19

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

number nineteen march 1969

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

In Australia, 5 for $2.00 from	John Bangsund PO Box 109 Ferntree Gully Victoria 3156
In New Zealand, 5 for $2.00 from	Barry Kirsten 98 Campbell Street Palmerston North
In Great Britain, 5 for 15s0d from	Ethel Lindsay Courage House 6 Langley Avenue Surbiton Surrey
In America, 5 for $2.50 from	Andrew Porter 55 Pineapple Street Brooklyn New York 11201
In Germany, 5 for DM 8.00 from	Hans Joachim Alpers 2850 Bremerhaven 1 Weissenburgerstr. 6

Elsewhere, local equivalent of A$2.00 from John Bangsund

Agent-at-Large: Mervyn Barrett 179 Walm Lane London NW2

australian science fiction review: March 1969 number 19
"We are giving you less: are you enjoying it more?" (Anonny.)
NORMAL EDITOR: John Bangsund, PO Box 109, Ferntree Gully, Victoria, Australia
ABNORMAL EDITOR (this issue only): John Foyster, 12 Glengariff Drive, Mulgrave, Victoria 3170, Aust.
Published by John Bangsund at the above address: printed by Lee Harding (and John Bangsund).
Produced on the backs of: Gary Woodman and Lee Harding
Non-credit distribution in the SPECTATOR AMATEUR PRESS SOCIETY, July 1969 mailing.
IMPORTANT NOTICE: All contributions have been edited (in addition to the normal generous supply of typographical errors) and consequently contributors are not to be blamed for any errors of fact or opinion. Neither is the editor: no one is responsible.
BLOOD DONOR: Lee Harding
COVER BY: Mike Gilbert

CONTENTS:

EDITORIAL NOTE: Although I (John Foyster) am named as editor of this issue of ASFR, it should be noted that the issue has been partly edited by John Bangsund in that his policy prevented the publication of some material I should have liked to use. Further, the size of the issue has been limited to the extent that I cannot include some articles I felt were worthwhile (over and beyond the previously-mentioned censorship). But let's not get maudlin.

1968: THE YEAR IN RETROSPECT

Instead of a careful summary of last year's major events in science fiction, this brief glance is presented. I claim it is better than nothing.

On the magazine front there were four major happenings: activity behind the iron curtain, certain changes in ANALOG and GALAXY and the improvement of NEW WORLDS.

John Campbell's ANALOG continues to be far and away the most important magazine in the field and this was emphasised by ANALOG's acquisition of a six-figure circulation once again. Campbell has worked steadily to achieve this, and circulation has risen from 74,000 (1960 report) to 100,863 (average) and 102,646 (latest) in the 1968 report. The increases over the 1967 figures were 6,077 and 4,735 respectively. The major cause of this has been the rise in subscriptions (from 32, 911 to 36, 267 in the last year alone). Since 1963, when detailed circulation figures were first released, ANALOG's subscribers have increased in number from 18,740 to the present figure while newstand circulation has gone from 62,000 to 66,379. This clearly shows the importance of an editor who tries to serve his readers. By contrast, GALAXY's earlier claimed 94,000 has shrunk to 75,000 while it outsells ANALOG on the stands but has only about 7,000 subscribers. The HUGO-winner is not in the competition.

The first 1968 issue of ROMANIAN REVIEW was devoted to science fiction, and I understand that the first SF magazine is now being published in Rumania (POVESTIRI STIINTIFICO-FANTASTICE): I've (p.53)

UP THE POHL

GEORGE TURNER

I see that the October IF contains a condensed novel by Van Vogt. I lay the magazine back on McGill's counter. I do not even look for the name of the work. I consider being sick on McGill's lovely new carpet, recall that it is not their fault that Frederik Pohl has the literary taste of a successful editor (there should be a way of condensing that into four letters), and run for the gutter.

The condensing of novels is a peculiarly modern evil. Abridgment is bad enough, but just barely permissable when the aim is to make a tough work of art attractive to children. Condensation, which usually results in the jettisoning of two-thirds to nine-tenths of the work, is an invention of the devil. Editors who order a condensation should be forced to eat every deleted word, preferably in the form of type in the process of being melted down, and the writer who permits this mutilation of his work should be chopped down by an equivalent amount and never mind his screams. (This need not apply when THE READER'S DIGEST buys the condensation. RD pays rates to make even those figger-lovin' astronomers boggle, and I suppose ever Shakespeare had his price.)

Do you know how this sort of abortion is produced? Well, the writer is rarely consulted; the operation (just word!) is conducted by the editorial staff. The idea is that the resulting "story" will contain only the author's own work, though in practice an occasional "and" or "but" will creep in for the joining of the first phrase of a slaughtered paragraph to the dissected remains of the last. So, you see, the job of the ghoul appointed for the bloodsucking is to remove, excise, rip out and destroy every word which is not essential to a basic understanding of what was originally written. Emasculation is not only permissible, but is actively encouraged.

Let's have a horrible example of how this is done. With some glee I select a passage from a Van Vogt novel "The Mind Cage", Panther edition, page 57.

> "There were about a hundred men and women. Each individual, Marin had been informed, claimed to represent from twenty to fifty units, or groups. Which meant that a total of some ten thousand people had their ears in this room, by way of delegates. There would be a spy or two of the Jorgian Queen's among them. Whoever it was would be caught within the hour and dealt with before Marin's departure.
>
> "Marin came out in a private's uniform. It was neatly pressed, and actually very very skillfully tailored to set him off to advantage. But it was designed to influence people who regarded themselves as idealists and who desparately wanted their small state to become a part of the politico-economic system of the Great Judge."

The Van Vogt style is spare. It doesn't seem that you can remove much without making it unintelligible. Well ... here goes:

> "There were a hundred men and women to represent 10,000 people. There would be a spy or two among them. Marin came out in a private's uniform designed to impress idealists who wanted to become part of the system of the Great Judge."

And if this leaves out everything in the way of atmosphere and lively detail, who cares? Condensations are made for people who will read, uncritically, everything shoved under their noses as long as it has a "name" attached to it. Van Vogt is a poor writer at the best of times, but even he doesn't deserve this treatment.

Another method of shortening is to locate a sub-plot and simply remove it entire. This often gets rid of a quarter of the book at one stroke (and half the characters). And if what is left seems to have loose ends, a lack of cohesion, unresolved arguments and an uncharming old-world haze over all, the editor couldn't care less. He knows damned well that the people who read condensed novels wouldn't notice anything less disruptive than an earthquake.

In fact, the condensed novel is one of the more blatant examples of an editor's utter contempt for his readers, his author and for the publication he edits.

It is true that the great bulk of SF stories are over-written and that many short stories would gain point and urgency from proper pruning. But this should be accomplished by returning the work to the writer and indicating where he has been longwinded or has obscured his point with too many words. Mere savage hacking achieves nothing but bloodshed and a dead work.

When it is done merely to cram a long story into a small space . . .

At this juncture a consideration of the VanVogt method of constructing his stories suggested the possibility of another technique of condensation, so I shelved a principle for the nonce and bought the publication in order to examine it. Sure 'nuff, the clues are there.

The thing is called "The Proxy Intelligence" and is a sequel (or continuation) of "Asylum" which appeared many years ago. What it is about does not matter here (or anywhere else, I imagine). The germane note is that it is not, in the strict sense of the word, a condensed novel - there isn't enough material in it to make even the most tenuously-drawn-out novel. It is, most probably, a section, reasonably abridged, of a more lengthy work, and has been achieved by pruning away a lot of surrounding material which carries on the action with other groups in other places.

Remember "Voyage of the Space Beagle"? Van Vogt wrote this as four novellas. Later, for book publication, he cound them together with a fifth story, containing a completely separate plot, which wound round and through the others. This is a technique of construction which he has tried in many variations, but never as successfully as on that first occasion.

My guess is that in the present instance the eventual novel will turn out to have a third (or even a fourth) story embedded in it, connecting and making some sort of sense of the two so far published.

For "The Proxy Intelligence" does not make sense. It flatly contradicts some of the information given in "Asylum" without supplying a rationalisation, it gives two versions of the nature of the Great Galactics and resolves neither, it leaves the main plot without a climax while it dithers around with the fortunes of a nitwit and his unattractive girl-friend, and asks far more questions than it answers. How the devil Pohl could print this as a "condensed novel" beats me. It is neither condensed nor a novel. It is an excerpt, probably hacked about to some order, and so badly tailored that the seams show with every move.

To get the full flavour of this new Pohl policy, turn to page 28 of this same issue of IF - "Next Month in IF" - and observe the advertisement of a "Special Novel Extract Supplement" for the next issue. (Roger Zelazny is to be insulted this time. An extract is no more legitimate than a condensation.)

"Supplement"? What makes it a supplement? I see no additional, supplementary pages.

So:

"The Proxy Intelligence" is not a "Complete Novel" - it is a butchered extract, and most incompetently butchered at that, of part os a novel.

It is not a condensation, save in a minor degree - it is a lump chopped out.

The "supplement" is not a supplement, but a regular section of the magazine coloured green to fool somebody or other. The readers? If so, God help them, because Pohl takes them for idiots.

Ah, what the hell! You can tell by now what I think about it.

A more deadly thought is that if Pohl can do this sort of thing and get away with it . . . why, then SF readers are getting what they deserve!

GEORGE TURNER

::

THE SPECULATORS

Jack Wodhams

Drog stood and gazed up into the night sky. "My," he said, "aren't the stars brilliant tonight?"

Crad looked up also. "Yes," he said. "It's fantastic, isn't it, to think that even the closest are many light years away."

"Some of them are thousand of light-years away," said Drog. "It's almost beyond imagining. Think of it: all those stars, and each one a sun, just like ours."

"Yes," said Crad, "and though some of them are bigger, and some of them are smaller, many of them must have planets, just like this one."

"Planets thousands of light-years away," said Drog in awe, "with people on them, just like us maybe. People looking up into the sky and wondering, just like we are wondering."

"Mmmm," said Crad, "maybe. On the other hand, they may not be like us at all. For instance, they may only have one head..."

"You're putting me on," said Drog.

::

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Next month we are going to do it! Do what? Prove the Shaver Mystery, of course. Yes, we now have a portion of the proof. We still can't produce a dero, or a cave, but dammit, we have something that you can sink your teeth into! We will present pictures, objects and documents."

Raymond A. Palmer, AMAZING STORIES - March 1948

"When we're only just beginning to discover the physical mechanisms underlying the astrological forces that operate on Earth's weather? (We have an article coming up on that; the underlying mechanism has been found, and it is real.)"

John W. Campbell, ANALOG SCIENCE FICTION /SCIENCE FACT,- May 1968

THE MAJOR SERIALS OF 1968

BRUCE GILLESPIE

1. SATAN'S WORLD by Poul Anderson (ANALOG, May-August)

Picture the future ANALOG reader. At the age of seven his mother takes him along to be entertained at the PTA meeting by Herr Dr. Baschem lecturing on the Ethical Values of Peking Dock-workers. Little Melvin doesn't know what it is all about but he enjoys the sight of his mother with her mouth shut. At twelve his English teacher lectures him on Space Travel or 13th Century Folk Dancing or any other subject unconnected with English. Melvin doesn't listen to her either, but he likes the way his teacher's hips move when she turns to the blackboard.

And then at the mind-splitting age of sixteen, Melvin discovers John Campbell's ANALOG! At last, a father-figure to lecture him! And in this particular case it is Poul Anderson who lectures on Science and Politics and Psychology in "Satan's World", the informative serial from the ejucational writer.

Anderson's first lecture occurs on the third page of his story and his last occupies most of the last quarter of the novel. The lectures occur at fairly fixed intervals (20 pages apart at most) and cover the gamut of subjects one can imagine finding in one very ordinary space opera. The purpose of this enlightening material eludes me, especially as Anderson is usually wrong, confusing and, for the most part, very boring.

It is hard to discover whether this material is well-meant. Anderson introduces his first mini-lecture in the following way:

> "Elfland was not the first unwalled community built on the Lunar surface ... The basic idea was simple. Space ships employ electromagnetic screens to ward off particle radiation. They employ artificially generated positive and negative gravity fields ... Let us scale up these systems until they maintain a giant bubble of air on an otherwise empty surface."

The betrayal of purpose occurs with those two words "Let us...". Does Anderson self-consciously take up the attitude of a lecturer, thereby confessing that he has no intention of writing a story? Or is Anderson pulling a very cynical swiftie on all his readers - realising that the ANALOG reader will take any sort of lecture and love it, so long as he thinks he is reading a novel? Simply because Anderson is Anderson (and thus rates at least one Favourite Story in anybody's list) we find it hard to accept that he is becoming senile. The only conclusion is that he now appreciates the little comforts of sub-urban living, and so figures that his "public" might as well be stung for 160 gabby, well-paying pages as 40.

All of which is to exhibit the same cynicism of which I have accused Anderson. What does the old pro use to shore up the cracks between the chunks of information? Has this any merit? Anderson has a sound story to tell, or at least this is so until the halfway mark, and it has energy of its own. The Satan's World of the title, a rogue planet with extraordinary meteorological fulminations, provides one very good scene, as the Trader Team heroes (Falk ayn, Chee Lan, Adzel) explore the planet they hope to salvage, rather unbelievably. Huge chunks of ice, and storms of deadly gasses pound the heroes as they do their exploring, and nearly become drowned in methane gas.

But whatever happens in this perfectly good invention, suitable for much more than one small episode? Heroes and Villains alike leg it for some other planet where they hope to find The Secret of Serendipity Inc. (purveyor of "thorough, accurate, documented, quantitative facts") and leave their original quest for the whole of the second half of the novel. And the story is supposed to be <u>about</u> this chunk of rock!

Other good things in the novel also come to an end. Nicholas Van Rijn, manager of the Trader Team, occupies about thirty entertaining pages, which include some dialogue that is quite enjoyable ("Work.' That Anglo-saxon four-letter word!"). He is the only thing in the novel that has any style. I suspect that he is a Billy Bunter. On the other hand, Anderson's impossibly capitalist system (in which Serendipity Inc. is allowed full autonomy?) must, if it is to work at all, rely on its police force to ensure some sort of structure. However Van Rijn and Team are supposed to gain our sympathy and credibility as (very) latter-day Robin Hoods by twitting a police chief here, bribing a judge there, and whirling around the universe like so many Sopwith Camels. Against this fantastic background, any importance Van Rijn might have had in giving " realism" to the novel is lost. We try to believe in Anderson's universe. We seize upon Van Rijn, the waspish character of Chee Lan, a few well-told incidents, <u>anything</u> to help us make some sense from the plot.

But we must fail, because Anderson himself has little idea of the direction of the plot. All the strands point towards a denouement centred on the planet of the title. With some luck we could have had a space opera battle around Satan's World that would have at least justified all the action of the early part of the novel. Instead we are taken off to a planet that languishes under hard masters and intense boredom. The reader is left in a hopeless limbo - we are supposed to switch our interest to these new villains, the Inhuman Centaurs springing to ravage the Earth, but Anderson in no way brings these villains sufficiently to life for us to feel any interest in them. The denouement that emerges is a thirty-page explanation os what did :: <u>not</u> happen in the novel.

2. SOS THE ROPE by Piers Anthony (F&SF, July-September)

How much rot can a wooden floor stand without collapsing?

How many mistakes can one novel stand before crumbling to dust in the mind?

Plenty, for both, if there are a couple of solid supports covering the rot. Piers Anthony's F&SF-Novel-Contest prizewinner, SOS THE ROPE, for instance, proclaims more questionable judgments and statements than a Government defence statement. The world he describes functions comfortably through the use of an odd mixture of pre-Blast artifacts, primitive tribal folk-lore, and an unexpected tolerance of a supercilious intellectual establishment, the "Crazies". These gentlemen dispense nylon, manufactured goods, and managed the half-civilized/Dawn-Of-Man social machinery of the world. We are not told how either the Crazies or the tribes benefit financially from this cozy relationship. It is not clear why anybody with the slightest curiosity cannot smell a dirty great rat in every corner of the systeg. All combat occurs between representative Warriors within the Ring. This arrangement does not arise from grassroots rules or legendary precedent, however, as in most primitive societies. The Crazies dictate the Rules of Combat, and training in the Orders of Weaponry that govern the tactics of the Ring.

These odd circumstances threaten to sink the novel before it is even launched. An exceptionally unoriginal "We Are Property" motif is used as "explanation" - both Crazies and tribesmen are under the thumb of a third mysterious group. And even this is still not an explanation.

The spiritual web between the sociological bones of this environment is sketchily traced. The bones themselves would crack immediately if any pressure were placed upon them. This world of post-Bomb primitivism is fetched up from the depths of other SF writers' nets, shaken up, and left in a mouldy pile as the "Background" for this novel.

But the plank in the reader's eye may be only a mote in that of the author. Until halfway through the novel, it seems to be about this sociological junk-heap. One man named Sol loses in the Ring to another named Sol, and so must change his name to Sos. He joins his vanquisher as comrade when he declares: "'Tomorrow we begin the empire.'". Just like that, huh?

The scheme aims to weld the disparate tribes into the first organised political group since the Blast. This represents an upward step in any classification of social evolution. It also represnts the result of some quite radical rethinking of social aims, and Sol the fighter is not that bright. Like the rest of the characters, he is not bright at all. The novel's plot demands a formula for (r)evolution that is just not there. Paradoxically, the aims of Sol and Sos are to be accomplished within the strict limits of the Circle, and the boundaries of the unenterprising thought of Sol the Imperialist, who has little taste for power. For more than half the novel's length, Sol's main role is as social tinkerer. He is the SF hero from way back who succeeds by a million-to-one chance, and then calls himself successful because he succeeds.

This socio-political half of a very slim novel may well have been the factor that prompted F&SF editor Ferman to close his eyes and open his coffers. But it is the padding, and Anthony himself does not rely on the surface texture of the novel.

The two solid planks supporting the structure are the main characters and the compulsively-readable Ring-fight scenes. Anthony's fuzzy background scenery disappears when the author focusses close-up on those elements of the novel in which he is really interested.

He does not make his intentions clear until the end of the second part of F&SF's serialization. The interrelationships between his characters were credible, even interesting, up to this point. The troika formed by Sol, Sos and Sola, Sol's "woman", is well-developed for much of the novel's length, but has no special importance. The reader still does not know where Anthony's attentions were directed. Just how does Sos's quest for self-understanding interconnect with the whole society's search for self-improvement?

Anthony stretches his meagre powers as a novelist to the limit as he unfolds his meaning in a series of intense dramatic scenes. At the end of chapter xiii, Sos must choose between loyalty to his master and love of his mistress, during a scene in which both are willing to surrender to Sos but cannot without surrendering the enterprise that brought them together in the first place. It is only at this point that we find out that:

(a) all Anthony's characters command equal sympathy from the reader: compare this novel with most of the genre - the reader has trouble identifying with the hero, let alone any of the other cardboard characters, whereas Anthony's subtle sketches are finally brought to life, and

(b) the conflict is resolved within the Ring, - rthe's traditional limits of battle, for this is the most "civilised" method available of avoiding death, injury or dishonour.

The paradox of the novel is maintained. The novel's impetus comes from the characters' desire to break free from primitivism, but the personal conflicts are generated by mutual loyalty to the social customs of this same primitive society.

All the time that primitivism is stage-managed. Sos does not realise this until it is

pushed under his nose. He is no great thinker - his knowledge amounts to the skills gleaned from the Crazt-prepared books, and those he needs to organise men into interdependent social groups. Sos is the archetypal Good Bloke, separated from most SF heroes only by his unpious morality and equivocal, hard-won victories. Anthony's strengths as author are Sos' strengths as protagonists - all of his major conflicts are worked out in terms of the Ring. Anthony's best-observed, most exciting scenes are the Ring combats. Therefore, when gargantuan, irrational Bog is finally defeated accidentally in the Ring, Anthony astonishes us with his ability to elicit sympathy for both combatants - astonishment and sorrow that Bog succumbs; empathy with Sos' sorrow at the death of his friend. And in the final scene Anthony is able to sum up the paradoxes of the novel, leaving Sos and the reader sobered at the thought of how pyrrhic any victory may be.

Mr. Ferman did not waste his money, then. The novel appears for much of its length to have scrambled its way to the top of a flat pile. Anthony still seems to be a short-story writer who had to concoct a wad of padding to fulfill the terms of the contest. By the same token, the novel's considerable virtue, including Anthony's salvaging of a point of view from the dross, stand out all the more clearly against the background.

To use a cliche, Anthony concentrates on what he knows, rather than on what he has read. Just as well, as his political and sociological booklist is short. His knowledge of nonlethal combat skills is at times dazzling, and if you think a knowledge of nonlethal combat skills shouldn't win prizes, then look again. Anthony concentrates, with both discipline and imagination, on those things he can do well.

3. A SPECTER* IS HAUNTING TEXAS by Fritz Leiber (GALAXY, July-September)

(* The word "spectre" is spelled this way by both author and reviewer: presumably it derives, in some obscure fashion, from "expectorate". Editor)

Leiber's first major novel since "The Wanderer"; Jack Gaughan's most spectacular packaging since "Dragon Masters"; and therefore confident and financial support from editor Fred Pohl. The most promising American magazine serial for 1968, in short. Leiber leaps back from sword 'n' sorcery to satire, we would think. Pohl adds some class to the old GALAXY warhorse.

Expectations hanging out, spectacles nose-perched, dog at feet, one launches into the powdered concrete of the first few paragraphs. "Son, you look like a Texan what got the hormone, but been starved since birth," drawls some Texas voice, to which the "I" replies: "True enough, noble sir. I was raised in the Sack and I am a Thin." Which, so far, means precisely nothing. Which means that Leiber must explain. Which means a Campbell-Anderson-type lecture unless he is very careful.

Until the explanations come, the 1000-word-a-minute reader squints ferociously, and backtracks hurriedly to sort out the lines of colloquialism. He must construct or discover for himself the world Leiber starts to describe. Plainly it is not the present Texas, a country within a country with a mythos and iconography as distinctive as the shape of an oil-rig. Leiber as author is trying to restructure a traditional image, rather than satirise the present one (compare this with our original expectation that "No Texas gets it in the neck!").

This first paragraphs plunge the reader into the vertigo and sense of rootlessness of any person thrown directly into a quite new environment. The as-yet unnamed narrator confirms this impression in the third paragraph: "My senses told me I was whirling as a punishing six lunagravs in a large cubical centrifuge ... On the same surface as I were two giants and a giantess in cow-

boy costumes and also three barefoot, hunchbacked, swarthy dwarfs in dirty shirts and pants". Leiber's language is already impressionistic and lively (and he is relying on indulgence based on prior experience of his works) but oriented entirely from the viewpoint of this main character.

What can we tell immediately about this main character? Plainly the whole novel will hang very much on his reactions to this new environment, whatever it is. We already know that he is gabby. But this may just be Leiber, who ruined several long stories for Gold's GALAXY through ornateness alone. This character thinks with a semblance of introspection - he slows time and action in his mind to gain a grip on experience. Now he manipulates these conclusions we have yet to discover.

Leiber, as author, is in no hurry to explain, however. Our expectations seem, for a moment, confirmed. "The centrifuge's two ends ... were covered with a child-simple mural of huge chalk-white cowboys on horses like elephants chasing tiny lipstick-red Indians ... across a cactus-studded landscape ... signed with a huge "Grandma Aaron"." We're in the Texan sticks after all. But when this chap "tries to coax(his) knee-motor properly alive" we are again lost.

Curiouser and curiouser: "The Portly Giant regarded me with benign interest ... The Giantess went into a tizzy". Do <u>you</u> make snap decisions about the people you meet in circumstances as strange as those that confront our Hero? Leiber's main character withholds judgment on matters of fact; he seems oddly certain about these people looming above him.

Again we think that the situation clarifies. "Texas" includes the whole North American continent. Christopher Crockett La Cruz, for such is the name of our protagonist, has landed in Dallas instead of Canada (now Canada, Texas). He has come from the Moon, whose residents have had no contact with Texas for quite some time. Orientation takes place at such length, but is entertaining as anything else Leiber has ever written. Nothing seems to be <u>happening</u>, but in a 200 page (plus) novel Leiber can afford to waste some space and whet the appetite.

It is only at page 60, however, that we start to realise that the Plot, if there is to be one, has not even raised an eyebrow. Christopher, dubbed Scully by one of the two Romantic Interests, has gabbed, joked, explained and romanced his way through a quarter of the novel already without the forces that move this world acting upon him, or any of his talents connecting with the entity that is Texas.

Scully represents Death to the enslaved Mexicans because of the mechanical exoskeleton that supports his ultrathin Moon-raised physiology. He is an immediate interest for two eminently seducable and not noticeably intelligent residents of Texas; one a nine-foot Texan, the other a (midget) five-foot Mex. Scully, an actor from the moon seeking a lost mine, ingratiates himself, and is absorbed into the Texan environment like so much ink into blotting paper.

But it is at <u>this</u> point that the explanation cease. Minimum descriptions of the physical dimensions of Texas are given, but nothing beyond the slightest sketchmap of its political structure. The President rules until successfully assassinated (a tradition commenced by that "Texan" Jack Kennedy). Scully is completely attractive to the two twits he collects along the way, but we see no reason why he should be attractive to <u>them</u>, or more importantly, why he hangs onto both of them so desparately. Scully is physically impregnable, dashing through frame-ups, loss of exoskeleton, revolution, and all manner of other diversions, with nothing but a smile, an irrelevant comment, and an astounding gullibility, both on his part and on the parts of those who help <u>him</u>. And above all there is the Death emblem of Scully himself. He ceaselessly talks about it, but it rarely has any relevance to any of the characters or oscillations of the novel. Scully just <u>looks</u> spooky.

Leiber has pinned everything in this novel on Christopher La Cruz, and Christopher La Cruz is a psychological, literary and structural mess. The man's motive's for engaging in action are rarely explained, or if they are, they do not make any psychological sense. Scully reminds one of the old joke that if aeroflying was impossible in 1860, it was not nearly as impossible as a scene of the Prime Minister kissing Queen Victoria on the steps of Parliament House. Scully gets along jes' fine with all the folks, but why do they get along fine with him, especially as most of them are trying to kill him at the same time?

And can Scully's attitude be explained as chumminess? What can we make of the following passage in which the Texas Rangers finally raid one of the revolutionary meetings?:

> "I looked back at the audience and, utterly fascinated, began to scan their faces one by one. Being an actor, expression is a mania with me.
>
> Here and now I found great confirmation for Leonardo's dictum that the grimaces of agony and ecstasy are almost indistinguishable, though I noted many an interesting trace of surprise, fear and rage.
>
> It occurred to me that the crowd constituted a semi-accidental work of art which could be titled with apt ambiguity "Field Slaves"."

Nero wasn't in the race! There is no joke - this is voyeurism at murder. The comments are not just diversionary or irrelevant. They are detached to the point of total insensitivity.

Beneath the badinage, quotable quotes, the ham acting, is a crystalline nasty cynicism. We are at first annoyed, then bored, and by the end of the novel, repelled by Scully. There are the nasty, self-defending, patronising attitudes we discern, but more importantly there is the chaos of attitudes that never appear. There have been other twits-as-heroes. However the creators of such characters usually needle us into discerning the difference between the author's and the actor's viewpoints. With Scully this is impossible - there is just not the information to weave into an ironic background. The text of the novel, Dylan-Thomas-like, is Scully speaking, and Leiber is behind him all the way. The True Friend and Neighbour is a knife in the back, but Leiber is the last to notice the pain.

"A Specter Is Haunting Texas" is then an extraordinary failure.

Failure - for the reasons I've listed, or hinted at. The list is long. Leiber calls a fantasy world a reality, and does not see that it is incomprehensible, even repellant. We have penetrated the skin of this world as little at the end of the novel as we did in those first puzzling paragraphs.

Extraordinary - because Leiber's language is always inventive, bright, entertaining. But Leiber is entranced by his own blarney; he tries for nothing more. Like Scully, this verbiage is impotent, disconnected with its object, signifying nothing.

If you want a novel, do not read this book. If you want a series of sketches, stretching from nowhere to nowhere, then you may enjoy Limbo.

In either case, for Leiber this is a complete waste of his spectacular talent.

4. BUG JACK BARRON by Norman Spinrad (NEW WORLDS, 178-183)

"Bug Jack Barron" by Norman Spinrad was serialised by NEW WORLDS in six parts during 1968. The first four parts comprised Chapters 1 to 10, printed complete as far as I know. Part 5 consisted of the next section of the novel. The chapters were unnumbered. Chapters 1 to 10

occupied about 65 to 70 of NEW WORLDS's pages. Part 5 took about 10 pages. Part 6 opens with Chapter 20 of the novel, with most of the second half of the novel contained in the synopsis. Therefore the editor's announcement that "the last part has been slightly shortened due to space requirements" is the most extraordinary understatement in SF history.

Mr. Moorcock, I enjoyed the first half of the novel, and I was keenly anxious to find out how Spinrad resolved most of the themes he states in the first half. Due to your unprecedented act of discourtesy, I was not able to read the most important part of the novel, and so have no basis for reviewing the whole novel. To make matters worse, both Australianand English readers may be lucky to obtain the Avon paperback when it is released, and your mutilated version may be the only access we will have to this novel.

Mr. Moorcock, your treatment of a novel that must become a classic within its genre is the worst example of barbarity ever perpetrated by an SF magazine editor. It may not be your fault, but other unforgivable mistakes in recent issues of NEW WORLDS make me suspicious. We want an explanation.

And, Avon Books, I will review "Bug Jack Barron" with enthusiasm if I can obtain a complete text.

Meanwhile, incomplete notes on an incomplete novel...

...Paranoia as the subject of a novel, looks promising. Jack Barron is BUG JACK BARRON, the show watched by ONE HUNDRED MILLION VIEWERS ...

Jack Barron is master of an electronic system that can plug in on any vidset in the US of A. Complaints from the pursaps must be answered by the "offender". Barron controls, for one hour a week, a network of communications, a network which surrounds him with its "camera, set, vidphone, promptboard, monitor, all compressed into a twenty by fifteen by eight pocket universe". Jack Barron has more potential power than the President of the USA. When you're in trouble - bug Jack Barron!"

It's the ultimate delusion of grandeur. Become master of the medium and it masters you. You become only its message. Sit on power, but try to use it (say for something you really care about) then the sponsors, the government, the network can have you off the air in no time. Do something really controversial and you lose your dream-apartment, the environment that completely recreates Southern California in New York. You lose your smugness. If you're Jack Barron, you lose yourself.

...Jack Barron is what Norman Spinrad spatters out in a stream of dialect. He's master of his medium, but Sminrad masters him with his medium. Southern Californian dialect, epithets, four-letter words, beat circumlocutions, is Jack Barron. Barron's mind reaches with a paw of brutal language and pulverises what it touches. Carrie Donaldson, his mistress, and Sara his ex-wife, believe in his reality, and so fall victim to the mailed fist. Barron is supposed to have copped out of Beat Crusading, but no trace of the crusader remains. There is only the monstrous, world-eating television image controlled for public consumption by yours truly, Jack Barron. Sock-it-to-'em image is controlled by Jack Barron, is fashioned by the image. Ultimately defensive world, impregnable to any other objects but Jack Barron.

...Problem is that there is another super-paranoic in the land - Benedict Howards, owner and controller of the Foundation for Human Immortality, which promises freezing until resurrection, but is actually working on... But why should I tell you? - that's Spinrad's story. As Chapter one

of the serial reveals, Howards' overriding obsessions extend no further than himself. If there is any difference between the two of them, other than that Spinrad calls Barron the hero and Howards the villain, it is that Howards feels so secure in his Immortality blanket that he cannot even conceive of anyone robbing him of it. When pitted against Barron (and that is the story of "Bug Jack Barron") Howards cannot break his own carapace of self-delusion, while a pressurised Barron can.

...Spinrad uses lots of big words like Power and Reality, with which Barron and Sara Westerfield pat themselves on their spiritual backs. Barron relies on them both, only to find that his power runs inevitably against the immense breakwater of Howards' power. His reality is peanuts compared with Howards' puzzles and Sara's seductions. Spinrad takes the opposite line of reality from (say) Philip Dick. For Spinrad, just because our own cozy world is punctured, it is not automatically rendered unreal. The "reality" lies somewhere - Barron's show and his pad may be just mental erections, or they may be the only reality he can rely on. Howards' game may be the superparanoia of all time (and Howards cannot survive mentally without it) or it may be, indeed it is, the only reality that can challenge Barron's. Sara's reality is insular too, in a very sentimental way, but her reality is enough to throw Barron's and Howards' calculations out of kilter. Spinrad's assumptions are less sceptical than Dick's - he doesn't entertain the suprême nightmare of the universe's possible non-existence. Spinrad takes the world of Barron and Howards on trust, and then shows how untrustworthy are its inhabitants. However, the mad bitchy semantically-violent world is the monument of the novel. It's slightly alien to ours, but its parlance is world-standard homogenized Beat dialect. Most of it is unquotable here, but constantly entertaining, funny, or enlightening in context.

...Spinrad keeps us reading thing l-o-n-g (despite Moorcock's attempts to persuade us to the contrary) novel by virtue of his story. "Bug Jack Barron" is the best hack novel of the decade - what will probably be 300 plus pages can be munched through to See What Happens. What Happens emerges from the progressive encounters between Jack Barron and Benedict Howards on BUG JACK BARRON. The tension grows slowly as Barron, working on his own ground, forces Howards to reveal the horror of his delusions, as Howards constantly missteps in his lurching attempts to retain ultimate power. Spinrad's observation of the workings of the television medium is superb - nearly as fascinating as the duel that develops through the camera's eye. Barron is on the verge of ferreting out the non-entity that is Howards-without-protection, of revealing the secret of the Foundation for Human Immortality ... when Moorcock slice out seven or eight chapters from the novel (between parts 5 and 6) leaving out the most important parts of the novel. An incoherent plot-summary in the synopsis for part 6 tells us The Secret, but robs us of the joy of the hunt. Whether BJB is a good novel or not, I don't know. I suspect the whole thing works, because the last episode is a ring-dazzler heart-in-the-mouth cliffhanger - the last labour of Hercules.

...Moorcock's mangle leaves out the section that may make or break "Bug Jack Barron" as a novel of any worth. Jack Barron remains as smug at the end as at the beginning. He has learned nothing of permanent value. He has destroyed the one thing that has permanent value for him. The iron cage of self-delusion, admittedly even more powerful and enclosing a slightly wider field of vision, closes over Barron at the end as vice-like as if it had never been lifted. The question that evades the reader of the NEW WORLDS version is: do Barron's experiences ever give him a moment of vision? Do Sara's inarticulate gestures of humanity, does the plight of Howards' inhumanity, ever show Barron the blankness of his own inhumanity? If the depths of his own surrender are revealed to him during the deleted chapters, does he ever for one moment suspect how insignificant are both Howards and he, compared with the forces that are unleashed by Howards? I doubt it. If Spinrad

could bring off this coup, he could have written a novel as important as "Camp Concentration" (which, superficially, BJB resembles). If Spinrad does not - i.e. if he does not realise, or cannot reveal all the ironies pregnant in the early part of the novel, then he has still written a fine SF novel. "Bug Jack Barron" has a story and superficial morality which is enjoyable in a Pohl/Kornbluth/Asimov fashion. Whether it can involve the reader more personally than that we may never know.

BRUCE GILLESPIE

::

A IS FOR APPLE

Jack Wodhams

Rurk had met them one by one and, in order to intitiate what he felt to be a desirable and necessary phase in their existence, had persuaded them by one means or another to adjourn to his cave. Now they sat in a half-circle in front of him.

There were four of them - Erm, Ger, Oog and Arr.

Rurk settled himself within range. Without preamble he started on Erm, the man to his right. Rurk held up his knobbly piece of wood and wagged it at Erm. "Glubba," Rurk said, "Glubba".

Erm scowled at the lumpy piece of tree limb. He lifted his own slightly smaller peacemaker and gestured with it. "Chik," he said.

"Glubba," Rurk said.

"Chik," Erm persisted.

Rurk belted Erm over the head.

Rurk had to wait a while for Erm to come round. Then Rurk started again. He shook his formidable truncheon at Erm once more. "Glubba," he said, "Glubba!"

Shakily Erm picked up his weapon of assault. He held it in the air. "Glubba," he agreed.

Rurk smiled. He moved on to Ger. He displayed his bludgeon before Ger's eyes. "Glubba!"

Ger looked doubtful. He offered his own cudgel. "Koof?" he said tentatively.

Rurk growled ominously and Ger shrank back. "Glubba!" Rurk demanded.

Ger swallowed. "Glubba," he concurred hurriedly. "Glubba".

Oog didn't wait. He patted his shillelagh and said "Glubba" four or five times to ensure that Rurk would not mistake his aptitude.

And Arr quickly followed suit.

Pleased, Rurk sat back. "Glubba!" he cried, holding the instrument aloft, "Glubba!"

"Glubba!" they chorussed, emulating his actions, "Glubba!"

(Watch out for Wodhams' new mystery novel, THE MURDER OF ROGER ARACHNOID!!!)

RITE OF PASSAGE - TWO OPINIONS

GEORGE TURNER

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

One can't complain about the ACE Specials. If none of them so far have been world-beaters, well, world-beaters are hard to come by and the Specials have at least been much better novels than the dreary SF average. In this respect "Rite Of Passage" is no exception. In other respects it has many unusual features.

There is a school of opinion, to which I subscribe, which holds that SF will not reach full fruition until it joins the mainstream and ceases to be a genre with separate and special conventions. "Rite Of Passage" is an interesting example of the SF novel on its way to join the mainstream, for it is not primarily a science novel so much as a socio-philosophic study and an account of a girl growing into social and personal awareness in her early teens. The SF decoration is hardly more than that - decoration. In fact the whole thing could have been done without calling in the aid of SF, star travel and the rest. Perhaps it is just as well it wasn't, for the fantastic and futuristic elements go a long way towards covering the deficiencies.

The plot:- A young girl of reserved character grows up via changes of environment and company, undergoes a "rite of passage" test which makes her technically an adult at fourteen and then takes part in an ethical debate which tests the truth of her feelings and brings her to her first fully adult decision.

The story:- The earth has destroyed itself and only two culturally divergent human streams remain, (a) the Colonies, which are mainly agricultural and under-developed and
(b) the Ships, which are hollowed-out asteroids carrying the scientific elite and their families who make their homes permanently in space. The Ships live by selling knowledge to the colonists (termed contemptuously "Mudeaters") in return for such requirements as cannot be produced under space travel conditions. The children of the Ship people undergo a Rite of Passage test at the age of fourteen - they are dumped on a planet with a simple survival kit and required to look after themselves for thrity days. Those who survive are adults; those who don't are dead. (This is done in the name of fitness to survive, but raised a question in my mind - which are the savages, the Mudeaters or the Ship elite? And I think you are intended to ask this question.) Mia Havero passes her test on one of the Colony worlds where the local citizens are, from her point of view, a pretty primitive lot, morally and ethically and in every other way. She and others of her year get some rough treatment from the locals but shoot their way out and return to the Ship as adults.

Then an unexpected but much more significant test begins. The Ship population decides that the Colonists of the world involved in their children's test are a menace to civilisation, not only by reason of their treatment of the children but also beacuse they are Free Birthers who don't observe population control and have had enough nous to obtain for themselves a scout ship and thus gain a toehold on space travel. One group, including the heroine's father, wishes to have this menacing world destroyed, literally blown out of the sky. The opposition preaches tolerance and a teaching programme.

The argument is given in some detail, and shows some chilling examples of the way even high intelligence thinks (and twists thought) when it feels its safety is threatened. The result gives Mia and some of the other newly-matured kids seriously to think - and the age-old battle of the generations is with us again as the book closes.

The ethical problems presented must be resolved by each reader according to his lights. I found the Ship people revolting once I began to understand their mode of thought; John Campbell perhaps, and Heinlein almost certainly would feel they had some right on their side. So here is a book which is truly controversial. However, a review is no place to engage in controversy, so I leave resolution to the individual reader.

Some other matters cannot be ignored. Mister Panshin has published a critical work, "Heinlein in Dimension", whose title indicates where his interests lie, and in fact "Rite of Passage" must inevitably invite comparison with the Heinlein juveniles, in particular "Podkayne of Mars". In both books the heroine is a teenage girl who tells the story herself, so in both books we have the not-so-common technique of a male writer assuming the female role in narrative.

And Panshin has it all over Heinlein. Heinlein's Podkayne was a brash flibbertigibbet and something of a brat, lifted out of any handy comic strip. Panshin's Mia is a human being with problems and feelings and an individual mode of expression; above all, she is a girl, not a boy with a few feminine traits grafted on to her.* This is a technical feat of a high order, and one which few writers attempt, for the pitfalls are appalling.

As with the later Heinlein, the book contains a philosophic system by which its characters live, a system as superficial as any of those by which any of us live; unlike the later Heinlein, Panshin does not hit you over the head with his ideas or present them as triumphant examples of good sense versus muddled thinking. Panshin knows very well where the weaknesses are, but leaves you to do your own thinking.

These last two paragraphs will of course be suspect by all those who know that I have no time for anything Heinlein has written in the last ten or twelve years, but I think I am not wrong is awarding Panshin superiority where comparison can be made. On the technological side he does not compete, and even my bias will admit that Heinlein can outdo practically everybody in that direction.

Compared with any SF with an anthropological and philosophic bias, "Rite of Passage" must stand pretty high. Compared with mainstream treatments of the central theme - the problems of growing up - it is only adequate. But it is a very courageous and commendable attempt at lifting SF out of the magazine rut and, I think, a successful one.

Its weaknesses are on the structural side. I was unable to fully believe in the live-or-die test being given at so early an age, and equally unable to believe in some of the prejudicial attitudes of the Ship people, who are an intellectual elite. One realises that IQ is no guarantee of good sense and freedom from prejudice, but Panshin failed to convince me. Nor was I able to accept the reality of the commercial-grab behaviour of the Ship people when dealing with the Colonists. It was, of course, set up purely for the sake of making the final argument black and white, but it was not set up well enough to convince. In fact the characters convinced me but the SF trappings did not. As I mentioned earlier, with a little ingenuity the book could have been devised without the SF element. But it would have been much less interesting, because Panshin has, after all, only traversed a familiar trail in literature and gilded his lily with SF

*Diane Bangsund disagrees, and I suppose she is in a better position to judge.

chocolate icing (though he doesn't mix metaphors).

Still, it is pleasant icing on a genuine lily, and the book may well be a pointer to new directions of SF writing.

GEORGE TURNER

After the Heinlein-study "Heinlein In Dimension", Panshin has written a Heinlein novel; "Rite of Passage"owes a lot to Heinlein, both in technique and subject matter, in a combination of the starship world from "Universe" and the survival tests from "Tunnel In The Sky". But the book is more than just this; Panshin is enough of a writer to have created a work unmistakably his own, which for a first novel is quite an achievement. When I say achievement, I mean this purely story-wise: the book is well written, solidly built for the larger part, even the heroine isn't the sexless being that the Heinlein hero is, the background is - for SF - realised quite well, and the book is entertaining. In short, quite good SF; but judged by any higher standard the novel is worthless, despite the best intentions of the author.

It is the story of the upbringing of young Mia Havero, an account of the period from roughly her 12th to her 14th year: her coming of age. She lives aboard one of seven starships, the survivors of a catastrophe that blew up the earth; her people are the inheritors and keepers of the science and technology of lost Earth. Besides the starships there exist a number of planetary colonies, established before the catastrophe, all on a primitive level, trading raw material such as tungsten ore for unspecified bits of knowledge from the starships. Young Mia, first convinced of the inferiority and worthlessness of the colonists, disdainfully called "Mudeaters", comes to recognise that all people, no matter where they are living, are human beings. Interspersed in the novel, but quite unobtrusively, are her musings about the moral changes in her. Now it must be admitted that her moral ideas, surprised as we are to meet them in an American SF novel, are all very banal and sometimes erroneous, but one cannot really say anything against this since one can't expect a girl of 12-14 years to be an Aristippos, Socrates, Immanuel Kant or Max Scheler.

And she is not the only character to have moral thoughts to express. There are also Mbele, her tutor, and her father, chairman of the ship's Council, "a very sharp mind ... mainly a mathematician". He'll say sensible things such as: "Just because a man disagrees with me doesn't make him a villain or a fool...", or (on the colonists): "They may be primitives, but they're still people. You might be surprised at what you could learn from them. The world doesn't end with a squad. It doesn't end with a Ship, either". But it soon transpires that his actions are quite different from his words: when he enc unters real differences, his tolerance is forgotten and he is for bombing the offenders out of existence, even at the risk of the mild moral disapproval of his daughter, who wonders in her naive way: "The thing that I didn't understand was how people who are as fine and as kind as Daddy and George could vote to destroy a whole world of people." I'm sure that the children of Adolf Eichmann also didn't understand why such afine and kind personality could be hanged by the vicious Jews in Jerusalem, although he had done something of the same order - perhaps less.

As I've said, there is a moral change in the heroine. But I contend that her morals aren't worth much, and the structure of his novel makes me suspect that Mr. Panshin unconsciously connects morality with passivity. Our heroine, who was quite active during her "Trial" (the survival test) on Tintera, rescuing her boy firend from prison, blowing up a powder magazine and a life-boat that had been captured by the "Mudeaters", and shooting at people - in short, going through all the acts that pass for competence and an active life in pulp fiction - becomes quite passive after

her return to the starship. She does nothing besides dropping, as it were, a tear, wondering why such fine people (etc. etc. - see above), and hoping that in the course of time things would automatically change for the better. But a morality that doesn't go beyond sentimental musings can't be worth much, for it doesn't ask anything of an individual. It takes more to be a human being. And it surely doesn't bring back into life the murdered population of Tintera that could have been saved by action.

The novel was acceptable up to page 239; but I wish Mr. Panshin had had better sense than to write the ending which follows, which is one of the most unfortunate things I've ever encountered in SF: doubly disappointing after what has gone before. Here, where the real issues of the novel emerge, Panshin ends quite abruptly; the heroine, the most important character in the book, vanishes from the scene, doing nothing (well, she says something to her father which takes her three days to say, but since Panshin doesn't tell us a word of it, we cannot decide whether she talked foolishly or wisely). Instead he presents us a public debate in which the Ship people decide, very democratically, whether or not to murder a world.

Mia Havero's father formulates the charges against the Tinterans:

> "First, the responsibility for what these people are - Free Birthers, possibly slavers, certainly attempted murderers - belongs to them, and they are products of the same history that we are, and if they have forgotten that history, it is not our business to teach it to them. ... They are menaces to us and to every other portion of the present human race."

The opposition to Havero is led by Mr. Persson, a "moralist" who keeps popping up every time a major decision in the Council or the Ship's Assembly is to be made, but who appears to be soundly asleep in between; for instance, it never seems to have occurred to him to form a political party; he speaks only when it is already too late, and then only infrequently does he speak to the point:

> "I accuse us. I accuse us of being lazy. We do not meet challenges at all. We drift instead on a lazy, leisurely, floating course that takes us from planet to planet, meeting no challenges, fulfilling none of our potential, being less than we could be. To me, that is a sin. ... We could be raising our fellow men from the lives of squalor and desparation that they lead."

His tirade continued for some time, and although he's only too right, one cannot help but wonder why he doesn't mention the more immediate issues (for example, the imminent mass murder), or a few obvious facts. His speech in inopportune and ineffectual.

Before we begin to analyse Mr. Havero's dementia, it should be noted that the two positions stated above are principally of the same nature: they are not expressions of, say, a Bismarckian realpolitik and a morally-oriented policy such as Gladstone's: they are expressions of different sets of morality.

The moral aim of Mr. Persson is obvious and needn't concern us here; but what Mr. Havero advocates is a policy of revenge, that is, a crude moral action. For obviously, moral considerations set aside, the annihilation of Tintera is unnecessary, even a political mistake: the Tinterans don't constitute a threat, and should the other colonies ever learn of the action, it could only produce a desire to exterminate, in turn, the starships. It is clear that the annihilation of one planet cannot prevent the other colonies shooting at starship people or trying to capture their ships. Murder does happen, and wars do happen, and nobody has yet found out how to prevent them: it

seems unlikely that anyone will ever find out. True, the one or the other murder might have been prevented, as well as the one or the other war: but murder per se and war per se have to be accepted as a part of life. It's curious that the starship people, who are all supposedly very bright, should be so upset about "attempted murder". "Not just another starship book, but a fully realised, lived-in world" says Mr. Blish on the back cover of the book. Perhaps I am less easily satisfied than Mr. Blish, but a lot of things are lacking in the "fully realised world": political life appears to be very primitive, for instance, without political parties; the starship people appear to have no precise conception of the law, nor do we learn what all the people aboard the starship actually do (besides doing research into a lot of anonymous matters, all undoubtedly with the utmost brilliance). Indeed, all the important affairs have the imprecision and anonymity that is so characteristic of sub-literature. In Westerns, for instance, the hero fights for an anonymous "law", without ever asking himself or telling us what, in particular, the LAW is or why it should be obeyed. (Bad laws have been known to have been enacted.) The people aboard the starship believe that they must obey "the rules", or they wouldn't be able to survive. But nonsense, often repeated, doesn't thereby become more convincing.

Murder seems to be unknown in the starship, otherwise Havero wouldn't be so shocked at the "attempted murders". Why? Also, we haven't been shown that even one of the tested children loses his or her life at the hands of the Tinterans; for all we know, the kids may just have been stupid and lost their walkie-talkies, with the result that they could no longer contact the starship. Indeed, they may all be in prison (and this wouldn't surprise me at all - they appear to be a trigger-happy bunch). But not one of the supposedly-bright minds on the starship tries to find out what really happened to them.

Apparently it also doesn't occur to the lawyers to point out the most basic facts about any legal proceedings: that crimes must be proven, that the punishment should be dealt out to criminals, not to other persons, and that the punishment should be in proportion to the crime. And it is certainly strange hoe Havero lets his moral indignation about possible slavery run away with him: he proposes to punish this offence by killing both slavers and slaves. But in some American circles there seems to be a growing tendency to "solve" a problem by exterminating it.

The murder of a whole planet on thin pretexts is something that you might expect of disturbed tyrants such as Chaka or Ivan IV, who had the population of Novgorod butchered on suspicion; or of the Nazi scum swept up to the top in a time of crisis where the old values had lost their meaning without new ones having taken hold of the minds of the people; or of desparate revolutionaries, perhaps even of coldly calculating asphalt animals: but such behaviour is out of place amongst the persons depicted, in a society as conservative as the one shown. Should the annihilation of a whole planet ever happen, it is to be feared that the persons responsible for it will have sounder - but still not sound enough! - motives than the absurd ones presented in Mr. Panshin's novel.

The silliest thing is the indignation about Free-Birth. Why are the starship people so surprised at Tintera being a world of "Free-Birthers"? I don't see how they, or all the other colonists, could have been anything else, or how any person of average intelligence, much less "brilliant minds", could have supposed them to be anything else. For birth-control, one needs an advanced medical and pharmaceutical science, unless one proposes such inhuman methods as castration, the murder of unwanted children or old people, or a sexual abstinence that may be possible for a few exceptional men and a lot of degenerates, but certainly not for a normal human being. From what little Mr. Panshin tells us about Tintera, they don't know much of medecine there. So how are the Tinterans expected to exert birth-control? It must be remembered that the population explosion is partly a result of

the progress of medicine. True, in earlier times people used to have a lot of children: but most of them didn't live to reach maturity, and of those that did, few grew very old. In the last decades of the 19th century, when the population increase in Europe was higher per capita than in the rest of the world, the increase was already due less to an increasing number of births than to a falling number of deaths: the result of hygenic and social measures.

Under the primitive conditions of Tintera, the colonists couldn't afford birth-control, even if they knew how to do it: they wouldn't be able to survive. Equally important - with a whole empty planet, and a population of only a few million, the idea of birth control simply wouldn't occur to them: nobody seeks for solutions to problems that don't exist in his time.

What I have said above is something that and ethnologist, sociologist or historian would know; the brilliant Mr. Havero is talking like some village idiot, but not like a scientist. The starship people apparently don't have historians in their community, for "from what I (Mia Havero) learned in school, population pressure is the ultimate cause of every war". The schools seem to be lousy there; no historian would teach such nonsense. But perhaps Mr. Panshin would care to name just a few of the many wars having <u>one</u> cause? Now I don't suppose that the heroine is always expressing Mr. Panshin's opinions, but why are there no people with better sense in his novel?

It is of course highly debatable that the Earth could ever be destroyed by population pressure; but even if it should happen it would mean nothing either pro or contra birth-control per se. There don't exist eternal solutions to historical problems. That birth-control is perhaps necessary today and will become more so in the future doesn't necessarily mean that it was necessary yesterday. A man who would criticise, say, the Roman Empire or the 19th century United States for not having had birth-control, is not a scientist, but an idiot. The population tide is our problem, not theirs: each age has and must solve its own particular problems.

But such is characterisation in SF: on the one hand SF authors claim the utmost brilliance for their characters, and on the other they make them say the stupidest things that you would expect more from morons than from scientists.

There are some other disturbing things in Mr. Panshin's novel, the rules being a handy instance. Several times it is repeated that the starship couldn't survive without them. It doesn't occur to anyone that the starship people wouldn't need birth-control: they could use the surplus population to colonise some planet (without needing to give up their ship) or for similar purposes. There are the "Rites": all children 14 years old are dropped on some planet for thirty days, alone, to prove their fitness to survive. For this they are prepared by long training, including the killing of a tiger with knives. But who, in a scientific society, needs to waste his time killing tigers or with similar nonsense? Who needs to prove his fitness for survival at all? And even the "moralists" around Persson don't criticise the Rites - they only object that no later use is made of the proven fitness. One would think that there would be at least a few radical thinkers daring to question the sense of the whole procedure. For a society consisting supposedly of scientists and similarly highly-educated people, such a conformity, such intellectual timidity, is astonishing.

Should anyone object that I have used up all my space discussing the epilogue, and not the bulk of the novel, let me justify my procedure by pointing out that the ending is the strategically most important part of a story: for here the reader forms his final opinion of it, here its meaning is divulged. One is sad to find an author undercutting the whole basis of his work in a few pages. To sum up the case against <u>"Rite of Passage"</u>: although it must be acknowledged that Mr. Panshin has tried to write a moral book, he has only succeeded in making a lot of moral mouth-noises; the morality in his book consists in talk and talk alone, for there is no truth iin it, and that is a

necessary condition for morality: the moral issues presented are bogus, or - to borrow a phrase of Bismarck's - but black print on white paper.

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

::

"All these ancient things combined to make the church, for me, into something that was entirely different from the rest of the village, a building, if I may so put it, occupying a four-dimensional space - the fourth dimension being that of time; into a great ship sailing across the centuries, and seeming, from span to span, from chapel to chapel, to have conquered and overleapt not only a few yards of ground, but successive epochs above which it towered victorious, concealing in the thickness of its walls the crudity and ferocity of the eleventh century whose blunt, round-headed arches, half masked by massive ashlar, showed only in the deep recess which was made, close to the doorway, by the stairway to the tower, and was even there disguised by graceful Gothic screens which pressed forward with a coquettish air like elder sisters stepping in front of an uncouth younger brother, ill-clad and badly-mannered, to keep him from the prying eyes of strangers. Above the Square, and pointing to the sky, was the steeple that had seen St. Louis, and seemed to see him still."

... Marcel Proust, THE VILLAGE CHURCH (Le Figaro, September 3, 1913)
translation by Gerard Hopkins.

::

"Well, y'see, this big spaceship comes down outa the sky an' these alien things - sorta like overgrowed turnips - come out an' say, if youse don't stop killin' these little yeller bastards we'll wipe our backsaides with youse. Nothin' happens for a while then this bloke named Cambull or somethin', somethin' to do with sciens, come and say - look, we'll wop these dirty great turnips with my higher ominous machine. So they start makin' 'em but the turnips must know somethin' and get out their atom bombs but then the Chinks reckon they can make an omnibus too and tell the turnips to (censored) so the turnips turn round to wop them but then they decide to blow up the whole worl' but another sciens (name Pole) say - let's pretend to give in but build the ominous machines secret which they do but the VC don't here Pole so the turnips are about toblow everythin' up when more things arrive in another spaceship and they are friendly because the others broke out of a mental home and the new aliens bring peace on Earth."

The entry which, it is widely believed, filled sixth place in the recent GALAXY competition. It is further understood that only its excessive length prevented its obtaining higher honours.

::

There is a frog in a wheelchair in Paris
By the Seine with tin cup sits and begs.
He enjoys not a swim in the morning,
is forlorn with no chasing for spawning,
has no croak, and so sad is his mourning,
For some French glutton has eaten his legs.

... Jack the Wod.

franz rottensteiner is a starship trooper

REVIEWS

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
THOMAS HARKER
BRUCE GILLESPIE
JOHN FOYSTER

BOOKS REVIEWED

STANISLAW LEM

THE INVINCIBLE (DER UNBESIEGBARE, NIEZWYCIEZONY)

Berlin: Volk & Welt 1967 230 pages

TEST

Berlin: Volk & Welt 1968 256 pages

After a lapse of several years, two new books by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem have been published in East Germany, both of them excellently translated and produced, far better than most of the SF published in West Germany.

"The Invincible", a novel, tells of the superspaceship "The Invincible" in search of a cruiser of the same class which disappeared without trace on the planet Regis III. The crew of "Invincible" find the planet a desolate and

barren world, full of sand dunes, apparently without life. There are careful descriptions of the preparations on the part of the "Invincible": force-screens are switched on, heavily-armed search-parties sent out, the ship is on full military alert. The "Invincible" seems to be just what its name says.

Unlike the physical nonsense presented by Messrs. John W. Campbell and E. E. Smith Ph.D. in their books, the technical information here is neither dull nor irrelevant; all of it has a function in the novel, it all serves to confirm our opinion that the ship is a powerful machine of war.

The wreck of the missing ship is finally found: its hull is full of tiny holes, and there is no one on board it, save one dead member of the crew found in deep-freeze. His brain is read, but nothing is found: it is completely blank. Later, the unknown strikes at the "Invincible": search parties do not return, the members being found later wandering, completely lost among the sand dunes, all suffering from amnesia. It turns out that the planet isn't quite as devoid of life as was first assumed: there are artifacts, remnants of a once-advanced civilisation, and there is primitive life in the depths of the ocean. Surprisingly, however, no trace of life is found on the surface of the planet.

The expedition members conclude that there must be some agent inimical to all forms of life; but an agent that cannot penetrate into the ocean. Clues are found as to the nature of this agent: there exist microscopically-small robots with the power to move about, to collect and accumulate energy from solar rays, and to reproduce. Harmless as individuals (?), these devices are quite dangerous when they unite, driven by some instinct, to form large communities, robot linking to robot. Then they appear as clouds that darken the sky and are capable of projecting powerful force-fields, either of the amnesia-producing variety, or of more destructive kinds. Dangerous they are, but not intelligent; they just follow the patterns built into them - the results of a dead evolution, an evolution of machines. They have wiped out the original population of the planet, and still follow the same urges that enabled them to win their fight against the intelligent life-forms of Regis III. They kill, but they do not know that they kill.

Against the clouds, even proton guns and atmoic blasters are to little effect. Finally the "cyclops" is sent out, the most powerful fighting machine aboard the "Invincible", to bring back some members of the crew still missing. For sheer grandeur of physical action, the ensuing battle between the "cyclops" and the cloud is the most exciting scene in the book, and it is interesting to compare it to similar scenes in Roger Zelazny's "Lord Of Light". Lem's description is every bit as good as Zelazny's, but whereas a battle between robots is in accord with the thinking of the 20th century, a reflection of modern time, Zelazny's Hindu gods riding around in automated chariots and throwing lightning, etc., is in such bad taste that it moves us to laugh about the author (and becaue the thing is so ridiculous, it became almost inevitable that the book should win a Hugo.)

The mighty "cyclops" loses the battle, the cloud takes over its positronic brain and turns its weapons against the ship, which then has to destroy its own most powerful tool. The machines have failed against their brethren - so Rohan, an officer, protected by shields suppressing his thought-waves, has to go out. His mission is without success, for his comrades are already all dead.

What has happened so far one could also expect to find in an American or British book; but the conclusion is different. What sets Lem apart from most SF authors (apart from his greater stature as a writer), is his Weltanschauung, his humanitarian aims. His heroes don't destroy

Regis III, as almost all American SF heroes would have done. On the contrary: they conclude that the robots, different as they are, hostile as they are to all life, and useless as they are to us, are a life form of a kind and so have a right to exist. And that to exterminate them would be a crime.

Just how different Lem's attitude is can be seen by comparing his novel of ideas with A. E. Van Vogt's novella "Black Destroyer", an admirable story in its own right. In the magazine version of Van Vogt's story, the character Kent says, after Coeurl has been killed: "We've got a job - to kill every cat in that miserable world."

Nobody objects: another character, Korita, just remarks that that should be simple.

In the book version (in "The Voyage Of The Space Beagle") there is some difference, for Grosvenor, a character who doesn't figure in the magazine version, says something else: "Pussy's brethren know nothing of us, and therefore are not a menace to us. So why not let them just die of starvation?"

But die the Pussies must. It's just not worth bothering to kill them all. To make my position clear, let me say that I don't object to the appearance of such opinions or such characters in stories; such people are eternal human types, and such opinions have been expressed in the past and will be expressed in the future. Therefore a writer has a right to present such men and opinions. But what seems strange to me, and even a little shocking, is that there are hardly any other characters in SF stories. There are the modern barbarians and little else. What does it matter to us if there be dangerous life-forms on some far-distant planet? These exist everywhere on Earth and one can't go around knocking down all enemies or potential enemies. Certainly beasts of prey are dangerous (bot not more than a lot of other things, and if we began to worry about them all, we would never get around to doing anything else), but they are also beautiful. Tigers, for instance, have been known to kill men, but only the insane would demand that all tigers be killed because of this.

I suppose such things don't become apparent to American readers brought up on the violent diet of the pulps: but for a European observer the crude social Darwinism of most SF is appalling, and it seems to have become more marked since "Black Destroyer". These days it seems to be impossible to open an American SF novel without finding the author talking about survival, and always in the most trivial way. One concludes that SF authors are terribly afraid (most of all, it seems, of themselves) and try to get rid of their fears of life by acting them out on patient paper. Someone without so much fear would hardly spend so much time discussing so relatively unimportant a question. Personally I much prefer the attitude of Myers' Silverlock: "Had I cared to live, I would have died."

Stanislaw Lem doesn't share this fear of alien beings: he would appear to be one of the few SF authors capable of accepting the truly alien. By way of reply, one might choose Hal Clement from amongst American writers. But it should be noted that Clement's aliens, however different they may be physically, are psychologically quite human, indeed even more human than his humans. But he never attempts to portray the truly alien; something that may be incomprehensible to us, or even revolt and horrify us - and with which we may yet have to live in the future. It is more difficult to accept such differences in moral, political, religious and other matters than irrelevant differences in outward shape. And this acceptance, this having-to-live with the alien is one of Lem's major themes, recorring in a number of his books. In "The Invincible" the idea of the alien being the true "hero", with the human characters being mere chiffres; what there is of human interaction between the crew of "Invincible" is more of an intrusion than anything else. "The Invincible"

is a philosophical novel by a genuine philosopher and a genuine moralist.

"Test" is a collection of short stories, and what an excellent book it is too. Lem is very well read in American and British SF (he is fluent in all the major European languages), and this shows in some of his stories, I think, although I wouldn't claim that he was actually inspired by some Western SF. Anyway, influences matter little; the importantthing about a writer is not where he gets his ideas from but what he makes of them.

"The Conditioned Reflex" (Odruch w arunkowy), for instance, might be said to combine elements from several well-known SF authors. The background of the lunar landscape could have been lifted out of Clarke (although Lem does it better, I think), and the plot is an ingenious murder-puzzle, as ingenious as any that Isaac Asimov ever did. What sets Lem apart from Asimov is, of course, that his characters are real living beings, not just talking wooden figures.

"Test" shares the theme of Harry Harrison's "Trainee For Mars", to quote a further example, and "Invasion From Aldebaran" (Inwazjaz Aldebarana), the story of the invasion that failed because the invaders misinterpret everything they see on Earth, has been done before by Fredric Brown and Eric Frank Russell (in "The Glass Eye" , I believe).

But there hardly exists a counterpart for the hilarious satire on American methods in "The Washing-machine Tragedy" (Tragedia Pralnica), a bag full of funny ideas that makes most SF humour appear even more feeble-minded, or for the robotic fairy-tale "The Computer Who Fought With The Dragon" (Bajka oaszynie cyfrowe co ze smokiem walczyla), in the fairyland of Kybera, where there be kyber-bees, kyber-wasps, but also kyber-guns and kyber-warriors, and where there are so many liberations that people get tired of them.

Four of the stories, "Test", "Conditioned Reflex", "Terminus" and "Albatross" have a common hero, the quite unheroic space cadet named Pirx. In "Albatross", a minor story, he is just an observer witnessing a rescue operation in space, but in the others he is more active, solving an apparent murder case in "Conditioned Reflex", undergoing a simulated flight to the moon in "Test" and doing active service in space in "Terminus". Terminus is the name of a robot who features prominently in that story. He is the sole survivor of a catastrophe in space, and keeps repeating the last desperate messages of the crew, automatically, without being aware of it until at last Pirx, disturbed by the resurrection of the past, has the robot melted. The story is written with much psychological insight, without ever getting sentimental.

Now the reader may distrust my opinions of SF (and I make little effort to conceal the fact that I think most SF writers would be better off as printers), and therefore I'm glad to report that Faber & Faber in London will publish Lem's novel "Solaris" in 1969. I haven't read the book, but it is considered by many (though not by Mr. Lem himself) his best work. So shortly the reader will have an opportunity to form his own opinion and I urge him to do so. It is only to be hoped that Faber & Faber will get a good translator, for many of Lem's books have suffered from being ineptly translated.

Perhaps the appearance of "Solaris" later and Sven Holm's Danish SF novel "Termush" (reviewed in ASFR 13) in May indicates a new trend in British publishing. The SF world isn't big enough that it can hope to disregard any true talent, and I sincerely hope that other translations will follow. Stanislaw Lem is a universe in himself, just as Josef Nesvadba is a worthy successor to Karel Capek.

... FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

ARKADY AND BORIS STRUGATSKY

FAR RAINBOW
Mir Publishers 1967 150 pages

THE MOLECULAR CAFE: SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

Mir Publishers 1968 280 pages

The Strugatsky brothers seem to have written around a half-dozen books in the last ten years, "Far Rainbow" having been originally published in 1963. In the collection "The Molecular Cafe" they contribute a short story and an introduction, the short story having already appeared in INTERNATIONAL SF. As a novel, "Far Rainbow" would make an excellent half of an ACE Double. It is of the right length, and superficially appears to be a simple adventure story. However there would be some difficulties. The amount of physical action involved is quite slight: the tendency is rather towards mental or spiritual action. And then again the plot itself seems slight, and not well developed. But what the Strugatskys have attempted in this novel is not quite what Emil Petaja is attempting, and consequently it would be unfortunate to attempt to measure the products with the same yardstick.

Like many Soviet authors, the Strugatskys's primary concern is for the reactions and interactions of human beings. And if these seem stilted and simplified to Western eyes then it may well have become time to widen our eyes and our horizons.

The action is simply the evacuation of a planet in peril; a planet on which reside people who act rather strangely and irresponsibly, it seems to me, until the time of crisis when one or two manage to make a decent fist of things. It is piled fairly high with super-science and all that stuff but this is so incidental that it hardly gets a chance to become convincing. The writing is quite classy, but the translation down to standard.

Translation is a problem I face again in looking at the 1968 collection, "The Molecular Cafe". There are probably good translators, but the style of many of those used for works like this is that of 1930s bourgeois but leftist middle-aged ladies with some distaste for the material they are handling, and quite apart from the fact that I find it hard to believe that present-day writers could use so archaic a style, I feel a certain resentment towards what seems to be definitely second-rate work and, alas, this most certainly interferes with my enjoyment of any story I am reading.

Ilya Varshavsky's "The Molecular Cafe" is a short-short which may originally have had some touch of the Bradbury style. Varshavsky apparently writes frequently at this length and on this sort of subject, and there is certainly nothing wrong with this rather gentle satire.

The Strugatskys' "Wanderers And Travellers" has already appeared in ISF, as I remarked above. The translation for general Western consumption was, though this seems scarcely possible, slightly worse than the one under consideration. With the present translation, however, the story is rather obvious.

The preface describes Anatoly Dneprov as a pioneer of post-war SF, and the story here printed, "Crabs On The Island", as 'one of his earliest'. It does seem rather dated, and here one may choose either this translation, the one in the second issue of ISF, or the one in SOVIET LITERATURE 5/68. Though the story is dated, as I remarked, it is no more dated than some other stories of its period (?) despite the uncertainty about that.

"The Secret of Homer", by Alexander Poleshchuk, is an F&SFish story of the gimmicky time-travel variety: the fact that I don't really like this kind of story makes it difficult for me to appreciate this or any other example.

"I'm Going To Meet My Brother" by Vitaly Krapivin is a tear-jerker which, in this translation,

is certainly a failure. The original may have avoided the pitfalls of bathos into which the English version so gaily steps.

Romen Yarov is an author whose single short story here appeals to me sufficiently to make me want to read more of his materail. "Goodbye, Martian", as you might expect from the title, is Bradburyesque, but it is very well done.

The long story (about the same length as "Far Rainbow") is "The Black Pillar" by Eugeny Voiskunsky and Isai Lukodyanov. It is a hard-science, world-disaster story, and that pretty well fixes it. It does struggle manfully against these bonds, and that of being written as history, but finally succumbs in an orgiastic eulogy.

Mir Publishers have done far more with these two volumes than did the Foreign Languages Publishing House, but I hope that something can eventually be done about the standard of translation.

... JOHN FOYSTER

ROBERT E. HOWARD

WOLFSHEAD
Lancer Books 1968 190 pages

Robert Howard's strengths and faults usually occur simultaneously, but you tend not to notice the strengths. The best passage in this collection of fantasy stories, which date from 1926 to the posthumously published "The House Of Arabu", occurs in "The Black Stone" (WEIRD TALES, November 1931).

> "(The black stone) was octagonal in shape, some sixteen feet in height and about a foot and a half thick. It had once evidently been highly polished, but now the surface was thickly dinted as if savage efforts had been made to demolish it; but the hammers had done little more than to flake off small bits of stone and mutilate the characters which once had evidently marched in a spiralling line round and round the shaft to the top. Up to ten feet from the base these characters were almost completely blotted out ... Higher up they were plainer, and I managed to squirm part of the way up the shaft and scan them at close range. " (page 19)

In a rare moment of detachment and poise, Howard shapes an image that genuinely arouses a sense of awe before alienness. The sense of the ancient, the ambivalent and the frightening that Howard seeks so unsuccessfully to evoke elsewhere, is here brought precisely and perfectly to our attention. However the author is not content to leave us with this impression of monumentality but goes on to destroy the power of the passage by resorting to the Double-Exclamation-Mark Effect ("characters ... like nothing of which I have ever read or heard") and to some joyless pedantry about similar writing seen in Yucatan. The rot of trivia sets in for most of the rest of the story - and from the first we gain an impression of a masochist remorselessly dedicated to the destruction of his own best work.

Take, for instance, the best story of the collection, "The Cairn On The Headland" (STRANGE TALES, January 1933). Howard repeatedly claims to base his stories on European and Oriental legends, but this is the only tale which even echoes the sounds of greater story-tellers. The Powers of Darkness (represented by the Norse god Odin) are challenged by the Forces of Good (represented by the White Christ). The general structure of this battle is adequately told, and the ending is quite rousing. However Howard does his level best to cripple a strong and simple idea by, firstly, the introduction of a flashbacked subplot at a critically inappropriate moment, thus nearly breaking the story's back, and secondly the use, as a main character (that is, the representative of good),

of a muddle-headed cretin who could be nothing but a Middle-western American traveller in Europe. Howard seems to have had little conception of the legendary notion of The Hero, and no idea of the conventional function of the Legend as a style of Literature. Whereas these archetypal stories attempted to explain the environment, and humanity itself, to their audiences, Howard presents us with vague "forces of evil" originating from "before the beginning of the world". There is nothing specific from which to conjure up a legendary atmosphere. Most of Howard's horrors are but ineptly-described BEMs surrounded by unreadable purple prose.

Most importantly, ancient legends attempted to delineate the Good and Evil within Man himself by means of such conventions as the Hero vs. the Monster. Howard, however, always presumes that evil is entirely external to humanity, that it springs from a remote place or time. Howard's most obvious expression of this myopic assumption occurs in "The Cairn On The Headland" - Odin (representing Evil) is captured, genie-like, for centuries and thus

> "(When) Odin fell, his religion was given its death blow. He was the last of all the heathen gods to stand before Christianity, and it looked for a time as if his children might prevail and plunge the world back into darkness ... But after Clontarf he was seen no more; his worshippers called on him in vain with wild chants and grim sacrificies. They lost faith in him ... his altars crumbled, his priests grew grey and died, and men turned to his conqueror, the White Christ. The reign of blood was forgotten; the age of the sea-kings passed." (pp 169-170, emphasis mine)

One can only gape at the super-19th century assumptions that evil itself disappeared 500 years ago and that the Great Christian nations march on towards perfection.

This assumption (that the story-teller is innocent, simply because he is an American) prefaces many of the stories. From "Wolfshead", structurally the most satisfying (and the earliest: WEIRD TALES, April 1926), comes the following. The hero is speaking about his intimate friend Dom Vincente:

> "Dom Vincente was a strange, far-sighted man - a strong man, one who saw visions beyond the ken of his time ... His plan of fortune was strange yet successful; few men would have thought of it; fewer could have succeeded. For his estate was upon the western coast of that dark, mystic continent, that baffler of explorers - Africa.
>
> "(The castle was) built of stone brought from a great distance; years of labour and a thousand negroes toiling beneath the lash had reared up its walls ... All this had required an immense amount of labour, but manpower was plentiful. A present for a chief, and he furnished all that was needed. And Portugese know how to make men work!" (pp 58-59)

Ye men of good will, rejoice! After such a display of moral indiscrimination, I feel the hero loses his right to comment glibly about devil-haunted de Montour, of the same story:

> "He seemed to be labouring under great excitement; his eyes hinted of ghastly mysteries known to him alone. And yet his face was not that of a wicked man." (page 71)

Thus, more disastrous to Howard's stories than the irrationality of setting and motive, are his heroes, who turn out to be more monstrous than his monsters.

Add Howard's paranoically cringing prose ("Valley Of The Worms" being the worst example) and this collection must be pronounced a disaster. Then why spend several hundred words pointing out the obvious? Afetr all, in his Introduction, Howard himself more-or-less admits that he never

was, or wanted to be, more than a hack, working in the then-prosperous fantasy field. I can only presume that, during his working life, Howard put in the least effort for the most return. My main concern, then, is not with the author's motives, but with the fact that Howard has always had a high reputation in the SF and fantasy fields and, since his death, has been accounted with such writers of his era as E.R. Burroughs and H.P. Lovecraft. In 1968 it is hard to conceive of an audience that would revere these stories, unless they are simply some of Howard's worst. Some of the prejudices shared by author and audience are obvious - condescension to other races, rather than explicit racism, the location of mystery and horror stories well outside America, and especially in Mid-Europe and the Orient, and the location of Evil itself as far from the individual American as possible. However, the fact that Howard's anti-rationality, and explicit sado-masochism, unrelieved by the slightest hint of humour, were <u>also</u> entertaining to large numbers of people (and still are - look at any issue of IF Magazine) is not explained by the standard sociologies of popular fiction. For the reader of the late '60s, there is little in the "<u>Wolfshead</u>" collection - but for researchers of the American psyche, there is still much here to puzzle over.

<u>DOUGLAS R. MASON</u>

EIGHT AGAINST UTOPIA (From Carthage I Came)
Paperback Library 1966 158 pages

To watch the development of a writer from a bad hack to a nearly good one, within the space of 158 pages, is a unique experience. The first three chapters of this book transgress most of the basic rules of novel-writing - the plot-line is simple, but the action snarls into a series of badly-connected gestures, and the characters are merely the worst SF cliches. The cretinous editor who retitled this novel gives away the story's essence: a group of rebels escape from Carthage, either the only, or one of the only refuges of humanity remaining after the Last War. A look at the title is enough to elicit a yawn. Boredom is not in the least alleviated until about page 50 - not only are the characters without identity, but Mason neglacts to supply an explanation for their desire to leave this Utopia - after all, the food's all right, the girls are magnificent, available and cheeky, and the authorities are either placid or blind until the Breakout. We are <u>told</u> that the place is Hell, but we are not shown it. If Carthage has been stably defended against exterior weather, radiation, and inner dissent for centuries, then Mason does not <u>show</u> us where the perfect mask slipped.

Mistakenly, Mason tries to work within the anti-State tradition of the fifties, having little idea of the emotional background to that era. Heinlein did, and still does, lead the Right-Wing Anarchists in science fiction. My own favourite piece of post-war paranoia is Williamson's "<u>The Humanoids</u>" but that was written about 1950, and was old-fashioned then. As with Heinlein, Asimov and the other ASTOUNDING writers, the arena of conflict is not Carthage, the Foundation, or Mars in A D 2000, but McCarthy-shadowed USA, 1950-1960, and the protagonists are not the postulated inhabitants of remots Hells, but middle-class Americans left bewildered by the development of technologically-based "Big Government". Mason's "eight" of the title, and their values, may only be explained in this way: notice the pre-adolescent view of sex, the belief in "Freedom" (an idea that does not seem possible in so highly-enclosed an environment), and an accompanying belief in "Progress", an idea that also does not seem to arise from the postulated framework of Carthage. After all, the copyright date of the book is 1966, not 1956. The writers of the ASTOUNDING era have failed to survive the sixties in America, or have found markets other than SF and those who, like the American SF editors, have simply tried to stand still, have instead slid back into the mindless violence of the 1930s. In other words, Mason starts a novel that should not work because he commences with an idea that no longer has importance for SF or his readers.

It is pointless to attempt to guess the reasons, but Mason then seems to notice the insincerity of his basis, and in the nick of time, sets out to write another type of novel altogether. My guess is that Mason is just a new writer improving as he goes along. From Chapter 4 onwards, the book's impossibly-staccato, sprawling prose becomes increasingly better organised. The author starts to think about the stick-figures with which he has burdened himself - he divides them into two groups and starts to compare their experiences, before linking them again for the last major episode of the novel. He realises that the only way he can repair the fabric of the book is to justify the group's original desire for release from Carthage, instead of leaving this a puzzle. He does this by emphasising the humanity of his protagonists and the inhumanity of Carthage. In the first three chapters, the escapees seem no more believable or human than the representatives of the authorities. Therefore Mason's task is to start from scratch at about page 50, in an attempt to convince us that his characters <u>are</u> people, facing problems in which we may become interested.

Firstly we are shown the psychological difficulties of an escape from an all-sufficing environment. Gaul Kalmar, leader of the group, continually asserts his own intelligence, but he panics at the slightest problem - his ability to survive remains unbelievable, but those who accompany him gradually learn to face the problem of living in a world from which man has retreated, but which has now re-grown into a usable environment. Chapter 5 shows us the group retreating ritualistically into "the interminable darkness" before they cross the frontiers of the city into "freedom". They are afraid to step outside the limits even though they realise that the surrounding force-screen has been deactivated, until the impulsive action of a reluctant recruit shows them the way. A second group's escape craft lands in the sea: Mason realistically shows in chapter 6 the newly-discovered problems and triumphs of dealing with an activity as unforeseen as sailing.

Mason retrieves drama from catastrophe surprisingly well. We are shown a frightened, disorganised group welded into a social unit by means of a realistically-described encounter with a new world. They are then compared with their pursuers - the crew of the "Strikecraft", which chases them from Carthage to Gibraltar. The Carthaginiansauthorities are shown as mindless killers, compared with their prey, who triumph without any resort to superfluous violence, using the power of cooperative effort, and some good luck. It is only when the group is trapped and forced to fight back that they become less than human - the effect of living in Carthage, and the necessity for escape, is demonstrated in retrospect, and Mason justifies his first chapters in reverse. Like Tania, the sacrificial victim, those who do not escape become less than human, eradicated "like an incised shadow on the cliff".

Mason learns from his mistakes, but a great improvement during the course of the novel does not justify a great deal of clumsy writing and 'good-buddies' characterisation, both of which persist to the last chapter. However it is encouraging to see an author writing himself out of a hack situation, instead of submitting to it, and presenting something of wider value. "<u>Eight Against Utopia</u>" is not a great book, but Mason's next book might be.

<u>A.E. VAN VOGT</u>

ROGUE SHIP
Dobson 1967 213 pages

A E VanVogt's latest novel "<u>Rogue Ship</u>" contains action passages as 'sick' as this:

"He was facing in the wrong direction when the forward drive of the ship hit him. The safety belt and the pit of his stomach had taken the blow. Now, he hung in his belt, doubled up ... He had the peculiar feeling that his insides would simply flow out of him if there were an opening anywhere in his body. His eyes bulged. The sensation was hideous." (page 79)

"Rogue Ship" contains more meaningless writing than an issue of a Melbourne newspaper, and statements as breathtakingly mad as this, occur often:

> "In his excitement, Lesbee shook Tellier awake.
> "'Hey! I've figured out the true nature of the universe.'"
> (page 177)

Some of the worst characterisation and most inconsequential plotting I've ever seen; some of the most ridiculous dialogue in science fiction - this 213 page bag of prize lemons should have been one of the worst books I have ever read. But it wasn't, and I hope that in writing this review I might be able to work out the reason. The problem is that although "Rogue Ship" should be crushingly dull, it is almost a can't-put-down.

Van Vogt's guiding idea is familiar enough - the self-contained, centuries-travelling interstellar spaceship has fascinated SF writers for at least 40 years (for instance, see the Ultimate magazines' 1966 revival of Don Wilcox's "Voyage That Lasted 600 Years"), and most authors have been always hard put to add an innovation of any importance to the original theme. Van Vogt is no exception - on the surface, the only new thing he does is bring the spaceship back to Earth, instead of setting it down on a virgin planet. Any particular distinction in the story arises from Van Vogt's side-shows - while the ship sails on effortlessly, floating right out of our range of interest, he arranges for a wild succession of 'happenings' (and the latest connotation of that word is not c completely inappropriate). Somehow, in this process, he manages to interest us.

However, as I have already mentioned, Van Vogt's many blunders nearly alienate us from the book altogether. Though the first 40 pages are fairly well written (and therefore not the section that comes from IF), the author sometimes subjects us to long passages of the disconnected, paranoic type of hack-writing that one finds only in science fiction. Van Vogt's grinding emphasis on simple "action" for its own sake prefigures, and probably influences Laumer at his worst. There is simply little or no awareness of his human beings do or can act in given situations. Therefore the reader is given no basis for accepting the characters - they feel no emotions, they never think, beyond the narrow limits that Van Vogt has set them: they only have "dizzying thrills", express "grinding rage", "quiver", fight, shoot (interminably), and perform a circus-ring-full of uninteresting actions. In other words, they are typical "characters" from SF.

Well (you say) so what? - name an SF story that has much more than that - it's the ideas that count! Right (I say): Van Vogt's "idea" is that five generations wander around the galaxy instead of belting along on faster-than-light drive, because their engines suffer from an easily-remediable limitation. The ship's occupants remain divided for five generations over the question of whether to return to Earth or not (believe that if you can). The book is structured as a study in human nastiness, and the plot howls for the touch of a satirist. Probably the author understands the possibilities of the situation, as he constructs his descriptions of the ship's politics as a bitter comment on man's constant impulse towards the rewards, and total moral corruption, of power. "Rogue Ship" should have been a minor tragedy - but it remains a nasty melodrama, as the ship's inhabitants have no defined existence, moral or personal. Van Vogt should not have written such a high percentage of his novel about a subject of which he knows so little - human beings.

The problem remains however - why is "Rogue Ship" always readable, and even at times entertaining? The answer stems from Van Vogt's famous idiosyncrasies which, during the early fifties, coalesced into a separate style within science fiction - that is: whatever you're writing about at the moment - stop it, and get onto something else! No matter how badly Van Vogt writes a scene, one always has the consolation that the pain will be short-lived, and the next chapter

might be worth reading. In some of Van Vogt's books, of course, the plot succumbs to the general madness, as do the characters, ideas and all those other things some writers treat as necessary unities. "Rogue Ship"'s basic story hangs together well, providing a welcome handrail of stability on what proves a jerky, if exhilarating roller-coaster ride. All the other elements of the story follow each other pell-mell.

Therefore the book is finally not about anything much in particular, and it might have been entirely barren if Van Vogt had not thought to include some good hard-core Campbellian science fiction. Chapters 22-26 are very good indeed, including one of the best depictions of alternate time-track notions that I have seen. The book ultimately fails because its attention is hopelessly divided between the ultimately arid passages about the power struggle, and the entertaining passages of more cosmic content. I find this depressing - a science fiction novelist's viewpoint seems indeed pessimistic if he can only see humanity as self-destructive, quite independent of constant scientific progress (the ship's sterility of purpose contrasted with the discovery of faster-than-light travel). Van Vogt entertains at one level, but ignores the important questions. I was not completely entertained, and I cannot forgive the blind spots.

COLIN COOPER

THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING MAN

Faber & Faber 1968 182 pages

Colin Cooper's "The Thunder And Lightning Man" slips down like the proverbial oyster, but is worth an extra tasting. It is one of those novels for which the label "compulsive reading" was invented, but arouses some unexpected responses along the way.

On one level, a level below which most readers need not reach, the novel is a very enjoyable SF thriller, and solidly English at that, sort of Agatha Christie cum ...? The novel commences with a historical inscription in a Somerset church, and finishes with a short description of England's ills during the next half century. The 182 pages in between may be taken as adventure fiction (aliens in the moors and military antivs), slick social protest (against military brutality), or any one of a dozen other categories of popular entertainment. Delete the sex and witty comedy and the novel could read like a juvenile. But what if these factors can least be left out?

The plot appears hackneyed in summary. An amiable Londoner en route to Cornwall, Mark Horley, "bumps into" Susanna, whose nice-but-irresponsible Aunt Emmy knows all about local eccentric Badgeroe who claims he receives messages from an alien ship on equipment made in 1821 by one Daniel Eldervale. Mark leaps into mystery-solving with gusto, aided by plenty of "puzzling clues". When the military become convinced that Badgeroe's warnings are justified, they transform the little English village into an Army camp. The fun, as they say, is on.

Thus blandness (plus a considerable amount of wit to pill the sugar) is one's main first impression of the novel. It's a two-hour read on a warm Sunday afternoon, with a drink at one's side. But find you in a more wakeful mood on a busier day without that drink and you may even be puzzled by the plot summary. The first section sounds just like Agatha Christie's first SF novel - typical English village, wacky old aunt, country vicar, a smashing mystery to solve, a laugh a page and (though not typically Christie) a roll in the grass. The second half, however, looks solidly social-satire-and-protest, with the British Army not coming out well at all. So there is one major inconsistency in the novel's tone. The second major inconsistency comes at the end, but I am not giving that away - it is above all a mystery novel.

The third puzzling feature of the novel's tone is Cooper's ability to strike verve and originality from stock characters. Aunt Emmy is just a silly old woman, but she gets some marvellous

lines. Captain Clyde is the paranoic super-efficient Intelligence officer, bent on doing his job and grabbing his man as quickly as possible. But this does not occur to the reader until well after he has been introduced. By then he is a character in his own right.

The familiar is never merely ho hum. Our interest in the settings, characters and purposes of the novel is successively set alight. But does this interest spring merely from some gilding the author has added in his less hurried moments? Is a novel that contains descriptions like

> "A scum of reddish-brown dust covered the surface of the tank-water. One or two insects paddled lazily across, their legs sinking deep without breaking the surface tension, giving the water the appearance and texture of foam rubber."

merely entertainment?

The novelist himself is never sure. At any rate, the issue of the seriousness or otherwise of the novel cannot be settled by looking at the anti-militarism of the second half. It is true that Clyde's and Crosby's reactions to the news of probable visitation resembles closely the reactions of the original destroyers of Eldervale's equipment. It is true that Horley and Susanna have right on their side - but they are the ones who wander stupidly into an army trap which kills one of their best friends. It is true that Horley is intelligent enough to have solved the problem long before it is too late, but when offered the opportunity he reacts:

> "Even then it is possible that disaster could have been averted. But, for the time being, I was defeated. I could only crawl into Susanna's bed, seeking, and miraculously finding, comfort in physical contact."

After a series of initial defeats, his well-meaning efforts to warn the Army of his discovered secrets are also doomed. By contrast, the Army carry out all their objectives with skill, not too much bloodshed, and within the blunt-spirited morality of their "orders". Horley stirs up the ant's nest, but from then on has no power over its activity.

Therefore, insofar as the novel is exploratory as well as bright, it explores its protagonist Mark Horley. He is Gulliverian in his impotence and his delusions that he is even a little fish, let alone a big fish in this little waterhole. "We can't afford to make the sort of error that comes from ignorance" intones Horley time and again, but he remains the most ignorant of the group. The author's broad hints to this effect, such as Horley's exasperated visit to his parents and his amatory fumblings on the moors, would appear on first reading to be merely diversions from a fast-paced context. Instead, they are delicate pointers to the main theme of the novel - that Horley, in exploring short-sightedly the mysteries of theThunder and Lightning Man, Daniel Eldervale, and solving them, fails to explore the more immediate areas of human experience that he uncovers during his Somerset stay. Daniel Eldervale, died 1826, is the hero of the novel, while Susanna, Aunt Emmy, Badgeroe and Thursk remain lively because of the author's gifts, but cliches because of Horley's non-committment.

These undersurface ironies give the novel its odd tone. The author seems to be offering us a slick England ruled by soldiers, sex and science. The dialogue "swings", and the attitudes are pert and without any of the mellowness usual in an English pastoral novel. The strangely detached epilogue completes the pattern. The tone may be a result of the author's lack of seriousness. But it may be that his narrator, Horley, is presented as a man-of-the-world never in contact with the world. Each reader must decide for himself, and I am not sure myself that the second effect has been fully achieved.

And you've never heard of Colin Cooper? And you, like myself, don't believe in first novels

starring such asides as

"I mean, think of it! A take-over by intellectuals! No wonder the Army's here."

and

"'Ninety per cent of genius,' said Aunt Emmy firmly, 'is the infinite capacity for taking pains. The other ten per cent is knowing the right people.'"

and you, like myself, keep thinking you've heard this song before (especially that odd feeling elicited by the story's ending), and that Faber give the game away on the back flyleaf? Congratulations, Brian Colin Cooper Shackleton Aldiss, whoever you are.

... BRUCE GILLESPIE

ROBERT SILVERBERG

TO OPEN THE SKY

Ballantine 1967 222 pages

This one is about a synthetic religion founded by one Vorst, and how it conquered Earth and opened the way to the stars:

"Noel Vorst's the most brilliant man of our times, and his accomplishments mustn't be underrated. He saw the culture of Earth fragmented and decadent, saw people everywhere escaping into drug addictions and Nothing Chambers and a hundred other deplorable things. And he saw that the old religions had lost their grip, that the time was ripe for an eclectic, synthetic new creed that dispensed with the mysticism of the former religions and replaced it with a new kind of mysticism, a scientific mysticism. That Blue Fire of his - a wonderful symbol, something to capture the imagination and dazzle the eye, as good as the Cross and the Crescent, even better, because it was modern, it was scientific, it could be comprehended even while it bewildered. Vorst had the insight to establish his cult and the administrative ability to put it across."

Says Silverberg.

"Nor do we see any sign which indicates that the term of her long domination is approaching. She saw the commencement of governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot in Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's."

That's Macaulay, writing on the Catholic Church in his essay on von Ranke's "History Of The Popes".

Compare the language - and you will have an impression of the respective intellectual standings of Silverberg and Macaulay.

Some time ago Judith Merril reprimanded Zelazny for having used mythological symbols rather than scientific ones, saying that scientific symbols are more powerful. It ain't so, Madam; a dinosaur is just a dinosaur, but a dragon is something wonderful. Any simple candle holds more power than an atomic reactor; and the Transubstantiation of Christ is a deep mystery because it is irrelevant with respect to science and precisely for that reason: the transmutation of elements, on the other

hand, is no mystery at all, and it is completely irrelevant to religion. "Scientific mysticism" is a contraditio in adjecto.

"To Open The Sky" is one of those wretched SF things in which we are asked to believe the impossible: that a deception with some of the trappings of religion, but nothing of its spirit, an empty shell lacking bones and sucked dry of blood, should be able to achieve what the most vigorous religions have failed to do in known history - to gain complete mastery over the mind of man; that a man, whom we clearly perceive to be fit only to be some petty executive, should be able to supplant Moses, Christ, Mohammed and Luther as the founder of a new religion. There are, of course, "extraordinary charismatic individuals" as Silverberg rightly asserts, but you won't find them in his book. "To Open The Sky" perpetuates some of the hoariest SF cliches: a founder providing for an heretical group of his own movement, and the achievement of some purpose alien to religion via religion (star travel, in this case). It isn't in the least the business of religion to extend the rule of man in the physical world.

To do Mr. Silverberg justice, however, it must be acknowledged that his piece in SPECULATION 15 on what he thinks is in his stories is better fiction than any to be found in these five stories from the pages of GALAXY.

... FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

FRITZ LEIBER

GATHER DARKNESS!

... a memory....

"I recall reading a book by Fritz Leiber," said Nat, " called THE WANDERER. And, if I am not mistaken, another called THE SILVER EGGHEADS."

"That was a mighty book," said young Tom Firkin. "I never thought robots could have a sex life until I read that one."

"And why not?" said Nat. "If they can write books surely they can....?"

Richard Crundall, a large gentleman with an aristocratic palate, raised his port glass, surveyed it, and remarked: "I recently re-read one of Mr. Leiber's books. GATHER DARKNESS! it is called, and it is a particularly good old friend of mine. In a preface to this edition Tom Boardman describes it as 'a classic from the golden age' and when he writes this Mr. Boardman is being neither fulsome nor mendacious, for, after all, what is a classic but a work which has stood the test of time?"

"A classic is a book everyone owns and no one reads," murmured Ossian Arblaster, but Mr. Crundall ignored him.

"When I first made the acquaintance of GATHER DARKNESS! it was read as a three-part serial in Astounding. This was during the dark days of the Battle of the North Atlantic, circa 1943. It lightened life during my infrequent off-watch spells aboard HMS CLARE, an old American four-stack destroyer, and assisted materially in preserving a small oasis of lunacy in an altogether too sane and brutal world."

"One treasured those three magazines for a couple of years until they met with an ignominious and unfortunate end as the sad result of an attack of dysentry in Italy just before V.E. Day. One still has the poignant memory of the seperate very soiled pages floating one at a time down the Grand Canal in Venice. Sic transit gloria mundi..."

Tom exhibited a puzzled frown and made to question Mr. Crundall, but Ossian silenced him. Mr. Crundall continued: "Leiber expanded and revised for book publication in 1950, and managed, as

always, to project himself into his writing to the point where he is very high on the list of people who would be welcome at my place for a very long stay."

"One confesses, without apology or regret, to being biassed - outrageously biassed - in favour of this book. It is a story of the second atomic era, when humanity has retrogressed to the point of mixing science and witchcraft. The protagonist is a ludicrous, inept, kindly, bumbling priest called Brother Jarles. But I imagine you know all about it, Nat?"

"A little, Richard, but I'm afraid I haven't read it ..."

"Then I envy you the experience of a first encounter with it," said Mr. Crundall. "Do be a good fellow, Tom, and pass me the bottle."

... THOMAS HARKER

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

2001 A SPACE ODYSSEY

Arrow 1968 256 pages

In what must have been a brief moment of hell in which his critical capabilities deserted him completely, Will Atheling, Jr. actually praised this unpleasant little volume.

Were this novel by a 'prentice author, it would merely be nauseatingly bad. But, alas, it is by the renowned ACC, and that seems to make it worse.

It lectures.

It tends to tell the reader about the story than to tell the story itself, almost as if Clarke had seen a movie and was trying to put down what he saw, assuming momentarily for the sake of argument that one admits that 2001 A SPACE ODYSSEY has a story.

It is padded.

It is inconsistent.

That will do for a start, I think.

Perhaps it is not easy to write history without lecturing, and in the early segment of this book Clarke is supposedly writing history. But this is no excuse. If Clarke found it difficult to write about long periods of time without sounding like a children's encyclodpedia then he should have reorganised the structure of this book to avoid the so blatant demonstration of his deficiency. As it is, one becomes bored with Clarke's pedantic style very early in the book, and although this is rather appropriate to some of the later sections, it is not encouraging.

Probably Clarke has never been good at telling stories - I don't know. But he certainly hedges at the game in this book. Here's an example:

> "The space-pod was slowly turning, and as it did so, it brought fresh wonders into view. First there was a perfectly spherical swarm of stars, becoming more and more closely packed towards the centre until its heart was a continuous glow of light. Its outer edges were ill-defined - a slowly thinning halo of suns that merged imperceptibly into the background of more stars.
>
> "This glorious apparition, Bowman knew, was a globular cluster. ..... "

This "glory" is present only in Clarke's telling us so. His description is barren, giving us nothing whatsoever. We feel no real emotion. This is not an isolated case. Consider as a second

example, the situation following the failure of the airlocks. I refer, roughly speaking, to the first two pages of chapter 28 "In Vacuum". On this occasion we have, or would expect to have, considerable stress. But just as Clarke failed to elicit any wonder in the quotation above, he now fails to induce in us any feeling of desperation. The writing is flat, despite the use of words like 'howling', 'racing', 'hurricane' and 'shriek'. Again Clarke is more interested in telling us what he sees than in telling us how Bowman feels. He tries to tell us about Bowman, I think, for the fifth paragraph is written with Bowman as subject. But subsequently Clarke slips into a totally unsuitable remote language which takes away any emotion we might expect to feel, using phrases like '...Bowman could have found his way through these ...' and '... he could survive ...' with the aplomb of such puppet masters as Van Vogt and Hubbard. It is not very convincing, at this point, to suggest that Clarke is deliberately being unemotional, for the early part of the chapter is written subjectively and emotionally - 'How, in God's name?'.

The book is padded, of course, simply because it is a novelette (at best), blown up to 224 pages (US) or 256 pages (UK), nice round figures. Clarke did add enough material to expand the original to a novelette, yes, but despite the publication of Harry Harrison's "The Man From P.I.G" as a pb, it is really not possible to sell novelettes as novels. You might be able to fool people as to the quality of your merchandise, but, so far at least, you can't do that with quantity.

And finally it is inconsistent. I don't mean that there are contradictions in the immensely-well researched philosophical aspects of the work, but rather that the book is sloppily written, without attention to simple detail.

In Chapter 7 Dr. Heywood Floyd is aboard the Pan-Am spacecraft taking him up to the space-station. We learn, page 47, that time to orbital rendezvous is 55 minutes. On page 52 of the edition I am reviewing (right at the end of chapter 7), we read:

> "...Then he buried himself in his endless technical reports, in a desperate last-minute assault on the usual back-log.
>
> "He would have no time for reading when he got to the Moon."

When I read this I sat up with a lurch. It didn't really seem sensible that he should have to read whilst going up a short distance like that when he still had to make the journey of several days to the Moon. Either he had one hell of a lot of work to do or Clarke was just writing to fill up the bottom of the page.

The trip to the moon, it turns out, occupies about 25 hours, and on page 62 of my edition we learn that:

> "There was plenty to occupy his time, even if he did nothing but sit and read. When he tired of official reports and memoranda and minutes he would plug his foolscap-sized Newspad into the ship's information circuit and scan the latest reports from Earth. "

Et cetera, et cetera. Floyd has no time to waste whilst making a short trip into orbit, but time to lazily read newspapers whilst on a day trip to the Moon. Mr. Clarke has filled up his page, but has shown his hand.

Now in chapter 17, "Cruise Mode", Clarke gives a 'careful' description of live aboard "Discovery". He states that Bowman and Poole work identically, but twelve hours apart. He goes so far as to say:

> "Poole's programme was a mirror image of his own, and the two schedules dove-tailed together without friction." (page 117)

after having described Bowman's day in loving detail, over some seven pages. Now I would need to quote most of those pages to demonstrate my point, but if you check by writing down just when Bowman and Poole perform actions you will find the following:

1. Bowman takes command an hour after waking, but Poole takes command immediately on waking, for otherwise Bowman could not take 6 off-hours until 2400.

2. Bowman has breakfast by himself, whereas Poole has his two hours after waking (at 2000) with Bowman.

3. At 1200 Bowman has lunch with Poole (i.e. starting 6 hours before Poole is due to awaken) and this does not seem to end until 1300, leaving Poole with 5 hours sleep.

The explanation is distressingly simple. Such a book is clearly the product of bone-headed laziness and a raging desire to make a quick buck.

The book has sold tremendously well and I guess Clarke has made a lot of money out of it. Good for him. I feel sick.

... KELVIN URIAH FANTHORPE WIDDERSHINS (dec'd)

LEIGH BRACKETT

THE COMING OF THE TERRANS

Ace 1967 160 pages

THE BIG JUMP

Ace 1967 128 pages

It is almost impossible to state the importance of Brackett's place in the pantheon of science fiction writers without going over into what seems almost ridiculous flattery. Yet Brackett's achievementswith the grandest of science fiction forms, the space opera, are so far ahead of those of any of her contemporaries or of those who have tried to follow her that comparison is not merely odious but also pointless. The only regrettable thing about the collection "The Coming Of The Terrans" is that it is so short: a large amount of Brackett's work still remains to be reprinted, and I am sure that ACE will not delay long in publishing further volumes.

Now this book contains only one story that is really vintage Brackett, "The Beast-Jewel Of Mars" (PLANET STORIES, Winter 1948), though "The Last Days Of Shandakor" might sneak under the wire. The other stories are late-PLANET ("Mars Minus Bisha") and second coming ("The Road To Sinharat" and "Purple Priestess Of The Mad Moon"). Brackett's crystal prose still shines in these later yarns, but the energy, and more particularly the familiarity seems to have been slightly lacking.

Brackett's plot-line is so simple that she does not have to devote time and words to keeping it running, and can devote these to sheer wordsmanship and characterisation: not deep characterisation, just deep.

But a brief page is not the place to go into matters of this kind.

"Here's another demonstration that youget a whale of a lot for your money from Ace." said P. Schuyler Miller in introducing his review of the original ACE edition of "The Big Jump". Of course, that ACE Doublealso offered Philip K. Dick's "Solar Lottery" as a 320 page, 35 cent package. The current edition, some twelve years later, contains just "The Big Jump" (128 pages) for 50 cents.

Isn't there something wrong here? As I recall it, or like to recall it, back in 1955 or so

paperbacks had two big advantages over the magazines. The material was usually much better, and one almost always got a lot more for one's money. In 1955 magazines were 160 digest pages (maximum) for 35 c. Most paperbacks offered more pages for the same price and ACE, as I have indicated, offered 320 pages. As late as 1958, when magazines were thinking about 50 cents as a price, and when 128 pages was nearer the norm, ACE was still offering 320 pages for 35 cents.

Nowadays there is no thought of a 320 pages ACE paperback for 50 or 60 cents. I presume there is a reason, and I d like to hazard a guess as to what it is.

The rises in costs of production for magazines and paperbacks seem to me to have been much the same. The rates paid to authors seem to have changed by much the same sort of figure, even though the rises here have been totally inadequate. If anything, the paperbacks have probably been slightly more generous, though this is only because the magazines are extremely mean.

Many magazines died a few years ago primarily because of the crummy ones which were around and took just enough of the casual market to shrink the sales of the classy publications a little too much (STARTLING STORIES is the example I always think of). AMAZING and FANTASTIC must be leading claimants for the position of King of the small-mag. killers. Just at the moment there are a large number of very bad science fiction novels being published in paperback, Emil Petaja being one of the better authors in this class (and that's saying a lot). Authors who used to start with short stories now make their debuts with novels for Yecch Books. Certainly anyone with an ounce of taste will not buy this rubbish, but there's probably just enough sale of these to cut into the sales of more worthwhile books by Delany or Brackett, say.

"The Big Jump" is worth 50 cents of anyone's money, and a dollar would not be too much to pay for this fairly standard Brackett novel (Brackett's novels range in quality from 'superb' to 'unsurpassed', you understand) of 1952. The guy gets the girl, the baddies are deat up, and 'there are some things into which Man is not meant to pry'. What more do you want or need?

ROGER MANSFIELD ed.

THE STARLIT CORRIDOR

Pergamon 1967 172 pages

The collection of short stories and poems takes its title from a poem by Kingsley Amis, "Science Fiction" which has to hold up the poetry side of the anthology aided only by some modest assistance from Constantine Fitzgibbon's "Space Probe to Venus". Amis has some success by being abstract, Fitzgibbon by being rather concrete, and the other five poems range from inept to almost.

The fiction is not too bad, though I feel sure that many anthologists could have made a better selection for use in schools. E.L. Malpass, a writer for whom many English readers apparently have an inexplicable weakness, is the odd man out, the other stories - "Before Eden" (Clarke), "Disappearing Act" (Bester), "Pawley's Peepholes" (Wyndham), "The Monsters" (Sheckley), "Harrison Bergeron" (Vonnegut), "The Happy Man" (Page) and "The Liberation of Earth" (Tenn) being, at worst, passable.

The regular contentsare followed by 24 pages of questions which are directed to a huge range of age-levels, but which are thoughtfully cross-referenced with occasional mentions of other stories by the same, or different, authors. Verdict: Ok, but could have been better.

DAMON KNIGHT ed.

ORBIT 3 Berkeley 1968 224 pages

This collection is far better than ORBIT 2, though that is not, alas, as much a recommendation as I would have liked it to be.

There's one very bad story, of which more later, a couple which are really non-starters, and a couple of good ones, which more or less reverses the previous performance. "Mother To The World" by Richard Wilson is probably the best of the bunch, though as Knight states in his introduction, it is not original in a major sense. It isn't, to be honest, even science fiction, because it is mostly about people, and people, in science fiction (almost by definition) don't mean a damn. It was the high point of the anthology, and it is not surprising that Knight used it as lead.

Richard McKenna's "Bramble Bush" is better than the yarn Knight disinterred last time, though Knight says he has done some re-writing which, if I have read the story as McKenna intended, lessened the story's impact. "Bramble Bush" is concerned with identity and reality, and it is alarming to read Knight saying "... I made a number of minor changes, mostly in the character's names. (In the original version, half a dozen of the characters had names that looked and sounded alike.)". It seems not impossible that McKenna intended that the names should look or sound alike, and not just for fun.

I liked Joanna Russ's "The Barbarian" no more than I liked the earlier stories about Alyx. But I am more used to the idea. Mr. Knight's introduction was again troubling, particularly in the second paragraph in which Knight weaves misunderstanding and plain drivel into rather shabby rags.

The stories by Wolfe, Buck and Wilhelm are goodish Orbit quality, though not very deep. Farmer has his little joke and Sallis his little pretension until we come upon the real stinker.

It is hard to understand why Knight should choose to print Jakes's "Here Is Thy Sting" unless he really believes his blurb ("Here is an exuberant and funny story about death"). There is no shred of evidence that Jakes considers himself ever to be other than deadly serious, other than in the triviality of the thought behind the story and the inconsequential way it is handled. But these skills are ones Jakes learned as a hack for Ziff-Davis: thought of the most superficial variety and writing which is almost self-parody. Why should we acclaim them as high art? I for one will never be able to join the throng barracking for Berkeley Livingston, though Mr. Knight seems to be headed in that direction.

A good anthology, certainly, but a trifle alarming in places.

SAMUEL R. DELANY

THE JEWELS OF APTOR

Ace 1968 160 pages

THE FALL OF THE TOWERS

Sphere 1968, 1969 144 pages x 3

"The Jewels of Aptor" was the first of these books to be 'rescued' from their original editions. It is presented here pretty much as Delany originally wrote it, which is to say that it is rather longer than half an ACE Double. Readers who only have the 1962 edition are missing something if they don't add this to their collection.

The republication of "The Fall Of The Towers" ("Out Of The Dead City", "The Towers Of Toron", "City Of A Thousand Suns") is a different kettle of fish. The three uniform volumes, their covers carefully reflecting the attitudes within the given volume (though out of order, as it happens) , painted by Russell Fitzgerald, are a genuine delight to read and to compare, except for one small problem, a problem Delany has faced over and over again. Misprints can be understood, perhaps, and losing a chapter can happen, but the last two pages of "City Of A Thousand Suns" appears at the beginning of the volume, the postscript being omitted entirely. In addition, there are plenty of typos.

But I'm not here to tell you what's wrong with this set of books, but to try to describe, I think best by example, what Delany has done to these since their original publication.

In the first edition of "Captives Of The Flame", the last paragraph of the prologue reads:

> "The entire scene was suddenly jerked from his head. There was nothing left but blue smoke, cool as blown ice, inside him, around him. He was spinning in blue smoke. Sudden lightning seared his eyeballs, and the shivering after-image faded, shifted, became . . . a web of silver fire, the red of polished carbuncle, the green of beetle's wings."

In "Out Of The Dead City" this becomes:

> "The entire scene was suddenly wiped from his eyes. There was nothing but blue smoke, cool as blown ice; he spun in blue. Lightning seared his eyeballs, and the after image shivered, shifted, became ... silver, red - beetles' wings."

Delany has tautened his prose greatly, in this case by omitting what he now regards as unnecessary words, and re-arranging others. Note in particular the skilful juxtaposition of 'shivered, shifted' in the second version which, though not far removed from the original, is the obvious result of some careful thought.

In another case, again in "Out Of The Dead City", Delany improves things just by the addition of a comma, after "knowing", and shifting the comma on from "light" to "and" in the following sentence at the end of chapter eight:

> "He turned his blank face left and right in the golden light, and with all his knowing could communicate no awe."

becomes

> "He turned his blank face left and right in the golden light and, with all his knowing, could communicate no awe."

This is again a matter of looking carefully at what you have written: the second version props in just the right places.

In another example, this time from "The Towers Of Toron" , Delany makes some major changes in describing a particular scene, in general moving towards the concrete. Here is the first version, in the middle of chapter nine:

> "Chains of light dangle between tent and gambling stand. Couples stroll, crumpling their greasy paper bags. A merry-go-round whirls light across the enameled hides of sea-horses and polished porpoises, and the children crawl from under the tent flaps again and scurry back to the walk-ways. Dolphins nose the corners of the aquarium wagons and the calliope increases its tempo."

The second version is:

> "Necklaces of light loop by tent and gambling stand. Couples stroll, eating fried fish from paper bags. A wonder-wheel rings the darkness and children scuttle under the railings along the walks. At the bottom of the glass aquarium, the octopus stretches over green rocks. The calliope hails notes against the neon night."

Again the second version is shorter, punchier.

And now the last section in "City Of A Thousand Suns", just before the epilogue, we have a

slight expansion:

> "Arkor turned in the waterless ocean of stone and began to walk back. The telepathic giant cried."

becomes:

> "Arkor turned in the ocean of stone and began to walk back. Alone again, the telepathic giant cried."

and I'm inclined to regard this as a small improvement. These examples could be multiplied many times over, but my purpose is merely to show you some of the ways in which Delany has modified what was written earlier. The result is a great change in readability and, to extend that a little, sheer quality of writing. There are, of course, many places where Delany has not changed what was written earlier.

There are no major changes in plot, if there are any at all. Readers who read only for plot will therefore not gain much by reading these new versions. Readers of ASFR, however, are expected to be capable of a little more, and for them I would regard the purchase of this version as essential. But don't throw away the old ones (you have got them, haven't you?), since an occasional comparison might do you the world of good.

Oh, and I don't think that all the changes Delany has made a necessarily good. There are so many of them that this happy coincidence is hardly likely. Even in the passages I have quoted are things I would rather Delany had not touched. But it is the overall effect which interests us. And that is all good, all improvement.

SLAWOMIR MROZEK

THE ELEPHANT

Grove Press 1965 176 pages

I am almost totally unable to appreciate this kind of writing, and only mention the book here on the off chance that some reader who does like it may not have come upon this particular example.

My argument is that if you have something to say you should say it. Mrozek does this in a way which I can only describe as guarded. I don't like fables, especially not ones about the stupidity of mankind: we do, after all, quite well enough in that line in the real world.

But Mrozek's tales have a kind of antique charm, that old-world style which John Bangsund occasionally affects so well, and those who grope in darkness after 'science fiction as literature' might as well grope here as anywhere else.

... JOHN FOYSTER

::

So long as reading is treated as a guide holding the keys that open the door to buried regions of ourselves, into which, otherwise, we should never penetrate, the part it can play in our lives is salutary. On the contrary, it becomes dangerous when, instead of waking us to the reality of our own mental processes, it becomes a substitute for them: when truth appears to us, not as an ideal which we can realise only as a result of our own thinking and our own emotional efforts, but as a material object which exists between the pages of a book, like honey made by others, to be possessed merely by stretching out our hands to a bookshelf and passively digesting it in a mood of bodily and mental torpor.

... Marcel Proust, in DAYS OF READING 1 in SELECTED WRITINGS translated by Gerard Hopkins.

JAMES BLISH &

NORMAN L. KNIGHT

A TORRENT OF FACES

Faber & Faber 1968 270 pages

"A Torrent Of Faces" is interesting primarily because it allows us to study the strategy of literary cheating, something that is very common in SF.

The year is 2794, and the population of Earth one trillion. With this background the authors develop a number of minor themes having little connection with each other, but which are bound together by the same set of protagonists, a fascistoid elite running the modern Utopia. The problems are all of a technical nature, never psychological, philosophical or political. As far as those realms of human ideas are concerned, we find only a tabula rasa.

These themes are: the saving of the guests of a shipwrecked hotel; relationships between humans and underwater beings developed from human stock; psi-powers (there are beings who can project their hallucinations into the material world, which the authors assume to be a valuable talent) thrown in for no good reason (other than, perhaps, being able to sell a portion of the book ("The Piper Of Dis") to Campbell); a family gathering of several millions of Joneses; the problems of feeding the budding masses; disagreement over matters of policy: a murder case, and so on. In short, a kitchen-sink story suffering from the usual weakness of this kind of story: quantity is substituted for quality, a number of small topics are supposed to camouflage the fact that no one of them is treated in depth.

And there is the threat of a large meteor, looming over most of the novel. On page 130, Biond, one of the principal characters, says: "We thought we might bomb it, but when we thought about what might happen when a radioactive cloud three hundred miles indiameter hit us, we gave up the idea. Instead, we have men drilling the rock and planting explosive charges in holes, for a start ... in the hope of fragmenting it, spreading it out. And I think we can use lasers on one side of it, to boil off some of the material and deflect it a little by vapor pressure...

"But when it hits ... it's going to be about a mile in diameter all the same."

I take this as meaning that only conventional explosives were used to fragment Flavia (the meteor).

On page 244, after the now somewhat smaller Flavia has struck the Earth, we learn:

"We figured on a lethal (radioactive) dose anywhere within a hundred miles of the impact. And no doubt we're going to see a lot of radiation sickness - and a whole lot of mutation".

"Could the nuclear bombs they used in the Third War have been as bad as this?" Jothen said. "They blew up whole cities " .

"Nothing like this", Biond said flatly. "The worst of those was rated at an explosive force of about a hundred megatons. Flavia ran about fifty million".

Now, if I haven't missed a reference in the text, there is no mention ofFlavia consisting of radioactive material.

It seems strange to me that a meteor burning in the air should produce radioactivity - and so much at that. But regardless of this (and Blish's science had better be correct for it took the authors 18 years to keep the science up to date), one cannot help wondering: wouldn't the radioactive cloud have been preferable after all? Even today it is possible to make atomic bombs that produce very little radioactivity and it should be child's play to blow up an asteroid, even one 11 miles long. A radioactive cloud three hundred miles in diameter certainly sounds impressive enough

- but the figure becomes less impressive when you consider that, given a certain amount of radio-activity produced by the atomic charges, the cloud is more harmless the bigger it is: for the bigger the cloud, the less the concentration of radioactivity per unit.

The solution of this puzzling refusal to blow up Flavia seems to be simply that the authors needed the meteor to destroy their Utopian civilisation.

The principal character of the story puts it thus: "Well, we made it for a while, quite a long while. But it was bound to break down sooner or later. If it hadn't been Flavia, it would have been something else, sooner or later. It turned out to be now, that's all."

If the authors had just claimed that the civilisation described had to break down because of some inherent weakness, and to break down now (and not in some far future, for it is a trivial fact that all things created, even the best of them, must also perish), the reader would have asked why. But once the reader has seen the civilisation destroyed - by an extraordinary event that could have happened to any society - he will, being naturally lazy, accept without much asking what the authors want to say about the inevitability of the event: something that belongs to a quite different order of reality. But this is nothing more than a dishonest technical trick to associate events that have no basic realionship. If other writers follow the examples given by Messrs. Blish and Knight we may perhaps next expect to see a novel wherein the authorshas ameteor fall on Moscow and then claims that this proves that Communism cannot work: or a Communist author may have a meteor fall on Washington or New York and proclaim this event to prove the inherent failure of capitalism.

The further aims of all this are quite clear: Blish and Knight want to blame anonymous "humanitarians" who are supposed to be responsible for the population problem. Again, as Biond puts it: "But we never even tried to face up to the difficulties. Instead, we ducked them - in the name of humanitarianism". (p. 265)

But then, it is always easier to blame a faceless group to which all possible evils are attributed, than to offer a serious investigation of a problem. We cannot expect SF authors to solve the problems of the world - for as a German critic remarked in 1899, if they could solve those problems they would have something better to do than to write novels. - but we can at least ask of them that they state the problems honestly and show some understanding of their nature. There is little indication in "A Torrent Of Faces" that the authors have understood the population problem. As far as we can see, there are no impediments to widespread birth-control in the world of "A Torrent Of Faces": the population is just as amorphous mass without political, religious or philosophical beliefs, they are nothing much in particular, seemingly easy to manipulate. So we have to conclude that the only reason why there is no birth-control is that the rulers didn't think of it.

The ending of the book is one familiar to all of us:" ... it's going to be guns, starvation and tyranny". It was said somewhere before that wars don't solve the population problem; this has been forgotten by now.

"And we threw everything we had into just one effort - to accomodate everybody, and not just adequately, but in luxury". Of course, this was wrong: punishment had to follow this presumption. God, one is inclined to believe, sent a meteor to punish the wicked humanitarians for their sins.

The masses are depicted as being stupid and full of xenophobia (one of the cliches of SF), but they are not quite worthless, for there is an occasional genius among them, who will invent fine stuff such as a new process for the production of food. But aside from this genius, one gets the impression that Mr. Blisha dn Mr. Knight consider human beings, unless they belong to the elite of technologists, as a mere inconvenience.

The members of the elite, competent in the solution of petty technological problems, become quite helpless where their own private problems are concerned. An indication of the poor characterisation is the fact that a mad member of the Council is introduced. Differences of opinion are normal in any collective body: in SF too often differing opinions are attributed to madness. In bad books, there seem to exist only two sorts of people: the good and the bad, or the intelligent and the unintelligent or the sane and the insane.

For the most part, the books lacks real drama; what happens concerns us but little, but there are a few moving scenes - for instance the moment when Dorthy Dunter and the Triton Tioru first leave the giant cities and enter the endless forest that covers the whole planet. There are also some good descriptions of the physical appearance of the future Earth.

But altogether, the book is crammed full with boring technical details: details that often serve only to lead the reader to believe that the important problems in the book are worked out as carefully as these trivialities - and they aren't.

...FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

::

MINCED MATTERS

a sort of letter column

GEORGE FERGUS

Sometimes I find it hard to believe in John Foyster. I fail to see why he couldn't think of any novels to put on his list of favourite SF. Sturgeon's "Baby Is Three" is his 4th favourite short work, but this is only a segment of the excellent novel "More Than Human". The whole novel is as well-done as "Baby Is Three", except perhaps for the last few pages. And I would think that such an avowed Cordwainer Smith fan would at least mention "The Planet Buyer" as a good novel. What of Frank Herbert's "Dune", or one of the novels of Pohl & Kornbluth? I notice that "Flowers For Algernon" is absent from either the novel or short story category. Conspicuously absent. There are, in fact, dozens of novels that could have been mentioned, but Foyster can't think of one.

. . . Foyster neglects Arthur C. Clarke's novels such as "Childhood's End" and "Against The Fall Of Night" in favor of "The Star", which has about one paragraph's worth of idea in it, and nothing else.'

(April 1968)

JF But I believe in you, George, just because you represent that great illiterate class so well-loved by Mr. Campbell. You may choose to regard "More Than Human" as a better short story than "Baby Is Three" (even though it isn't ... you say), and "Childhood's End" as a better short story than "The Star", or "The Star" as a worse novel, depending. My apologies for cutting out all that other rubbish you wrote.

AL JACKSON

I think it wrong to look to Cordwainer Smith for the 'spelling out of detail', for he showed, with great skill, in his writing of SF, that you cannot write about the future as you might write about the present because of the inherent contradiction. I find this to be a most irksome pivot about which all futuristic science fiction turns. The milieu of ten thousand years from now is in detail

as far beyond our comprehension as our setting is to neolithic man.

Smith has shown genius for riding the edge of the futuristic scene-setting. We never find out any details about how the underpeople are made. Sure, we know about genetic structuring and all that, and Smith heads us in that direction several times, yet he always reaches the point of saying "whoa, twentieth-century man, this is all really over our heads", and leaves off. We are left to fill in whatever we might with our imaginations, but there are not too many gaps, for that would spoil the effect.

It is amusing in these times when style is such a part of somebody's "thing" that Smith, though usually acknowledged, is not usually taken to heart. And style is Smith's reall strength. There has never been a writer of SF so terse. He could pack more into one page than many can into twenty.

(April 1968)

GEORGE TURNER

I make a plea for good manners in correspondence. Few writers choose to answer their critics because those who do are apt to be accused of being unable to accept criticism, which is unjust and untrue but allows any and all to pillory them in safety.

This we accept when the critic has a case to argue and some disputative ability. It becomes, however, less supportable when the critic substitutes personal ridicule for argument and covers a lack of critical capability under a rain of sneering attack. I have never obtained any satisfaction from insulting strangers and cannot understand those who do (save, perhaps, clinically).

Eisenstein opens his opus ((ASFR 15.Ed.)) with a swinging personal insult, snorts violently and lays about him with the hectic rage of a d'Artagnan taking on the Cardinal's Guards a dozen at a time. It is perhaps as well that JB had to cut his letter off at the point where he did, because in the 'cogent reasons' he refers to in his apology for so doing add nothing to the validity of the turade presceding them. Alex Eisenstein's trouble is an old one in fan criticism - he bitterly resents what another has written, feels it is all wrong, even feels he knows wherein it is wrong and thereupon launches an impassioned indictment so ill-considered that it indicts nothing but himself. In a lengthy paragraph Mister Eisenstein makes a series of apparently damning statements about the article which roused his wrath, but a closer look reveals that he has not backed a single one of them with a reasoned argument or a demonstrable fact. It reveals also that he has either not understood or has only cursorily read the article in question (a possibility which, curiously enough, he raises himself at the height of his denunciation).

I feel that the personally insulting missive which one sees occasionally in the columns of the professional magazines is out of place in ASFR, which is (one hopes) a forum for discussion rather than ill-mannered name-calling. But perhaps there is some cachet in insulting a professional - as with the man who throws a punch at a boxer, safe in the knowledge that the other's professionalism prevents him from hitting back. Except that once in a while it doesn't.

(May 1968)

JF The attitude of the editor can put an end to this sort of repartee, too. John Bangsund, for some reason he refuses to admit, has a policy of not publishing this kind of letter, and since I (in my J.G. Maxwell guise) came in for the magic touch of Alex Eisenstein I also wrote an unpublished letter. But I'm willing to put all this down to the natural ignorance of Americans and Alex's personal stupidity. I'm fair to all. But I think I should point out that Alex did raise two pertinent questions, neither of which you chose to answer, George. He queried your use of the word 'extra-sensory', which he regarded as "vague", and also just how theoretical justification could reinforce a plot. Answers, please!

James Blish . Turner is extremely good in "On Writing About Science Fiction" until he turns to the specific reviewers themselves, and then he shows what may be a blind spot of his own. I say "may be" because I find it impossible to extract any meaning from what he says about Knight's work or my own. "Knight is too busy whooping after hares to bring down any real deer" was a colourful image a century or so ago, I dare say, but the citing of an example or two as it relates to Knight's work might have redeemed what now is what Stuart Chase would call a semantic blab. Similarly, "seems uncomfortably concerned with the world in relation to James Blish rather than the reverse" sounds damning until I consider what, if anything, is meant by "the reverse". It seems to me that the reverse would be an equally undesirable attitude for a critic, who is after all supposed to be talking about somebody else - even if, as in my case, that somebody is occasionally a persona of himself.

I would hesitate to speak for Knight's critical philosophy, but I should have thought my own pretty plainly stated. What I was trying to produce in those days was technical criticism, my intention being to look at a story as a piece of construction, and if I found it to be well or badly constructed, to say exactly why. This kind of criticism is aimed primarily at writers and editors, but may also be of some interest to readers who are interested in fiction as a craft. (Quite a lot of Knight is so classifiable, as is Turner's subsidiary discussion of Zelazny's style in his review of LORD OF LIGHT).

For the most part I concentrated on magazine stories, because technical criticism of a novel is a major undertaking if one takes it seriously. My current book reviews for Amazing, on the other hand, are aimed at readers and are 90% non-technical.

The judgment that I had my eye on an eventual book is untrue. I never offered the Atheling pieces to any book publisher and didn't even have a manuscript; when Advent approached me, I had to construct one from the back files (and, in the case of the Pittcon speech, from a tape). I am positive that this was also true of Damon. As for the unnamed reviewers about whom this imputation is also made, I cannot read their minds, and neither can Turner.

To get off the subject of myself for a moment - as Turner says, writers are like that - I have a more general observation. All criticism has to be somewhat ex cathedra in tone, including criticism of criticism, and I don't fault Turner for showing rather an excess of it; my favourite mainstream critic is the worst case on record, as far as I know, but this is one reason why I so enjoy his work. He knows he's got a hot line to Heaven and isn't afraid to say so. But I do feel that in Turner's essay, it involves the additional danger of convincing (or selling) the unlettered - and there are many signs that these are Turner's intended chief audience - that the kind of critical practice he endorses is the only kind that can be respected. As a corrective, I warmly recommend to everyone THE ARMED VISION by Stanley Edgar Hyman, and its companion anthology, THE CRITICAL PREFORMANCE. As Turner himself says on page 15 (although in curiously inverted form), parochialism in a critic is poison.

Now, back to the useless presents. I was surprised to find John Foyster declaring the characters in A TORRENT OF FACES well realised. He is the only reviewer thus far to say so. Naturally we (Blishknight) think everyone's out of step but him.

jf: The problem with having a hot line to Heaven is that one occasionally gets one's fingers burnt, though I don't know this from personal experience. A review of A TORRENT OF FACES which is slightly at variance with my own appears around page 42 of this issue of ASFR.

Sten Dahlskog (extracts from a letter written over a long period of time)

Sometimes I think that science fiction would have a better standing with the literary

establishment, with the critics and publishers, if fandom had not existed. What are they to think of SF if they happen upon our bombastic, illiterate, ridiculously self-conscious fandom? Certainly SF did better in the late 1800s and early 1900s: Wells, Verne and the other pioneers were considered serious authors and noticed - and now, after close to 40 years of (dis)organized fandom, the best SF authors are not given as much serious attention. And whenever I think like this, I need only to pick up the latest issue of the North's leading literary magazine or open the daily to the "cultural" page to find as undignified though more literate an approach as any fanzine could ever boast.

I like ASFR because it tries to give fandom a little dignity, tries to give honest arguments in place of name-calling, tries to be objective and recpgnise different points of view.

That is why I feel so sorry for the lapses. They occur everywhere now and then, but in ASFR they hurt, because ASFR is more important than the general mismanaged fanzine which is just an outlet for the idiosyncracies of a little unimportant clique having more paper than they can spend to good purpose. Your assaults on Campbell and ANALOG is one case in point (reason them out and motivate them, don't just mouth "praeterea censeo Campbellinem esse delendam"). Widdershins is another. Can't you deport him to Macquarie Island or something? Of course it would be a pity for the poor penguins, but rather them than me. If you want to give ASFR a bad reputation as just another fanzine, by all means publish more reviews in which Mr. Foyster states that he has skipped parts of the book or in which Mr. Widdershins states that he has not bothered to read more than 2 stories in an anthology but condemns the rest anyway. There is some justification for Mr. Foyster, because one can judge an author's style (but not his plot or his characterisation) by skimming his work, but it is shoddy workmanship to do so for a reviewer, and it would have been much better not to review the book at all. As for Mr. Widdershins, he has nothing whatever to do in a journal devoted to serious criticism, and if I want to be entertained by pompous, ignorant know-it-alls, then the referates from the Swedish Parliament are much funnier than Widdershins. (And just who is doing the name-calling now? Fandom corrupts, there is no doubt about it.) A joke should be a joke, but Widdershins is a bad-mannered bore.

Franz Rottensteiner is certainly not a bore. He makes quite a few points and immediately proceeds to make a mess of them, mostly by carefully avoiding defining his terms and by generalizing to such a degree that I am not sure if I understand what he meant or even if he understands it himself. To begin from the beginning : "... in fiction technique is comparatively less important ... than in painting ... In these arts a long study of technique is required ... But anyone with a sure grasp of his mother tongue can write fiction." (...) It takes not only talent, not only an acute ear and a fine sense of rhythm and melody, it takes long, long years of intensive training and hard work for a writer to acquire"a sure grasp of his mother tongue", and most of them never do, and only an infinitesmally small percentage ever learn enough to be able to teach. (...)

Mr. Rottensteiner then divides our functional needs and blandly states that emotional functional needs are more important than intellectual functional needs. He does not give any proof whatever for this statement, but one can hardly say that he defines his terms either, so it does not matter very much. Personally I have always considered intellectual stimulation a very strong emotion, but Mr. Rottensteiner calls it pleasure, which he does not seem to consider an emotion at all. Maybe I am confused. Maybe I was born that way. Maybe Mr. Rottensteiner confused me even more. Mr. Rottensteiner then goes on to say that science fiction is limited by dealing only wit science (agreed with applause, although I would add "and with the implications and consequences of science"), but that great literature can deal with anything (agreed). But why make such an illogical and unfair comparison by considering a small part with the whole? SF is limited, yes, but so is drama, so is the essay, so is the saga, so is fantasy, so is religious poetry, and if Mr. Rottensteiner wants something really

limited I suggest the haiku, and I dare him to call any of these sub-literature because they are limited.

Mr. Rottensteiner repeats the weary old complaint that "SF deals with the emotions, if at all, only in a formularized way". Oh, no. SF is the one form of literature which tries to deal with scientific research, and if you think that scientists have no emotions, then you never met any. Ambition, greed, vanity, jealousy - the whole gamut of human emotions, good or evil, are just as rampant in a scientific laboratory as outside it, and they have been not only the background but the chief subject for some very good stories, most of them published in Astounding-Analog (Isaac Asimov's BELIEF, ASF 1953, Randall Garrett's MACHINE COMPLEX, ASF July 1956, Raymond F. Jones's THE GREAT GRAY PLAGUE, ASF February 1962 - examples deliberately chosen to call attention to writers whom Mr. Rottensteiner perhaps does not consider likely as authors of emotional stories. I could mention Frank Herbert's DRAGON IN THE SEA, which was serialised in Astounding as another emotional story in an equally hard-science milieu, but it is rather commonly agreed by now, isn't it, that DRAGON IN THE SEA is one of the most psychologically-oriented SF novels we have had as yet, so I don't think I have to). Perhaps I had better state that I do not consider the emotions of scientists in a scientific laboratory to be the one set of emotions proper in a science fiction tale. I have used these examples just to show that a story does not have to "deal with the emotions only in a formularized way" just because the background is about scientific research. Science is a very emotional thing.

In the next paragraph we learn that van Vogt, Heinlein and Blish interest us intellectually but are unsuccessful because we disagree with them. How anybody could find intellectual interest in van Vogt is such a riddle to me that I would like it documented. And how anybody can mention him as compeer of careful, competent craftsmen like Heinlein and Blish is beyond my understanding. Finally - how does Mr. Rottensteiner justify such a sweeping statement as that Heinlein and Blish are unsuccessful? Well, believe it or not, like this: "Blish has failed to give ... (antimortalica) ... some use that is meaningful for our human existence". In other words, prolonged life does not matter to us. This statement is too dazzling for me to want to criticise it.

Somewhat later on Mr. Rottensteiner pulls off the following: "Classification is a worthless game when one is concerned with critical appraisal". On the contrary: classification is the necessary prerequisite to critical appraisal. You have to have a small glimmering of what a thing is and what it tries to do before you can judge it. One might ask why Johannes V. Jensen was afforded the Nobel Prize: after all, his grammar is awful and he could not even spell, one might say, and if one is a Swede and is judging his work as Swedish one would be perfectly right - but it would be rather dishonest for a critic, wouldn't it, not to start by noticing that Jensen wrote Danish? One would make the same kind of mistake by judging a play text as a novel, an essay as a poem or a work of fantasy as science fiction. But it is very easy to do: fantasy can be even more superficially similar to science fiction than is Danish to Swedish (in any other corner of the world the two tongues would be called dialects). This is why critics of science fiction should learn a little science before starting out.

What is a critic for, anyway?

Is a critic writing only for those who have read the work discussed? No, he is not, he is also writing for a lot of people who are using his criticism to help them decide if they are to waste their time reading the book or not. (This is perhaps not the way we would like it to be, but it is why some critics have influence.) Therefore a critic should be a reviewer to begin with, or many (probably the majority) of his readers will never get any clear idea of what he is talking about. And if there is any handier way of making a short review than by classification ("this is a Conan-tale type sword-

and-sorcery") I wish that Mr. Rottensteiner would tell me. So a critic has to classify, not only for his own sake but for his readers.

There are works which cannot be classified by any single term, true: but this simply means that our classification must be fluid and many-valued, not a strict either-or hierarchical system. Many-valued classifications have proved extremely valuable in the natural sciences: there is no reason why they should not apply to the humaniora. MOBY DICK is an epic, an allegorical fantasy and a documentary realistic reportage: a classification which tries to fit in it in one class would not only be false, it would be degrading. A classification which tells us about all these qualities would be a far better guide than the one classification allowed by Mr. Rottensteiner, which would be 'good literature'. What <u>is</u> good literature, anyway? You tell me. Mr. Rottensteiner does not - he just says that it satisfies our emotional functional needs, and for some reason that does not tell me much.

One of the characteristics of many works usually regarded as good literature is that they can be read in many ways, on many levels. So let us use some classifications to illustrate in which ways the work in question can be read: if we can show the work to be readable in several ways we have at least shown it to have many values, which would substantiate our judgment somewhat more than a mere statement that it is good literature.

You read ROBINSON CRUSOE when you are nine years old as a rousing adventure, and if you are unlucky you never find an unabridged edition so that you can read it as a travelogue when you are sixteen, as a character study when you are twenty or as an essay on economics when you are twenty-five. The reviewer who does not try a many-valued classification on ROBINSON will probably miss some of its facets, and in fact several have done so, or ROBINSON would not be so commonly regarded and dismissed as a children's book, which it most definitely is not.

Would there be any special value of classification to science fiction? Yes, I think so.

Why science fiction anyway?

Here I make the same bold statement as Bretnor and Heinlein before me. It never fails to irritate humanists to the point of incoherence, but so what? If you do not like what I am writing, then <u>prove</u> me wrong. (I might be wrong. I quite often am.)

Science fiction is the most vitally important literature being written today. It is not the best. It is not the most brilliant. It is not the most rewarding to read. But it is the most urgent.

Literature can entertain, instruct and stimulate. Entertain by action (Fleming, Wodehouse) or by aesthetic brilliance of language (not having English as my native tongue I am at a disadvantage in trying to choose examples here, but three authors who have shown me something of what English can be made to do are Kiplin, Sturgeon and Wodehouse again. John ((Bangsund)), it shows how much I have left to learn that I still have not found any English author whom I read with pleasure just to enjoy his language as I can read so many Northmen. I can read Karlfeldt and Jensen, Hedenvind and Ibsen, Laxness and Eriks just to be carried along on their language as if in a canoe on a river stream - but when I read Englosh I read for the characterisation, the action or the ideas. Suggest some English authors for me to start on, will you? Back to the argument.) Literature can instruct by telling facts (any really competent textbook, and how few they are: try Gilluly-Waters-Woodford's PRINCIPLES OF GEOLOGY, Ralph Buchsbaum's ANIMAL WITHOUT BACKBONES or StanleyCain's FOUNDATIONS OF PLANT GEOGRAPHY if you want to know what I mean), or it can instruct by fusing facts and events into a not necessarily existing but nevertheless true characterisation (Wodehouse and Fleming hardly try, Kipling in my opinion is not very successful, but Sturgeon sometimes is.). And literature can stimulat by making us think (including

thinking about feelings, which is what emotional passages try to do): any textbook tries to do it, any character novel tries to do it, but very few succeed.

Of these five tasks the ones considered most important generally are aesthetic brilliance of language and characterisation. Action entertainment has no prestige at all (ever heard anybody call Wodehouse or Fleming great authors?), factual instruction is blandly disregarded (some people are very astonished when told that textbooks are literature), and as for intellectual stimulation, it has quite a lot of prestige, very little practice and is far too seldom taken as a starting-point for criticism.

"Mainstream" literature (a very foolish term, agreed), is generally rather weak on action, moderate or weak on fact, tries hard at aesthetics and characterisation and is weakest on intellectual stimulation. Science fiction, on the other hand, is generally weak on fact, characterisation and aesthetics but strong on action and sometimes tries hard to be intellectually stimulating.

Now you may have whatever views you like on the relative importance of these five tasks, but I think it is hard to deny that this present culture of ours needs to be stimulated to think about facts more than it needs to be entertained by action or aesthetics.

(...)

This was as far as I got half a year ago, and now I don't quite know how I intended to go on. I should perhaps have made a stronger try at the definition of "intellectual" versus "emotional stimulati n" - "mainstream" literature tries hard at emotional stimulation, but it hardly seems aware of intellectual stimulation. Science fiction tries hard at intellectual stimulation and not enough at emotional stimulation. This does not invalidate my argument above, but it makes it somewhat more confused than it ought to be.

But this I consider to be true: we need some way to distinguish between speculative fiction written with respect for the structure of science on the one hand and fantasy on the other. Both can become great literature, but they should not be confused.

This is what makes science fiction important: we know it might come true. Look out, it bites! Fantasy does not need concern us: we know it is just a fancy.

I dislike Judith Merril's attempts to lump science fiction and fantasy in one shapeless all-embracing category "speculative fiction". I deplore Ballard's being called a science fiction writer (he has written some hard science fiction - BILLENNIUM for instance - but most of his output is no more SF than Alice) as much as I regret having to call such a cheap cops-and-robbers chase as Clifford Simak's THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE science fiction. If you give up the demands on the respect for the structure of science and say that Ballard's works are all as good science fiction as Clement and Clarke and Heinlein, then the chances that SF will ever develop into the intellectually stimulating literature we need will become even smaller than they are now.

Perhaps the term 'science fiction' has been so widely abused by now that we should coin a new one for the really speculative, scientifically-orientated part of it. Then we might be able to discuss things in a clearer way, and then we could go on and let the fanzines deal with all kinds of speculative fiction in the widest sense, which is what most of us, including me, would prefer the fanzines to do. I do not want speculative fiction to become exclusively the hard science fiction I have been preaching: I just want to be able to read that kind of fiction too, and above all I want to read better works of that kind. My insistence on clearer classification and delimitation is a result of my belief that any task is easier to accomplish well if you first determine where the limits are and then try to reach them (instead of setting out to break them before understanding how far off they

really are). Complete freedom without any limits, any rules gives no result other than anarchy, a sort of Brownian movement where nothing really gets accomplished. (Or, in Mr. Turner's words, break the rules by substituting another set of rules, not by flinging them overboard.) At present it seems to me that many are deploring the fact that SF is literarily backward in some respects and that far too few are considering that at its rare best it is far ahead of the field in one particular. I believe that SF will progress faster by developing its strength than by polishing its weaknesses. (It might do both, of course, but just now the New Wave seems to have put the emphasis too much on the polishing of weaknesses.)

jf: John Bangsund and I are agreed (a remarkable First) that Sten's letter falls naturally into two parts: the above and then the section below in which Sten writes about the things he thinks SF should be doing. Since we both (approximately) agree with the latter section but find the above to be somewhat contradictory to the basic ASFR position (blush), I am stepping in here to put some counter-arguments. Those who think this unfair should skip this section.

Although what follows is writ by Foyster, it may be considered in part to represent the opinion of John Bangsund (ask him which parts....).

Classification is indeed a worthless game; Sten's classification of MOBY DICK does not tell us a single useful thing about the book (in the context of his requirements for a critic, p. 48). "Handiness" is not much of a criterion for judging the absolute worth of a piece of apparatus, for that matter. Classification can have some place, but in science fiction (and indeed, quite often elsewhere) it becomes a substitute for criticism.

Science fiction differs in content from such things as poetry, drama and so on. The difference between poetry and the novel, say, is one of form. In suggesting that science fiction was limited as a result of this, one only makes the sort of remark one would make about a chemist who was extremely skilled but refused to have anything to do with oxygen: silly, isn't it?

Sten's 'bold statement' is rather empty, and the context is one to make a scientist rather than a humanist writhe. "Prove me wrong" has been the catchcry of fakes from Alexander to Velikovsky. But Sten goes even further and admits that science fiction has shown little or no sign of the importance he claims for it; surely this is unscientific. The reasons for Sten's use of the word 'urgency', I should say, emerge in the section of his letter which follows. But they have to do with the possible values of science fiction, not the existing ones, and critics can only deal (so far as I know) with what exists in fact, and not at all with someone's fancy.

The phrase 'intellectual stimulation' as used by Franz Rottensteiner had a rather limited meaning compared with that used by Sten Dahlskog: in terms of Dahlskog's usage there is more intellectual stimulation in Henry James's THE SACRED FOUNT (to lead with, say, the seven of diamonds) than in the entire body of science fiction.

The distinction Sten seeks between fantasy and genuinely 'speculative fiction' is one which has been already made for him: the latter class is so rare that one really needn't worry about it. Critics should learn some science, yes, but let them wait until the SF writers get some into the stories.

Franz Rottensteiner, I think, can take care of himself.

jf: In reviewing BABEL-17 I wrote : "I am not in the habit of reading every word of a novel in order to follow the plot", a fairly clear statement, I thought, about the complexity in Delany's novel (which I went on to suggest I thought too great). In a letter of comment published some time ago Sten mildly distorted this to suggest that I hadn't read the book, something which is nowhere implicit or explicit in my remark. Seeking to correct Sten's misreading I wrote to John Bangsund. He declined to publish the letter, and when I asked why, declined to answer that as well. In all, John has refused to publish about half-a dozen of my replies to correspondents: some of them may well have been boring twaddle not worth publishing alongside the fascinating letters of Um and Er which have appeared in recent issues. (Other contributors have also suffered, I think).

But in this case Sten has repeated his falsification, and I have an opportunity to refute it. I have to do no more than to refer to the original review.

Since it is widely known that I write as Widdershins, I should perhaps come to the poor fellow's defence as well as to my own. Widdershins was originally designed as a reviewer who would take a basically sound position but would express it in rather violent terms, in the hope of arousing some thoughtful rebuttals. Alas for our early idealism (and I note that there is no distortion of feeling in Widdershins's contribution to this issue)! I think Widdershins did indeed only review two stories in a recent issue of NEW WRITINGS IN SF, but how many issues of Mr. Palmer's AMAZING did Mr. Dahlskog read before deciding it was not for him?

The attitude of ASFR to ANALOG is rather hard to pin down, since so little has actually been said. But the magazine most mentioned in ASFR is ANALOG (since it is the most important) and my own Hit Parade of SF magazines (published last year in ASFR) lists the current ANALOG as better than any other SF magazine ever was. Perhaps Mr. Dahlskog needs to be a little more specific.

And now to the remainder of Sten's letter: I agree with most of his hopes, but remark once more that there is little or no evidence for SF's ability to play the role Sten wants it to.

Sten Dahlskog (continued)

Our society is a technological one and it is a mess - but there is no sane way out but making it more technological. (We have no possibilities at all of going back to an agrarian society: there are too many people, too much eroded and depleted soil, too little high-quality ores left.) The science due to dominate our way of life in the next 20 years in ecology, which is fast becoming very technical indeed. (When air pollution from German industries in the Ruhr is destroying the productivity of Swedish Lapland lakes - look at a map - some drastic changes in our customary thinking about private enterprise and national sovreignty are indicated for the near future.) Mainstream literature seems almost completely unaware of the scientific-technological basis for the society it tries to depict. This does not invalidate mainstream, but it does make it limited in one important respect. Science fiction, on the other hand, is by definition the one and only form of literature capable of not only describing a scientific-technological society but of speculating about changes in it, too. (This does not mean that science fiction should have just this one task!)

And how we need changes! We will get them all right, or more probably mostly wrong. The population explosion is going to see to that. If we are to have any future civilisation at all we have to speculate on the changes we want to make: we have to get out of the old rut of just letting the disasters creep upon us. (If you think that an atomic war is the most frightful disaster we could let loose, then you live in happy ignorance of ecology.) Please do not blame scientists and technologists, by the way: blame the politicians and economists who never bothered to learn, and, above

all, blame the general voter for electing them.

Science fiction is the one form of literature which can speculate about the impact of change on our scientific-technological society. No other form of literature can do this job. That is reason enough for me to state that SF is the most important literature being written today. I do not deny that SF generally shows a rather low technical command of language and a weak degree of characterisation, and I agree that the general level of SF in these respects is far below that of "mainstream", and I approve of all efforts to raise the standard of SF in these respects. However, what bothers me most is not that SF is so bad in the points where mainstream is strong, but that SF is so dismally awful in speculations about the consequences of science, the point in which mainstream is even worse.

It is for the intellectual stimulation, for the ideas, that we read science fiction - if what we wanted primarily was aesthetics brilliance and character development there is lots of it in other fields than ours. If it were not for the intellectual stimulation which SF sometimes gives us we would all have given it up long ago and started writing little mood pieces for the lit. magazines.

(January 1969)

jf: I definitely don't like relying on SF to do this.

.....

EDITORIAL (continued from page 1) been offered a subscription for $4 a year. Then the fifth 1968 issue of SOVIET LITERATURE MONTHLY was devoted to SF. And a new publisher (MIR) put out two paperbacks (see REVIEWS) which are far better than earlier books from FLPH. Prediction for 1969: Stanislaw Lem (see REVIEWS again) as a Best New Author.

In England Moorcock's NEW WORLDS continues to improve rapidly. Despite the troubles outlined in SPECULATION 19, the magazine has become regular at last, though extremely poorly distributed in Australia, and the quality of the stories is improving. The December issue featured Aldiss, Delany, Disch and Moorcock.

Last and least, GALAXY went monthly. Changes in magazines are frequently accompanied by improvemantsin quality (compare ANALOG's size changes of several years ago, and GALAXY's own switch to bi-monthly) but on this occasion the improvement was minimal. GALAXY also blotted its copy book with a competition approximately at the level of moral sophistication of a guessing-game based on the number of Jews to die in Germany in given months of 1944.

The ACE Specials seem to have had mixed success, but otherwise publishing has remained static.

Fanzines devoted to SF continued much as before, though Geis's changing the title of PSYCHOTIC to SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW once more indicates a change in attitude. The only other magazine seriously discussing SF in English seems to be Pete Weston's SPECULATION. Unfortunately the best magazine being published today has a small circulation (by comparison with SPECULATION, SF REVIEW or ASFR) and is in German: Franz Rottensteiner's QARBER MERKUR. Some translations appear in ASFR and in SPECULATION, but much is omitted.

All in all, 1968 was a year of promise rather than one of achievement.

MISSING FROM THIS ISSUE

I have been forced to omit 12 important articles on religious aspects of science fiction.

However, I am able to print the openingphrases of each one. Firstly, a long article on one of the stories published in GALAXY in the middle of the year:

"The religio-mystico- economic significance of Fritz Leiber's A SPECTER (sic) IS HAUNTING TEXAS seems to have been overlooked by critics everywhere. For instance, note the significance of the hero's name: Christ Over The Cross. Scully is supported by his cross, but, like Christ ..."

Then there was the film-review I received:

"The religio-mystico-philosophical implicationsof the film made from Jean Claude Forest's BARBARELLA seem to have been over-looked by most critics. We cannot pretend that anything in this film is accidental. We all know that the name given to the city of evil (SOGO) is Japanese for religious enlightenment, so let us not pretend that this vicious attack on the Catholic Church...."

Well, I couldn't bring myself to publish them, but try looking elsewhere: they'll be around.

"AFFLUENT LIVING AT A PRICE YOU CAN AFFORD"

That's a sign just down the road from here, but it is something which some of us might remember whenever we read puffs by editors and publishers. The science fiction editor's most important job is to sell copies of his magazine: other considerations are secondary. Most of the time it is not hard to remember that a blurb is a blurb, but occasionally the distinction between blurb and genuine opinion becomes blurred. This is particularly so in the case of the rear-end of paperbacked books, formerly the province of the most illiterate staff member of the publishing firm but in many cases now given over to unctuous commentary by other authors. In many cases criticism of science fiction has descended to this level. The only way to combat it is in magazines like ASFR, whose influence may be small, but which at least is able to keep its readers informed of rather less palsy-walsy opinions of current SF.

SF critics are, in fact, a poor lot, but this is a product of their environment. It isn't goingto help anyone to knock a book, so it is very rarely that we find a critic or reviewer willing to come out and rubbish a book. When he does it is all too often like the example set by Algis Budrys last year who fell flat on his face over Aldiss's AN AGE. On the other hand, the Atheling who writes for AMAZING is not the Atheling who wrote for the fanzines. Ah, it's a sad picture. But cheer up. The latest issue of your favourite magazine will tell you that things have never been better.

To some extent they've never been better for publishers. ANALOG sells in Australia for 70c (that's about 77c US) while GALAXY sells for only 55c (60c US). It is not much to laugh at, looked like that, and if the differences in wages are considered, then the cost of ANALOG soars to about $1.50 US. In England things are even worse: I'd reckon that considering the average wages I'd say that $2.50 would be about the British cost. Perhaps this explains why fewer people read US SF these days. (Fortunately England gets some of that back by overcharging Australians, but let's not get personal).

But remember the high cost of fanning, then, and subscribe to ASFR. Write letter, too. Try to cheer John Bangsund up as he contemplates thecost of the next issue: make the letter complementary, even is it hurts. Maybe he'll use your letter as a back cover blurb.

JOHN BANGSUND

Don't forget that name: John's been publishing ASFR for nearly three years, now, and he gets tired easily. Cheer him up. Let's hear it for him now!

Ah, it is a relief to have that arm free. - John Foyster