Chunder!

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In this issue Bruce Gillespie writes about rock music in 1982 and George Turner writes about the American magazine TRI-QUARTERLY's science fiction issue.

Contributions are always welcome.

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THE CHUNDER! ROCK COLUMN

Bruce Gillespie

1982: ROCK ROLLED; CATEGORIES MELTED

(This column was suggested by **Chunder!** editor, John Foyster, when I said that I spent more money on records than on science fiction books, and that I consulted **The Rock Encyclopedia** more often than **The Science Fiction Encyclopedia**. Not that rock is any easier to write about than science fiction.)

The Beatles disbanded as a group in 1970. Since then, a host of people have been waiting for The New Beatles. I'm not sure what all the fuss was about, really. The Beatles were nowhere near as interesting as The Rolling Stones, and even groups like The Animals made somewhat better music. But everybody loved The Beatles; at least, the press said so. In them, Americans found The Great British group, and so accepted British (and later, Canadian and Australian) pop music because of them.

There can never be another Beatles, of course. The Beatles were the product of the pop music of their time, as well as one of its producers. There is no "consensus" (as the politicians like to say) any more. To put it simply, one devotee of one particular type of pop music hates a devotee of another type with the kind of ferocity previously shown by party political partisans. If a new Beatles arrived, four fifths of the rest of the listeners to pop music would hate them on principle.

There can never be another Beatles because it looks as if there will soon be no substantial audience for them - of any kind. Record sales in America and Australia fell during 1982 by between 40 and 60 per cent (according to which figures you see; there are no official figures in the record trade). The floor has fallen in; rock music is dead; long live rock 'n' roll. Nobody quite knows why. Kids are playing video games, or they are taping records they would otherwise by buying, or they are not buying anything, because they are unemployed. My guess is that they have become bored with the music.

It's the music industry itself which has created many of the categories which have divided pop music for the last ten years. It's simpler to categorise a record than play it. Punk fans hate everything else because they haven't heard it; middle-of-the-road fans hate black music because they've never heard it; country music has been relegated to a ghetto instead of being treated as one of the major sources of pop music. The Beatles played every type of music that fertilised the genre; now their records would not fit the radio station programmer's schedule, and a new Beatles would still be playing pubs in Liverpool.

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Given the iron-cast categories which have enslaved pop music for the last few years, 1982 provided a few surprises which cheered me considerably. In the 1982 uproar, as record sales fell, I would have expected that record companies would have accentuated the categories and made everything worse than it was. Certainly, many fringe performers have not had their recording contracts renewed, and only the few acts which are still very popular are being promoted. But some of these very popular people have failed to deliver hackneyed records, as you expect, and have done some interesting things.

So here is a review of some of my favourite records of 1982.

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Vangelis guaranteed his meal ticket for the 1980s by producing the soundtrack music for **Chariots of Fire**. Much of that record contains music which is no better than on several previous records by Vangelis, but the "Main Title" of the film is delightful. Having been given his meal ticket, Vangelis has decided to be a bit more adventurous. In **The Friends of Mr Cairo** (Polygram), he and Jon Anderson produced my favourite record for 1982 - although I don't expect many people to agree with me.

I like **The Friends of Mr Cairo** because, of all the records for 1982, it stands alone and unrepeatable. What is Vangelis' usual category? I would call it the swoosh-swoosh brand of electronic music - lots of long, boring glides between planets, trips inside waves, meditations on modulations of bleeps, etc. It grew out of the "art-rock" movement of the early 1970s, which specialised in pallid, swishy background music of an unearthly disposition. (Tangerine Dream was probably the least interesting electronic art-rock band; Pink Floyd started it all, and was the best such band.)

Most of Vangelis' music (composed by Vangelis, arranged by Vangelis, and performed by Vangelis on synthesisers) fits the above category. **The Friends of Mr Cairo** is different, quite different. On it, Vangelis shows an ability to write songs. On it, Vangelis shows an ability to perform richly multi-layered sounds which are also structured by interesting percussive effects. On it, Vangelis produces

broad, anthem-like tunes with which one can sing along. (If one could sing, which I can't.) **The Friends of Mr Cairo** is jolly stuff.

Why the change? It must have something to do with Vangelis' partner on this record, Jon Anderson. Anderson, you might remember, has a penetrating, very high choirboy's yodel which echoes around the edges of most of the music produced by the early 1970s band, Yes. Anderson still sounds like a choirboy who's trying to yell to the back of the cathedral, but Vangelis has given him something good to yell about. In turn, Jon Anderson has given Vangelis some A-grade drippy pop lyrics, which mean not a thing, but provide strong curtain rods on which to hang a tune.

You've probably already heard the "hit record" from **The Friends of Mr Cairo**. It's called "I'll Find My Way Home", and it has a very drippy lyric. "But if my spirit is strong," says Anderson, "I know it can't be long,/ No questions I'm not alone/ Sometimes I'll find my way home." Most of the other songs also tend towards the wispy-mystical-sentimental, straight from the late 1960s. "State of Independence" talks about "a meditative State"; "Beside" invokes "a possible change of heart"; and "Mayflower" stretches a metaphor to the edges of the ludicrous.

But who listens to the lyrics on pop records, anyway? I don't - well, not very often. "I'll Find My Way Home" is magnificent because you can't hear the words, and because of the music which Vangelis has draped around those unlistenable words. (I looked up the lyrics on the record sleeve, which is why I can quote them.) Anderson's voice is acceptable as a pop musical instrument, floating high and free above the deliciously varied sounds, and the tune is a let's-join-in anthem which sounds joyous and stays in the memory. When Anderson shuts up (in the middle of the song) Vangelis has a great time, piling up crescendos of orchestrated sound in a glorious wave which breaks only at the end of the song, when, huff puff, Jon has found his way home.

Electronic pop music - indeed, electronic music of any kind - still comes high on my list of Top One Hundred Most Hated Phenomena. Many pop groups wield synthesisers at the moment, but the poor abused instruments are entirely wasted. Often they are used because they can be carried around more easily than traditional rock-band instruments. One sees synthesiser operators in rock bands thunking away as if they were playing children's toy pianos. That's what the results sound like, anyway. Even drums, now synthesised by some, sound like irritating, unstoppable metronomes.

The Friends of Mr Cairo stands outside its category because it is the first and only record of synthesised music which constructs sounds that are truly orchestral. It's a sport, an oddity. After all, why not use an orchestra to produce the same sounds? But it works, whereas (say) Carlos' butchering of Beethoven for the **Clockwork Orange** soundtrack definitely did not work. Vangelis took on the

challenge of giving body, richness, percussive variety, and melody to the products of the infernal machine, and he succeeded.

The melodic crescendos of "I'll Find My Way Home" continue on Side 1 of **The Friends of Mr Cairo**. In "State of Independence", Vangelis even combines Anderson's warblings and his own passable tune with, oddity of oddities, a reggae beat. "Beside" is a pop ballad which appeals to me because, again, it has a delightful tune. "Mayflower" is the song which comes closest to Vangelis' closet spacy tendencies. It works, but only just. Anderson sings some silly words for a while ("The Sea like The Sea/ The Wind like The Wind/ The Stars in the Sky"; second verse: "The Sea like The Sea/", etc.) while Vangelis oozes out the orchestral whipped cream. Towards the end, however, Vangelis varies the sound colouring to give a sense of falling free in space, out to the stars, rah, rah, Mayflower pilgrims, **Mayflower** space travellers. I liked this record better for hearing it on earphones late at night. (Maybe Vangelis listens to his own music only on earphones, never on speakers.)

"The Friends of Mr Cairo" - the song, that is - is the only lyric with any claims to sophistication. Sounds from old movies, free bits of verse, and commentary mingle in what I take is meant to be a "sound movie". Highly technicoloured, of course. At the end, Anderson tries to squeeze in a Big Message about fantasy, reality, God, and Wonderful Wonderfulness of It All (or, maybe, the Awful Awfulness of It All). Vangelis wins, anyway, overlapping sound textures and colours to give the real movie, the sound images which one really listens to.

Like most listeners to pop, I've never associated synthesised music with uncomplicated 1950s-style rock 'n' roll. Probably that's the real reason why I don't like synthesiser music. In "Back to School", Jon Anderson and Vangelis ignore the categories altogether and produce a rock 'n' roll song with an entirely synthesised accompaniment. You might find this to be the best track on the record. It's a joke, of course, turning all the expectations of the listener on their heads. Anderson yells: "I wanna go back to school/ I wanna go back to school/ Man it's crazy out here in the outer world/ I wanna go back to school." Vangelis pulls out the stops, and shows that synthesisers have energy as well as transistors.

"Outside of This Inside of That" is as pallid as the title suggests. It seems that Jon Anderson won this round. But you can take the tone arm off the record before the start of this final track.

Since this record appeared, Vangelis has done more film music (back to the spacy and tuneless, to judge from the **Blade Runner** soundtrack), and Jon Anderson has recorded a solo album. So maybe **The Friends of Mr Cairo** will remain unique.

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Category-breaker Number 2 - Bruce Springsteen's **Nebraska** - is as different from **The Friends of Mr Cairo** as you will find within the bounds of popular music. For a start, the words are all-important, and many listeners find the tunes a bit dull. I think the record is faultless.

You've probably read about **Nebraska** already: how Bruce Springsteen recorded it by himself on a four-track recorder as a demonstration tape for his next record with the E Street Band; how the band decided that any accompaniment from them would be superfluous; how Springsteen decided to release the tapes as he had recorded them originally, low fidelity and all. Probably lots of performers would like to be able to get away with releasing their solo demonstration tapes, but only Springsteen has succeeded. How did he persuade Columbia-CBS to release it? That's what we don't know.

I've already described (in SFC) Springsteen's records as "American folk music", even when, musically, they sound like loudest rock 'n' roll. Springsteen's lyrics have always been the most important aspect of his songs, even when you can't hear them over Clarence Clemens's saxophone. Springsteen's grumbly, rumbly, echo-chambered and buried voice has never seemed very good for anything but riding his own band's wall of sound. On **Nebraska**, the wall has come down - and you still can't hear the words very clearly. However, you can now hear the tone and meaning of his songs - you can hear what he's been singing about all along: desolation, loneliness, pursuit, the night, the edge of the city.

For instance? Take my favourite song on **Nebraska**. It's called "State Trooper". It tells of a man on the run. He's in a car which burrows through the wet night, riding the endless highway. "Licence, registration, I ain't got none,/ but I got a clear conscience,/ 'bout the things that I done/ Mister state trooper please don't stop me..." A threadbare lyric, but the essence of the American legend. The state trooper doesn't appear, but the lad on the run needs somebody to talk to in the night. "Maybe you got a kid maybe you got a pretty wife,/ The only thing I got's been botherin' me all my whole life." So maybe the singer is a sex criminal. Maybe he committed endless petty crimes. Maybe he's the same multiple killer whose story is related in the song, "Nebraska".

The night gets so lonely that the fleeting criminal almost forgets the vengeful figure of the state trooper who is maybe behind him, maybe ahead of him. Now the singer's only company is the car radio: "In the wee wee hours your mind gets hazy,/ radio relay towers lead me to my baby,/ Radio's jammed up with talk show stations,/ It's just talk, talk, talk till you lose your patience/"... Nothing isolates him more than all that "talk talk talk" filling the air, part of a world which has left him behind, which he can't return to. "Hey somebody out there, listen to my last prayer,/ Hi-ho silver-o deliver me from nowhere."

Is there any deliverance except into the hands of the eternal state trooper? Only the music itself can tell us. And the only musical accompaniment to Springsteen's night chant is the thwump-thwump of a lone bass guitar. Nothing lonelier than that. The man's gone to hell already.

No other song on the record is so severely unaccompanied, which might explain why none works too well. Each lyric tells the story of a frustrated, lonely figure, usually at odds with the law, usually trying to find some resting-place in bleak America. But America now has no refuges, it seems. The only successful people are policemen, sheriffs, executioners ("Sheriff when the man pulls that switch, sir, and snaps my poor head back/ You make sure my pretty baby is sittin' right there on my lap"), judges, used car salesmen, and nobody else. ordinary people are unemployed, down on their luck, releasing their last energy in lunatic violence.

This is no dance record. In most of the songs, Springsteen accompanies himself on acoustic guitar. Sometimes he livens the sound with solo electric guitar. Occasionally some background percussion. Weird night howls offstage. Night. Nightmares. Columbia-CBS must have been annoyed when they received this record from Bruce Springsteen. In the end, listeners enjoyed it just because it crossed categories.

To me, this record is a great pleasure. There are so many records which should have been recorded this way, according to the original impulse of the composer-performer. Any number of records do not survive the compulsory addition of electric guitars, girlie choruses, horns, or drums. Other records remain listenable only if the listener filters out the extraneous sounds for him or herself. If Springsteen can get away with recording his own brand of American folk music, perhaps others can claim the same right as well.

* * *

Category-breaker No. 3: Someone who could get away with recording his own voice, accompanied only by his sinuous guitar-playing, is Mark Knopfler. That's not the direction he's taken. If anything, his first album, **Dire Straits**, is the most sparely recorded of the four albums by Knopfler and his ever-changing group, Dire Straits. **Love Over Gold** is the most baroque album by Dire Straits, but it changes direction so abruptly that Knopfler's American record company told him to cut the guitar solo on the fourteen-minute track, "Telegraph Road". Knopfler told Phonogram, ever so politely, to get stuffed. The result is the best piece of music yet conceived and executed by Knopfler. Again the lesson is plain - hard times need not lead to predictable music. If Knopfler can call the tune, others may play theirs as well.

The average Dire Straits album has not excited me very much - perhaps because Knopfler has tended to muddy his best playing with choppy. irritating, reggae-like rhythms and uninteresting tunes. Often he

has sounded like a maestro looking for some good piece to play. Since he wrote the music, it was left to him to improve his song-writing. This he has done for **Love Over Gold**.

More than merely improved his song-writing, I should say. While listening to **Love Over Gold**, you get the sense that Knopfler has rediscovered pop music, has decided to re-invent it. Absolute success, or none at all - that is the feeling which reaches me while listening to the record. There is a moment in "Private Investigation" where Knopfler mumbles away in echoing dark about his mysterious private investigation, only to burst out from the gloom with a glistening trill on a Spanish guitar. As if this is not enough, that sound gives way to a chunky, ringing electric guitar. Sounds rebound from each other, hurtling along, intertwined musically to give an effect. This is quite different from anything on any previous Dire Straits album.

Love Over Gold would appeal to those listeners who might find **The Friends of Mr Cairo** a bit overbearing. Knopfler doesn't need synthesisers, although they can be heard from time to time, blended into the general sound. Most of the sound is derived from splendid drumming (Pick Withers, who has since left the band), guitars (Knopfler, wielding a wide variety of instruments), and Knopfler's vocalising, which sounds more and more like that of Dylan from the 1960s and early 1970s. **Love Over Gold** is dominated by The Sound - a glowing, epic shine of sound, which accentuates rather than diminishes the clarity of the playing.

The lyrics? Well, they're printed on the sleeve if you're interested. "Telegraph Road" is okay, I suppose. It tells of a small American town that once was a log cabin in the wilderness, and is now a city where the narrator cannot find work. When it comes to writing down the words, Knopfler is no Springsteen or Dylan. The highlight of the track, as I've mentioned, appears after the lyrics have been sung: it's a long, virtuoso guitar solo which, by itself, makes the record worth buying.

The only song where the words are interesting is "Industrial Disease". A nice chant of pommie satire is accompanied by a doo-wop bubblegum beat which is so banal that you have to listen to the words. ("Doctor Parkinson declared `I'm not surprised to see you here/ you've got smoker's cough from smoking/ brewer's droop from drinking beer/ I don't know how you came to get the Bette Davis knees/ but worst of all young man, you've got Industrial Disease.'") Knopfler is amusingly nasty at the expense of the British System, the British Government ("they wanna have a war to stop Industrial Disease"), ITV, and BBC.

The best thing about **Love Over Gold** is that Knopfler cannot repeat it. The next record must be different. Besides, he's already changed the members of the band again.

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A few more favourites:

* **The Blue Mask**, by Lou Reed (RCA). Just when everybody had written off Lou Reed, he has produced his best record since he left Velvet Underground. This is not so much a cross-category record, as a return-to-form record. On his last album, **Growing Up in Public**, he had the lyrics right (you buy that record just to read the sleeve), but the music was muddy and unlistenable. On **The Blue Mask**, a small group of exemplary rock musicians bash out spare, exciting backings for yet another fine set of songs.

* **Business As Usual**, by Men At Work (CBS). Everybody's heard this, so I won't say much about it. Not altogether successful as a record, but it contains the year's best single ("Down Under"), some funny lyrics, and some fine playing. And the Yanks have liked it, which is the real reason why Australians are delighted by this record.

* **Daylight Again**, by Crosby, Stills, and Nash (Atlantic). No sign of cross-categorising here. CS&N simply do their thing better than they have since their first record in 1969. I like listening to this record over and over, just to hear fine musicianship and harmonising. I'm told by reviewers that the lyrics are dreadful, but I haven't even bothered reading the record sleeve.

* **Talking Back to the Night**, by Steve Winwood (Island). Again, more an improvement on the old than any change of direction. Steve Winwood is no Vangelis when it comes to solo synthesising - so he sticks to simple stuff and sounds like a good old-time gospel singer with a street organ. "There's a River" could even by a hymn tune. Some of the fast songs are good, too, with their echoes of 1976 Fleetwood Mac.

Enough, enough. It's a good year when I find more than one or two records which I like all the way through. In 1982, there were at least eight (some I haven't discussed here). What's for 1983? Who knows? Will the record companies even bother releasing records? Who knows?

Bruce Gillespie
8 February 1983

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CRITICAL MESS

George Turner

Some time ago I reviewed, for **CHUNDER!**, an issue of an American "mainstream" magazine, **TRI-QUARTERLY** 46, in terms of great admiration and noted that a science fiction issue was planned by the editors.

That issue (**TRI-QUARTERLY** 49) is now to hand and the Contents page promises well.

Algis Budrys (oh, excellent man!) - Tom Disch (delight, delight!) - Gene Wolfe (that fine, fine writer) - Samuel R. Delany (we'll play wait-and-see on that one) - Craig Strete (new to the genre but well spoken of) - Ursula Le Guin (where would quality be without her?) - and two people, Ian MacMillan and Michael Swanwick, of whom I have not heard before.

The people who produced issue 46 certainly know the smell of quality. My hope was that issue 49 would demonstrate what sf can be, demonstrate in fact that sf can, when properly handled, hold up its head in the highest echelon of modern fiction.

Well, it doesn't.

It will be necessary to discuss the contents before getting to the real business of this essay: a group of questions arising from the very existence of **TRI-QUARTERLY** 49.

So, to the contents...

Budrys leads off with a 72-page essay on the origin, history, importance, meaning, etc., of sf (he uses a private abbreviation - "stef"), written from a totally American, Campbellian and blinkered point of view, and probably addressed to poor, ignorant readers of mainstream fiction who wouldn't know whether he knew his subject or made it up as he went along. There's no space for detail, but he tosses off the whole of the New Wave in two and a half disdainful pages and doesn't even bother with factual accuracy over the British contribution. One short quote should suffice to damn him: "Up to that time (1960), English commercial stef writers had been divided into two kinds: the hopeless and those who sold to the American media. . ." The mind, as they say, boggles. Ballard, Aldiss, Clarke and Wyndham were all publishing in British sf magazines in the early 'fifties; "the hopeless"? One expects better from the writer of **Rogue Moon**.

Then it comes to mind that Budrys grew and prospered under the Campbell/**Astounding** dispensation, and that is where he remains today; the expansion of sf has passed him by. And these unfortunate editors probably had no way of knowing that they had picked themselves a chauvinist turkey. Operating outside their field, they were - however unintentionally on the part of Budrys, who probably believed himself to be writing fact - suckered.

Following this lamentable opening is a sweetly cruel poem by Tom Disch, taking the mickey out of the pretensions of sf and its writers. Again a short quotation:

> You are welcome therefore, Stranger, to join
> Our confraternity. But please observe the rules.

Always display a cheerful disposition. Do not refer
To our infirmities. Help us to conquer the galaxy.

Now, **that** should have warned the **TRI-QUARTERLY** editors that there could be niggers in the woodpile. (One can only approve the Disch comment and wish for more of the same. If you want to see it done really savagely, beg or borrow **FOUNDATION** 20 and observe R. A. Lafferty laying into the pseuds without mercy.)

Then comes "Small Mutations", an excerpt from a forthcoming novel by Ian MacMillan. It promises to be a very interesting novel. It's a post-disaster piece, with two families making their way across a starving and dangerous mid-west USA. Cannibalism is the theme of the excerpt and MacMillan treats it as would a mainstream writer; that is, he turns his interest on the psychology and sociology of cannibalism, using only such sparing shock effects as are essential to the telling and creating horror out of the circumstances that dictate cannibalism instead of melodrama out of the thing itself. His mainstream background cried out inescapably through the thirty-odd pages; his attitude to the subject is human instead of sensational and all the more effective because of it. This is the second best piece in the book and comes from outside the genre. I will be watching for the whole novel.

Next is "In Looking-Glass Castle", by Gene Wolfe, sf by virtue of its setting in a near-future, clone-propagating matriarchy. the tale itself is pure mainstream, excellently written but not outstanding, the sort of thing Wolfe can do with one hand while completing his Income Tax return with the other.

Then we get thirty pretentious and violently over-written pages from Samuel R. Delany's next novel, **STARS IN MY POCKETS LIKE GRAINS OF SAND**. It would be interesting at a third of its length; in some 12,000 words only one definable action occurs, almost at the end; the rest is dialogue between people who make speeches where ordinary characters would simply talk, clumsy insertions of unnecessary "atmospheric" stuff (rather as though a character in a contemporary novel felt impelled to describe a kitchen chair before he sat on it, just making sure you knew what it was) and pseudo-scientific flim-flam on the customary Delany grand scale. It's all icing with no cake under it. But Delany has some sort of an academic reputation now and perhaps it has become culturally unsafe to leave him out, in case he really is an incomprehensible genius.

Craig Strete is a comparative newcomer from the occult field. He is a Cherokee Indian, so a theme of miscegenation is reasonable, even expectable. What is neither reasonable nor expectable is that (a) he writes like a survivor from the Golden Age, clumsily, and (b) that he concentrates on the sorrows of the superior settler (read "white man") while giving no hint of feeling for the predicament of the ill-treated native woman (read "Indian"). In today's climate, curious.

Michael Swanwick is another newcomer. "Ginungagap" is his second published sf story and is solid old ANALOG stuff, pitched somewhere between John Varley and Larry Niven and rather crisper than either, but written in standard style with due attention to sex, feminism and the tough-guy-spaceman tradition. Campbell would have loved it. I liked it myself, but it doesn't belong in a literary magazine.

Next to last is some beautiful Disch, a truly self-contained extract from a forthcoming novel, THE PRESSURE OF TIME. It is about growing up in a very near future wherein some are immortal and some are not and uneasy, unresolved tensions hover over adolescent understanding. It is fine sf and it is fine mainstream writing; it is the kind of literature sf could be if the more talented big-name blowhards had half Disch's honesty of intention.

To end is a short-short by Ursula Le Guin, a nice little allegory of betrothal and the end of virginity, but more cunningly allusive than impressive. Ursula at half pressure.

* * *

Sorry to have been so detailed, but all the comments add up to a series of questions now to be asked.

What was the object of compiling this issue?

There is no editorial to offer clues, though the name of David Hartwell, mastheaded as "Guest Editor", suggests how the two sf-in-mainstream-fashion pieces (the best in the book) came to be included. I can think of nothing to excuse the inclusion of the Amerika uber alles Budrys article except simple ignorance; it isn't even accurate, much less perceptive. (But someone has nominated it for an Advention '81 William Atheling Award! It takes all kinds . . . if that helps.) Were the editors really saying that this is the best sf could offer? If so, they were badly advised; three of the authors are plainly incapable of better than run-of-the-mill prose and two of their samples are unashamed magazine fodder. Were they, perhaps, caught short with insufficient material of a high standard? In that case the issue should have been deferred. Or were they suggesting that TRI-QUARTERLY 49 offered a reasonable state-of-the-art cross-section of American sf? Rightly or wrongly, this is what it does offer, containing the work of three highly competent writers who use the genre instead of conniving with it, two quite passable samples of magazine product, one piece of high camp technicolour nonsense, one harmless little fantasy and one poem which will annoy the noisier writers (Hugo runners-up and such) if they catch on that they are the people pointed out - and, before I forget, some excellent illustrations by Richard Powers and Jack Gaughan, competent artwork by three or four others and one ANALOG-style piece of ho-hum from Kelly Freas foisted on - of all unbelievable pairings! - the Disch excerpt. And, of course, the trivial essay by Budrys, which just may represent the way intelligent US sf writers see their genre, though I doubt it.

Representative of the state of the art in the US? yes, I think so.

Even so, why did the highly literate editorial staff (who have proved their expertise before this) permit the inclusion of three pieces whose sheer literacy does not pass any kind of quality test? No matter what their advisers said, they should have refused Strete, Delany, and Swanwick. Budrys they can be forgiven on ground of deferring to a supposed expert.

I don't know the answer, but the questions lead me to further questions:

What is wrong with the criticism of sf that allows non-sf critics often to spot the failings and infelicities that in-group sf critics ignore or drown in irrelevant praises?

Why, on the other hand, do some of them lose all sense of literacy before the antics of "far out" sf and fall for the genre's self-aggrandising propaganda?

And why, after all this time, do so many in-group critics fail to realise that they also are too often blinded not by science but by the brilliant colours of over-decorated crud?

These are not small questions; they have occupied me on and off for some time. I hope that John will allow me to expand on them in some future issue of CHUNDER!

George Turner

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