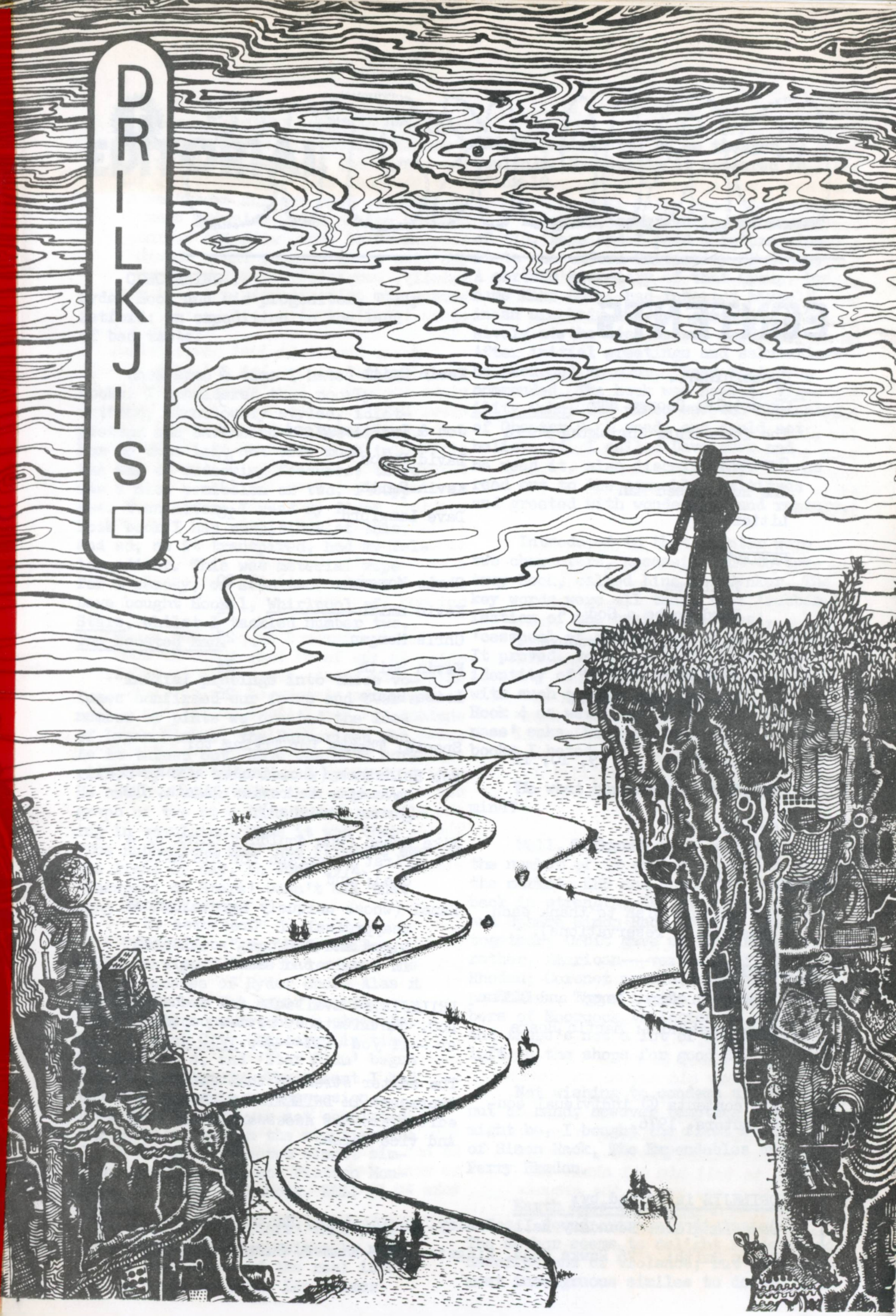


DRINK JIS



DRILKJIS

1

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The editors wish to thank each other (with reservations).

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Mike Rohan (who couldn't think of a first paragraph for his article); and

Hazel (whose uniquely Egyptological reappraisal of "Creatures of Light and Darkness" collapsed in a welter of erudition).

DRILKJIS is available for exchange, LoC, contribution, review copies or---if you will---40p.

The editor stresses that opinions expressed in DRILKJIS by the other editor are not necessarily his own. And vice versa.

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EDITORIAL

CONCERNING...

Ryder Hook and his progenitor, Tully Zetford: an expedition to the land of bad taste.

Once upon a time I hated Hook books. I considered them poorly written, atrociously styled, idiot-plotted and cardboard-characterised. For me this left not very much in the way of redeeming features; there was a nice semicolon or two, I suppose. Even before I read my first Hook book I had suspicions of this, and so, as it transpired, had my fellow editor. This was material ripe for a parody, or even two. And so Dave bought Hook 1, Whirlpool of Stars, whilst I tackled number two, The Boosted Man.

Initial probings into these volumes confirmed our fears and over a number of pints we created the idea of Lynan Sinker, the Rubberised Man. As it turned out, Dave was more horrified by his task than I by mine. He could read no more than a paragraph or two at a time before recoiling in revulsion. Thus it was that 'The Rubberised Man' was first to see the light of day, in June 1974. 'Cesspool of Stars' wasn't all that long in following.

There was a gap then, while we hoped that poor sales had caused the timely decease of Ryder Hook. Alas it was not to be. The paper shortage caused only a pause, not a stoppage. Hook 3, Star City, appeared in time for Novacon 4, and 'Star Slum' began almost immediately. That meant I had two Hook books in my possession. That third parody was not completed for a while, and in the meantime the first two were rejected almost simultaneously by Science Fiction Monthly. No sense of humour, NEL.

'Cesspool of Stars' then made a trip to New Writings, since by now we had suspicions of the real identity of Tully Zetford. Ken Bulmer

didn't publish it, as we thought he wouldn't. Eventually it appeared in Sfinx 10.

Later on, sometime in the summer of '75, Dave and I paid a return visit to the Oxford University SF Group. A certain secretary of that Group, by name Mike Cule, had inserted himself in an armchair and was chuckling massively at the book he was reading. After initial greetings and salutations he beckoned me over. "Read that," he commanded. The book was Hook 4, Virility Gene. The place was the beginning of Chapter 9. I read, and could not believe it. I called Dave over and he read it, also disbelieving. It was read out to the assembled multitude and greeted with wonderment and rapture.

Introduced in that chapter were two characters, assassins out to destroy Hook, called Line and Synker. The key words were all there too: 'rubberisation of the brain faculties', 'cesspool of stars', and a few others. It proved, to our satisfaction, the identity of Tully Zetford. Naturally, with such a reference I had to buy Hook 4 as well, and then, for completeness' sake, Hook 1. Suddenly I had four books I hated.

So what happened to change my mind?

Well, I became very annoyed at the number of SF series appearing on the market. ERB and Doc Smith came back in strength; NEL produced Hook and Sphere Simon Rack more or less together; Orbit gave us English---or rather, American---versions of Perry Rhodan; Coronet manufactured the Expendables. Throw in the countless numbers of Moorcock trilogies as well, and there's not a lot of shelf space left in the shops for good SF.

Not wishing to condemn all series out of hand, however tempting the idea might be, I bought the first stories of Simon Rack, The Expendables and Perry Rhodan.

Earth Lies Sleeping by Laurence James I found extremely distasteful. The author seems to delight in detailed descriptions of violence, but uses the most incongruous similes to do so. For

example, "...the bones of his skull smashed with the noise of a ripe apple falling on to stone." Really? And again, "Simon, standing a distance away, was splashed by the man's brains as his head split like an earthenware jar." Besides evoking revolting images, these two examples betray a general inaccuracy of description. There is also a gruesome sex scene, narrated in a manner both nauseating and naive---something of an achievement, I suppose.

I refuse to accept that these are necessary for the plot. The loosely connected structure that passes for plot in this book has already been so stretched to accommodate unnecessary incidents that stretching it to omit a few would hardly be noticeable.

As far as nausea is concerned, the first Expendables book, The Deathworms of Kratos, by Richard Avery, doesn't cause as much. The characters are as immature and superficial as Rack and Co., but the violence is not described with such loving detail, although there is a scene in which a woman is raped by about thirty natives, who then amputate both her legs just for the hell of it. Or perhaps they do it so that the author can give her artificial legs that can run all day at fifty miles an hour.

This is typical of his approach to writing. He always takes the easy way out and has some very neat labour-saving devices to do so. We've seen them all before, of course, but very rarely all together. For instance, the first part of the novel (called Stage One) consists of both current events, labelled Event, and flashbacks, labelled Flash. I suppose he did it so that he could tell which bit he was writing. Also, he quite blatantly uses that hoary old device for introducing background, namely the 'page-three lecture'. The hero is awakened from suspended animation by a smart-aleck robot called Matthew. Matthew proceeds to tell him all about the mission they are on, on the grounds that suspended animation generally causes temporary amnesia. How convenient. How can he get away with it?

The characters have it easy too, or they would have if they behaved in a manner approaching rationality from the beginning, instead of waiting till near the end. Their opponents are the deathworms, huge brutish creatures a hundred metres long, weighing over three hundred tons, with two brains the size of an orange. Thus, though totally, completely outweighed, our heroes are only slightly out of their class intellectually.

Perry Rhodan is just unspeakable. Perry pontificates a lot and is a right bastard in the treatment of his crew. Mind you, the crew asks so many dumb questions you can understand his attitude. In Rhodan's world of the future I should imagine all people's muscles, apart from the jaw, have atrophied, since they actually do very little---just talk a lot. And everyone, though speaking American, does so in a manner quite Germanic. It almost feels wrong that all the sentences do not end in verbs.

Of the three I suppose The Expendables is the least bad; there is some action, at least. Simon Rack is awful; he makes the mistake of having pretensions and the failure is all the worse for that. The fact that 200,000 copies of Perry Rhodan are sold in Germany every week (as the foreword proudly claims) merely causes me to doubt the wisdom of having them in the EEC. The deutschmark is a very good counter-argument, however. Perry Rhodan? Bleah!*

Reading these three put Hook books into perspective. It didn't change any of the opinions expressed in my opening paragraph; from even a mildly literary viewpoint they are bad books. But they are such unpretentious little things, so imbued with the peculiar charm and fascination of the very bad, that it's impossible to hate them properly. You don't hate a crippled horse.

There hasn't been a Hook book for some time now, and sources tell me that he has, like a crippled horse, been put to rest. Let us hope so. You can only take so much bad taste. ---KEVIN SMITH

*Look it up in any decent Snoopy Dictionary.

CROSSTALK: GEORGE HAY

GEORGE: ...No, you did not introduce me to the President of OUSFG. Now he tells me she was attractive! Did I ever tell you how I feel about the kind of person who says to you "You know, she's a smashing bird, and I know you'd have clicked with each other. What a pity I forgot to introduce you at the time." Go there, my heart's abhorrence... (no matter, no matter, I can still see my future stretching brightly ahead into my past).

DRILKJIS: Sorry, I must have been overcome by distrust. To business. George, you're the archetypal Man Behind the Scenes, unknown to the public—though the cognoscenti have your old anthos, TAC letters, hatch-et-jobs on van Vogt and others—

G: Whatever my views on some of van Vogt's prose, I really am a great admirer of his. In the first place, some of his books, especially the EMPIRE OF THE ATOM series, really were well written by orthodox standards. Secondly—as you'll have noticed if you read the bio bit that I got him to write for FOUNDATION—his battering of syntax etc is done on purpose. I once remonstrated with him that I really drew the line at such items as "he felt kind of dizzy". He wrote back that he often strolled over to Mayne Hull's typewriter, looked at what she had in it, and inserted the odd "kind of"! Whether they like his ideas and prose or not, readers should never get the idea they arise from any tendencies to the slapdash on his part. Overwork, possibly—carelessness, never.

Mayne Hull, who had been ill for some time, died recently. Sad... Or, if her illness was a lingering and painful one, perhaps not. The intimacy of death is another of those subjects that SF writers seem to

steer clear of. Odd, in view of the increasing number of old people in Western society. I have sat at the bedsides of two old people recently. They used identical words: "I want to die..."

D: The sociologists might say, "is two a statistically significant sample?"... But let's hear about some of these Hay Projects. I know they're so many and varied that most people don't know whether you're a pro or a wild-eyed fanatic amateur. Though they may have opinions.

G: A sense of professionalism has nowt to do with money or status; it is a certain attitude towards one's medium. If you have that, it matters little whether the author be rich, famous or whatever. In STOPWATCH I did something to put before the public some authors whom I thought possessed of professional calibre and potential, but whom, in the normal course of events, would never reach the public view. I am as interested in these as in the famous names, much as I do like the latter.

D: How do you feel about that book—apart from your comment of "not subversive enough"?

G: I think STOPWATCH is a good read, and reasonably well-balanced as an anthology. I was particularly pleased with the fact that the publishers did a good job on layout and format. Also, that I was able to get the dedication in to Dick Geis. Yet further also that van Vogt and Ursula le Guin were so helpful, as was Virginia Kidd, Ursula's agent. NEL asked me to do another anthology, but I said I'd rather try them on a novel, which I must now make time for. Frankly, the anthology field has been worked to death—even Roger Elwood has given up now. I think the worst example I've ever seen was something called AN ABC OF SCIENCE FICTION, which

started with Aldiss and ended with Zelazny. How lazy can you get?

D: You could try assembling the Hugo or Nebula collections.

Can you hold forth about some other projects?

G: There is the embryonic Applied SF Association---consisting mainly of myself and Richard Kirby---which is assembling a file of SF concepts as (i) basic material for an anthropological look at SF; (ii) a file of ideas for scientists, sociologists etc who aren't really into SF but are interested in lifting some of its ideas. After all, the ideas are there to be lifted, or so I say. (This will hopefully tie in with Gil ---GUYING GYRE---Galer's SF evaluation project) My part in the SPECTRUM Modular Think-Tank is also concerned with applications of SF ideas.

In Starlight Research, Mollie Gilliam and I are handling tape-cassettes of SF authors reading their own work; and microfiche; and SF postcards---I had a super story from Ursula le Guin, for postcard use!

D: ((matters)) Lucky bastard.

I've seen your microfiche list and notes there are some odd selections---what goes into picking them? Early novels by G. Hay...

G: The reason for titles chosen is mostly (i) availability (ii) cost. I offer people in general a fair royalty (10% if I recall aright) with a small advance payment or not, as the case may be. I had to pay far more than I wanted for the Angela Carter novel ((The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman)), because Granada are greedy on principle---in fact, I only got them to agree with difficulty, even when paid... But I think this is a magnificent work, and I had to have it.

The early items by Ken Bulmer, G. Hay etc are justified, if not by their literary quality, then by their rarity. I hold no special brief for my own early work, which inevitably makes me wince when I read it: on the other hand, some folk who asked for copies of these pb's (loaned with reluctance) said that they got some pleasure from them---and some of

these were young readers. This doesn't prove they were good, but it does prove they are readable. I hope shortly to be able to resume fiction writing. I would say that I can't wait to see the result, except this would simply be inviting unkind people to say that they can, and will...

D: What's the point of converting stuff to microfiche?

G: Posting of fiche over long distances offers a very real saving, always allowing that the recipient has a reader---this being of course the snag. But one has a definite basis in the university/college/library area, plus people like yourself with access to readers.

D: And you photo the fiche yourself?

G: You must be joking. In the first place, the special camera costs money; in the second (to steal a witty expression I heard lately from the lips of Alan Garner) I am a technological incompetent in my own right. Also, though you might not believe it, I am not trying to add to the number of hats I wear. No, I simply pay the printers (or photographers or whatever you call them) to make a master and a few sample copies: when orders come in, they produce another fiche and post it direct to the buyer.

What strange dedication keeps me at it? Simply that I like to see things done as I think they should be. There must be many who could do it better than I, but they don't so I must. I adhere to the Dick Geis school: "Damn the typos---get the job out on time."

D: The energy-output is horrifying. As well as all this, you generally send me three letters for every one I can write.

G: I don't really deserve credit for drive etc. I have a fair record for production, but that is (a) because I'm interested (and anyone who isn't interested in life might as well jump off a cliff); (b) because, when I worked for the dreaded L.Ron Hubbard's scientology outfit, I learned the excellent principle that you double your output if you deal, as far as is humanly possible, with all your correspondence as it comes in. Work it out: each time you get a letter, read it and toss it aside for later, you double your workload.

Tomorrow, you'll have to search around in the in-tray, find it, then read it again to make sure of what it said. Leave it too long, and you know well it will never be answered, and you'll feel guilty into the bargain. Now I must hasten to add that Hubbard, if he came into my office today, would have a fit, as it is heaped with unanswered letters like autumn leaves in Vallombrosa. However, I think I can say that, though there have of necessity been exceptions, anything that really should have been answered, has been, and mostly in quick time.

D: My letters you answer before I write. ---Well, it had to come: what about Scientology?

G: The canny answer is to say that Sc. is all things to all men. This is also literally true, since L. Ron Hubbard's spoken and written output is so prodigious that there can be few aspects of life that he has not only covered, but covered from multiple viewpoints. Future biographers will be able, according to their prejudices, to describe him as a wild-eyed communist or a monster of capitalistic greed.

LRH is a genius of a peculiarly American kind, such as Henry Ford or Franklin Roosevelt. You might have noticed that the same varying and apparently contradictory accusations were launched at these two men, who were described alternately as the destroyers or the salvation of their country. Ford, whom I believe died the world's richest man, and who ran his commercial empire with total ruthlessness, was yet the hated enemy of the bankers, and was also the first employer to voluntarily pay his men more than the unions were asking. Look back at the old New Yorker cartoons about Franklin D. and you will realise just how deeply the establishment rich hated him---a hatred matched only by that of the hard-core Socialists.

One sees at its highest in LRH that characteristic so typical of Americans that they themselves are often unaware of it---the passion for rationalisation. Only the old Romans matched it, and it is no accident that busts of Roman Senators

in the British Museum often have features indistinguishable from those of their contemporary counterparts in Washington.

Hubbard sat down and asked himself "Why can't mass-production methods be applied to the treatment of the human psyche? Why should psychoanalysis be available only to the rich?" And step by step he analysed the features of the mind and devised 'processes' for improving them, without drugs, electrical treatments or hypnosis.

D: You are saying that the processes work? I was intrigued by your letter in TAC, which said that despite accumulated rubbish, there was at the heart of the cult a valuable core of truth...

G: I am not setting out to do a selling job for Scientology. If you want to know in brief what is wrong with it, I would point out that powerful organisations with valuable techniques and methodologies inevitably attract power-seekers. The parallel between the history---brief though it is---of Sc. and that of the Jesuits is quite extraordinary, in detail as well as in outline. Yet, abuses or no abuses, the Jesuits accomplished an extraordinary amount of good---and frankly, I think the Scientologists have done also. This does not lead me to feel any more kindly to the idiot who, having done a two months' Comm-Course, thinks he is God's gift to a failing civilisation; still less to the Mafiosi-types who may be found in the higher echelons of the Orgs.

But I defy any honest person to look objectively at what LRH has actually done---starting from scratch in 1950---compare it to the record of---let us say---the drug companies or the British NHS---and not be impressed. Hubbard's output is Balzacian---and even were his work considered a total failure, one would have to admire the scope of his aims, in an age where, as someone recently remarked, as the stage has become gigantic, the actors have turned into dwarves.

D: Let's move back a bit, to the British Golden Fifties, when all the world was young and Ken Bulmer dashing them off. In other words, have you

anything to say about your own fiction?

G: Do you know how I got into professional SF writing? I was working for the Refuse Collection Dept. of Camden Borough Council---I think it was still Hampstead in those days---when I wrote a first chapter and outline of a novel and sent it blind to Hamilton-Stafford. Gordon Landborough was editing for them (later he founded Armada Books and other first-rate series): he liked it, and said I should finish it. No contract, mark you! I dropped my work, let my rent pile up, and sent in the finished product. At £1 per 1000 words for 36,000 words, by the time I got the cheque it all went in rent! Well, it was a start; not everyone sells the first book they write.

D: ((bitterly)) No. ---Which authors were Formative Influences, then?

G: In very early years, people like John W. Campbell and Clark Ashton Smith. I suppose it's hardly necessary to say I'm an admirer of Campbell, warts and all? After all, for a long time I was the only person to have kept him in print in this country, first with that Tandem collection---they used my blurb but didn't credit me---and then with The Best of John W. Campbell.

I'd like to get back to fiction, though. What sort of fiction? I belong to the school that never knows what it's going to write till it has written it, and can read it, so it can then reply to the question.

D: Having replied, you'll burst on the British Public?

G: It would be nice to do so, but honestly, what would (will, I hope) give me far more pleasure would be to write something I really did enjoy reading. The safe rule is: if you don't enjoy it, no-one else will.

D: Agreed. Nearly finished now. Where's my list of Approved Boring Questions for Interviewers? Ah, got it: "Which trends and even individuals in the modern SF world do you approve of, and which do you loathe and despise?" If you say 'fanzine interviewers' to the latter part, I shall stamp my little feet.

G: I don't think I loathe and despise any people---at least, I hope I don't. However, I certainly loathe and despise some attitudes, and I'll agree that at times it is hard to distinguish the attitudes from those who express them.

One thing I find sad is the reign of quantity in publishing, as evinced by the editor who says, "Of course, I realise that this young writer you suggest we publish is just as good as you say he is, but---well, you know how it is---can't you find us something by Robert Heinlein or Arthur C. Clarke?" Of course, sometimes the editor is sincere, and really would like to publish the new names. But he needs his job, like all of us. Others are just plain hypocrites, and would junk Arthur C. Clarke in favour of the telephone directory, if only Thompson hadn't acquired the rights on that first.

You know the really sad thing about publishers? Most of them have totally forgotten that publishing is a particular way of conveying concepts, feelings and aesthetics. They have confused the ends with the means. Hell, you could publish, if you wanted to, and had the money and the patience, by getting birds to fly in word formation. But you try and get that across...

* * * * *

GEORGE'S FREE PLUGS: or, How to fill a little spaces at the ends of interviews

George asked us to mention:
SPECTRUM "Environmental Think Tank"
(David Cluett, 87 Woodfield Rd, Ealing
LONDON W5 1SR)
OLAF STAPLEDON SOCIETY (Richard Kirby
---via George)
H.G.WELLS SOCIETY, STARLIGHT RESEARCH
(microfiche) et endless cetera---
G.Hay, 38b Compton Rd, LONDON N.21

* * * * *

"I doubt if any passages in the body of this book are seditious, but it is quite likely that by improvement in the law they may become so. It should therefore be read quickly, while it is still legal to do so."

(J.B.S.Haldane, 1934)

* * * * *

DRILKIS PRESENTS...

MAC MALSENN

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WORLD!



SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT BEGINNINGS CAN LEAD TO INCREDIBLE ENDS....

AS MALSENN LEAFS THROUGH REMAINDERED COPIES OF S.F. MONTHLY, LITTLE DOES HE KNOW....

LITTLE DO I KNOW



BUT SUDDENLY—

CURSE THIS SMALL PRINT

GOD! WHAT DO THEY PUT IN THESE CHIPS NOWADAYS!



THAT COULD ONLY MEAN ONE THING!

SOME FIEND IS CAUSING EARTH TO COLLAPSE INTO A BLACK HOLE!!

DO YOU BELIEVE IT, ISAC?

OF COURSE NOT, ARTHUR

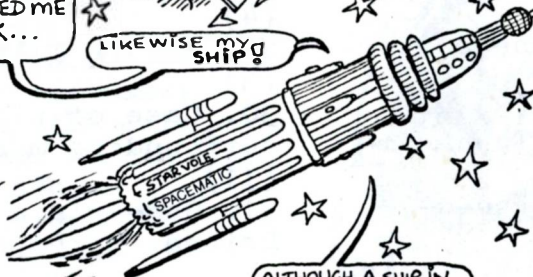
THE NATIONAL TREE...

SPACEPORT

FORTUNATELY MY COSMIC AGENT UNIFORM SAVED ME FROM BEING SHRUNK...

LIKEWISE MY SHIP!

SHRINK! SHRINK!



ALTHOUGH A SHIP IN UNIFORM DOES LOOK SILLY!

CAREFULLY ASSEMBLING SUPERSENSITIVE DETECTION EQUIPMENT, MALSENN SEEKS THE FONS ET ORIGO MALI !!! *

* No translations provided

THE B.L.F.A. IS THE GOOD!! (IT'S SWEET AND SWEET!!)

HA HA! HA! DESTRUCTION, TOTAL!!! DESTRUCTION!!!

BUT ON NIVEK'S OMNI-SCANNER...



FROM NEXT GALAXY BUT THREE...

NIVEK!

AND THE ARCHFIENDS!

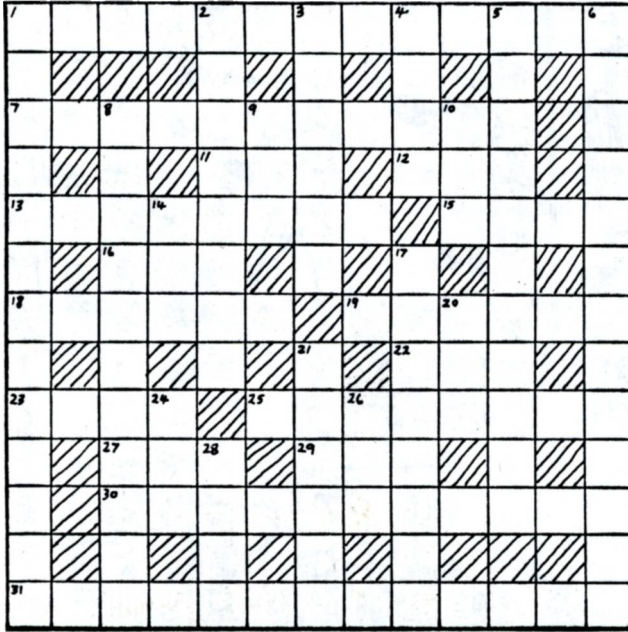
MALSENN LIVES! (SPIT, CURSE...) PARTIAL DESTRUCTION!

HE MUST PERISH!

WILL THE EVIL NIVEK CONTINUE TO BEUTLE THE EARTH?... WILL THE SOLAR SYSTEM ACQUIRE ITS FIRST BLACK HOLE SINCE THAT TIME AT CALCUTTA?... WILL MALSENN PERISH?... OR WILL HE ESCAPE WITH ONE MIGHTY BOUND?... WHO IS THE DIRTY LITTLE MAN?... YOU MAY NEVER KNOW — UNLESS DRILKIS 2 GETS OFF THE GROUND.....ZAP!

END ONE HORNED KILBARIAN GORM PROVER

THE CROSSWORD



1 ac. Conventional normality surrounds a third Ursula Le Guin blood relationship. (13)

1 dn. Confirmed Dune sector gin is drunk. (13)

2. 1.75 Gr = 26 E (8)

3. Of Spacing and Townswomen. (6)

4. Not-not-noticed; c-c-cold. (4)

5. Possibly, Vincent, it is involuntary. (11)

6. End of Eternity,
Saul gives in,
Nothing changes;
Frey's Pediculus.

(5,2,1,5)

7. Misery when sunship pane shatters. (11)

8. Useful-sounding hat for rising salesman who levels the odds. (11)

9. Below which is good or ill. (3)

10. Lad sounds bright. (3)

11. Computer bluff king? (3)

12. Point---don't lose the point. (3)

13. Maybe drank endless As-ti from these. (8)

14. D'ye know Mr Bulmer? (3)

15. Unless I do wrong to return. (4)

16. Coming out of Debr-ett. (3)

17. Tear and twist heads off---dig in. (8)

18. Destroyed under one transformation. (6)

19. Performs in French play. (6)

20. In strait and river (3)

21. Demolished Man, ie, a condition of pale American. (6)

22. Tom's blue (3)

23. From ouija, Zarathustra produced immutable prophecy. (4)

24. Raise no weight to see animals. (3)

25. Nongravitational; three of the nine get mistrial. (8)

26. Space-raider's age. (3)

27. Palladium holds nothing but peas! (3)

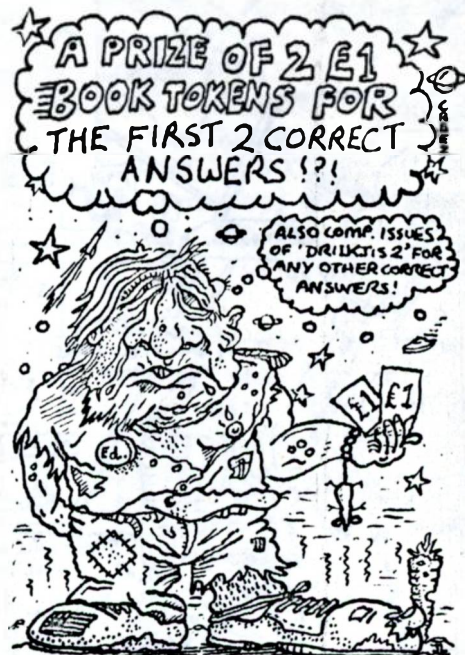
28. Backyard boozewagon. (4)

29. Before I left the lake. (3)

30. Case of wine and water surrounding married worker. (11)

31. God---in a Tory hat? Bribed, perhaps? (5,8)

* * *



(11)

Lynan Sinker leaped the last ten treads of the escalator from space shuttle to concrete. He was onplanet again, on one of the twin worlds of Beenangonn and Dumnit, or would be as soon as the one tenth Earth gravities of the planet pulled his lightweight Rubberised body down. He'd filled his foam rubber body cells with helium gas so as to pay less on the interstellar liner. There were distinct advantages in being a Rubberised Man, even half a Rubberised Man, which was all Sinker was. As now, however, there were disadvantages too. When he finally touched ground the other passengers were all in the terminal, having taken all the luggage trolleys. Sinker cursed and bent down and took hold of his bags. When he straightened the bags stayed put and his arms stretched. At the same time he felt that unique sensation, as of sago pudding being poured down his back.

How he craved this experience.

How he loathed and dreaded this experience. He was allergic to sago.

There was a fully Rubberised Man somewhere in the vicinity, and Sinker's latent Rubberised powers were now there to be used. Or almost there. It always took a little while for him to gain full control of himself when the resonances with an R-Man made him fully Rubberised. He looked at the ground and saw that it was nearer. His legs had coiled up and collapsed.

But what was an R-Man doing here?

There was a sudden scream from the terminal and a mass of humanity and others came charging across the concrete towards the shuttle. Their faces were contorted with fear and they screamed their terror as they ran. Behind them was another mass, but in front of the mass was another screaming crowd, their bodies and faces horribly distorted by the ravages of a dreaded disease. The panic and disease stricken mobs came closer and Sinker was still unable to move, though he fought for control of himself. The R-Man had to be a long way off, since the conversion

THE

RUBBERISED

MAN

Kevin Smith



was taking such a long time.

"Watch out, you Sons of Rodents!" he swore, or tried to swear. But his vocal cords only twanged like rubber bands. The crazed hordes came closer still. At last he was completely in control and sprang up on his coiled legs and was immediately flattened by the first mob. Rubberised Men are very flexible, however; their Rubberised bodies can assume any shape. Sinker was very thankful that a carpet shape was allowed.

His erstwhile fellow passengers had by now all boarded the shuttle. The pilot operated the controls and an immense badminton racket launched the shuttle into orbit. The diseased hordes came closer and he could well see why the others had fled in such terror. The terrible alien disease had ravaged the features of the planet's inhabitants so that they were now all identical replicas of the Eternal Footballer. The dreaded Cluffitis had stricken the planet Dunit!

Swiftly Lynan Sinker plastered impervi-gel over his head, thankful for the moment that his suit was completely sealed up to the neck (though this had caused some embarrassing problems in the past). Now he was totally isolated from the planet's atmosphere, sealed away from the horrendous disease. As he began to suffocate from lack of oxygen, he cursed.

"By Icky Dikki Trashti, I'm in a pickle. If I don't take off the impervi-gel I'll die from lack of oxy, and if I do I'll catch the dreaded Cluffitis. By the ungodly mice of Doctor Dread, curse this blasted planet!"

But wait! He was still a Rubberised Man, with all the abilities thereof, and an R-Man could go into Rubber Time! Lynan Sinker went into Rubber Time, moving at Rubber Speed. To the outside world he appeared to freeze, his heart and breathing to stop. To him everyone vanished in a myriad of streaking blurs, and in the twinkling of an eye, one of his own eyes, the space port was deserted and all was still.

Suddenly he began gasping. The air tasted like mouldy jam, furry and bitter. He was out of Rubber Time, without wishing to be. The other Rubberised Man must have left. He whipped off the impervi-gel, always having had a sado-masochistic streak in his make-up, and breathed in the good fresh air. The Cluffitis quasi-bacteria in the air would have died by now, and the affected people would have bored each other to death with countless, interminable, in-depth football match analyses so that he was perfectly safe. But Lynan Sinker took nothing for granted and took a filter-mask from one of his bags and put it on, in case some of the bacteria had decided to ignore the laws of nature. Now he should be more than perfectly safe.

Lynan Sinker never took a chance. His many years as the notorious Bull Finch, assassin, had taught him that much, if nothing more. You couldn't be too careful when exterminating vermin. Rats, mice, voles — Sinker had slain them all, and was wanted for rodenticide on half the inhabited worlds in the galaxy. The other half had no rodent problem. But he had given up that profession many years ago. The continuous slaughter, the endless massacre, the interminable execution, the non-stop annihilation, the never-ending sight of mangled and maimed and bloody corpses had finally made him feel a little queasy. So Bull Finch had vanished from the face of the galaxy, and Lynan Sinker had appeared.

He'd volunteered to be a guinea-pig (deciding to continue reminiscing for the moment) for an experiment carried out by ZZZZ, one of the vast multiplanetary economic organisations which were referred to in common parlance as vast multiplanetary economic organisations. ZZZZ had originally been manufacturers of sleeping pills. The experiment had been an attempt to turn him into the first Rubberised Man by replacing his bones with soft rubber, and his flesh with foam rubber. In addition his mental powers would have been increased enormously, giving him the ability to solve complex and complicated problems of addition using only pencil and paper. Being Rubberised he had the advantage of being able to erase mistakes with

his little finger. But the experiment had failed, leaving him only with the Rubberised body. He was only half an R-man, with the full powers only in the vicinity of a truly Rubberised Man, or a rubber plantation, or a bridge game..

Sinker brought his entire mind to bear on the situation in which he found himself here on Dumnit; thus his reflections ceased. A Rubberised Man was also here, and the population had been stricken by the terrible Cluffitis. Sinker was horrified just thinking of the fate of the afflicted ones. Thus it was immediately obvious that there was a secret camp of R-men who wanted to clear the planet of non-Rubberised people for some arcane and antediluvian scheme of their own. More than that, thought Sinker, they had no doubt kept a work-force of workers under hypno-control to do their evil bidding. But what was the purpose of it all? What? Sinker thought for a while longer, and the answer came to him in a flash. Of course, it had to be! Rubberised Women! Sinker boggled at the thought of Rubberised sex, and strange thoughts entered his head. The hypno-control had taken him!

What was he doing here? He should be in the factory, working with his friends. Yes, there it was. The crumbling, decrepit concrete walls; the foul, black, reeking smoke from the chimneys; the stench of garbage rotting in the streets. Just like good old Earth. One of the work shifts had just finished and were filing out. Tired and haggard they looked, their clothing rags. Bringing up the rear was a man in a puce and yellow suit. Sinker felt the sago pudding. It was a Rubberised Man.

As his powers came to their full, the hypno-control over his mind was broken, and he saw the factory and workers in their true light. The shining marble building; the clean, fragrant air; the immaculately cut, fresh clothes. No wonder the mental control was so strong. No wonder the mental control was so strong. No man in his right mind could work in such alien conditions. These

Rubberised Men would have to be smashed ruthlessly, without mercy, showing no pity, not an iota of sympathy. They were trying to bring down the foundations of modern industrial society, and that could never be allowed. Clean air indeed!

The guards! that was the answer. In the induced unreality they were each carrying, as was standard practice the universe over, a HilfArm model T-1 power rifle capable of destroying an armoured flyer with but a single half hour burst. In the foul reality Sinker could see, they were carrying viciously pointed and furled umbrellas. But (and this was the point of mentioning the guards, Sinker reminded himself) they had to be wearing screening devices against the mind control. He had to get one before the R-Man went too far away. Moving like greased treacle he felled the nearest guard, an alien, before he could use the eight sharp, eye-gouging spikes on his umbrella. He searched the alien thoroughly, finally unearthing an earpiece which was attached to a piece of wire which led to... Aha! So that was why they were wearing those fifty pound backpacks.

Quickly he put one on and put the earpiece to his ear. Damn their accursed alien physiology, he cursed soundlessly. Why in the name of Zutty Telford did they have to have ears nine inches across? The earpiece wouldn't fit!

Working swiftly he dismantled the instrument and began to reduce it to wearable size. Lyman Sinker was jack of all trades in the galaxy; but anyone who assumed he was master of none would make no mistake. He glanced furtively round to make sure he hadn't been spotted and returned to his task. Then he stopped and looked up again. Twenty Rubberised Men were sitting on the concrete watching him with interest.

"Were you going to remove the red wire next?" asked one.

"Yes, but..." replied Sinker. The speaker turned to one of his fellows.

"Ten credits you owe me," he said. "You hadn't spotted the lethal protective circuits," he explained to Sinker.

"Why you know-it-all chancrous gonil!" cursed Sinker. "You haven't got me yet!"

He went into Rubber Time. Three of the R-Men went with him. His powers were enormous, phenomenal, frightening when he was Rubberised. Well, somewhat above average, anyway. He could, for example, drink any normal man under the table, thanks to the capacity of his foam rubber body cells. But these were also Rubberised Men, and Sinker would have to call on all of his assassin's specialised knowledge to defeat them. He went into the Vole Marmaliser fighting pattern without delay. They must have realised what he was doing, for they went out of Rubber Time almost immediately, the cowards! Sinker chorled at this first victory. Then he saw the iron bars firmly set into the concrete floor, and the sheet metal roof.

They had tricked him, outsmarted him! Working in normal time they'd built a cage around him where he stood. He cursed at the universe, at the blind fickle fate that had led him to pit his wits against someone with a modicum of intelligence. He came out of Rubber Time and shook the bars in rage and anguish.

"How did you know, you verminous curds? How?"

"Your filter-mask, sweetie. None of our people would be seen dead in a blue one."

Several days passed. Sinker spent the time in Rubber Time, coming out only for meals. The days passed in the blinking of his eye. The trouble was that he couldn't bring himself to leave the food, always having hated waste, and yet it was difficult to work up much of an appetite blinking. After a week in captivity he realised that only bars prevented his escape, and being Rubberised he could easily squeeze out between them.

"By Icky Dikki Trashti, their first mistake. Why didn't I think of this sooner!"

"Yes, why didn't he?" complained an R-Man. "He's held us up for a week. There's barely enough time left!"

"I know, but he is absolutely vital. We can't risk one of ourselves yet only a Rubberised Man can possibly do it." They continued their spy-beam observation.

Sinker oozed between the bars and found the hypno-control screening device still on the floor—their second mistake. He still had to modify it to fit his ear, but that would take only an instant, and time was vital. He heaved off the red wire. A flesh-dissolving vapour gushed from the backpack.

"Oh good grief!" moaned an observing R-Man.

But Sinker's body was Rubberised and the vapour had no effect other than blinding him for ten minutes. He removed the black wire. Qi gas flooded the area and he fell unconscious. The Rubberised Man began beating his head against the wall, but to no avail. Does a tennis ball mind bouncing?

When Lynan Sinker recovered his senses it was dark. From a secret compartment in the heel of one of his fluorescent green boots he slipped a battery powered, forty kilowatt spot lamp and continued his work. It was still dark when he finished, some three hours later, and he was looking around, considering his next move, when out of the corner of his eye he noticed the eight-foot neon sign reading: Nuclear Generator Building.

"That," thought Sinker savagely "can only be their nuclear generator building. If I can put that out of action I'll be better able to beat them."

There were, however, guards all round the building, all of them armed with rolled copies of the Times! Wily Sinker circled the edifice, lugging the heavy backpack with him, cursing its weight continuously. On one dimly lit side there was only one guard, a small open window! If he could remove the guard... Even as he pondered on this problem the alien doubled up clutching at his midriff, his face contorted in agony.

"Now that's a fortuitous heart attack," thought Sinker, taking immediate advantage of the development by heaving the heavy backpack with him. The window was too small for a normal man to climb through, but he was Rubberised. There was, unfortunately, no way to get the screening device through.

"Oh well," thought Sinker, "I don't really need it anyway."

Not knowing precisely where to

go, he could think of no better course of action than to follow the arrows labelled NUCLEAR GENERATOR. He came to several doors in the corridor, but fortunately they were all open. This was easy. Then a sudden thought struck him. It was easy—too easy. He didn't like it, not one little bit. Outside, the "guard" with the heart attack stood up and closed the small window, and contacted Central Control. "He's in. Seal off the building."

Very cautiously Sinker approached the generator room. One might have thought he was in Rubber Time, but he wasn't. He was merely moving extremely slowly. From his other boot heel he took a portable vermin detector, a relic of his old job, and flashed it about a bit. There were no vermin in the room. He ostentatiously kicked open the door, flattening a man on the other side of it.

"Damn it!" he swore. "I must stop thinking of these rats as rats."

On one side of the room was a generator, a large black box with leads leading from one side, and an ON-OFF switch on the other. On the other side, of the room, was a workshop and a weapons rack. In Central Control the radiation monitor, or radmon, for the room showed "RED ALERT—OVERLOAD." Sinker knew nothing of this, and switched off the generator. The power dies and the lights went out, simultaneously. In the pitch blackness he could see nothing.

"Curses!" he cried, his imaginative vocabulary for the moment failing him. He fumbled for the switch and turned the generator on again. In the light he fished out his forty kilowatt spotlight and turned the generator off for the second time. He looked over the weapons rack, but there was nothing there but the wall, so he returned his attention to the rack. There were a couple of HilfArm model T-1 power rifles, four D-180 handpieces, and six immense D-181's. These caught Sinker's eye. A D-181 could be modified, if certain materials were available, into the only weapon truly effective against Rubberised Men—a Vulcanising Ray. It would work against normal people, giving them pointed ears; against an R-Man the effect was even more dire. They would slowly

become rigid, until a blow with a hammer could shatter them into little pieces. The right materials were all there, but there was no power available. Sadly, Sinker switched on the generator. In Central Control the Rubberised Men stretched their hair in rage and frustration. If the generator were left on for much longer it would explode, and they dared not turn it off themselves for fear of the effects of the overload of radiation.

Finally he was ready and stormed out of the room, stormed back in, picked up the Vulcanising Ray, stormed out again. He had just reached the outer walls of the building when he stopped short and turned round. There seemed something wrong. He'd forgotten to switch off again!

The exit, when he eventually came to it, was sealed off. But this couldn't stop him, not now, not after he had come so far and done so much. Hadn't he been the notorious assassin, Bull Finch? Wasn't he now Lynan Sinker, Rubberised Man? The door was not impressed. It remained closed. Sinker hurled himself at it with all his force, and spent a happy five minutes bouncing from wall to wall, out of control. He turned his ray on it, but magnalloy steel does not succumb readily to vulcanisation, and the pointy ears it grew were of no use to anyone. There was just one remaining chance. He took off a boot and removed a small, rounded object.

"That's better, damn stone!" he swore.

From the heel he took a kit of micro-tools, put on micro-goggles and began to cut his way through with an oxyacetylene micro-torch. It was taking a long time, so he went into Rubber Time. An instant later the torch had gone out, having used up all the acetylene in the micro-cylinder, but it had cut a way through. Yes, there was a hole in the six inch thick magnalloy door, though even a Rubberised Man would have difficulty squeezing through a hole three-tenths of a millimetre in diameter. Worse still, the Vulcanising Ray certainly could not get through. Sinker sighed and extracted a micro-hacksaw.

Sinker emerged into the daylight.

He was instantly horrified by the sight of the workers relaxing in the sunshine. The power was off, so that they could see the reality, yet they hadn't revolted! Though he had told no-one, not even himself, he had been half relying on them revolting. Sinker was revolted. These Rubberised Men were more insidious and inarguable than he had thought, to have so subverted innocent workers. They must be stamped out, and if no-one else could do the job—well, he was Lynan Sinker, and he could do it, stamp them out single-handed if need be, though he had two hands and two feet available.

He sprinted to the building which was obviously Central Control, being, as it was, in the centre. The R-Man outside the front door saw him, but Sinker was too fast and fired a lethal blast of vulcanising energy, almost enough to kill him. The man went rigid and toppled over. Sinker cursed—as he often did—for he hadn't brought a hammer to finish the job properly.

He went into the building. Immediately in front of him a heavy steel plate slammed down, blocking his way forward. Another crashed behind him, but a third sealed off his escape before he could move. Straightaway a high pressure water hose began to fill the compartment with high pressure water. Swiftly the level rose, and his body cells absorbed it. He became soggy, and found it increasingly difficult to keep afloat. But he couldn't give up. He was Sinker, Sinker! And he was sinking, fast. Was there no chance of escape?

Rubber Time was no use. His thought processes would slow like the rest of him—well, perhaps not quite as much—and though he might be able to hold on till the doors rusted away he had to escape quickly, to destroy the R-Men. With desperate intuition he fired his Vulcanising Ray at the concrete wall, then unclipped a sonic impact grenade from his belt and hurled at the treated wall. The resulting explosion and shockwave had no effect on Sinker; his elasticated eardrums absorbed the tremendous sound. The pointed ears on the wall had no such protection; the wall collapsed. The

water gushed out, flooding the entire ground floor, and Sinker was able to breathe again.

He squeezed himself dry and set off in pursuit. Up the stairs he ran, searching every room on every floor and finding no-one. Finally he came to the roof and had to admit that he had once more evaded him. Some hundred metres away a spaceship lifted on a column of flame. They had blown it up! To one side another ship took off—forcibly—its outer hull. They were destroying every ship in the spaceport. Finally one was launched intact. The R-Men just had to be abated. Without further thought Sinker leapt off the top of the building to the ground. Halfway down came the sago pudding sensation! But now now. It can't happen now, thought Sinker. I must retain my powers until I hit the floor, or I'm done for. He felt them fading and struggled to hold on, but there was nothing in the air to grasp. They vanished and he hit, and he bounced! The radiation overload had preserved some of the Rubberised powers within him, and the one-tenth Earth gravity hadn't hindered either. Nor had his rubber body.

"By Icky Dikki Trashti, that was a stroke of luck," he swore joyfully, though he still knew nothing of the radiation dosage he'd had.

He continued bouncing across the concrete, coming to a stop in front of a space speedster which had been miraculously overlooked by the R-Men. He leapt in and gunned the grav-motor and lifted effortlessly after them. Very quickly he overhauled them, having mounted the Vulcanising Ray in the weapons bay—a sight to behold. Matching velocities precisely he opened the weapon bay doors. The enormity of the decision weighed on his mind like a soggy doughnut. Did he have the right to destroy them all, just like that? No, he had to do it, for the well-being of society, for the preservation of order, because they'd made a fool of him. He pressed the button. The lights went out—it was the wrong button. He tried another and the ship was bathed in Vulcanising Rays until the power pack of the gun ran out. Sinker decided against chasing after it. They would all be rigid, as good

as dead, by now.

But had he destroyed them for the good of society, really? Or only because they possessed a power he craved and couldn't have? He hoped no-one would think Lynan Sinker to be that petty. To make sure no-one would think him that petty he would tell no-one about the affair. The authorities needn't know. He didn't want their empty glory, and there were no rewards. He headed the speedster for the next system. When he landed he meant to enjoy himself or know the reason why.

Back on Dunnit, the Rubberised Men emerged from hiding.

"Well," said one, "we've solved our problem and got rid of that pest. Either the radiation will kill him, or the rigged air-recycling plant, or the doctored grav-motors, or the liquorice in the tea-bags. But if he does survive, and we meet him again, we'll have to remember to underest-
ate him."

THE END

* * * * *

A Plot Overheard in the One Tun: Our reporter strained his hearing-aid to the limit as Operative-1 (codenamed DOCTOR) kittenishly requested Op-2 (code KNOCKOUT) to arrange a spurious letter from the Boak-Con hotel in Blackpool, saying to a Mr H.Rosenblum: "Sorry, full up." Vindictive glee was heard from both Operatives; stroking his beard (or hers—we give no clues to identity), No.2 added "And if he still comes, there are three piers to throw him off."

Tut-tut.

Addendum to Editorial: It seems that Richard Avery OLF (of little fame) is none other than Edmund Cooper. Does that alter Kov's comments in any way?

Of course not.

* * * * *

"In my daydream College for Bards ...the library would contain no books of literary criticism, and the only critical exercise required of stu-
dents would be the writing of parodies."

(W.H.Auden)

////////////////////////////////////
TWO GOLDEN MINUTES WITH IAN WATSON
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Scene: The King's Arms, Oxford.

"This is Ian Watson."

We advanced, bowing five times, and introduced Hazel, soon to be President of the Oxford SF group.

"This is Hazel," we said. "She's an Egyptologist."

Ian stood silent, a moustachioed aristocrat; amused, perhaps a little contemptuous. Who could say?

There was a pause. Then, he spoke.

"Cartouche," he said, "is the best form of birth control."

When Hazel, stunned and catal-
eptic, had been led away, we return-
ed to the attack, heedless of Ian's air of having in reserve a convers-
ational megadeath potential. He launched into an account of his vasectomy—"Surrounded by dark faces...Surgeon with something dangle-
ling from his forceps like a bit of spaghetti bolognese..."

Presently (we know not how) the subject of pseudonyms arose.

"Chris Priest," we recollected, "mentioned writing a lot of books under a pseudonym. He was a bit retic-
ent about what sort of books."

Ian, with great emphasis:

"Soft Porn."

"Oh."

"You can't make a living just writing SF."

Pouncing: "Then what about you? Do you..."

Ian (smug): "I write hard porn."

We retreated in disorder, dismay, etc., etc.

* * * * *

"Et cetera, et cetera. O curse,
That is the flattest line in
English verse."
(Auden, again)

* * * * *



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LITTE R

(18)

Editorial collaboration, I'm coming to think, is even trickier than authorial: the overlaps can be greater. Kevin veils himself in more literit pretensions than I; thus I'm leaving him to explain (read "invent") our Basic Policy and Critical Standards. This column is quite irrelevant.

Letters to the condemned cell:-

Rob Holdstock: "The fact of your spectacular arrest was known to me. Also the reason, but a reason shrouded in brevity: you tried to blow up Oxford. The impression I get is that you and three others tried to set off some giga-fireworks in public places and got caught lighting a fuse on one. Such rumours will build in volume until, unless you clarify for my big nose to stop twitching, I'll begin to believe that MI6 uncovered you building a fusion bomb beneath Trinity College (and muttering: this'll bring Malsenn to the public eye, this will!)

"Bit daft wasn't it, setting off explosions? Bloody oxford ((sic)) students, got as much brains as..."

Ken Bulmer: "I heard some vague story about the Oxford group's leaders being committed to the Tower for some lese majeste or similar offence... glad to know you or whoever it was saw daylight again..."

Julie Davis: "Thank you for sending us your science fiction short story. After due consideration we regret to inform you that we have not found it suitable for the magazine..."

---Not to mention verbal good wishes from Chris Priest, the remaining members of Pieria and OUSFG, and others too numerous to mention.

What happened? Now it can be told. On June 1st 1974, I and the insidious Demrot (Dobson) hung a couple of fireworks out of a window at Brasenose--- Aula Regia et Coll. Aeni Nasi, Oxon.--- to enliven the boring ball being held there. Commercial fireworks, look you:

maroons, 30p each over the counter. Let's change gear.

So---0100, bang! Satisfactory noise. Little alarm, but the damn thing breaks a window. As most college staff laugh their heads off, paranoid porter rings ambulance, fire-brigade, police. Firemen leave in annoyance; police pause to retrieve firework remains and do ditto. Ball continues without pause. Curtain.

2½ months elapse before second act.

Multiple bangs in Oxford! Fireworks again, but big ones, 60p over the counter. Much breakage of windows. Police machine grinds gears and surges backward. Five arrests within the week: three for the later events, plus me and Demrot. "Realise it was only a prank," oozes superintendent, as he makes charges: criminal damage, endangering life, etc. Wonderful fireworks, fun for young and old. Special charge for Demrot---possession of timing device. Throw away your alarm-clock before it's too late. Cells---all night. Magistrates. £600 bail. Exeunt.

Evidence released. Brasenose looks undamaged in photos---taken after repairs, after arrests. Others are Mike Skelding and one Moore---infrequent OUSFG attendees---also someone called Grainger. Much muttering from Demrot & I.

September. Magistrates again. Endangering life? no case to answer dammit. This submission rejected. Great things ahead, lads.

October... Crown Court, the day before Novacon! Oppressive panelled place. "Not guilty" from all. Adjourned: sorrows drowned at con.

December: here we go at last. Endless preliminaries. Prosecution nasty & Skelding & Co, moderate to us. Five defence counsel---great confusion. Jury all-male: what became of Women's Lib? Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Moore reads Kierkegaard in cell; should be Nietzsche, says Skelding. Thursday. We tour "bombsites", all now repaired. Police car; Judge and clerks in Jag; jury squashed in minibus-for-10; accused and screws comfortable in ditto; coachload of barristers follows. Police clear roads, wonderful organisation, what was that about a fuel crisis?

prosecution point of "Glass driven to ceiling" turns out to be peeling paint. General hilarity. Back to court—end of Crown case. Plea—regaining. "Guilty to breaking windows" say Demrot and I grudgingly. "Endangering life" charges dropped—others stand. I am out until sentencing. Rejoicing, I head for Meria (Saturday).

Four days more. Demrot cleared. Possession, others found guilty. Hilarity fades... Finally: all in black. Silent as death. Mike gets 10 years; Grainger six months; more a £300 fine; us, £25 each.

Out into the light: mid-afternoon, pubs closed... always are, when you need them.

Moral? You choose one.

Letters from the condemned cell.

Mike Skelding:-

"...Oddly enough, this place (H.M. Prison, Ashwell)) is fairly thickly populated by 'defrocked' accountants, not to mention solicitors, town councillors etc. etc. makes a change from the rapists, armed robbers and even murderers at Oxford! (The gaol, not the University)

"...For the time being I earn my crust of bread by working as a farm labourer for 95p per week (not at all bad by prison standards). I have acquired such diverse skills as tractor driving, milking cows and castrating pigs. Except in the unlikely event of my meeting Twill* in later life, I fear that these accomplishments will be of little value, entertaining though they are.

"...It costs £2.62 a week to feed me, and about £3.60 for a prison dog...

"Instead of cells, we at Ashwell sleep in 25-man billets. One does have access to a loo at all hours of the night, which is a significant advantage, but on the other hand, reading and writing are a little difficult when one has to compete with twenty-odd other blokes and radio 1!"

I believed to refer to a member of the Oxford SF Group.

"...I only wish one could find a transcript of what went on in the jury-room! It probably consisted largely of grunts and squeaks broken only by a pause when the attendant brought in another bunch of bananas and they peeled them with their feet."

"...Last week I took an exam in agriculture; what use this will be to me, even if I pass, I fail to see, but it involved a day out in an agricultural college (we were allowed to wear civilian clothes for the outing)...

"The crunch came when they asked me to catch a calf in a pen. Now I hadn't a clue how to do this, and the calf, no doubt sensing this, decided from the start to make it clear that its participation in the forthcoming event was to be on a fairly non-voluntary basis...

"First, I grabbed hold of an ear (one of the calf's, that is) but the calf then dashed between my legs, and I narrowly avoided a rather spectacular somersault. Next I tried picking it up, but collected a kick in the crutch for my pains, and was on the point of despair when I remembered a little of my OTC unarmed combat. Eventually I got the little bugger in a sort of headlock, stuck the finger and thumb of my free hand into his nostrils and dragged him across to the rail! When the examiner had stopped laughing he pronounced the test at an end..."

"In the fullness of time, if I refrain from annoying the management, I can get into a single room in a recently built block... In the meantime I am working on the construction of a black hole, in which I shall no doubt be able to obtain privacy. (The only problem is where to keep it; if I don't take care it'll start sucking in passing cars or something.)

"Anyway Dave, thanks once again for writing and allow me to wish you, Hazel and the AWRE computer a very happy life together. (Seems a bloody unnatural relationship to me, sniff, sniff, but then I always was a bit old-fashioned; after all, women are all right, but they're nothing like the real thing.)"

DRINKJIS. No room to editorialise: I'll let it speak for itself, or grunt, or remain silent—it'll depend on the reader. That's all. You may go now.

—DAVE LANGFORD.

REVIEWS

DHALGREN by Samuel R. Delany
(Bantam \$1.95; Corgi 75p; 879pp)
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Since the publication of his last novel, NOVA, in 1968, Delany has had the time (even allowing for teaching CLARION and editing QUARK) to write perhaps five or six novels; instead he has written DHALGREN, which is five or six novels in terms of length, but much more than that in terms of complexity. Make no mistake, this is an exceptionally difficult book, compared with which such things as BABEL-17 and THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION are childishly simple. (Faced with a complex novel, any reviewer can do one of two things: he can re-read it several times until he understands it, or he can set down his first impressions. As DHALGREN took me a solid week to read through once, here are my first impressions.)

DHALGREN is set in Bellona, USA, "one of the half-dozen largest cities in America", in the year 1975. It is a city which has suffered some sort of unspecified calamity or collapse, a short while (a few months, perhaps) earlier, transforming it into a very odd place indeed. There has been some damage to property; fires still burn (though not always in the same places); the sky is hidden behind clouds, which make the time of day uncertain; most of the original inhabitants have left and some young people have entered, setting up communes; no direct communication is possible between Bellona and the outside world—radio and TV signals do not penetrate; the remainder of the US has apparently almost forgotten its existence.

Into this "autumnal city", this "city at the end of time", comes the novel's protagonist, a young man—aged 27 but looking much younger, half American Indian, one foot sandalled, the other bare—who does not know his own name. Slowly he learns about Bellona. (He doesn't succeed in under-

standing it; the city is an organism, incomprehensible, ever-changing; one cannot hope to understand it, merely to coexist with it.) He meets the peculiar characters who live there, becomes acquainted with the social structure. Although Bellona is large its population is tiny: everybody knows everybody, and well-defined groups exist. A peaceful hippie community lives in the park under the informal leadership of John and Milly. There are various "nests" of scorpions—bikeless but clearly evolved from Hell's Angels—led by Nightmare and the Dragon Lady. Small groups of the respectable middle-class—like the Richards family—try to live and behave as if Bellona is a normal city. In the district known as Jackson are the remnants of the indigenous negro population. In a mansion overlooking the city lives Roger Calkins, millionaire proprietor of the eccentric Bellona Times newspaper, who gathers high society about him (including luminaries imported from the world outside) in order to observe the amusing struggles for survival of the city's inhabitants. Besides these groups there are certain individuals such as Tak (sado-masochistic aesthete), Bunny (male dancer in a bar) and the Reverend Amy, who add to the richness and variety of Bellona's human scenery.

Delany's young protagonist starts with nothing. He acquires protection (a length of fine chain hung with small pieces of glass, which is for winding round one's body), a weapon (an orchid—a wrist-fastening basket of knives) and a name ("the Kid"). He finds himself a girlfriend and a boyfriend. He writes a series of poems (he's never written poetry before) about Bellona. Eventually he becomes the leader of the city's scorpions, a semi-legendary figure.

DHALGREN is the story of "the Kid" and Bellona—of the effect each has on the other. At the same time it is a great deal more than this. It is a study of creative genius, of the relation between character and environment, of leadership. It contains as much autobiography and discussion of language as the author's long two-part article in recent issues of FOUNDATION. Not least, it contains longer and more explicit descriptions of love-making (of various

kinds) than anything else in SF.

But is *DEALGREN* SF? It contains a couple of gadgets which, as far as I know, do not yet exist, but these are of no great significance; the answer to the question lies in the degree of objectivity present in the Kid's observations of Bellona. If the fires in the city do start and stop spontaneously, if the warehouses do somehow refill themselves with food stocks, if there are sometimes two moons overhead, and if the sun is big enough for its disc to cover half the sky, then *DEALGREN* is SF. But if these can be explained away as the Kid's mental fantasies, the SF contents is reduced. The Kid "loses" hours and days without noticing. He sees some things which cannot exist and which those with him do not see. Having constructed the Kid's character out of blocks of genius, rationality and exactness of observation, Delany allows cancers of brutality and impetuosity to grow within, and then covers the result with a thin crust of doubt. Nowhere is Delany willing to commit himself as to the exact nature of the peculiar happenings in Bellona. To the contrary, he deliberately presents the book's final section in the form of an undated diary—incomplete, out of order, with marginal notes and corrections—to further increase the element of doubt. Perhaps the whole thing is intended to be an LSD-influenced view of the real world. Perhaps it is schizophrenia seen from the inside.

Language has always been Delany's favourite toy. He delights in forming new word constructions, in dreaming up new similes and metaphors; he avoids clichés as though they were mad dogs. *DEALGREN* contains some of the finest, most innovative prose ever to come from Delany. It also contains chunks which are boring, trite or simply unintelligible. The overall result is to make the book exciting to read but very slow going. Absent are the familiar hackneyed sentences which riddle most fiction. Instead one must pick one's way through unique phrases and unusual word use, often re-reading sentences several times over to grasp their

meaning.

How is it possible to sum up a book of such length, of such variations in theme and quality, in a few words? I can say that *DEALGREN* is inner-space SF seen through poetry-tainted lenses, which sounds clever, is succinct and is even true, but that tells the prospective reader little of what to expect. Charlie Brown, in *LOCUS*, says that the in-crowd question throughout US fandom in Spring '75 was: "And how far did you get through *DEALGREN* before giving up?" As one who has read the entire novel, I must admit that the journey is preferable to the arrival: I was disappointed by the way in which Delany resolves his sketchy plot without explaining anything. Despite this, there is so much sheer enjoyment in *DEALGREN* that anyone who feels there should be more depth to SF than is provided by Tully Zetford is recommended to try Delany's flawed masterpiece. And as you struggle to make some sense out of the Kid's adventures in surrealistic Bellona, remember this: one cannot spend a week in the company of a literary genius without a little bit rubbing off.

* * * * *

HARD TO BE A GOD by Arkadi and Boris Strugatski

(Eyre Methuen h.c. £3.35; 219pp)

Reviewed by Kevin Smith

The story is set on an alien planet on which an Earthlike people have attained a feudal society very similar to that of medieval Earth. The ruling class, the "noble dons", roam about living a life of indolent and unwashed ease, expecting and receiving complete subservience from the poverty-stricken, unwashed peasants and the emergent middle-class of shopkeepers and merchants, both unwashed also.

This is revealed to us through the first person we meet, the viewpoint character, Runata. In one of the most skilful scene-setting chapters I have had the pleasure to read, the main characters and the basic problems are neatly set into a finely drawn background. Briefly the situation is as follows:

Don Runata is one of a number of Russian historians living in the society and passively observing its development to test the Basis theory of

history. Rumata (Anton to his friends in Russia) believes that something is going wrong. The Grey Militia formed of the middle class and led by Don Reba are persecuting the intelligentsia—poets, doctors, anyone who can read and write—to death. According to the Basis Theory this organised persecution has come too soon, but Rumata's superior Don Kondor does not recognise the organisation and will not act, insisting that the policy of non-intervention be obeyed. Don Reba has captured a leading intellectual, Budach, and Rumata is going to deal with the situation, it being in his area of observation.

The skill of the authors in conveying this information, and more, to the reader lies in the devices they have chosen. Any information of this sort has to be conveyed by some device and all too often in sf the device chosen is the indigestible lump, the sort of thing that begins "Twenty years ago the ships of the Federation..." and lectures for three or four pages. The Strugatski brothers use the reflections and conversations of Rumata in a natural manner. He does not sit around thinking "Twenty years ago the ships of the Federation..." or say "Gosh, professor. What is this cunning thermocouple-like gadget attached to the ship's sensor banks?" ("A thermocouple, son.")—as subtle writers who have advanced beyond the indigestible lump might do. The thoughts are aggressive, irritated, frustrated, real; they reveal as much about Rumata as about the background. The Grey Militia are introduced by a confrontation with two militiamen, thus showing the subservience of the commoners to the aristocracy, the feelings of Rumata about the Grey Militia, and the contrast of Rumata the noble don with Anton-Rumata the historian. To the noble don the Grey Militia are beneath contempt; to the historian they are savage brutes.

That Rumata is a Russian historian is revealed by a meeting and argument with other historians. It's a simple device, but that is the strength of the first chapter, simplicity. The authors waste no time by leading the reader up any of several possible

garden paths to give him (and us) a bit of surprise at the end of it. There is absolutely no need. The wealth of information is sufficient in itself.

The story progresses through various court intrigues and bloody power struggles in a fairly straightforward manner which would not be enough to sustain a novel if that were all there were. Here, however, the action is of minor importance and the plot is a vehicle for social comment and character study.

The character of Rumata is well developed through the course of the novel. The harshness forced upon him by the society is contrasted by the warmth of his relationship with his gentle native mistress, Kyra, whom he regards as the only human on a beastly brutish planet. He also faces the conflict of involvement. He desperately wants to help the oppressed peasants, but he realises that there is little he could do, and historians must not become involved. This is the first conflict that makes it hard to be a god.

This aspect of his internal conflict is inseparable from the sociological aspect of the novel. The Basis Theory is never explicitly stated, but is pretty evidently the Marxist view of history. The aristocrats are never condemned, they are merely playing their part in history. Rumata's big worry is the Grey Militia, which is accurately described as fascist. The problem is that they have organised too soon and are stamping out the intelligent, the hope of the future for all men, before the peasants can grasp the idea of united action against their oppressors. "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains" is a concept beyond their comprehension. This is why Rumata wants to act on their behalf, and why he knows it would do no good. The point is hammered home by Arata, a native of the planet and a revolutionary ahead of his time, who always fails in his revolutions because the peasants cannot unite for longer than it takes to achieve a single short sighted objective.

Unfortunately, this is where the authors do tend to lecture. Arata is brought in near the end for no other

reason than to emphasise why it is hard to be a god. Also, in chapter 6, we have a lecture on the necessity of intellectuals, especially artists. Men in power who resist intelligence will be destroyed by cleverer rivals. Men in power who make concessions will be digging their own graves, due to the intellectualisation of all society. The result will be a society freed of all class distinctions and the oppression of man. It's a perfect paraphrase of Marxism.

The end of chapter 8 is a discussion between the rescued Budach and Rumata in which Budach plays the role of suppliant to the Supreme Power, begging for changes to improve the lot of all mankind, and Rumata takes the role of God, telling why the changes are not possible. But part way through the conversation the role playing ceases; Budach talks to Rumata as if to God Himself, and Rumata accepts the exaltation. Why it is hard to be a God is again shown in Rumata's answers, and to Budach's last request, 'to change the nature of man, Rumata replies: "My heart is heavy with sorrow, but this is not within my power."—a full acknowledgement of Godhead.

The final chapter brings Rumata's internal conflict to a culmination, managing to echo on the way Hamlet's indecision, as when Don Kondor tells him he should have acted and not conferred. The resolution of the conflict is achieved only by the death of Kyra at the hands of a mob storming Rumata's house. Finally, he acts.

But that isn't all. I have so far omitted mention of the prologue. This is an incident from Anton's childhood which parallels the main story. I'm not sure that it is really necessary, except perhaps to provide a balance for the epilogue. It doesn't help in the understanding of the story.

The epilogue tells what happened at the end, and from a different viewpoint. This is really the first stylistic lapse, but it is to a certain extent justified. The story has come to an end and the epilogue needs to

be as short as possible so as not to deflate the ending. To make it short another viewpoint is essential. Also, the three children present in the prologue appear again in the epilogue, rounding the work off.

Certainly this is a very good novel. The background is real, perhaps because it is so close to that of earth centuries ago, and more believable than most supposed semi-barbaric societies in sf. The characters, especially Rumata, and the sociology combine with sufficient depth to sustain the novel despite the simple plot.

However, this is not a great novel. The originality of thought required for a great novel is lacking, since the sociology and history are so obviously those of Marx and the society is taken almost directly from earth. A factor that makes this book good unfortunately prevents it being better. Absence of greatness should not deter the reader, though. Of the books published in 1975 only a few will better it.

* * * * *

HELLO SUMMER, GOODBYE by Michael Coney
(Gollancz h.c. £2.60; 221pp)
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

In this unpleasant and largely unoriginal offering, Michael Coney spends 190 pages being nauseatingly mudlin over the sky seaside antics of a bunch of scarcely pubescent teenagers. The book's narrator and his girlfriend are finally allowed to consummate their virginal love, but this is described in such a cliched and totally unbelievable manner that one can only assume that the author has no personal experience on which to draw. At this point Michael Coney effectively drops trite teen-age love as the book's major theme (perhaps he, too, could stand the boredom no longer) by introducing a climatic change which parts the lovers and threatens most of the book's characters with death by freezing for the final thirty pages, the outcome of which is left unresolved.

The setting for all this is an Earth-type planet inhabited by humanoid aliens. As Michael Coney says in a prefatory note, he has "assumed their

civilisation to be at a stage of development approximate to our year 1875 although, due to the special nature of their planet, there are significant differences between their civilisation and ours." (The morality and class-consciousness of Victorian England have been transplanted virtually intact.) He also says that he has assumed his humanoids "to be subject to human emotions and frailties", which means that he has chickened out of creating and describing a properly alien ethos and has imbued his characters instead with the most hackneyed of twentieth century behavioural quirks. Thus any intended alienness or originality is submerged beneath the massed hordes of stock characters (irascible father, vague mother, gnarled old fisherman, double-talking government administrator, shy and blushing teen-aged girl, and the rest) who trample across the book's fairly alien background. The narrator (named Drove) is a rude and naive youth, unlikely to attract any reader's sympathy. The only believable person in the book is Ribbon, a sharp-tongued girl (and friend of Drove's sweetheart---the improbably named Browneyes) who matures during the course of the action, becoming more pleasant and approachable. Her relationship with Drove, which remains one of friendship not all that far removed from love, is sensitively developed.

The most interesting and simultaneously the most infuriating aspect of this novel is the alienness of its planetary background: it is the most interesting because the author has thought up some fairly original ideas, the most infuriating because he has left them ragged and undeveloped. In particular there are the lorin, hirsute monkey-like creatures which are generally treated as animals (or negro slaves, perhaps) but are known to have telepathic powers and to be highly skilled at controlling the planet's daught-animals. I would have much preferred the book to concentrate on the lorin (which only make three brief appearances) rather than on its rather ridiculous humanoids. Similar walk-on parts are played by ice-devils and sentient

flowers. A major natural phenomenon which is employed in the plot but never properly exploited is the grume---a curious summer increase in the specific gravity of the sea, which becomes almost viscous enough to walk on. Yet another aspect of life on the planet which is mentioned and then forgotten is mutation, induced by the sun's radiation. A third arm or extra fingers are referred to as commonplace amongst outdoor workers. Surely this could be expected to produce, over several generations, a vast range of physical and mental freaks---most of them subnormal---leading to a social structure very different from that which to author imposes upon his creations. The point I am trying to make here is that the book's planetary background is hideously inconsistent (though composed of some excellent ingredients) because Michael Coney has not taken the trouble to think out the implications of any of the differences between his construction and Earth in 1875. It is a shoddy piece of work.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of HELLO SUMMER, GOODBYE is that it is published as adult SF by this country's most respected and discriminating publisher of hardcover SF---Victor Gollancz Ltd. If the novel were classified as a juvenile (the naive sex scene notwithstanding) then I would be willing to overlook some of its shortcomings, but when aimed at an adult readership it is a poor book by a poor author.

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KEV'S LIGHTNING REVIEWS---

THE GODWHALE by T.J.Bass
(Eyre Methuen h.c.; 306pp)

This was a Hugo nominee? I don't see it.

The Godwhale is a novel without direction. At no time did I feel that we, the story and I, were going anywhere special. We seemed merely to be ambling along enjoying the countryside and when we'd finished our stroll I wasn't sure that we'd really arrived anywhere. Incidents are all that comprise the plot of this book; it is very disjointed and there is no-one with whom to identify. Characters appear as if to take the lead, but seem afraid to sustain the performance; and someone else takes over for a while.

It is a pity that poor construction should be allowed to spoil some imaginative description and lively action. However, I've never come across a book with so much medical detail so lovingly described. I couldn't shake the impression that the writer is a part-time surgeon.

Or perhaps a surgeon who's a part-time writer.

THE WRONG END OF TIME by John Brunner (Eyre Methuen h.c.; 185pp)

This is yet another Brunner Extrapolation. After taking us brilliant through over-population and pollution and less well through civil violence, he now presents us with National Paranoia and the Return of Isolationism in the USA. This is not nearly as good a book as Stand on Zanzibar, however. Some of the neat phraseology and clever little insights are there as before, but the story is much weaker and the "one man who knows" seems to know less. Danty Ward is a lesser character than the incomparable Chad Milligan.

It's quite an enjoyable read, as one expects from Brunner, but there's no real depth to it.

10,000 LIGHT YEARS FROM HOME

by James Tiptree Jr.

(Eyre Methuen h.c.; 312pp)

In his introduction to this collection Harry Harrison says that he found the stories a "pleasure to read". I quite agree; the stories are good. All of them, even the lighthearted ones, are about something; they are not just a series of events cleverly structured by an author into the form we call a story. In trying always to tell us something, however, Tiptree falls down occasionally. He tends to be heavy-handed in his approach and his messages sometimes land with a dull thud. This blunt instrument technique is most obvious in the opening story, where the essence of it is told to us, really told to us, by one of the characters. It is again obvious in "Mama come home" and "Help", which use the same characters. These entertain extremely well while showing us the "other side" of rape and of fundamentalist missionaries at work. Thing is, the "other side" tends to support conclusions arrived at by most thinking persons rather

than revealing something fresh and dramatic about humanity, which is what literature ought to be doing.

It is certainly what Tiptree ought to be doing, for he has the class to be a very good writer. In "Faithful to thee, Terra, in our fashion", for example, he manufactures a tragedy the enormity of which is beyond comprehension—the self-destruction of Earth—and makes you feel the aftermath of that tragedy with the protagonist. At the same time he has a lively, well-constructed story going on, which could quite easily stand on its own. That is class.

If he can sharpen and refine his blunt instrument, and shorten his titles (I think "The man who walked home" works a lot better than "And I awoke and found me here on the cold hill's side", for instance) we will have some excellent reading in store. I hope someone can tell me that we have already.

((We have. "Warm Worlds and Otherwise", Ballantine 1975. —Dave))

EXTRO by Alfred Bester.

(Eyre Methuen h.c.; 218pp)

His new novel, the cover proudly proclaims, and about time too. The twenty-odd years since Tiger! Tiger! have dimmed his talent not at all. Extro is a very readable book; the pace is fast, the people wild and you don't mind the hero's lecturing on the future world background. There are flaws, obviously, but they are curious ones. Some of the events happen too quickly and without apparent good reason, and the people say some peculiar things; the feeling is one of not-quite-rightness. But then the whirlwind narrative sweeps you on again and the flaws don't seem to matter.

Extro is not up to the standard of The Demolished Man or Tiger! Tiger!, but it is damn good.

(An event like a new Bester novel should not be dismissed in as few words as this, but I thought it better to mention it briefly than to ignore it altogether. There are enough long reviews already. More next time, I hope.)

* * * * *

A general point about the first five Eyre Methuen SF books: with three good ones and two reasonable they have made a fair start. Obviously they are

playing safe, with such Names as Bester and Brunner; but Hard to be a God, being Russian, has to be considered experimental.

Two niggles: I expect "colour" to have a "u" in it, and expect straight margins on both sides of a printed page. To find the "u" gone is annoying, and to see a jagged edge on the right-hand side makes the book feel inferior; this, from a British publisher, irritates me.

I am glad Eyre Mathuen have published SF; I wish them success enough with it to publish more, including, may we hope, some new writers.

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THE WOUNDED PLANET

ed. Roger Elwood & Virginia Kidd
(Bantam; 235pp)

reviewed by Liese Hoare

If the Trades Descriptions Act applied to the blurbs on book-covers as it does to the list of ingredients on a packet of food, then in no way could this book proclaim itself "a collection of astonishing science-fiction stories about the ecological crisis".

I was very disappointed with this anthology. One pictures Elwood saying to himself, "Why can't I do something like Dangerous Visions?"; and to the writing world, "I'm going to do a collection of stories about the ecological crisis"; and the writing world saying, "I've got this old story here that might do for Elwood. It's not about the ecological crisis but about after-the-bomb/after the bacteriological war/what may happen if we carry on even worse than now/the future/nothing in particular but I can change a few words to fit it to the theme near enough... etc."

In the majority of contributions the ecological crisis theme is merely incidental; none serves what I presume was Elwood and Kidd's aim: a warning.

The introduction by Frank Herbert was repetitious in that he not only said nothing new but did not even say it in a new way, leaving a feeling of pages of clichés. However, upon reading the rest, the intro stands out as one of the better parts of the book---and all Herbert says

is valid.

The first story concerns an environmental conference: a setting I find contrived. Do environmentalists really sit on window-sills chain-smoking, dropping fag-ash onto the street below and replying to the offer of an ashtray: "No thanks, I haven't filled this one yet"?

Norton and Zebrowski offer stories that just stretch themselves into the category; many of the other stories do not, without being such that their presence might be excused through sheer brilliance. Snyder's "Smokey the Bear Sutra" is so bad that the author did not even bother to copyright it...no-one could possibly want to claim ownership of that.

The Nevilles' story is a collection of anecdotal tales, each of a few paragraphs, reflecting a world of pollution-contamination paranoia. I rather like the one about the dentist who refused to admit patients with amalgam fillings for fear of acquiring mercury poisoning.

Several authors from whom one expects good work turned in mediocre stuff: Katherine Maclean, Malzberg and Anderson are guilty of this.

The book does have two redeeming features. The first, "Scorner's Seat", is pure Lafferty; no fan of his will be disappointed by this unusual account of life in the sewers of tomorrow, and of how to prevent the recurrence of the cause of the past's downfall: overpopulation. And Silverberg presents what would have been a better introduction, giving a witty word-painting of the irresponsible damage we are doing to this planet.

I can recommend these last two contributions, but suggest that you seek them in better surroundings than the pages that press on either side of them here.

Books like this, good or bad, will do nothing to help the environment; not until the men in power---as well as those SF converts to whom alone the book preaches---extend their gaze beyond the next election into the next century.

* * * * *

AFTERTHOUGHTS

(27)

For reasons beyond our control (you should pardon the cliché) some of the sheets in this issue were duped on the wrong size of paper. This was a public-service announcement to set minds at rest regarding oddities---eg. fugitive margins---caused by this error.

WHY YOU RECEIVED DRILKJIS

You should be able to work it out quite easily. It may be that we love you, or despise you, or wish to use you for our ruthless ends; if none of these, then perhaps you paid money, real money? Should you be reading a copy which isn't yours, shame on you: write off for your own at once. You have been warned.

And yes, there will be a DRILKJIS 2, hopefully more punctual than the present issue.

Irate reader: "This zine just doesn't hold water."

Suave editor: "Then we'll put in a plug---"

SFINX 11, the latest number of Britain's longest-running amateur ficzine, is now available. Orders (20p plus postage) to: Andrew Chapman, Oriel College, Oxford.

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Thanks for help with collation to Jon, Heather and Hazel.

"All right, Dave, that's enough. Let's print it now."

"Wait, you fool! I haven't yet told them that I'm marrying Hazel in June---"

"It won't interest them."

"And what about my story in New Writings? Hey---gerroff Kev---Hey, all you people out there, buy New Writings 27 before---nnng---"

"Hello. This is Kevin. Dave's a little indisposed just now; so I'll say goodbye until---"

"Where am I? Wha---nnng."

"Until DRILKJIS 2. Bye-bye."

