



SF COMMENTARY 11

I thought it would be dead easy. I would not have taken the job otherwise. Just copy out John Bangsund's ballot form and list of rules from last year, change a couple of rules slightly to give the prozines a chance, scrap the nomination pre-ballot so that people will not be influenced in their votes, print 500 Ditmar forms, and....

RESULTS: SECOND AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS  
(The 1970 "DITMAR AWARDS" given at the 9th Australian Science Fiction convention, held at the Capri Theatre, Murrumbidgee, Victoria over the Easter weekend 1970)

The Ditmar Award, by a huge landslide, went to "DANCING GERONTIUS", written by Lee Harding, and published in VISION OF TOMORROW. It scored 89 points. (The ballot form was made out from 1 to 4; No 1 on each ballot form received 5 points, No 2 received 3 points, and so on.)



rulers faced with a critical overpopulation problem. American writers on the subject (such as Sydney van Scyoc in A VISIT TO CLEVELAND GENERAL) put this idea in the same pigeon-hole as Socialized Medicine and regard it as horrifying. Lee Harding lends a bit of empathy and wit to both parties in this macabre deal in his story DANCING GERONTIUS. The hospital staff prepare old Berenson for "Year Day". The old man's intelligence and senses have withered away to almost nothing:

One by one he felt the tiny needles nose their way under his skin and squirt their marvellous little juices into his blood.

There had been a time - long ago, it now seemed - when he had feared this gentle rupture of his flesh; but he had since grown accustomed to the ritual and thankful for the benefits the injections brought to his aged body.

At first the prospect of awareness horrified him as "the narrow room snapped cruelly into focus for the first time in years".

The rest of the story tracks Berenson's spirit as it uncurls from the mists of his "normal" old age. The hospital staff provide the drugs that enable their patients to enjoy a "last fling". Berenson's mind longs to rest in oblivion but he begins to enjoy himself as he meets his fellow patients. Frenzied music breaks through the last barriers to stop full involvement; the author orchestrates all the impressions to burst through the old figure's brain during his last splendid moments:

The music softened in preparation for the orgiastic ~~oda~~. The rhythm became broader and more amenable to clumsy feet. Slowly the drunken mob around the dais began to beat out the time of the Chiaroscuro with their feeble feet. The music had at last possessed them.

And he led them. Sweeping and gliding now like a bird caged in an old man's body, now striking and elemental as he hammered out the fierce tattoo of the finale on the bare wooden floor. Dancing as he had never danced before he felt that he had mastered for all time the dark lady of his dreams, and even while his feet hammered at the music he found time to smile.

A remarkable experience, intensely felt. The story could have been a great deal better of course, as it was written before the current Harding boom. Explanations are offered where they are superfluous; compact though it is, the story is still probably far too long. But it certainly stands out in any year.

As you may have realized, Jack Wodhams<sup>\*\* \*\*</sup> was a bit unlucky this year. He scored very well in all the placings except the top one. Had he been at the Convention, I just may have reached into my own pocket and given a special Committee Award for Consistently Best Australian Writer, or some such. But he wasn't, and I didn't. However, Jack definitely does hold a unique place in Australian science fiction as our first fully professional s f writer. Lee Harding and David Boutland have now joined him as full-time pros, but David still writes very little science fiction. Robert Bowden was the most interesting phenomenon of the year; still (so I'm told) 17 years old, he has already sold 2 stories to VISION OF TOMORROW. Let's hope VISION finds many more new Australian and English writers.

For the record, my own choices in this section were: 1. SPLIT PERSONALITY. 2. ANCHOR MAN. 3. DANCING GERONTIUS. 4. TRY AGAIN.

BEST INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION of any length, or Collection

The Ditmar Award in this section was given to "COSMICOMICS", a novel/short story collection by Italo Calvino. This book scored 45 points, and the British edition is published by Jonathan Cape.

The runners-up in this section were:

2	(39 points)	The Left Hand of Darkness (Ursula K Le Guin) (Ace Books)
3	(30 points)	Bug Jack Barron (Norman Spinrad) (Avon Books)
4	(24 points)	Stand on Zanzibar (John Brunner) (MacDonald)
5	(8 points)	Pavane (Keith Roberts) (Ace Books)
5	(8 points)	Captive Universe (Harry Harrison) (Berkley Books)
7	(7 points)	Nightwings (Robert Silverberg) (Ballantine Books)
8	(5 points)	Emphyrio (Jack Vance) (AMAZING)
8	(5 points)	A Short and Happy Life (Joanna Russ) (F&SF)
8	(5 points)	The Infinity Sense (Verge Foray) (ANALOG)
8	(5 points)	Dune Messiah (Frank Herbert) (GALAXY)
8	(5 points)	Since the Assassination (Brian W Aldiss) (INTANGIBLES INC - Faber)
13	(3 points)	The Patient (Hoko Norris) (from ANALOG)
13	(3 points)	The Tuvela (James Schmitz) (ANALOG)
13	(3 points)	Ubik (Philip K Dick) (Doubleday)
16	(2 points)	Timescoop (John Brunner) (Dell)
16	(2 points)	The Soft Predicament (Brian W Aldiss)
16	(2 points)	And Comfort to the Enemy (Stanley Schmidt) (ANALOG)
16	(2 points)	Casablanca (Thomas M Disch) (NEW WORLDS)
21	(1 point)	Galactic Pothealer (Philip Dick) (Berkley)
21	(1 point)	Trap (Christopher Anvil) (ANALOG)
21	(1 point)	The Last Hurrah of the Golden Horde (Norman Spinrad) (NEW WORLDS)

COSMICOMICS details the extraordinary adventures of Qfwfq, eternal sufferer under the dicta of pompous statements of unbedazzled scientists. Shaking his equations like a slightly mildewed magic wand, Calvino's scientist intones at the beginning of THE FORM OF SPACE:

'The equations of the gravitational field which relate the curve of space to the distribution of matter are already becoming common knowledge.'

To which Qfwfq supplies the meaning behind the meaning:

To fall in the void as I fell: none of you knows what that means.... I'm talking about the time when there wasn't any Earth underneath or anything else solid, not even a celestial body in the distance capable of attracting you into its orbit. You simply fell, indefinitely, for an indefinite length of time.

But this is not the extent of the problem. This poor chap would have had not problems if only he wasn't accompanied by a lady who refused to make the journey any more enjoyable for either of them, and another bloke on the other side of the lady:

Assuming then that one was falling, everyone fell with the same speed and



rate of acceleration; in fact we were always more or less on the same level; I, Ursula H'x, Lieutenant Fenimore. I didn't take my eyes off Ursula H'x: she was very beautiful to see, and in falling she had an easy, relaxed attitude. I hoped I would be able sometimes to catch her eye, but as she fell, Ursula H'x was always intent on filing and polishing her nails or running her comb through her long, smooth hair, and she never glanced toward me. Nor toward Lieutenant Fenimore, I must say, though he did everything he could to attract her attention .... There were no meetings possible among us, because our falls were parallel and the same distance always remained between us. (pages 115 - 116)

You can't get a more hopeless love affair than that! Qfwfq thinks he may meet the lady if he bends the laws of space, or tries to ignore the rules that bind him. After falling through some of the most brilliant prose I have read, the poorest lover of them all must conclude:

We never meet in our constant fall: I, Ursula H'x, Lieutenant Fenimore, and all the others.

We don't meet "the others" in this story, of course - we are the others, and the constant fall through space is both a valid science fictional experience and a universal experience of human love.

All the other stories work on many planes, some tricky, some profound, and all funny. Can you resist a story that starts like this?:

One night I was, as usual, observing the sky with my telescope. I noticed that a sign was hanging from a galaxy a hundred million light-years away. On it was written: I SAW YOU. I made a quick calculation.... Even before I checked my diary to see what I had been doing that day, I was seized by a ghastly presentiment: exactly two hundred million years before, not a day more nor a day less, something had happened to me that I had always tried to hide.

This most universal story-teller tells his adventures within the single point that contained the universe before the Big Bang; he relates the story of the last Dinosaur, ignored by all the New People. And there's not a slab of metal or psychedelic lights anywhere in sight.

My own choices on the ballot-paper were: 1. SINCE THE ASSASSINATION (Aldiss). 2. UBIK (Dick). 3. CASABLANCA (Disch). 4. LAST HURRAH OF THE GOLDEN HORDE (Spinrad).

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BEST INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL SCIENCE FICTION PUBLICATION (including collections of original fiction).

The decisive winner in this section was VISION OF TOMORROW, edited by Philip Harbottle, and founded and published by Sydney-sider Ron E Graham. VISION received 64 points.

The runners-up in this section were:

- 2 (53 points) New Worlds (edited by Michael Moorcock, Langdon Jones, Charles Platt, et. al.)
- 3 (31 points) The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction (edited by Ed Ferman)
- 4 (28 points) Analog Science Fiction-Science Fact (ed. John W Campbell)
- 5 (24 points) Amazing Stories (ed. Ted White; Barry Malzberg)
- 6 (14 points) Worlds of If (ed. Ejler Jakobbson; Frederik Pohl)
- 7 (5 points) New Writings in Science Fiction (ed. John Carnell)
- 8 (4 points) Galaxy (ed. Ejler Jakobbson; Frederik Pohl)
- 9 (3 points) Venture (ed. Ed Ferman)
- 10 (2 points) Fantastic Stories (ed. Barry Malzberg; Ted White).

There's not a great deal I can say about VISION that I haven't said before here in S F COMMENTARY, at two Conventions, and in letters to overseas fans. It is not a great magazine.... yet. But it is already more consistently readable than any of the other "regular" professional magazines, and it certainly has better layout and artwork than any of them. So far the great strength of the magazine has been its conscientious attempt to resurrect magazine science fiction in Britain and the Commonwealth, its willingness to help new writers, its reviews, the Walter Gillings articles... in short, the willingness of both editor and publisher to try out new ideas and not be satisfied with second best.

I'll speak more about this later, but VISION obviously wins on a technicality. Only one issue appeared before the closing date for overseas magazines - September 1969. But as John Foyster pointed out when it became clear that both VISION itself and DANCING GERONTIUS, from December's issue, were the most popular items in the whole ballot, "It's published in Australia". Which it is - have a look at your current copy of the magazine. This also means, incidentally, that VISION Number 4 will be the first issue eligible for next year's ballot.

My own choices in this category were: 1. NEW WORLDS. 2. VISION OF TOMORROW.  
3. AMAZING. 4. ANALOG.

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#### BEST AUSTRALIAN AMATEUR SCIENCE FICTION PUBLICATION ("Fanzine")

The Ditmar in this category was awarded to THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY (affectionately known as JOE, and formerly called EXPLODING MADONNA) edited by John Foyster. This fanzine received 52 points.

The runners-up in this section were:

- 2 (45 points) Scythrop/Australian Science Fiction Review (ed. John Bangsund)
- 3 (39 points) Rataplan : Magazine of the Arts (ed. Leigh Edmonds)
- 4 (33 points) S F Commentary (ed. Bruce Gillespie)
- 5 (17 points) The New Forerunner (ed. Gary Mason)
- 6 (3 points) The Mentor/Eos (ed. Ron Clarke)

Poorly circulated, but more widely read and admired than John Foyster would ever admit, JOE has established itself as the best fanzine of its type in Australia, and probably in the world (although QUARBER MERKUR would almost certainly beat

it on the world scene if only we benighted Australians could read it). John lists Franz Rottensteiner, editor of QUARBER MERKUR, as associate-editor of JOE in JOE Number 3.

To loaf through a pile of exploding madonnas and JOEs (which I am doing now, in between typed words) gives me more than some pleasure. There is "em5second January 1969 issue: the relentlessly quarterly fanzine that is published at weekly intervals" - well, that was in happier times, before John started the third year of his Science degree. Em5 was the Special Samuel R Delany Issue. Originally published for about 30 people (although the circulation rose a bit higher around that time) it appeared before 800+ readers of SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW late in 1969. :::: em6 announced a change of name, and also published Franz Rottensteiner's brilliant article MR BUDRYS AND THE ACTIVE LIFE. Richard E Geis promised to publish this long ago, but there is still no sign of it in SFR. There were also letters from Blish, Dahlskog and Harry Warner Jr. This may explain why I have appeared so rarely in the magazine.

JOE 1 was published officially in July 1969, although I seem to remember that at that time John put it out about three months before the official date. JOE 1 contained that most entertaining article, CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR, chewing out Heinlein and Panshin, or, more precisely, the people who praise those two demi-gods. This article has since appeared in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW - it is rumoured that Franz would find it difficult to enter the US of A should he ever want to do so. The same magazine contained AN APPROACH TO SCIENCE FICTION, by George Turner and John Foyster's scurrilous and accurate review of A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS. :::: There was also a Stanislaw Lem special supplement which accompanied JOE 1. The main article from that, POLAND: SCIENCE FICTION IN THE LINGUISTIC TRAP, appeared in S F C 9. :::: JOE 2 entertained with John Foyster's review of two translations of the poetry of Basho, the PAUL MYRON ANTHONY LINEBARGER BIBLIOGRAPHY, which I will reprint as soon as possible (yes, Paul Stevens - Cordwainer Smith!), and a review of an early Australian s f novel. :::: Why go on? You may already see for yourself how consistently good JOE was during 1969. I tell you this in detail simply because I hope, before the end of the year, to reprint the entire run of em and JOE in the form that John originally published them. They are too good to become very rare collector's items. :::: Incidentally, JOE 3 (January 1970) contains fragments of AN INTERVIEW WITH J G BALLARD by Robert Lightfoot and David Pendleton; STURGEON'S SADISM, by George Turner; ROBOTS IN SCIENCE FICTION, by Stanislaw Lem - a critical article which is at least as good as the one that appeared in SFC 9.

The magazine was (there may be one more issue, but no more) summarized in John Foyster's immortal cry "Wake Up, You Lot!" Amongst other reasons, John published the magazine to start really worthwhile debate on the subject of science fiction. I think he found, as I do, that there are very few people who really want to talk about science fiction. Therein lies the death of JOE and all such efforts.

My own choices in this section were: 1. JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY. 2. S F COMMENTARY. 3. SCYTHROP/AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. 4. RATAPLAN.

#### TEARS, IDLE TEARS

If a few of the results in the Ditmars were surprising to you Out There, you may imagine how surprising they were to those people who attended the presentations on Sunday night, 29th April. You may, if you like, imagine how surprising they were to the Scrutinor and the Committee. Daggors were drawn (figuratively, of



course... I was too busy enjoying THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN to care much anyway). John Bangsund has been sufficiently incensed to issue his own SCYTHROP POLL which has rules strict enough to cut out two, and possibly three of the Ditmar winners. That leaves a pretty poor field to choose from. John begs me not to tell the world (all 150 readers of SFC) how stupid Australian fans are.

But that is precisely the point I wish to make, even if I show how stupid I am myself. That shouldn't be too hard to do. FACTS: 1. 500+ Ditmar ballot forms were printed and distributed throughout Australia. Even if some people did receive two or three copies of the form, this publicity still meant that every fan who has even put his nose through the front door of the Melbourne S F Club or the Sydney S F Foundation, received one of these forms. The closing date was listed as 5pm on the first full day of the Convention.

FACT 2. By 5pm on the first full day of the 9th Australian Science Fiction Convention, I had received 12 ballot forms. A 2.4% return. Only two of these returns had all places in all categories filled out. Mine was one of them. Without looking too glum (I hope) I felt rather desperate. I had just never realized how little Australian s f fans read or cared about science fiction.

What worth have awards based on popular vote, given by 12 people? Little or none, I decided, so when I met Dr Dick Jenssen on the Saturday afternoon I suggested that he call off at least two awards, the Best International S F, and the Fanzine awards. At that time, the eventual winners of the other two categories were clearly in front and never looked like losing, but THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS had 13 points; 2 firsts and a second. 13 points from 120 Convention attendees! What a farce. I had received ballot forms from practically none of the people I would have expected to be eager to vote - eventually I received forms from only two pros.

FACT 3. The ever genial Dr Jenssen looked undismayed, which was good of him, considering that he had paid to have the Ditmar trophies made. "No worries," said he, or words to that effect. I went into town on the Saturday afternoon to see PATTON, disgruntled with people's reactions to the Ditmar and the general listlessness of the Convention up to that point (except for John Foyster's performance on the Saturday morning). When I returned, I was handed a great sheaf of Ditmar forms. Voila! Where I had failed to stir much interest in people, Dick had managed to get some people to vote on something. Never have I been so grateful to one person for one kind deed. (Dick had auctioneered all that afternoon, so he must have been quite busy).

FACT 4. At about 12.30 on Sunday morning I added up the final scores, and found the results that you may read in this magazine. There was one odd thing that I noticed - several ballots looked oddly similar, and most of them voted for a book I had never heard of. Was it possible...? Who had....? Something very odd had happened while I was elsewhere.

In short, certain people who must remain nameless took advantage of the fact that people didn't care much about the Ditmars and/or were extremely stupid. Some people voted exactly the way in which some other people told them to.

John Bangsund wants to know why I did not disallow these ballots. Firstly, because I had no proof that anything was amiss - all ballots were made out by paid up members of the Convention. This was sufficient qualifications for voting. Secondly, if people were as stupid as all that, then they deserved what they got. Thirdly, by very devious methods the Convention voted for what were really the Best selections in each category. In the Best Australian S F and Best

International Prozone section, the selections were grass roots popular votes. Fourthly, much as Italo Calvino and John Foyster may dislike to admit it, the points score in their sections was still not an overwhelming vote, when you consider that the possible maximum votes were 170 for each category. These items won by default - in the fanzine section in particular, no fanzine editor in Australia can feel happy about the votes for his magazine. In the International S F Section, we can see that very few people in Australia read much s f, or if they do, they certainly don't agree with each other in the way that the Hugo ballots have led us to believe.

Is it worth holding future Ditmar Awards?

My immediate answer would be - no. Or at least we should not pretend that they are popular votes. When it came to the rub, the 1970 Ditmar Awards became the personal awards of Dr Ditmar Jenssen. If we had known this was going to happen, we could just have easily asked Dick and the few other people who read a lot of recent science fiction to form a panel and pick the Ditmars.

On the other hand, I made a few fundamental mistakes which cut down the chances that people would vote for the awards. I did not do preselection ballots, for a start. Lee Harding tells me that "people like to have a little list in front of them which they can mark 1, 2, 3 and 4". Bully for them - the only problem is that the preselection ballot virtually decides which item will be the eventual winner. I like to make my own choices in such matters, and I foolishly presumed that other people like to do the same.

I copied out the ballot form that John Bangsund distributed the year before, including a few changes. John now complains about the imprecision of this year's voting form; it is his voting form. But obviously the ballot form must be made far more precise by next year.

Many other problems must be solved, if we are to continue the Australian S F Achievement Awards. We must solve the problem of overseas books that reach us for the first time years after they have been published overseas. This is mainly the fault of Doubleday and Co, who publish many of the potential winners. They sent no copies of STAND ON ZANZIBAR to Australia during 1968, so the first edition of the novel to reach Australia was that published by MacDonald (UK) in 1969. I allowed SOZ in the voting because it would have been very unfair to John Brunner and his admirers to leave it out. Similarly, COSMICOMICS was first published in Italy in 1965; the first English language edition came out in USA in 1968 (published by Knopf) - but the first edition we could possibly read under existing copyright arrangements is the Jonathan Cape edition of 1969. On the other hand, thanks to Mervyn Binns (c/o MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB, 19 SOMERSET PLACE, MELBOURNE 3000) Ace and other American paperbacks are available to any person in Australia who wants to get on Merv's mailing list. Thanks to Merv, nobody has any excuse not to keep up with most of the latest science fiction - except for Doubleday hardbacks, as I mentioned.

So, I want suggestions (if I remain Scrutineer of the Ditmars) 1. Should we change the categories, and if so, to what? 2. How should we get over this problem of books' availability in Australia? (I suggest "Best International Science Fiction available in Australia in 1970 for the first time" or some such. This leaves out individual copies bought by individuals directly from overseas, and normally refers to any books imported by Merv Binns during 1970. 3. I need nominations for the Proballot form sent to me during the year. If we must direct people's votes with a Nomination Form, then let's do it on a democratic basis. Both John Foyster and I will keep our readers informed on what will appear during

1970. (The latest venture by John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds is NORSTRILIAN NEWS, published fortnightly for a 5c stamp a copy; news to Foyster, money to Edmonds, P O Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183).

and, most importantly 4. I need people who will actually vote at the end of the year. What about thinking if it now? Noting down stories that catch your attention during 1970?

I don't like to sound like an evangelist, but I had never realized before how apathetic people can be. (I didn't join any student political movements while at University, so I didn't have my heart broken then). John Bangsund, in CROG, suspects me of cynicism. How right he is - but how could I be more cynical than most of the members of the 9th Australian S F Convention?

(No, I haven't finished yet. I should explain to those overseas fans who enjoy watching the antics of Australian fans that the only people who got even slightly upset about all this were John Bangsund and Mervyn Binns, and me, until the Saturday afternoon of the Convention. Personally, I think that the Hugos will need to improve greatly before they can boast an array of award-winners as dazzling as the 1970 Ditmar Winners. There's always next year, anyway).

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and, while we're at it ---

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FOR MAGAZINE SCIENCE FICTION - OCTOBER 1968 TO SEPTEMBER 1969

\* No, it's no longer the B\*O\*W Award (Best of the Worst). Magazine science fiction improved greatly over the last year, and these are the best of a very good bunch. If somebody will tell me where Tom Disch lives, I might send him some memento of the occasion. \*

- 1 CASABLANCA (Thomas M Disch) NEW WORLDS, October 1968
- 2 THE LAST HURRAH OF THE GOLDEN HORDE (Norman Spinrad) NEW WORLDS, July 1969
- 3 OUSPENSKI'S ASTRABAHN (Brian W Aldiss) NEW WORLDS January 1969
- 4 THE NEGOTIATORS (Harvey Jacobs) NEW WORLDS May 1969
- 5 THE KILLING GROUNDS (J G Ballard) NEW WORLDS March 1969
- 6 THE CASTLE ON THE CRAG (P G Wyal) FANTASTIC February 1969
- 7 SPLIT PERSONALITY (Jack Wodhams) ANALOG November 1968
- 8 HIGH WEIR (Samuel R Delany) IF October 1968
- 9 SIXTH SENSE (Michael Coney) VISION OF TOMORROW August 1969
- 10 RICHMOND LATE SEPTEMBER (Fritz Leiber) FANTASTIC February 1969
- 11 THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE (Brian W Aldiss) NEW WORLDS May 1969
- 12 SUNDANCE (Robert Silverberg) FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION June 1969

I've left out nearly as many enjoyable stories as I have included. The best piece of short fiction for the year did not appear in a magazine or magazine-type collection, but in INTANGIBLES INC AND OTHER STORIES by Brian Aldiss. The story, of course, was SINCE THE ASSASSINATION. :: The publications considered for this list were: NEW WORLDS, AMAZING, FANTASTIC, F&SF, VISION OF TOMORROW, ANALOG, GALAXY, IF, NEW WRITINGS and ORBIT.

G O L D E N     A G E     -     P A P E R     A G E

or

WHERE DID ALL THE CLASSICS GO?

---

George Turner

oo

Love is not love    (sang Shakespeare)  
That alters when it alteration finds,  
Or tends with the remover to remove:  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark.

And so we cling to the teddy bear beloved in pre-salad days  
(taking care not to look at the poor thing lest reality rush in)  
or to the books we loved at first reading - and now and then  
re-read them and despair. First impressions count for much. And  
so John Foyster clings to his Golden Age of s f - the 'forties  
- and small blame to him, because the 'forties produced some  
memorable s f.. And various fan clubs cling to Edgar Rice  
Burroughs and H P Lovecraft, while otherwise business-like people  
kiss the dust of John Russell Fearn, alias Vargo Statten, alias  
Lon Chaney and all his masks. And in the mainstream field there  
are those who cherish secret yearnings for BERRY AND CO, THE FOUR  
JUST MEN, DOCTOR FU-MANCHU and BILLY BUNTER.

Alas I can find no justification for any of these yearnings  
(explanations, yes, but that's something else altogether) but I  
remember, I remember...

....that Tarzan once fascinated me, and I had fantasies about  
Barsoom, and Simon Templar was my ideal of manhood. And now they  
bore me stiff. Even the s f of the 'forties seems, with powerful  
exceptions, inept and hollow stuff. Of all the old paper loves,  
only H G Wells remains untarnished. (As a teenager I loved the  
novels of Sir Walter Scott, but the love I have for them now is a  
different breed of affection, so he doesn't count.)

We know why these loves flew out the window - we grew up. But  
what caused love to be born in the first place? What, in fact,  
was the attraction of these dead works which have come to be  
called s f classics? Simple youthfulness and naivety? Partly,  
but I suspect something more than that - that in fact they had  
some values which from our superior station in time we tend to  
ignore.

This train of thought was suggested by Damon Knight's review, in  
his book of s f essays, of THE BLIND SPOT.

It was as merciless a piece of savaging as any novel ever received - and thoroughly deserved - but I wondered why he had bothered to slaughter a book already a quarter of a century dead. (It had just been re-issued - a publishing error). I wondered even more why a writer of Knight's perception had not tried to discover just what made it the s f "classic" it had been regarded as for many years.

You see, THE BLIND SPOT was written in the early 'twenties, in the pre-AMAZING days (yes, Virginia, I know you weren't around) and one of my memories of that period in the late 'twenties - the flower of the Gernsback era - is of fans writing frenzied pleas for its republication. Whether or not Hugo obliged I can't recall, but I think he did. But by then I had had my first surfeit of s f and did not catch up with the book until the 'forties. And by then it was very much a museum piece.

What was wrong with it? First, the s f gimmick on which it was based was the idea of a world which could be reached by penetrating the "blind spot" in our vision, that point not far in front of our eyes where focal lines cross and vision is imperfect. The present day s f reader would not accept that. But call it "fantasy" and they'll accept anything - and then back-track and call it s f. So that wasn't much of a fault.

Secondly, it was deadly slow-paced. Half of its 110,000 words could have been chopped without loss. But that was the suspense method of the time - pile up detail and make 'em wait for it. And it is creeping back into modern thriller literature. In ten years or so you may be loving it and pouring scorn on the halter-skelter story-telling of the 'sixties. Just a matter of fashion. So we can't throw the book out on that score.

Finally (there were other things wrong, but three's enough) it ended with the dreary old situation of the earthlings battling against invaders from beyond the blind spot. But that wasn't quite such a dreary old situation in nineteen-twenty, and if it was handled with conventional crash-thud-wallop, is it handled any better today? No, Virginia, it is not. We get a cover of so-called psychological insight and anthropological hou-ha to account for the downfall of the invaders, but in the end it's the old one-two that really gets 'em - and the readers.

So what made THE BLIND SPOT top of the pops in its day? It isn't as though there was no other s f to compare it with - the scene was lousy with the stuff. Then what?

For one thing, it was written in the smooth, unagitated prose which was characteristic of the period, and which comes as a welcome relief from the flea-hop story-telling of today. Not good prose, mind you, but a bloody sight better than such as is offered by Laumer and Biggle and Petaja and other contemporary successes. (But on the whole, modern s f prose isn't too bad - just flat, undistinguished and empty).

And the gimmick was brand new. It would be a reasonable bet that most readers of the time weren't aware that the visual blind spot existed, and the idea had the charm of novelty. General knowledge of such matters was not nearly so widespread then as it is today. And the s f field was not then plagued by a horde of scriveners

homing in on any new idea to get a few thousand words out of it while the craze lasted. Remember the "semantics" period, and the monsters from the past period, and the esp period, and the robot period, and so on?

The suspense element was maintained successfully through two-thirds of the book - a technical exercise few of our modern boys dare to try - and then thrown overboard for a showdown in a glamorous other-world finale which was at least as good as anything else done at the time.

In fact, it had everything.

What finally damned it was that its virtues were ephemeral. It simply went out of date. It became a bore.

And that has been the fate of practically all the s f written before it or since. How many s f stories are worth reading thirty years after their first appearance? Half a dozen? Two dozen? Not many in a cornucopia of thousands. And thirty years isn't enough to make a classic. Seventy years may be, and only H G Wells can fill that bill - nobody, literally nobody else. Jules Verne, I admit, is a special case.

Conclusion: With the possible exception of the novels of H G Wells there are no s f classics, and the word should be discarded.

Genre writing does not encourage the production of classics, readable a century hence. In the flourishing field of detective fiction, somewhat allied to s f, how many acknowledged classics exist? Exactly one. It is called THE MOONSTONE, it was first published in 1868, and if you haven't read it, Virginia, you should be ashamed.

S f lacks the universality required for classic status, and reviewers who should know better waste too many superlatives on works which will never win even so modest an award as a Hugo, let alone deserve one. (And how many did deserve it?) Each story has its little ecstasy and is done. An occasional novel is republished, such as SLAN, and Schuyler Miller duly notes the re-emergence of Van Vogt's "magnificent novel". But I'll bet he didn't re-read it first. It's a dreadful, inept book, with a good start and a frightful finish. ("John Thomas Cross, come into your inheritance!" Oh boy, the drama! And the creaking of the stage props.)

Still, let us not despise SLAN. It caught the imagination of the moment and added a little more to the central attraction of s f, which is "ideas".

Alas, our love alters very smartly when it alteration finds, and yesterday's idols are scrapped without a tear. And so it is intellectually <sup>fashionable</sup> to toss the head at Asimov, as being one of the old school, when in fact he gave more to s f in the way of ideas and careful writing than any three of the present idols. Wells is considered a drear by too many of the younger readers because he didn't write at a high pitch of hysterics or present epic heroes - they prefer such "intellectuals" as Delany and Zelazny, those two thoroughgoing adherents of the thud-and-blunder school who can't disguise their rattling skeletons under a load of symbolism and impressionistic prose. (They are both well out of date in the field of contemporary literature, but too many readers



haven't discovered it yet.) And as for John Taine - All right, Virginia, ask me who was John Taine.

Now, I'm not saying that we should all rush out and buy an armload of yesterday's "greats" and start drooling over them. The fact is that most of them won't repay the effort. S f is basically ephemeral, and who cares for yesterday's ephemerae? What I am saying is that we should be a little less blindly enthusiastic about the present product, and that we should learn enough about the past to realise that the amount of true originality in s f is vanishingly small. Nearly everything that matters has been done before - by those stuffy grandfathers whom one can't be bothered with. In fact, let's all pull our back hair right down to the ankles and admit that s f is mass entertainment on about the level of the TV thriller series. In fact, let's go the whole way and admit that the TV thriller is technically much better handled than the average s f yarn.

S f has too many pretensions, and has reached the stage when even the authors are taking themselves seriously. Harlan Ellison on the subject of his "art" must surely be the joke of the year. There isn't a real artist in the business, and only a handful of good technicians. (I suggest that the real artist finds the s f genre too constricting, and that s f has never since Wells said anything that hasn't been expressed as forcefully, and probably more perceptively, in the "mainstream". Anybody want a fight?)

Nevertheless, s f is enjoyable, and makes a pleasant hobby. And, as with any hobby, it is more enjoyable if you know a little more about it than the bit that comes with the latest magazine.

So, just for the hell of it, and perhaps to show that there is more to be looked at than the latest fantasy masquerading as s f, I propose to argue (with justice, I hope) that the true Golden Age of s f was between 1870 and 1910, and that all since has been a genre in decline. Present popularity means nothing. It takes the great originals to show the popularisers how to do it, and even the fabulous 'forties were only a little hump on the plummeting graph.

## II

Modern s f began with Jules Verne. The French had popularised a sort of science fantasy before that (e.g. Flammarion's END OF THE WORLD) but Verne brought it down to earth, and fathered the branch of s f which became epitomised in the early Heinlein stories and the very different but similarly descended early Campbell novels.

Verne was the first to really see that science was an adventure field, the first to look at knowledge and say that with a little push here and a little more knowledge here and a hey presto! and here comes the Nautilus and the Clipper of the Clouds and the Moon Shot. He was the great extrapolator, and if he committed enormities in the name of extrapolation, his cone of fire was wide enough to score a number of predictive hits. (Few of them were really original with him, but how many s f writer's ideas are? As usual the scientists were first and he picked up the more interesting crumbs. The boys are still at it.) His informed guesses were no wider of the mark than those of all the other

writers of technological s f. (No, Virginia, Heinlein did not "predict" the Waldo - he merely gave a popular name to something already in existence.) And he never repeated himself. He did not merely originate the field, he opened it up, from space to subterranea, with a side glance at practically every technology then available for his scrutiny. Later writers merely applied the method to new knowledge as it appeared.

And he put s f on the map. He was popular in a fashion that has never been matched since. He gave it the push which made modern s f possible.

And he is today almost unreadable save by the young. I assure you that the problem is not one of translation; the French versions are as pedestrian as the English. The young can, and do, read him uncritically, lost in the wonder of ideas (because we haven't really caught up with him in practice) and those who didn't read him in their youth have lost the chance for ever. Only better techniques make the modern technological s f writer more readable than his master; they have never deviated an inch from the path he marked out; they have added flossier decoration, but have not added a thing to the basic method.

So he has nothing to say to the modern reader. Is he the less important for that? Do we despise Newton because his laws of motion have become the property of schoolboys?

At the same time an American, Edward Bellamy, was writing a dull, verbose tome destined to become one of the all-time best sellers. It was called LOOKING BACKWARD, and established the method of looking at present day civilisation through eyes other than our own. It was a notable first, and its descendants are still with us. Nowadays they look through far more alien eyes than Bellamy imagined, but they see little more than he did; they have merely lost the compassion with which he viewed the world.

Wells, who was writing during the last years of Verne, added a fillip to the theme of reconsidering our own time - he opened it up to suggest the possibility of other viable civilisations, and did it so well that THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON remains the most impressive statement about alien contact. Unlike Verne, he was not greatly interested in the products of technological advancement; he was interested in their effects on humanity. So he indulged in no more technicality than was necessary to establish a possibility, and then told a story of his own times, with people who were not heroes or geniuses. This, the best aspect of his work, has been largely lost to s f, which has become a form wherein the characters are mostly larger than life and have to be swallowed at a gulp.

But he did much that has not only remained, but become staple. It pays to look at each of his books separately.

THE TIME MACHINE was his first, and its importance to s f was that it proclaimed that time was not a metaphysical concept but a physical one, and might one day be subject to manipulation. The one and only improvement on his ideas in seventy years has been the consideration of paradox. It was also the first of the if-this-goes-on type of stories, wherein present trends are extrapolated to an extreme conclusion.

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS had nothing much to offer beyond the extreme realism of the method of presentation. This also has been lost to s f, more's the pity. He achieved it by having characters who were recognisably people, without flourishes, strange talents or the knuckle-headed obtuseness of heroes.

In WHEN THE SLEEPER AWAKES he wrote the prototype of a million-and-one novels about the man who wakes up in a far tomorrow. And his tomorrow was a real one, not a stage set designed to allow some super-hero to overthrow the rulers. His hero overthrew nothing. He didn't even understand this strange tomorrow. Wells never lost sight of the realities of the human condition; this prototype has been degraded into a blood-and-guts exercise, and extrapolation to little more than a reductio ad absurdum. The modern s f writer gets wilder and woolier and piles on the fantasy, but he never relates to home as Wells unfailingly did. It's the difference between a novelist and a hack. The hack grabs the idea for exploitation; the novelist takes it for examination.

With MEN LIKE GODS he opened up the field of parallel universes, and came to the conclusion that if we were offered Utopia we wouldn't want it. What we want is what we have, only more of it. The lesson doesn't seem to have been learned. The modern s f writer operates on the principle that humanity is sufficiently intelligent to desire the better life. Hell!

In FOOD OF THE GODS he went further, to prod at our penchant for destroying what we do not understand. The modern variations are endless.

THE INVISIBLE MAN was harsh laughter at a daydream, the one wherein invisibility makes a man a king, inviolable. S f has been savaging daydreams ever since. He failed to note that by any system so far imagined an invisible man must also be blind - and left us a problem that has not yet been satisfactorily solved. That doesn't stop s f writers using invisible men.

THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU was an examination of the appalling pettiness of power for its own sake. It's a challenge that no other s f writer has successfully taken up.

THE WAR IN THE AIR was a warning against using knowledge for destruction. This is a field wherein s f could serve a useful purpose, but prefers to note it and pass on. And, truly, no writer powerful enough to handle it with any impact has arisen.

His other novels, though entertaining, were not true forerunners, but in those cited he covered the bulk of the present s f field. There is little written today that is not a descendant or a variant of a theme Wells touched on. Esp is perhaps the one outstanding exception, and it is doubtful whether that really belongs in the s f pasture - its main use seems to be to provide a way out of unworkable plots.

Wells really did something with his s f. He opened the eyes of millions to the possibilities that existed. And his books were fabulously popular; most are still in print, seventy years later. If Verne put s f on the map, Wells consolidated its position.

From that moment on, the genre lived. It lived, unfortunately, in the hands of people who took the melodramatic elements and discarded everything of importance.

So we had thirty dreary years of Burroughs and Cummings and Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint and Victor Rousseau and George Allen England, all writing with little variation on the themes Verne and Wells had propounded. Themes? Not really. They took over the trappings and invented a few new ones, and swamped it all in high adventure. There's nothing wrong with high adventure, but why call it s f?

One new voice was heard in the thirties, and who would have guessed from WHEN THE ATOMS FAILED that it was to be the most influential voice heard since Wells? Under the prodding of John Campbell a renaissance began. It did not last, because it had only better writing and better plot ideas to offer. The real breakthrough of new conceptions was not there. It had all been prefigured by the masters.

Since then we have had only more and more pretentious writing, smothering thought in a cloud of words.

Wells and Verne and Bellamy ushered in the Golden Age, and ushered it out again. All since has been decline - wider screens and brighter technicolour and noisier action - and not a new idea in sight.

Oh, there have been occasional good books - A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, GRAVY PLANET, and a handful more - but they have not been enough to stimulate the field. The publishers have it firmly in their grip, and the only product better than a good thing is a hundred reproductions of it.

I think I shall give up reading s f.

But I won't, of course.

The next novel may be the one we've all been waiting for.

I don't believe it, of course, but you never know.

oo oo oo

Postscript:

I suppose the true Golden Age is the year in which you discover s f and can hardly breathe for excitement. But the rot soon sets in as you turn over the novels and the magazines and get the eternal mixture as before. Even the youngest of us can't swallow the diet for ever, and in youth one is expert at gulping down the indigestible.

But it must have been fun to be hungry for novelty when Wells and Verne were writing, and everything that came from them was utterly new and different.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.

Alas for Wordsworth, he was dead before s f got into its stride. But he did like FRANKENSTEIN.

- George Turner 1969.



expended on keeping STAR TREK alive for one more season might be enough to improve OUT OF THE UNKNOWN's chances of being screened in the United States. The education television network gobbled up THE FORSYTE SAGA series from the BBC, and it has scored a major success over here, after allowances are made for the kind of major success anything can achieve on stations that are too weak in power and few in number to gain mass audience. The fantasy series might be a natural choice for next season on the ETV outlets, if the commercial networks continue to get so nervous at any thought of running British-made series.

#### CRITICISM AND THE AVERAGE FAN

LAUGH ALONG WITH SIGMUND ALDISS makes me feel quite confident that you could handle the critical volume on Aldiss. (\*\*When you see SFC 10 you may not be quite so confident\*\*brg\*\*)) However, there are several things which complicate any hopes for many critical volumes in the real book format from the semi-pro houses. Maybe fandom could do some serious thinking about a systematic attempt to get some large-scale critical studies in print in less elegant format: mimeographed volumes averaging perhaps 150 pages, bound in FANCYCLOPEDIA manner so supplementary pages might later be provided to cover more recent works of the writer. One such volume wouldn't be more work than three large fanzines, from the publishing and financing standpoint, and the appearance of two or three such volumes might ease the biggest problem, where to find manuscripts sufficiently high in quality. When a market opens up, manuscripts grow. There is one American organization that might some day have the finances and facilities to back such ventures but it's mostly undercover for the time being, in an effort to begin activities eventually without a record of public existence and no action for years. I'm not sure what Australia may possess with respect to foundations and university grants and so on; this source of finances probably wouldn't be practical in the United States where mimeographed productions just aren't impressive enough to show to trustees and directors as evidence of where the money is going. I don't think there would be much difficulty disposing of a substantial quantity of such productions, once they started to appear with some regularity; there must be at least a couple of hundred libraries throughout the world that would put in a standing order to boost the mail order and convention markets.

#### ON S F COMMENTARY No 7

##### AUSTRALIA IN 75 ?

You would undoubtedly double or triple your attendance, in the event that Australia gets the Worldcon in 75, by guaranteeing that attendees need not go near a hotel at any time during the entire event. There really isn't any reason why a worldcon must be held in a hotel, except for the problems of convenience and transportation that arise in this country when a convention attempts to stage events in a large hall not connected to a hotel. The fact that hotels have been used to stage worldcons has tended to create some of the now traditional sideshows like the hucksters' room and the Hugo awards banquet, which would be rather difficult by now to work into a single large hall. I still haven't heard how they're going to manage things at Heidelberg this summer, although I understand that it'll be necessary to lodge fans all over the city, which is by far the smallest city ever to host a worldcon. As you must know from the conreports during the past couple of years, the hotel usually gets more criticism than anything else involved in the worldcon, and Australia's turn at the new-format worldcon might be a tremendous success and precedent-setter if you people were bold enough to work out a totally different physical arrangement. A beach resort town just before or just after its main season, for instance, might provide a locale. My own pet theory is that the American convention will eventually be forced to use university campuses for meetings and lodgings, because hotels are growing so expensive and restrictive.



## SEX AND DICK GEIS AND MONEY AND...

Dick Geis' letter imparted a bit of information I'd been wondering about, the sales potential of all-out sex books. Most public libraries don't purchase them, I assume, so there can't be substantially more readers than the 15,000 copies or so for each title. Is the low sale the result of lack of courage to purchase by all but a comparative handful of the people who enjoy this kind of writing? Or is the bulk of the population just plain uninterested? It's hard to understand, in view of the stupendous popularity of books that are ballyhooed as sexy romps and contain nothing of the sort.

## "THE WITCHES OF KARRES"

Your reviews continue to have several things in common: complete frankness, which must be hard to maintain when you have so many of the pro authors involved on your mailing list, and subject matter that I've not read yet, for the most part. I did by accident re-read the other day the original version of THE WITCHES OF KARRES and I can't understand how James Schmitz could have had the temerity to turn it into a novel. It is so perfect as a novelette and I get the cold chills just at the thought of reading a novel based on it. Of course, money must have had something to do with the novelization, but Schmitz is a splendid writer and an imaginative fellow and might have been able to create a profitable novel on an entirely different subject without giving himself the nightmares of remorse that I'm sure he feels over what he's done. Incidentally, I can imagine the novelette turned into a movie without feeling the same sense of sacrilege, since the film would be a different medium. It might be a natural for the Disney people to produce.

## REL-A-X WITH S F COMMENTARY

In general, you shouldn't take too seriously the complaints over the unrelaxed nature of SFC. The letter column wouldn't be out of character in a faaanish fanzine of the most informal type, and the reviews are written by sufficient people to produce a pleasant variety of styles. Given your intention to concentrate the fanzine on science fiction itself, I don't see how you could relax much more without reprinting a page of Joe Miller's Joke Book between each pair of reviews. I think I've already mentioned to you my indifference about the lack of art work: I enjoy the lavishly illustrated fanzines as much as anyone, and I don't notice the lack of art in publications that don't use much. Although I must admit that you stung my sense of wonder in your reply to Ron Clarke's letter. It sounds as if it's possible to purchase a machine to cut stencils electronically in Australia. I've never heard of them being available in this country. The price you quote would be out of reach of virtually any fan in this country but if they are available up here, an enterprising fan could get his money back quite quickly by doing the work for many fanzines at lower prices than the commercial sources. I assume that the machines operate on the same principle as the engraving machine we use at the office, and that is a monster which can't be purchased, is just rented, looks as if it would cost \$15,000 or so to manufacture, and goes out of order more frequently and in more ways than any other object in this nation, except the postal service of course. But it really is possible to get magnificent results on stencils without electronic scanning. The hand-done stencil cutting that British fandom achieved during the first years of the 1960s hasn't been matched anywhere in or out of fandom, to the best of my knowledge.

\*\*\*brg\*\* Harry talks about SFC's reviews. Believe it or not, they will be back in SFC 12, which will appear as soon as possible (before postage rates rise, in other words).: How do the American fans do their electro-stencils? ::: Harry has also sent an LoC for my apazine, THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW, available to non-ANZAPA members for reviews, articles, LoCs. \*\*\*

ANYONE FOR TRANSCRIPTION ?

The very small amount of tape transcribing I've attempted is sufficient experience to make me realize the ordeal this issue involved. You did a splendid job (\*\*brg\*\* It was Peter Darling's blood sweat and tape recorder, not mine. Even more remarkable an effort, because much of it was done in New South Wales country pubs, etc. \*\*) apparently tidying up the verbiage just enough to make it readable without losing the flavour of the spoken language. The people at this convention seem to have stuck to their points somewhat more closely than is customary at the American conventions I've attended, unless you did some discreet deleting where the speaker went too far afield. It's needed; all we have is an occasional guest-of-honour's speech printed in someone's fanzine and the few Proceedings that have been issued for three or four Worldcons. There are plenty of tapes available, but nobody seems to have the energy to do the transcribing and publishing.

DOOM AND MR FOYSTER

John Foyster is convincing in his arguments, while I'm reading the transcript of his talk. But after I've closed the fanzine and escaped from the spell of the silent oratory, I can see some reasons why things may not be so ominous after all in the population sense. The Pill is, of course, the element that John barely considers, together with the great probability that there's a second Pill in the immediate future for us he-men to take. The birth rate seems to have subsided slightly in this country already, and the potential effects of this birth control measure in Asia are stupendous. Then there's the gradual advance towards a more advanced form of civilization for the peoples of Africa, Asia and South America, and the fact that this always creates a higher standard of living, and the higher standard of living invariably cuts into the birthrate. Even if the population of the world continues to grow rapidly, I'm not so sure that food will be the worst problem. It might be necessary to stop producing meat animals, the most inefficient form of growing food. But before there's famine, I suspect that there's going to be a general shortage of things - metals, fuels, paper products, all the other things that we must have for our present way of life. I heard one of Maryland's health department officials predict recently that within a decade, it will become illegal to throw anything away - recycling will be needed for everything. The government here has asked electric power companies to stop advertising the advantages of air conditioning, lest power consumption increase too rapidly. Silver is so scarce that it is no longer used in silver coins and there's a frantic search for a practical new photographic medium that doesn't involve silver in its chemistry.

A TRANS PACIFIC FAN FUND ?

Your long editorial should be quite helpful if I ever got my history of fandom advanced to a more contemporary era. Meanwhile, I still feel that the very best thing that could be done for Australia in '75 and for the good of fannish conventions in general would be some breaking down of the barrier between your fandom and ours. I've mentioned in a few locs, though probably not to you, the thought that TAFF might be revised somewhat to provide for U S-Australia trips. There is a general feeling that TAFF in its present format is suffering from too much contact between U S and European fans. TAFF is extremely fortunate this year to have three exceptionally good candidates, but there seems to be a definite feeling that in the long run it's not going to keep fandom's interest. My thought was that alternating Europe and Australia as the source or destination for trips might save the institution or organization or whatever you want to call TAFF. Realistically, I

know that Australia doesn't have the large quantity of fans or the intense interest in U S fandom to provide a very large proportion of the funds for such trips. The longer trips would force greater efforts to raise funds up here. But I was wondering if such a scheme would create any interest at all in Australia, if enough hospitality to reduce lodging and transportation costs for a TAFF delegate would be available down there, if it would be possible to find two or three Australian fans with the maturity and ability to arrange vacation schedules to run for TAFF?

\*\*\*brg\*\* What a question to ask! The place just crawls with brilliant fans rehearsing the speeches they will deliver at some future Worldcon. John Foyster is the obvious first choice -- brilliant raconteur and wit, has the ability to write up entertaining TAFF reports. He is also the person in Australia who has finally persuaded Australian fans to send money to TAFF. Overseas fans would probably most like to meet John Bangsund, but... well, we never quite know what he is doing. Not beyond possibility. Robin Johnson will make Heicon and some future Worldcons on his own account. Again, not beyond the realms of possibility. Leigh Edmonds would leap at the chance -- by far the most entertaining of the younger fans. And then there's always the most voluble of us all, Lee Harding. But a fan? Well, he's on the Worldcon Committee. I would be disappointed if the Worldcon Bidding Committee did not already have plans for some sort of Trans-Pacific Fan Fun during the next few years.\*\*\*



Gillespie in front of the magazine, Gillespie at the end of the magazine .... you can't escape the post. But there are a few things that I should have mentioned as long ago as issue Number 7, and a lot of matters which I should have mentioned in Numbers 8 and 9.

\* He was reputed to be the world's oldest science fiction fan. He was born in Belfast in 1883; attended no school, had an Army career until he retired in 1948; started to read science fiction in 1904, finished reading, collecting and arguing about science fiction on January 31, 1970. He was, of course, the remarkable Pat Terry. When he wrote to me for the first (and last) time he complained that he could not write often because of arthritis in his hands. He also suggested that he did not think it worthwhile to send me a subscription because he "dared not plan too far ahead". He must have realized that he could not live much longer, and so he enjoyed himself up to the end. Diana Martin told me extraordinary tales of Pat's energy when he came to Melbourne for the 1968 Conference - even then he could out-talk the lot of us. He fought hard for issues he thought important (although other people agreed with him less frequently as the years went by) and supported many worthy causes. Possibly far more of a loss to us than I could imagine. (Information: John Bangsund in THE SOMERSET GAZETTE).

\* There was more to the 1970 Easter Convention than the Ditmars, although you would have been hard put to guess that so far. Coming so soon after Syncon, I found it disappointing. As I suggested briefly in S F COMMENTARY 9, a lot of people I expected did not turn up. On the other hand, a lot of unexpected people did turn up - representatives of the 275 strong STAR TREK Fan Club who had more enthusiasm than the rest of us put together; David Grigg from the newly formed Melbourne University S F Club; three or four South Australian fans; a contingent of three from Ararat; and squads of people I've never talked to before but who thoroughly enjoyed the Convention.

What a pity that all the "regulars" chose to make themselves the silent majority. Harding rarely asked a question during the whole Convention, the Worldcon Bidding Committee, having elected themselves into office, then disappeared during most of the rest of the Convention. I think I remember seeing John Bangsund - I gave him a \$5 note, so I must have met him at one time or another. Fortunately, Paul Stevens, Merv Binns, and people like Cedric Rowley (who manned the tape recorders) and Noel Kerr kept proceedings on the move.

\* The main Convention attraction was the Film Program. The budget of the Convention nearly reached \$800; Merv reports that we nearly broke even; people paid to see some very good films; the films were mainly arranged by Paul Stevens; so the success of the Convention very much comes from Paul's efforts. (It is reliably reported that Merv Binns did most of the rest of the work, but I wouldn't believe that either. If anyone can get Melbourne fans to work, Merv can). 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY must remain a regular feature of future Conventions. I had not seen it for a year; I came back to it as to an old friend. It's still the most beautiful film ever made. We saw BARBARELLA properly this time - I liked it far better than when it was squeezed onto the Australia Cinema's pillbox screen some years ago. I missed PROJECT X which Lee Harding liked very much, but caught the splendid Italian-French film DANGER DIABOLIK, which had very poor distribution when it rounded the drive-in circuit about a year ago. THIS ISLAND EARTH had a hopeless script, but some very fine colour photography compensated for the idiocies of the rest of the film.

\* And now - the news you've been all waiting for... yes, we do bid for the 1975 World Convention, provided that the present Convention rules are changed to make a non-American World Convention worth staging. We will fight hard to change the rules brought in at St Louiscon last year. During that very odd afternoon of the first Friday of the Convention, the people who eventually became the Bidding Committee brilliantly sparred motions and amendments, gained unanimous support for all their main ideas, and cleared up the whole rigmarole in about half an hour. The rest of us sat stunned. The committee, by the way, comprises: (from Sydney) Peter Darling, Robin Johnson, Gary Mason (co-ordinator and treasurer, and at the moment, publisher of AUSTRALIA IN 75), Alf Van Der Poorten; (from Melbourne) Mervyn Binns, Leigh Edmonds, John Foyster (co-ordinator and main publicity agent) and Lee Harding.

As this has turned into an offshoot of True Confessions (see RAISON D'ETRE if you don't believe me) I must admit that I felt on the afternoon that I had been politely brushed aside by the Committee. On further reflection, I must admit that I was not exactly active in my efforts to discuss the Convention in AUSTRALIA IN SEVENTY-FIVE, and the one letter I sent was distinguished mainly by its lack of ideas. For those who did not see it; AUSTRALIA IN 75 was a fortnightly fanzine in six parts published by Leigh Edmonds between New Year and Easter to discuss whether Australia should hold a Convention or not. In the long run, the response was encouraging - more people responded to AISF than to the Ditmar Awards, for instance. I think most people had made up their minds how to vote before they came to the Convention, and this was the purpose of AISF - to circulate opinion so that all interested Australians might judge whether we could hold a Convention or not. John Foyster has suggested an ingenious plan which might solve the Melbourne-Sydney rivalry which has figured in people's thoughts since the idea of a World Convention was put forward. John Foyster suggests that overseas visitors could avoid hotel bills, and see Australia fairly cheaply if we had one day of the Convention in Melbourne, one day in which people travelled from Melbourne to Sydney (by jet - one hour; by train or bus - 14 hours), one day in Sydney, and had then either a Central Australian tour or a Barrier Reef tour for those who can afford it, or do not have to go back to America or Europe. And all this is done not so much to please overseas visitors, as to drag in the Australian supporters. As Australian Convention organizers well know, they are a problem at any time.

The Committee have explained, by the way, that my Ararat residence in some way ruins the delicate balance between Melbourne and Sydney that you can see on the Committee. They also know that I favour Sydney as the only possible place (at the moment) in Australia to hold this type of Convention. In the meantime I've been asked to keep free whole pages for Convention publicity. John Foyster and Gary Mason promise to write all this publicity, so I've agreed. You have to pay to advertise in SFR.

\* What else can I say about the Convention? Syncon featured the professional writers; the Easter Convention nearly ignored them. Marv and Paul tried to cut down panel discussions, but unfortunately they only cut down author panels without cutting down the total number of panels and speeches. John Foyster and Lee Harding put on a great show on the Saturday afternoon when they discussed the relationship between the pulps and s f 's aspirations towards Literature. For just a few moments there was the excitement of Syncon, as John Foyster tried to involve nearly all the audience in the discussion. Most of the other panels went slightly flat because the people who could ask the pertinent questions just did not bother to attend. But Carey Handfield and Stephen Campbell and Darryl Lindquist and those marvellous "Trekkies" sat through the whole lot! Yes, through everyone of the panels I was on!

Every Convention has its heroes.

MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE (S F COMMENTARY 11 - CHECKLIST) :

2nd AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS (the "DITMAR" awards) (pages 2 to 11) \* bbc tv (producer): OUT OF THE UNKNOWN (19) \* edward bellamy: LOOKING BACKWARD (16) \* edgar rice burroughs: (general) (12) \* italo calvino: COSMICOMICS (5 - 6) \* samuel r delany (general) (14) \* john foyster: FAN GUEST OF HONOUR SPEECH - 1969 EASTER CONVENTION (22) \* john foyster (editor): JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY (7 - 8) \* john foyster (editor): NORSTRILIAN NEWS (11) \* richard e geis (general) (21) \* austin hall & homer eon flint: THE BLIND SPOT (12 - 14) \* philip harbottle (editor): VISION OF TOMORROW (6 - 7) \* lee harding: DANCING GERONTIUS (2 - 4) \* THE S F COMMENTARY AWARD (11) \* STAR TREK FAN CLUB (24) \* TRANS ATLANTIC FAN FUND (3, 22-23) \* pat terry (24) \* jules verne (general) (15 - 16) \* a e van vogt: SLAN (14) \* h g wells (general) (16 - 18) \* h g wells: FIRST MEN ON THE MOON (16) \* h g wells: INVISIBLE MAN (17) \* h g wells: MEN LIKE GODS (17) \* h g wells: TIME MACHINE (16) \* h g wells: WAR IN THE AIR (17) \* h g wells: WAR OF THE WORLDS (17) \* h g wells: WHEN THE SLEEPER AWAKES (17) \* jack wodhams (general) (3, 4) \* WORLD CONVENTION BIDDING COMMITTEE (20, 22-23, 25) \* roger zelazny (general) (14) \*

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