muses, and reveals the nature of his universe. He lives on a vast plain and there are millions like him. At any one time half of them can crawl and half cannot. They move jerkily across the plain of this world, each carrying his precious sack. Bom postulates the existence of a God ("the one in charge of the sacks"), and even wonders about the possibility of a heaven:

one perhaps there is one perhaps somewhere merciful enough
to shelter such frolics where no one ever abandons anyone
and no one ever waits for anyone and never two bodies touch
and if it may seem strange that without food to sustain us
we can drag ourselves thus by the mere grace of our united
net sufferings from west to east towards an inexistent
peace we are invited kindly to consider

But finally, after a brief moment of anticipated glory, Bom turns his back on such things and gladly re-enters the cycle.

Now science fiction writers just don't make any attempt to portray an alien world. Beckett does, and does it very well.

I realize that it is not conventional to see HOW IT IS as a work of sf, but this should be no hindrance. Beckett does not need sf, but sf needs his influence.

How rarely do we mutter to ourselves, "THE STAR MENACE FROM THE SLIME GALAXY - no, I'm sorry to say I missed that one"! A science fiction novel missed is so often precious time regained (plug). Yet Frank Robinson's THE POWER is a novel I did not read when it first appeared and I admit that I am sorry I had not read it earlier.

Certainly Robinson does fumble the ending, but in a way he had painted himself into a corner: all the suspects had been eliminated, which means that one of the eliminations had to be wrong. This idea is quite popular, I understand, amongst writers of detective fiction, who have no scruples anyway, but in sf it is not quite fair.

I don't know whether THE POWER is still in print anywhere, so I might be carrying this message into utter darkness, but THE POWER is better than most sf novels. It is certainly much better than many of the novels appearing on Miller's Best Novel list of last year.

Robinson's superman is thoroughly believable as a human (or an actor) even if his power is not so easily acceptable. By contrast, many supermen in sf have powers one could accept (telepathy, for example) yet fail to make themselves believable. It is here, and in his handling of backgrounds, that Robinson gets his marks.

In 1956 the Hugo went to DOUBLE STAR (rather than to THE POWER or THE LONG TOMORROW), which shows that taste doesn't win. But THE POWER is a novel which will always be read by sf fans, where DOUBLE STAR will soon be forgotten.

HAYDEN HOWARD: THE ESKIMO INVASION (Ballantine: 90¢)

- reviewed by Robert Gerrand

THE ESKIMO INVASION is based on the strongly-drawn character of Dr. Joe West, founder and ex-Director of Oriental Population Problems Research at Berkeley. When West enters the Canadian Eskimo Sanctuary to get data on the Eskimos, he discovers Esks - Eskimo-like people, except that they are docile, lack initiative, and reproduce every month. West sees the Esks as a population explosion threat, and this is his driving obsession throughout the novel. He tries to interest various authorities in the problem, with, for complex political reasons, little luck. Deciding to take steps of his own, he accid-

entally kills some Eskimos, and ends up in the "Modern Penitentiary", a Canadian prison.

At this point there seems to be a distinct split in the construction of the novel. Before this it is a better than average, well-characterized sf novel, but then things start happening - quickly: via deep-freeze, we next meet West twenty years later being revived and treated by the CIA, and then shot off to Peking, where millions of rescued Esks are being used in massive irrigation projects. (The Americans also use the Esks as a source of cheap labour.) We finally see that they are the means of life-continuance of a Galactic-scale creature, and in a rather metaphysical ending the Esks reach a sort of Nirvana.

Howard can write tenderly and frankly of love (West at one stage is married to an Esk) with no false sentiment or neurotic overtones. He conveys beautifully the zest for life, the joy and delight in the relationship - to use a too formal word - between West and Marthalik.

He also makes you intensely aware of arctic conditions: you can almost feel the blizzard freezing your fingers off. These scenes are perhaps the best-handled, the most vividly described, in the book.

THE ESKIMO INVASION is a puzzling book. On my first reading I felt let down by the final climax; but on a second reading I find myself looking at it differently, and things I had thought over-extended, if not irrelevant, now appear necessary. This is because Howard has tried to cram into 380 paperback pages a hell of a lot of different ideas, superficially unrelated, and these are brought together in a fairly complex attitude to life.

The book is not a masterpiece, but it is a very impressive first novel. It poses a lot of problems, recognizes their complexities, and shows the way to some solutions to them. I look forward to his next book.

The stories which have gone to make up the novel appeared in GALAXY between April 1965 and April 1967.

JOHN CHRISTOPHER: THE LITTLE PEOPLE (Hodder: \$2.30)

E. C. TUBB: DEATH IS A DREAM (Hart-Davis: \$3.15)

CHRISTOPHER HODDER-WILLIAMS: THE EGG-SHAPED THING (Hodder: \$2.65)

POUL ANDERSON: PLANET OF NO RETURN (Dobson: \$1.80)

MAURICE OWEN: THE WHITE MANTLE (Hale: \$2.00)

- reviewed by Diana Martin

THE LITTLE PEOPLE is more of a study in characterization than is usually found in works of science fiction, but the Little People who give point to the whole work are completely based on scientific laws and fictionally are most credible.

From the day Bridget Chauncey sees the house her Uncle Seamus has left her she is committed to the remote countryside of Ireland, and with a streak of mad stubbornness she determines to change her inheritance from an apparent millstone to a useful commercial proposition as a country hotel. Her guests are a mixed crew of Americans and Germans, her English fiance and the nice Irish lawyer who first gave her the idea of the hotel. With the skill of a

true story teller, John Christopher leads up to the finding of the Little People by cleverly disclosing the backgrounds of his characters and laying the foundations of the events which follow.

It would be unfair to disclose the ultimate happenings, but all is written in a facile style that keeps one reading on with increasing excitement until the denouement, if one could call it that. Possibly the only criticism one could level at the author is the rather neat solution he gives to the problems of some of the minor characters, and a slightly let-down feeling as to the fate of the tragic little people. These are only minor points in a fine story which grips the imagination and reads like fact. It may not be to everyone's taste as "pure" sf, but as a study of human behaviour the book is worth reading more than once.

E.C. Tubb's DEATH IS A DREAM has all the elements of "pure" sf, and reads with a tremendous impact and swift action. The hero has been to all intents resurrected from the dead, and finds himself in an entirely new society which has formed in England. The mores and aims of this new society are so strange and distorted that our hero takes the entire book to come to terms with them. The art of the story-teller is here in gripping narrative which makes for compulsive reading. One doesn't even notice the cleverly contrived coincidences for what they are, so well is the attention held by the action. To me this is narrative writing of a high standard. Not until the book is laid down and the images start to fade does the technique begin to penetrate the mind and the development of the plot stand out, but there is nothing in the story to hint at the finale. And is it the finale?

After reading of a society which is quite shockingly materialistic but believes in reincarnation, the reader will find it difficult to accept an end to it all. My only complaint is that Tubb does not linger on the reincarnation parts of the story, which are so vital to the whole, but possibly this is fair enough: he handles a delicate theme in a competent manner without bogging down in too much explanation. For sheer entertainment this is one of the best books I have read this year.

In its glossy gold dust jacket, THE EGG-SHAPED THING comes into your hands practically pulsing with promise. Alas, this promise chickens out somewhere in the narrative and the reader struggles on through purple passion, symbolism and suggestive hints of relativity and time transference, trying to follow the story line to a satisfactory climax. This never comes, though plenty of action does appear.

The whole work seems over-contrived and over-polished; just because the hero has had a nervous breakdown I don't quite see why the reader has to suffer with him to the bitter end. A little more continuity and sweet reasonableness would give the story more point and greater impact. As it stands it seems to be a thread of happenings loosely held together by various people equally loosely brought together to make the happenings. Oh heck! you work it out for yourself. If you happen to have a mind which enjoys jigsaws based on higher physics, this book might be just your cup of tea, but it is hard going for the average reader.

This is really sad, because all through the book I kept feeling there was something good in the story, and that it was just eluding me because of my denseness. The style showed a chatty slickness and the opening pages indicated future good things, but even with back-tracking and almost a re-reading the same

conclusion was reached: the story line fell off the track somewhere and never quite made it back again.

There are some good things in PLANET OF NO RETURN, including a cunning plot, but the book as a whole seems to fall somewhat flat. Especially the ending, which seems to have a message in it, but I just couldn't get very excited about the matter.

Perhaps the fairest appraisal of this novel is that it would have more of an appeal to younger readers, who would enjoy the action, the counter-planning and the space travel, without a care for the deeper meanings. Viewed in this way it becomes a competently-written adventure yarn without any jarring inconsistencies and a rather new angle on aliens. But it is not a book to feed the mind.

Maurice Owen's THE WHITE MANTLE marries style to content in an extraordinarily gripping way. The story is a grim one - of Earth's last Ice Age, set in a not-too-distant future - and of the manner in which Mankind faces his eventual destruction. There are no holds barred, and only one means of survival for the race appears - and this isn't terribly promising.

With stark, almost documentary, writing the author explains what causes the catastrophe; this is probably pseudo-scientific, but as far as I am concerned it gives a sufficient sense of realism to carry the action through to the bitter finale. The moralizing on the situation is cleverly tied in with the theories of the scientists, and the solution is a masterly combination of political and technical supremacy worked out between the two major countries of Earth.

As a reader one becomes involved with the story to the extent of wondering how one would react in the situation, and even imagining that the cold snaps we have been experiencing are the beginning of the end. There is no blame attached to the humans on Earth or outside aliens: the whole terrible business is just Nature in her coldest, most inexorable, form - hence the urgency to get on with some means of survival, to at least preserve a portion of Mankind for the future.

The only criticism of the writer's handling of this depressing story, I feel, is in the planning for the survivors. Although very carefully worked out and expounded, I cannot see why the couples mated on Earth should not remain together instead of having the pregnant women go off alone to mate again with strangers. Their final destination is going to be difficult enough without changing partners, and the details of their journey also seem a little too sketchy and uncertain when considered with the rest of the writing, which is so precise.

If ever a book could use a sequel, this is it; and judging by his handling of this story I feel certain that Maurice Owen would be equal to the task. THE WHITE MANTLE is not light entertainment, but it will hold your interest. Please write a sequel, Mr. Owen!

SAMUEL R. DELANY: THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION (Ace: 50¢)

JAMES BLISH: FAUST ALEPH-NUL (IF, August-October 1967)

- reviewed by K.U.F. Widdershins

Delany's latest novel is even more difficult to appreciate than its

predecessor, BABEL-17 (which, our kindly editor informs me, has been declared by two Top People In The Field to be the worst sf novel of the year). Delany prefaces each chapter of THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION with quotations which are marginally relevant at best, and which include some quite ephemeral "author's diary" pieces. Yet if all of this is stripped away, and if the story is allowed to stand alone, without frills and furbelows, then it emerges as a fine piece of writing, far better than BABEL-17.

What hath Delany wrought? A post-War novel? Yes. A novel about mutations? Yes. Some are outcast and some are not? Yes. It all sounds very familiar, does it not?

What's the action? Hero chases girl. I've read that before, too; this month in fact, in Gardner Fox's WARRIOR OF LLARN, and there the hero battled against all kinds of odd monsters... Much the same in THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION.

In that case, why do we bother about Delany? For a start, he makes the plot seem fresh. Although he is retelling the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, after a fashion, he has been able to set it in so odd a world as to make the plot new. On the other hand, he is still a little heavy-handed in some ways. After introducing a character who is obviously Christ, and having him carry out many Christ-like actions (to the extent of even playing out the temptation scene with Delany's devil-figure, Kid Death), he comes on with the Big Revelation: "this guy, whom you thought was just an ordinary old character, is actually Christ..." Wow!

Well, we can put up with that sort of thing, and Mr. Delany's little pretensions, in order to get down to a really solid adventure story which is well written. Delany suggests in one of his notes that after this story he will be able to go on to something new. One would await such newness with enthusiasm.

In ASFR 6, James Blish wrote:

"...pleased though I am with the Roger Bacon novel as it finally turned out, it doesn't in the least satisfy my original itch to write a novel in which ceremonial magic would play a large part. Happily I am now coming down the home stretch on just such a novel, to be called FAUST ALEPH-NULL."

I must assume that Frederik Pohl's heart melted at the thought of poor Jim's mania for "such a novel", and when it came to cutting this major work down to fit in between editorial pieces and the works of (in the three issues of IF in which it appeared) Roger Deeley, Harl Vincent, and Donald J. Walsh, he was careful to retain all available incantations.

The result casts quite a spell over the reader, not to even consider the plot. Nevertheless, the remaining bones are good to look at, and when the complete corpus appears...

But back at the ranch Blish has turned out a very readable novel. I cannot recall ever laughing at a piece of sf before, and in fact I understand that attending a farce with me is fatal to an evening's enjoyment, but Blish managed to squeeze a little golden blood from these eyes in places.

Blish indulges in a good deal of tuckerization. So in a list of characters we have "the aged archivist Fr. Bonfiglioli", Frs. Boucher, Vance, and Anson ("a brusque engineer-type who specialized in unclouding the minds of

The story takes place after World War Three: the actual catastrophe one hears nothing of. The foresighted - and wealthy - people have acquired survival insurance in the form of payment for a room at the hotel "Termush" (thermo-, terminus, mushroom?), situated at a remote place on the Atlantic Coast.

In this closed society one strives to live life as before. A strange, frightening pre-war hotel life. One does not, of course, succeed. Both outer and inner forces counteract the good (?) intentions of the "management". The outer: wounded, radiation-affected people who flow towards Termush and threaten the existence of the occupants; the inner: the occupants' reactions to the catastrophe, the isolation, the minimal existence.

The style is concise, objective, rather dry, with almost no vivid words. Exceptions are some fantastic visionary dreams which the narrator has. The story works with a low, intense tone; it is told in the form of diary entries by a former university teacher - the observing humanist! One follows his anxiety and uncertainty as to the future, from entry to entry. An actual development in him does not take place; he tries to interfere with events, but in a vague, ambiguous way. He stays in his passivity, yet his entries give a hint as to his gradual acceptance of responsibility for the other people - those outside.

It is one of the good ideas in the book that when the hotel guests come up from their "cave", the world has not changed. In any other way, that is, than that it actually does not exist. The scenes are still there: trees, lawns, the sea. The catastrophe lies in wait in the invisible dust. A forced uncertainty.

The book ends with this uncertainty. The occupants have fled from Termush and the wounded ones, out on the sea. "Outside the sea has stopped, it is not dark nor bright."

You will survive, or you will not survive...

ANTOLOGIA DE NOVELAS DE ANTICIPACION, VII SELECCION
Ed. Aoervo, Barcelona 446pp 185 Pesetas
reviewed by Carlos Buiza

(Anthology of Stories
of Anticipation, 7th
Selection)

This volume gathers together nine Spanish authors and one foreigner, Jacques Ferron. It is the first anthology of Spanish authors in which, taking Domingo Santos's words from the preface, "they are not all those that exist, but they are all those that endure" and it is possible that the phrase is to the point, since for some all those who write sf are mad...

The group of stories included cannot be neglected by anyone. Nor by us - we say it again, although you will have noticed it - who are rather demanding. Perhaps because we are convinced that selecting harshly from all that is published is the only way in which the genre will attain its greatest diffusion and, of course, its greatest quality.

All right, let's look at the group: Jumping for joy, we applaud the short stories by Francisco Lezcano. The two or three things we know about him from the publishers did not succeed in satisfying us, but these stories - ah yes! Surely his are the most successful in the whole volume: pure sf, 100%, straightforward stories, without pretence to another class, without rambling or padding, and which, in a certain way, are allied to the three stories of Jacques Ferron (BJORCK, INDIFFERENCE, THE ANTIQUARIAN) which go straight to

the heart, despising embroidery and inadequate baroquery.

The nine stories by Alfonso Alvarez Villar turn out to be somewhat heavy, despite their brevity. The cause lies, we think, in his scientific schooling: when it comes to connecting science with letters, as often occurs in sf, the writer's technical knowledge is more often a handicap than a help.

Jose Sanz y Diaz offends with seeming baroquery, and with three stories totalling more than 100 pages is the author most generously treated in the book. Not so Domingo Santos, whose three stories (PSI, THE EXPLORERS, and THE SHAPES FROM THE LAKE), classical in theme (and let it be known that we do not use the word "classical" derogatively), demonstrate happily his experience as a writer. Santos is the proto-pioneer of sf in Spain, a fact about which he is silent in his preface.

We were afraid, regarding Jose-Maria Aroca, with his STORY OF MARTIN VILALTA, that this rather reminded us of the novel by Hanck Janson, THE VIOLATION OF TIME: there is a public servant with head-aches, a park scene, &c, but - coincidences apart - the story is "right." Of the three stories by Juan Atienza, THE TABLES OF THE LAW stays with us: in it the author sets out possible sex problems of the future. F. Valverde Torne offers two stories: THE BOOK, which we didn't like because it is very dangerous to mix religion - Catholic - with sf in order that something positive might result; and THE MECHANICAL MAN, a robotic "pocivo" with an inverted theme... but handled with an ingenuity that gets the best from it.

As for Buiza, Carlos, you already know the CONFESSION OF A GRATS and THE GOOD TIGER. THE FALL is inspired by the Bible, oft-imbibed fountain of sf ideas, and FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL is a story from F&SF, a la lemon.

DOMINGO SANTOS: LOS DIOSES DE LA PISTOLA PREHISTORICA (The Gods of the
Infinitum, 25 Ed. Ferma 208pp 35 Pesetas Prehistoric Pistol)

Briefly, Domingo Santos's latest novel deals with a trip to the past to try to clear up whether the Earth was visited in the Quaternary by beings from another world. The action, full of surprises, develops in that epoch and culminates in a surprise ending. The result is good, even though the author is not very pleased with it.

A short story, A STRANGE LODGER AT THE LONDON ZOO, completes the volume. Its theme is classical, its development and treatment humorous - even though its content may not be so.

ANTICIPACION, Numero 1
Ed. E.D.H.A.S.A. Barcelona, 1967 241pp 100 Pesetas

With this issue EDHASA begins a collection of sf stories, which to my great amazement adopts the same title as some other Spanish publications - the Anthology of Stories of Anticipation, commented on above, and the magazine ANTICIPATION. For this there is no excuse, because there are a good few names that could be applied to new sf collections - including names with some commercial allure.

As for the selection, it suffers from a defect of the first order: antiquity. John Carnell, former editor of NEW WORLDS, compiled it. The book can be recommended to those who have read absolutely no sf and who want to start looking for some safe references. And only to them. From the point of view of the habitual reader (and each new collection must surely be directed

principally to this class of reader) the ensemble would appear prehistoric. Only one story in it has the qualities which allow it to be classified as modern: QUEST (here renamed THE LAST MAN) by Lee Harding, published about a year ago by Acervo. And not because the story is of recent vintage, but because it has an enduring theme: the quest of a man in a soul-less, mechanized world, with its robots and perfectly aseptic cities. We are present, step by step, at the tragedy of the protagonist, upon whom, finally, is hurled the last, uncontainable tragedy.

TED WHITE: THE SECRET OF THE MARAUDER SATELLITE
Westminster Press, 1967 US\$3.75

reviewed by Andrew Porter

Ted White makes no secret of the fact that he highly admires the juveniles of Robert Heinlein and Lester del Rey. This book shows it: it is a highly competent, never dull, novel.

The plot is simple: Paul Williams, recent graduate of the Space Academy, goes to an orbiting space station, has many adventures, and goes a good way toward becoming a man. Of primary appeal to the young, this novel is the prototype of much of the best juvenile sf published. Ted handles the plot well, and seems to space out his major events in a manner designed to keep the reader's interest. The events are, perhaps, too evenly spaced. This is possibly planned, but such exactness led this reader to expect something to happen at even intervals.

Perhaps the largest point of contention is the use of familiar, fannish names for all the characters. The common reader, admittedly, will never have heard of any of them, but I found myself trying to match up familiar names with familiar characters, a task which shortly became very confusing.

Aside from these minor faults, the book is a very well written novel, with strongly developed characters, plenty of action, and even - surprisingly for a juvenile - something of a love interest. If you have a son or daughter whom you want to interest in sf, you would do well to whet their appetites with this book.

TED WHITE: THE JEWELS OF ELSEWHEN
Belmont Books, 1967 US\$0.50

This offering is Ted's best book to date. An alternate-world story, it is based on the idea that Leonardo da Vinci has discovered Jewels which he has used to create imaginary realities, projections of the idea of "What if...?" The hero and heroine find themselves catapulted into an anomalous New York, of hollow shell-like buildings and no living things. From this world they tumble into a series of distorted realities, each based on a probable series of events. The characters are developed smoothly as real people, and the book reaches a neat climax in which the purpose and reason for the Jewels of Elsewhen are revealed. A finely-designed, attractive cover, which has unfortunately little to do with the interior, caps this book, one of the best to come from Belmont in many months.

NEIL R. JONES: THE SUNLESS WORLD
Ace Books, 1967 US\$0.50

Thud and blunder in the grand and glorious tradition of the pulp magazines of the thirties. Cardboard characters, papier-mache science, and wierdly alien

ies and discovers what a really fine writer Brunner is. Sometimes there is too much polish, too much control, and the characters move jerkily like puppets instead of smoothly and not too predictably. But this is a minor irritation when one considers how much clumsily crafted fiction is allowed to get into print. Perhaps Brunner's best quality is that he is not afraid to write passionately when the occasion demands. Stories like THE NAIL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HAND, SUCH STUFF and THE TOTALLY RICH are made the more powerful by the author's intense emotional involvement. In fact there is not a story in this collection that smells of hackery: Brunner seems to have forged each one with a white hot intensity.

I could be wrong. He may have hacked them out for money, but if so then he manages to conceal this better than his contemporaries. Brunner is an earnest, serious writer working in the sf medium. His own introductions to these stories assume very much the manner of Harlan Ellison, but somehow never sink to the embarrassing level of that equally earnest writer. They allow us into the writer's mind and provide valuable comment on the stories.

Brunner may perhaps be too professionally polished for his own good, but this is the best single-author collection in years.

THE PLAYBOY BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY (Souvenir: \$4.45)

- castigated by John Bangsund

The editors make two modest claims for their selection: that it breaks once and for all the sexual tabus that have restricted sf - and that it is the best sf published anywhere.

Their first claim is backed by a quote from Kingsley Amis's NEW MAPS OF HELL, which was published seven years ago; and I regret to inform the editors of Playboy that even if that book gave an accurate account of sf at the time, things have changed since. A glance at any issue of Mike Moorcock's NEW WORLDS would probably reveal more sexual tabus broken than Playboy has ever accomplished. Hell, there isn't a single example of sex in this volume that I haven't struck somewhere in an sf paperback or magazine. Some of the daring ideas, in fact, have been quite done to death - and since a number of them appear in stories devoid of literary worth or entertainment value, I can only assume that Playboy published these stories for the tabu-breaking qualities they ignorantly supposed present in them. And not a four-letter word anywhere!

The best sf published anywhere? Do they really believe that? The poor, smug, ignorant bastards!

Slickness characterizes this book: chrome-plated fantasy for the organization man. Most of the stories are smoothly written, fine examples of the suave style of the sixties, with not a trace of the classical or the experimental. Most are of the sting-in-the-tail variety, and with two exceptions, all are earthbound. Pohl's THE FIEND and Sheckley's SPY STORY are the only stories in the book which venture into space. Of the thirty-two stories, I liked those by Bruce Jay Friedman, Bernard Wolfe, J.G. Ballard and John Ather-ton; most of the rest are quite entertaining if taken in small doses - and provided you ignore those insufferable bores, the editors.

The book is nicely produced - decorative headband, coloured top and endpapers - but at \$4.45 it is obviously not aimed at the sf-buying public. Just the thing, though, for the glovebox of your Thunderbird, to show your playmate that you're up with this space-age stuff.

ROBERT SILVERBERG: NEEDLE IN A TIMESTACK (Ballantine: 60¢)

How to entertain without saying anything profound. Silverberg knows how to do this very well and the ten stories in this collection all exhibit a high degree of polish even if they are wanting in style. THE PAIN PEDDLERS is a brutal bit of moralizing that does point the bone, and TO SEE THE INVISIBLE MAN has the sort of charm usually lacking from this author's work. Taken all round this is a well-balanced, smoothly readable, and 90% forgettable collection. Recommended only to those who like predigested fiction with little or no roughage.

PHILIP K. DICK & RAY NELSON: THE GANYMEDE TAKEOVER (Ace: 60¢)

Keen fans will have fun with this one. Is that Ray Nelson writing on page X or is it Phil Dick writing the way people like to think Ray Nelson does? And is that really Dick writing on page Y or is it a neat pastiche by his co-author? This should at least indicate that the novel is significantly different from the usual Dick production to invite such digging. Certainly the character of Percy X, the Negro revolutionary, acts like a Nelson mouthpiece, but then both boys could be having us on. There's a very moving section on something like transcendentalism and a marvellous psychedelic battle that could have been written by either member of the team. Maybe they've both had fun twitting us. If you add these extras to what is essentially a routine Dick novel, bursting with ideas and gimmicks, you have a very interesting book indeed. Recommended to Phil Dick fans and just about anybody else who enjoys good American sf.

HARRY HARRISON: MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! (Penguin: 70¢)

Lee Harding reckons this is the best novel this year, and he could be right. Harrison's picture of New York at the turn of the next century is fascinating if not faultless. His attention to character is commendable, as is his side-stepping of a contrived ending. The book may be full of scientific holes at which the pernicious may cavil, but the book as a whole is no mean achievement. Sober, and at times frightening, it is very different from the author's previous works. No thrills here, and no belly laughs either. Recommended for thoughtful readers, but not for space-adventure fans. See ASFR 7 for Lee's review.

RAY BRADBURY: THE ILLUSTRATED MAN (Hart-Davis: \$1.55)

A classic collection of stories, this is the fifth British reprint - and look at that price! May one dare to hope that this is merely the first of a series of cheap sf hardbacks from Rupert Hart-Davis...?

DOUGLAS HILL (ed): THE DEVIL HIS DUE (Hart-Davis: \$3.15)

Yipes - \$3.15? (Twice the price & a tenth as nice.) A smallish book, it contains eight stories about deals with the devil; all eight competently written but quite forgettable. Wyndham, Merril, Tubb, Roberts, Bailey, Moorcock, Disch/Sladek, and Ramsay Wood. Not one of them even begins to approach, at one end of the spectrum, the Faust story or, at the other, Frederic Brown's NASTY.

L E T T E R S

Books Discussed In This Issue

FREDERIK POHL Thanks for send-
New York ing me the August
ASFR, with Jim's
blast. How that man can blither on.

He's quite right about one thing:
The sentence "That's all there is to
criticism" is a considerable error
on my part. Obviously there's more;
Jim knows I know there's more, be-
cause I admitted it to him (at a
dinner in the restaurant of the Stat-
ler-Hilton Hotel in Washington, a
few days after the editorial appear-
ed) and explained (without, I grant,
excusing) that sentence on the
grounds that I just ran out of space
and had to make a rather destructive
cut to fit the editorial into the
pages available. But the rest of
what he says is poppycock.

No doubt there are a number of crit-
ics who share Jim's view of the role
and the duties of criticism. In my
view these critics are nearly all
both dull and irrelevant. In any
case, the critics I was talking
about were those who try to build
reputations by elevating incoherent
trash, just so it is unusual inco-
herent trash, to the status of art.
The central statement of my editor-
ial, so far as it touched on critics
at all, was that these people do
exist and that their activities
range from the ludicrous to the con-
temptible. If Jim wanted to quarrel
with that statement I would be glad
to debate with him. But he doesn't;
he agrees to it; he only says that
it tells us nothing about the func-
tion of criticism. Of course it
doesn't. It also does not tell us
who wrote the "Shakespeare" sonnets,
what to do for warts, or whether
Peewee Harris ever made Eagle Scout.
I can think of lots of other things
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sound was by now distracting customers from their purchases. I was then able to explain to Mervyn that I was only carrying out D. Knight's instruction to his readers. He quickly understood, and after some talk I managed to persuade him to stock up on copies of SF YEARBOOK.

As I left the shop I received a heavy blow to the back of the head (13 copies of THE IF READER OF SCIENCE FICTION).

Who do I sue?

The Moving Finger Fumbles

The editor of this journal boomed in issue no.12 when he printed my TOP TEN pieces of short fiction. Actually there was a TOP SIXTEEN or some such ridiculous number, and the cautionary comment was made that only the top three or four were in order for sure. He assures me that the complete list will be published in the present issue. There were certain rules in compiling the list: no author is represented more than once, for example. And on the other hand I tried to make it a wide-ranging sample, so that a particular type of story would not be listed too frequently.

I note with pleasure that only three of the stories listed in the first version of my list appeared in the YANDRO POLL (abridged edition) which appears in ANALOG for November. And there were only three stories on the YANDRO list I'd not read. Be Different - follow my lead.

It isn't much use just to list some stories, so I want to use this little platform here to propagandize for one of them each issue. This time -

ALGIS BUDRYS: THE EXECUTIONER (Astounding: January 1956)

This story appeared in a very strong issue of ASTOUNDING (with Sturgeon, Cole, and part 3 of Herbert's UNDER PRESSURE). In the AnLab ratings it appeared just behind the conclusion of the serial, which is about as good as a short can be expected to manage.

I suppose it really isn't sf, except in the sense of being strange, perhaps in the same way as Cole's stories (of which INDIRECTION was not representative). Although it is set in a future New York, this choice is entirely fortuitous, and the setting could have been anywhere not of our time.

The story attracted my eye because it gives a human protagonist a problem. He must choose between continuing to live the kind of life he has lived in the past, knowing it to be a lie, or to destroy that life completely and so destroy himself. At the same time this choice is burdened by the problem of whether or not God exists. Budrys solves this most adroitly.

The story was written relatively early in Budrys's career, so it is understandable that he has one sentence too many. But perhaps this is underlining for the poor ASTOUNDING readers who wouldn't get the point. The penultimate sentence is a magnificent piece of work, getting the message, the action, the philosophy across accurately and briefly. The writing in this sentence is finely controlled; Budrys builds slowly up to his point, stopping us with commas, making clear the indecision in his protagonist's mind, until finally the story's soul floods out of the page.

The Hugo Results

Well, what a sad tale they are. A short story I abused some time ago wins the short story award, the novel which won was really the fourth or fifth best, among the nominations, and the novelette won because of gross stupidity on someone's part. I really cannot see how CALL HIM LORD could have been considered a novelette. The damned thing was really very short, certainly not more than a thousand words longer than NEUTRON STAR (billed in the magazine as a novelette, by the way, whereas CALL HIM LORD was dubbed a short story).

This seems to me a gross error at the level of the Con Committee. And it's the sort of thing which should be straightened out. I guess I'm just sore that my choice lost. But then the best novelette didn't even make the final list.

Foyster's Top Ten-and-a-bit

(JB: Okay, so I boobed last time. So let's go back to scratch.)

AUTHORS:

Cordwainer Smith
Philip Jose Farmer
Theodore Sturgeon
Walter M. Miller Jr.
Henry Kuttner
A.E. Van Vogt
Alfred Bester
Leigh Brackett
Kurt Vonnegut
John W. Campbell

NOVELS:

(I can't think of any.)

EDITORS:

Campbell - 1945-50
Campbell - 1938-44/51-55
Campbell - 1956-58/63-
Merwin - 1946-51
Boucher - 1949-57
Campbell - 1959-62
Gold - 1950-53
Lowndes - 1951-61
Knight - 1950-51/58
Mines - 1951-53

MAGAZINES:

ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

STARTLING STORIES

FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION

BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION

IF - WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

PLANET STORIES

WORLDS BEYOND

SPACE SCIENCE FICTION

INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION

SHORT FICTION:

Smith: The Burning of the Brain
Russell: Metamorphosite
Farmer: Sail on! Sail on!
Sturgeon: Baby is Three
Miller: The Big Hunger
Ballard: The Voices of Time
Clarke: The Star
Shiras: In Hiding
Matheson: Born of Man and Woman
Budrys: The Executioner
Bradbury: The Million-Year Picnic
Van Vogt: Recruiting Station
Kornbluth: The Mindworm
Moore: No Woman Born
Campbell: Cloak of Aesir
Dickson: Call him Lord

(Rules: 1. No author shall be represented more than once. 2. Roger Zelazny and Everett B. Cole are deliberately omitted pending careful reading. 3. Order is certain to around 3-4, uncertain thereafter.)

ARTISTS:

Virgil Finlay
Kelly Freas
Ed. Cartier
Hannes Bok

a. Astounding Science Fiction
b. Unknown

a. Startling Stories
b. Fantastic Story Magazine
c. Thrilling Wonder Stories
d. Space Stories
e. Wonder Story Annual

a. Fantasy & Science Fiction
b. Venture Science Fiction

(as published by James Quinn)

a. Space Science Fiction
b. Fantasy Magazine
c. Science Fiction Adventures
d. Rocket Stories

(JB: On completing the previous page I contacted John Foyster by bush telegraph and said to him: "John, I am delighted to see that you have included the well-known ROCKET STORIES in your list of top magazines, but you seem to have unaccountably overlooked certain British publications." "@*%!&@*@?!" said John, approximately. "And you won't change your mind about the, er, novels?" "Nope." "Well, how about telling me what was the best novelette of 1966?" There was a sound of exasperation from John's end, then, in a jeez-you're-dumb-Bangsund kind of voice, he said: "UNDER OLD EARTH - what else?")

The Worst Science Fiction Story Ever Published

Nominations for this distinction have been open for over forty years, and it would not be unreasonable to expect that there would be many claimants for the title. The story I have selected seems to me to have such remarkable qualifications that any other proposal would really have to be one out of the box.

Now it would really only be fair to the reader to allow him or her to read this choice piece, but I suspect that there are not many copies of IMAGINATION for June 1957 around. And yet, going into the matter a little more deeply, it may even be the case that I am the only person in the world ever to have read this story. Editor Hamling wouldn't have read it (I hope), the compositors presumably had long given up, and the author probably didn't bother. The reader of the issue in question probably turned in haste from a Randall Garrett short (SIX FRIGHTENED MEN - "It was an unexplored planet - holding a dangerous creature impossible to fight") to the Robert Silverberg piece (WOMAN'S WORLD - "Thrown 500 years into the future he was a hunted man - because he was a man"). How can we possibly blame the eager young fan? So, perhaps, he missed THE THREE THIEVES OF JAPETUS, by Mark Reinsberg.

"Jake moistened his thin purple lips and clenched the radiophone tighter." Jake, presumably, is some odd and alien form of life and occasionally has to go through a complicated process to keep those thin purple lips moist. The "radiophone tighter" is presumably a gadget of the future with wondrous powers.

"His hand rubbed the gun hidden beneath his shirt." Was it Mr. Jones or Mr. Mailer who had the little poem about the rifle and the gun in his hoary old war story? (Later on they "bare their guns"...)

But enough of this frivolity. We shouldn't really expect too much of a bloke's style, back in those pre-Ellison days, when there were no glittering examples.

PLOT:

The three thieves lie in wait for a freighter carrying a "valuable cargo". They feign helplessness and are taken aboard by the unsuspecting crew. Then they draw their guns and force the crew out of the spaceship to die. The cargo, it seems, consists of vital supplies for Titan. One of the three must go to deliver an ultimatum. While he is away the others realise that the money will go further between two. When he returns with the news that the money will be sent, and some bottles of whiskey, he is shot. The remaining thieves discover that the dead one had been followed by the Space Police. Having taken a swig of whiskey, they prepare to defend them-

The three owlhoots lie in wait for a stagecoach carrying a "valuable cargo". They feign thirst and are taken aboard by the unsuspecting stagehands. Then they draw their sixguns and force the cowpokes from the stage, to die in the desert. The cargo, it seems, consists of rifles for the defenders of Tombstone. One of the three must ride into town to deliver an ultimatum. While he is away the others realise that the money will go further between two. When he returns with the news that the money will be sent, and some bottles of whiskey, he is shot. The remaining owlhoots discover that the dead one had been followed by the Sheriff's Posse. Having taken a swig of whiskey, they prepare

selves, but realise too late that it
is poisoned. They die and exit left.

to defend themselves, but realise too
late that it is poisoned. They die
and exit left.

Is it too much to expect that a published story should have some merit
other than just filling up space? If so, THE THREE THIEVES OF JAPETUS should
not have been published.

Now I am not a dogmatic man. It is just possible that once some editor
published a story which was worse than this one, but if so I have missed it.
I may not have read all the sf magazines ever published (though I did read the
two bed-sheet FANTASTICS) so I won't claim that this is genuinely the worst.

Therefore - ASFR hereby opens its

G*R*A*N*D I*N*A*U*G*U*R*A*L C*O*M*P*E*T*I*T*I*O*N

Readers are invited to nominate their idea of the worst sf story ever
published. Only stories published in professional magazines are eligible (to
save embarrassment of author and editor). Readers should outline the plot and
indicate the worst features.

All entries must be received by 31st March, 1968.

The Judge will be John Foyster, Connoisseur of the Crummy.

The Winner (that is, the nominator of the Genuinely Worst Story) will
receive

A S*U*R*P*R*I*S*E G*I*F*T

In the event of a tie, the earliest date shall determine the winner.

The Author of the winning story shall have his works discussed at length
in this column.

Relatives of Richard S. Shaver and Raymond A. Palmer are ineligible.

Back To Throon Week

Although it is but a moment since the time when it would have been unbe-
lievable, I now appear to have reached a state of mind in which it seems just
faintly possible that Mrs. Edmond Hamilton is not the greatest artisan of the
written word yet born. The remoteness of this possibility from my conscious-
ness was undoubtedly enhanced by the fact that I have - or had - not read any
of Leigh Brackett's works for some years. But a recent reading of SHADOW OF
MARS (to the gentle accompaniment of Joan the Wad and Rheumatic Pains?) has
suggested that there may be minor flaws even in this masterwork.

No matter how much it contrasts with my earlier, stronger, and therefore
truer, feelings, I am almost forced to accept the idea that Miss Brackett's
characters are not entirely true-to-life. I find myself almost accepting the
idea (O, halt the foul thought!) a hard-bitten hero would not say "Bosh!" or
"My Stars!" Nevertheless, Miss Brackett's writing remains superior to that of
all living writers in English, and the critical position of such works as
STARMEN OF LLYRIDIS, LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR and SEA KINGS OF MARS is surely
unassailable.

Naturally, this discovery, that my memory of the past is in places cloudy
(and indeed, silver-lined) was mildly distressing. "What," I conjectured,
"about Edmond Hamilton Himself? Surely THE STAR KINGS is just as good as it
was when I first read it in 1957?"

Because I occasionally watch television commercials, I knew that the
thing to do was to conduct a scientific test. I therefore read THE STAR KINGS
and report that although it is good reading, it is not quite so good as it
seemed in 1957. But though it was possibly not the best sf published in 1947,
it was possibly the best published in that particular magazine - AMAZING .

"John Gordon" is a former war pilot who cannot become used to flying a

desk, and he starts to hear voices in his head. It was this latter feature which probably sold the novel to Ray Palmer, who peddled the magazine to readers with just the same problem. However, in this case it turns out that the voice is that of Zarth Arn, who is living in 202,115 AD, and who wishes to exchange minds with John Gordon, or maybe I mean bodies? At any rate, the idea is that John Gordon's mind will wind up in Zarth Arn's body, in the future, and vice versa. (This idea was later handled by a Mr. Van Vogt.) After some misgivings, John Gordon agrees to the exchange, but not until an event extremely rare in sf occurs. I quote:

"Of course, your age would be equally strange to me. For that reason, if you agree, I should want you to prepare thought-spools from which I could learn your language and ways."

"Thought-spools? What are they?" Gordon asked, puzzled.

"They are not yet invented in your age?" said Zarth Arn.

This is quite surprising. Few sf novels include problems of a trivial nature, and when this sort of thing occasionally creeps in it gives one quite a jolt.

At any rate, the change is effected, and the action immediately slows. Zarth Arn turns out to be the second son of the Emperor of the Universe, married to one girl, scheduled to marry another. The Emperor is murdered and Zarth Arn is kidnapped (so that he will appear to be the killer) and is taken to the lair of the heavy, Shorr Kan (ulp!), who plans to Rule the Universe. After a bit of fakery, Zarth Arn (John Gordon?) deceives Shorr Kan and escapes, fights off cloud monsters, starts mutiny, and returns to Throon, the world where the goodies hang out. He manages to save his brother's life, save the Universe, and lose the girl.

The next day he returns to our time, and some weeks later is charmed to learn over the intercom that Zarth Arn hopes to be able to send flesh into the past. Maybe John Gordon finds a mind-blow insufficiently stimulating.

Things did slow down a bit after that Great Leap Forward. Unhappily the book is quite as good as some other space opera being published in 1967.

Two New Magazines

In past years some sf writers have been working the vein of ineptitude and passing this off as "skill". Casting aside the achievements of those who bothered to learn, they have opted for ignorance as the path to truth.

At last a magazine has been produced for these writers. Incredibly badly edited, BEYOND INFINITY lacks almost all virtues, saving only that the pages seem to be in the correct order. It refuses to allow reproduction of anything from its pages (which is remarkably optimistic), and denies the intentional similarity between names of characters and of living persons. This is hard to defend with two stories tuckerized to blazes. The editor takes two pages to say nothing. The content of the editorial is precisely zero, even when compared with an average Paul Fairman job. There are two entirely different photos of the editor. I imagine the reader is expected to think they are the same.

But, my God, suppose the thing is successful!

Fred Pohl's INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION is a different kettle of fish. It is rather slender and is, one would estimate, operated on a shoestring. The stories are almost uniformly bad, but perhaps this truly represents the state of sf around the world. Damien Broderick, I know, would rather not have had his story printed. But the endeavour is undoubtedly worth while, and we must hope that the same can soon be said for the contents.

LETTERS

(Frederik Pohl continues, from p.30)

it doesn't tell us, because it wasn't intended to; it was only intended to say that just because a critic says a kind of science fiction is good doesn't necessarily mean it is good. He may be merely wrong in his judgment. He may be trying to make a buck out of it. He may be working out his personal problems on his readers. Or he may just be copying what someone else has said. He may even be preparing an elaborate practical joke on his readers, even to the extent of masquerading under an assumed name and setting up straw men so that, at tedious and self-righteous length, he can knock them down again.

JB: I'm not buying into this discussion, mainly because - mugwump that I am - Jim's a friend and one day I may want to sell something to Mr. Pohl (like, maybe, a real hotshot critical magazine?).

TONY THOMAS

2/109 Albert Street
East Melbourne 3002

This letter is mainly to let you know that my new address for service of notices, friendly visits and, Most Important of All, issues of ASFR is, as it says on the top of the letter, in East Melbourne.

ASFR 11 is possibly the best issue you've published so far. It can become tiring to read someone's views on someone else's views on some obscure sf writer. But Cordwainer Smith deserves all the acclaim, all the writing about, that he can possibly get. I hope that John Foyster is going to write much more about his stories. Last year he told me about a 20-page article which you had asked him to expand. What happened to it?

JB: What indeed? But I believe there is another Cordwainer Smith article in the works right now. (Omigod! the noise! First day we moved here we discovered that the bloke opposite is a go-kart fiend, in the habit of roaring up and down Wilson Street all through the weekend. Now we find that the mob next door have formed a rock group... Oh, the peace and quiet of Northclump!) Professor Joseph's letter arrived today, after I had printed the first ten pages of this issue; a few days earlier and I could have altered my editorial to make me appear really on the ball. Ah well...

MICHAEL JOSEPH

Associate Professor
Dept. of English
University of Auckland
PO Box 2175
Auckland New Zealand

Thank you so much for your letters which, I need hardly tell you, gave me very great pleasure indeed. If I have been so long in replying, it is because I have been involved for the past six weeks in our annual marathon of final exams, and still am, to some extent, as we are now marking University Entrance papers.

You're quite right in thinking that THE HOLE IN THE ZERO owed something to Stapledon; he seems to me the great unacknowledged (?) master of sf, and I was probably thinking particularly of the latter part of STARMAKER (I wish someone would reprint it; I lost my copy years ago). Ballard, too - I admire him very much. Aldiss I didn't quite cotton onto until quite recently, when I read that splendid tour de force, THE SALIVA TREE. (Incidentally, he gave me a short but very encouraging review in the Oxford Mail.)

The book also started off, in a way, from PARADISE LOST (Satan's journey through chaos) as well as Pope's DUNCIAD ("Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos, is restored"), on both of which I lecture; and it has probably more literary echoes or parodies than I at first intended. Among other things, I'm sure it contains partly buried recollections of stories read many years ago in the magazines, and remembered now only as isolated themes and incidents.

I've read sf almost as long as I can remember; at least, one of my earliest

memories - a delightful one - was of my grandmother reading Jules Verne to me from one of those Victorian translations with the steel engravings. I went on, while at school, to read Wells and the Capeks and anything else I could lay hands on, and I followed the magazines pretty assiduously from the time I came across the first AMAZING STORIES. I wish I could claim that I was a real "buff", with complete files of the magazines and that incredibly encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject that the real aficionados possess. As it is, I seem to have this generalised and rather foggy recollection, in which some of the best, like Miller or Pohl or Vonnegut, stand out like landmarks.

I was a student during much of the '30s, first at Auckland and then at Oxford; after leaving the army, I came back here to teach in 1946, and have been here ever since except for sabbatical leaves. This is my third novel, but in venturing to write sf I can't help feeling rather like a boy-conjurer who has barged in on a magician's convention; for, as I'm sure you'll agree, the standard of the best sf is really tremendously professional, and it seems terribly cheeky to venture into the same field as a writer like Arthur C. Clarke. Also, the standard of reviewing in the magazines seems to me a good deal more rigorous than that of the ordinary "serious" novel. Not that I would take the "serious" novel too seriously; it seems to me that sf is far more concerned with fundamental ideas, not only about science properly so called, but about such things as social behaviour or historical causation. (I have a notion, which I want to try on our local History journal, that much sf is really about history.) In that respect it seems to me to have directly inherited the tradition of discussing ideas in an imaginative setting, a function which the realistic novel tends to abdicate, and which was once carried out by poems like PARADISE LOST or plays like THE TEMPEST or stories like GULLIVER'S TRAVELS.

I was most interested in the copies of ASFR which you so kindly sent me, and have put them aside for summer reading. I'd certainly like to try writing for it some time though I'm not sure how soon: I'll be through with exam papers by Christmas, but I've also undertaken an edition of FRANKENSTEIN for the Oxford Standard Novels series, and I'm hoping to get a first draft off by the end of the summer. (Do you remember Shelley's preface to the first edition of FRANKENSTEIN? It's very interesting and more or less suggests what I said in the last paragraph.)

I'm very glad that THE HOLE IN THE ZERO has reached Australia. The copies of the N.Z. edition are still on the way, held up (ironically enough) by the London dock-strike, which is just about the most unscientific and backward-looking thing I can think of. Incidentally, Dutton's are bringing out the American edition sometime next year.

This letter is probably too long already, but I've just remembered something that may interest you. Have you come across a novel called QUEEN VICTORIA'S BOMB by (I think) Robin Clark? It's the story of how a Victorian scientist invented the Bomb, and why, in the end, it was never used; very convincingly done, in a deadpan, Vernesque sort of style, and a perfect example of the sf novel which is also historical fiction.

JB: I think, Dr. Joseph, that your reference above to rigorous standards of reviewing is meant to apply to magazines in general, rather than sf magazines? - that generally critics are much tougher on sf? :: Berkley last reprinted THE STAR-MAKER in paperback in 1961, and this edition is apparently still available. :: I have not struck QUEEN VIC'S BOMB.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
Department of Customs
and Excise

NOTICE OF SEIZURE: Notice is hereby given that I did on the 11th day of December, 1967, at (b) Melbourne, Victoria, in pursuance of the powers conferred by the Customs Act 1901-1967, seize as

forfeited to Her Majesty (c) one (1) copy of each of the publications listed on the reverse side hereof which were forwarded to you per post from the United States of America, for the cause that (d) the said publications are prohibited imports within the meaning of Regulation 4A of the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations. ... "The Naked Lunch" by William S. Burroughs "The Soft Machine" by William S. Burroughs.

JB: So I still don't know if it's true that Burroughs writes sf. Maybe Her Majesty will let me have Her opinion when She is finished with my books. Anyway, dear readers, please do not send me any books which you suspect may be prohibited in this land of the free. (Free of sex, free of culture, free of informed opinion &c &c) I am a Marked Man. Even fanzines are being opened, but I guess that's something I'll just have to learn to live with.

AN OPEN LETTER TO JAMES BLISH & ISAAC ASIMOV
professed authors of STAR TREK and FANTASTIC VOYAGE:

Sirs,

For many years I have held the belief that a foundation stone of a man's life - no, I emphasize further - the foundation stone of a man's life, the foundation of his behaviour, is the fact that he comes into this world owning three precious things which are his and his alone. These three gifts are akin to the holy Trinity, in that they, too, are three in one - in one three: A man's name, his word, and his signature. "Who steals my purse steals trash - who filches my good name - etc etc."

In this day and age the foregoing might be naive - in which case put me down as one of childlike simplicity who respects his fellow man - but, simple though I am, I say to these two authors of previous good repute: Gentlemen, you have sinned - you have offended grievously.

As one who has for over one geiger-second been a fan, and having for years past automatically procured any book published by your selves, I am entitled to ask - it is in fact my duty to ask - by what right do you take it on yourselves to shed the mantle of respectability and become confidence tricksters?

It is quite clear that neither of you had very much to do with the actual writing of these books which are issued under your names. Why then do you join with your publishers in literally defrauding those of us who pay out good hard-earned money for your books? The low-standard claptrap in these books is worthy only of pre-war soap opera in a poor vintage year.

Sirs, I have been cheated and I am wrathful.

Yours etc,
BRIAN RICHARDS
50 Shenton Road
Swanbourne WA 6010

JACK WODHAMS
PO Box 48
Caboolture
Queensland 4510

Damon Knight did not go far enough back in his allusions to the origins of sf. It is doubtful to even suppose that the Greeks started it all with Jason and his Argonauts, or with Perseus and his helmet of invisibility, winged sandals and whatnot. Man's imagination has been running wild ever since Eve decided to cover up with a fig leaf.

Which leads me naturistically to ponder (while appreciating the over-exposed ASFR 12 cover), the effect of nudity upon creativity. Nudity, I aver, state, and assert Wyndhamwise, has a great deal to do with the promotion of imagination. Or, rather, the lack of nudity has. Contrary to expectation, we would be a lot less nutty if the wearing of apparel had not been generally

adopted. A woman without clothes is basic, inspiring anatomically perhaps, but - to the imagination? Nothing, my friends. But give her a sweater, or matador pants, or, better yet, an eskimo outfit, and then, oh boy! the fizzlewheels start spinning, Erskine Caldwell stands aside, pictures flash inside the dome drome, and the mind goes clickety-clack as it inventively devises ways and means of getting down to the bare essentials and discovering if its guesswork is correct. Put it this way, as the actress said to the, ah, it is easier for us to imagine the human population of the world being naked, than it would be for members of such a naked population to imagine the world's hordes fully clothed. Creatively speaking, all-encompassing nudism would rob most films, advertising, books, magazines, TV and art of any point, titillation or purpose. And thereby consequently would affect very many other things also. Clothes in fact have done much toward making Man.

On Harry Harrison's piece: Liked this as much as John Brunner's earlier item. Nothing equivocal about that. I read 'em for clues and clues I get. No two writers think alike, work alike, have the same scale of values, or make the same cop. A statistic read somewhere noted that the bulk of writers earned less than the basic wage. Count me in. Still and all, a writer is his own personnel manager, union-chief and yes-man, and, as in any other occupation, he is at liberty, more so, to quit at any time he chooses. The way it affects me, a few modest cheques buy a helluva lot of independence.

Mr. Temple's plagiarism article was okay, but I always take exception to the "no new thing under the sun" bit. Apart from being untrue, it is depressing. Satellite launchings and moon landings are undeniably new, but then so was everything else at one time. Maybe salami was invented by the Turks or the Arabs or the Druids, but it is certain that somewhere, sometime, salami was original.

There was something suggestive of latent violence in Jannick Storm's sf course being slotted between porcelain-painting and first-aid. Presumably the ess-effers are expected to wreak havoc upon one another with the pottery failures in order to provide St. John with genuinely battered cases.

What is gladdening about the lettercol is the given evidence of world-wide scope and the deserved interest shown in ASFR by intelligent and discerning overseas fans.

Now let's look back. At 1¢ a word, that'll be....

JB: Well, Herr Teufelsdrökh of Caboolture, if you get your clobber on and hurry down to your fascinating fully-clothed newsagent, you may just be in time to procure a copy of SOLAR no.44, which features an article called NUDISM IN FICTION by one Bertram Chandler. (A despicable photo accompanying the article shows the author judiciously clad in a table and typewriter. Unfair, I say.) :: Jack has had stories in two recent ANALOGs - September & November. Also in the latter is a novelette by "Martin Loran" - i.e. John Baxter and Ron Smith of Sydney. These and other recent Australian stories we hope to review in our next issue.

And that's it, people, for another time. Other recent correspondents have included Hayden Howard, James Blish, Judith Merril, Buck Coulson, Stephen Morton, A. Bertram Chandler, John Danza, Pat Terry, John Brosnan, Donald H. Tuck, Svend Kreiner Moeller, Ian Godden, Gary Mason, Gary Woodman, Michael O'Brien, Mervyn Barrett, Graham Hall, Andrew Porter, Kevin Dillon, Bruce Gillespie, Norma Williams, Stewart Leslie, W.H. Fenn, Peter Darling, Alan France, Leigh Edmonds, Michael Gilbert, and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Recent non-correspondents (hint! hint!) include Carolyn Addison, Frank Bryning, Sven Eklund, W. Fisher, F.W. Frederickson, T.D. Golding, Bob McCubbin, Ian McLelland, Eric Rayner, Rick Sneary, John Baxter, and J.G. Ballard. Oh, and I had a marvellous letter from Sten Dahlskog. This and others maybe in the next issue.

M E L B O U R N E S C I E N C E F I C T I O N C L U B

The MSFC meets at 19 Somerset Place (off Little Bourke Street, parallel to Elizabeth Street, behind McGill's Newsagency) every Wednesday at 8.00pm. MSFC Film Group conducts regular programs of sf, fantasy and other films. Secretary: Mervyn Binns. (See him at McGill's if you're in the city.) The Club is now also open on Saturday mornings, between 9 and 12.

S Y D N E Y S C I E N C E F I C T I O N F O U N D A T I O N

The SSFF was formed on 29th November 1967. (Guests of Honour at this inaugural meeting were Edmond Hamilton and Leigh Brackett.) The Foundation will be holding regular meetings on Wednesdays at 7.30pm, at Flat 7, 116 Victoria Street, Potts Point, NSW 2011 - home of Secretary John Danza. (Phone: 35 5640) Sydney fans and visitors are warmly invited to attend.

A U S T R A L I A N S C I E N C E F I C T I O N R E V I E W

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John Bangsund is Australian Agent for SF WEEKLY, SF CRITIC and ALGOL, published by Andrew Porter, and NOVA SF, published (in Italian) by Ugo Malaguti. He will also attempt to satisfy your enquiries about other fanzines and overseas conventions.



Great Scott! - it's Roget's Thesaurus!