

# SF COMMENTARY 26



#### THE LATE LATE NEWS:

SCYTHROP 26 exists... The NEBULA AWARD WINNERS are: NOVEL: TIME OF CHANGES (Robert Silverberg); NOVELLA: THE MISSING MAN (Katherine McLean); NOVELETTE: THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS (Poul Anderson); SHORT STORY: GOOD NEWS FROM THE VATICAN (Robert Silverberg)... Malcolm Edwards has indeed taken over the editorship of VECTOR... SFC 26 late due to one collapsed duplicator and lots of bad luck... Special thanks to John Bangsund for the design and the printing of the front and back covers.

#### I AM AGENT FOR:

##### LOCUS

The leading newsmagazine of the science fiction field. It comes airmail every fortnight, and is edited by Dena and Charlie Brown. 10 for \$3.50; 26 for \$8.

##### VECTOR

The magazine of the British Science Fiction Association, now under the dynamic leadership of Malcolm Edwards. It's cheap too: 10 for \$5.50. Printed; bi-monthly.

##### SPECULATION

England's great s f discussion fanzine, edited by Peter Weston. \$2 for 5.

##### SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW INDEX

Hal Hall is preparing the new edition. \$1.50 each.

##### EUROCON 1

The first all-European convention. \$4 non-attending membership.

Richard Adams Locke: GREAT ASTRONOMICAL DISCOVERIES LATELY MADE BY SIR JOHN HERSCHEL AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE (pages 36-37) \* ADELAIDE S F CONVENTION (6-12) \* Monica Adlington (8-9) \* John Alderson (14) \* John Alderson (ed.): CHAO (12, 119) \* Brian W Aldiss (67-88, 103, 118) \* Brian Aldiss: AN AGE (87) \* Brian Aldiss: EQUATOR (68-71) \* Brian Aldiss: GREYBEARD (77, 84-88) \* Brian Aldiss: HOTHOUSE (80-84) \* Brian Aldiss: THE MALE RESPONSE (75-80) \* Brian Aldiss: NONSTOP (71-76, 80-81) \* Brian Aldiss: ORGY OF THE LIVING AND THE DYING (38) \* Paul Anderson (113) \* Poul Anderson (90, 103-104, 117) \* Poul Anderson: QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS (21) \* Poul Anderson: TAU ZERO (102, 118) \* Bill Andresen Jr (16-17) \* Anon.: THE GREAT STEAM DUCK (35) \* Piers Anthony (100) \* APA-45 (19) \* Isaac Asimov: INTRODUCTION to THE MAN IN THE MOON (35) \* Isaac Asimov: WATERCLAP (39-40) \* William Atheling Jr: THE ISSUE AT HAND (105) \* Phyrne Bacon (98-99) \* Roy Ward Baker (dir.): FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH (9) \* Iain Ban (13) \* John Bangsund (7-10, 13, 113, 119) \* John Bangsund (ed.): AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (26) \* John Bangsund (ed.): JOHN W CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE (14, 119) \* John Bangsund (ed.): SCYTHROP (12, 119) \* Charles Barren (ed.): FOUNDATION (118) \* Neal Barrett Jr: GREYSPUN'S GIFT (41) \* Julian Bell: MARSH BIRDS PASS OVER LONDON (88) \* Gregory Benford: NOBODY LIVES ON BURTON STREET (41) \* Cyrano de Bergerac: THE COMICAL HISTORY OF THE MOON (36) \* Howard Berk: THE SUN GROWS COLD (97) \* THE BIBLE (95-96) \* Mervyn Binns (10) \* Mervyn Binns (sec.): MELBOURNE S F CLUB (119) \* Mervyn Binns (mgr.): SPACE AGE BOOK SHOP (115, 119) \* James Blish (101) \* James Blish: review of SOLARIS (F&SF) (29) \* David Boutland (118) \* Robert Bowden (11-12) \* A Philippe Boyer (ed.): MECHTA (117) \* Bertolt Brecht: SHORT ORGANON FOR THE THEATRE (48-49) \* John Brosnan (16) \* Dena & Charlie Brown (eds.): LOCUS (5, 112) \* John Brunner (105-108) \* John Brunner: DOUBLE DOUBLE (42) \* John Brunner: HOST AGE (105) \* John Brunner: THE JAGGED ORBIT (106) \* John Brunner: LUNGFISH (105, 107-108) \* John Brunner: THE PRODUCTIONS OF TIME (106) \* John Brunner: QUICKSAND (106) \* John Brunner: THE SQUARES OF THE CITY (106) \* John Brunner: STAND ON ZANZIBAR (106) \* Capt. Samuel Brunt: A VOYAGE TO CACKLOGALLINIA (36) \* Linda Bushyager (ed.): GRANFALLOON (17) \* L Sprague de Camp (27-28, 103, 117) \* L Sprague de Camp: THE GOBLIN TOWER (103) \* John W Campbell (ed.): ANALOG (31) \* Stephen Campbell (11-12, 113) \* Terry Carr (93-95) \* Terry Carr (ed.): ENTROPY REPRINTS (27) \* A Bertram Chandler (118) \* A Bertram Chandler: THE BITTER PILL (118) \* A Bertram Chandler: THE HARD WAY UP (118) \* A Bertram Chandler: SEA CHANGE (38) \* A Bertram Chandler: WHAT YOU KNOW (118) \* Perry

A Chapdelaine: REVERSE RACISM (SFC 23) (28, 116) \* Agatha  
 Christie (42) \* Ron Clarke (ed.): THE MENTOR (13-14, 119) \*  
 Ron Clarke & Shayne McCormack (eds.): WOMBAT (13-14, 119) \*  
 Thomas D Claerson (ed.): EXTRAPOLATION (117) \* Thomas D Clar-  
 erson: FOREWORD to NEBULA AWARD STORIES 6 (31, 34) \* Christo-  
 pher Columbus (48) \* Michael D Coney: WHATEVER BECAME OF THE  
 MCGOWANS? (41) \* CORNMARKEET REPRINTS (114-115) \* Juanita &  
 Robert Coulson (eds.): YANDRO (20) \* Lyle Cullen (15) \* Barry  
 Dabes (11) \* Bruce Davison (66) \* Samuel Delany (104) \* Samu-  
 el Delany: ..AYE, AND GOMORRAH (100) \* Philip K Dick (104-  
 105) \* Philip K Dick: MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE (104) \* Philip K  
 Dick: A MAZE OF DEATH (111-112) \* Philip K Dick: UBIK (104)  
 \* Ann & Frank Dietz (eds.): LUNA MONTHLY (19) \* Kevin Dillon  
 (7, 11, 13, 116) \* Thomas M Disch: BODIES (21) \* DOWN UNDER  
 FAN FUND (102-104, 119) \* Don Dunstan (12) \* Leigh Edmonds  
 (109-113, 119) \* Leigh Edmonds (OBE): ANZAPA (119) \* Malcolm  
 Edwards (16) \* Malcolm Edwards (ed.): QUICKSILVER (17) \*  
 Malcolm Edwards (ed.): VECTOR (5, 18) \* Gordon Eklund: DEAR  
 AUNT ANNIE (41) \* Harlan Ellison (ed.): DANGEROUS VISIONS  
 (100) \* Harlan Ellison: THE REGION BETWEEN (102) \* Ralph El-  
 lison: INVISIBLE MAN (117) \* Philip Jose Farmer (18, 100,  
 118) \* Philip Jose Farmer: THE LOVERS (101) \* Philip Jose  
 Farmer: STRANGE RELATIONS (101) \* Philip Jose Farmer: TO  
 YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO (20, 90) \* John Foyster (102-103,  
 110, 113-114) \* John Foyster (ed.): NORSTRILIAN NEWS (13,  
 119) \* John Foyster (org.): NOVA MOB (119) \* John Foyster  
 (ed.): S F COMMENTARY 19 (17-18, 115-117) \* John Foyster &  
 Leigh Edmonds (ed.): BOYS OWN FANZINE (13, 119) \* Daniel F  
 Galouye: PROMETHEUS REBOUND (38) \* Alan Garner (97-98) \*  
 Alex Gas (sec.): MONASH UNIVERSITY S F ASSOCIATION (119) \*  
 Richard E Geis (ed.): SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (116) \* David  
 Gerrold: LOVE STORY IN THREE ACTS (21-23) \* John Gibson (15,  
 113) \* GILGAMESH (48) \* Barry Gillam (25) \* Barry Gillam: L  
 SPRAGUE DE CAMP: THE SCIENCE OF NIGROMANCY (SFC 23) (27-28,  
 103, 117) \* Bruce Gillespie (109-112) \* Bruce Gillespie: I  
 MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS (SFC 23) (19) \* Bruce Gilles-  
 pie: I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS (SFC 24) (24-25, 93-99)  
 \* Bruce Gillespie: THE REAL THING (SFC 9) (18-19) \* Michael  
 & Susan Glicksohn (eds.): ENERGUMEN (117) \* Nelson Glueck:  
 RIVERS IN THE DESERT (95) \* Jean-Luc Godard (dir.): WEEKEND  
 (64) \* James Goddard (ed.): CIPHER (115, 118) \* Gogol (50) \*  
 Francis Goodwin: THE MAN IN THE MOONE (35) \* VICTOR GOLLANCZ  
 LTD (114) \* Ron Goulart: CONFESSIONS (41) \* Ron Graham (113,  
 116) \* David Grigg (ed.): THE FANARCHIST (13, 119) \* Carey  
 Handfield (ed.): COR SERPENTIS (12-13, 119) \* Lee Harding (9  
 -10, 113-114) \* Jeff Harris (9) \* M John Harrison: THE COMM-  
 ITTED MEN (97) \* Harry Harrison: AMERICAN DEAD (38) \* Harry  
 Harrison: BY THE FALLS (34) \* Harry Harrison (ed.): .NOVA 1  
 (37) \* Harry Harrison (ed.): THE YEAR 2000 (37-38) \* Harry  
 Harrison & Brian W Aldiss (eds.): THE YEAR'S BEST S F (37) \*  
 Sabina Heggie (sec.): DUSK (119) \* Robert Heinlein: THE



ROADS MUST ROLL (27) \* H B Hickey: GONE ARE THE LUPO (40) \* Alfred Hitchcock (dir.): THE BIRDS (66) \* HUGO AWARDS (21, 26, 112, 114) \* Philippe Hupp (15) \* Peter Innocent (113) \* Henry James: TURN OF THE SCREW (26) \* Richard Jefferies: AFTER LONDON (55-62, 88) \* Richard Jefferies: THE STORY OF MY HEART (56) \* Dick Jenssen (104) \* Robin Johnson (9, 114) \* Gerald Jonas: THE SHAKER REVIVAL (40) \* James Joyce: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN (25) \* Arnie Katz (19-20, 117) \* Noel Kerr (ed.): SOMERSET GAZETTE (14, 119) \* Gerald Kersh (39) \* Damon Knight: A FOR ANYTHING (108-109) \* Damon Knight (ed.): ORBIT (31) \* Stanley Kubrick (dir.): A CLOCKWORK ORANGE (118) \* LACON (114) \* R A Lafferty (104, 106) \* R A Lafferty: CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK (33, 41) \* R A Lafferty: THE DEVIL IS DEAD (21) \* R A Lafferty: FOURTH MANSIONS (97) \* Francis T Laney (27) \* Jerry Lapidus (16) \* Jerry Lapidus (ed.): TOMORROW AND.. (18, 20) \* Keith Laumer: IN THE QUEUE (33-34) \* F R Leavis (ed.): A SELECTION FROM SCRUTINY (20, 105) \* Walt Lee: A REFERENCE GUIDE TO FANTASTIC FILMS (115) \* Ursula LeGuin (116) \* Ursula LeGuin: THE LATHE OF HEAVEN (20-21, 93, 97) \* Ursula LeGuin: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (90-93, 117) \* Ursula LeGuin: THE TOMBS OF ATUAN (93) \* Ursula LeGuin: A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA (93) \* Fritz Leiber: ILL MET IN LANKHMAR (34) \* Stanislaw Lem (19, 28-30, 89-90, 99-102, 115-118) \* Stanislaw Lem: LOST OPPORTUNITIES (SFC 24) (90-93) \* Stanislaw Lem: SCIENCE FICTION AND FUTUROLOGY (29, 90) \* Stanislaw Lem: SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION (SFC 22) (17-18, 100, 115-116, 118) \* Stanislaw Lem: SOLARIS (25, 28-29, 97) \* David Lindsay: A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS (91) \* Eric Lindsay (ed.): GEGENSCHWEIN (13, 119) \* Paul Linebarger (104-105) \* George Lucas (dir.): THX 1138 (18) \* Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell (eds.): STARLING (20) \* Lesleigh Luttrell (13, 102-103) \* Bruce McAllister (ed.): S F SUPPLEMENT for EDGE (115) \* Shayne McCormack (ed.): TERRAN TIMES (13, 119) \* John MacDonald (117) \* Christine McGowan (15, 114) \* Mike McGuinness (sec.): FUTURIAN SOCIETY (119) \* Daniel Mann (dir.): WILLARD (65-66) \* Gary Mason (113) \* Gary Mason (sec.): SYDNEY SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION (119) \* David I Masson: TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT (38) \* MELBOURNE FANTASY FILM GROUP (119) \* Melbourne University S F Association: YGGDRASIL (14) \* Sandra Miesel (16, 99-102, 117) \* Naomi Mitchison: AFTER THE ACCIDENT (38) \* Sir Thomas More: UTOPIA (52-53) \* Clive Morely (sec.): MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY S F ASSOCIATION (119) \* William Morris: WHAT AN INCREDIBLE FOLLY (57, 61-62) \* Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: PIANO CONCERTO No 23 (110) \* NEBULA AWARDS (21) \* Larry Niven: BIRD IN THE HAND (39) \* Michael O'Brier (ed.): TOLKIEN BULLETIN (14, 119) \* Chad Oliver: FAR FROM THIS EARTH (37-38) \* Alexei Panshin (103) \* Fred Patten (103) \* Ted Pauls (15) \* Roger Peyton (mgr.): ANDROMEDA BOOK CO (115) \* Edith K Pizor & T Allan Comp (eds.): THE MAN IN THE MOONE (35-37) \* Andy Porter (102-103) \* Marcel Proust:

TIME REGAINED (108) \* Q-CON (114) \* Blair Ramage (9) \* REVE-  
 LATIONS TO JOHN (95-96) \* Mack Reynolds: UTOPIAN (38) \*  
 Franz Rottensteiner (19, 102-105, 115-118) \* Franz Rotten-  
 steiner: CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR (SFC 19) (104, 113, 116-  
 118) \* Joanna Russ (118) \* Joanna Russ: AND CHAOS DIED (97)  
 \* Joanna Russ: THE SECOND INQUISITION (33) \* Bertrand Rus-  
 sell (66) \* Alan Sandercock (6-7, 9-10, 12) \* Alan Sander-  
 cock (sec.): UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE S F SOCIETY (119) \* Le-  
 land Sapiro (ed.): RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY (17-18, 117) \* Frank-  
 lin Schaffner (dir.): PLANET OF THE APES (18) \* Jeff  
 Schalles (117) \* SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS OF AMERICA (31-34)  
 \* Arthur Sellings: THE LAST TIME AROUND (40-41) \* S F COM-  
 MENTARY HONOURS LIST (113) \* William Shakespeare: HAMLET  
 (80) \* Bob Shaw: INVASION OF PRIVACY (41) \* Bob Shaw: PALACE  
 OF ETERNITY (95) \* Robert Silverberg (20, 100, 116-117) \*  
 Robert Silverberg: BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL (38) \* Robert Silver-  
 berg: DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH (97) \* Robert Silverberg: ISH-  
 MAEL IN LOVE (40) \* Robert Silverberg (ed.): S F HALL OF  
 FAME (23-24) \* Robert Silverberg: THE WORLD INSIDE (97) \*  
 Clifford D Simak (ed.): NEBULA AWARD STORIES 6 (31-34) \*  
 Clifford Simak: THE THING IN THE STONE (41) \* Bob Smith  
 (ed.): KANGAROO FEATHERS (14, 119) \* Cordwainer Smith (104-  
 105, 115) \* E E Smith (94) \* Jeff Smith (ed.): PHANTASMICON  
 (18) \* Dennis Stocks (114) \* Dennis Stocks (sec.): BRISBANE  
 F & S F ASSOCIATION (119) \* Leon Stover: AMERICAN SCIENCE  
 FICTION (22) \* Theodore Sturgeon: KILLDOZER (32) \* Theodore  
 Sturgeon: SLOW SCULPTURE (31-33, 41) \* Darko Suvin (14-15) \*  
 Darko Suvin: THE OPEN-ENDED PARABLES OF STANISLAW LEM AND  
 "SOLARIS" (28-29) \* Thomas Burnett Swann: THE FOREST OF FOR-  
 EVER (21) \* Jonathan Swift: GULLIVER'S TRAVELS (48) \* SYNCON  
 2 (114, 119) \* TORCON 2 (114, 117) \* Douglas Trumbull  
 (dir.): SILENT RUNNING (117) \* Wilson Tucker: THE LINCOLN  
 HUNTERS (97) \* Wilson Tucker: THE LONG LOUD SILENCE (96) \* Wil-  
 son Tucker: THIS WITCH (96) \* Wilson Tucker: THE TIME MAS-  
 TERS (95-97) \* Wilson Tucker: YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN (24-28,  
 93-99, 117) \* George Turner (15, 113, 116) \* George Turner:  
 STURGEON'S SADISM (SFC 19) (17) \* Arthur Uloth: ENGLAND IN  
 THE WILD (59) \* Jules Verne (51) \* Jules Verne: FROM THE  
 EARTH TO THE MOON (50) \* Jules Verne: TWENTY THOUSAND  
 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (48) \* H G Wells: COUNTRY OF THE BLIND  
 (48) \* H G Wells: FIRST MEN IN THE MOON (54) \* H G Wells:  
 THE INVISIBLE MAN (50) \* H G Wells: THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU  
 (48) \* H G Wells: THE TIME MACHINE (56) \* Frederic Wertham  
 (101) \* Peter Weston (ed.): SPECULATION (5, 17) \* Ted White:  
 EDITORIAL for AMAZING (101) \* Joy Window (7) \* Robert Wise  
 (dir.): THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN (63-64) \* Gene Wolfe: THE  
 ISLAND OF DR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES (34) \* Donald A Woll-  
 heim (105) \* Donald Wollheim & Terry Carr (eds.): WORLD'S  
 BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1971 (39-41) \* Roger Zelazny: AND CALL  
 ME CONRAD (43) \* Roger Zelazny: CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARK-  
 NESS (43) \* Roger Zelazny: JACK OF SHADOWS (43-46) \*

# S F COMMENTARY

NUMBER 26

APRIL 1972  
120 PAGES

## IN THIS ISSUE

oo

John Bangsund and Lindsay Cox  
COVERS

MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE - S F C 26 CHECKLIST 3

### EDITOR & FRIENDS

Philippe Hupp	Malcolm Edwards
Sandra Miesel	Jerry Lapidus
Bill Andresen Jr	Paul Anderson
David Gerrold	Ed Cagle
Harry Warner Jr	Stanislaw Lem
Ursula LeGuin	Bob Tucker
Phyrne Bacon	Franz Rottensteiner
John Brunner	Damon Knight

Leigh Edmonds  
I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS 6

George Turner	Lyle Cullen
Christine McGowan	Bruce Gillespie

CRITICANTO 31

### DARKO SUVIN

COGNITION AND ESTRANGEMENT:  
AN APPROACH TO THE POETICS  
OF THE SCIENCE FICTION GENRE 47

### JOHN GIBSON

THE NIGHTMARE OF BLACK LONDON 55

### BARRY GILLAM

THE OLD DARK HOUSE 63

Bill Wright

SCIENCE FICTION BY BERTRAND RUSSELL 66

### BRUCE R GILLESPIE

THE S F NOVELS OF BRIAN W ALDISS:  
PART ONE  
THE GREAT ADVENTURES 67

PAUL ANDERSON  
BILL ANDRESON  
PHYRNE BACON  
JOHN BANGSUND  
JOHN BRUNNER  
ED CAGLE  
LINDSAY COX  
LYLE CULLEN  
LEIGH EDMONDS  
MALCOLM EDWARDS  
DAVID GERROLD  
JOHN GIBSON  
BARRY GILLAM  
BRUCE GILLESPIE  
PHILIPPE HUPP  
DAMON KNIGHT  
JERRY LAPIDUS  
URSULA LEGUIN  
STANISLAW LEM  
CHRISTINE MCGOWAN  
SANDRA MIESEL  
TED PAULS  
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S F COMMENTARY 26, April 1972, 120 pages, is typed, printed, and published by BRUCE R GILLESPIE of GPO BOX 5195AA, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA 3001, AUSTRALIA. (Phone 47 1303). Available for letters of comment, contributions, traded magazines, and for subscriptions: AUSTRALIA: \$3 for 9; USA: \$3 for 9 surface mail, \$8 for 9 airmail, from Charlie & Dena Brown, 2078 Anthony Avenue, Bronx, New York 10457; ENGLAND: £1.50 for 9 surface mail, £4 for 9 air mail, from Malcolm Edwards, 75A Harrow View, Harrow, Middlesex, England. Electronic stencils by Noel Kerr. Picture page 55 by John Gibson.

MUST BE  
TALKING  
TO MY  
FRIENDS

\* The engines sounded like the outlet pipes of a factory. Their long snort came to a crescendo, they began to whistle, then abruptly the tense roar faded away, and the Boeing 727 was in the air.

Well, it was the first time that I had travelled in the air since I was four years old, and I wasn't nervous. Not much. I was too far away from the window to see anything intelligible below. Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport lies well out from the suburban area, so there wasn't a lot to see. After the retracting wheels thudded into place, I didn't have much to do except lower the little table that is attached to the seat in front, and attend to the elaborate morning-tea ritual which takes most of the journey between Melbourne and Adelaide. When I could look through the window, I could only see clouds below. Twenty thousand feet below, since we were travelling at thirty thousand feet by the time that we passed over Bordertown and lost a half an hour. By the time that we had all drunk tea or coffee, and I had read about half a page of a magazine, we began to circle over Adelaide. Adelaide looks very different from Melbourne, for Adelaide has trees along most of its suburban streets. Adelaide looked as dry as Melbourne does during January, but Adelaide had a grid of green. A pleasant impression to begin with.

I might not have gone to Adelaide at New Year for Advention, if only they had not made me Guest of Honour. I hate travelling by car, and the train journey to Sydney during New Year, 1970, was intolerable. So I decided to take a chance on our airlines, the world's safest (as the publicity leaflets say). I arrived in Adelaide only half an hour (officially) after I had left Melbourne. Alan Sandercock, one of Adelaide's convention committee members, and Robin Johnson, were there to meet me. We waited for a few minutes to see whether Michael O'Brien had flown in from Hobart, but he hadn't, so we left for Alan's place.

All day we did little but meet people from Melbourne. Soon after we arrived at Alan's place, John Bangsund, his car,

David Grigg, and Carey Handfield, limped in. They had been travelling overnight, although they all stopped in one motel room for a few hours. The road had been flat and the landscape empty, John had found a bookshop in Warrnambool that stocked first editions of old hardbacks at their original prices, and he had already spent a good part of his Convention finances, which he did not really have to spend anyway. This was one Convention when nearly everybody was tired before it started.

John Bangsund brought a plentiful supply of wine, which he then proceeded to sip while other people dashed in and out of the house. I helped to type a bit of the auction list, and helped to collate the Convention booklet, bits of which John had brought from Melbourne. Joy, one of the Adelaide committee members, arrived. Alan went to collect piles of food and other supplies. John Bangsund decided to do his laundry. (The not-entirely-unbelievable story was that the laundry basket had piled high for four weeks. John was headed for the laundromat a few days before, just before a contingent of fans invaded Bundalohn Court.) We went to look for an Adelaide laundromat, and soon found one. John put the first lot into the tub while David and I talked to Joy Window, one of the more noticeable assets of the Adelaide convention committee. Whether she wanted to hear it or not, she soon heard the complete history of Melbourne fandom, Australian fandom, overseas fandom, and ASFR. (Marvellous how the conversation runs when you are waiting in a hot Adelaide laundromat while young harassed housewives look at you oddly and nearly order you to give them seats.) Our most appreciative audience came from a young boy who immediately noticed that we were out-of-towners and definitely not good guys. His ear-splitting cry of "Wheeee-eeee-eeee" quickly turned into "bang! bang!". After David Grigg had melodramatically died a couple of times, and John had returned some answering fire, the kid became really warlike and tried to cut us down with some choice epithets that only children in comic strips don't know. After we had ignored being "shot at" for half an hour, the kid finally gave up. Them dang furriners.

We spent most of the day (Friday, December 31, 1971, if you really want to know) at the still centre of a hurricane. The cars of John Hewitt and Alan Sandercock provided the active outer edge of the hurricane. After they had filled the house with supplies for the weekend, including over \$100's worth of meat, we filled the cars with the perishables and us. Under Adelaide skies, we set off for the hills and Melville House. I asked Alan whether Melville House was as terrible as it sounded - dormitories, bunks, and cook-your-own? "Well - er - yes," he said, comfortingly. It didn't worry him any. We picked up Monica, another member of the committee, and through the Adelaide Hills (which are ten miles nearer Adelaide than the Dandenong Ranges are to Melbourne, and so they are almost in everybody's back gardens), and finally drove down a bush track and stopped in the "car park" of Melville House.

The Melbourne fans maintained a stunned silence for fully one minute. I felt very comforted that I had brought enough money to stay at a motel if the need arose. The house, surrounded by trees, and halfway down a valley, looked ordinary enough. By its side stood two brick buildings which looked like old stables. When we looked inside we found that they had been old stables; they were now "dormitories". Ironwork bunks decorated the insides of the dormitories. "It's just like Camp Waterman," said John Bangsund faintly. (Camp Waterman is the boy-scout-cum-torture-camp so favoured by parents who belong to the Church of Christ. I managed to avoid going to camp at Waterman during my entire childhood, but now I met up with this.) We unpacked our gear, and I picked a bunk that looked a little bit secure. I didn't expect to get any sleep for the rest of the Convention, so the choice didn't matter much.

I should explain that Melville House is one of a number of guest houses in the hills. They are owned by some association of university groups, which hire them out to university associations for conferences like ours. We only had to pay 50 cents per night for accommodation, and the committee charged a separate fee of \$2 per day for food. Joy and Monica, plus various male friends and indefatigable helpers, prepared the meals during the entire four days of the Convention, and did not complain once or get annoyed with the Convention attendees. Somehow the dishes were done, the place kept clean, and the food always arrived. One of those Adelaide-managed miracles which made this the best Australian convention yet.

Eh? Yes, I said that this was the best Australian convention yet, despite all the opposite indications. Australians thrive on discomfort, perhaps.

On Friday night, people found their own food, although Monica and Joy managed to provide some soup for people who had nothing. People whom I hadn't seen for nearly a year made their appearances: Robert Bowden, who had arrived at 3am the previous morning, and suitably dishevelled and hirsute, had grabbed one of the few bedrooms inside the house; Ron Clarke and Shayne McCormack from Sydney, the fabulous co-publishers of WOMBAT; Barry Danes and Sabina Heggie, also from Sydney; Blair Ramage, about whom more will be said; and, nearly unrecognisable, Stephen Campbell, the wild artist from Nelson. We "saw the New Year in", and I talked for an hour or so to Kevin Dillon, without whom no Australian convention is complete. At 1 am, one of the committee members arrived at the Convention with his (then-current) girlfriend. His girlfriend wanted very much to meet John Bangsund, about whom she had heard a great deal. John Bangsund had made his "bed" as comfortably as possible, had sprinkled "Grigg repellent" all over the nearby bunks, and had retired at about 10pm. The lady wanted to meet him anyway. Some people decided to wake up John. After debating the matter for awhile, they tramped across to the dormitory and put on the light. Several people ducked under the covers when they saw that - gasp! - a lady was present. John Bangsund slept on. "Wake him," said one person. "Turn off the light!" moaned Barry Danes, or one of those tired Sydneysiders who had come 800 miles. Somebody tried to shake John awake. When everybody had nearly given up, John put his head out of the blankets, said, "I keep telling you fellows: no autographs after midnight", and fell back asleep. The committee member's girlfriend got her interview.

When I came back to the dormitory at 2am, the lights were out, and most people had begun the long night's struggle to get some sleep. I decided that I might get thrown out if I put the light on to change into pyjamas, so I slid into my sleeping-bag and hoped that my clothes wouldn't get too bedraggled. The bunks creaked. An hour passed. The muttered jokes subsided. Some people moved into the house. I fell asleep, unbelievably. Next morning, I felt completely refreshed, and I didn't have a bad night's sleep during the Convention. Maybe I would have enjoyed Camp Waterman after all. (I've since worked out that I felt so well during the Convention because I didn't have to use my brain for a whole four days.)

Next morning, the strange pattern of convention meals began. A few early-risers assembled in the kitchen by 8am. As more people joined them, some people put on eggs and toast. A few more brought out some plates. Joy and Monica woke up and began to cook. Everybody finished breakfast by 10am. Lunch and tea, much better organised, occurred at similar strange hours. Who cared? Nobody cared about anything much for a whole four days. Such luxury!



Advention has during the last few months become known as the Unconvention, or the convention-without-a-program. However, the program unravelled very slowly, and on New Years Day, the committee made a valiant and largely successful attempt to keep to the program. Everybody registered, the committee introduced itself and other people, and the first panel started. Paul Anderson, Bill Wright, Robert Bowden, Alan Sandercock, and I began to debate the merits of various magazine, anthology, and book editors. At this point Lee Harding walked in, fresh from his journey, and began to ask curly questions from the audience. Robin Johnson (also in the audience) began to answer the questions, and Blair Ramage (another member of the audience) had his say. The panel sat at the front of the room and looked politely interested. We didn't need to say much at all. We should have been warned, and cancelled the rest of the program from then on.

Alan tried to continue John Foyster's idea (from the 1971 New Years Convention) of programming concurrent panels. However nobody wanted to hear my panel on the relative merits of the writing of Bob Silverberg, Philip Dick, Brian Aldiss, and others. Quite rightly they wanted to hear Adelaide committee member Jeff Harris' panel on PSEUDO-SCIENCE IN SCIENCE FICTION. This was the most interesting "serious" event of the convention, as Jeff deftly demolished most of the pseudo-scientific ideas upon which s f stories are based. The program remained steady for most of the rest of the day, but the rot had already set in. Most people watched Richard Fleischer's FANTASTIC VOYAGE. Tea was (not too) late. Most people were outside, enjoying the last of daylight-saving-provided sunshine, but I began my Guest of Honour Speech anyway. At the end of the exciting event, myriads of fannish fans invaded the room, all wearing plastic propeller-capped beanies. Arnie Katz would have loved them. The infinite beanie, live from Adelaide. Well, fifteen beanies. The first part of the auction, conducted by Monica Adlington, followed in a very jovial way. However, the interstate travellers were becoming more and more tired. FIVE MILLION YEARS FROM EARTH (QUATERMASS AND THE PIT), even more horrifying at my third viewing than at the first, sent people (literally) shivering to bed, and I don't think anybody bothered to start a midnight hike.

We had had cool January weather (about 60°), but on Sunday the sun came out. So did the bush flies. So did the people - out of doors, I mean. So much material remained unauctioned, that Lee Harding mustered some spirited bidding for piles of musty pulps and comics. The bidders sat on a grassy parapet in front of the house, shielded their faces from the flies and their wallets from the auctioneer. A motorbike mysteriously turned up. Some people went for a ride on it. Two of them came back bloodied... they ran into a gate. The glissando of the roar of a motor-boke, the hum of the flies, and the voice of Lee Harding, gradually disengaged our brains. When Alan Sandercock tried to return to the program, he ran into some steady opposition. (I should mention that we had had already a barbeque lunch. This didn't help anybody to stay serious.) Alan set up a panel on the outside porch of the house. The panel had the topic, ROBERT HEINLEIN - THE MAN YOU LOVE TO HATE, I seem to remember that the people who sat on the panel were Alan Sandercock, John Hewitt, me... and Blair Ramage. (Further parenthesis: Blair Ramage had the most fun of anybody at that convention. He's the only person I know who has ever come to an s f convention and talked non-stop about science fiction, and about nothing but science fiction. He deserves a Most Devoted Fan of the Year award, or something.) Blair was the only person among the audience or the panel who wanted to talk about Heinlein. Harding, Bangsund, and company did not want a panel at all. The rest of the panel members, in their somnolescent and contented states, could not think of all those brilliant reasons

why Heinlein isn't a very good writer. Blair told us why he was. Harding and Bangsund made jokes at the expense of Heinlein and Blair. The rest of the panel tried to pretend that they were miles away. John Hewitt took out his camera and began to photograph Ron Clarke who was taking photos of the panel members. The audience, especially Lee Harding, conducted the panel discussion among themselves.

Mild Lunacy followed. I think Alan Sandercock probably shrugged his shoulders at the whole damn lot of us at that stage, but since Alan doesn't let anything annoy him, he kept going anyway. John Bangsund, who had sipped a fair bit from his personal flagon during the day, began to play the piano. He slipped into his Victor Borge routine, as scraps of tunes all turned into the 'THIRD MAN' THEME. Some of us gathered around the piano to listen. Merv Binns began to whistle. We looked astonished - how many other hidden talents does Merv have? Merv began to sing along with the piano. Our jaws dropped lower. Lee Harding came in. While Merv whistled and sang, Lee began his Fred Astaire routines. The convention became a singalong and mainly stayed that way. After the impromptu concert, we had tea. Everybody received one meatball, so Harding spent most of the night making an attempt to get another meatball in his spaghetti. The committee-member's girlfriend arrived, and Lee Harding and John Bangsund promptly sat her between them. Toasts to Tolkien's birthday and Asimov's birthday and nearly every other non-event of the year, followed. For a hushed audience, Lee Harding played the first strains of the EROICA SYMPHONY on his teeth. (And if that doesn't bring you lot to Australia in 1975, I don't know what else will.) Afterwards, Alan tried to tell people about Australia In 75, but somehow it was neither the time nor the place. The only people who listened properly were members of the Australia-In-75 Committee. There followed a panel suitable to the occasion, when Dracula (alias Paul Stevens) interviewed a cretinous monster, a lunatic film director, and a drunken film critic "who really doesn't know much about films but I know a lot about cookery" (who were ably portrayed by Merv Binns, Lee Harding, and John Bangsund, in that order). Some Adelaide fans decided to dispose of the Dracula menace from Melbourne for all time, so they tied sticks across broomhandles, and charged Dracula. Unfortunately they didn't have any garlic as well. Dracula survived.

Those people who could still see watched Byron Haskins' very good s f thriller THE POWER, and most people retired by 2am, which was the time when others began their "midnight hike" which finished at about 5am. Fortunately I had been asleep for several hours by the time that they returned.

For some of us, the Monday of the Convention was almost as interesting as the day before. Some of us got up fairly early (say, 9am) and had breakfast. "What if," said John Bangsund, "the whole world has been destroyed, and there is nothing left over the top of that hill?" "That'd really test the ingenuity of s f fans," said somebody else, not quite receiving John's message - that the Convention members had become so contented and self-sufficient that they couldn't possibly want to return to the mundane world. "No," said John. "Do you really think that s f fans would build generators and buildings and start a new world? Of course not. They would sit down and talk about science fiction and watch movies and look at comics, just as usual." Some weeks later John said that as he drove across the Little Desert, halfway between Adelaide and Melbourne, he felt that he wanted to turn around and drive right back to that valley.

Interstate people began to leave soon after this, and about ten of us stayed to play tapes (I finally heard Bob Silverberg's GoH speech at Heicon) and to

talk to people like Kevin Dillon, who told me something about the stormy history of Sydney fandom. Jeff Harris, who had been too busy during most of the convention to talk to many of us, and Barry Dages, Sabina Hagga, and Jim Morgan, who form one of the more interesting sections of Sydney fandom.

Barry decided to see something of Adelaide before he left, so five of us crowded into his car and headed towards the city. We arrived in an unexpectedly short time; I still had not become used to the shorter distances between landmarks in Adelaide. We drove (a bit too) quickly around North Adelaide, which is the Carlton of Adelaide, only much more genteel. Also the land developers have not yet ruined it, as they have wrecked Carlton. Barry put on his propeller-cap, which had stayed in the back seat since Friday. We opened the windows. The breeze blew the propellers. A taxi passed us, and the driver shouted, "I'll take you to my leader." "All right," said Barry to the rest of us, "Let's follow him." The taxi-driver quickly realised that he was being followed. He twisted around several streets, so we saw much more of North Adelaide this way. After about ten minutes he gave up, and drove into the carpark of a pub. We drove after him, and pulled up beside him. The taxi-driver got out. He probably thought that we were about to attack him, so he wanted to have his mates in the pub to protect him. "We're from a science fiction convention," said Barry. I don't know whether he disbelieved us, or he didn't know what science fiction was; he wanted to make friends as quickly as possible. "Come and have a drink," he said, "I'll shout you all drinks." "No thanks," said Barry. "We have to get going." The taxi-driver, who seemed to have been drinking most of the afternoon, despite his taxi-driving, shook his head, tried to offer us a round of drinks again, then gave up, and staggered to the back door of the pub. We drove out. Things became complicated after that. We had left Bill Wright to battle with inhabitants of the museum piece called Adelaide Railway Station. We had to go back to Melville House, pick up Robin Johnson, and deliver him back to the station in about an hour's time. Unfortunately for Blair, he went back to Melville House with us. Meanwhile somebody else had already driven Robin to the station. Barry set off back to Adelaide with Blair, but I've learned since that Blair was the only person who did not catch the right train. (Other rumours say that Bill Wright, Robin Johnson, and Kevin Dillon spent most of the train trip telling the other passengers about "Australia In 75". For this, Bill Wright received the Melbourne Science Fiction Club's Achievement Award for 1972 - or maybe it was for other feats of enthusiasm as well.)

When I arrived back at Melville House, I found Bob Bowden and Stephen Campbell sitting dejectedly at the kitchen table. They were the only members of the convention who saw the "other side" of South Australian life. Bob and Stephen went into Adelaide, and found a commune to which Bob had been referred in Sydney. Not many people were around, so Bob and Stephen decided to hitch-hike back to Melville House. They were standing by the side of the road, when a car pulled up. "Get in," said a voice from inside the car, "We'll drive you straight to the lock-up." Stephen put his head in the door, and said diplomatically, "It's the fuzz!" The roving plainclothes detectives, not too impressed by this epithet, said "Get in!" again, and did their best to arrest the two. "Where are you going?" "To a science fiction convention in the hills." "Where do you live?" Stephen told them that he lived in Nelson, and Bob said that he lived in Sydney. "We don't want you hippy types in South Australia," said the detective. "Get out of our state as fast as possible." They made another attempt to arrest Bob and Stephen for something. "Where are you working?" "We're students," said Bob, as he took out his Sydney University Union Card. Foiled again! - the detectives thought that they could make arrests for vagrancy. After twenty minutes of questioning, the detectives

let them go, and warned them not to try hitching again, and told them again to get out of the "pure" state of South Australia. Bob and Stephen caught a train back to Melville House. :: The whole incident cast a curious light on South Australia. Most foreigners know SA as the state where Don Dunstan is the premier. Dunstan is a dashing, intelligent Labor politician who managed to beat a system of conservative election gerrymandering in order to gain power. We tend to think of SA as liberal in a graceful English sort of way, whose people chew their cud in the green paddocks of the welfare state. Unfortunately, SA's police force feels differently. During the anti-Vietnam War Moratorium marches in 1970, Dunstan told the police to lay off the marchers, and the police promptly laid into them. Dunstan expressed his shock and horror, but at least he and the electorate realised that the police force and the current government do not like each other very much. Perhaps - and this is just supposition on my part - Adelaide's roving coppers regard all vaguely hippy-looking people as "Dunstan's type". Perhaps the detectives just wanted to arrest somebody.

\* That's the end of the Convention, but it wasn't the end of my holiday in South Australia. The Andersons kindly put up with me for a few more days. On Tuesday, I went into Adelaide by train, and travelled down a picturesque line that winds among the hills until it suddenly emerges in the middle of the suburbs. During the trip, I gained a view of the Adelaide hills and also saw a landscape of the entire Adelaide skyline. The most exhausting day of the trip was the day in which I tramped around the city. Next day, Alan Sandercock, having recovered slightly from the Convention, took me for a car-trip down Victor Harbour way. Then I caught the plane home. End of nostalgia-trip. I had said goodbye to everybody, and I expected to meet them all again at Easter in Melbourne. But that's another story. Details next issue.

\* You will have already noticed that this issue's back and front covers were designed and printed by John Bangsund. On the inside back cover, John lists a number of Australian fanzines, all of which you should read if possible. S F COMMENTARY is the magazine that you hold in your hand. Time, and this year's Hugo nominators, will decide whether it is Hugo-class. Personally I think that SCYTHROP should win the Hugo, not merely enter the nomination list, as my fanzine might do. SCYTHROP is published at long intervals by John Bangsund, PO Box 357, Kingston, ACT 2604. SCYTHROP's main disadvantage is that readers wait a long time for their copies, for otherwise it contains the most entertaining writing in fandom, and some of the most skilful mimeo and artwork. No 25 contains articles by John Bangsund, "secret master of Peacock fandom", Bob Bloch, "definitely not recommended reading for the jung and easily freudened", George Turner, "secret master of practically everything", and the Gentle Readers. Since John Bangsund moved from Melbourne to Canberra, not a lot has come from him, but we keep hoping. :: CHAO (John Alderson, PO Box 72, Maryborough, Victoria 3465) is Australia's oddest fanzine, and sometimes it is as entertaining as SCYTHROP. John entertains his readers most by deliberately misspelling at least one word in every line, and by writing highly improbable fiction which he describes as his autobiography. You can buy CHAO for 40 cents per copy, but like John Bangsund and the other editors that I mention, John would much prefer letters of comment, artwork, or written contributions, to money. As Leigh Edmonds said several years ago, "I like letters much better than money. All dollar notes look the same, but each letter is different from all the others." Val doesn't agree. :: COR SERPENTIS is the infrequent publication of the Monash University Science Fiction Association. The last issue that appeared had the date of August 1971, but was posted in December. It contained reprints from earlier Australian fanzines, including John Bangsund's classic PROBE ON REPORTABILITY A, and Don Symons' THE

VELIKOVSKY AFFAIR. Carey Handfield has been knocking people over the head with a nulla-nulla during recent weeks in order to get material for COR SERPENTIS 3. As I have contributed something, it might never appear. If it appears, it will be printed offset. For further details, write to Carey Handfield, 2 Banoon Road, South Eltham, Victoria 3095. :: You probably realise by now that I am following John Bangsund's Order-of-Fanzines from the inside back cover. I am not sure that I would call GEGENSCHWEIN the best of the NSW fanzines, but Eric Lindsay (6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776) has done his best to make it so. Eric says that he adopted justified margins a few weeks before SFC did, and I'll believe him. Eric has gone on to improve every other facet of the magazine, and in Number 5 he includes a swag of artwork. Iain Ban writes a very interesting account of the methods by which an Australian fanzine editor might even make money, and other articles come from Australia's "new wave" of fanzine writers, people such as Leith Morton, Clive Morley, Blair Ramage, Alan Sandercock, and Paul Anderson. Kevin Dillon (Australia's most seasoned fan, although not its oldest), Nick Shears, Don Tuck, and John Alderson, also appear in GEG. :: NORSTRILIAN NEWS (John Foyster, PO Box 96, South Yarra, Victoria 3141) does need money - \$1 for 14. Our main news magazine, under its original leadership. Indispensable. :: BOYS OWN FANZINE and RATAPLAN (John Foyster; and Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3182) are fanzines that sometimes exist and sometimes they don't. Leigh says that the stencils for BOF are still sitting in his back room, waiting for a Foyster editorial, or something. Meanwhile, Leigh has just produced two issues of RATAPLAN in two weeks. Leigh doesn't accept money; he wants only your letters, commentary, articles, and other expressions of interest. RATAPLAN 7 contains Leigh's editorial, and articles by Lesleigh Luttrell (Instant Ad: LESLEIGH LUTTRELL FOR DUFF!), Nate Bucklin, and Bill Wright. RATAPLAN 8 contains more words by Lesleigh Luttrell, another Edmonds editorial, and articles by those two renegades from SFC, Barry Gillam, and Bruce Gillespie, plus a reprint of John Bangsund's brilliant tilt at Australian censorship, KILLJOY'S COMPLAINT. (I write lots of stuff about rock and roll, by the way.) :: It seems that nobody, not even the combined efforts of tv executives and sponsors, can kill interest in STAR TREK. To celebrate continued Trekkie-madness, the Sydney STAR TREK organisation called DUSK puts out TERRAN TIMES every so often. (The editor is my favourite femmefan, Shayne McCormack, 49 Orchard Road, Bass Hill, NSW 2197). Shayne does not say how much money you must pay to get copies. Probably you only need to write to her and say that you are a STAR TREK fan. In TT4, articles appear by Suisaidh Peigi, Shayne McCormack, Jim Morgan, John Alderson, Jenny Stevenson, Shayne again (the best thing in the magazine, a story called THE POINT IS), Phillip Williams, and assorted letter-writers. It's a pity that I've never seen episodes of STAR TREK, or otherwise I could raise more interest in the magazine. :: David Grigg (PO Box 100, Carlton South, Victoria 3053) has tried to make THE FANARCHIST into the best fanzine of its type in Australia. Its "type" is fannish - "people-oriented", as David expresses it. Nothing about s f, but lots about the various odd people and events that louse up David's life. John Brunner, Steven Phillips, John Alderson, Harry Warner Jr, and Ed Cagle, appear in No 7. David Grigg, armed with an IBM typewriter, makes a very successful effort to improve the appearance of THE FANARCHIST. Good stuff, even if I would rather read SPECULATION. :: I'm not quite sure why John Bangsund put THE MENTOR and WOMBAT so low on his list. Probably because he wanted to warn people away from the most successful team in Sydney fandom, Ron Clarke (78 Redgrave Road, Normanhurst, NSW 2076) and Shayne McCormack (address above). Ron says that THE MENTOR is "his", but we fear that Shayne runs TM as well as WOMBAT. THE MENTOR has a magnificent record (a much longer one than SFC's, for instance) for discovering new Sydney talent, especially among people who write fiction. TM 22 is atypical, because it contains only one piece of



fiction, Michael Black's INTERREGNUM, and a few more articles (by John Alderson - its that man again! - plus Steven Phillips and Edgar H Lepp) than usual. Michael O'Brien gives a short autobiography, in the AUSTRALIAN S F FANS series, there are some reviews, and then THE MENTOR finishes with the magazine's real strength, the letter column. Issue after issue, Ron manages to set Australia's most cool-headed fans at loggerheads with each other, and the result is often more interesting than to read a whole swag of the same fans' own magazines. Shayne McCormack co-edits Ron's other magazine, WOMBAT, which is a marvellous mixture of odd bits and pieces, funny articles, strange poems, and a letter column that often causes as much furore as that in THE MENTOR. For both fanzines, Ron and Shayne like to receive written response rather than money. (If you really want to give them money, they won't refuse it.)

The other fanzines on John's list are rather unknown quantities. SOMERSET GAZETTE was edited by Noel Kerr, as the official magazine of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. However, Noel now has other things on his mind. (He has got married.) The name no longer seems appropriate, as the Club has long since moved from its quarters in Somerset Place. The latest news is that Lee Harding will edit a fanzine, as yet unnamed, for the Club, and that it will completely replace SG. All inquiries about it should go to the Melbourne S F Club, GPO Box 1267L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001. :: I'm not sure whether Michael O'Brien intends to proceed with TOLKIEN BULLETIN. However, Michael will continue to produce fanzines at intervals for his many correspondents in Australia and overseas. If you want your name on Michael's correspondence list, write to him at 158 Liverpool Street, Hobart, Tasmania 7000. :: I don't know much about the fate of YGGDRASIL, the magazine of the Melbourne University S F Association. You could probably find out about it from Anne Sartain, 6 Power Street, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122. :: And KANGAROO FEATHERS? Nobody has told me much about it, except that it will be brilliant when it appears. Bob Smith will be the editor, and it seems now that John Bangsund will produce it. KANGAROO FEATHERS will present the very best of Australian fanzine writing, and it should provide the best argument yet that Australia has the kind of fan tradition that merits overseas support for our Worldcon bid. :: I see that John has slipped in an ad for his book, JOHN W CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE. If John had stayed unemployed longer in February (which he couldn't afford to do), he might have finished this monumental tome. When John becomes established in Canberra, he will begin to work on this book again.

\* After reading about all those other fanzines, you may want to rush out and order them all. Wait around, please; there's more of S F COMMENTARY yet. Only financial considerations prevent me from publishing an issue the size of WAR AND PEACE. Well..the size of ANNA KARENIN, at least. I have eighty-six letters of comment by about sixty correspondents from which I can choose the contents for this column. There are fifteen articles in the file. Quite a few people have promised me reviews. 'S F COMMENTARY' has become a monster which I don't know how to control. I can't say, "Don't write letters", because happiness is a full mail-box, as you well know. If you stopped writing letters, I would give up. Don't stop sending articles or reviews. Keep sending fanzines; I read them all eventually. But you may need to wait until I acknowledge your letter, or print your article, or read your fanzine. Worst of all, you may have to wait long periods of time between issues of SFC. (The present issue is a case in point.) You could persuade your friends to subscribe. Best of all, you could think of a way in which I could give up my job and spend all my time publishing SFC, or writing articles about s f writers. Then I could print more articles by the kind of people who appear in this issue; people such as DR DARKO SUVIN, who is Associate Professor of English at McGill University, Montreal, Canada. According to the afterword to Dr



Suvin's book, OTHER WORLDS, OTHER SEAS, he is "an expert in two fields - modern theatre, and utopian and science fiction", has written seven books, which cover subjects from Bertolt Brecht to s f, and has "written over two hundred critiques and essays published in various Yugoslav, Swiss, Czech, Polish, French, and American periodicals". And I had the hide to ask Dr Suvin if I could sub-edit his work! Shame. Why does he write for S F COMMENTARY? Probably so that he can have an essay published in the Australian language as well. JOHN GIBSON is a more mysterious character. He lives in Blaxland, in the Blue Mountains forty miles from Sydney, because he dislikes cities and the general technological trend of today's society. He has had poetry published in THE HUMANIST, is a pacifist "for purely cowardly reasons", and writes very little, very well. Then there's... well, I gave you my potted autobiography last issue. The distinguished reviewers include GEORGE TURNER, to whom I devoted a small amount of space last issue. John Bangsund still hopes to publish an anthology of George's essays sometime, called PLUMBERS OF THE COSMOS. It will be one of the great events in the science fiction world, and I think that Doubleday or Faber should publish it. LYLE CULLEN is a gentleman and a scholar (to coin an apt cliché) who has been everywhere and done everything except attend s f conventions, and who holds an honours degree in philosophy. He also works at the same place as I do, which qualifies him for some kind of award. TED PAULS is a person that I won't meet for a couple of years, because he lives near Washington, DC, USA. From isolated impressions I pick up from fanzines, Ted has been in fandom for about ten years, he has participated in almost every possible fan activity, including an excellent, now-discontinued, politics fanzine, KIPPLE, and currently has a reputation for book reviews and feuds with New York fandom. The latter reputation may no longer apply. CHRISTINE MCGOWAN has become active recently in Melbourne fandom. She is doing a law degree at Monash University, she reads and writes a lot, and she likes to conduct long and brilliantly-reasoned arguments about sex with prudish male fans. (Really, she will talk about anything with anyone, and convince them that she's right.). And...well, I hope that I can fit in some more film reviews by BARRY GILLAM, who studies hard for an Arts degree at New York University, and who writes very well about almost anything. Again, he is a person whom I hope to meet in 1973. If I've missed out anybody, their articles went in at the last moment.

\* And some people have taken the hint given by me and Houston Craighead in last issue. Fan biographies have come from people like:

PHILIPPE HUPP  
34, rue Bossuet, 57 Metz, France \*

I'm eighteen, and I am a student at Metz University. I attend the English section, which means that I study only what concerns English - British and US literature, grammar, and civilisation. That pleases me a lot, as I am really fond of US literature and English-speaking literature as a whole. As an s f fan, I can translate all sorts of things, speak with writers, attend cons, which I cannot do without a knowledge of English. My favourite literature is, by far, science fiction. My favourite writer is William Faulkner. My favourite pop music group is Pink Floyd (an s f pop group). I don't read any French books, and I want to become an interpreter or a translator. My favourite s f writers are Ray Bradbury, Clifford Simak, J G Ballard, Harlan Ellison, Samuel Delany, A E van Vogt, Isaac Asimov...and, well...maybe I've forgotten a couple. (November 16, 1971)\*

\* Philippe also co-edits a fanzine, and contributes to HORIZONS DE FANTAS-

TIQUE, for which he writes fanzine reviews. I was amused that he doesn't read French writers, since I'm one of a large number of English-speaking readers who regard French novelists as much better than English or American novelists. My favourite writer is Gustave Flaubert, followed closely by Proust and others. \*

\* MALCOLM EDWARDS  
75A Harrow View, Harrow, Middlesex, England

Your potted autobiography at the end of SFC 25 arouses my interest. 6' 1"? But did not John Brosnan say unto me that you were a dwarf? Who am I to believe? Are you misleading we ignorant foreigners? Or is it that Brosnan deducts several inches from the height of everyone he knows that isn't likely to appear in person to prove him wrong, in order to convince a disbelieving world that there are other people even smaller than himself (pretty bloody unlikely, when you think about it)? Or did I simply mishear him? Or have I invented the entire conversation? In any case, I have made it a firm rule in life never to trust fully anyone taller than 5' 9½". That is the proper height of man; anything else is unnatural, and should be approached with suspicion. (January 20, 1972) \*

\* Well, we found out something about Malcolm Edwards. Brosnan is wrong; no doubt he also says that Leigh Edmonds has short hair, John Bangsund looks like a pretzel, and that John Foyster is a mad history professor. Fear not, John Brosnan, we shall appear some time at a British convention, and confound your evil attempts to slander Australian fandom. (Please note Malcolm's new address, by the way.) A few writers answered my request "straight": \*

\* SANDRA MIESEL  
8744 North Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240, USA

I'm thirty, married to a Ph D organic chemist, we have three children (6, 3, 2), I have a master's degree in biochemistry and medieval history from the University of Illinois, am 5' 6½" with a long mane of black hair, read, draw, embroider, and cook. (January 20, 1972) \*

\* JERRY LAPIDUS  
54 Clearview Drive, Pittsford, New York 14534, USA

Twenty-three. 5' 7". One of the few people I know of in the theatre. Currently I am pursuing (in the sense of chasing after) a career in professional theatre. I have a BS in drama, will do graduate work in it for the next couple of years, and for the next few months in the Netherlands. I have read s f for thirteen years, and have been active in fandom for nearly six. Musical tastes run from Leonard Cohen to the Beatles to the Clancy Brothers to Stephen Sondheim; s f from Delany to Ellison to Disch to Heinlein. I also like Beethoven, rape, and ultraviolence. ((\*brg\*\* i.e. CLOCKWORK ORANGE?\*)) (January 25, 1972) \*

\* BILL ANDRESEN Jr  
3826 Castlerock Road, Malibu, California 90265, USA

I'm a shade over 6', eighteen years old, reasonably thin, clean-shaven, with relatively short hair, and I wear gold-wire-framed glasses. I dress somewhat liberally (but not very) and I work in a men's wear clothing store after school and on holidays. I go to Santa Monica High School, and I am in my senior year. My plans for next year are

not too concrete, but I plan to attend either the University of Southern California or the University of California at Irvine, with a major either in political science or international relations. I am aiming at a career either in law or teaching. My favourite s f authors are Robert Silverberg, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein. (Roger Zelazny should be there, too.) From the time that I was fourteen until very recently I read straight s f with practically nothing else (unless one of my teachers made me read something else), but recently I have begun to read other things. In other words I read just about everything and anything that I can get my hands on, these days. My main musical interest is in both hard and soft rock, although I like some classical music. (March 30, 1972) \*

\* Thanks very much, Sandra, Jerry, and Bill. More fan autobiographies from other people, please. Please feel free to provide far more details than I put down about myself - e.g. what are your favourite film directors? (mine include Kubrick, Hitchcock, Renoir, Visconti, Cocteau, Godard, Truffaut, Rossellini, Chabrol, Losey, Lester, Franju, Bergman, and, best of all, Orson Welles, plus lots of others), and can I ask you the question that often I would like to ask at random people in the street, "Why do you bother to exist?"

S f will seem like small beer after all that, but a number of correspondents have strong opinions on the subject. First spotlight shines on:

PAUL ANDERSON  
21 Mulga Road, Hawthorndene, South Australia 5051

The cover of S F COMMENTARY 19 (the John Foyster Special) was pretty good, and even showed a fair likeness. I have a few quarrels with the stated aims of EXPLODING MADONNA, as I thought that sf was discussed seriously enough in Sapiro's RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY. The first and the second aims conflict with each other. John restricted his audience so much that he screened out worthwhile opinion as well as that of the "jerks". The only valid reason for restricting the number of printed copies was lack of funds, and the more fuggheaded letter-writers would be deterred sufficiently by the nature of the material that John printed. :: The section on Sturgeon is enlightening, but now I would like to see a sequel in which George Turner compared the treatment of the premise in VENUS PLUS X with that in LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. :: At least your magnum opus appeared, which is more than can be said for Bergeron's projected Willis fanzine. (July 18, 1971)

I am now the Australian agent for Linda Bushyager's fine fanzine, GRANFALLOON, and I would appreciate some publicity. :: I've just received a renewal notice for SPECULATION, but I am curious to know when Pete Weston will publish another issue? Not to mention QUICKSILVER, and other things for which you are agent. I like the fact you are commenting on the original fiction anthologies, but whatever happened to the series on Aldiss? Where's a follow-up article on the recent novels of Dick? SFC 20 was quite good, but too many of your reviews put down the books discussed. (November 3, 1971)

S F COMMENTARY 22 wasn't too bad, but it was a little out of balance, with a large amount of space devoted to the Lem article, good as it was. My main quibble with the article itself is that too often Lem

wanders into dissertations on the current beliefs of society, but only rarely does he tie these back to the main theme of sex in s f. A few quibbles: Would the progeny of the union of the last astronaut in PLANET OF THE APES and Nova take after their mother? Would not this depend more on the nature of the regression that caused the loss of intelligence, and whether the genes were dominant or recessive? Would not the "intelligence" of the hero count for something? The children could be either mute, normal, or a mixture. Naturally I question most of all the intelligence of the film's hero. SEX IN S F seems to show that Lem has not read John Boyd, John Norman, Dick Geis, the later Farmer, or Silverberg - these are a few that spring to mind.

Barry Gillam's review of THX 1138 renewed my frustration about the inexcusably bad motion picture distributors who sit on good films, but screen garbage for long periods of time. A week after THX 1138 began in Melbourne, the distributors advertised that it would be the next film at one of our local cinemas. But no - it was lost or diverted, and we endured an extended run of SUMMER OF 42, and something else will follow that. In Adelaide we are still waiting for LITTLE BIG MAN and LITTLE MURDERS. (November 19, 1971) \*

\* I think that you and I must have different meanings for the word "serious" if you think that RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY talks "seriously" about s f. The last one that I received was quite an improvement on previous issues, but generally RQ talks about few topics more serious than comics, Tarzan, heroic fantasy, and other kids' stuff. (Sorry, Phil Farmer; but your REAP speech was worth a lot more than all Burroughs' books put together.) The main reason why John restricted the circulation of EM was financial. If I had an ounce of sense, I would follow his example. It's very hard to distribute a letter-of-comment-payment fanzine, like EM, because people just don't write letters - at least not to my non-s f fanzine, METAPHYSICAL REVIEW. Therefore MR's extra-apa circulation has never risen much beyond thirty. :: Paul is also the agent for Jeff Smith's and Jeff Clark's enterprising American fanzine, PHANTASMICON. It talks about s f, so I find it very easy to read. :: Ahem - ask Pete Weston and Malcolm Edwards about their fanzines. Malcolm has just taken over VECTOR, the magazine of the British S F Association, and he will publish that instead of QUICKSILVER. Pete has quietly sunk into the Birmingham landscape. Both Peter and Malcolm got married - at least I can avoid that ultimate catastrophe. :: Frequent requests like Paul's made me recommence work on the Aldiss articles, which is the main reason why this issue of SFC is late. I've written the first draft of "Aldiss II", and given enough time and freedom from nervous breakdown, I might finish "Aldiss III". The more that I study Aldiss' books, the less that I know about them. I'd like to write about the most recent Dick novels, too, but when....??? :: Would I annoy you too much, Paul, if I said that the "dissertations" in Lem's article made up the real meat of the thing? I still think that the title of the article should have been SOCIOLOGY AND S F. :: I have an article by Lem, called S F PORNOGRAPHY AND PHANTOMATICS, about a Dick Geis book, on file at the moment. Wait patiently. :: Thanks for keeping up your comments about SFC, Paul. You must be its most faithful correspondent, except perhaps for:

\* JERRY LAPIDUS  
54 Clearview Drive, Pittsford, New York 14534, USA)

In the 9th issue of TOMORROW AND..., my fanzine, I will run your article about Philip Dick as the entire mimeo review section. This

will be attached to the offset part of the magazine. Hopefully, I will try to fit THE REAL THING into eighteen or nineteen pages.

\* There is the Big Announcement, again, for all you people who are desperate to buy a copy of S F COMMENTARY 9, which is out of print. Don Miller has already reprinted Part 2 of SFC 9. Now Jerry will reprint Part 1, about three novels of Philip K Dick. If you want TOMORROW AND.. 9, please write to Jerry, and enclose \$2 for 5 (subscription) or a written contribution. It's a good fanzine. \*

APA-45 "fannishness" cf. Katz "fannishness": Did you read the one comment that Seth McEvoy directed to me, entirely seriously, when I dared to question Arnie's motives? "Get it through your head," he said, "that fannishness is friendliness!" The feeling is very good in APA-45. SFC cannot capture quite the same feeling because of the slightly overwhelming atmosphere of the whole thing. People are afraid that they will be stepped on by Franz Rottensteiner or some other high-brow critic, if they dare to voice their opinions about some subject. I should write a long letter about Rottensteiner sometime. Although you share with him the feeling that s f rarely lives up to its promises, you differ at this point. I don't think I've ever read that Franz actually likes anything in science fiction, apart from the single exception of his pet writer, Stanislaw Lem. Lem is his god, and Rottensteiner is his prophet to the world. (November 27, 1971) \*

\* As SFC 25 announced to an astonished world, Franz actually does like some current s f apart from Lem's. A recent LUNA MONTHLY carried an excellent article in which Franz Rottensteiner explained why he thinks that Lem is the world's best s f writer. (You can get LUNA MONTHLY for \$4 per year from Ann F Dietz, 655 Orchard Street, Oradell, New Jersey 07649.) :: I thought that my correspondents stomped on Franz as much as the other way around - and droves of people write to the magazine, anyway. Masochists.

SFC 23 Editorial: I think that you are guilty of the same exclusivity of which you accuse some American fan editors. I abhor the "fannishness is the only thing worth reading" philosophy as much as you do, but you seem to present the "fannishness is never worth reading" philosophy here. I certainly can't agree with that. You've printed fannish writing yourself, David Grigg's work among others. I've always liked writing in both fannish and more serious modes.

The problem is deeper than the fact that Arnie Katz has influenced a large number of fans. For lots of reasons, new fannish fanzines are springing up, with little corresponding increase in the number of serious magazines. There are just plain very few good critics around. There are very few people who can write in an insightful and interesting way. Mediocre fannish writing is readable, but mediocre serious writing is deadly dull. In editing my magazine, I haven't found many people who can write that sort of interesting, analytical discussion and review that you want to see in fanzines. I seek out actively writers, and ask for material; besides this, of course, material comes in unasked. I get a limited amount of material by Andy Offut, Ted Pauls, Richard Delap, and Bruce Gillespie. I would love to have more of this - but I cannot get it. Sandra Miesel wants to write something for TA, but she has nothing ready. John Foyster told me that he doesn't feel like writing criticism, but he sent an excellent personal/political column. Other top fan editors have the same problems. They can only

print what they receive, and they have high standards. I like a good mixture of writing in TOMORROW AND.. Here's a challenge to those people you do consider fan critics and people who can write s f discussion worthy of the time spent reading it. Bruce, John, Franz, Stanislaw - we are waiting. Will you leave us to the mercy of the fannish hordes?

It's strange that you find YANDRO and STARLING the two magazines that are worthy of mention. YANDRO contains primarily personal ramblings from the various contributors and editors. Sometimes it is interesting, and sometimes not so. Buck's book reviews are precisely the type that you claim to dislike - the extremely short, like/dislike variety. Half the fanzine is letters and fanzine reviews. Ninety per cent of STARLING is regularly non-s f - films, comics, rock - with Joe Sanders' column as the only s f element. I've never seen Joe write anywhere else; I doubt that he even wants to do so.

When I come right down to it, there isn't anything all that notable in SFC 23, either. The comments from letter-writers are just about the most interesting part, as well as your editorial - but these talk about s f analysis and discussion, and are not the genuine article. There is some fine critical writing here, but a lot of it is good writing of another type, a type that is not very far away from the work that you criticise. (December 31, 1971) \*

\* You missed the point of that editorial, Jerry, but so did a lot of other people. Jeff Schalles summed up neatly the whole question when he said, "There's a lot of untapped or misguided talent lying around in fandom, and eventually it will show itself." I don't think that that talent will come to light while one person and his followers say at conventions that "there is only one type of fanzine writing, and if you don't write that way then you can count yourself out of my group." When I wrote that editorial I thought that this was the reason why good serious writers were ducking their heads and lying low. Lots of letter-writers have told me that the whole "feud" disappeared long ago in USA, so I'll leave the matter there. The fan press should be a free press. I think it might stay that way, although, as you point out, Jerry, there are not many writers who can take the best advantage of that freedom. They must earn a crust, for a start: John Foyster, and Franz Rotensteiner, and Stanislaw Lem, and George Turner, and William Atheling Jr., and Bruce Gillespie, are just too busy to write much for non-paying markets. :: Buck Coulson once said about Avram Davidson that he is such an interesting writer "that even his laundry labels must be interesting". I say the same thing about everything that the Coulsons write, and the same for the members of Columbia fandom. They are interesting people, not a little back-scratching group. \*

Nothing at all stands out as a Hugo contender for next year, but the list certainly looks more promising than the final ballot last year. Silverberg's A TIME OF CHANGES is one of his best novels, and far superior to TOWER OF GLASS; also, his SON OF MAN and THE WORLD INSIDE are both well worth reading, and possibly merit Hugo consideration. Both FURTHEST and TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO are very well-written. SCATTERED BODIES is probably Farmer's most successful complete novel, and it is certainly far better than, say, RINGWORLD. THE LATHE OF HEAVEN seems to be a bit over-rated. It is a good novel, it contains excellent ideas and writing, but the plot tends to drag. Main character dreams, changes world, repeats a dozen times. It is not "the only



possible Hugo contender". I still can't finish THE DEVIL IS DEAD; it still reads like a bunch of minor Lafferty short stories strung together, to produce an even more minor Lafferty novel. Swann's THE FOREST OF FOREVER is a thoroughly charming novel, in all the possible good senses of the word. Only one piece of short fiction has really impressed me all year - Poul Anderson's QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS.

(December 26, 1971) \*

\* As some of us know, Jerry has a depressing habit of talking about the Hugo Awards at all times and in all places, even in SFC. I wasn't going to allow him to say a word this year - but, well, I've heard the Nebula nominations (which often give a guide to the Hugo nominations), and we had an interesting discussion about the Hugos at the Easter Convention. (One Australian writer, who was asked, "What would you need to do to get a Hugo?", answered, "Move to America. Meet fans and pros." I can't remember whether he mentioned the minor detail that he would need to write good stories as well.) I've read a small number of last year's books, and a much larger number of last year's short stories. LATHE OF HEAVEN for Best Novel; and BODIES, by Thomas Disch, for Best Short Fiction. QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS was lousy, a non-event. None of the Silverberg novels interested me at all.

Now that I've angered a sufficient number of people, I might mention that the nominations for the Nebula Award are: NOVEL: THE BYWORLDER (Poul Anderson), A TIME OF CHANGES (Robert Silverberg), HALF PAST HUMAN (T J Bass), THE DEVIL IS DEAD (R A Lafferty), THE LATHE OF HEAVEN (Ursula LeGuin), and MARGARET AND I (Kate Wilhelm). NOVELLA: THE MISSING MAN (Katherine McLean), THE INFINITY BOX (Kate Wilhelm), THE PLASTIC ABYSS (Kate Wilhelm), BEING THERE (Jerzi Kosinski), and THE GOD HOUSE (Keith Roberts). NOVELETTE: THE ENCOUNTER (Kate Wilhelm), POOR MAN, BEGGAR MAN (Joanna Russ), A SPECIAL KIND OF MORNING (Gardner Dozois), MOUNT CHARITY (Edgar Pangborn), and QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS (Poul Anderson). SHORT STORY: HORSE OF AIR (Gardner Dozois), GOOD NEWS FROM THE VATICAN (Robert Silverberg), HEATHEN GOD (George Zebrowski), and THE LAST GHOST (Stephen Goldin). The big surprise is the absence of Farmer's TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO and Disch's BODIES (which he may have withdrawn himself because it is a section from a forthcoming novel). I haven't read four of the novels, but even if I did, I suspect that LATHE OF HEAVEN would still come Number 1. Both THE MISSING MAN and THE GOD HOUSE are brilliant, and so are THE ENCOUNTER and HORSE OF AIR. That's the nearest I've ever come to an agreement with the SFWA choices, so probably this year each category will get a No Award.

Not much of an answer, I suppose, to Jerry, who has been one of SFC's most consistent supporters. But it was Jerry who asked me to give longer answers to letters of comment. Unfortunately, longer answers mean that I can publish only a small percentage of the letters that I want to print. As a result, I will have letters in this issue that comment on issues as far back as SFC 22. Such a letter comes from:

DAVID GERROLD \*

Box 526, Hollywood, California 90028, USA

Today I received a copy of the May issue of S F COMMENTARY. Thank you for sending it to me. However, while I appreciate the thought, I'm afraid I cannot thank you for your comments on my story LOVE STORY IN THREE ACTS (which you referred to as LOVE IN THREE ACTS).

Admittedly, it is not my best story. It was written more than four

years ago, and it was one of my first experiments with the short story form. The flaws in it are obvious to me; but its virtues still outweigh its errors.

For instance, the WASHINGTON STAR took two paragraphs out of a three-paragraph review to praise the story as "an unnervingly taut tale..an antiseptic commentary on the present-day psychoses labelled incompatibility". Just recently Leon Stover of the Illinois Institute of Technology asked permission to quote part of the story in his book, AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION, which is scheduled for publication next year.

With reaction like that, your review leaves me puzzled. I can only surmise that you completely misinterpreted the story - or did not read it very carefully. In fact, to judge from your comments, you missed the last line of the story altogether. The last line is, "It wasn't until the next morning they discovered the guidance module had not been connected." If it was missing from your copy of the book, I would be interested to know that. Without that last line, the story is very much different. In fact, it would be the inane and banal "silly series of words" that you accuse me of, and I would justifiably deserve your scorn.

However, the point of the story, as I wrote it, and most others have interpreted it, is that lovemaking programmed by machine is putrid and repulsive. The reader is supposed to be appalled at the idea. The last line is supposed to further that shock when the reader thinks about it and realises that these two human beings need the "fantasy" of machine guidance in order to achieve maximum satisfaction.

The way that you reviewed the story, you implied that I "solved" the problems of John and Marsha. Quite the contrary, Mr Gillespie. I was only trying to define it - and that was the point that you seemed to have missed. (Indeed, I find it very hard to understand your plaintive query, "But does Gerrold make the situation comic?" Sir, this situation is anything but comic. Tragic.)

I hope that in future you will take more care with your reviews - especially when you are reviewing my work. I hope that you will read the stories more carefully and I certainly hope that you will think about what I was trying to accomplish before you sit down to comment on it. Otherwise, you will do both of us an injustice.

PS: Upon consideration, I think that the story is still shocking - even if you do miss the last line. The implication that two people would be willing to let a machine guide them is a sad commentary on a consumer-oriented culture; i.e. nothing is worthwhile unless you pay for it.

PPS: I have appreciated your reviews in the past, especially your comments on ORACLE FOR A WHITE RABBIT (GALAXY, December, 1969).  
(December 7, 1971) \*

\* Astute readers will note that May's issue (admittedly, posted in June) reached David in December. :: Puzzled readers will find LOVE STORY IN THREE ACTS in NOVA 1, edited by Harry Harrison, which I reviewed in S F COMMENTARY 21. :: I like to think that I am a fairly careful reader, and lots of other authors have said that I read their works carefully. It's very difficult to remember why I wrote what I did two years ago, but I think that I

can safely say that there are two (or more) interpretations that one can give to LOVE STORY IN THREE ACTS, and I admit that your interpretation did not occur to me. What didn't I like about the story? First of all, I said to myself, "Oh no, not that old idea again!" Secondly, I would have said to myself, "Well, who cares if John and Marsha do have problems with their love-making anyway?" They are such uninteresting types, who are far more mechanical than any machine. They shout a lot at each other, but I can't empathise with their rage. Lawrence Wolfe, of BEM, is obviously the villain of the piece. (I admit that David did not mean me to see the situation that way, but since the two "main characters" are so obviously women's magazine cliches, then I presumed that any other characters fall into the same neat slots.) Wolfe keeps talking to John, and John talks to Wolfe, and neither says anything to the other. My head was ringing by the time that I had read a few pages of this very short story. Wolfe sells this gismo to the main characters, and in the last line we realise that - hoorah! - they don't need computer stimulation; they have beaten The Machine and its representatives! Well, so I'm wrong. But to see the story in the way that the author saw it, I would need to sympathise with the situation of John and Marsha. Since David Gerrold makes them into such dolts, then I can't do this. Also, I didn't like the obvious prudery on the last page, when the big love scene is reduced to euphemisms ("a wholeness of being", "push his sharing") which only make the main characters seem more trivial. :: Never fear, David. When I like one of your stories, I will say why in terms that are just as clear. \*

ED CAGLE \*

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(In S F 23) George Turner not only puts on a good show when he writes reviews, but he touches all the important points along the way. His review of S F HALL OF FAME was extremely interesting to me because most of the stories therein are ones I try to regard as my own s f experience. Some of the stories started me reading s f; some of them kept me reading s f when all was dark and boring. Some of the material passed before my eyes before I became blind to pure, simple, unpretentious story-telling, before the trappings of perfected technique posed barriers to my reading pleasure. Since George Turner beat around this point without actually giving it a good, solid rap on the tunka, I'd like to.. uh.. thump its tunka.

George said that he was sticking out his neck to suggest that the writers who voted for the stories relied on memory-stuck-in-the-mind, and they did not buckle down and cull the field. Yeah, maybe they did allow their hearts to rule over their heads a little, George. Surely they all know and understand - and can recognise - the subtly interwoven presence of technical perfection in a work of fiction, can't they? One would expect this group to choose a list of yarns that were more or less sterling examples of the writer's craft. Almost instinctively they would choose a technically superior story over a near-equal that lacked technical polish. But George seems to think that they relied on memory alone, and on that not too discriminately. Oddly enough, I agree with him. But that's where I part company with George, for I believe that had they "got down to business and really winnowed out the best", as he suggests, the whole point of the collection would have been lost. George, if you and I can have a momentary lapse and just recall a story with fondness, why can't all those writers have a similar privilege? Maybe the result, a selection that was based on critical standards would have provided you with a little honey of a

book to write a review about, but is that all there is? Would the rascal sell? Would a collection that was based on those standards really mean anything to you, or me, in terms of what we call our "s f exoerience"?

...I've made up my mind to subject Australia to my presence in 1975, Worldcon or no, and I'm already squirming with impatience! But I know what's bugging me now - I hate appointments and set dates with a passion. To have left it undecided would have been my wisest choice, I guess. Meanwhile, out here by the river, in the trees, between these grassy hills in the timber by the river, the temperature is hovering around 18°, ice coats the projecting surfaces of everything, the wind is North at 20 knots, our three boys are having a fight in the basement, and if that runs its usual course, the eight-year-old will whip the pants off the ten- and thirteen-year-old members of this address, or arrange it so that they get their butts in a jam... and I look forward to the third day of January when the Christmas vacation from school will - finally! - be over. I would like to return best wishes to you, if belatedly, for a very prosperous New Year, and since Christmas is long gone, I wish you a year-long holiday instead.

(December 30, 1971) \*

\* Amen to that last wish, and thanks for the other wishes. At Eastercon, during the panel about the Hugo awards, I pinched an idea from you, and suggested that Hugo nominators and voters probably work in much the same way as the SFWA Best Short Story of All Time awards were made, i.e. that most nominations were likely to come from the second half of the eligible year, and that the voters pick stories that are immediately memorable (i.e. flashy, and perhaps shallow) rather than stories that are the "best" (i.e. for me, stories that show qualities that might only come to light at a second or third reading.) Reply by Lee Harding: "You mean you read an s f story twice?" (Y'can't win, clobber.) I think that Robert Silverberg picked his "best"-story collection in THE MIRROR OF INFINITY, a collection which I hope to review soon. \*

(Re S F COMMENTARY 24): Melbourne's climate sounds very agreeable. Extremely hot and bitterly cold temperature ranges seem wearisome at times, but after experiencing a bit of "seasonless" and a bit of "four-goddamn-distinct-seasons" type of climate, I must admit that there is something to be said for a change. Our summers are about the same as yours, it appears, but we have (usually) much colder winters. And sometimes winter drags on forever. There is only one way to beat the drearies where climate is concerned, though, and that is to move around. I strongly recommend it. Once every five years, pack up and never look back. You get into some of the damndest messes! :: Two fan editors in this area have had the word laid on them about THE CAUSE (YAAAY!!), and reacted favourably. Creath Thorne, who used to write reviews for Geis, asked for my copies of SFC. And I gather that there will be a con in Kansas City, in June, which might offer a few opportunities for promotional whiwham.

SFC 24 was an issue I found easy to start, courtesy of the excellent writing within the vertical line of dots in the first piece. It was written by Boris Govcerccek, I believe, or some name similar to that. Whatever, or whoever, wrote it, it pleased me very much. Even the review was well done, though it was not nearly as engrossing as the "thoughts" that led it off. YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN didn't impress me as much more than goodole fast-moving work by a writer whose specialty

is another field of fiction, but it was a reasonably good book by any standard.

The review of SOLARIS was reminiscent of something that a public relations man might tell the press about his favourite celebrity. You were too long and too openly involved in creating meanings within meanings that have very little to do with either reading or reviewing a book. You strained at some of the interpretations. It is wonderful to behold complexity and truth in a simple set of circumstances, be they tangible or vaporous, but a book must be reasonably explanatory, or the reader takes the responsibility for writing it, instead of the writer. For myself, I didn't like the cold, cold, flavour of the writing of SOLARIS. The words of warmth and beauty and compassion were all there, but they seemed to come from a machine. Is it a fair question to ask if you would work as hard to understand a book that you didn't like, as you might for one that you were quite fond of? Stop and think what might happen if an extraordinarily good book happened to be written in a style that a reviewer abhorred. (March 8, 1972) \*

\* I will answer your points in reverse order. I think it is a very fair question to ask whether I would devote as much energy to a book that I did not like, as to a book that I liked as much as SOLARIS. I don't know. I have at various times devoted a lot of time to the demolition of a book that I did not like, but that wasn't your question. Take an example. When I did English II at University, several people explained exactly why James Joyce's PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN was one of the world's great books. I agreed with them. I still hated the book, and I haven't read it again. When I do, I will probably like it very much. (Put it on your memory-pad, Gillespie: 1972 is your year to read James Joyce.) But in 1966, when I read it first, I could not have devoted any energy to an essay about PORTRAIT. At various times, I could have said the same about Jane Austen and Albert Camus. But the question hardly arises in s f, surely. The field is so barren, that the reader/critic can only justify the time he spends on books that he likes, since he knows that most of those enjoyable books are not very good, anyway. SOLARIS, on the other hand, is an important work of European literature, and I think that before the end of this decade, a lot of people will have to read Lem's books if they want to make a claim to know anything about Eastern European literature in general. And as for "straining for interpretations"? Well, I think that probably I only captured a few of the most superficial meanings of SOLARIS, rather than "straining". One of the ways I test a great work, is to see how far I can "sink" into it, to see a part of its complexity, to feel that it contains a great deal that I have not glimpsed. Ironically, Lem himself agrees with you more than me, as you will see from his letter in this issue.

We had very strange weather during January and February. For the first time for many years, we had east winds during most of summer, instead of west winds. In Victoria, hot east winds come off the sea, and so they are much cooler than hot north-west winds, which blow from the land mass. However, Queensland and New South Wales had cyclones during most of January and February. In some strange way, cyclones up north gives us east winds, which give us a cool summer. Summer started about the time that children and teachers went back to school after the "summer vacation", but it did not last for long. On Thursday, February 17, Melbourne had its worst downpour ever, when about three inches of rain fell in half an hour. I've heard that some overseas newspapers printed the extraordinary picture that an AGE photographer took of the south end of Swanston Street, as a tidal wave of water swept away cars in the streets and flooded some of Melbourne's biggest shops. To make it worse,



the torrent" began just as commuters prepared to leave work for home. Many people took three or four hours to get out of the city. Fortunately I work in Carlton, to the north of the main city area. It only took an hour for us to get home, but we had to travel through nearly-flooded streets and roads. The downpour caused a flurry because such things happen so rarely. You never know - in August 1975, Melbourne might even have good weather. (I should mention that summer is making up in longevity for what it lacked in warmth. Our "Indian summer" has now stretched into the middle of April, and thousands of parents and teachers hope that it will last until the May school vacation.)

\* HARRY WARNER Jr  
423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, USA

Maybe the best kind of apology would be the simple statement that I agree with each and every thought that you've had about me in recent months. S F COMMENTARY has assumed for me exactly the status that AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW attained. I hope that I'm not too late in the case of your fanzine. If all that sounds cryptic, look up my article in the January-March AUSTRALIAN S F MONTHLY, and you might understand. I'm making one final test of whether I can still live with locs. I'm trying to work from the present backward, and write about each fanzine as it arrives, and turn to the most recent items in the backlog as spare time permits, on the theory that this will guarantee the gradual shrinkage of the backlog if it works at all. If it doesn't work, I have no other recourse than complete surrender - a general open letter to fandom that I can't take it any more, that I'm too old and befuddled to write locs as I did for a dozen years. Either I'll ask to be taken off everyone's mailing list or I will try to publish a small personal-type fanzine and send it in trade to everyone, depending on whether I have any energy at all remaining at that time. So if all goes well I'll get around to other recent fine things that you've sent me and if it doesn't go well you'll be among the great majority who will hear something else, and meanwhile I'll confine myself to the September issue which just recently arrived, even though it seems to bear an October postmark.

I wouldn't do anything as radical as disagree openly with Ursula K LeGuin (in SFC 23), but I feel pretty much as you hinted in your reference to D G Compton. Her Hugo is a tribute to the extreme merit of THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, the exception that proves the rule that Hugo nominations and victories tend to go to people who are pretty well known through personal appearances at worldcons. Someone could draw up an imposing list of people who have partially or wholly abstained from fandom and have been hard to find on Hugo ballots: Vonnegut, Derleth, Christopher, and a dozen others. Then another list could be created of items that won Hugos or came close, partly because their creators are familiar figures in fandom, and partly because those creators used their presence at conventions to make it plain how much they wanted Hugos.

Somewhere I have one complete book that contains nothing but essays on TURN OF THE SCREW, most of them devoted to the reality or non-reality of the ghosts. I can't find it at the moment, but I'm sure that even some of those who insist that the ghosts were all in the governess' mind admit that this is not consistent with one glimpse of the ghosts by an impartial outsider, who is neither the children nor the narrator.



I don't think that Heinlein looked too closely at the rolling road idea. The flaw in that story, for me, has always been his refusal to tackle the question of where the roads eventually go and what they do when they get there. Do they suddenly dive underground so that they can return through a subway like enormous endless belts, with everything on the roads hanging on somehow while upside down, and if so, how does a traveller cross the gap that is essential at each end for clearance? Or do the roads turn somewhere and form a gigantic loop that eventually brings each section back to its starting-point, and if so, what kind of mechanics would allow such enormous solid structures to stretch on one side sufficiently for even the gentlest of turns, when something as small and lightweight as an auto needs an absurdly complicated differential so that its two rear wheels can live with the turns that the front wheels induce? Or do the roads just run into disintegrator rays at the end of the line while at the starting end new sections are attached as fast as needed? Heinlein thinks so much of American technology that that might be the way it was. Another note on George Turner's letter: Maurice Hugi really was a separate and distinct author.

Barry Gillam's contribution on de Camp (THE SCIENCE OF NIGROMANCY) is easily the best thing in this issue. It could serve almost as a complete succinct literary summary of de Camp as a writer of fantasy and science fiction. I can't imagine that anyone else could do a better job unless he used ten times as much space. Where did I read many years ago that de Camp doesn't really find much humour in things, and that he writes humour by calculating how other people react to humour? I haven't the slightest idea if that's true, but maybe it might explain the peculiar virtues of de Camp's humour if it's so, just as Beethoven's music took on a special glory when the composer could no longer hear clearly what he had composed.

Either exhaustion or secret diplomacy seems to have achieved a truce in the sercon-fannish confrontations in USA since you published SFC 23. I'm afraid that I never did understand why people would object to one or the other type of fanzine. Fanzines don't chew up each other, nobody in fandom has the power to prevent large quantities of other people from publishing the kind of fanzines that they want to produce, and for several years there has been an ample quantity of each general type of fanzine. Laney's impact was cumulative. One article by him doesn't make nearly the impression that the same article would make if it appeared in a 150-page collection of his writings. Vernon McCain is a good example of a more recent much-admired American fan whose writings disappoint modern fans when they run across one example in an isolated old issue. I think that even the legendary Burbee falls into this category. Would anyone remember Charlie Chaplin if he'd appeared in just one two-reeler and then dropped dead? (January 13, 1972) \*

*about  
he did as  
for as felt as*  
No, but everybody would have remembered Orson Welles if he had made CITIZEN KANE and then dropped dead, and John Bangsund would have had a great reputation even if he had published nothing but ASFR Nos 1-10. My main worry about Terry Carr's dusty fight against entropy, is that he digs up so few of the great serious articles of the past. On the few occasions when I get a chance to look through old fanzines, I find it fascinating to see the first reviews of science fiction classics, or the first appreciation of an author (e.g. David Bunch in INSIDE) who later became very famous. Laney did not seem to merit quite so much praise. :: Maybe your praise for Barry Gillam's

article about de Camp will inspire him to finish his article about R A Lafferty that he has promised to do for so long. :: In a year when you had hospital treatment and attended the World Convention, I am surprised that you had time to write to anyone at all. However, I hope that you don't have to give up writing letters of comment altogether. A lot of fanzine readers and editors, including me, would be disappointed.

I'm sorry that I don't have more space to print some other letters about SFC 23, especially about Perry Chapdelaine's REVERSE RACISM. HOUSTON CRAIGHEAD sent in one particularly hostile reaction to the article, and I can only apologise for not printing the letter. The oddest aspect of Houston's letter was that he thought that I should not print articles about racism, or any other topics that are covered by the general press. Again, I repeat, that I will print articles on any subjects that interest me, from any writer who submits good articles to SFC. However, I am disappointed that Houston and more readers did not see the connection between REVERSE RACISM, which concerns a real problem that will affect the future, and science fiction, which rarely talks about futures that are really possible. Fortunately, there is one s f writer who does see things more widely and deeply. Greetings to.. \*

\* STANISLAW LEM  
Krakow, Poland

Your discussion of SOLARIS (in S F COMMENTARY 24) was cleverly done, since you used as a "pass key" my own words -- my statement taken from the review of Joseph's novel. It could be that this is truly a focal point, because when I spoke about Joseph's work, I did not have in my consciousness all the possible implications and ramifications of this proposition. Of course I do not know if you have revealed the "true cornerstone" of SOLARIS. Sometimes, as author, I do know what I am speaking about while I write a story or a novel, but this was not the case when I wrote SOLARIS.

Since you are interested in the novel, perhaps may I tell you how it was written. I had no knowledge, not an atom of it, when I wrote the first chapter, what Kelvin would encounter on Solaris Station. I went forward in the same way that Kelvin went, and spoke for the first time with Snow, not knowing what was going on. Then, as I approached the end, again I did not know how to end the story, and it took a whole year -- one day there came this illumination, and so it was. I do not like this kind of creative work, because I am myself a rationalist, and I would prefer to write in a planned, "rationalistic" way. But nothing doing; one must be sincere, so I feel obliged to tell the truth, even if I do not like it. There were no plans, no elaborated preconceptions, no tactics, no nothing. Of course it is very risky indeed to write without some kind of "foreknowledge", or even without a foggy "premonition" of what one is writing about, not knowing the general direction, etc. From my own experience I know that in eighty per cent of cases this trial-and-error method ends in a cul de sac. But, again to tell the truth, my best works were done in this "inadvertant" way; so I am totally helpless, and of no value, as an "expert" to tell you perfectly what SOLARIS is "about".

Suvin's essay is sophisticated and well-done: that is so. But, the point for me as an author is this curious thing: every review is a rationalisation a posteriori. Because I am also a critic by profession, I could perhaps criticise my own work, and impartially, as it goes, I

hope. Nevertheless, the point is that the individual qualities of a work of art are not susceptible to rationalising criticism, because all the general problems and dilemmas that are so beautifully analysed and exposed (e.g. by Suvin) could form the backbone of a very bad and boring story. This statement is valid for all possible works of literature - the very quality of such a work must be taken for granted, and so it is impossible to reconstruct a work if you know only the whole mass of criticism that the work caused. That is the point: quality, if it exists, is inexplicable in the critical discourse. That is a very unpleasant thing for the critic to realise, as he must, in the last resort, tell his impressions, i.e. in some way he gives us "his word of honour" that the work that he esteems highly is a very good or a splendid one.

Blish's criticism ((in F&SF)) was penetrating, but for me his statement that the greater the knowledge, the deeper the mystery, is a very evident matter of fact. The so-called "open structures" are not my original discovery: they are the basis of all human knowledge, empirical as well as metaphysical. You have no "final solution" for any problem in the whole kingdom of the natural sciences - even in mathematics! Where does s f derive its "closedness" - its narrative structures, its naive kind of Laplacean determinism? From fairy tales, from stories with happy endings, but neither from modern science nor from modern literature. In s f every apocalypse ends very badly, but nevertheless in a deterministic way. The world, the true world, is made in another way. So the openness of a story is not an addendum, a refinement, or a sophistication, but on the contrary, that is the only way to know things.

Thank you for your essay on SOLARIS. My S F AND FUTUROLOGY will be translated and edited in Germany, so perhaps one day you can read it in English too. (January 13, 1972) \*

\* I wrote back to Mr Lem, and said (if I can remember accurately) that one of the great strengths of SOLARIS is the feeling that the author conveys to the reader that both of them see things through Kelvin's eyes, feel the fabric of the Station through Kelvin's body, and explore each of Solaris' problems through the psychological convolutions of Kelvin's mind. However, a much grander structure seemed to support the whole novel, a structure in which Kelvin represented one aspect of a general struggle of humanity. I still feel that this structure (whether theological, sociological, or metaphysical) gives the novel its power and splendour, but I will have to admit that Lem did not consciously "write it into" the book. The question of a book's literary "goodness" or "badness" worries us all in our better moments, but I think the approach of F R Leavis (especially in A SELECTION FROM SCRUTINY, which I was reading when I received Lem's letter) comes closest to a reasonable approach. Stated at its crudest, Leavis' theory is that we can see how "good" or "bad" a work is we look closely at the text of the work under discussion, and judge the tension between the actual experience that the writer conveys, and the writer's judgment about that experience. In SOLARIS, Lem makes us feel that we are actually in the Station, on the surface of the planet, etc., but he also evaluates the quality of all those experiences, especially in relation to the entire experience of an Earth's population which can spend over a century engaged in a "useless", but absorbing study of a planet that resolutely fails to reveal any information about itself. :: I'm not quite sure what "set off" Mr Lem into the following letter, but I probably said that I judge any story, even an s f story, upon its literary merit, and not upon any extra-literary qualities:

Perhaps what I wrote to you about my "method" of writing s f was unintentionally biased, with a deviation to the side of "unconscious" creation. I have never observed myself while writing, or, to put it more precisely, when I start to write something new. Well now, here I am collecting some ideas and concepts for the next volume of short stories, and I can see the heuristics of my search in the following way.

Firstly, I am not in the least interested in unimportant variations on ideas that I or someone else have already used, with this unequal exception of when I see how an idea was distorted or belletrised in a crude, oversimplified, and false way. But even then I feel a strong repulsion about going back to do something that is already done, even if its general intellectual structure could be somehow optimised. Secondly, my field of research for new concepts is the field of contemporary science itself. I give particular attention to those spots and places where the level of general ignorance (not mine, but that of the well-informed scientist) is at its maximum. I do my best to preserve a specific type of balance: I know that I shall be unorthodox, but at the same time I have no right to become the author of nonsensically "mad" hypotheses, which lack any contact with the whole body of already-known scientific facts. So my stories are the borderline cases, between light and darkness. In practice, as I see it, s f has blinded itself to this type of research in manifold ways.

Take, for example, the golden rule about voyages at hyper-light speeds. It is true that this assumption is a very helpful one, and, for instance, my SOLARIS could not have been written at all if it had not had this assumption implicitly underlying it. But, at the same time, in a single step this assumption falsifies automatically the whole universe. In particular it falsifies the whole problem of truth and communication, as follows. First take a well-known earthly problem, that of what is really occurring on the mainland of China. Now there are two very strongly different versions of the state of things there. According to one version, in China there is an authoritarian state that manipulates the broad folk masses with somewhat distorted information about world affairs; but at the same time it takes care of the well-being of the people; the general standard of living is, even if not especially luxurious, then nevertheless very decent; etc. According to the other image, in China there reigns a terrible terror; the typical policy of the state is to liquidate all its opponents; the state's typical policy is to make mass murder the very instrument of a policy to liquidate, say, the prostitution problem; this terror is partially chaotic; the betterment of the standard of living is only a superficial camouflage, a mask; the cultural revolution was an act of destruction of China's own cultural heritage, of a multitude of works of art and literature and philosophy; the very possibility of an intellectual creation is excluded; and so on.

Since those two opposed versions occur because of a censorial barrier, we could principally get at the truth, and we hope that this will be the case in the future; i.e. even if we do not know yet what is really going on in China, we shall find out in time. A small model of the same situation occurred during the war between India and Pakistan. While the military censorial restrictions worked on both sides, for a while we did not know who was winning and who was losing the war. After some weeks this ambiguity disappeared, and we could find out a true picture of the conflict.

## CRITICANTO

SICK, TWISTED ONES

George Turner reviews:

NEBULA AWARDS STORIES 6

edited by CLIFFORD D SIMAK

Victor Gollancz :: 1971

220 pages :: £1.90

Any Editor of this yearly anthology has a limited field, since he is restricted to the winners and runners up in the novella, novelette, and short story sections of the Nebula Award as voted by the SFWA. In this case Simak had nineteen stories to choose from and the list indicates that he was better served than James Blish for the 1969 collection. At any rate it adds up to a more interesting volume.

Note that four of the seven published here came from Damon Knight's ORBIT anthologies and one each from GALAXY, IF, and F&SF. ANALOG seems to have missed out completely, even amongst the runners-up, and I think only one of these seven could have found a berth there if submitted. Which at least tells us something of the general orientation of the SFWA.

Theodore Sturgeon's SLOW SCULPTURE took the Best Novelette award over such competition as Lafferty's CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK, Russ' THE SECOND INQUISITION (both included in this volume) and Gisch's THE ASIAN SHORE, all of which were, for my taste, better stories. But so it goes (with apologies to K V). Since writers - who should know their business - chose it, a critical long look is indicated.

First, it is the usual Sturgeon mixture-as-before. In his spell of years away from s f he seems to have neither progressed nor retrogressed; this is the Sturgeon of 1960. Or 1950, for that matter. His return to s f with (so far) a handful of short stories and novelettes offers the same old preoccupations, the same old love stories disguised as s f and the same old technique, wherein obliquity masquerades as profundity and a fine dramatic ingenuity is expended on punching home emotional cliches.

Professor Claeson (Professor of English, The College of Wooster, Ohio) notes in the Foreword which he supplies instead of Editor Simak, "Theodore Sturgeon's SLOW SCULPTURE deals with the familiar image of the scientist-in-advance-of-his-times, but with a difference, for Sturgeon's protagonist is disillusioned with, self-exiled from, a world that will disregard or misuse what science can do for it. Into this revelation ((sic.)) he weaves the image of the bonsai tree, whose slow sculpture may be read in reference both to the character and the world which he loathes."

So far, so good - though a psychologist might give some less comfortable suggestions about the real nature of the hero's disillusionment. But there is also a love affair - I told you that it is a love story, and the WOMEN'S WEEKLY wouldn't despise it - and it is the same old Sturgeon love affair between two twisted people. It involves the usual Sturgeon scathing at-and-thrust before the clinch, and the usual barrowload of Sturgeon special wisdom on the subject of emotional relationships. And so, on page 51, we get this (a very long quote to get the full flavour of the thing);

And she said, "Maybe you're asking the next question instead of asking the right question. I think people who live by wise old sayings are trying not to think - but I know one worth paying some attention to. It's this: If you ask a question the right way, you've just given the answer." She paused to see if he was paying real attention. He was. She went on, "I mean, if you put your hand on a hot stove you might ask yourself, how can I stop my hand from burning? And the answer is pretty clear, isn't it? If the world keeps rejecting what you have to give - there's some way of asking why that contains the answer."

"It's a simple answer," he said shortly. "People are stupid."

"That isn't the answer and you know it," she said.

"What is?"

"Oh, I can't tell you that! All I know is that the way you do something, where people are concerned, is more important than what you do. If you want results. I mean - you already know how to get what you want with the tree, don't you?"

"I'll be damned."

"People are living, growing things, too. I don't know a hundredth part of what you do about bonsai but I do know this - when you start one, it isn't often the strong straight healthy ones you take. It's the sick twisted ones that can be made the most beautiful. When you get to shaping humanity, you might remember that."

Let's hope that neither of them ever gets round to shaping humanity. The reader who will fall for that sort of rationalisation will fall for anything. And Sturgeon has been getting away with this for over thirty years. Emotionally crippled protagonists, doubtful "philosophy" and "psychology" based on shaky facts and shakier analogies, and a gimmick to scrape it in as s f - that's the formula and it isn't good enough. (Apparently it's good enough for the SFWA, which is a warning to read with care and both eyes open.)

I sometimes wish that he would return to the hard, uncontroversial, but dramatic style of KILLDOZER, which remains one of his few really good tales. When he becomes controversial he becomes contrived and woolly also (the weakness of too much of today's "controversial" s f). The answers look good until you stare hard at them. And they look even less good when you notice how carefully the problem has been slanted to fit the conclusions.

One expects a group of reasonably talented writers to know a good story from an unsoundly based one, but a couple of centuries of literary history shows



that the bulk are no more discriminating than their readers. It would be interesting to know exactly who voted for what in each category.

R A Lafferty's CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK is, like any really ecstatic sensation, virtually indescribable. It is one of those stories forever on the verge of disclosing a meaning and never doing so, and holding you breathless to the last infuriating word.

Five archaeologists investigate a rock-and-mound formation which seems anachronistic in its striations and layers. Nothing about it is as it should be, A stranger appears and is hired to help with the dig. Inscribed rocks are discovered, all from periods separated by centuries, all in different scripts but carrying a connected narration which it appears will continue on another rock to be laid down in the future. Furthermore, the narration deals with the love affair of the hired man and one of the archaeologists.

Events provide the affair with an ending - or do they? This is Lafferty at his most evasively fascinating.

I don't pretend to understand it at all. Perhaps there is nothing to understand - just a continuing mystery. It leaves that feeling that perhaps on a tenth reading something will emerge. Or won't.

It should be a bore; instead, it's a gem. I can't criticise or discuss it; I can only report on how it affected me.

Joanna Russ has so far seemed to me a lady of great talent who has not discovered a suitable vehicle for it, but in THE SECOND INQUISITION she comes close to the mark.

It is the fairly simple tale of a descendant who returns from future centuries to prevent her ancestor - a teenage girl - from making a mess of herself with convention and private fantasies. More by reason of the ugly intervention of other futurians than by her own efforts she succeeds, in a fairly grisly manner.

Professor Claerson sees the ending as ambiguous, calling into question the reliability of the narrator (the teenager). Though this view is certainly tenable, I read the ending as an announcement of the fulfilment of the descendant's intention. This at least leaves the story firmly in place instead of in a misty and useless midair.

Let the individual reader decide.

In any case the psychology and general rationale are as careful and acceptable as Sturgeon's are biased and inaccurate. And where Sturgeon appears to write well, Joanna Russ actually does so. Her management of language is a joy, and her story is my choice for best in the book - a very short neck in front of the Lafferty.

For some reason unstated no award was given in the short story category, but the three printed are fair - one of them more than that.

Keith Laumer's IN THE QUEUE is an almost Kafkaesque fantasy at a far remove from his usual blood-and-guts conceptions.

A man is in a vast queue, extending from a forgotten tail to an inspecting

clerk of unknown significance. Hestler, armed with documents, has apparently waited in the queue all his life. At last he reaches the clerk, has his papers scanned and stamped, and leaves the queue. To go where? There is nowhere to go. He rejoins the tail of the queue.

The symbolism is obvious but unsatisfying in its resolution. Some bolder statement seems required. But for a Laumer story it is refreshing.

Harry Harrison's BY THE FALLS is similarly interesting and finally unsatisfying. Two men in a hut by the bottom of a waterfall do not realise that the fall must come from somewhere and that at the top must also be a world. One day a ship comes tumbling down the fall, and they are suitably awed, but not to the point of taking any action.

A parable, if you like, but again some further resolution seems needed. It is like a preliminary sketch for a larger theme.

The third short, THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES, is very good indeed, but it is not really s f or fantasy. It is an offbeat treatment of a straight mainstream theme which has been handled in a hundred variations. It recounts a short period in the life of a small boy in a house where some fairly unpleasant events take place. He, immersed in a world of pulp thrillers and comic strips, observes without comprehending and simply merges all happenings into a continuing other life of fantasy adventure. Doctor Death and Talar of the Long Eyes and the Lemurian bowmen are more real to him than his parents and their circle.

The style and structure are less than fully professional, but intensity carries it along very well. The overlapping of fantasy and reality, with fantasy winning every encounter, is done convincingly. And there is a nasty reminder at the end that if you go about it the right way you can keep reality at bay for ever. Of course it will kill you at last, but what of that?

There remains only ILL MET IN LANKHMAR, Fritz Leiber's account of the first meeting of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. I read the first of these stories some thirty-five years ago in Campbell's UNKNOWN and have avoided them since. For duty's sake I read this one (ah, Bruce, the things I do for you!) and I am able to report an increased smoothness of style.

As sword-and-sorcery it hasn't even the appeal of word magic. It recounts a spiteful and bloody adventure of two gutter-group heroes who deserve victory no more than their defeated opponents. What possessed the SFWA to vote it best novella of the year is beyond imagination. It isn't as though the other possible choices were worse. After all, Blish's A STYLE IN TREASON was on the list, as well as Simak's own THE THING IN THE STONE, and Anderson's THE FATAL FULFILLMENT.

Professor Claeson's FOREWORD is worth reading, particularly as he includes a short examination of the six books that were short-listed for the Best Novel award (which RINGWORLD won). He also has some interesting pages on the present state of the art, and, although he does not commit himself, seems to follow the line of contemporary opinion (which includes mine) that most s f of any consequence is moving into the mainstream and will eventually become indistinguishable from it. The SFWA also thinks so, to judge by its choices.

With two outstanding stories in seven and only one reverberating disaster, NAS 6 is pretty good value.

Lyle Cullen reviews:

THE MAN IN THE MOONE:  
AN ANTHOLOGY OF ANTIQUE  
SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

edited by EDITH K PIZOR  
and T ALLAN COMP

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1971  
230 pages :: \$A 6.90

THE MAN IN THE MOONE is an anthology of fantasy that spans a little more than two centuries, and represents writers of three continents. The collection includes reprints from some extremely rare manuscripts and is illustrated with contemporary prints that depict early thoughts about flying.

In the introduction, Isaac Asimov, who comments on the last of the reproduced stories, says, "Yet a new age was dawning, and true science fiction was on the verge of being born." Whether you will maintain Asimov's contention de-

pends upon your views about the nature of science fiction, and you can only establish the nature of science fiction if you examine carefully all the works that have a claim to that rubric.

This volume is an important step in carrying out that investigation, because it provides a first-hand example of the type of literature that developed into modern science fiction.

Considered as literature, the collection shows the change that has taken place in style over two centuries. Compare the extravagant style of Francis Goodwin's THE MAN IN THE MOONE (1638) with that of the anonymous author of THE GREAT STEAM DUCK (1841).

Goodwin's hero, Domingo Gonzales, contemplates how best he might be borne aloft by the strange birds known as Gansas:

Having prevailed thus farre, I began to cast in my head how I might doe to joyne a number of them together in bearing of some great burthen: which if I could bring to passe, I might enable a man to fly and be carried in the ayre, to some certaine place safe and without hurt. In this cogitation having much laboured my wits, and made some triall, I found by experience, that if many were put to the bearing of some great burthen, by reason it was not possible all of them should rise together just in one instant, the first that raised himselfe stayed by a weight heavier than hee could move or stirre, would by and by give over, as also would the second, third, and all the rest.

The author of THE GREAT STEAM DUCK:

It is a well known principle in mechanics that the influence of friction is such as to prohibit all possibility of increasing the power with a similar increase in the velocity of the machine acted upon by the propeller.

But some people, or at least Asimov, think that the difference between these two stories is more than the difference between literary styles. The later stories seem to focus more attentively on the science aspect of the tale, compared with the previous disregard for science and the preoccupation with ex-

treme exaggeration and the care not to offend established religious practice and principles.

Yet why should anybody think that this creates something of a new literary form? Did not the early seventeenth century man concern himself just as much with what was regarded as the foundation of truth in his day - orthodox religion, backed by the theological authority of the BIBLE and the secular authority of Aristotle and Ptolemy?

We will grant that the seventeenth century putative science fiction writer wrote as if he were keeping one eye open for the ever present ecclesiastical censor. But often he drew his very subject matter from the subject matter of theology. In the present volume, Cyrano de Bergerac, in THE COMICAL HISTORY OF THE MOON (1656), describes the lunar setting in terms such as "There the whole year is Spring"; "there no poisonous Plant sprouts forth, but is soon destroyed"; "My old hair fell off, and gave place for thicker and softer locks: I perceived my Youth revived", etc. Surely we can only regard such a place as a materialised version of heaven, but because it was material a man could theoretically attain it in this life.

Seventy years after Cyrano's tale we read the anonymous "Captain Samuel Brunt's" A VOYAGE TO CACKLOGALLINIA, in which the hero journeys to the Moon to find a sort of limbo world. In this world he meets the Selenites who tell him that "We pass our Days without Labour, without other Anxiety,... and the longing Desire we have for our Dissolution, makes every coming day encrease our Happiness." The "Dissolution" refers to the freeing of the Understanding from the soul - which in turn has already been freed from the body - and its return to the creator.

In so-called pre-scientific times, the church's teachings reduced all of nature to order and reason. When man became tired of the present life he could take solace in the thought of an after-life. But if he were more impatient he could seek to escape via his imagination in flights of fancy. All such flights would have to pay due homage to the established authority on the nature of reality. So when man escaped to the moon, often he found that his goal turned out to be a version of paradise, different from his only existing world, but still largely in accord with the Great Plan.

Some centuries later, when both religion and philosophy had, for the majority of men, forsaken their thrones as arbiters of reality, and science had become the norm against which man tested reality, man still sought to leave his present situation, but again he could only do so after he had paid due homage to the new deity of science. Thus ships might planoform and leap through hyperspace without an explanation of the exact details, but still the writers pay due respects, in that they acknowledge that the new techniques overcome the normal limits of everyday reality as delineated by science.

By 1835 the great battle between science and religion had already passed its climax, much more so than most people realised. True, the evolutionary campaign lay in the future, but Copernicus and Galileo had made the major breakthroughs. Yet in 1835 there appeared the extraordinary GREAT ASTRONOMICAL DISCOVERIES LATELY MADE BY SIR JOHN HERSCHEL AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE, an extract from which appears in THE MAN IN THE MOONE.

Richard Adams Locke perpetrated this amazing hoax in the pages of the New York paper, THE SUN. For several days in August of 1835, THE SUN ran accounts of discoveries about the Moon's surface, made by Sir John Herschel using a new

and powerful telescope. Despite the exaggeration of the reports - sightings of lunar vegetation, unicorns, biped beavers, and man-bats - the stories had an enormous success and helped to push THE SUN's circulation higher than that of any other newspaper, including THE LONDON TIMES. That such a hoax could be so successful illustrates the fragility of the nets of science or religion in their attempts to impose a world view on man.

And the real value of this anthology lies in its exposure of the tenuous hold of such systems. Just as today, with science at its height (perhaps even slightly past its zenith) science fiction can launch men's minds on journeys out to the farthest limits or into the innermost depths, so in the heyday of religion science fiction could take men's minds into the regions of fantasy, more incredible and yet more plausible than any theologian's exegesis.

I think that THE MAN IN THE MOONE should find a place in the library of any science fiction fan, not as an example of pre-science fiction, but rather as an example of science fiction of another age.

DON'T BUY IF YOU CAN BORROW

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Ted Pauls reviews:

THE YEAR 2000

edited by HARRY HARRISON

Faber & Faber :: 1971

288 pages :: \$A 6.35

Harry Harrison is developing rapidly a reputation as an editor of not-quite-first-rate anthologies. This is the third that I've reviewed in the past year. With Brian Aldiss, Harrison edits the BEST S F series; when I commented on the 1968 volume I suggested that the editors could have titled it better as "Some Pretty Good S F, Including a Couple of the Best of 68". It appears that Harrison's problem is that he is an indiscriminate anthologist.

He seizes upon an idea for an anthology, he rushes out and corrals the first dozen stories that fit into the proper category. In NOVA 1, he proclaimed the originality of an anthology of never-before-published stories (two years after DANGEROUS VISIONS; more years after the birth of the ORBIT stories) and offered fifteen selections, the majority of which will probably have the dubious distinction of also being never-again-published stories. Now he has produced THE YEAR 2000, and doubtless he will bring out another anthology by the end of spring.

As the title suggests, this is a "theme" anthology, unified by the factor that all of the stories are set in the year 2000. The jacket flap says, "In compiling this unique anthology, Mr Harrison has asked some of science fiction's most noted writers to contribute an original story, the only stipulation being that the story be set in the year 2000." Thirteen writers (including the editor himself) sent in stories. Some of them are good stories. Some of them are mediocre. All of them appear in this volume. The indiscriminate anthologist has struck again.

Four of these stories are top-flight works of speculative fiction. Chad Oliver's FAR FROM THIS EARTH, like several other selections in this volume, is not essentially an s f story, except that it is set thirty years in the future. In this extremely well-done and sensitive story, the author tells of a Kenyan who is torn between traditional African and modern Western culture, and

probably it could have been written about an individual anywhere in the "Third World" any time after 1960.

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL, by Robert Silverberg, set in an all-black New York City, is a somewhat parallel story. The central character, a 17-year-old named James Shabazz, does not face the problem of the collision of two cultures, but the collision between the romance of revolutionary struggle and the reality of the revolution's achievement. In this tale, which Silverberg tells with his usually smooth style, Black Power has become a reality. Shabazz, imbued with the emotion of a centuries-long struggle, can't accept the idea that there is no longer any white oppression against which he can struggle. The black establishment which runs America's cities has become as conservative and as status-quo-oriented as the white establishment always was.

David I Masson's TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT is an utterly extraordinary two-track story which shows an English family in two radically different societies, one which is primitive (post-catastrophe) and the other which is advanced. Each is nightmarish in its own way. This story is an extremely New Wave piece, in which the author never bothers to explain anything or to provide any background, but he writes it superbly. I cannot describe adequately Masson's prose, particularly his use of an oddly grammatical vernacular in one of the time-tracks.

Finally, there is Harrison's own contribution, AMERICAN DEAD, the last selection in the volume. It is an excellent story about the racial guerilla warfare that some observers see in USA's not-too-distant future.

The other nine stories range downward from the competent, interesting, but unexceptional, to the dull and mediocre. The lead story, Fritz Leiber's curious, muted AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL, fits into the former category, along with JUDAS FISH, by Thomas N Scortia, J J Coupling's TO BE A MAN, and Keith Laumer's THE LAWGIVER. Daniel F Galouye's PROMETHEUS REBOUND is a dull, conventional "hard s f" tale that might have appeared in a Gernsback magazine thirty-five years ago. In AFTER THE ACCIDENT, Naomi Mitchison attempts again to be an s f writer, while in UTOPIAN, Mack Reynolds is Mack Reynolds; it's a minor one-punch story. Like Oliver's story, Brian W Aldiss' ORGY OF THE LIVING AND THE DYING is only marginally science fiction. Its background includes some s f elements, but the basic story tells of famine relief efforts in India, and might just as well have happened in 1972 as 2000. It is interesting, but over-long. SEA CHANGE, by A Bertram Chandler, is twelve pages shorter than the Aldiss story but it seems longer. Chandler writes a Hemingwayesque story about a sea captain who employs the Old Methods and wins the respect of his young upstart officers. Its s.f element is that the captain has been in suspended animation (the deep-freeze idea).

Except for Galouye's anachronism, this book doesn't really have a downright poor story in the lot, but you cannot judge anthologies by the same standard as that applied to magazines. A mediocre anthology is one which mainly has stories that are competent without being exceptional in any way, and THE YEAR 2000 is the latest in a series of mediocre anthologies that Harry Harrison has edited. It's worth borrowing for the four really worthwhile selections, but I wouldn't recommend that anybody should actually buy the book.

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Christine McGowan reviews

WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1971

edited by DONALD A WOLLHEIM  
and TERRY CARR

Victor Gollancz :: 1971  
320 pages :: £2.20

I cut my science-fictional teeth on anthologies. Indeed, they introduced me to adult reading matter: the lack of pictures and the (comparatively) small print were magnificently compensated for by weird aliens, luridly-described action, and ideas and concepts that boggled my nine-year-old mind. To this day the appealing aspects of short stories have remained my literary yardsticks. My ideal short story centres around one idea, is long on action and short on introspection, and always has

a sting in the tail. (Therefore my favourite writer in the genre is Gerald Kersh.)

Memories usually keep a rosy afterglow, and nowadays I'm never satisfied with any anthology. But I am convinced that the fault does not lie merely in myself - just as I cannot deny that my literary perceptions have matured in ten years, so I cannot deny that the general character of the science fiction short story has changed, or is changing. I won't say yet whether the change is good or bad (and I am dimly aware of the great battles that have been fought about the New Wave style, by more experienced combatants than myself, and without apparent profit to either side, save that of notoriety). However, I will say that the immediate personal appeal that I knew as a child has disappeared from many stories, and often I can trace this sad state of affairs to an objectively discernible absence of colour and action, and a corresponding surfeit of verbose, ill-disciplined word-play. On the other hand, many of the really good new stories are much better in every way than those of fond memory. They combine the qualities that I look for, with a much higher degree of technical mastery, so their narratives become something more than straight and unadorned story-telling.

Within WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1971, a hopefully-titled volume, Donald A Wollheim and Terry Carr provide examples of all three categories: the old; the new and disappointing; and the new and excellent.

Larry Niven's BIRD IN THE HAND most ably represents the old style. It is a well-thought-out and well-told yarn that only betrays its recent authorship by its cheerfully ingenious twist about the current concern of pollution. I was irritated by only one thing, and that appears on the first page: I trust that by now hordes of irate Aussie fans have informed Mr Niven that the ostrich is not native to Australia. Of course he may have been thinking of the emu, but either way he displays a rather slap-dash attitude to simple research.

The editors should not have included WATERCLAP in this volume. Not only does it fall far below the world's best, but it does not even qualify as one of Asimov's best. In the worst traditions of the old style, the story combines a weak, slow-moving plot with cardboard characters and some truly uninspired writing. For example, the central character is asked, euphemistically, if he wants to go to the toilet:

He spoke carefully.

"How are sanitary facilities handled here?"

"It's cycled mostly - as on the Moon, I imagine. We can eject if we want to or have to. Man has a bad record of fouling the environment but as the only deep-sea station, what we eject does no perceptible damage. Adds organic matter."

He laughed.

Demarest filed that away, too. Matter was ejected. Ejection mechanisms existed. Their workings might be of interest and he, as a safety engineer, had a right to exhibit interest.

"Actually," he said, "I'm comfortable at the moment. If you're busy..."

Not only does pollution rear its ugly head quite gratuitously, but the whole story moves at the same excruciatingly slow pace, and for someone who is used to the intricacies of CALLAN, THE RAT-CATCHERS, and Agatha Christie, the twist at the end has no surprise, anyway. However, Asimov does try to intrigue the reader. I will forgive him, but I don't feel like forgiving the editors for their lack of discrimination.

I feel even less forgiving when I come to THE SHAKER REVIVAL, by Gerald Jonas. In my opinion, this is the worst story in the book, and if anything its stylistic debt to the new trends in s f make it even worse. Seemingly the story is an idiomatic documentary account of a new-Shaker sect that gains popularity among the youth of a rather unpleasant late-twentieth-century America. (The Shakers were an eighteenth and nineteenth century sect who lived communally but who practised complete chastity, and used music and dancing as substitutes for sex. They were so dedicated that in due course they died out.) The idea has possibilities and a good writer could have made a novel from it. But Jonas shows little imagination, and so he writes a story which completely lacks a plot or characters. The author loses direction about half-way through; for had he written a straightforward narrative instead of a supposed "sociological document, he might have written one of the world's best stories.

Stylistic gimmicks can work, and when they do, the effect is electrifying. My favourite story in the collection is GONE ARE THE LUPO, by one H B Hickey (originally published in QUARK/ 1), which has an alien as narrator. This risky technique works splendidly. With a brilliantly economical use of words, the author draws a subtle, convincing portrait of the simple, knowing Moomie and his race, and their rather stupid and finally pathetic conquerors, Man. Hickey keeps the sting right to the last line. When I reached it, my hair actually stood on end.

Robert Silverberg employs the same device in ISHMAEL IN LOVE. A dolphin tells the story of how he falls in love with a human being. The beast's insoluble predicament permeates the narrative, and I found myself accepting the rather maudlin ending because - well, one must make allowances for dolphins.

Love also forms the theme of THE LAST TIME AROUND, by Arthur Sellings. In a dim fashion most s f readers know that if Einstein is right, a deep-spaceman would be removed from the ordinary mortal time-scale that governs our lives. Sellings considers the human implications of this idea which "made his life, inevitably, a gamble. Not, ironically, out there - instrumentation took a lot of the risk out of that - but here, in what a man came back to." Sellings' psychology rings true, and makes believable his evocation of the loneliness of Grant the spaceman. Grant was called away from his bride of a week, and he

finds her an old woman of sixty-seven:

He had been prepared for her aging; prepared loyally to do all that he could to make her happy, to make amends for the unnatural existence to which he had condemned her. He had not been prepared for a Helen determined crazily to pretend that time had stood still. A Helen who had used every artifice of twenty-second century cosmetic surgeons, who paraded before him to entice him, in the grotesque negligees of a world foreign to him.

It was that - the contradiction in her craving to turn the clock back, yet needing the sustainment of the latest fashions in order to feel young - that symbolised the unbridgable gulf between them. That, more than the old body behind the cosmetic facade, the mincing imploring gestures, that sent him fleeing from her.

Here we have no aliens with two heads and green skins, but only people who are trapped by their own mortality, and unable to become more than human. Therefore it is a pity that Sellings makes the ending of THE LAST TIME AROUND so unbelievable, so forced and false. Grant's situation contains something of Greek tragedy, so Sellings sells himself short when he provides a happy ending where it does not belong.

The rest of the collection contains mainly above-average stories that you will enjoy according to your personal tastes. Of course I can't leave unmentioned WHATEVER BECAME OF THE MCGOWANS?, by Michael G Coney, who tells of the mysterious disappearance of pioneer settlers on a sleepy agricultural planet that apparently supports no native sentient beings. Pleasant reading, but Coney does not quite know whether the intrepid McGowans met a beneficial fate or not, and he communicates his uncertainty to the reader so that it unnecessarily destroys the story's delicately created mood.

GREYSPUN'S GIFT, by Neal Barrett Jr, is a charming piece of nothing, a diverting account of the meeting of the human race with a puzzled, delightfully naive alien observers. The author makes some amusing though not necessarily valid observations on the human condition. CONFESSIONS, by Ron Goulart, is a detective yarn with a superficial science fiction overcoat, and Gordon Ek-lund's DEAR AUNT ANNIE is a confused, staccato, New-Wave-influenced picture of the collapse of a futuristic society that is observed by Big Auntie, the ultimate in Dorothy Dix figures. NOBODY LIVES ON BURTON STREET, by Gregory Benford, is an intriguing verbal trompe d'oeil that initially reminded me of FAHRENHEIT 451, and ends up very differently. I enjoyed THE THING IN THE STONE; I rarely fail to enjoy anything by Clifford Simak, and I don't need to make an exception of this almost lyrical story about strange things in the backwoods. On the other hand, Theodore Sturgeon's SLOW SCULPTURE attempts lyricism, and achieves only a superior (or pretentious) kind of artificially-induced boredom. INVASION OF PRIVACY, by Bob Shaw, invokes the well-known cliché of the invaders among us, but the hero, instead of girding his loins for the long battle, lapses disappointingly into a suburban apathy that surely qualifies him as a leader of the Silent Majority. Finally, CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK, by R A Lafferty, is a little too impressionistic for my taste, but it bounces along with entertainingly eccentric characters who casually contemplate things that would make ordinary mortals gibber hysterically.

On the whole, I liked WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1971, but I won't tell you to buy it - I never buy a book which I can borrow, or can get as a review copy.

Christine McGowan reviews

DOUBLE DOUBLE

by JOHN BRUNNER

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1971

222 pages :: \$A 4.30

First US publication 1969

John Brunner is a well-respected name among s f readers, and not merely because of his admirable, monumental STAND ON ZANZIBAR. Therefore I approached DOUBLE DOUBLE in a suitably respectful frame of mind, which lasted for about the first page. After that I was overcome gradually by creeping disappointment.

Perhaps I expected some sort of minor masterpiece, but instead I found that I was reviewing a pot-boiler. It's quite a good pot-boiler, which has a few patches of dramatic writing towards its end. But it's second-rate literature, for all that. It is relaxing, an uncomplicated narrative with no symbolic subtleties or hidden traps of language -- but Agatha Christie fits the same description, and she is more original. The central (nay, the only) idea of DOUBLE DOUBLE has whiskers on it, and others, including the writers of DR WHO, have handled the idea much better.

DOUBLE DOUBLE's plot revolves rather sluggishly around the hunt for a "thing" from the bottom of the sea, which ingests people and then takes on the shape of its last meal. I hope I don't spoil the book for some people by revealing so much, but most people will guess the meaning of the preliminary, supposedly intriguing antics, from the beginning. There remains only the capture and the disposal of the shape-changer. This comes much, much later in the story, but the average reader will arrive streets ahead of the rather thick characters, and the delay becomes a little boring. The reader only needs to guess the thing's next dinner.

I feel no sympathy for the victims of the starving shape-changer. In fact, I feel nothing whatsoever for anyone, for characters barely exist. Instead, Brunner tries to dress up his rather uninteresting plot with a bit of "colour". (The blurb says "gaudy", which is not entirely inappropriate.) In order to capture the reader's interest, the author introduces a totally unbelievable, utterly absurd, and incredibly twee pop group that travels in a multi-coloured van with a rubber octopus on the roof. The group is also multi-coloured. We meet an American, a West Indian, an upper-class Englishman, a musical genius who "plays nineteen instruments completely", and two girls, one who is an artist gifted with total recall, and the other is a student of philology; and of course a manager who lurks in the background, terrified that the public might think that his proteges are connected with the drug scene. Of course they are all good clean kids, despite moonlight swimming and the odd four-letter word.

Brunner conceives his other characters in the same superficial way -- a drunken journalist, a plodding policeman, a power-mad scientist, and a dotty old lady. None of them evokes the slightest spark of interest, let alone sympathy. The scientists give several moderately informative lectures on the physiology of the thing, but this is not even an ANALOG-type story where the hard science successfully substitutes for both the characters and the plot.

I have to admit that at the end I sympathised slightly with the police sergeant who must explain to Whitehall (which knows nothing about the thing) why he called out the Army on a wild-goose chase. DOUBLE DOUBLE finishes before the potentially entertaining story even begins.

Bruce R Gillespie reviews

JACK OF SHADOWS

by ROGER ZELAZNY

Walker :: 1971

207 pages :: \$5.95

I was all prepared to hate every word of this book. I became very suspicious of Zelazny's verbal tricks after I read AND CALL ME CONRAD. The sections of CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS that appeared in the s f magazines convinced me that Zelazny said goodbye to rationality long ago.

But I read JACK OF SHADOWS, and I can't dislike it.

"Jack of Shadows" is a spritely figure who lives in a strange half-lit world called Darkside. He specialises in theft, but in the first chapter he is caught and beheaded. He wakes up in the Dung Pits of Glyve. Zelazny begins to write a fairly standard sword-and-sorcery story that features a standard sword-and-sorcery hero. However, in chapter 2, Zelazny indicates that he is interested in more than mere genre cliches. The reader begins to notice the clipped, precise sentences of the narrative - none of that gooey mock-medieval style that paralyses most sword-and-sorcery books. The reader might also notice that the book contains some logical basis, so it might not fall into the "sword-and-sorcery" category at all. Jack heads "east", and therefore the points of the compass apply to this world. Jack cannot rely on magic all the time, for he must undergo an arduous trek in order to escape from the pits.

As the book proceeds, Zelazny makes his language increasingly lucid and precise. He sets up a rhythm of delightfully onomatopoeic sentences with "Stripped and sinking, Jack stood upon the shore of that dark and silent place." Zelazny gives life to even the Dung Pits: "Rivers of (filth) ran to the lake", "Fountains occasionally erupted", and "There were cracks and crevasses from which the odour of sulfur dioxide constantly arose."

In many of his previous books, Zelazny tortures the English language unmercifully in order to make it scream and writhe. In his attempts to capture the Big Effect, Zelazny gained a tin ear and an unsubtle style. In JACK OF SHADOWS, Zelazny again opens his eyes and ears. Objects regain their shapes, sounds, and smells. Zelazny has taken the trouble to refine his style in this book so that his world becomes surprising instead of wearying. For the first time in many years Zelazny is talking instead of shouting.

Where does the book's greatest strength lie? Here are two examples.

Jack enters a glowing cleft in the rock face. The sides of the cleft menace him ("black shrubbery grew along the bases of the walls"), and "all vegetation ceased at the perimeter of the circle". At the far end of the valley "a huge mossy boulder stood at (the circle's) centre, glowing faintly." Within a few sentences, Zelazny draws a picture of menacing sterility and danger. Jack may still escape, but the object's strangeness attracts him. He walks towards the rock, and it begins to "speak" to him telepathically:

"Who are you? Where are you?" he asked.

I lie before you, little one. Come to me.

"I see just a mouldy rock... No thank you," said Jack.

A slight joke, perhaps, but even in this section of the book, Zelazny maintains the mocking tone that the reader notices at the beginning of the book. However, in JACK OF SHADOWS, Zelazny does not indulge in the gross jokes that mar many of his earlier books. Instead, Jack smiles beguilingly when things go badly, and he doesn't laugh too loudly when things go well.

Slowly the rock forces Jack to come nearer. However, "turning his body, (Jack) yielded to the pressure (of the rock), but the step that he took was more to the right than straight ahead." In this way, Jack slowly circles the rock, instead of yielding to the pressure that tries to make him step straight towards it. He sees a pile of bones behind the "rock". Zelazny sums up the whole episode in two clear sentences:

There were only two things in the universe, himself and the pink boulder. The tension between them filled the air like a steady note which goes unheard after a time because of its constancy, which makes it a normal part of things.

Zelazny employs one metaphor here more precisely than he employs strangled similes and arduous adjectives in his other recent books. Not only does the "tension" like a "steady note" create in us Jack's experience, but Zelazny shows why the experience is horrifying in the last clause, "which makes it a normal part of things". Zelazny shows that he can sculpture words (by chipping away the extraneous layers of words and leaving the essential core) and not blow them up into a balloon. I won't tell you how Jack escapes from the rock, and so spoil Zelazny's little story. One brief sentence marks the end of the story-within-a-story, "Then, wrapping himself in shadows, he rose to his feet." Just right, Mr Zelazny.

JACK OF SHADOWS contains a lot of good, or even great, writing. However, is it a great, or even a good, book? Here's my second example of Zelazny's strength as a writer.

The first chapter gives to the reader a very misleading impression of the whole book. As I've already mentioned, Zelazny includes a number of cliches from the sword-and-sorcery genre. "Darkside" sounds like Erewhon or any of those other fantasy lands. Zelazny writes about a "hellflame", characters have names like Smage and Qazer, and there are two-bit rulers like the Lord of the Bats. We expect that the author will tell us the standard number of tall stories and grand adventures. Jack dies, but he rises again in the second chapter; magic rules, death disappears, and, it seems, so do all other serious human concerns.

When the Lord of Bats captures Jack, his arch-enemy, Zelazny slowly reveals the book's more serious meaning. The Lord places Jack in "the centre of a large, many-sided chamber. All of the walls were mirrors as were the countless facets of the concave ceiling and the gleaming floor beneath him." Zelazny's room dazzles the reader as well as Jack, who loses his balance and self-assurance:

Hurrying then, he passed the table and continued on in what he deemed to be a straight line. The table was behind him, then above him. After several hundred paces, it was before him once again. He turned in a right angle from his course and repeated his walk. The results were the same.

Surely this intricate word mosaic stands by itself as a fine piece of minor



art? Zelazny dazzles the reader for several more pages. The Lord of Bats has placed Jack inside an impregnable room. He taunts Jack, as he holds out a jewel that is suspended from a heavy silver chain:

"Take it. Hold it near to your eye. Consider its interior."

Jack raised it, closed one eye, squinted, stared.

"Inside..." he said. "There is a tiny replica of this chamber inside..."

"Look for this table."

"I see it! And I see us seated at it! I am - I am studying - This stone!"

The jewel's walls surround Jack and prevent him from stealing anything or playing tricks on anybody. Worst of all, he cannot seek the consolation and escape of shadows, those patches of darkness that give him power.

Like the vignette about the flesh-eating stone, Zelazny's story stands on its own, a perfect gem within what the reader hopes is a perfect setting. The captor and captured continue their urbane discussion until both figures begin to analyse each other's motives. The Lord of Bats says that Jack "likes to outwit the mighty to appropriate their possessions." The captor vows to keep Jack in "an inescapable prison where he will have absolutely nothing to do but exist... I will break that smug self-assurance." The banter of threats and insinuations continues, while Jack insists that he has only a "touch of kleptomania", and the Lord maintains that Jack is a deadly enemy.

In this scene Zelazny calls for two contradictory responses from his reader. On the one hand, Zelazny asks his reader to enjoy the "wonders" of the prison: the crystalline walls, the Lord's ironic hospitality, and the expectation that Jack will trick the Lord in some way. Zelazny even weaves a kind of word magic from the Lord's and Jack's way of speaking in the third person about each other. Zelazny tries to lead us convincingly from the book's first scene to the last few lines of chapter 4:

He heard the sudden chatter of the World Machine. He moaned and cried out at this omen; and within the walls, infinities of Jacks twisted on sweat-drenched beds.

Jack sees omens, takes warning, and suffers. His imprisonment poses a threat to his personal identity. In other words, Zelazny expects the reader to feel sympathy for Jack, or to judge him, or to understand him in some way. This expectation contradicts the tone of the rest of the early part of the book.

In order that the reader can approach the second half of the book "correctly", he must "understand" Jack within the first half. Zelazny changes his tone altogether during the second half of the book. Jack sets off a chain of events which threatens to destroy the whole of his physical (not supernatural) world and to ruin his personal happiness.

But the reader does not need to reach the book's second half before he finds that Zelazny's novel totters badly. Zelazny introduces Jack as basically a supernatural figure, a man who can go anywhere and do anything provided that the shadows protect him. When the Lord of Bats places Jack in a shadowless

prison, he takes away his power and reduces his stature. Jack still beats the Lord in this particular competition, but during this episode the author shifts the emphasis away from the battle between two magical figures. Almost out of the blue, Zelazny tries to make us "sympathise" with Jack, as if we could ever share in his adventures. Then, in the book's second half, Zelazny asks us to participate in Jack's great moral traumas, while all the time we wish that Jack would commit a few entertaining crimes.

Early in the book, Jack staggers away from the Dung Pits of Glyve:

He did things to keep awake. He counted his paces - a thousand, then a thousand more; he rubbed his eyes; he hummed several songs all the way through; he reviewed spells and incantations; he thought of food; he thought of women; he thought of his greatest thefts...

The author makes a catalogue of things that do not fit together. The first item is convincing: Jack must "count his paces" because he cannot find a stray shadow to carry him out of this hell-hole. "He rubbed his eyes" - yes; "he hummed several songs all the way through" - yes, Jack is a cheerful villain; "he reviewed spells and incantations; he thought of food; he thought of women" ...and then "he thought of his greatest thefts". That really struck me as odd. So far, Zelazny has not shown us any of Jack's greatest thefts. He does not show us any skilful thefts during the rest of the book. Everybody knows that Jack is a great villain, but in this book he does little to justify his reputation.

Zelazny lets down his own hero. Where he should have shown us Jack's most spectacular performances, he writes about the "morality" of Jack, whether or not he should have done this or that. But how does morality apply to a magical, anything-goes world? If Jack can rise from the grave, he can do almost anything with impunity. He is a shadow, a non-man, who can play tricks galore. Why doesn't the author let him?

You may advance your own theory. Perhaps Zelazny ran out of puff half way through, and couldn't think of any more tricks for his hero. Perhaps he tried to make Jack into a "well-rounded character" (a la all the best creative writing textbooks), but the book's premises kill this idea from the beginning. Jack's agonised (and agonising) girlfriend Evne provides the epitaph for JACK OF SHADOWS: "Once there was something slightly gallant about you. It is gone now." And the author took it away.

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(Now I had better review this book. Zelazny fans will love it, and non-Zelazny fans will enjoy it. The last chapter is magnificent, but the rest of the second half does not provide a sound basis for it. Fans should buy the Walker hardcover edition rather than wait for the paperback, for Walker have provided a splendid cover and the best interior layout that I have seen in any s f book for years.)

# **DARKO SUVIN**

## **Cognition and Estrangement**

AN APPROACH TO THE POETICS OF THE SCIENCE FICTION GENRE

### 1 SCIENCE FICTION AS FICTION (ESTRANGEMENT)

11 The importance of science fiction (s f) in our time is on the increase. First, there are strong indications that its popularity in the leading industrial nations (USA, USSR, UK, Japan) has risen sharply over the last 100 years, regardless of local and short-range fluctuations. S f has particularly affected some key strata of modern society, such as college graduates, young writers, and the avant garde of general readers who appreciate new sets of values. This is a significant cultural effect which goes beyond any merely quantitative census.

Second, if one takes as the minimal generic differences of s f, either radically different figures (dramatis personae) or a radically different context of the story, we find that s f has an interesting and close kinship with other literary sub-genres, which flourished at different times and places in literary history: the Greek and Hellenistic "blessed island" story, the "fabulous voyage" from Antiquity on, the Renaissance and Baroque "utopia" and "planetary novel", the Enlightenment "state (political) novel", and the modern "anticipation" and "anti-utopia". Moreover, although s f shares with myth, fantasy, the fairy tale, and the pastoral an opposition to naturalistic or empiricist literary genres, it differs very significantly in approach and social function from such adjoining non-naturalistic or meta-empirical genres. Writers and critics in several countries are vigorously debating both aspects - the sociological and the methodological. Both testify to the relevance of this genre and the need for scholarly discussion, too.

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Darko Suvin

This essay was presented to the Secondary Universe Conference 3 at Queensborough Community College, New York, in 1970, and is scheduled to appear in its PROCEEDINGS.

In the following article I shall argue for a definition of s f as the literature of cognitive estrangement. This definition seems to possess the unique advantage of rendering justice to a literary tradition which is coherent through the

ages and within itself, and yet distinct from non-fictional utopianism, from naturalistic literature, and from other non-naturalistic fiction.

12 I should like to begin one approach to such a discussion, and to this field of discourse, by postulating a spectrum or spread of literary subject matter which runs from the ideal extreme of exact recreation of the author's empirical environment<sup>1</sup> to an exclusive interest in a strange newness, a novum. From the 18th to the 20th century, the literary mainstream of our civilisation has been nearer to the first of these two extremes. However, at the beginning of a literature, the concern for a domestication of the amazing is very strong. Early tale-tellers relate amazing voyages into the next valley, where they found dog-headed people, as well as good rock salt which they could steal or at the worst barter for. Their stories form a syncretic travelogue and voyage imaginaire, a daydream and intelligence report. This implies a curiosity about the unknown beyond the next mountain range (sea, ocean, solar system..), where the thrill of knowledge joined the thrill of adventure.

The paradigm of the aesthetically most satisfying goal of the s f voyage is the island in a far-off ocean, from Iambulus and Euhemerus through the classical utopia to Verne's island of Captain Nemo and Wells' island of Dr Moreau. This paradigm applies especially if we subsume under it the planetary island in the aether ocean - usually the Moon - from Lucian through Cyrano and Swift's mini-Moon of Laputa to the 19th century. Yet the parallel paradigm of the valley, "over the range"<sup>2</sup> which shuts it in as a wall, is perhaps as revealing. It recurs almost as frequently, from the earliest folk tales about the sparkling valley of Terrestrial Paradise and the dark valley of the Dead, both already in GILGAMESH. Eden is the mythological localisation of utopian longing, just as Wells' valley in THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND still fits within the liberating tradition which contends that the world is not necessarily the way our present empirical valley happens to be, and that whoever thinks that his valley is the world, is blind. Thus, beside curiosity, s f also implies a hope of finding in the unknown the ideal environment, tribe, or state, or the fear of the contrary. In any case, this literature assumes the possibility of other strange, co-variant coordinate systems.

13 The approach to the imaginary locality, or localised daydream, practised by the genre of s f is a supposedly factual one. Columbus' letter (which is technically or genologically non-fictional) on the Eden that he glimpsed beyond the Orinoco mouth, and Swift's voyage to "Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubbdrub, Luggnagg, and Japan" (which is technically non-factual), stand at opposite ends of a constant interpenetration of imaginary and empirical possibilities. Thus s f takes off from a fictional ("literary") hypothesis and develops it with extrapolating ("scientific") rigour. The specific difference between Columbus and Swift is smaller than their generic similarity. Such factual reporting of fictions confronts a set normative system - a Ptolemaic-type closed world picture - with a point of view or glance which implies a new set of norms; in literary theory, this is known as the attitude of estrangement. The Russian Formalists first developed this concept ("ostranenie", Victor Shklovsky) while dealing with non-naturalistic texts, and it was most successfully underpinned by an anthropological and historical approach in the opus of Bertolt Brecht, who wanted to write "plays for a scientific age". While working on a play about the prototype scientist, Galileo, he defined this attitude (Verfremdungseffekt) in his SHORT ORGANON FOR THE THEATRE, "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognise its sub-

ject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar." And further: for somebody to see all normal happenings in a dubious light, "he would need to develop that detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. He was amazed by the pendulum motion as if he had not expected it and could not understand its occurring, and this enabled him to come at the rules by which it was governed." Thus, the look of estrangement is both cognitive and creative; and as Brecht goes on to say, "One cannot simply exclaim that such an attitude pertains to science, and not to art. Why should not art, in its own way, try to serve the great social task of mastering life?" (Later, Brecht also noted that it might be time to stop speaking in terms of masters and servants altogether.)

In s f, the attitude of estrangement - used by Brecht in a different way, within the "realistic" context of a parable framework - has grown into the formal framework of the genre.

## 2 SCIENCE FICTION AS COGNITION (CRITIQUE AND SCIENCE)

21 The use of estrangement both as an underlying attitude and a dominant formal device is found also in the myth, a ritual and religious approach which looks beneath the empiric surface in its own way. However, s f sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a cognitive glance. The myth is diametrically opposed to the cognitive approach since it conceives human relations as fixed, and supernaturally determined, which emphatically denies Montaigne's "la constance mème n'est qu'un branle plus languissant". The myth makes absolute and even personifies apparently constant motifs from sluggish periods with low social dynamics.

Conversely, s f, which is organised by extrapolating the variable and future-bearing elements from the empirical environment, clusters in the great whirlpool periods of history such as the 16th-17th and 19th-20th centuries. Where the myth claims to explain once and for all the essence of phenomena, s f posits them first as problems and then explores where they lead to. It sees the mythical static identity as an illusion, usually as a fraud, in its best case only as a temporary realisation of potentially limitless contingencies. It does not ask about The Man or The World, but which man?; in which kind of world?; and why such a man in such a kind of world? As a literary genre, s f is just as opposed to supernatural estrangement as to empiricism (naturalism).

22 S f is then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.

The estrangement differentiates it from the "realistic" literary mainstream of the 18th to 20th centuries. The cognition differentiates it not only from myth, but also from the fairy tale and the horror fantasy.

The fairy tale also doubts the laws of the author's empirical world, but it escapes out of its horizons and into a closed collateral world which is indifferent toward cognitive possibilities. It does not use imagination as a means to understand tendencies in reality, but as an end sufficient unto itself and cut off from real contingencies. The stock fairy-tale accessory, such as the flying carpet, evades the empirical law of physical gravity - as the hero

evades social gravity - by imagining its opposite. The wishfulfilling element is its strength and its weakness, for it never pretends that a carpet could be expected to fly; that a humble third son could be expected to become a king - while there is gravity. It just posits another world beside yours where some carpets do, magically, fly, and some paupers do, magically, become princes, and into which you cross purely by an act of faith and fancy. Anything is possible in a fairy tale, because a fairy tale is manifestly impossible. Therefore, s f which retrogresses into fairy-tale (e.g. "space opera" with a hero-princess-monster triangle in astronautic costume) commits creative suicide.

The fantasy (ghost, horror, Gothic) tale, a genre committed to the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment, is even less congenial to s f. Where the fairy tale was indifferent to the empirical world and its laws, the fantasy is inimical to them. One could defend the thesis that the fantasy is significant insofar as it is impure and fails to establish a super-ordinated maleficent world of its own, causing a grotesque tension between arbitrary supernatural phenomena and the empirical norms into which they infiltrate. Gogol's Nose is significant because it walks down the Nevski Prospect, with a certain rank in the civil service, etc. If the Nose were in a completely fantastic world - say Lovecraft's - it would be just another ghoulish thrill. When fantasy does not establish such a tension between its norms and the author's empirical environment, its reduction of all possible horizons to Death makes it into just a sub-literature of mystification. Commercial lumping of it into the same category as s f is thus a grave disservice and rampantly pathological phenomenon.

Compared with such a harsh but deserved judgment, the pastoral is essentially closer to s f. Its imaginary framework of a world without money economy, state apparatus, and depersonalising urbanisation, allows it to isolate, as in a laboratory, two human motivations - erotics and power-hunger. The pastoral relates to s f as alchemy does to chemistry and nuclear physics: an early try in the right direction with insufficient sophistication. Therefore s f has much to learn from the pastoral tradition, primarily from its directly sensual relationships without class alienation. S f has in fact often written about these, whenever it has sounded the theme of the triumph of the humble (Restif, Morris, etc., up to Simak, Christopher, Yefremov, etc.). Unfortunately, the baroque pastoral abandoned this theme and jelled into a sentimental convention, discrediting the genre. When the pastoral escapes preciosity, its hope can fertilise the s f field as an antidote to pragmatism, commercialism, other-directedness, and technocracy.

23. To claim that s f has a Galilean estrangement does not at all mean that one commits it to scientific vulgarisation or even technological prognostication, which it has engaged in at various times (Verne, USA in the 1930s, USSR under Stalinism). S f works at a juvenile level can include the needful and meritorious task of popularisation as a useful element. But even this euphoria, such as Verne's FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON, or Wells' INVISIBLE MAN, though a legitimate s f form, is a lower stage in its development. It is very popular with audiences who just approach s f, such as juveniles, because it introduces only one easily digestible new technological variable (Moon missile, or rays which lower the refractive index of organic matter)<sup>4</sup> into the old empirical context. The euphoria that this approach provokes is real but limited, better suited to the short story and a new audience. The roman scientifique evaporated more quickly as positivistic natural science lost prestige in the humanistic sphere after the World Wars (cf. Nemo's "Nautilus" as against



the US Navy's atomic "Nautilus"), and surges back with prestigious peace-time applications in new methodologies (astronautics, cybernetics). Even in Verne, the structure of the "science novel" is that of a pond after a stone has been thrown into it: there is a momentary commotion, the waves go from impact point to periphery and back, then the system settles down as before. The only difference is that one positivistic fact - usually an item of hardware - has been added like the stone to the pond bottom. This structure of transient estrangement specifically applies to murder mysteries, not to a mature s f.

24 After such delimitations, one can perhaps indicate some differentiations within the concept of "cognitiveness" or "cognition". As used here, this term does not imply only a reflecting of but also on reality. It implies a creative approach that tends toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment. Such a typical methodology of s f - from Lucian, More, Rabelais, Cyrano, and Swift, to Wells, London, Zamyatin, and the last few decades - is a critical one, often satirical, which combines a belief in the potentialities of reason with methodical doubt in the most significant cases. Notice the kinship of this cognitive critique with the philosophical fundaments of modern science.

As a matter of historical record, s f has moved from a pre-scientific or proto-scientific approach of debunking satire and naive social critique closer to the increasingly sophisticated natural and human sciences. The natural sciences caught up to and surpassed the literary imagination of the 19th century. Some might argue that the sciences that deal with human relationships have caught up with it in their highest theoretical achievements, but they have certainly not done so in their alienated social practice. In the 20th century, s f has moved into the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, and has become a diagnosis, a warning, a call to action, and - most important - a map of possible alternatives. Yet whenever it is relevant, it remains a poetic parable.

### 3 SCIENCE FICTION AS A LITERARY GENRE (CONCEPT AND NAME)

31 As a full-fledged literary genre, s f has its own repertory of conventions and devices, many of them highly interesting (the motivation of the estranged framework and the transition to it, the complex relations between author and narrator, etc.). The change that is crucial historically is the shift of locus of estrangement from space to time. I cannot discuss all this in a short theoretical approach, as it is properly the subject for a book-size work. I should only like to mention that all the estranging devices in s f are related to the cognition espoused, and that together with the historical venerability of the genre's tradition as here postulated, to me this seems to provide a second, methodological reason for according s f much more importance than academe usually does.

32 Finally, however, I should like to discuss the concept of a "science fiction tradition" or genre, which is the logical corollary of its recognition as the literature of cognitive estrangement. You can glean from my approach and examples that I think that the literary genre which I am trying to define embraces the sub-genres mentioned in 21, from Greek and earlier times until today (the Blessed Islands, Utopias, Fabulous Voyages, Planetary novels, Staatsromans, Anticipations, and Dystopias - as well as the Verne-type romans scientifiques, the Wellsian Scientific Romance variant, and the 20th century

magazine and anthology-based s f (sensu stricto). If the definitions and delimitations for which I offered some, necessarily sketchy, arguments in this article hold, the inner kinship of these sub-genres is stronger than their obvious autonomous, differentiating features. I cannot possibly enter here into a historical discussion of these kinships and differences, except to observe that the significant writers in this line were quite aware of their coherent tradition and explicitly testified to it (the line Lucian-More-Rabelais-Cyrano-Swift-Verne-Wells is a main example). Also, some of the most perspicacious surveyors in the field, like Ernst Bloch, Lewis Mumford, or Northrop Frye, might also assume this unity. I have tried to set forth some explicit reasons for stressing it, too.

33 The novelty of such a concept shows at its most acute when one tries to find a name for this genre as here conceived. This name should, ideally (1) clearly set it apart from non-literature; (2) from the empirical literary mainstream; (3) from non-cognitive estrangements such as fantasy; (4) and it should try to add as little as possible to the already prevailing confusion of tongues in this region. At present the most academically acceptable designation is that of a literature of utopian thought. No doubt the concept is partly relevant, but it fails to meet the first above criterion. Logically, this is usually taught and considered within the scope of either history of ideas, or of political and sociological theory. Although I would agree that literature (and especially this genre) is most intimately involved with life - indeed, that the destiny of humanity is its telos - I think that one should quickly add that literature is also more than an ideological document. Since this is the rationale for any systematic literary study and scholarship I may not need to labour the point.

The only proper way to search for a solution seems to require starting from the qualities that define the genre, as this would take care of criteria 1 to 3, at least. Taking the kindred thesaurus concepts of science for cognition, and fiction for estrangement, I believe that there is a sound reason for calling this whole new genre Science Fiction (sensu lato).

There are two main objections to such a solution. First, cognition is much wider than science. This is correct, and I argued as much myself in 24. It is much less weighty, however, if you take "science" in a sense that comes much closer to the German Wissenschaft, French science, or Russian nauka, which includes not only natural but also all the anthropological sciences and even scholarship (cf. Literaturwissenschaft). As a matter of fact, that is what science has been taken to stand for in the practice of this international genre: not only in the writings of More or Zamyatin, but the writings of Americans such as Asimov, Heinlein, Pohl, Oliver, etc., would be completely impossible without sociological, psychological, historical, anthropological, et. sim., extrapolations and analogies.

Further, an element of convention enters into all names (cf. "comparative literature"), but it has proved harmless as long as the name is handy, approximate enough, and above all applied to a clearly defined body of works.

The second objection is that the use of "science fiction" introduces an ambiguity between the whole genre and the 20th century s f from which the name was taken. Weighed against the advantages of the only term at hand that fulfils the above criteria, I should argue that this objection is at worst a minor drawback. Nobody has serious trouble to distinguish between More's book, the country described in it, and the sub-genre of "utopia". The trouble begins

with the variety of unrelated interdisciplinary and ideological interpretations that are foisted upon such a term, "Science fiction" might perhaps escape the inter-disciplinary part of that obstacle race. Furthermore, to acknowledge clearly your methodological premises seems always to give you certain advantages. As both Lukacs and Eliot would agree, any tradition is modified and re-established by a sufficiently significant new development, from whose vantage point one can reinterpret the tradition. I would maintain that this is the case for the mentioned ci-devant traditions, e.g. "utopian literature", in the age of science fiction. If that is accepted, the new name is no drawback at all, but simply an onomastic consummation.

34 If one finds acceptable this argument, one can check the various sub-genres for their relationships with various sciences. The utopias are - whatever else they may be - clearly sociological fictions or social-science-fiction, whereas modern s f is analogous to modern polycentric cosmology, which unites time and space in Einsteinian worlds with different but co-variant dimensions and time scales. Significant modern s f, with deeper and more lasting sources of enjoyment, would also presuppose more complex and wider cognitions. It discusses the political, psychological, anthropological use and effect of sciences, and the becoming or failure of new realities as a result of it. The consistency of extrapolation and the width of reference in such a cognitive discussion turn into aesthetic factors. (That is why the "scientific novel" that is discussed in 23, does not seem completely satisfactory - it is aesthetically poor because it is scientifically meagre.) Once the elastic criteria of literary structures have been met, a cognitive - in most cases strictly scientific - element becomes a measure of aesthetic quality, of the specific pleasure to be sought in s f. In other words, the cognitive nucleus of the plot co-determines the fictional estrangement in s f. This works on all literary levels, e.g. purely aesthetic, story-telling reasons led modern s f to the cognitive assumption of a hyperspace where the speed of light does not necessarily limit the flight speed.

Significant s f (to which, as in all genres - but somewhat disappointingly so - at least 95% of printed matter that claims the name does not belong) denies thus the "two cultures gap" more efficiently than any other literary genre that I know of. Even more importantly, it demands from the author and the reader not merely specialised, quantified positivistic knowledge (scientia) but a social imagination whose quality, whose wisdom (sapientia), testifies to the maturity of his critical and creative thought.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 A virtue of discussing this seemingly peripheral subject of "science fiction" and its "utopian" tradition is that you have to go back to first principles. You cannot really assume them - such as in this case "What is literature?" - as given. Usually, when you discuss literature you determine what a piece of literature says (its subject matter) and how it says what it says (the approach to its themes). If we talk about literature in the sense of "significant works possessing certain minimal aesthetic qualities" rather than in the sociological sense of "everything that gets published at a certain time" or the ideological sense of "all the writings on certain themes", we can more precisely formulate this principle as a double question.

First, epistemologically, what possibility for aesthetic qualities do

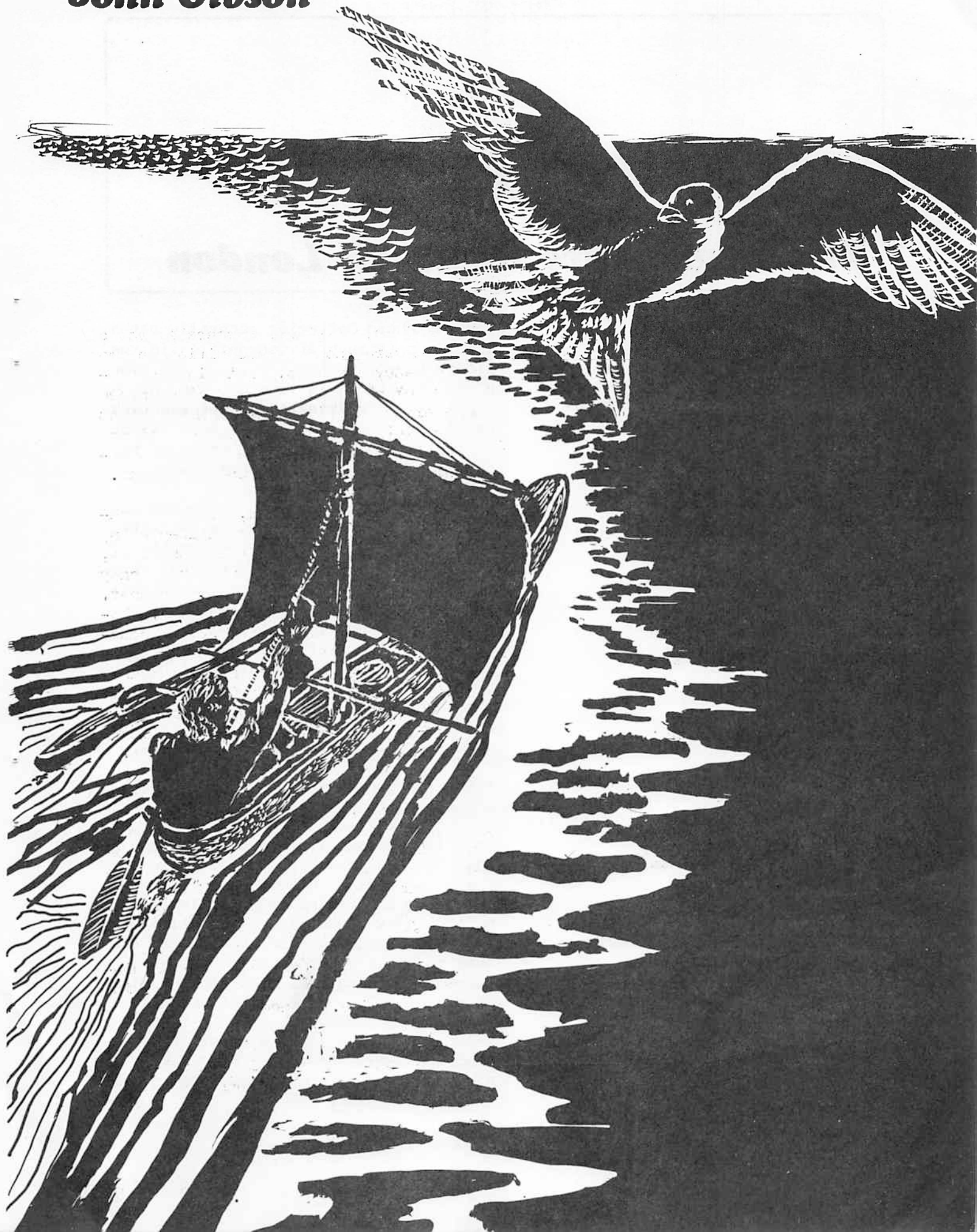
different thematic fields ("subjects") offer? At the moment the answer of dominant aesthetics is - an absolutely equal possibility; and with this answer our aesthetic kicks the question out of its field into the lap of ideologists who pick it up by default and proceed to bungle it.

Secondly, historically, how in fact has such a possibility been used? Once you begin with such considerations you come quickly up against the rather unclear concept of realism (not the prose literary movement of the 19th century but a meta-historical stylistic principle), since this genre is often pigeonholed as non-realistic. I would not object to, but would heartily welcome such labels if one had first persuasively defined what is "real" and what is "reality". True, this genre raises basic philosophical issues; but it is perhaps not necessary to face them in a first approach. Therefore I shall substitute here the concept of "the author's empirical environment" in place of "realism" and "reality". This term seems as immediately clear as any.

- 2 Sub-title of Samuel Butler's s f novel, EREWHON.
- 3 J Willett, ed., BRECHT ON THEATRE, New York 1964, pp 192 and 96. I have changed Mr Willett's translation of Verfremdung from alienation into estrangement, since alienation evokes incorrect connotations.
- 4 Note the functional difference to the anti-gravity metal in Wells' FIRST MAN ON THE MOON, which is an introductory gadget and not the be-all of a much richer novel.
- 5 E Bloch, DAS PRINZIP HOFFNUNG, vol 1-2, Frankfurt a M, 1959; L Mumford, STORY OF UTOPIAS, New York 1922, and UTOPIA, THE CITY AND THE MACHINE, in F E Manuel, ed., UTOPIAS AND UTOPIAN THOUGHT, Boston, 1967; N Frye, VARIETIES OF LITERARY UTOPIAS, in Manuel, op. cit.

- Darko Suvin  
Montreal 1969

**John Gibson**



# JOHN GIBSON

## *The Nightmare of Black London*

John Gibson discusses

### AFTER LONDON

by RICHARD JEFFERIES

J M Dent :: 1948

First publication 1885

and refers to:

### ENGLAND IN THE WILD

by ARTHUR ULOTH

ANARCHY vol iii No 12

:: 1963

### THE STORY OF MY HEART

by RICHARD JEFFERIES

Macmillan :: 1968

### WHAT AN INCREDIBLE FOLLY

by WILLIAM MORRIS

Pelican :: 1962

First publication 1890

### THE TIME MACHINE

by H G WELLS

Penguin :: 1960

First publication 1895

Today Richard Jefferies generally rates about a paragraph of recognition in the bigger encyclopedias, but his *THE STORY OF MY HEART* is one of the unique happenings in literature, a book that falls into no pigeon-hole but stands defiantly by itself, hated or loved according to the reader's understanding.

Some of his other works, composed rapidly during his last few half-healthy years (he was dying of consumption), also stand as singular events that only the resurrected author could repeat. Among these works is *AFTER LONDON*. Today we would at least attempt to categorise it as pessimistic science fiction. We would put it in that branch of s f that looks at the real world with unabashed hatred or gloom - or both - but which often puts forward somewhat brighter alternative worlds.

It's my guess that Jefferies hated smoggy, dirty, putrid, poverty-plenty London of the late 19th century because he believed that its industrial filthiness was responsible for the disease that was eating his lungs. (He was quite right to think this.) Therefore he consigned London Town and all similar civilised messes to the garbage dump of history, and he made speculations about England after the passing of civilisation. Hence *AFTER LONDON*.

Jefferies was an early pioneer of s f. Even H G Wells borrowed from him for his picture of the future England of *THE TIME MACHINE*.



I suppose that you could also say that Jefferies was a pioneer in his early recognition of the problem of industrial pollution. However, he was not the only prophet in this field, for that other fantasist, socialist, artist, artisan, and author, William Morris, was a contemporary who also condemned the ugliness of industrial civilisation. Morris says:

I feel sure that the time will come when people will find it difficult to believe that a rich community, such as ours, having such a command over external nature, could have submitted to live such a mean, shabby life as we do.

Morris also talks about the "unmanageable aggregations called towns" (long before today's horrifying ant-heaps called megalopolises) in which people are "condemned to live idiotically cramped", and this "without even gardens or open spaces". Morris saw that the horror of his civilisation was a result of "profit-hunting". This was right, but it was also the result of England's (and the world's) ever-growing population problem.

All the incredible filth, disorder, and degradation of modern civilisation are supposed to be signs of prosperity. So far from that, they are signs of slavery - slavery of the people. But when people are no longer slaves they will, as a matter of course, claim that every man and every family should be generously lodged; that every child should be able to play in a garden; that houses should by their obvious decency and order be ornaments of nature, not disfigurements of it.

(William Morris, WHAT AN INCREDIBLE FOLLY)

Indeed how very far we must go before we realise Morris' generous dreams! Perhaps we are even proceeding in the wrong direction. Would not Morris have been utterly astounded by the disfigurement of nature that is our civilisation?

I digressed into Morris for an obvious reason: Morris and Jefferies were not only Englishmen disgusted by the frightfulness of English industrialism, but they were also soul brothers who escaped mentally from their own time by destroying that civilisation they hated and creating something else - an imaginary world - in its place. Morris had his NEWS FROM NOWHERE; Jefferies his AFTER LONDON.

Someone has probably said this before - but isn't it clear why Westerns appeal so much to modern man? They are his balm, his dream, to ride an empty landscape on a horse, no other man for miles. The reality is too dreadful to bear without such fantasy. The reality is the human ant-heap: people pressed shoulder to shoulder in trains; people breathing their daily ration of toxin; people squashed so closely together that they don't want to know each other or be friends; people who are more lonely than the cartoon hermit who sits by his hut on top of a mesa - lonely although they cannot inhale without taking in the breath of other men. Jefferies wanted to escape that which we also want to escape from: the curse of crowding, and dirt, and the malevolence of civilisation 19th- (or 20th-, for that matter) century style.

But Richard Jefferies' self-created world is still a malevolent one. England has broken up into seigneuries and city-states. Most of its population has vanished into some untold direction. There is speculation, of course, among those who pass in this age as intellectuals; for in this age intellectualism

is regarded with distrust. "Sports" - i.e. hunting, jousting, and guzzling - are approved pastimes for those of noble birth, but reading and reflection are all but treasonable activities. (Sounds like contemporary Australia - almost.) The petty kinglets rightly suspect that any contemplative man plots against them. Catholicism, Protestantism, and Fundamentalism feed upon each other's blood, and periodical religious massacres are common. Slavery is the punishment for such crimes as debt, so that nine-tenths of the population are serfs.

Jefferies' main character, Felix Aquila, based on Jefferies himself, observes the society in which he lives:

Seen thus from below, the whole society appeared rotten and corrupted, coarse to the last degree, animated by the lowest motives. As himself of noble birth Felix had hitherto seen things only from the point of view of his own class. Now he associated with grooms, he began to see from their point of view, and recognised how feebly it was held together by brute force, intrigue, cord and axe, and woman's flattery. But a push seemed needed to overthrow it. Yet it was quite secure, nevertheless, as there was none to give that push, and if any such plot had formed, those very slaves who suffered the most would have been the very men to give information, and to torture the plotters.

One essay-writer on Jefferies, Arthur Uloth, noticed that Jefferies' ideas in WILD ENGLAND (the alternative title for AFTER LONDON) were completely counter to those of his time. Most socialist and capitalist thinkers had taken Science to their hearts as a cure-all for the world. Progress was Science, Science was Progress. Whichever way you looked at the future, things would get better and better to infinity. Jefferies did not believe this. He reasoned that civilisations had risen and fallen in the past and so there was no justification for thinking that his civilisation would go on forever. This was tantamount to heresy in that age of Science-Futurism in which even Wells believed on odd occasions. In fact Wells' worshipful scientific utopias bear a close resemblance to Hitler's super-scientific Third Reich.

The second major feature of Richard Jefferies' writing is his deification of Nature and the natural. In a glorious way he wipes out civilisation off-handedly and begins his wonderful verbal landscapes of England as it returns to the wild. Consider the opening lines of the book:

The old men say their fathers told them that after the fields were left to themselves a change soon became visible. It became green everywhere in the first spring, after London ended, so that all the country looked alike.

"After London ended..." As simple as that. To begin a story in this manner, to fill in the convincing little details, and to make such a story both readable and enjoyable at the same time, one has to be truly creative.

But the really significant thing about AFTER LONDON is its datelessness. True, there are some linguistic problems. This is comprehensible; the book was published in 1885. These things aside, the work does not date with the extraordinary rapidity of some recent works. Assuming that neither nuclear war nor some unpredictable eco-catastrophe takes place, man can look forward to societies based on feudal, seigneuristic, or tribal lines, for man will not

have the numbers to build more complex organisations. Today, we have the means to make Jefferies' dreams into realities, if you hope optimistically that at least some people will live through the coming disasters. There is the possibility, of course, that we will breed ourselves, DDT ourselves, or bomb ourselves, into utter oblivion.

But let's be cheerful about it. Let's assume that the world does survive with a drastically reduced population. This assumption has compensations. The world again grows green and fertile. The ruins of London have dammed up the Thames, creating a vast fresh-water sea inland, and around this sea - or, as Jefferies says, "lake" - grow up the city-states, seigneuries, fortified chateaux and, between all, the Great Forest haunted by "Bushmen" and "Romanies", not to mention great varieties of wild animals (some domestic gone wild), birds, and plants. In Part I of AFTER LONDON, Jefferies describes all these in vivid detail. Not until Part II, some forty pages into the work, does the story's concern with individual human characters begin.

In Part II, Chapter I, Jefferies indicates obliquely the true barbarism of the period. He informs us that the art of glass-making is lost, and the people of this age guard jealously the chips of the stuff that remain from the time when it is believed that the people were at least demi-gods. "There were only two panes of glass in the window," writes Jefferies, "each no more than three inches square, the rest of the window being closed by strong oaken shutters, thick enough to withstand the flight of an arrow." Note here the economy of language. Jefferies sketches the uncertainty of the age in the phrase, "...thick enough to withstand the flight of an arrow." War is the most popular hobby of the day. The barbarian Welsh, Irish, and Scots invade the scarcely less barbaric Thames' lake dwellers, who in turn constantly war with each other. Add to this the pleasant murderings and massacres of the churches, the Bushmen primitives, the Romanies, and the general slavery, viciousness, legal lynchings, and tortures, and you have an era that is not too dissimilar from our own. (Remember Vietnam, Biafra, Hiroshima, Stalinism, and so on.) Yet they do have the better of us. They can breathe clean air and drink pure water; and they certainly don't have to swim in shit.

Jefferies' writing gives us a great deal of sensual pleasure. His attention to detail gives the work a tactility that Marshall McLuhan would have us believe comes from that ultimately dead medium of television. "The ink," describes the author, "was very thick and dark, made of powdered charcoal, leaving a slightly raised writing, which could be perceived by the finger on rubbing it lightly over."

Arthur Uloth describes Felix Aquila as a "neurotic young man". There is some truth in this. Felix is a natural loner. He and his brother Oliver only get on fairly well with each other because of a mutually-developed tolerance. Sometimes, however, Felix becomes really insufferable and Oliver walks out on him, later returning and not even mentioning the incident. Felix' defensive arrogance turns most characters against him while Oliver, who is totally in tune with his society, is a good sport, good swordsman, a life-of-the-party type. Again, Felix does not even do well at the noble art of swordsmanship. He spites everyone by becoming proficient in the bow, a weapon of commoners and slave retainers.

"Why didn't you ride into town with me?" (asked Oliver).

"The water must have been cold this morning?" said Felix, ignoring the question.

"Yes; there was a slight frost, or something like it, very early, and a mist on the surface; but it was splendid in the pool. Why don't you get up and come? You used to."

"I can swim," said Felix laconically, implying that, having learnt the art, it no longer tempted him.

And later in the same conversation:

"...I wish they would either dance or fight." (Oliver)

"Fight! Who?" (Felix)

"Anybody. There's some more news, but you don't care."

"No. I do not."

"Why don't you go and live in the woods all by yourself?" said Oliver, in some heat.

Felix laughed. "Tell me your news. I am listening."

"The Irish landed at Blacklands the day before yesterday, and burnt Robert's place; they tried Letburn, but the people there had been warned, and were ready. And there's an envoy from Sypolis arrived; some think the Assembly has broken up; they were all daggers drawn. So much for the Holy League."

This is a real example of economy of language. We discover many things from these few lines of artificially offhand dialogue: we gain an insight into the characters of Felix and Oliver, a hint of the kind of socio-political set-up in which they live, and more: questions arise in our minds about the natures of the Assembly and the Holy League.

The story continues at a bucolic pace, seemingly at odds with the rush-rush, time-means-money society in which Jefferies lived and hated to live. We learn that the stockaded estate kept by Baron Aquila, Felix' father, is mortgaged twice over; that Oliver is trying to take service in the army; that Felix is building a dugout canoe with which to explore the Great Lake and seek his fortune. This last thing causes friction between the brothers, for Oliver, noting the duration of its construction, is ever teasing Felix, saying that he will never complete it.

However Felix does complete the canoe, but with Oliver's aid in its final shaping. The cantankerous individualism in Felix detests Oliver's good-natured help but eventually consents to it as a tolerable means to a much-desired end. With quite a fast little single-sail outrigger under his control, his few possessions stowed aboard, his brother farewelled, Felix ventures out onto the beautiful waters of the great lake. Jefferies has free rein to do what he really does best; to give a completely sensual description of nature - the lake, the sky, the birds, and the feeling of sun and wind:

Upon the silent water the time lingered, for there was nothing to mark its advance, not so much as a shadow beyond that of his own boat. The waves having now no crest, went under the canoe without chafing against it or rebounding, so that they were noiseless. No fishes rose to the surface. There was nothing living near, ex-

cept a blue butterfly, which settled on the mast, having ventured thus far from land. The vastness of the sky, over-arching the borad water, the sun, and the motionless filaments of cloud, gave no repose for his gaze, for they were seemingly still. To the weary glance motion is repose; the waving boughs, the foam-tipped waves, afford positive rest to look at. Such intense stillness as this of the summer sky was oppressive; it was like living in space itself, in the ether above.

Before he takes his long exploratory voyage around the lake, Felix first seeks his fortune by joining the service of a warlike king of one of the bigger city-states. This really exposes the true viciousness of the society. Although he is intelligent, he is given the most menial chores to do. Accidentally he eats dinner with a slave. After he overcomes his distaste at the incident, he realises that slaves are as human as he is. This is the equivalent of a voortrekker who realises that negroes are people, or a Hindu Brahmin who is struck by the thought that untouchables have feelings. But the politics of power bite to his core. He sees people tortured to death, is arrested for treason himself; one minute the king recognises that he is brilliant, and the next minute Félix is drummed out of camp (at the king's orders) as a fool. After these humiliations and self-awakenings he sets out on his voyage of discovery.

For many people this is the best part of Jefferies' book. Obviously Jefferies himself most enjoyed working on this part. He describes the lake in all its moods - stormy, windy, sun-calmed. This was his escape from his age of misery. The wide waters of the great lake were his defence against the madding crowd and the poisoned city.

Although I fell in love with the lake as the author imagines it, I preferred rather his haunting, almost mad painting of Felix' journey into the centre of ruined London. As he approaches these regions, not knowing for sure where he is, he notices what look like numberless flocks of migrating fowl that come at him from the horizon. But it turns out that the birds are of all species, which, because it is nesting time, he finds somewhat disquieting. When he looks over the side of the boat, into the water, he fancies that he sees schools of thousands of fish, all travelling in the same direction as the birds. However, soon the strangely spontaneous migrations cease, leaving him alone on the lake, sailing toward a sulphurous yellow mist that stretches across the eastern sky. Quickly the mist envelops him, yellow and disgusting, restricting his very breath. He also becomes aware that the water that surrounds the canoe is foul. Suddenly the crystalline, pure waters of the great lake become undrinkable, even untouchable, and streamers of scum glue themselves to sick reeds:

Upon the surface of the water there was a greenish yellow oil, to touch which was death to any creature; it was the very essence of corruption. Sometimes it floated before the wind, and fragments became attached to reeds or flags far from the place itself. If a moorhen or duck chanced to rub the reed, and but one drop stuck to its feather, it forthwith died.

Is this a 19th century intuitive prediction of nerve gas or radioactive waste? I think not. Jefferies was really setting down a picture of the polluted London of his day, the London that contributed to the breakdown of his health. As William Morris puts it, "Not even the most ordinary precautions were taken

against wrapping a whole district in a cloud of sulphurous smoke." Today smog swathes not only districts but whole centuries. No wonder sensitive men like Jefferies and Morris began their outcry against this kind of thing almost a century ago. Yet what Morris calls the "incredible folly" still goes on under the same banners of growth production and population increase. The "mad imagery" of Felix' nightmare sojourn in the black landscape of the defunct London has to be mad to be sane. "You are all living in Bedlam," was Jefferies' cry to his age via the fictional Felix Aquila and the contrast between the pictures of the beautifully natural lake and the man-made "very essence of corruption" that was black London.

Felix sets foot on the shores, blackened and yellow-misted, that are the remains of the great city. The oppressive heat and general putrescence of the place make him sick. He walks on, his footprints glowing phosphorescently in his trail.

The sun had not sunk, but had disappeared as a disk. In its place was a billow of blood surging on the horizon. Over it flickered the palest blue tint, like that seen in fire. The black waves reflected the glow, and the yellow vapour was suffused with it. In the level plain the desolation was yet more marked; there was not a grassblade or a plant; the surface was hard, black and burned, resembling iron, and indeed in places it resounded to the feet, though he supposed that the echo came from hollow passages beneath.

Felix becomes sicker as he penetrates further into this hell, wondering to himself whether he will ever get out again alive. He encounters the chalk-drawn remains of a human skeleton, undoubtedly that of some luckless person who ventured to the same place and was overcome, unable to make good a retreat. "He had penetrated into the midst of this dreadful place," writes Jefferies, "of which he had heard many a tradition: how the earth was poison, the air poison, the very light of heaven, falling through such an atmosphere, poison."

Felix does manage to sail out of this pest hole, though he is desperately ill for nearly a week afterward. At this point Jefferies' creative powers degenerate. He lets his hero win the leadership of a band of nomadic shepherds. Then he settles down to live with them, presumably happily ever after. Quite obviously the shepherds are just another version of the noble savages - well, at least they have one thing in their favour: they are the least vicious people in the book. Apart from this deus ex machina at the very end, the book is superb.

You should read AFTER LONDON for its beauty, its far-sightedness, and its foresightedness. It is a must for conservationists and anti-pollutionists, and indeed for all who distrust the idea that more and bigger make better. It never ceases to amaze me that the ancient Athenians produced such high quality art from a population not as large as that of the Sydney suburb of Parramatta. And what has that suburb produced? Dime-stores and supermarkets and gossiping old bags at church socials. If Great Society just means Great Big Society, you tell them from me that I don't want it; nor should anyone else, I think. You can have your smoke-stacks, your autos, your supermarkets, your glut of instant garbage. I'll hie me in my mind to Jefferies' pure lake, his wild birds and deer and horses, and there I'll sail with him in that absurd little dugout-outrigger-cum-sailboat until the philosophies of the more and more and bigger and bigger give way to that strange philosophy called excellence, that

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 86



# BARRY GILLAM

## The Old Dark House

Barry Gillam discusses:

### THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN

Directed by ROBERT WISE; screenplay by NELSON GIDDING, from the novel by Michael Crichton; director of photography: RICHARD H KLINE; music by GIL MELLE; produced by ROBERT WISE; released by Universal Pictures.

With ARTHUR HILL (Dr Jeremy Stone), DAVID WAYNE (Dr Charles Dutton), JAMES OLSON (Dr Mark Hall), KATE REID (Dr Ruth Leavitt), PAULA KELLY (Karen Anson), GEORGE MITCHELL (Jackson).

1971. 130 minutes.

their mere presence and not to ask for connections.

Briefly, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN tells the story of an alien micro-organism that a space probe brings back to Earth. Incautious residents of a small New Mexican town open the capsule and they are all killed, except for an old man and a baby. The body of the film concerns the efforts to determine just what the organism is, why these two survived, etc. This latter section takes place in an elaborate, sterilised complex of laboratories which Wise uses effectively only occasionally.

The actors never rise above the script, which is as oppressive as the set. Whoever put the "humour" into the film didn't understand the comic potential inherent in the material, and he injected his "jokes" rather than discovered them. There are moments when one is not sure just what was intended, as when one scientist says to another, after we have seen the magnified green organism rise like yeast, "My God, it's growing."

THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN is boring and I really can't think of anything worse to say about a movie that claims to be a thriller.

The film isn't merely incompetent: very few movies are today. Director Robert Wise has had a long and occasionally distinguished career (CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE, THE SET-UP, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, THE HAUNTING, WEST SIDE STORY). Nevertheless, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN is full of all sorts of uninteresting technology. It has little in the way of technique, and no style at all. That is, the split screens, insets, etc., have nothing to do with what they enclose. Wise expects the viewer to be impressed by

My real complaint about the film, though, must be that it contains no suspense. Wise has attempted a pseudo-documentary style, and what results is the kind of dull, explanatory science film that I used to sleep or talk through in high-school physics: scientists from all walks of life, of all convictions, coming together at the insistence of the United States Government to battle a bug from outer space for the good of mankind. So much purely informational material is simply boring.

After dehydrating the blood of the New Mexicans, the Andromeda Strain starts to destroy plastic and, really, there is no difference in this film. If anything, when we are informed that the Andromeda Strain is over California, now doing nothing worse than eating plastic, we have a vision of the entire Coast crumbling at its foundations.

THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN so busily tries to create a pseudo-reality, to justify its "authenticity", that it neglects what might be called its "fictive reality". The whole movie is too slick. For example, the television monitors are matted into the screen so that we see films rather than real flickering television images. There are moments when we feel a touch of reality, and these only show the blatant artificiality of the rest of the film. While the organism is being administered to test animals, we watch several mice and a monkey die. The monkey's death is really the touchstone of the film: the helplessness and the pathos of the necessity come through. However, since the film has already carefully warned us, "Animal sequences filmed under supervision of the American Humane Assn.", we know that this is just as false as the rest.

Jean-Luc Godard, in WEEKEND, administered a very interesting test of reality. Towards the end of the film, a pig is killed and the camera holds on the action. No matter how many times the killing may have been simulated in rehearsal, while the film is running, the pig is killed and the action will never be repeated for that animal. It is a chilling reminder of the fiction that Godard was creating, moving all the while toward the documentary that seems to have stifled him completely now. I am not arguing for or against documentary, but it is obvious that Robert Wise miscalculated the means that he employed towards his goal.

On its first run, the film was marketed with the injunction that "no one will be seated during the last ten minutes". The last ten minutes contain a reckless race against time that is gripping in a single-minded way and is cleverly used. Since most people allow the last ten or twenty minutes of films and plays to form their impressions of the whole, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN gives its audience something exciting to leave with. This is merely a ruse, however, and it can't save the film.

The best moment in the film, after the monkey's death, comes at the end. We see a brief shot of the Pacific Ocean and we are informed that the Andromeda Strain has drifted out over the ocean and the seawater will destroy it. The ocean alone provides a possibility of escape. The escape comes not only from the expanse of open space and the naturalism of the water, but also in the allusion. I remembered that episode of THE OUTER LIMITS in which an alien vegetation, brought back by a space capsule, grows unchecked by fire, bombs, DDT, acids, etc., only to be shrivelled by a shower of spring rain.

THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN shockingly lacks dramatic effect and I can only lament the passing of inspired visual s f like THE OUTER LIMITS. Go see THX 1138.

## WILLARD

Directed by DANIEL MANN; screenplay by GILBERT A RALSTON; director of photography: ROBERT B HAUSER; music by ALEX NORTH; produced by MORT BRISKIN; based on the novel RATMAN'S NOTEBOOKS by Stephen Gilbert; released by Cinerama Releasing.

With BRUCE DAVISON (Willard Stiles), ERNEST BORGNINE (Al Martin), ELSE LANCASTER (Henrietta Stiles), SANDRA LOCKE (Joan), MICHAEL DANTE (Brandt), JODY GILBERT (Charlotte Stassen), JOAN SHAWLEE (Alice), WILLIAM HANSEN (Mr Barskin), J PAT O'MALLEY (Jonathan Farley).

1971. 95 minutes.

ITEM: At a showing of the trailer for WILLARD, a man in the audience yelled out, "You don't have to go to the movies to see rats. Just look around at home."

ITEM: In a test, two advertising campaigns were prepared for WILLARD. In one campaign the distributors, afraid that people would, indeed, not go to the movies to see rats, played up the film as scary but they did not mention rats. The other campaign displayed a rat. More people in the city with the "rat" campaign went to see WILLARD.

With the release of WILLARD and THE HELLSTROM CHRONICLE, film companies are asking the public to pay to see something that they would normally pay to exterminate. And Americans, at least, are responding overwhelmingly. Both films are doing phenomenal business and in New York special late shows have been added to handle the crowds.

Not only is it hard to discern the attraction of rats, but WILLARD is simply a bad movie. Daniel Mann directs it rather dully, and as a film it is inadequate in almost every way imaginable. It is a horror film that is not in the least frightening, and a drama full of caricatures. The film does not even have a reasonable set of special effects to offset its other failutes.

Willard is a young man with a great feeling of inadequacy. His boss has stolen the family business from his father. His mother berates him for his lack of ambition. Bus drivers close their doors in his face. He bides his time, waiting for some kind of prop with which he can avenge himself on the world. Probably he fantasises various tortures for his boss. Then he finds the rats. Much as some children invent imaginary playmates, Willard befriends and trains the rats that he finds in his backyard. They give him a feeling of confidence that he enjoys. He has a secret that makes him special and allows him -- at least in his own mind -- the revenge that he seeks. Soon, however, he starts to act on his impulses. He uses the rats to fulfill his desire for vengeance. WILLARD deals with that revenge.

A good description of the events that take place in WILLARD would be truly frightening, I think. But the film never is. The few rats that we see in closeup are quite tame and they squeak compliantly in answer to Willard's statements, questions, and commands. The two named rats, Socrates and Ben, are even sympathetic in a "nice little animal" way. And one of the few really touching moments in the movie comes when Martin, Willard's boss, kills Socrates with a poker, after finding him in the office store room. Socrates is a white rat, for one thing, and as he is trapped between two boxes, the killing seems rather cruel.

When the tables are turned, and Martin is on the receiving end, the result is a frenzied screen and a yawning viewer. The sight of a hundred or so rats as

they mill around in a room might caution some viewers, but inevitably we never see more than two or three in the same frame as any of the actors, except occasionally Willard. The difference is crucial in such a peripheral film. We may be aware in THE BIRDS (with which WILLARD is inevitably compared) that the birds are on transparencies, but the effects are so good that we can accept the presence of the birds and their threat. WILLARD never gives us closeups of rats biting people, and the viewer sees the actors covered with rats only in shadow and knows that their frenzied movement just imparts motion to the prop rats attached to their clothes.

Bruce Davison is rather good as Willard, and Ernest Borgnine and Elsa Lancaster enliven their roles, which are rather trite in concept. In the end, though, the movie doesn't live up to its advertising. The ad campaign in New York shows a rat's face and it bears the legend: "This is Ben. He is Willard's friend. He will do anything for Willard." This is far more frightening than anything in the movie.

- Barry Gillam 1971

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#### SCIENCE FICTION BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

At the age of eighty, Bertrand Russell surprised himself by writing five short s f stories, published by Penguin Books in 1951 and reprinted in 1963. In the preface to the 1963 edition, Russell tells us that these stories have no great moral purpose; that he wrote each for its own sake, simply as a story, and if the reader finds it either interesting or amusing it has served its purpose.

The titles of the stories are:

SATAN IN THE SUBURBS (subtitled, HORRORS MANUFACTURED HERE)  
THE CORSICAN ORDEAL OF MISS X  
THE INFRA-REDISCOPE (my favourite)  
THE GUARDIANS OF PARNASSUS  
and BENEFIT OF CLERGY (a wicked little tale with a happy ending).

These stories are fun to read. Russell's style is well-nigh perfect, his paragraph and sentence structures are flawless, and his language is clear, meaningful, and in the best of taste.

The characters are larger than life, but Russell describes them superbly. I keep seeing in the people I meet every day the stanic malevolence of Dr Mal-lako; General Rrz (pronounced "Pish"), the distinguished soldier/statesman who loves to give advice; the witty and beautiful Lady Millicent Pinturque, whose love of pampered elegance allows her to be cruelly manipulated by her wicked husband, Sir Bulbus Fruriger, the great advertising tycoon; Pandrake Markle the brilliant and anarchic inventor; the disreputable journalist, Verity Hogg Paucus, who is almost always intoxicated, has a single bed-chamber in one of the worst slums of London (he has brilliant talents as a journalist, and when his money runs out sobriety forces him to write articles that are so mordantly witty that journals cannot refuse to publish them); the virtuous and naive Thomas Shovelpenney, whose disillusionment ends in suicide (the silly fool); and many, many more.

These stories are recommended, if you can find them.

- Bill Wright July 1971  
BILL WRIGHT

# THE S F NOVELS OF BRIAN W ALDISS

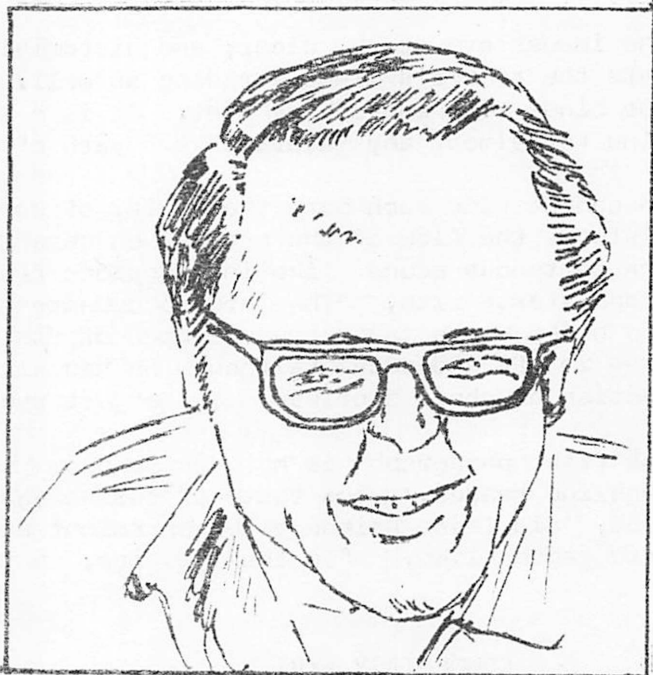
BY BRUCE R GILLESPIE

## PART ONE: THE GREAT ADVENTURES

In 1970 I began to publish a series of articles about the s f novels of Brian W Aldiss. The first article appeared in SFC 10, April 1970, which had a print run of about 150. The sequel articles failed to appear. This year, SFC will publish the entire series, and so I have decided to reprint THE GREAT ADVENTURES for those people who have become readers of SFC during the last two years. I have revised and added to the original version where necessary.

### NOVELS AND EDITIONS USED IN THIS ARTICLE

EQUATOR (Digit Books R533, 1958, 102 pages); NON-STOP (Faber paperback, 1958, 252 pages); THE MALE RESPONSE (Beacon 305, 1961, 188 pages); HOTHOUSE (Faber, 1962, 253 pages); GREYBEARD (Panther 24603, 1964, 219 pages). This is not a bibliography. These are the editions that I used in the preparation of this article, and in some cases they may vary from the US editions of the same books. I have listed US titles in the text of this article.



PART ONE:  
THE GREAT ADVENTURES

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by BRUCE R GILLESPIE

Life was a pleasure; he looked back at its moments, many of them as much shrouded in mist as the opposite bank of the Thames; objectively, many of them held only misery, fear, confusion. A fragment of belief came to him from another epoch: Cogito ergo sum. I feel so I exist. He enjoyed this fearful, miserable, confused life, and not only because it made more sense than non-life.

They were all actors performing their parts against a lead curtain that cut off forever every second as it passed.

- Brian W Aldiss: GREYBEARD

1958: EQUATOR (US title: VANGUARD FROM ALPHA)

The first words of Aldiss' first long piece of fiction are suitably impressive:

Evening shadows came across the spaceport in long strides. It was the one time of day when you could almost feel the world rotating. In the rays of the sinking sun, dusty palms round the spaceport looked like so many varnished cardboard props. By day, these palms seemed metal; by evening, so much papier mache. In the tropics, nothing was itself, merely fabric stretched over heat, poses over pulses.

The images are stark, clear, and pictorial. The march of the evening shadows sets the reader's mind striding as well. The tropical environment glints in our minds with end-of-day heat. It is a more interesting start than we would find for almost any "average" s f yarn of 1958.

We cannot find much more than this, of course. In the second sentence, Aldiss disturbs the flow of the prose when he addresses the reader directly. Some of the sentences sound like instructions from a film scenario. The third paragraph starts with, "The three occupants of the ship..." Some newspaperman's lip curls as he takes the measure of "this latest sci-fi effort". Brian Aldiss is off and away (although he had already published one interesting collection of short stories). Is he just another s f writer?

The first paragraph is not just a ploy to catch the attention of some jaded magazine reader. The taste of the paragraph continues through EQUATOR. In 1958, did Isaac Asimov or Damon Knight start their stories with terse little word games like, "In the tropics, nothing was itself, ...merely fabric



stretched over heat, poses over pulses"? Did Heinlein ever attempt minor Marvelisms like, "living meant extra adrenalin wallowing through his heart valves, the centipede track of prickles over his skin, the starry void in his lesser intestine"? The last phrase does not really mean much, but isn't it unusual in an s f story to pick out an interesting image like this, to enjoy saying it under one's breath?

From the beginning, Aldiss' main interest is in language - the English language for its own sake. A welcome change from the interests of other s f writers, but this is only a vague guide to the ultimate direction of Aldiss' work. In 1958 Aldiss was trying harder than the others. The story that contains that first paragraph has little enough to recommend it. Aldiss whirls his hero, Tyne Leslie, from Earth to Moon, where the alien "rosks" ambush Leslie and his party, Knocked about the head, then set free, Leslie drops back to Earth and the Sumatran jungle, tries to discover who killed his best friend on the moon, suspects his other best friend, chases him all around Sumatra and surrounding district, and finally finds the Solution To It All. And all this in 100 pages. Tyne Leslie hardly ever looks puffed, but the reader might become dizzy.

Leslie's buddy is not killed after all, the "betrayor" is an unwilling decoy for a Rosk plot, and... Well, the pattern is familiar, and Aldiss plays it by the book. To judge from this summary, EQUATOR might be one of a host of juvenile adventure stories that still crowd s f shelves of bookshops. Aldiss seems to run through the formula without much thought or originality.

But Tyne Leslie, except for his physical endurance, does not look like a hero by the end of the story. He tries to solve the mystery by himself, but at the end some amused United Nations agents carefully explain to him the answer to the puzzle. All the other characters treat him as a nuisance; the harassed agent, Dickens, tells him that "the situation is too complex for you; it comes in layers, like an onion."

Leslie does not like it when people keep calling him superfluous. The United Nations agents try to take him back to safety, the Rosks spot the intruders on their base, and attack the whole party with a "fly-spy". Leslie ruins the party's chance of escape when he complicates everything with his own escape:

"Dickens!" Tyne yelled.

The agent slithered over the rocking surface of the fly-spy. His legs dangled, kicked wildly in air. Then he caught a finger hold in the machine's central mesh and drew himself into a more secure position.

All this had obviously taken the Rosks who controlled the big disc completely by surprise. It just drifted where it was, helplessly. Then it moved. Its pervasive note changing pitch, it shot up like an express lift. Dickens was knocked flat by a bough.

Heedlessly, Tyne jumped from the tree to sprawl full length in a flowering bush. Picking himself up, he broke from the trees, running along below the fly-spy, shouting incoherently. He dare not fire in case he hit Dickens.

Dickens knelt on top of the thing, wrenching at the screens on its upper surface. In a moment, he had unlatched a segment of screen,

a wedge-shaped bit that left the rotors revolving nakedly underneath. He wrenched his shoe off and flung it in the rotors... Tyne was still running when it crashed into the river he had noticed earlier, bearing its passenger with it. They did not come up again.

This is one of the most clearly described and most exciting action sequences in Aldiss' novels - and it contains elements that interest us more than the dizzy flight of uncontrollable events. Dickens tries to rescue Leslie when he need not have put himself in immediate danger. Leslie treats the agent as an enemy, although he is not one. Dickens saves them all when he puts his shoe in the rotor. Leslie will not or cannot do anything but shout ineffectively. The "hero" is saved, but from self-induced danger, and at the same time he kills one of the few people who know what is really going on. As in the rest of the story, every step that Leslie makes is the wrong one.

Aldiss ends the story "happily ever after", and so he works within the normal structure of the s f fairy tale. But the mystery that Tyne Leslie tries to solve with great gusto is "pure bluff from start to finish". The embarrassed UN officer can only say, "You were really ill-advised, if I may say so, to get mixed up in it." And the "hero" still does not wake up to his own foolishness.

EQUATOR should read as much like a comedy as like an adventure. Indeed, there is almost a subgenre of science fiction that takes the mickey out of its brave heroes. If Aldiss had left EQUATOR at that, he might have written a minor classic within the subgenre. Unfortunately Aldiss breaks the story's light surface in too many passages:

"It's crazy!" Tyne thought, "all absolutely crazy!" He had time to wonder about the respect he had held for men of action. He had seen them as people at the equator of life, in the hottest spots, going round the fastest; he saw now it was true only in a limited sense. These people merely went in circles. One minute they were hunters, the next the hunted...

A game! That was the secret of it all! World events had become too grave to be treated seriously. One could escape from all their implications by sinking into this manic sub-world of action, where blood and bluff ruled.

Shades of Dostoyevsky! The naive hero, stricken for the first time by the world's realities, breaks down with the horror of it all! But the whole novel depends on Tyne Leslie's ignorance - if he were the sort of person who could probe the metaphysics of world politics, he would not have been foolish enough to involve himself with all this tomfoolery in the first place. Aldiss makes a mistake when he tries to write a self-conscious intelligent character into a role that demands the opposite qualities. The Tyne Leslie who makes sense to the reader is the one who slithers around tropical islands. Aldiss loses the point of his story if Leslie realises the ridiculousness of his position and yet continues to act like a comic opera buffoon.

Of course, it is not Tyne Leslie, boy adventurer, who speaks these words, but Brian W Aldiss, author, who wants to impress the reader. Surely frantic action prevents thought, but Aldiss makes Tyne Leslie say, "It was a lovely night, so quiet you could hear your flesh crawl" when the action stops for a paragraph or two. And while the Rosks prepare to throw him into the sea,

Leslie exclaims to himself, "Absolute poverty, like absolute power, corrupts absolutely". The swirling tip of the author's cape again.

A literate science fiction writer in 1958 must have come as quite a surprise. However, in this beginner's exercise, Aldiss did not realise that literate or mock-"significant" language in the sub-literate medium that EQUATOR fits merely destroys the conventions of the medium without replacing them with anything believable. Aldiss still had a long path to travel before he could find a consistent approach to his writing.

1958: NON-STOP (US title: STARSHIP)

A similar problem occurs in the first sentence of NON-STOP:

Like a radar echo bounding from a distant object and returning to its source, the sound of Roy Complain's beating heart seemed to him to fill the clearing.

"Like a radar echo" is not a bad simile, but it only takes a few pages for us to find that Roy Complain inhabits an environment so primitive that he could never have heard of radar. Therefore the first sentence must show the author's impressions of Complain's feelings: Complain is the object under discussion. However, the second sentence reads:

He stood with one hand on the threshold of his compartment, listening to the rage hammering through his arteries.

The second sentence contradicts the effect of the first sentence. Aldiss places the reader "in" the mind of Roy Complain, who does not know about radar.

What sort of attitude may we have towards Roy Complain? Aldiss starts the book with one of Complain's lovers' quarrels and runs from there into all of his other doubts, fears, and pleasures. Aldiss makes the unspoken claim that he is writing a traditionally English "novel of character", despite the book's many science fiction puzzles. "The Teaching" rules the "Greene tribe". Any habitual science fiction reader will spot a "starship story" before he has read a dozen pages. This mindless tribe lives in a world of decks and metal, the walls and floor of which are covered with jungle-like growth. This is the centuries-travelled starship in which "something has gone wrong", and where the descendants of the original inhabitants have forgotten the real purpose of their environment.

NON-STOP relates the story of Complain as he escapes from his unimaginative tribe with Marapper, the cynical priest, and several other malcontents. They leave their own area, called Quarters, travel through the empty Deadways, which still shows signs of some long-gone catastrophe, and reach the more "civilised" people of Forwards. The form of the book suggests an analogy with a gradual rise of mankind from its primitive beginnings towards civilisation, but Aldiss is not so severe in his choice of images that I would insist upon this interpretation. The travellers find the secret of the Starship, and all mayhem breaks loose in the last fifty pages of the book. A simple story with dozens of surprises at the end.

Summarised in this way, NON-STOP does not sound like a "novel" of intimate human experience. Aldiss prefaces the novel with R L Stevenson's smug little

phrase, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive", and these pilgrims have great fun during their travels. But Aldiss spoils the fun, because he pays as much attention to his main character as to the other aspects of the book. Complain is an outsider in his own tribe, because they accept the unchanging cycle of life in the bowels of the starship. Complain and Marapper try to bring a bit of life, however paradoxically destructive, to the tribe:

The crisis powered his inspiration. Flinging both hands over his face, he bent forward, groaning loudly and staggering, making believe the edge of the door had struck him. Through his fingers he saw Zilliac, the Lieutenant's right-hand man, next in line for the lieutenancy, burst into the room and kick the door shut behind him ... As he turned, dazed ready, to survey the room, Complain whipped up Gwenny's wooden stool by one leg and brought it down at the base of Zilliac's skull, square across the tense neck. A delightful splintering sound of wood and bone, and Zilliac toppled full length.

Aldiss captures the stupidity of the violence as well as the fun of it. Like a couple of schoolboy delinquents, Complain and Marapper have become so bored that they burst into violence. Now they must escape from the tribe. The tide of energy and mental restlessness of an explorer and a clown flows in Complain's veins.

Complain's explorations lead the party through Deadways, which nobody has crossed before because nobody bothered. His party discovers a Manual of the ship's electrical wiring. Previous generations had burned most of the other vital information about the ship because they thought that it was useless. When he discovers the diary of the original ship's captain, Complain is one of the few people who understands most of its implications.

The journey starts this way:

Cables hung in the middle of the opening. The priest leant forward and seized them, then lowered himself gingerly hand over fist down fifteen feet to the next level. The lift shaft yawning below him, he swung himself on to the narrow ledge, clung to the mesh with one hand and applied his cutters with the other. Tugging carefully, levering with his foot against an upright, he worked the gate open wide enough to squeeze through.

One at a time, the others followed. Complain was the last to leave the upper level. He climbed down the cable, silently bidding Quarters an uncordial farewell, and emerged with the others. The five of them stood silently in rustling twilight, peering about them.

This passage contains all the briskness of Complain's other actions, and the same concrete feel of the environment that marks all the best passages in NON-STOP. Aldiss conveys a feeling of expectancy and optimism. Like Alice going down the rabbit-hole, the characters feel that anything may be hiding in the "rustling twilight".

The pattern of the novel appears clearly only when Aldiss sits on his (metaphorical) little platform in space and tells us the story. Complain's part in the whole remains mysterious. He can discover a lot of information about the ship and understand it whenever he feels like it. However, Aldiss writes

perfunctorily, or even awkwardly, about Complain's intimate relationships with the other people he meets. The meeting between hero and heroine in the middle of the novel could come straight from Gernsback's AMAZING STORIES.

At times Complain faces the ship's metamorphosis with vitality and insight, but at other times in the novel Aldiss gives us almost the opposite impression:

The shock of finding the controls ruined had been almost too much for both of them. Once again, but now more insistently than ever before, the desire to die had come over Complain; a realisation of the total bleakness of his life swept through him like poison... Instinctively, Complain made the formal gesture of rage. He let the anger steam up from the recesses of his misery and warm him in the withering darkness. Vyann had begun to weep on his shoulder; that she should suffer too added fuel to his fury.

He foamed it all up inside him with increasing excitement, distorting his face, calling up all the injuries he and everyone else had undergone, churning them, creaming them up together like batter in a bowl. Muddy, bloody, anger, keeping his heart a-beat.

Complain's little ceremony embarrasses us, or makes us laugh at Complain. How can such a silly child discover the secret of the ship, weld together two of the Forwards tribes, and hold the novel together? The answer is that he does not. Aldiss thinks that he does, but sometimes he lets us enjoy Complain's antics, sometimes lets us laugh at him, and much of the time the author takes over the story altogether and lets Complain wander around a corridor or two. Each exciting incident contains its own ironic undertones. However, we cannot, as Aldiss might want us to do, sympathise with Complain. He discovers the story of the ship, but he fails to understand anything about the people around him. Complain goes through a farrago of emotions, but usually he acts with petulance, misunderstanding, and unthinking sadism. Complain is a circus act, not a person.

And, as in EQUATOR, we would feel satisfied if only Aldiss did not identify himself so closely with the viewpoint of Complain. Complain's party discovers the long-lost swimming pool in Deadways. First we share the wonder of the discoverers as they gaze at a swimming-pool for the first time:

Lit only by one bulb which burned to their left, it seemed to stretch forever into the darkness. The floor was a sheet of water on which ripples slid slowly outwards. Under the light, the water shone like metal. Breaking this smooth expanse at the far end, was an erection of tubes which suspended planks over the water at various heights, and to either side were rows of huts, barely distinguishable for shadow.

Aldiss shows us how the ship's passengers cannot understand the new phenomenon, so severely limited has been their vision ("it seemed to stretch for ever into the darkness"). Their severely limited expectations cannot account for new factors ("The floor was a sheet of water"). Eyes rove round the large room, trying to fit all the details into an acceptable pattern.

Complain tries to form a personal view:

He saw that there was a sight here which needed a special choice

of vocabulary. His eyes switched back to the water: it was entirely outside their experience. Previously, water had meant only a dribble from a tap, a spurt from a hose, or the puddle at the bottom of a utensil. He wondered vaguely what this amount could be for. Sinister, uncanny...

This is a second type of prose. Aldiss reports Complain's confused impressions and shows that he does not ask quite the right question ("He wondered vaguely what this amount could be for"). We must worry a little at the first sentence, for Complain is not an artist and he does not come from an artistic environment. It is hard to believe that this man in this environment would ask himself about the right word for the occasion. Perhaps it is only Aldiss who scurries around for the right word.

One member of the party, Roffery, thinks that this stretch of water must be what the old books call a "river":

This meant little to Complain; he was not interested in labels of things. What struck him was to perceive something he had worried over till now: why Roffery had left his sinecure to come on the priest's hazardous expedition. He saw now that the other had a reason akin to Complain's own: a longing for what he had never known and could put no name to.

The first sentence contradicts the first sentence in the other passage on the same page. Is Complain really interested in the pool or not, or does he just try to protect himself against the dubious presence of Roffery? Complain's quest is vague and cliched and again he seeks what he "could put no name to". Again we follow the path back to confusion. The vision of the pool contains its own justification. Complain's confused and nonsensical thoughts twist the book's pattern, but Aldiss insists upon Complain's importance. When the character of Complain fails the situation, Aldiss tries to change him so that he can absorb the meaning of events.

NON-STOP fails as a novel; it communicates to us well only when Aldiss writes about non-intimate, extra-personal information. To make it an interesting book, Aldiss must make Complain's environment more important than Complain. Often he succeeds. In the first half of the book Aldiss maps the wonders of this world in many splendid passages. Few lines in s f could match the balanced tension and visual pleasure of the following:

They moved through the tangles in silence. Progress was slow and exhausting. A solitary hunter on his own ground might creep among ponics without cutting them, by keeping close to the wall. Moving in file, they found this method less attractive, since branches were apt to whip back and catch the man behind. There was too another objection to walking by the walls: here the chitinous ponnic seeds lay thickest, where they had dropped after being shot against this barrier, and they crunched noisily as they were trodden on.

No diminution in the plague of flies was noticeable. They whined endlessly about the travellers' ears. As Roffery in the lead swung his hatchet at the ponics, he wielded it frequently round his head, in a dangerous attempt to rid himself of this irritation.

The ship swells with ponnic growth, and the floors crunch like a forest path.



Here, Aldiss does not cramp us into Complain's tiny spirit, but allows us to live in this living world for ourselves. The "characters" are merely blood corpuscles in the body of this vessel, and nearly all the best passages in the book use rich biological images. Aldiss' irony is, that like modern factory-owners, the ship's inhabitants pollute and destroy their world as soon as they learn something about its functions. When they learn that Earthmen have imprisoned them within this world the Ship's brigands cut into the vitals of their only support. They cut "the delicate capillaries of the vessel", "rupture a sewer sluice and a main water pipe", and "sizzling, rearing like a cobra, live wire flashed across the rails the inspection trucks ran on; two men died without a chirp". Finally "the gravity blew. Over that entire deck, free fall suddenly snapped into being."

Complain does not discover the most important secrets of the ship until they are revealed to him. His knowledge does not bring him any success (for he wants to captain the ship back to Earth) but tears the ship apart:

"It's the Emergency Stop!" Fermour shouted. "The moths have activated the Ultimate Emergency Stop! The ship's splitting into its component decks!"

They could see it all. The fissures on that noble arch of back were swelling into canyons. Then the canyons were gulfs of space. Then there was no longer a ship: only eighty-four great pennies, becoming smaller, spinning away from one another, falling forever along an invisible pathway. And each penny was a deck, and each deck was now a world of its own, and each deck, with its random burden of men, animals or ponics sailed away serenely round Earth, buoyant as a cork in a fathomless sea.

This scene is both very beautiful and very desperate. We become part of the ship, and we are fully involved in Complain's desire for the answer to it all. But with The Answer comes the destruction of everything that Complain considers important: his whole world dissolves into "eighty-four great pennies... falling forever along an invisible pathway". Aldiss changes the rhythm of this passage (note the series of "and"s) so that all of Complain's energy, and concrete reality of the ship are transformed into a new kind of existence. For Complain, it is a religious statement of sorts, but the revelation does not strike down Complain, and on the book's last page he accepts its implications with the same verve and naivety with which he faces everything else.

Even during the last scene, we feel most concern for the fate of the ship, rather than the fate of Complain. Aldiss' main mistake in NON-STOP is to think otherwise; so NON-STOP remains a vital, penetrating invention about a remarkable world and humanity in general. Aldiss tries to make it more than that, and so renders it something less.

#### 1961: THE MALE RESPONSE

A superficial cynic like myself could easily say that all of Aldiss' novels are rewrites of NON-STOP, and prove it. But Aldiss' comedy-adventure, THE MALE RESPONSE, would remain the exception to the rule, even if I wanted to advance the rule, which I don't. Where NON-STOP is hesitant and confused, THE MALE RESPONSE is full-bodied, robust, and well-controlled. Where NON-STOP glows, THE MALE RESPONSE shines. The alien environment of NON-STOP becomes

the "darkest Africa" of THE MALE RESPONSE, hot-headed Complain becomes the hesitant Soames Noyes (whose mother was "fond of Galsworthy") and nothing about the starship is more mysterious than Africa's mysteries, embodied in Dumayami, the dangerous witch doctor.

Soames Noyes is as much of an emotional fool as Roy Complain and Tyne Leslie but at least he is the kind of fool with whom we can identify ourselves ("Primitivism cast no spells over Soames. He was a Manchester Guardian man."). The only piece of scientific hardware in the novel is the world's most expensive white elephant, the "Apostle Mk II, Unilateral's newest, most svelte electronic computer, bound for the Palace of Umbalathorp, Goya". Except for a few scenes (in one of which it can only type "INSUFFICIENT DATA"), the Apostle interests us no more than the superficial aspects of NON-STOP's starship.

THE MALE RESPONSE surpasses NON-STOP (and many of Aldiss' other novels) because Soames Noyes and darkest Africa form part of the same pattern, and part of a complex conflict in which Aldiss does not give special privileges to the main character. Aldiss laughs at himself in his occasional asides to the audience, compared with NON-STOP where frequently Aldiss indulges in earnest dissertations. Note the hearty travelogue cliché that commences the novel:

This is the miracle of our age: that one may be borne swiftly and smoothly along in winged luxury, constantly fed and reassured, while underneath one unrolls the great veridian mat of central Africa, that territory to be flown over but never conquered, whose mysteries... (etc, etc).

No, says Mr Aldiss, this will not be another one of those novels: we have far more interesting business at hand:

Soames Noyes did not remember the chatty man's name. They had been introduced rather hurriedly by Sir Roger at the Southampton airfield. Soames never remembered names upon introduction; although his thirtieth birthday was creeping up on him as surely as a tide, he was still paralysed on all meetings with people. For an instant, he would be back at his kindergarten, Miss Munnings would be conducting the Deportment Class and saying, "Now, when you are introduced to somebody, you stand with your feet so, left hand resting gently on the hip so, right hand extended so, and you say, 'How do you do?' Now, Soames, will you come out here and give the other boys and girls a demonstration?"

The whole field of social behaviour still mystifies Noyes, and the mystification all began in childhood. Soames can see many of his own shortcomings, but does not see nearly as many of them, or their results, as the reader. All Soames Noyes' most debilitating self-doubts concern sex:

"Just let us loose in Umbalathorp, that's all I say," Timpleton remarked.

Soames said nothing. He could not casually reveal his sexual experiences in this way - not that he had ever felt anything so exotic as an Arabian heel grip in the small of the back. Obviously it was time he asserted himself.

Ignoring the chatter of the other men, he fell into a reverie. Now or never, presumably, was his chance to break the bonds of his

confounded reserve, to leap free from the constraints of a cold temperament and climate. On this trip he would prove himself a man or die in the attempt.

Soames Noyes prophesies well with those last words. Goya challenges his very English personality to the limit. Aldiss filters Africa through an English mind, and all the mysteries of Africa sap all Noyes' certainties. Noyes runs the gamut of psychology-textbook inhibitions:

He was the son of a doggedly timid father and an assertive mother, and the war between his parents had been perpetuated in him.

Note the exact similarity with the parents of Algy Timberlane, the main character of GREYBEARD. Like Algy, Soames is a man in search of the main thread of the pattern of his own soul, and so he must seek the main thread of the pattern of Africa.

In almost mystical fashion, Africa represents all those aspects of life that Aldiss' Englishmen are least willing to talk about but most need. So Aldiss appears to let his naive hero loose in Africa to bruise himself at random, and to entertain the reader. In fact, THE MALE RESPONSE shows careful workmanship, for here, more than in most of his other novels, Aldiss tries to express the greatest amount in the least possible number of words.

Africa contains within it a vast supply of possibilities for the uncared-for Englishman. Its most dangerous symbol is Dumayami, the witch doctor who fears the Apostle computer as a dangerous rival. Soames Noyes is in charge of the computer, so Dumayami's hatred falls upon him. The plane that carries the computer crashes, just as the witch doctor predicted. He also predicts that:

"If you do not step over this sign, you do not leave Africa," he said. Raising one hand, he stepped from view and was gone as noiselessly as he came.

"Damned silly," Soames muttered aloud. "Of course I can step over it."

He went over to the doorway to examine the mark Dumayami had made. Before he got there, two little yellow and red birds had fallen squabbling and copulating on to the path outside. Their bright wings, fluttering in lust and anger, erased the witch doctor's sign.

The symbols of Africa remain consistent: lust, anger, and more than a little flatfootedness keep Soames within this unexplored territory until he experiences all its possibilities.

Less terrifying than Dumayami, but just as mysterious to Noyes, are King M'Grassi Lander of Goya and his quaint half-African, half-English family. Princess Cherry dabbles in an unconnected mixture of European customs:

On a long cane chair lay Princess Cherry, heiress to her mother's estates and physiognomy. She wore a heavy, heavily flowered dress; a blue plastic bow slide was clipped into her tight curls. One pair of earrings adhered to her ears, another was clipped to the superb dihedral of her nostril flanges. In her hand, negligently, was a copy of Thomas Mann's BUDDENBROOKS; it was right way up.

"This is the Englishman, Mr Soames, Princess dear," said the Queen. "Get up and put your shoes on at once."

A few epigrams reveal the sad, but sufficient, cultural confusion of these very constitutional monarchs. M'Grassi Landor thinks that he has summed up both Moyes and Dumayami, and his people think that they have the best of all possible worlds. Aldiss shows that they merely insulate themselves from the savageries of both Europe and Africa. M'Grassi still loses his son in the power struggle between "progress" and the traditional darkness that everyone tries to ignore. Cherry thinks that she can know Europe from the pages of BUDDENBROOKS.

So Aldiss lets the outsider, Noyes, discover the deepest emanations of Africa. Noyes recognises the danger from Dumayami, but for the time being he possesses no weapons against approaching disaster. And he recognises part of the wonder of Africa that he had never discovered before:

"Coitila," Soames said aloud, savouring the name. The black girl had been aptly christened. Seen so close, Coitila was a whole country, hills, valleys, plains, embankments, tumuli, every inch of it flawless. Soames touched the magnificent landscape with his fingers, with his tongue, marvelling. He found himself thinking, as he had done long ago before the plane crash, that this was another planet, that the creature beside him was of another species, quite alien. The only thing they had in common was a difference of sex.

A gentle wonder at what he had done filled Soames. It would have been unthinkable a week ago. Not only time and colour changed as one yielded up to the arms of the equator, but life itself, and one's attitude to life. Here, no withholding was possible. In the heat, the pores of the heart opened. One was an organism, involved in all the organisms around, the ability to be aloof was lost in Africa.

He saw the depths of Africa full of eyes and flowers and genitals and lizards and mouths and corn and mammals and leaves, going on for ever - individuals changing, types unchanging, parts fading, the whole always bright, something too rich to be grasped, a pattern of fecundity making the rest of the world a desert by comparison, a moon of a place with craters for breasts.

Aldiss' romanticism flows deepest here, although it is a romanticism that has already soured one novel. "No withholding was possible" but we cannot tell exactly what has captured Noyes. The central metaphor rolls majestically through the passage, defining the limits of Noyes' perception, not its extent. The last paragraph implies that Soames achieves saving knowledge (and who can deny its almost religious fervour?) if he abandons his Englishness and discovers Africanism. However, Noyes can only see this vision in this particular way because of his Englishness. If it were not alien, he would not see it. He becomes the geographer of his own possibilities; Coitila remains mysterious and Africa remains mysterious. But now Noyes has a base from which to explore - now we wonder whether this vision will give him spiritual as well as physical potency.

As in most of Aldiss' best passages, we stop short of complete belief in the viewpoint of either Noyes or Aldiss. There is a flavour of revealed truth

here that disturbs the pattern of revealed possibilities. We almost expect Aldiss to break in with an "Hallelujah" at some inconvenient moment. Aldiss nearly breaks the main pattern of the novel, in which Noyes' ignorance is our revelation, not his own.

So Aldiss has not lost his habit of dropping in digressions that should have formed part of the mainstream of the novel. One particularly bad example reads:

The way the opposed forces of piety and wickedness have of intertwining together like lovers has been remarked since the earliest times; good and bad, beauty and horror, comedy and tragedy - they walk hand-in-glove down the ages like the figures of an old morality. Only in our psychological epoch, with its emphasis on behaviorism, has this duality been forgotten, superseded by the dangerous theory that no motives are entirely black or white... In Umbalathorp, the powers of light and dark miscegenated with their traditional abandon.

Will the preacher please step down from the pulpit? Here does Aldiss try to make fun of his own beliefs? Maybe, but it looks as if he is in earnest in this paragraph. Surely no s f novelist has ever done more to separate the simplicities of black and white into their more interesting shades of grey? Africa educates Soames Noyes not to think in all the old categories, but Aldiss still intones about "the opposed forces of piety and wickedness". Such notions do not fit the non-hysterical, ironic tone of the rest of the novel.

Noyes himself fails when he can no longer see the colours at the extreme ends of the moral spectrum. There is the novel's brilliant last page and last sentence:

Soames: "We thought it better to let you go free; you are an old man now, and harmless. It was my decision not to have you shut away, so you need not bear me any grudges, need you?"

"Carrion birds at last eat all grudges," Dumayami said.

By the single mud step, a snake lay motionless in the shade.

"That's the first snake I've seen since I came to Africa," Soames confided, inspecting it with cautious interest.

"Black mamba. Very deadly; one bite -- death come at once," the witch doctor said gravely. "This fellow I kill this morning. Kick him, make you feel better, prove your new power."

"All right," Soames said, humouring the old man. "Take that, you sinister-looking -- "

The kick never landed. As Soames' boot moved, the casual coils of snake twisted and launched themselves with deadly accuracy. The fangs sank into the flesh just above Soames's ankle. Dumayami, without pausing, turned and went up into his shack, as Soames rolled among the oleander bushes.

So all of Noyes' ebullient discoveries end in death "among the oleander bushes". Africa has the last laugh. We never really learn any of Dumayami's

motives. Noyes discovers Coitila's body but he never glimpses the minds of Africa's inhabitants. The most moving encounter in the book is Noyes' brief entrance into the lives of the outcast English people, the Pickets, who need the help of one interested person so much that Noyes fails them altogether. At the end, Africa brushes aside Soames Noyes as if he had never existed.

Aldiss' most penetrating "raid on the inarticulate" still does not provide a prose style that is strong enough for all demands that the author places upon it. The argument of THE MALE RESPONSE, to the extent that there is one, is that Noyes must seek the mysteries of Africa because there are mysteries to be sought. Do the greatest novelists climb Mount Everest because it is there?

In a sense, yes (although Aldiss rarely reaches literary summits). All the great novelists face the paradox of THE MALE RESPONSE: if the intellectual view of the world does not gather sufficient data about the world, what do we put in its place? If we do put something in its place, such as the subconscious, or "the deepest feelings for life", how can we test the validity of this data except by intellectual means? Aldiss writes best when he keeps asking the question in the face of all the data about any one of his worlds. His novels fail, and even THE MALE RESPONSE fails badly in places, when the author plumps for one side of the question or the other. Noyes' vision of Coitila and Africa is dwarfed by the whole pattern of the novel, but for a few paragraphs Aldiss drops the ironic tone of the novel and speaks as though Noyes' views are sufficient for life. However, Soames Noyes proves nearly adequate to THE MALE RESPONSE, which puts the novel far ahead of NON-STOP in Aldiss' written pilgrimage.

1962: HOTHOUSE (US title: THE LONG AFTERNOON OF THE EARTH)

The main mistake of Aldiss' early work (and even in some of his recent books) is his assumption that he must add theoretical digressions to novels that already express his ideas in their structures. Perhaps Aldiss only follows the unfortunate tendency among English writers to devote long passages to their main character's reflections "recollected in solitude". (Perhaps Hamlet always does look a bit of a fool when he lounges around the stage speaking all those soliloquies.)

But HOTHOUSE contains few soliloquies, and the theory that explains this overheated world is Aldiss', not that of the characters. Aldiss lets action, description, and "theory" strain together in this most adventurous of his "great adventures".

Aldiss' main characters cannot reflect Aldiss' own preoccupations, for all the characters in HOTHOUSE are waiflike remnants of humanity, descendants of a race doomed by an overheated Sun. This world is not merely a biological workshop, like that of NON-STOP: this is a world where non-human life ignores humanity altogether, except at feeding time:

The dumber bore Lily-vo down to the rescue of the helpless child. Clat lay on her back, watching them come, hoping to herself. She was still looking up when green teeth sprouted through the leaf all about her.

"Jump, Clat!" Lily-vo cried.

The child had time to scramble to her knees. Vegetable predators are not as fast as humans. Then the green teeth snapped shut about her waist.'

Under the leaf, a trappersnapper had moved into position, sensing the presence of prey through the single layer of foliage. The trappersnapper was a horny, caselike affair, just a pair of square jaws, hinged and with many long teeth. From one corner of it grew a stalk, very muscular and thicker than a human, and resembling a neck. Now it bent, carrying Clat away down to its true mouth, which lived with the rest of the plant far below on the unseen forest ground, in darkness and decay.

Here again is the mindless life-energy of NON-STOP's automatic ship and THE MALE RESPONSE's subliminal Africa. But this time the humans are part of the prey, caught in the processes of churning life and death of a tropical forest. One side of the Earth forever turns towards the Sun, the Sun has come closer to the Earth, and nearly all animal life, except humanity, has disappeared from the Earth. Instead, there are plants that act like animals, and one vast banyan tree that covers half the Earth's surface. In HOTHOUSE, Aldiss does not pretend that his characters are civilised thinkers. They are part of the foliage. They can do little but accept Clat's death - but because they accept this existence, the tribe constantly grows smaller.

HOTHOUSE is the story of their diminishment. At the start of the novel the forest is a green womb where humanity can maintain a status quo but has no real purpose or hope. The dumblers, trappersnappers, wiltmilts, and burnurns are all equally ferocious, and the humans must move fast. We are completely involved in this world from the first page of the novel. Aldiss gives neither us nor himself opportunity to stand back and pontificate, so he also refrains from slipshod writing.

The pilgrimage starts when some of the characters break through the dangerous status quo towards a new environment. One party, whose members seek a ritual death, rises through the top of the forest and climbs into seed pod "coffins", which are carried into the sky by a "traverser, that gross vegetable equivalent of a spider":

The traverser was descending slowly, a great bladder with legs and jaws, fibery hair covering most of its bulk. It floated nimbly down a cable which trailed up into the sky.

Other cables could be seen, stretching up from the jungle close by or distantly. All slanted up, pointing like slender drooping fingers into heaven. When the sun caught them, they shone. It could be seen that they trailed up in a certain direction. In that direction, a silver half globe floated, remote and cool, but visible even in the sunshine.

Unmoving, steady, the half moon remained always in that sector of the sky... Now Earth and Moon, for what was left of the afternoon of eternity, faced each other in the same relative position. They were locked face to face, and so would be, until the sands of time ceased to run, or the sun ceased the shine.

And the multitudinous strands of cable floated across the gap between them, uniting the worlds. Back and forth the traversers



could shuttle at will, vegetable astronauts huge and insensible, with Earth and Luna both unmeshed in their indifferent net.

With surprising suitability, the old age of the Earth was snared about with cobwebs.

"Surprising suitability", indeed. Surely Aldiss created the whole (scientifically impossible) picture so that he could attach that last line to it. With extraordinary sonority, Aldiss unfolds one visionary possibility after another, each more pleasurable than the one before. The world becomes more stable as it slowly dies. No wonder the small humans expect to travel to some sort of heaven - the Earth now has its gods' eyes permanently fixed on it. Now the Earth has an intimate relationship with the rest of the universe, just as the small humans are pressed into an intimate relationship with all other life-forms. The uninterpreted mixture of life and death that we call Nature surrounds us completely in HOTHOUSE. Everything fits.

But all the forms of this nature are new, so Aldiss can write a book that sets us gaping. When the small band of adventurers reaches Nomansland, the border between the banyan and the sea, they see this "new" nature at its most ferocious:

Two rayplanes fluttered by, locked in combat. The rayplanes were so mortally engaged they did not know where they went. With a crash they sprawled among the upper branches near the group.

At once Nomansland sprang to life.

The famished angry trees spread up and lashed their branches. Toothed briars uncurled. Gigantic nettles shook their bearded heads. Moving cactus crawled and launched its spikes. Climbers hurled sticky bolas at the enemy. Cat-like creatures, such as Gren had seen in the termights' nest, bounded past and swarmed up the trees to get to the attack. Everything that could move did so, prodded on by hunger. On the instant, Nomansland turned itself into a war machine.

The most energetic life lies closest to the most violent death. The forest "lashed", "crawled", "bounded" around the characters' (and the reader's) heads. Aldiss' magnificent names for his creatures, names like "thistle-whistle" and "killerwillow", give an extra rhythm and energy to this writing. With this sense of seeing-that-which-we-have-never-seen-before, Aldiss writes the kind of book that justifies the existence of science fiction as a separate field of literature.

Decay riddles every process of the planet, and the human party breaks into smaller parts. The hot-headed, but still childish, Gren is thrown out of the band and he must assert his own individuality. He does this through assorted adventures and disruptions of the other human life that he meets. An intelligent fungus called the morel drops onto his head and parasitically invades his nervous system. The last trace of formal "intelligence" in the world, the morel, drives Gren out of the forest, onto the sea, and away from the sun toward the dark side of the Earth. Gren acquires the knowledge of good and evil. He ceases to enjoy his world, and he pushes on in search of "something better". Gren learns to destroy in a more "intelligent" manner, and so he kills the tree of the Fishers. The Fishers, the comical "tummy-belly men" tag along, the only creatures in the novel to whom we give unreserved sympathy.

The morel knows only about former human "civilisation" - its ancestral memories stretch back a million years - but it cannot resurrect civilisation in this dying environment. The party discovers a "heckler" left on an oceanic island by people from the twentieth century. They call the bird-like machine Beauty, but only we can understand the message of its heckling:

With scarcely a murmur, Beauty rose from the ground, hovered before their eyes, rose above their heads. They cried with astonishment, they fell backwards, breaking the yellow container. It made no difference to Beauty. Superb in powered flight, it wheeled above them, glowing richly in the sun.

When it had gained sufficient altitude, it spoke.

"Make the world safe for democracy!" it cried. Its voice was not loud but piercing... "Who rigged the disastrous dock strike of '31?" Beauty demanded rhetorically. "The same men who would put a ring through your noses today. Think for yourselves, friends, and vote for SRH - vote for freedom!"

"It - what is it saying, morel?" Gren asked.

"It is talking of men with rings through their noses," said the morel, who was as baffled as Gren. "That is what men wore when they were civilised. You must try to learn from what it is saying."

The morel represents "civilisation", and it has put another ring through the noses of men. Although few humans are left, it seems that not even they can hope for a world that is "safe for democracy". Aldiss' brief swipe at twentieth century society strikes as effectively as any longer passage would have.

Finally the pilgrims land on a lonely hill at the end of the earth. The travellers can see only a faint glimmer of sunlight on the horizon. Their isolation intensifies the newly-discovered human consciousness of Gren and Yattmur. Yattmur gives birth to a son; at the same time the morel grows towards duplication and it wants its "offspring" to take control of Yattmur's baby:

Gren stood against the wall by the entrance, half-concealed. She was past him before she realized it, only turning as he began to bear down on her.

The surface of the morel was black and pustular now - and it had slipped down so that it covered all his face. Only his eyes gleamed sickly in the midst of it as he jumped forward at her.

"Gren, the morel thing is killing you," she whispered.

"Where's the baby?" he demanded. Though his voice was muffled, it had too an additional remoteness, a twanging quality, that gave her one more item for alarm. "What have you done with the baby, Yattmur?"

The life-form that gives them "knowledge" and self-awareness now threatens

procreation, almost the only function of life that this humanity still possesses. For a time, the relationship between Gren and Yattmur had become a genuine marriage - under the guidance of the morel. Now it becomes the form of life that can most harm that human emotional core that the killers of the novel's early chapters left entirely untouched. For a few pages, the characters themselves symbolise the fecund death of the whole planet.

Even in this novel; Aldiss does not always let the experience speak for itself. At the start of the novel he tells us the raison d'etre of his hothouse:

Obeying an inalienable law, things grew, growing riotous and strange in their impulse for growth. The heat, the light, the humidity - these were constant and had remained constant for... but nobody knew how long. Nobody cared any more for the big questions that begin "How long...?" or "Why...?" It was no longer a place for growth, for vegetables. It was like a hothouse.

In this passage Aldiss captures the sense of overgrowth and overcrowding which characterises the rest of the novel. At the same time we might object to the use of terms like "inalienable law" and "impulse for growth". During recent years conservationists have predicted how easily man may cancel the laws of growth. Can the author take even these terms for granted? Link this passage with the morel's explanation at the end of the novel:

"Nature is devolving. Again the forms are blurring! They never ceased to be anything but inter-dependent - the one always living off the other - and now they merge together once more... All of us here have by accident been swept aside from the main stream of devolution. We live in a world where each generation becomes less and less defined. All life is tending towards the mindless, the infinitesimal: the embryonic speck. So will be fulfilled the processes of the universe."

How pleasant if all novelists could call on "the processes of the universe" to justify their ideas! We know that biologists sometimes talk as if evolutionary (or, in this case, devolutionary) processes were automatic, or purposive - that one species "learned" how to fly, that another species became "redundant". But here Aldiss goes beyond the scope of his novel and accepts loose talk about the "main stream of devolution" and the "tendency" of life towards "the mindless, the infinitesimal". At the beginning of the novel, the whole wonder of the hothouse world is that it is a human, neutral towards conscious beings, always mysterious and alien. Aldiss takes away some of this wonder with this superficial flourish at the end of the book. He wants us to accept the metaphor as scientific possibility. In general, HOTHOUSE succeeds because the metaphor convinces us - the life-forms impress on us their own truth. However, behind the life of the novel Aldiss tries to convince us that he has some other Great Answer. Fortunately he has both less and more than that - a splendid book.

1964:    GREYBEARD

We might regard GREYBEARD as a peak of enterprise, the end of a period, or a magnificent failure. Certainly Aldiss puts nearly all of his deepest intuitions into the novel, and the result is strange.

GREYBEARD contains all of Aldiss' virtues as a writer. From the eager swim of the stoats at the novel's beginning, to the dawn of ambivalent new life at its end, GREYBEARD throbs with the texture and substance of life. We feel more sunk in Nature than in any other Aldiss novel except HOTHOUSE. Perhaps the author writes so well because this is Aldiss' home-territory, the country that surrounds Oxford:

Behind them, an overripe winter's sun blinked at them from among trees. Except for the sun, distorted by the bare trunks through which it shone, all else was told in tones of grey. A mist like a snowdrift hung low across the land. Before them, beyond the littered road that crossed the bridge, was a large building. It seemed to stand on top of the mist without touching the ground. Under a muddle of tall chimney-stacks, it lay ancient and wicked and without life; the sun was reflected from an upper window-pane, endowing it with one lustreless eye.

This passage does not contain the violent agitation of HOTHOUSE's images - here Aldiss wears the cloak of Cowper, or even that of Wordsworth. The cosiness and secretiveness of the English countryside glows in the first sentence and in the phrase, "all else was told in tones of grey". Aldiss captures the ecstasy of a winter moment in the sentence, "It seemed to stand on top of the mist without touching the ground." Passages like this must drive Australia-resident Englishmen mad with nostalgia.

Yet the impression is not wholly romantic. The building is more important to these travellers (yes - another band of pilgrims) than the scenery, and the winter's sunlight reflects dismally from this hoped-for resting-place. Even in this passage, Aldiss shows that GREYBEARD is another novel of restlessness, and that life-and-death issues hide behind the beautiful surfaces of this landscape.

Algy Timberlane, nicknamed Greybeard, his wife Martha, and their friends Charley Samuels and Jeff Pitts escape from the haven of Sparcot, a village in the Thames valley, seeking only an acceptable life in the last days of the world. Fifty years before, atomic explosions in the Van Allen belts had washed the biosphere in hard radiation, destroying the reproductive ability of numerous animal species, including man. At fifty, Algy is one of the youngest men alive. Everybody is doomed to shuffle off the mortal coil in step; as one weary character says, "That's life, as they always say about death." Another captures the tone of the novel with his words, "Everyone is doomed for ever to think and say what they thought and said yesterday."

To create this memorial approach to life, Aldiss writes most of the novel in a series of flashbacks, some of which telescope back into even more distant memories. Aldiss has an eye for the teeming life of the Thames that takes over from man; he can also scour our minds with this image of an Oxford under martial law:

The new day had brought no improvement in Oxford's appearance. Down Hollow Way, a row of semi-detacheds burned in a devitalized fashion, as though a puff of wind might extinguish the blaze; smoke from the fire hung over the area. Near the old motor works, there was military activity, much of it disorganized. They heard a shot fired. In the Cowley Road, the long straggling street of shops which pointed towards the ancient spires of Oxford, the facades were often boarded or broken.

Some readers may recognise a part of the long tradition of British "disaster novels" in this passage. But this is not just a novel of despair or strange events, like so many of "the tradition". This passage provides merely one of many contradictory impressions of Oxford which Aldiss shows us throughout the novel. All the impressions together show a city that maintains the virtues of scholarship although barbarous forces often commandeer it; a city that maintains three freak children as the only results of fifty years' research. Algy, and his wife Martha, do not accept the desolation of Oxford. They view this scene while they attempt to escape from the despotic Captain Crowther: no form of despotism keeps Greybeard down.

The novel has two complementary movements. The journey from Sparcot to Oxford is short, but adventurous enough to prepare Greybeard for the ambiguous role that he takes on at the end of the novel. Meanwhile Greybeard's memories drift further and further back towards childhood, until he reaches the memory that, for him, summarises the world that created The Accident:

Through the kitchen window, they had a glimpse of Algy running in long grass, on a pursuit no one else would ever know about. He ran behind a lilac tree and studied the fence which divided this garden from the next... The fence was broken at one point, but he made no attempt to get into the next garden, though he thought to himself how enjoyable it would be if all the fences fell down in every garden and you could go where you liked.

And they did, and he could... without direction, and with these memories as the most vital part of his mind. He has travelled from the Eden of his childhood to the Eden of an empty world, and both seem innocent, featureless, and impotent. Somewhere in between, he and the rest of humanity failed to come to terms with the problems of knowledge and power. Fifty years after the event, Algy begins to see what went wrong during the time of his childhood.

Aldiss relates the story of Algy's recuperation from "the illness" that killed many children, and left the remainder impotent forever. But the sickest thing in Algy's childhood is not the unseen radiation belt but the sterile marriage between Algy's mother and father:

Patricia Timberlane came out of the back door with two men. One of them was her husband, Arthur, a man who at forty-odd gave all the appearance of having forgotten his more youthful years... Arthur cut a glum figure; he was a man saddled with troubles who had never decided to meet them either stoically or with a sense of defiance...

What Arthur most resented was that this trouble, into which his firm slipped more deeply even as he spoke, should come as a barrier between Pat and him. He had seen clearly, a while ago, that they failed to make a very united couple; at first he had almost welcomed the financial crisis, hoping it would bring them more closely together.

The uneasy relationship between Algy's mother and father involves us far more deeply than anything else that happens to Algy. Genuinely, but rather boringly, Greybeard seems a bit too good to be true. His painfully-awkward father's emasculation prefigures the world's sterility of later years. He sums up a world whose main reaction when it learns of the effect of The Accident is, "If it comes to the point - well, too bad, but worrying isn't going to stop it

coming." As the author adds, "That had been his commonsense man-in-the-street approach to the whole thing." When the disaster comes it deprives the world of the children who buy the toys that Arthur's company makes; he commits suicide, and saves himself from the worry that affects his son.

Like the miner's family in *AN AGE*, Aldiss' vignette characters are drawn magnificently. Along the pilgrims' route, Aldiss draws equally skilful miniature portraits of such people as Jingadangelow, the old man with the badger wife, and Jeff Pitts. They are all part of the very familiar leavings of time: they are ourselves in the same situation.

But Algy Timberlane, Greybeard himself, is the blind spot of the novel. For this reason we can say that Aldiss shows some of his old faults, as well as all his virtues, in this novel. Aldiss' eye runs truly over the outer surfaces of this twilight world, but he observes the main character uncertainly. Aldiss will not laugh at Algy in the way that he chaffs all the other characters. He lets Algy get away with self-pity and far too much moaning. "I've been a flop all through my life," he tells his wife towards the end of the novel, and his dutiful wife (and Aldiss) rushes to reassure him of his basic goodness.

Greybeard is a sensible man, living his strange life in the only way possible. But with almost the air of an election promotion manager who tells us that his man is "basically a good ordinary bloke", Aldiss keeps telling us that, "Timberlane was a man who only rarely indulged in self-examination." Does Timberlane do much else in the novel but "indulge in self-examination"? Many of the most interesting impressions of the novel reach us through Greybeard's thoughtful, clear mind. At the end of the novel, when he finds the first members of the "new generation", he exclaims to himself:

The fraudulent Master was right in at least one respect: human hands were turned against children in practice, if not in theory. He himself had fired at the first child he had been close to! Perhaps there was some kind of filicidal urge in man forcing him to destruction.

This is the voice of one of the few people who has kept thinking during the last few barren years, and can bridge the gap between the suicidal humans and the new race. We cannot back away from Greybeard or patronise him because Aldiss always makes him so very right.

And Aldiss tries to speak directly to the reader through Greybeard's thought (or rather, I presume that here Aldiss speaks directly, for he struggles to present similar ideas in all his other books):

Life was a pleasure; he looked back at its moments, many of them as much shrouded in mist as the opposite bank of the Thames; objectively, many of them held only misery, fear, confusion. A fragment of belief came to him from another epoch: Cogito ergo sum. For him that had not been true; his truth had been, Sentio ergo sum. I feel so I exist. He enjoyed this fearful, miserable, confused life, and not only because it made more sense than non-life.

...They were all actors performing their parts against a lead curtain that cut off for ever every second as it passed.

Aldiss expresses nowhere else his artistic credo more forcefully. "Phenomena ..are themselves their own lesson", to paraphrase the Goethe quotation that begins REPORT ON PROBABILITY A. In most ways, in most parts of his novels, Aldiss renders the unexpected and the life-like in such a way as to support the truth of feeling. But the question returns over and over again: is this enough? Axiomatically, life makes no sense without rationality. Aldiss can be excused from ultimate explanations; every line of his novels reveals rationality infused with feeling. But Aldiss has his characters say things like "Sentio ergo sum" as a kind of prayer to excuse them from thought. (Notice that the phrase stands in place of its Cartesian predecessor, and not as its necessary complement, which is where I would place it.) Aldiss can excuse his characters' stupidity (or anything else about them, so we become really confused) in a way that he would not excuse about himself. The greatest irony of Aldiss' work is that he comes so close to his main characters that he does not allow us to see them clearly. Therefore Aldiss blurs the subtleties towards which his fine thought and feeling lead him.

- Bruce R Gillespie  
April 1970  
(revised version  
April 1972)

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THE NIGHTMARE OF BLACK LONDON - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 62

adds quality to living and joy to being alive.

I'll leave the last word to a poet whose reading of AFTER LONDON inspired him to write the following:

An empty marsh beneath skies grey,  
Where only birds come all the day;  
But through the dark the marsh fires gleam  
From rotting weeds, and shifting, seem  
The blurred reflection of the lights  
That danced there for a thousand nights.  
And with a desolate calling  
Comes the whimbrels flight.  
Fallen, fallen and fallen -  
The cities pass and fall,  
The wild birds of the marshes  
See the end of them all.

(MARSH BIRDS PASS OVER LONDON  
- irregular ode by Julian Bell)

- Raymond John Gibson  
December 28, 1971



But take now the hypothetical case of an extraterrestrial civilisation, at a distance of, say, ten light years. Let us make the assumption that two different states of Earth have sent their spaceships there. After some twenty-five years both of these fleets come home, each with a version of what the other civilisation is like. These versions do not on the least overlap. On the contrary, the two reports are quite different, and they cannot be reduced to a single, con-contradictory image of the other civilisation, of the course of events there, of the role played by the men of both space fleets, etc. The important question arises: in what way could we get at the truth? The communication barrier is clearly not of an artificial type, as it was in the cited cases of China, and the India-Pakistan War. This barrier is physically unbreakable, since we cannot send impartial observers to the other civilisation, and if they were sent, they will return with their reports only after twenty-five years. Meanwhile the governments of Earth must clearly act now, on the basis of the already-existing reports. Of course, we put the crews under pressure, to find who lies and who tells the truth, but it is very probable that every bit of both these reports is a complex mixture of truth, half-truths, biases, and even lies. So the naked, simple, totally objective truth shall remain unknown for a very long time, and this interval when it is impossible to separate lies and truths is in direct proportion to the spatio-temporal gap between Earth and the other planet. Perhaps the next generation will gain the truth, but not this contemporary one. So the people and the governments must necessarily live with this "state of things". A totally new phenomenon occurs, a "dichotomisation", or even a "polytomisation" of the history of extraterrestrial events. At last the historians may perhaps formulate a new principle of "macroscopical indeterminism", based on these facts. Such a situation would be, of course, very interesting, and also a very promising one from the literary/s f point of view. But when you presume that there is a technique of "hyperspeed" travel, this whole culturally and philosophically intriguing and puzzling phenomenon cannot occur at all.

The same (but even a fortiori) applies to any type of "telepathic" communication between single beings, or between whole star civilisations. With a single stroke, the assumption of ESP nullifies a whole world of very intriguing phenomena which look like real future possibilities in an age of distant space travel. (And very relevant for the CETI project.) So that is the position of my search for new ideas, concepts, and qualities in s f writing. Not in every case, not in every novel or short story, but I think that I have an obligation to give them some of my attention. My "method" in some way compares to the typical procedure in abstract mathematics, where the mathematician searches for general solutions to a whole set of problems/tasks, and if he finds a general solution, he is not in the least interested in the painful exemplification of all particular cases, i.e. all the elements of the proper set, since he has already constructed an algorithm. He searches for new, not-yet-discovered regularities and laws, and there lies some resemblance to my attempts to create something new in the s f field. (All that I have said is simply taken from my search as it is going on now.)

Your SFC comes to me, and I am very thankful for your magnanimity. I would prefer to remain an outsider, an observer of what goes on in the field, without feeling myself obliged to enter into various polemics. I am already overloaded with work and correspondence, and I do not be-

lieve in the good sense of conducting polemical battles on all possible fronts. What for? I am a very liberally-thinking man; I have far from an authoritarian's attitude, i.e. I will never want to convert believers in today's s f to my own creed. If I have offended some of the men in fandom, by writing my monograph (S F AND FUTUROLOGY) I have clearly, explicitly, stated the principal presumption of that book - that there futurology is my reference system, but this does not necessarily mean that I want to ban or damn all other possible points of view. True, I do not like 99% of contemporary s f, simply because this stuff is a bore to me. But there is no space for arguments: how could someone change your taste or mine? Let it be called bad taste or good taste - that doesn't matter; as a reader and a writer I like this or that, and I do not like some other stuff. Of course I can give some of my motives for liking this and abhorring that, but the rest is silent. (February 21, 1971) \*

\* Amen, I say, with all the exceptions that I have expounded during twenty-six issues of S F COMMENTARY. I should explain that so far it appears that the mail to Poland has chewed up SFC 25, which contains some strong polemics about some of Lem's earlier articles. I think that I had better make another attempt to beat the combined efforts of the Australian and European post offices. :: I found the major part of this letter extraordinarily interesting. I would only add that I would apply the Occam's razor of literary criticism to reach the same conclusion: that s f writers should never make use of miracles (like hyperspace travel, ESP, time travel, etc.) unless they can make them interesting in a human and literary way. Few stories make telepathy interesting, for instance, despite the great metaphysical problems that acceptance of its existence imposes on the writer, and even fewer stories have made ftl travel anything more than a convenient miracle. I never can remember the name of the very good Poul Anderson story in which Poul presumes that wars between planets will be fought over light-years, and therefore long periods of time, even generations, will elapse between encounters. Imagine what the inhabitants of the participating planets feel like, as they wait for as much as twenty or thirty years until suddenly they come under attack again. In that story Poul Anderson makes the human predicament far more interesting than any of the whizz-bang wars that E E Smith's heros ever fought.

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((Re: LOST OPPORTUNITIES, in SFC 24)): To have one's work criticised according to intellectually demanding and passionately felt aesthetic standards is a rare experience, and exhilarating. I value it, as I value the tenuous contact thus first achieved with a distant and admired colleague.

Stanislaw Lem's projected novel - THE RIGHT HAND OF DARKNESS? - is fascinating, as tantalising as one of Borges' hints-for-stories. I wish that Lem would write it. I couldn't, partly because the physiology of "my" Gethenians is not as Lem reads it. The tragedies that he calls for are obviated by the "differentiating" mechanism which provides that the second or slower of a pair which enter kemmer will always develop the opposite sex to the first or earlier (see page 90 of the Ace edition) - a fact which is incidentally the major physiological basis or enabling factor of "vowed kemmering" or Gethenian marriage. The entrance-door for tragedy, I think, is rather the strong likelihood that two long-term lovers might drift out of synchronisation, as it were: a few hours' difference in the length of their

somer-kemmer periods would do it within a year. This difficulty I evaded shamelessly, and only provided a sophisticated pharmacopeia and highly refined techniques of body control to the Gethenians, so that some solution of such latent disasters was imaginable.

Lem is not the first to accuse the Gethenians of being all, or 90%, male. I have already been scourged for this by organised Women's Liberation. As a lifelong feminist, I have shut up and let my sisters make their point. But Lem is a Pole and a gentleman, and I cheerfully accept his challenge. Will he, or anyone else, please point out one passage or speech in which Estraven does or says something that only a man could or would do or say?

Is it possible that we tend to insist that Estraven and the other Gethenians are men, because most of us are unwilling or unable to imagine women as scheming prime ministers, haulers of sledges across icy wastes, etc.?

I know that the use of the masculine pronoun influences the reader's imagination, perhaps decisively. Women's Liberation tells me that I should have said "she" - but as a minor artist I respect my medium more highly than any message I am capable of transmitting through it. I will not deform English even to make an ethical point, and it is against the grain of the language to call a neuter person (e.g. God, or a distant obscure figure) "she". "She" is even more decisively "sexifying" than the masculine (see page 94). Alexei Panshin and others have demanded an invented neuter pronoun. I did consider this carefully, and I decided against it. The experiment was tried by Lindsay in A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS, and it is to my ears a failure, an exasperating preciousness; three hundred pages of it would be intolerable. The intransigence of the medium is, after all, the joy of it. Though you can do more with English, perhaps, than with any language that any artist was ever lucky enough to speak, you cannot do anything you like with it. However, for those who want to try the effect, and also as a means of testing the alleged masculinity of Estraven, here are a couple of random passages. I use se nom., sem acc., and sen poss.:

(page 193) Se stood up, still chewing, put on sen hieb, coat, and boots, and slipped otterlike out the self-sealing valved door. From outside se stuck sen head back in: "I may be late, or gone overnight. Can you manage here?"

"Yes."

"All right." With that se was off. I never knew a person who reacted so wholly and rapidly to a changed situation as Estraven. I was recovering, and willing to go; se was out of thangen; the instant that was all clear, se was off. Se was never rash or hurried, but se was always ready. It was the secret, no doubt, of the extraordinary political career se threw away for my sake; it was also the explanation of sen belief in me and devotion to my mission. When I came, se was ready. Nobody else on Winter was. Yet se considered semself a slow person, poor in emergencies.

(page 258) I remember sem standing there in the shadows

of the firelit room barefoot and wearing nothing but the loose fur breeches the chief had given *sem*. In the privacy and what they consider the warmth of their houses *Karhid*ers often go half-clothed or naked. On our journey *Es-traven* had lost all the smooth, compact solidity that marks the *Gethenian* physique; *se* was gaunt and scarred, and *sen* face was burned by cold almost as by fire. *Se* was a dark, hard, and yet elusive figure in the quick, restless light.

This last passage reminds me of a small injustice I want to protest. Lem, do you want them in miniskirts? You refer to their dress as masculine. What do people in really cold climates wear? I took the *Es-kimoes* as models. They - men and women - wear tunics and trousers, of course. Did you ever try to wear a skirt - long or short - in a wind at 20° F in deep snow?

But all this about masculinity-femininity if perhaps part of the larger, and I think more valid, criticism offered by Lem: The interesting thing about the book is the bisexuality. Why then isn't that the centre of the plot? Why is it all "about" treason, cold, alienation, etc.

Possibly because of a profound psychological peculiarity of its author, which forces her to come at everything really important sideways and in the dark (this may also explain why she writes science fiction).

I did want a "normal", and male, Terran observer as narrator, because I thought that people would have trouble to identify emotionally with *Gethenians*. Indeed, I thought that many people, especially men, would find them repulsive. I was wrong, and I should have had more courage. None the less I still believe that one can convey more indirectly than directly, unless one simply delivers a message. I am a novelist, not a telegraph office; a fantasist, not a scientist. What I had to say about *Gethenians* was intended to rouse the reader's own imagination, not to inform his (*sen*?) intellect. Therefore I moved indirectly. And therefore the tragic love story which Lem wants is, indeed, there; but it is in the past, hinted at, alluded to, told as if it were a legend. It is an iceberg, seven-tenths submerged. Yet all the action takes place on the bit of the iceberg that is visible. It is the ground and basis of the whole book.

Still, the justice of Lem's criticism remains. I would temper it only by denying categorically that any desire to cater to a lowest-common-denominator of readers or editors, any acceptance of the s f public as childish or low-brow, influenced the writing of the book. I wrote it as I wanted it written. My shortcomings are not the result of any blighting curse cast by the nature of s f, but are entirely my own.

Finally, the "happy ending" that Lem objects to: I remain puzzled to the point of vertigo. Because the ship has landed, that's a happy ending? Lem points out himself that the "starship" part of the plot is mechanical, and resents it and dismisses it - and then implies that it is of such strength and effectiveness as to provide the book a happy ending. I should have expected so acute a reader, a fellow artist of marvellous subtlety and complexity, whose own works are

certainly not devoid of irony and ambiguity, at least not to be more simplistic than I myself was. If that's a happy ending, why then so is HAMLET - Fortinbras is alive and well in Elsinore, isn't he?

I hope that Lem will take these arguments as what they are, a kind of thanks. Only one thing is as valuable to a writer as praise from readers to whom he has given pleasure, and that is dialogue with a fellow writer who takes their common craft with equal seriousness, and refuses to forgive any shortcoming in the conception or execution. If praise is wine, then real criticism is bread. I thank Mr Lem for sharing his loaf, across, across two oceans and three languages.

(December 27, 1971) \*

\* And thank you for such a pleasant reply to Lem's (at times) severe criticisms of LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. I won't enter into this debate at all, except to apologise for my crankiness in not liking LEFT HAND very much, and to say that I have little but praise and affection for A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA and THE LATHE OF HEAVEN, which I have read more recently. If LATHE OF HEAVEN wins the Hugo Award this year for Best Novel, then it will be the first year for a long time that I will agree wholeheartedly with the other voters. The novella version of TOMBS OF ATUAN had some marvellous moments as well, but I don't like to make a judgment about it until I can obtain the book-length version. Best wishes to Ursula LeGuin and Stanislaw Lem, novelists, both.

\* A preliminary note about the next few items, which discuss another section of SFC 24, my editorial called WHERE WE'RE COMING. No one, not even the author of YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, spotted that the piece is as much about me as about that book; also that it concerns the reasons why I write, and why I publish this magazine in the way that I do. Also the article is "about" the very peculiar mood which overtook me while I was writing that article. Let's say that I put everything of me that I could into that particular article, and your response showed me that my mood did communicate itself, after all. From the author of the book that everybody thought was the "subject" of the article:

BOB TUCKER

Box 506, Heyworth, Illinois 61745, USA

\*

I deeply appreciate your sending SFC 24 to me, and I am just as delighted with your commentary on YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN - as you may easily imagine. Had you disliked the book my reaction would have been the same: your ability to read between the lines, plus an ability to understand what was not being said, makes you a sensitive reader to be prized by any writer. Speed-readers and surface-readers are a burden, because they refuse to take the necessary time to read anything thoroughly, and yet they criticise because they think that something is missing from the story. I will not quibble or quarrel with anyone who honestly dislikes a story; there can be many reasons for disliking any story and a subjective opinion is usually the most lasting one. My quarrel is with those who dislike a story (or an idea, or a proposal) after only a surface inspection and a snap subjective appraisal.

QUIET SUN was written three times, over a period of almost three years. That, I think, accounts for the careful attention to detail that you found. The first and second versions were rejected by this editor and that, including Terry Carr, who finally accepted the third version. Each new revision uncovered loose ends and flaws that I had not seen before, and each version enabled me to shape the ending

toward the beginning. The very first page was the last one to be written, except for minor changes that Terry Carr wanted after he had the manuscript in hand. When the ending was finally reached, I realised what should be said on the first page. And I am ever so pleased that you understood the quiet reference to alpha, omega, and the gravestone. I am learning not to shout in novels, to gain a better overall effect. When I re-read E E Smith, for example, the shouting offends me.

And as you have probably surmised, QUIET SUN was written as a love story. Fandom may hang me by the thumbs for that confession because fandom believes itself to be too sophisticated for love stories, but I'll stand by it. I will also stand by a device I used which many American readers have denounced as a trick. The protagonist's colour-of-skin means absolutely nothing to the story until the future slams into him two-thirds of the way in; he was hired for his own and honest skills and abilities, for his knowledge, and his colour played no part in it until colour was forced upon him when he collided with the future. I detested the very idea of pinning a big black label on him in the first chapter -- that kind of writing is for youngsters and bigots. I tried (but failed) to cause him to think and react like a black man; he was so thoroughly a part of the white world that he had to be told why certain field operations were forbidden to him (pages 150-151, Ace editon). But alas, many American readers still did not realise what was happening. Speed-readers, I guess.

But thank you again; you more than made up for the many criticisms here. John Hale has published a hardcover edition in London, and Arrow Books will reprint a paperback in a year or two.

(January 7, 1972)

\* A very gratifying letter. It enhances my respect for Terr Carr's editing abilities (a respect which hardly needed enhancement) when I found out that he refused to publish YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN until it was exactly right. Now if every editor did that, you can imagine that the s f scene would look a lot more healthy than it does now. (Readers could support the current request by some fanzine editors that they should write to the LACon Committee and ask that Terry Carr should receive a special Hugo Award for his work as editor of the Ace Specials.) Of course, Bob had to refine the book for himself, and he made all the right decisions -- especially the decision not to "shout". The matter of Chaney's race (which touches the plot at only three brief spots in the novel; count them) was so unimportant to me that I forgot to mention it during my article. Unfortunately, many American reviewers showed their own fears more obviously. :: Even after I received Bob's letter, the religious or pseudo-religious references still puzzled me greatly. You may remember that in my article I could not work out whether any overall allegorical plan governed the plot of the book. I begged Bob to tell me "the secret": \*

It is difficult to say what is the religious background of YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, if any. No open and aboveboard religious significance was intended, other than I wanted the protagonist to be interested in scrolls because I am deeply interested in scrolls; and of course that interest permitted me to give the man a reason to half-retreat from the world because the world (the newspaper part of it) treated him so poorly after it misread his book. And for story purposes, it also permitted the project director to misread him, and it worked in smoothly toward the end when the protagonist discovered that he was

involved in an end-of-the-world situation which paralleled in some few respects the scroll that he had translated and labelled fiction. This last was one of the minor revisions that Terry Carr asked for: he wanted more forceful symbols inserted into the end, symbols which directly sprang from the scroll in chapter 5.

Ordinarily I care very little for symbolism in books and stories, as distinct from ideas and gadgets which will have meaningful turns later to advance the plot. I wasn't aware that I had inserted much symbolism into QUIET SUN although some reviewers have said that the book is chockful of them. But, for Terry, I revised the final chapter to include the lab building which resembled the white temple in the moonlight, the barbarians' failure to bring it down, and a greater emphasis on the figure with the feet of clay coming forth twice from beneath the temple. Earlier points, such as the rupture of the fence and ice on the rivers (and others) were included early on simply to make points in plot development.

I admire Terry Carr; I think that he is a brilliant editor and I regret his departure from Ace. He has his weaknesses like all of us, his blind spots, and he has taken unwarranted criticism from some fans because he saw some books differently than they did. Fans are too quick to point to imaginary flaws, but they really mean to say that they wouldn't have written a given book in the same manner that an author wrote it. I guess that fans are in a rut. They want the same fiction presented in the same old ways, but at the same time they cry for something new. Bob Shaw offered an exciting new twist to PALACE OF ETERNITY, but how did the fans accept it? They wanted stock space opera.

I'm sending you a copy of THE TIME MASTERS. This version was updated for Bob Hoskins at Lancer, because the original was some eighteen years out of date; Cape Kennedy didn't exist when it was written. Gilgamesh is in it, but not as a symbolic legend or anything of the kind; he is simply the still-living protagonist. And you will find a typed page of manuscript in the back of the book which completes the story; the printers lost the last page, causing the book to end in mid-air.

Nothing in YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN comes from the BIBLE or the Dead Sea scrolls except those obvious references to REVELATIONS, DANIEL, etc. The scrolls that Brian Chaney translated are wholly fictitious. To my knowledge, there is no such thing as another translation of REVELATIONS which differs from the historical one, while the other scroll, the ESCHATOS document, is purely imaginary.

I've followed the story of the real scrolls since the first announcement of their discovery, and I have been fascinated by them. Archaeology is my great weakness, the one science that I like above all others, and during the past quarter-century or so I've read numerous religious and semi-religious books that deal with biblical archaeology and geography. Also I enjoy reading various BIBLE commentaries to find how religious authors treat legendary people and places and events. From all this, it occurred early on that good fictive use could be made of the scrolls. The matter of the Nabataean cistern - and photographs of it - come from fact: Nelson Glueck's RIVERS IN THE DESERT (Grove Press, New York, 1960). I have a persistent habit of



doing this: all manner of historical and archaeological facts are worked into my novels as part of the background, sometimes Historically true and sometimes altered just enough to fit the plot.

Gollancz will publish a mystery-adventure novel this year, THIS WITCH, which uses the same technique. The plot is the search for the treasure of Solomon, lost now for 1900 years since the Roman Tenth Legion sacked the Temple (yes, that same Temple) in Jerusalem about 70 AD. The plot turns on the different locations of Jericho throughout history, and how it was rebuilt first in this location and then another one. The treasure site must be located in relation to the location of the town in 70 AD. Again the scrolls serve as part of the background: real scrolls this time, copper scrolls which were actually discovered in one of the caves. Those copper scrolls were an inventory of the lost treasure, but I treated them as a subterfuge to mislead the Romans. All this is much more fun than cops and robbers stories set in dirty old American cities, using dirty old backgrounds that are already dull. (January 26, 1972) \*

\* THE TIME MASTERS arrived yesterday, only three months after you sent it. I will try to review it as soon as possible. :: You are one of the few current s f writers who can bring exotic settings and the distant past to life. Perhaps this is because you do all the requisite research. I hope that THIS WITCH arrives in Australia soon. :: Thanks for answering my question. It's a lot more interesting than the answer that I thought you might give. \*

\* MALCOLM EDWARDS  
75A Harrow View, Harrow, Middlesex, England

YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN is a good novel by one of the best s f writers around - and one of the least talked-about. I'm glad that you appreciate some of his qualities. Maybe we can start the Wilson Tucker Fan Club. Have you read his other books? THE LONG LOUD SILENCE is superb. Unflinchingly pessimistic (presumably why it's not so popular), my only complaint about it is the way that Tucker brought it "up to date" for the recent Lancer edition. I suppose that it was necessary for commercial reasons, but the situation, credible for 1955, did not really fit 1971. The others are good too - WILD TALENT, THE LINCOLN HUNTERS, and THE TIME MASTERS - though not quite in the same class.

Why, I wonder, didn't you make any but a passing reference to the mid-rash? As you say, every sentence bears a huge weight of meaning, so you cannot dismiss it as just archaeological window-dressing (as most critics seem to have done). You shy away from the possibility of a religious framework for the book, but don't these texts, and the part that they play, provide just such a framework? I hadn't noticed that the first sentence was a hidden reference to REVELATIONS, but that is a clue, a very clever one, which points in two directions: to the part that Kathryn (not Katherine, incidentally) von Hise plays in the book; and to the part that the book of REVELATIONS plays. Chaney's discovery is controversial because since the ESCHATOS is so obviously fiction, this implies that the same is true for REVELATIONS. But, by the end of the book, the prophecies have come true. The sky is swept clean. So the ESCHATOS is, in essence, accurate prophecy. What then of REVELATIONS? I'm not sure whether this implication is significant, or merely playful; but certainly the book does carry this meaning. One of the most rewarding things about the book, in any case, is the

way that Tucker works in this material, careful never to overstress its meaning: a considerable advance in technique over the similar material in THE TIME MASTERS (much the same advance in treatment as Alan Garner made between THE WEIRDSTONE OF BRISINGAMEN and THE OWL SERVICE, to quote an example with which I'm sure you won't be familiar).

Anyway, a good s f novel: something to be grateful for. Actually, when you come to think of it, times aren't so bad: there were four good s f novels in 1970, to my way of thinking (even though some of them were not without their faults), viz YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, AND CHAOS DIED, FOURTH FANS IONS, and DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH. Not to mention the translation of SOLARIS. 1971 has produced at least two: THE COMMITTED MEN, and THE SUN GROWS COLD (by Howard Berk, published by Gollancz, and I strongly recommend that you get a copy). Without having read them, THE LATHE OF HEAVEN and THE WORLD INSIDE look promising.

To get back to YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN... Close textual students like yourself might be interested to note that Tucker has pretty definite ideas on how a time machine should look (though he brings them up to date):

(It was) a long and thin bullet, manufactured of glass and steel. This was the stepson of H G Wells's bicycle.

The bullet was seven feet in length and had a circumference barely large enough to admit a fat man lying down. The fat man - or any other - would recline full length on a webbed metallic floor and grasp small handrails near his shoulders. The fat man's waist would touch the topside of the hull. Areas of clear glass surrounded the head of the bullet, permitting the passenger a clear view of his outer vicinage. And that was the only comfort permitted or provided.

(THE LINCOLN HUNTERS, page 34)

The TDV was a plastic and aluminium bucket resting in a concrete tank filled with polywater, the whole apparatus occupying a small space in a nearly bare basement room. The machine didn't seem capable of moving a minute.

The drum was about seven feet in length, and of a circumference barely large enough to accommodate a fat man lying down; the man inside would journey through time flat on his back; he would recline full-length on a webwork sling while grasping two handrails near his shoulders, with his feet resting on a kickbar at the bottom of the drum... The upper end of the drum had been cut away - it appeared to be an afterthought - and the opening fitted with a transparent bubble for observing the clock and the calendar.

(THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, pages 92-93)

Fascinating, eh? At least we can say that Tucker's style is improving. Note particularly the subtle change from full length to full-length. (January 20, 1972) \*

\* Yeah. At least it beats descriptions of new styles in wizard's costumes, dowsing rods, etc. :: I hope that my reply to Bob Tucker and his reply to me answered a few queries about the religious aspects of YEAR OF QUIET SUN. For me, YOQS was far more awesome than all those obviously "transcendental" books that Silverberg has been writing recently; far more a "religious" book than they are. :: I've heard of Alan Garner, because he writes brilliant stories for children, one of which we rejected at the beginning of last year. (The rejection had nothing to do with the quality of the story, by the way.) Since then, I've seen favourable notices for Garner's books in all the English educational journals. :: I've just finished TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO. Add that to your list of good novels of 1971. :: And I haven't read the other Tucker novels yet. I'll do that as soon as I've finished the s f magazines for 1971. :: Now to a letter that deals with what I tried most to say in WHERE WE'RE COMING:

\* PHYRNE BACON  
3101 North West 2nd Avenue, Gainesville, Florida 32601, USA

I enjoyed WHERE WE'RE COMING. As I write more and more letters I begin to realise that one of the exciting things about life is that little bits and pieces of memory turn up in relation to other things. And some writers can use that sort of mosaic material - the present filled in with bits of memory from the past. I always think of Pangborn in that connection. I guess that I noticed its use first when I read DAVY. But you seem to talk in terms of superimposed images of the same person seen at different times. In my comments on REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, which I sent you, I mention my distress that someone doesn't pay for the meal. It is just the sort of temporal baggage that I brought to the book. But in reality, you could pick almost any situation or object, and I could free-associate from that starting point. That was one of the strong points of YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN. The swimming pool. The people who saw it remembered it from earlier, and the reader remembered it from many times. From a girl, from trash, from bodies, from a little water... They were all there simultaneously - or rather there was a quick succession of memories. Someone said that we are time-binding creatures. When I think of tools, I think of my father as he sharpened his hoe; I cut my finger on it when I tried to imitate his testing its sharpness. I think of the carpenter that Mother hired to do some cabinet work for her. I loved to watch him saw. I wanted to be a carpenter when I grew up. I think of the boy on stage crew at my high school who could make nails sing when he hammered them. I think of sawing a limb off our plum tree last spring and the sawdust being so pink. (Coulson said that it was still damp). I remember the men who came to fix our refrigerator and didn't have any spin tights - I could hardly believe that - just tiny wrenches. But that is the way that almost everything is. What do you think of when I say the word "book"? Can you remember books? Different kinds of books? And when you saw them? Where you bought them? Where you sold them? Whenever you read about someone doing something, don't you also remember yourself doing a similar thing? Or imagine yourself doing the same thing? Wasn't that really what I did when I felt embarrassed because the character had not paid for his meal? Sometimes the most wonderful part of a story is the way that it parallels closely something that I have felt or done or dreamed or hoped.

You were ever so right about one thing. I can communicate much better by typewriter than I can in conversation. Someone who knew me first

by letter and then by more ordinary conversation commented that I insisted on talking about trivial things. I write about trivial things too, but not as exclusively. Besides I think that two people are twice as likely to be distracted. I have been able to carry on conversations about one or a number of closely-connected subjects for hours - but it took real determination on the other person's part. Most people will let me get away with a change of subject of conversation every second sentence. Or even change it themselves. But with a typewriter I feel some kind of obligation to write coherently. To express all my immediate impressions on a subject. And of course I can take as long as I like to think up replies. Or even write and rewrite my replies. And best of all, I cannot mail the ones that embarrass me too much, and I can write DNQ on all of them, so that I can have the advantage of not having to worry about that - not at once, anyway. So I become in some way a slightly different person that I appear to be in conversation. And in some way all the images of me are false. And no amount of writing or talking will ever give a true image. I just am. And the only person who will ever really hear my thoughts is me. And I can write or talk - but I write or talk so that I can be understood. But I don't think anyone else could understand the thin fabric of my thought - the bits of memory, the fragments of sentences. Thought like the physical reality is one of the fundamental mysteries. Something that just is. And there can be explanations and expoundings, but they can at best evoke a feeling of nearness to reality. And I guess that is one of the most wonderful, exciting things that can happen in someone's writing - they can evoke a feeling of nearness to reality.

Science evokes the feeling in me. The feeling that somehow science has explained enough to be really close in some kind of important sense. About physics. About genetics. About thought. About phylogeny. I guess it is that kind of explanation that makes science so close to religion. Cosmology and ontology all in one package. No teleology though. Something that most satisfying religions supply. A vacuum that science fiction seems to fill to some extent. Trying to sketch in the myriad possible futures. The futures of one's choices.

(December 20, 1971) \*

\* I won't add anything. Thanks, Phyrne, for expressing most of what I could not express myself in the article. "I just am." C'est ca! (And, of course, YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN is one of those rare books that "evokes a feeling of nearness to reality".) Thanks again.

\* As you might expect, S F COMMENTARY 25 provoked a rather different (but no less engrossing) response from the response received for SFC 24. Firstly, who else but...

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Felsenstrasse 20, 2762 Ortmann, Austria

\*

I thought that I was past surprise; nevertheless P J Farmer and Sandra Miesel always manage to come up with new surprises. Even at the risk that again I will be accused of anti-Americanism, I must say that their attitude strikes me as quite typical. You know, that poor cousin in Poland, his "physical and linguistic isolation", who has no connections with the wide, wonderful world of s f. Imagine, he isn't even a member of the SFWA. Poor communists, isolated from the rest of

the world, etc. How, I ask you, and Mrs Miesel specifically, is Lem isolated "linguistically"? To the best of my knowledge, he's perfect in French, German, Russian, and Ukrainian (and Polish, of course); he reads and writes English and Latin. How many languages does Mrs Miesel read and write, I might ask? And how is Lem isolated? Not only does he get many of the new scientific books from the Soviet Union and Poland, but Mr Lem regularly reads LE MONDE, NEWSWEEK, SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, some French journals, and a lot of other things most American s f authors don't even know about. Also I doubt very much that Mrs Miesel knows Saul Bellow as well as Lem; nor Robbe-Grillet, nor Nathalie Saurraute, nor a host of others. Is Lem isolated perhaps because he has never visited an s f convention? One American actually wrote to me once to say that he thought Poland was a land of peasants and that therefore a Pole had no right to criticise American s f, or to speak disdainfully about the information and intelligence of s f writers and readers. Even if his opinion of the country were true, what difference would that make to Lem's achievements?

What endears Mrs Miesel, to return to her, so to me, is her fine sense of logic - and Mr Farmer is her brother in this. That a man doesn't choose to mention something doesn't necessarily mean that he doesn't know it, or had a "mother block" (in Mr Farmer's opinion): he may have simply thought that it was too unimportant or too uninteresting to mention. As it happens, I'm in a position to enlighten Mrs Miesel somewhat. For instance, Lem has read DANGEROUS VISIONS, and he knows ..AYE, AND GOMORRAH. I've written proof that he thinks that it is a childish story, that should not be taken seriously: it inverts just ordinary values, without giving any justification for it. By the way, I know no European critic who thinks that DANGEROUS VISIONS has any value. In Europe the book generated a reaction of amused laughter. There is nothing more painful than the sight of an s f author who attacks headlong taboos that are no longer problems, except to him. Lem's thoughts about Ellison are on record, as are those about Delany! What Lem thinks of Spinrad is not suitable for print. I don't think he knows much about Silverberg or Anthony; since I don't consider that those two authors are worthy of attention, I don't send him their stuff.

Now to Mr Farmer, who somehow seems to have got it into his head that I am his enemy, and that I took a hand in forming Lem's opinions for him. The facts are quite different. Lem didn't know Farmer's work, and when he wrote his book on s f, I thought that it should discuss Farmer, so I sent Lem THE LOVERS and STRANGE RELATIONS. But certainly I had no influence on what Lem would write: in fact, up to the present day, he doesn't know what I had written earlier on Farmer. From what I've seen of Lem's linguistic achievements in other fields, it would not surprise me to learn that he reads English better than Mr Farmer. Although two different versions exist of the Polish essay, SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION, as printed in my QUARBER MERKUR, and reprinted in INSEL ALMANACH AUF DAS JAHR 1972, was written in German by Lem himself. Perhaps Mr Farmer is unused to such treatment from his publishers, but I don't change articles that I accept: what I don't like, I reject. Everything in the article is Lem's opinion, and Lem's alone; and the faults of the English version are purely translation errors, and not the result of some manipulation; and if anything they are the result of sticking too closely to the original German. Lem's German is perfect; in Germany I was even asked who had translated the article

so well. On the other hand, I've yet to see even one American s f writer who could write a correct German sentence. Most of the time the quite mysterious desire to shine with some German results in achievements such as Mr Blish's in KALKI: he managed to commit two grammatical errors just by quoting the title of Kant's most famous book.

I do not consider that it is my task to defend Lem's arguments, especially since that may confirm Mr Farmer's delusion that the original article contained my opinions, not Lem's (as if Lem would allow me to form his thoughts for him!), but I'll pick out a few points. I don't know whether Lem has the time or the desire to answer. You know, he does not consider himself an s f author, and it really doesn't matter what the people who think they are his colleagues say or write. What he fears most is that he will be admitted to the s f pantheon, as an equal of writers like Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, and all the other writers whose fiction he detests.

So, just in short: Lem did not say that the lalitha was the result of evolution by reason (whatever that may mean). Instead he said that biological evolution becomes unimportant once there is intelligence; and that a parallel evolution between humans and lalitha, stage for stage, is nonsense. And what are "whatever factors there are that guide evolution?"

Farmer's argument about wishful thinking reminds me of Ted White's syndrome. In an editorial in AMAZING Ted White developed the interesting view that people like Frederic Wertham should not write about s f: only fans intimately familiar with s f should do so. By no means outsiders. I find this an interesting new piece of logic, for if I understand Mr White correctly (but who can claim to understand Mr White correctly?), he means to say that if you write about fandom, you must be a fan yourself. Consequently, if you want to write about the Romans, you must have been one yourself; and only madmen may write about madmen; and that presumably you must be an electron yourself if you want to study electrons. While deeply sympathising with Mr White, I beg him nevertheless to consider: that would reduce some people to write about blockheads all their lives. Similarly interesting is Mr Farmer's view that only he himself, with the help of a psychotherapist, could decide what in his work is a projection of wishful thinking. It is very consistent of Mr Farmer, and proof of his intellectual capabilities, that on the other hand he knows perfectly well that Lem may have a mental block on the word MOTHER (and presumably, although he doesn't say so, also on BROTHER and SISTER). In view of this, it is very gratifying to see that Farmer thinks that his stories have some importance because he managed to squeeze Freudian principles into them (to such a depth that anybody can pick them up after half an hour's reading). Frankly, I wasn't aware that Mr Farmer had already improved on Joyce, for then I would not have bothered to provide for his immortality in the form of a footnote to Lem. And Aristophanes, Rabelais, and Sterne, are among his influences. Who am I to comment on people who so readily discourse in the company of such giants?

Looking back upon the article, I really don't suppose that Lem will answer it. It would be very much like trying to explain to Mr Budrys what a machine is.

I don't quite know what Sandra Miesel tries to convey in her reply to

my review of THE DISAPPEARING FUTURE. To me it seems that she tries to help me, without knowing it. My opinion is simply that:

- 1 S f writers hardly ever deal with real problems. They just replay a number of silly cliches: psi, robots, myths, etc.
- 2 Marxism is too complex for them, and too repugnant. They just take on what is either initially very simple and sufficiently nonsensical (tarot, banal mysticism, psi, dianetics, etc.) or what becomes so in their hands (Freudian psychology, social theories, etc.).
- 3 What the authors claim for their work and what they do actually are two different things. Ellison may think that THE REGION BETWEEN descends from e e cummings - but for me he can claim only to be the heir of Ray Cummings.

Re Poul Anderson: 1. The "few special situations" are far too many, to my mind. 2. I'm perverse and interested in human aberrations.

And why should I write in another language, if my opinions were the same as everybody else's? I'm really sure that Alexei Panshin can write much better the way Alexei Panshin writes; and Sandra Miesel writes better as Sandra Miesel than I could.

PS

I just wonder: what does Sandra Miesel find in Dick?

I read TAU ZERO: what a dull and incompetent book. Anderson actually succeeds in making the end of the universe so boring that, compared to it, the death of a fly must seem like a drama of cosmic significance. And the banal Freudian remark that one of the characters makes at the supposed climax of the novel! (that they were afraid to peer into the bedroom of their parents). Really, writers should be made to eat their own pulp. (January 22, 1972) \*

\* You sum up TAU ZERO better in a few lines than I did in a three-page review. (That's a hint that SFC should have more Rottensteiner reviews, of course. For good reasons that you give in the rest of your letter, I don't suppose that I'll ever get them.) :: Just to keep the magazine boiling, here's:

\* SANDRA MIESEL  
8744 North Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240, USA

As it turned out, our reluctance to deplete our savings to make the DUFF trip was prudent. Just before Christmas my husband's car was demolished (no one hurt) and the cost of replacing it dented our savings account. It's hard to choose between Lesleigh and Andy, but she would be the more unconventional visitor. She's a buxom, plain-spoken young woman with long dark hair. Really we wish that we could have competed although you might have been disappointed that I argue a bit more mildly in person. I have always imagined that John Foyster would be pleasant face-to-face even if I disagree with much he says in print. If you see him or John Bangsund please thank them for sending me their fanzines and tell them that I'll get around to writing sometime.

Rottensteiner is "so good because he annoys people so much"? What an



utterly contemptible thing for you to say! Not that he tells us new information, that he sharpens our sensibilities, that he reveals new insights, or any similar worthwhile critical deeds. If annoyance value is your goal, you might as well print Stephen Pickering! "Marvellous cavalier smile?" Ha! If Rottensteiner tried to smile his face would crack apart. A friend of mine who has corresponded with him claims that he makes a milder impression in letters and suggests that the characteristics which enrage me are European academic mannerisms - abuse your opponent before he abuses you. His endless harangues about "stupid people reading stupid books" are obnoxious and unfounded. What am I supposed to do, submit my IQ scores, flash my scholastic achievements? While there's no such thing as an "average fan" I've certainly met large numbers of highly intelligent and inquisitive people in fandom, qualities unrelated to amount of education. I thought that Alex got much the better of the CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR debate. Nobody can chastise me for liking Heinlein - I don't and never did. I've read exactly four pieces of his short fiction and I wouldn't read any more unless lavishly paid to do so.

So, to repeat the thought from my previous letter, things like your Aldiss paper, based on exact research and genuine love of subject are far more welcome than Rottensteiner's rantings.

The de Camp article by Barry Gillam (in SFC 23) was indeed a treat. The very rationality and thoroughness which characterise de Camp's work hamper him a trifle in his Conan pastiches. Sanity is a handicap in simulating Howard. A recent de Camp novel, THE GOBLIN TOWER, may be taken as a light-hearted complement to the Conan stories. Why, it even spoofs the Worldcon.

Anderson "cutesy-cuddly"? Who're you talking about, Zenna Henderson, maybe? Here's a writer whose great themes for the past twenty-five years have been physical and social entropy and man's response to them. Do you, like some other critics, really object to his conclusion that some victories over entropy can be won, that man can wrest some meaning from existence? I realise that these are unpopular views at present, but how can you overlook the lacrimae rerum strain that runs through his writing? Sure, he's a public and private optimist but dare you call the following "cutesy-cuddly"? LET THE SPACEMEN BEWARE, THE BROKEN SWORD, THE MARTYR, KINGS WHO DIE, THE MAN WHO CAME EARLY, THE BURNING BRIDGE, THE LAST OF THE DELIVERERS, TERMINAL QUEST, JOURNEY'S END, THE HORN OF TIME, A MAN TO MY WOUNDING, SISTER PLANET, FOR THE DURATION, THE CHAPTER ENDS, NO TRUCE WITH KINGS, SOS THE MOON, THE GARDEN IN THE VOID, WILDCAT, TURNING POINT, MARIUS, MY OBJECT ALL SUBLIME, THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN, BRAVE TO BE A KING, KYRIE, THE DISINHERITED, WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT?, and QUIXOTE AND THE WINDMILL. If you do, you're way around the bend. (Titles just out of my head; didn't consult a bibliography; taken from all qualities and periods, so they are a true cross-section.)

(January 17, 1972)

\* Whew! I'd better watch out before I start to print letters that I thought were directed against Franz Rottensteiner. Somehow the fiery breath has turned around and scorched my tail-feathers. :: More propaganda to get Leigh Luttrell here in August via Down Under Fan Fund, although Sandra did not mean that as propaganda. Andy Porter is the other candidate. Send votes (1 each; at least \$1 a vote, but send more if possible) to American agent, Fred Patten, 11863 West Jefferson Blvd., Apt. 1, Culver City, California 90230, or

to Australian organiser, John Foyster, PO Box 96, South Yarra, Victoria 3141. :: How many people actually annoy fans? People who publish fanzines with profanity every second word? Stupid people? Right-wingers? Left-wingers? To judge from the experience of the small number of people who actually try to annoy fans, it's a tough struggle. Abuse hurled through the mail in fanzines never seems to find its target. SFR to the contrary, it's fairly difficult to start a genuinely bitter feud in fandom. (I don't count the regular run of "fannish feuds", where the opponents play the game by the rules, yet still drink together at all the conventions.) Franz Rottensteiner, however, really does annoy American fans. Take CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR, for instance, the essay which more than anything else made Franz's face a feature of fannish dartboards all over the place. What does that essay attack? Not Panshin. Not even Heinlein. In that essay, Franz attacks the assumptions of the people who regard Heinlein as a great writer. Because the rhetoric of the s f field often sounds more like that of some weird mid-Western sect than of anything else, any full attack on the assumptions of the field amounts to heresy. And, whereas in most other fields of intelligent endeavour in the western world, it is now difficult to utter heresy, because the rules have become so fluid, in s f the old nineteenth-century values lie one cuticle under the skins of most s f fans. No doubt I could write a long, fully-researched, and vastly boring essay on this subject: you need only do spot analyses of fanzines like S F COMMENTARY to test the truth of such observations. Now, in most of his articles, Franz does utter heresy, but only because some of his readers have such glowing faith in the s f field. I'm sure that the few interested outsiders who read this magazine must find that in his essays Franz does not annoy, but merely puts s f into perspective beside the works of real literature. Often, Franz only repeats Dick Jenssen's dictum from the 1971 New Year's Convention: "Fans love bad writing." Hell, it's true enough for me. :: All right, you win re. Poul Anderson. I've read only one of those stories. From the Anderson stories that I have seen from recent years, I still say that Anderson's predominant recent prose style is indeed sentimental and "cutesy-cud-dly". \*

Your response to my letter of comment in SFC 25 was most astonishing. First, where's the conflict between appreciation of Chinese civilisation and right-wing politics? Classical Chinese civilisation was one of the world's more conservative societies, you know. Linebarger certainly wasn't feigning in the religious Instrumentality stories. He was a devout (if unorthodox) Christian. Does this betray prejudice on your part? ((\*\*brg\*\* Of course it does.\*\*)) Do you imagine that all conservatives are uncouth hard-hat monsters? (By all the evidence, William Buckley and Russell Kirk are cultivated men.) Would you see a parallel contradiction between Lafferty's writing and his conservatism? (which also extends to religion). Double-think in Delany? The man and his work have been all of a piece since he was a teenager, although that doesn't preclude growth and re-examination of ideas. You wouldn't have recognised Dick's background in Eastern thought? What's deficient, your education or perception? Read UBIK. Read the BHAGAVAD GITA. Notice any similarities? And the way that Dick handles Japanese civilisation in MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE. A friend with a degree in Russian studies laughed at the impossibility of a faked Marxist novel - said the Soviets do it all the time. (January 20, 1972) \*

\* (Sandra did add to that letter, "Hope you get a Hugo nomination.") Aw Hell Department: To explain precisely what I meant last issue I would need to write a 5000-word essay, with examples from all over the place, and research for months. Your last point gives me a clue. If somebody wrote a "Marxist novel", what value would it have? None at all, if it were nothing but a

"Marxist novel". Such a work would only acquire value when it became a good novel, which perhaps a Marxist wrote about the life of a Marxist society. I'm always concerned about whatever-it-is that good writing is. You can never justify the literary quality of a work if you describe only the "influences" upon it, or the "richness of reference", or the "symbols", or whatever. I must refer you and everybody else again to Leavis' work, in which he talks a lot about the trust that literary critics place in the "scholastic apparatus", the machinery of references and scholarship, the mill-wheel that never grazes the wheat-seed. :: However, (deep breath here), s f is very peculiar because it introduces numerous extra-literary elements, and many of its readers would say that we must consider those elements, such as credibility, scientific accuracy, and sociological knowledge, when we make a literary judgment about s f. For me, this ain't so - except for the special conditions that William Atheling Jr sets out in THE ISSUE AT HAND. (However, I don't worry much about even those conditions.) The particular extra-literary quality that I look for in s f is "newness", the ability to see mankind, the world, or the universe in a quite new light. I don't see how a "conservative" (i.e. someone who, by definition, opposes change) can do this, if he or she really loves old values. I know that there are many conservatives who read poor s f which, in its futures replaces 1972's values with those of 1872. But that is hardly s f. Cordwainer Smith had a remarkably critical and free-wheeling approach to the universe, and it seems to me this approach does not match with the views of Dr Paul Linebarger, a man who, for instance, missed the significance of one of the world's great "future" movements, the revolution in China. :: Again, I repeat, I need pages and pages, and years more, to work out my ideas on such topics. Sandra, you're right: I missed the Eastern influences in Dick's work because I don't know a damned thing about Eastern culture. I don't really see why I should in order to appreciate why Dick is a good writer. When I pick up some information about Eastern culture I will probably enjoy Dick's writing even more; but I don't think I will have much more equipment to conduct a true critical investigation of his writing. The only evidence for such an investigation lies in the words on the page. The fact remains that the words on the pages of Dick's novels do not actually talk about Eastern culture; if they talk about actual social organisations at all, they talk about American culture. :: Sometimes I wish that I was Franz Rottensteiner. Then I could write two-line answers that would sum it all up. Thanks for the brain-teaser. \*

JOHN BRUNNER  
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S F COMMENTARY 25 has fortunately caught me on one of my rare days off; I seldom have time to write to fanzines any more. I was much interested by Barry Gillam's remarks about my work, particularly since I've just been editing myself very extensively - i.e. I've been asked by Don Wollheim to produce a three-novelle collection for his new firm, DAW Books, and as is my invariable custom, instead of just supplying tearsheets or carbons I've rewritten the whole lot, some 70,000 words near as dammit, I suppose. (All those of my shorter stories which have been collected under my own name, as distinct from those contributed to other people's anthologies, have been through the type-writer again for book publication.)

It's always a very educational experience to do this, and more so than usual in the current instance because the first two stories (HOST AGE and LUNGFISH) both appeared in Nova magazines more than a decade ago - indeed, they're from 1958 and 1959. And so completely has my approach

to my work changed in the interim that it hasn't simply been a matter of rewriting them; rather, I've had to re-tell them. One does learn with the passage of time. Or one hopes to.

And that point arose in my mind with some force when reading Barry Gillam's remarks. For instance, he makes a trip of SQUARES OF THE CITY, STAND ON ZANZIBAR, and THE JAGGED ORBIT, disregarding the fact that there's almost nine years between the first and the last, and - as has been borne in on me for reasons mentioned above - an almost unrecognisable difference between the respective states of mind in which I conceived them. At the age of twenty-five, when I wrote SQUARES OF THE CITY, I was giving myself a pure craft exercise; no one to my knowledge had ever built a readable novel literally and exactly on a grandmaster chess-game, so I set out to do so. (As I've often said since, I've wondered endlessly what different course my career would have taken if SQUARES had been published the year that I wrote it instead of having to wait five years for American publication and over nine years for publication here in Britain.)

The two later books, by contrast, were not conceived in any sense as exercises, but as creative acts on a very different level, dealing with subjects which I regard as of major importance (naturally I also regard the idea of a government trying to achieve total control over its citizen as important, but that wasn't primary in the planning of SQUARES) and employing various technical devices in order to present the argument from a wide range of viewpoints - I could almost say facets.

Given that, yes indeed, it does follow that the characters in the books have to be explicitly products of the imaginary society against whose backdrop they are depicted. And this, by the way, is among the reasons why I am writing less and less s f, because I regard it as an inherent limitation. The only function of s f which is of genuine concern to me nowadays is the projection of social trends; man in his relation to other men, in other words man as a social creature, can very advantageously and stimulatingly be examined in the s f context (and in an historical context too, and in others).

Here, please bear in mind that I'm talking about characters, lower-case, not Characters. Much as I love R A Lafferty's short stories, I don't get on too well with his novels, because they are populated almost exclusively by C-C-Characters, oversize and remote from humanity. (I suspect that Jubal Harshaw would get on fine in their company...)

I find it a little odd that when specifically discussing the presentation of character in my work, Gillam does not refer to QUICKSAND, or THE PRODUCTIONS OF TIME, two of my books in which the nature of the plot and its associated argument did indeed lend itself to detailed in-depth exploration of character in a way which the majority of s f inhibits. (More the former than the latter, by the way.) When I want to do that sort of thing, I turn away from s f and write THE CRUTCH OF MEMORY or THE DEVIL'S WORK, rather than taking some star-spanning theme as a basis. These also are items that he does not mention.

Which is a way of bringing myself back to those novelettes that I've just been revising. Even the earliest had a good strong plot; sometimes I suspect that the only reason I got so much of my early work

into print, flawed as it was, must have been that I kept coming up with neat plot-gimmicks! (As I so often say when explaining to strangers how come I've managed to stay afloat as a freelance for such a long time, I got paid for making a lot of mistakes. Most people aren't that lucky.)

The actual text, however, required an overhaul from the ground up, and it's been especially interesting to see how the two chief reasons for that intertwine. On the one hand, I myself have changed, and in particular I've acquired a whole new range of technical skills which I can bring to bear on the revision of my old work, thereby making it read not only more smoothly but also with greater conviction. On the other, the world outside has changed. Within the relatively short space of a decade or so, a whole group of social attitudes that were, in essence, a hangover from some generations ago have simply melted into nowhere. For instance, at the time when I published LUNGFISH (re-titled for US publication as RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY, for FANTASTIC UNIVERSE), it was a rather risqué notion that the crew of a starship intent on colonising another planet after a voyage of some forty years or so, and having had children en route, would have to not merely accept but encourage promiscuity, because otherwise the gene-pool of the new colony might be inadequately mixed.

Well, while it hasn't exactly become commonplace, the idea of multiple relationships, extended-family groups, and so on has at least entered the public consciousness. One knows it happens, if not very often, and one doesn't any longer assume that this is going to bring down the heavens on our heads. It made quite a powerful point when the story originally appeared. It doesn't do so in the 1970s. So I've had to reconstruct that entire element of the story so that it's no longer treated in terms of the social implications; instead it's treated from the viewpoint of the protagonist who's concerned about the impact it's had on him personally, to prevent him from establishing strong friendships or affections.

The same applies to various technical points. When I published HOST AGE thirteen years ago, one did not assume - as nowadays one must - that a biological laboratory evaluating new antibiotics would operate with continuous access to the company's computer, thereby making it a great deal more difficult to smash up their most promising series of cultures. (As a matter of fact I worked out, with the help of a couple of authoritative friends, an entirely new technique for sabotaging the computer to take care of that little problem. At least, my friends say that it's new, and since one of them works at the National Physical Laboratory it probably is. But I shan't be in the least surprised if someone puts it into practice before the revised version of the story sees print.)

Updating the technical aspect, though, is a very minor problem compared to updating the social aspect. As for updating the actual text - dialogue, passages of description, and the general bricks-and-mortar of the story - that's no trouble at all, though it does lead not only to second but even to third thoughts, and there are a good few pages in the 266 which I have stacked here on the desk which have too many hand-corrections on, and will require to be re-typed tomorrow.

When I say that it's no problem, what I mean is that compared to creating something new which matches my present self-imposed standards,

it's dead simple. Even though I would no longer bother to sit down and write any of these stories if the idea occurred to me today, I know - because they saw print a long time back - that people regarded them as good stories (in the strictly narrational sense), and consequently I can rely on that and merely polish, condense, re-phrase, and now and then catch a trick that I missed the first time.

On the other hand, a novel which I set out to write in a hurry last summer, and which I thought would be a simple book to tackle, a sort of medical detective story, has been through six drafts - strictly, the first two-thirds have been, and the ending one -- and I'm still not satisfied with the product. I'm winding up to throwing the lot away, in fact, to start over. Meantime, alas, I have to make a living!

So what in the world am I doing writing a four-page letter? Trying to find out, I suppose, what I'm hung up on... (March 1, 1972) \*

\* It seems that you're hung up on the sort of problems that I was trying to discuss immediately before this letter.. how to write stories that actually look at the future. I think that it is almost an impossible job, especially as some aspects of the human holograph (aspects such as attitudes to sex, which you mention) change much faster than others, and a story like LUNGFISH can be outdated within ten years. Yet another good reason to dissuade people from the adoption of s f writing as a career. :: Quite apart from that, I would like to know how it feels to perform an archaeological investigation of one's own mind - which, surely, is what you do when you work through some of your early stories? What do a writer's early stories show to the older writer who reads through old material (apart from the fact that one has improved as a writer)? What remains the same? (Of course, I am thinking of Proust's metaphor from TIME REGAINED, where he captures a picture of his whole life as a series of independent strata of the mind, laid one on top of each other, each layer distinct from the one above.). \*

\* DAMON KNIGHT

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I thought that I might respond to two points made in Paul Anderson's review of A FOR ANYTHING.

1 "It's handy that Knight does not look at the Gismo too closely - I'm rather curious about the workings of such a gadget, especially as it does not seem to have a power source." From the book, page 6 (Walker edition): "There was just the one circuit, that looped over to one of the little metal-glass blocks on the left side and then looped over to the other on the right side. The rest of it, attached to the upright, was nothing but a pair of dry cells and an ordinary mercury light switch."

2 "Of course the slaves have been mass-produced by the Gismo, so they all have this bland sameness. Knight nearly trips himself up here: the leader of the slaves seems to have no rivals, but at the same time he must have hundreds of duplicates among the slave population." From the book, page 67:

..."Exactly how many are there of you at the present moment, Frankie?"

Frankie's expression grew equally serious. "This morning," he said, "they was two hun'ed forty-three of me exackly. You know las' month they was only two hun'ed twelve, the mos', but this month we doing so much work to build up the Long Corridor where it fell down, they need us bad. We the bes' servan' in Eagles, Misser Ruell. Nex' nearest is Hank the carrier, and I think they only a hun'ed, a hun'ed ten of him. Well, Misser Jones, you never see a fellow so many, eh?" He laughed with pleasure.

They turned away. "There used to be some fabulous number of him," Ruell said, "I don't recall, three hundred fifty or so, and Frankie's one ambition is to beat his own record. He counts himself every morning, and if he's lost any, he goes around with a long face for the rest of the day. Is anything the matter?"

The point is, of course, that supernumerary slaves are routinely killed rather than kept in idleness. From the book, page 136:

Down here, burrowing like moles in the subterranean parts of Eagles, the Frankies had created a world of their own. Like all the servants at Eagles, they were supposed to be "rotated" at forty or earlier; sent away to other establishments, in theory; actually, killed and disposed of. But here was a Frankie who had obviously lived at least a decade past his span; and here were others who had not been upstairs for years. Surplus Frankies, probably, duped for some special job and then, instead of being destroyed, smuggled down here. He could only guess at how long it had been going on.

In a revolt led by a group of slaves all duplicated from the same prototype, the question obviously arises, who is to be the leader? But the answer is equally obvious - the "Old Man" of the novel, the one who has outlived all his contemporaries. (March 25, 1972) \*

LEIGH EDMONDS

PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3182

\*

I was reading this S F COMMENTARY thing and thinking about things, when it occurred to me that Bruce thinks far more clearly and succinctly than I do. This upset me, because I would like to be better than everybody else at everything, and if Bruce is in better control of his thinking powers, then there must be millions of things that he is better at than I. ((\*\*brg\*\* True,\*\*)) There must be some things that I can do that he can't, but all the things that he can do are worth doing, and the things that I can do aren't worth doing. ((\*\*brg \*\* Not true.\*\*))

So there you have it. To my shame, disgrace, and eternal misery I now must admit to all that I have a lazy, wandering, weak-willed, low-powered, witless, uninterested, disorganised, undisciplined, immature, and dreamy mind. Also I have pimples on my bum and I am given to speculation about any possible connection. My thoughts wander and waver all over the spectrum. They bring a great deal of idle enjoyment at



moments when there is nothing else that I feel like doing, but this is frustrating when I attempt to think in a straight line about one subject in an attempt at creative or dissective thought. I read SFC and all the Gillespie fanzines with avid interest, and all that stuff. Also I talk to Bruce on the phone and see him down at Degraives Tavern. At each of these encounters I go green with envy, for when Bruce says something you know that it is carefully considered, not just an off-the-cuffer which he threw in to sound intelligent. (I am trying to master this trick.)

(While I attempt to marshall my mental resources for an all-out assault on the next paragraph, it occurred to me that there is something that Bruce isn't very good at - light-hearted banter. My heart and my spirits rose as I contemplated this flaw in that which was so disgustingly perfect, until I realised that I am not actually a light-hearted banterer myself. As compensation, I drifted off into contemplation of nipples and other mammary accessories... Now I marshall my forces once again and attack the next paragraph.)

To read a Gillespie fanzine could be called an enlightening if somewhat unnerving experience. See Bruce Gillespie take his razor-sharp analytic scalpel in hand, see him plunge it directly to the heart of the literary work, see him lay bare the inner workings of the piece in a virtuoso display of vivisection, see the truth lay revealed in its pinkness and nakedness; and all this with the minimum of words, an uncanny insight, and only a slight tendency to over-quote (which is natural enough for a fifty-page fanzine). The crowd rises to its feet as one. They toss flowers and hats into the arena of criticism while from the massed open mouths came a multitude of "bravos" and "olehs" and "alohs". What a happy day; and there's not a cloud in the sky.

As the sun sets, a certain Mr Elias Mludge enters the arena so recently vacated by the hero Gillespie who was, incidentally, borne away on the shoulders of his admirers. Mr Mludge is the cleaner, and it is his job to see that all the hats go to the lost property office for collection by their wearers, and all the flowers go back to the florist (though in all confidence I shall tell you that Elias sometimes keeps some of the flowers and takes them to the hospital to give to his disabled mother who was accidentally subjected to criticism by a certain John Foyster). Elias also must sweep up the lolly wrappers and ice-cream sticks which he bundles up and sends to some lesser fanzines.

On the occasion that I am recounting, Mr Mludge came across a dilemma called Mozart's PIANO CONCERTO No 23. Not given to unnecessary mental exercise he did not bother to wonder why it lay among the hats, flowers, ice-cream sticks, etc. He set it aside, and intended to send it later to an obscure American fanzine which specialised in that sort of thing. Little did he know that it was the prize possession of Leigh Edmonds (that's me) - his sole defence against weltsmertz. Leigh (or he) had been so overcome with excitement at the Gillespie performance that he had tossed it into the arena as a tribute.

Meanwhile, in a small adobe hut in the shadow of the great arena, Leigh Edmonds sits huddled over a piece of clean parchment with his pencil stub in his hand. The flickering light from the candle reflects from his eyes. One might think that he was inspired, but the

truth of the matter is that he is determined to be as good at this criticism thing as Bruce, and he is determined to write a masterpiece that will live forever in the annals of the art of criticism.

He looks at the parchment. It is blank.

So is his mind.

Where to start?

Inspiration! Write down the title of the book: "A MAZE OF DEATH, by Philip K Dick."

Now, he needs a big start, something to make the readers sit up and pay attention to him, some profound statement, some flash of vivid insight - or at least something that sounds good.

"Combining the mind-warping pyrotechnics of his masterpiece UBIK and the excitement and bravado of good old-fashioned space opera, Dick has woven a web of masterful suspense, and the book has that intangible quality which is his remarkable ability to convey shifting reality."

Leigh opens his eyes and looks at what he has written. Not bad. It could be a lot worse. But now to follow on. With a sigh, Leigh realised that he had to justify the opening statement. Inspiration and cool clear logic failed to come. His thoughts wander through various shady and oft-times erotic groves of the mind. Finally it comes to rest on the idea of getting his friend Steve to build him a synthesiser with four variable-signal generators and a white-sound source, with all kinds of wiring to obtain all kinds of sounds. Then he considered the problem of his lack of knowledge of acoustics and he graduated from there to the problem of the lousy acoustics of his adobe.

Some time ago Leigh had had a Wharfedale quadrophonics system installed in his humble living quarters, but that story is best not told, except to say that the walls did not react very well to the aural battering. Leigh had to put some more mud on the walls.

Ahem. Back to work. Concentrate, damn it...

"Dick, with he deft touch of a master of the genre, has..." Er.. has what? Go on.

"...has... created a stylistic universe in which the... the..." Yes?

"...the forces of good and evil are characterised in a set of characters which the author manipulates symbolically to demonstrate..."

To demonstrate what?

How should I know!

You wrote it, so you should know.

Okay then... "...demonstrate the plurality of..."

What comes next?

Dear Bruce

Received S F COMMENTARY 25 the other day, but I haven't as yet had time to sit down and write you that letter that I've been promising you. As for the review of A MAZE OF DEATH - I'm sorry that I can't do it as I seem to have lost my copy of the book, most likely on the train. Also I lost FRIENDS FROM FRO-LIX 8 which I had promised to review for you as well. I'll try to post that other article that I promised you next Sunday,

Yours

Leigh

(February 9, 1972) \*

\* In reality, the crowds that carried Gillespie shoulder-high from the stadium dropped him in the next alley and beat him up. Besides, Leigh and Val, relaxing in their adobe, were really watching a festival of ants. After Mr Mludge has scampered from the tiny arena, those giants of the land, Edmonds, Foyster, Bangsund, and Harding, tramp all over the arena, and the crowds scatter for safety. That tiniest of ants, Gillespie, tries to escape, but one of the colossi points his giant mitt at the little creature and says, "There's that Gillespie again. Squash 'im." Meanwhile, Edmonds dreams his dreams, and writes letters that are very pleasant, even if not quite accurate.

\* However, somebody in USA must share your opinions about S F COMMENTARY, as you will see from the Hugo nomination list:

BEST NOVEL: DRAGONQUEST (Anne McCaffrey); JACK OF SHADOWS (Roger Zelazny); THE LATHE OF HEAVEN (Ursula LeGuin); A TIME OF CHANGES (Robert Silverberg); TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO (Philip Jose Farmer). BEST NOVELLA: DREAD EMPIRE (John Brunner); THE FOURTH PROFESSION (Larry Niven); A MEETING WITH MEDUSA (Arthur C Clarke); THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS (Poul Anderson); A SPECIAL KIND OF MORNING (Gardner Dozois). BEST SHORT STORY: ALL THE LAST WARS AT ONCE (George Alec Effinger); THE AUTUMN LAND (Clifford Simak); THE BEAR WITH A KNOT IN HIS TAIL (Stephen Tall); INCONSTANT MOON (Larry Niven); SKY (R A Lafferty); VASTER THAN EMPIRES AND MORE SLOW (Ursula LeGuin). BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN (Robert Wise); A CLOCKWORK ORANGE (Stanley Kubrick); I THINK WE'RE ALL BOZOS ON THIS BUS (Firesign Theater); L A 2017 (episode: NAME OF THE GAME); THX 1138 (George Lucas). BEST PROFESSIONAL MAGAZINE: AMAZING (Ted White); ANALOG (Ben Bova/John W Campbell); FANTASTIC (Ted White); FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION (Ed Ferman); GALAXY (Ejler Jakobsson). BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST: VINCENT DIFATE; FRANK KELLY FREAS; JACK GAUGHAN; JEFF JONES; JOHN SCHOENHERR. BEST FAN MAGAZINE: ENERGUMEN (Michael & Susan Glicksohn); GRANFALLOON (Linda Bushyager); LOCUS (Charles & Dena Brown); S F COMMENTARY (Bruce Gillespie). BEST FAN ARTIST: ALICIA AUSTIN; GRANT CANFIELD; WENDY FLETCHER; TIM KIRK; BILL ROTSLER. BEST FAN WRITER: TERRY CARR; TOM DIGBY; SUSAN GLICKSOHN; ROSEMARY ULLYOT; BOB VARDEMAN; HARRY WARNER Jr. (Details from LOCUS).

I can't really believe that SFC has made that list - mainly because all the facts say that it shouldn't be there. Only about 225 copies go to USA each issue, whereas some fanzines which didn't make the list, but should have, such as OUTWORLDS, distribute about 350 copies an issue in USA, and the print run of LOCUS now stands at about 1250-1300 copies per issue. (Australians should note that I am your friendly agent for LOCUS.) I am well aware that over thirty Australians have joined LACon, and their nominations must have been very important, but the fact is that a whole lot of overseas people, for reasons best known to themselves, think that SFC is Hugo-class. Thanks very much for liking a magazine that never claimed to present anything but the type of material that I like to read. I'm lucky that you share my taste.

Most of the credit for the success of SFC should go to the following people who have contributed to the magazine, provided encouragement and support, or helped in its physical production (in order of appearance):

John Bangsund, Lee Harding, Leigh Edmonds, John Foyster, George Turner, Robert Toomey, Damien Broderick, Bernie Bernhouse, David Boutland, Gary Woodman, Peter Darling, Brian Aldiss, John C Jaeger, Tony Thomas, Jack Wodhams, Wynne Whiteford, Mervyn Binns, Stephen Campbell, Ron Graham, Greg Hocking, Ron L Clarke, A Bertram Chandler, Ian Godden, Richard Geis, John Gibson, Brian Richards, Paul Anderson, Graham Stone, David Piper, Lynn Hickman, Harry Harrison, Leland Sapiro, Franz Rottensteiner, Philip Dick, Robert Silverberg, Sam Moskowitz, Derek Kew, Joanne Burger, Andrew Escot, Andy Porter, Stuart Leslie, Hal Colebatch, Creath Thorne, James Blish, Stanislaw Lem, Paul Stevens, Peter Ripota, John Brunner, Robert Coulson, David Penman, Harry Warner Jr, John Brosnan, Samuel Delany, Phil Harbottle, Michael O'Brien, Robin Johnson, Jim Lowery, Phil Collas, Tom Newlyn, Bill Wright, Dimitrii Razuvaev, Bill Rotsler, Adrian Rogoz, Henry Newton Goodrich, Bob Smith, David Grigg, Hedley Finger, Barry Gillam, Bozena Janicka, G K Saunders, Perry A Chapdelaine, Alex Robb, Charlie Brown, Peter Weston, Ted Pauls, Gene Wolfe, Geoff Gardner, Dennis Stocks, Chris Priest, Michael Deckinger, Sandra Miesel, Alf van der Poorten, Ronald Bleker, Marvin Zeman, Leigh Milvain, Bob Shaw, George Hay, Noel Kerr, Sten Dahlskog, Alan Sandercock, Peter Innocent, Malcolm Edwards, Leslie Luttrell, Ursula LeGuin, Marcel Thoon, William Temple, Darryl Lindquist, Hal Halls, Alex Eisenstein, Jerry Lapidus, Hank Davis, David Gorman, Brian Williams, Michael Cameron, Neil Rahman, Liz Fishman, Sydney J Bounds, Cy Chauvin, Rick Sneary, Robert Bowden, Jeff Schalles, Kevin Dillon, Aubrey Beardsley, Robyn Wallace, Gian Paolo Cossato, Harlan Ellison, Leon Taylor, Paul Walker, Damon Knight, John Alderson, Valdis Augstkalns, Phyrne Bacon, L Sprague de Camp, Shayne McCormack, Wylie Tom Gillespie, Bill Bowers, Kenneth Faig, Bruce McPhee, Jeff Smith, William F Nolan, Philip Jose Farmer, Richard Delap, Poul Anderson, Houston Craighead, Bill Andresen, Philippe Hupp, David Gerrold, Ed Cagle, Darko Suvin, Bob Tucker, Lyle Cullen, Christine McGowan, Eric Lindsay, Patrick Kelly, Blair Ramage, Michael Glicksohn, Philippe Boyer, Gray Boak, Patrick McGuire, Hal Davis, and Lindsay Cox.

Unfortunately, I have probably left out many people who have not contributed directly to the production of the magazine. Gary Mason comes to mind: among his many indirect services to SFC, he and his parents accommodated me during Syncon 1. Then there are the subscribers, people who trade fanzines, other regular letter-writers, and hundreds of other people who should really get the credit for their support for SFC. Some special thanks must go to the first five names on that list. For many reasons, this magazine would never have existed, except for the efforts of the "ASFR team", John Bangsund, Lee Harding, and John Foyster. John Bangsund donated some very valuable items from the ASFR files for early SFC issues, and Lee Harding, Leigh Edmonds, and John, helped to print, collate, and post the first three issues of SFC (before I bought a duplicator). Such people as George Turner, Franz Rottensteiner (who has almost become the Assistant Editor of recent issues of SFC), Barry Gillam, Paul Anderson, and John Gibson (to pick a few names) have formed the nucleus of the "SFC team", people who are scattered across the world, and most of whom I have never met. I owe a great deal to Ron Graham: Nobody but a few people know that in mid-1969, when I had \$1 in the bank and nothing in my pocket, Ron provided the cash that enabled me to buy the tiny Adler typewriter upon which issues 5-20 were typed. The most timely and valuable present that I have ever received. Barry Gillam and John Foyster have each edited issues of SFC (numbers 10, 16, and 19 are among the very best issues of the magazine). Stephen Campbell gave a huge amount of time and effort to the production of SFC while I was at Ararat. He also drew many covers and illustrations. Also thanks to Peter Innocent, whose suggestions led to the improvement in recent issues.

\* Back to the Hugos. I know that my choices never win, but here they are anyway: Novel: LATHE OF HEAVEN; Novella: THE FOURTH PROFESSION (there, that surprised you, didn't it, Pete Weston?); Short Story: I've only read two of them, and I didn't like those. Dramatic Presentation: Sight unseen, A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. Of those presentations that I have seen: THX 1138. Pro-zine: AMAZING. Pro Artist: JOHN SCHOENHERR. Fanzine: S F COMMENTARY (of course). Fan Artist: BILL ROTSLER. Fan Writer: HARRY WARNER Jr. These are not my favourite items in these categories (except in Novel, Dramatic Presentation, Pro-zine, and Pro Artist categories) but only my favourites from the published nomination lists. I'll talk about my real favourites next issue.

\* Other news received during the last few months includes information about two forthcoming Australian conventions: SYNCON 2 (11TH AUSTRALIAN S F CONVENTION) will occur at the Squire Motor Inn, Bondi Junction, Sydney, on August 11, 12, and 13, 1972. At the moment the attending membership is \$4; non-attending membership \$2; if you join you can nominate and vote for the annual Australian S F Achievement Awards. You must hurry if you want accommodation at the Squire Inn; rates as low as \$6 per person. Send your money to The Committee, Syncon 2, GPO Box 4593, Sydney, NSW 2001. In John Bangsund's words, the Syncon committee have "thought Big". In a year of good conventions this should be the best. Guest of Honour will be the winner of the current DUFF competition. :: On behalf of the Brisbane Science Fiction Association Dennis Stocks will organise Q-CON 2 on January 1, 2, and 3, 1973. At this convention, Lee Harding will be the Pro Guest of Honour, and Christine McGowan will be the Fan Guest of Honour. Send your \$3 attending membership to Dennis Stocks, GPO Box 2268, Brisbane, Queensland 4001. :: And a special plea: if you live on the American continent or the European continent or the Antarctic continent, and you plan to visit Australia before 1975, plan to attend either Syncon or Q-Con this year. We are waiting to extend that famous Aussie hospitality that all the travel folders talk about.

\* You still have time to join LACON (\$6 non-attending membership, from John Foyster, PO Box 96, South Yarra, Victoria 3141) and vote for the Hugos. As well you will receive the many publications of the World Convention committee. Also join TORCON 2, the 1973 World Convention, which will be held in Toronto, Canada. At that convention, fans will vote on the site of the 1975 World Convention. Make inquiries to Robin Johnson, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne, Victoria 3001. A number of Australian fans plan to attend Torcon, and a smaller number will try to make it to Los Angeles this year.

\* Some book news: GOLLANCZ will publish the following books of interest to s f readers during early 1972: THE PURITAN PLEASURES OF THE DETECTIVE STORY: A PERSONAL MONOGRAPH (Erik Routley); THE PILTDOWN MEN (Ronald Millar); THE UNIVERSE MAKERS (Donald A Wollheim); REPORT ON PLANET THREE AND OTHER SPECULATIONS (Arthur C Clarke); THE DRAGON (Yevgeny Zamyatin); THE TOMBS OF ATUAN (Ursula LeGuin); DIMENSION X: FIVE SCIENCE FICTION NOVELLAS (ed. Damon Knight); DREAD COMPANION (Andre Norton); GREAT BRITISH TALES OF TERROR: GOTHIC STORIES OF HORROR AND ROMANCE, 1765-1840 (ed. Peter Haining); THE WIND FROM THE SUN (Arthur C Clarke); A MAZE OF DEATH (Philip K Dick); RINGWORLD (Larry Niven); CONSCIENCE INTERPLANETARY (Joseph Green); HOLDING WONDER (Zenna Henderson); THE LATHE OF HEAVEN (Ursula LeGuin); THE GODS THEMSELVES (Isaac Asimov); KULDESAK (Richard Cowper); THE PATTERNS OF CHAOS (Colin Kapp); THE DISAPPEARANCE (Philip Wylie); MORE THAN HUMAN (Theodore Sturgeon).

CORNMARKET REPRINTS (42 Conduit Street, London W1R ONL) will issue during 1972 the following books under the general heading, THE HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: THE REIGN OF GEORGE VI, 1900-1925 (Anonymous; first published 1763,

£4.50); MEMOIRS OF THE YEAR 2500 (Sebastian Mercier; 1722; £6); THE LAST MAN (Mary Shelley; 1826; 3 vols. £12.25); EUREKA, A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE (R F Williams; 1837; 3 vols. £12); THE AIR BATTLE, A VISION OF THE FUTURE (H Lang; 1859; £3.40); THE BATTLE OF DORKING CONTROVERSY (Sir G T Chesney et al; 1871; £6); THE COMING RACE (E Bulwer Lytton; 1871; £4.75); THREE HUNDRED YEARS HENCE (William Delisle Hay; 1881; £5.25); A CRYSTAL AGE (W H Hudson; 1887; £4.75); NEWS FROM NOWHERE (William Morris; 1890/1891; £4.50); LOOKING BACKWARD (Edward Bellamy; 1888; £6).

\* ROGER PEYTON has formed the ANDROMEDA BOOK CO., which offers a wide range of second-hand and new books. Roger's address is 131 Gillhurst Road, Harborne, Birmingham B17 8PG. Presumably if you show any interest, he will send you his attractively-presented catalogue. Just in case you happen to be in the area any Saturday morning, the Andromeda Book Co has a shop at 38 Reddal Hill Road, Old Hill, Warley, Worcestershire. :: And in case Australian readers want their books slightly sooner they should write to the SPACE AGE BOOK-SHOP, GPO Box 1267L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, or call at the shop at 317 Swanston Street, Melbourne. Merv Binns, Lee Harding, and company, have one of the world's widest ranges of science fiction, fantasy, pulps, and other types of cheap thrills. :: WALT LEE (PO Box 66273, Los Angeles, California 90066) sounds depressingly like John Bangsund in his finer moments, when he offers pre-orders on his REFERENCE GUIDE TO FANTASTIC FILMS. Walt says that it will be "the first book in what will be a comprehensive, multi-volume study of fantastic films (science fiction, fantasy, and horror)" which will "cover every fantastic film any mention of which has been discovered in twenty years of intensive search." It will contain about 20,000 film listings from some fifty countries over seventy-five years. Pre-publication price (ah! now you see the connection) is \$22.50; post-publication price will be \$28. I have not yet heard that it has been published; but it sounds interesting for people who like lots of lists. :: BRUCE McALLISTER (2928B Pepper Tree Lane, Costa Mesa, California 92626, USA) will edit a science fiction supplement for EDGE, "an international literary journal based in New Zealand, with an international circulation of 2000". Bruce would appreciate contributions of fiction, poetry, criticism, and graphics from all possible countries. The supplement also offers advertising space at \$US30 per page, or \$US15 per half-page.

\* This issue has many more pages than originally I planned for, because I wanted to fit in at least a reasonable number of the many letters that I wanted to publish. Other interesting letters remain in my files. I will save a few of them for next issue, but in the meantime I can only apologise to the people whose letters I could not use this issue, and say that:

\* WE ALSO HEARD FROM: BRIAN WILLIAMS, who sends postcards-of-comment regularly, and who never seems to climb out of the WAHF column. Apropos of SFC 19 he inquires about further material on Cordwainer Smith. I think that James Goddard (Woodlands Lodge, Woodlands, Southampton, Hants, England) plans to publish a special Smith issue of his magazine, CIPHER. I would like to write more about Smith's work, but lack of time stops such a huge task. Brian describes himself as "someone in danger of learning enough to understand Franz Rottensteiner". He found most intriguing (in SFC 22) "Lem's point that cultures dictate the form of their anti-cultures." :: ERIC LINDSAY thinks that "a lot of your correspondents imply that there are fixed standards by which they judge the value of any piece of fiction. I would very much like to know the standards by which you and your readers judge literature." Actually, we have taken 26 issues of SFC to show those "standards" - that is, if any of the magazine's correspondents would agree with each other. :: JACK WODHAMS says (about SFC 22) that "the article by Stanislaw Lem is one of those worthwhile

pieces that fanzines publish from time to time, so to redeem their good names and to perform a service. Mr Lem is a pro, unmistakably, and there is authority and command in every line that he writes." :: KEVIN DILLON sent lots of interesting but not-completely-comprehensible letters. Kevin can't trust himself to comment fully on Lem (not liked) but has lots of praise for "La Guin". I asked Kevin about his present life-style: "I have to try to survive in a purgatory of never knowing from one day to the next what can happen to me in this house or job situation, a too-long story to try to tell, living on an ancient level of scavenging, dragged out now for a year or so, no longer any help, no way to tidy up affairs at all - ever, I'd say - and I still battle to keep searching second-hand shops, odd library reading to survive - don't ask." No, there are some questions that I shouldn't ask. Unfortunately, it's all true. :: CY CHAUVIN had lots of objections to Franz Rottensteiner's various pieces in SFC 19, especially, "How can you judge a story from its philosophy, and condemn it for the message/ideas that it contains?... You can only condemn an author for his faulty style, plotting, etc." :: PERRY CHAPDELAINE says "Thanks for my picture on the front cover of SFC 23. Your artist did a fine job, even to the complexion." :: SYD BOUNDS speaks for many correspondents when he says that "this Lem is an infuriating character! Some of the time I agree with him, and some of the time I disagree totally." He likes the magazine because it helps him "to get some idea of personalities and outlooks in upside-down land. Glad to see that Ron Graham is still around." :: TO HELL IN A HANDBASKET, the article by HANK DAVIS that appeared in SFC 25, was only part of a thirteen-page letter, most of which I have still on file. During the rest of the letter, he comments on other sections of SFC 19. He complains a lot about Franz Rottensteiner, thinks that "this George Turner is a hard man to take" because "he does not like Sturgeon, but he praises a boring, plotless piece of agitprop like Wells' MEN LIKE GODS." I suspect that both statements about George are untrue. Hank has most to say about Alex Eisenstein's letter in SFC 21, and he conducts his own long investigation into the matter of the first s f anthologies. If only I had room to print all the extra information that Hank has collected. :: PATRICK KELLY points out to Perry Chapdelaine (SFC 23) that since the black schools that he talks about have been supported by white funds, then white values subvert any indigenous black values in these schools. "The establishment of black private schools seems to be a way out. The only question seems to be, 'Who will pay for them?'" :: BLAIR RAMAGE disagrees with George Turner: he thinks that the first PACIFIC BOOK OF AUSTRALIAN S F was much better than the second. "And just what are the requirements of a good story, Mr Turner?" :: ED CAGLE, in another letter, asks, "Speaking of old books, who is A Manly Bell? A publisher's list I have states that 1972 will see the re-release of several (actual number to be decided) novels by this Australian writer of some repute in years gone by. Being a curious sort, I extracted several dusty old collections in an attempt to locate this man. All I found was an A M Bell who wrote an old WEIRD TALES story that was chosen (now get this!) as one of the Best-of-the-Year in a mainstream anthology! Odd, what? By what secret method does an Aussie s f writer manage to crack the formidably stuffy barriers in the US? And who is he?" Considerable investigation of this mystery reveals little, except that "A M Bell" may be a long-forgotten female Australian writer. Legend has it (no, Lee Harding did not tell me this story) that A M Bell ran off with a jackeroo in the 1930s, but this story may be only part of the vast fund of lore that is a feature of Australian s f history. :: BILL ANDRESEN hoped that SFC would provide an adequate substitute for SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. Not a hope; although I think that the letters in this issue beat those that appeared in most issues of SFR. "Alas, it seems as if there really isn't any real successor to Geis' fanzine." Not unless Geis produces the successor. Bill didn't like the news that Robert Silverberg considers retirement from writing. However, since I received that



letter, I have heard that Robert Silverberg has delivered at least one more novel to his publishers. To judge from this year's LOCUS POLL, upon which four of Silverberg's novels appear, he should not get too upset about fandom's reactions to his recent work. In another letter, Bill made the comment that "I have been subscribing and writing to fanzines for about a year and a half now, and your letter was the first that I have ever received in reply to one of my scribblings." Wake up, you other fanzine editors. How many newcomers to fandom do we lose each year just because we cannot bother to write those extra few lines? Thanks for staying with fandom, Bill, despite the cool reception. Bill recommends SILENT RUNNING; a review of this new film will appear in SFC soon. :: In answer to somebody else's letter, I have already said that JEFF SCHALLES summarised very well the differences between my approach to fanzines and that of Arnie Katz's group. "Darkness isn't everywhere. Tons of untapped or misguided talent lies around in fandom, and eventually it will show itself. The ultimate fanzine may never be reached, but things aren't so bad." Jeff deserves his own SFC Good Buy Award: "As I am about the only person in the Pittsburgh club who still receives fanzines, I passed around S F COMMENTARY 19. Everybody else enjoyed it too. I took it to school with the rest of my fanzines, and some people noticed it and read it. It got quite a bit of mileage, even if that copy never provided you with any letters of comment." In answer to Perry Chapdelaine, Jeff recommends Ralph Ellison's INVISIBLE MAN. :: MICHAEL GLICKSOHN, a rival Hugo nominee who happens to publish a very good fanzine, said that "one gets a strange sense of deja vu when the fannish/sercon debate springs up in SFC courtesy of the surface-mail induced time." Mike is yet another person to tell me that the whole debate disappeared months ago in USA. :: POUL ANDERSON says that "it doesn't bother me in the least if a fan writer makes unfavourable comments; my experience has been that not even professional reviewers influence the sale of a book one way or another. It is, perhaps, a bit irritating to be misunderstood." Poul suggests that most critics can only understand some writers, and no critic can understand all writers. (He implies that Sandra Miesel's harsh criticism is far more valuable than the harsh criticism of - say - Franz Rotensteiner.) "Pro writers don't really get much response either," concludes Poul. "John D MacDonald, who deserves his immense popularity, has nevertheless himself described the process of writing as like dropping feathers down a well." :: A PHILIPPE BOYER (46 Saranac Boulevard, Apt 5, Station T, Toronto, Ontario, Canada) wants me to mention a new magazine called MECHTA which has vast ambitions ("MECHTA will attempt to work from a broad intellectual base"). Philippe would appreciate contributions from Australians, and especially studies of Australian writers. Write to Philippe for more details. He adds, "It would be interesting to hold one Convention on Ayer's Rock.... Come to Toronto in 1973, if only to see the beginnings of the World's Tallest Building (150 stories) and the 7000-volume s f library that the city owns." :: In SFC 23, KENNETH FAIG Jr also finds Silverberg's letter disheartening. He thinks that I should have mentioned EXTRAPOLATION and RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY when I talked about "serious" fanzines. Perhaps, although Tom Claerson doesn't claim that EXTRAPOLATION is a fanzine. "Gillam's evaluation of de Camp is as delightful a piece of criticism as I've seen in SFC to date." :: GRAY BOAK was the only person other than the author herself to point out (re SFC 24) that Ursula Le Guin invented a feasible biological basis for Gethenian marriage in THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. Good detective work. Gray also says, "I read YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN while travelling on a commuter special out of London at the time of the Quebec diplomat-snatching. I looked up from the 'ramjet' section to see the headline 'MARTIAL LAW DECLARED IN CANADA'. For a moment I felt like a Dick character, stranded half-way between two realities, and not knowing which way to turn." :: DAVID BOUTLAND says, "I'm heartily tired of this German-Polish pontification, and your own uncritical acceptance of it. Franz Rotensteiner and Stanislaw Lem obviously do not exist. They are simply the

fabulous creations of Bruce R Gillespie. A gigantic hoax." If only you were right. Then I could write brilliant articles like Franz's and great novels like SOLARIS. David has changed his address recently to 48 Empire Street, Haberfield, NSW. :: PATRICK McGUIRE made some very interesting comments on SFC 22, but they arrived too late to form a regular part of the letter column. Patrick's claim to fame is that he can read Russian, so he can check on Lem. Also, he makes the point that I have made several times, although nobody has believed me, that "The European tradition of scholarship is not so 'polite' as is the system of the English-speaking countries. Often articles by Europeans assume a degree of belligerence that one rarely meets in the scholarly writings of native-born speakers of English. People should realise that such European writers probably do not have quite the 'chip on the shoulder' that they seem to have." Patrick has also read a lot of Lem's stories, which do not "match" with his criticism. :: CHRISTINE McGOWAN wrote lots of extra interesting comments about TAU ZERO. "You and Sandra are talking about two different things, I think. You criticise TAU ZERO, quite fairly, as literature; on the other hand, Sandra sees it as the presentation of a magnificent idea, which it is. To read TAU ZERO was a bit like watching IMT, that now-defunct variety show, of which it was said that you made tea, put the cat out, and so forth during the acts, so that you wouldn't miss the advertisements." :: SFC 25 disappointed JOHN BROSNAN: he thinks that writers, even Farmer, should leave other people to defend their works. "Funniest thing about Farmer's tirade was the bit at the end where he welcomed Lem officially into the s f fold. I imagine that's the last thing in the world that Lem would want." John disagrees with Barry Gillam that Kubrick does not have a "style": "perhaps Barry will change his mind about Kubrick when he sees A CLOCKWORK ORANGE." With any luck, Barry will write a review of CLOCKWORK ORANGE for SFC. It opens in June in Melbourne. :: A BERTRAM CHANDLER hopes to attend Syncon 2. People who attended Syncon 1 will remember that Bert was the star of that convention, especially when he told those very dry, very amusing stories of his. "Re. the real life identity of the bossy bitch in WHAT YOU KNOW - I wish that you hadn't asked. Now you've got me wondering." Soon, Bert hopes to publish THE BROKEN CYCLE, a Grimes story, and the complete Lieutenant Grimes stories in a volume tentatively titled THE HARD WAY UP. Ace will soon publish GATEWAY TO NEVER and THE INHERITORS. Bert has expanded the Ditmar-winning novelette, THE BITTER PILL, into a novel. :: And, chronologically last, comes a postcard from HAL DAVIS (who recently changed his address to 50 East 1st Street, Apt 1, New York, New York 10003) who doesn't seem to like THE RECOGNITIONS as much as I do, and adds, "You are quite perceptive re. Joanna Russ. I have met her, and drawn similar conclusions. Her written persona is a fair reflection."

\* Well, right now it is the second week of May, and I might have this issue in the mail by the end of the school vacation. Big hope. Most of this issue was typed during April. Next issue will contain... well, I won't say what will be there, because I don't know yet. Lots of articles to choose from, though. A couple of magazines you should not miss: CIPHER (James Goddard, address in this issue) contains in its latest issue a long interview with Brian W Aldiss. The most interesting fanzine item for a long time. Australian agent is Eric Lindsay (address also in this issue). FOUNDATION is the first professional printed magazine about science fiction to appear for a long time. At last the magazine that we all hope for, even while we twirl our duplicator-handles? 50p (\$A 1) per copy from The Administrator, The Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Barking Precinct, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS, England. Charles Barren is the Editor-in-Chief, on behalf of the Science Fiction Foundation, but our old friends George Hay and Ken Bulmer are heavily involved as well. More details next issue. With a bleat of trumpets, we depart. Seeyuz. Last stencil typed May 8. \*

A Nigh-Witless Account by John Bangsund

What indeed? - as Ross Chamberlain's little man, Q, seemed to remark quite often in some ageing fanzines I am rather fond of. Clubs springing up everywhere, new fanzines bulging from every mailbox, vast commercial enterprises, and that supreme temerity the Australia in Seventy-Five bid.

Dear me, all this activity! Do you remember when there were only ASFR and occasional Foyster SAPSazines? (And what happened to that crispy bacon we used to get before the war?)

My assignment - and Bruce Gillespie is paying for it, so I'd better get down to the job - is to fill this page with stuff about fan activities in Australia. Page? - it should be an inch-thick one-shot! There's just too much going on. There are (would you believe it?) Australian fans who don't know who I am! - rank neos who think Bruce started it all, who've never heard of Lee Harding, John Foyster, Bob Smith, John Baxter. Why, back in '42, when Lee and I were producing our first crudzines in kindergarten... But I digress.

No mucking about now: this is fair dinkum (as our ancestors used to say). We're going for the Big One in 1975, and we're confident that with your support this will be a Worldcon to remember. It won't be awfully big, of course. We've cunningly planned things so that we are so far away from the main centres of fandom that only the most dedicated, most interesting fans will be present. Please yourself, but if you want to get back to those crispy Worldcons we used to get before the war, you'll vote Australia in '75.

is the vast commercial enterprise alluded to above. An entirely fan-orientated business (Ron Graham and Mervyn Binns are the proprietors), Space Age carries an incredible array of science fiction and fantasy, new and old, nostalgic and sickeningly with-it. Books, pulps, fanzines that you haven't seen for years - all on sale in this incredible shop. GPO Box 1267L, Melbourne 3001, for catalogues and things. Mervyn has a mailing-list approaching the thousand mark in Australia alone. The majority of these people, fortunately, aren't fans. Not yet, anyway.

There were about a dozen when I last looked, but that was about six months ago and there might be more since then. I'll just list the ones I know about.

The Melbourne Science Fiction Club (GPO Box 1267L, Melbourne 3001: secretary Mervyn Binns) started about 20-odd years ago, has existed for all that time without benefit of organization or programmes, and now has two locations - one above the Space Age Bookshop, the other in South Yarra. Associated with it is

The Melbourne Fantasy Film Group (GPO Box 4039, Melbourne 3001: Robin Johnson, secretary), which has regular screenings of sf and fantasy films in 16 and 35mm. Homeless for some months, it now has Big Secret Plans to acquire its own theatre.

The Nova Mob (PO Box 96, South Yarra, Victoria 3141: John Foyster, Bossa Nova) meets occasionally. Loosely associated with the Mob is a group of fans which meets weekly in a dimly-lit eating-place in the city. At these meetings Plots are Hatched and Destinies Decided. The Melbourne University SF Association (Secretary, Clive Morley, 8/280 Cardigan St, Carlton, Vic 3053) and The Monash University SF Association (Secretary, Alex Gas, 75 Trevallyn St, Sth Caulfield, Vic 3162) are active in a way that I am only vaguely aware of. Other Australian groups (I'm rapidly running out of space here) are The Sydney Science Fiction Foundation (GPO Box 4593, Sydney 2001; Gary Mason, Secretary), which is hosting the 11th Australian SF Convention; the Futurian Society of Sydney (GPO Box 4440, Sydney 2001: Secretary, Mike McGuinness), the oldest club in Australia; DUSK (Secretary, Sabina Heggie, 20 Tryon Avenue, Wollstonecraft, NSW 2165), a Star Trek orientated club which has spread interstate; the Sydney University SF Association (Secretary, Leith Morton, 110 O'Connor St, Haberfield, NSW 2045); the Brisbane Fantasy & Science Fiction Association (GPO Box 2268, Brisbane 4001: Secretary Dennis Stocks); and the University of Adelaide SF Society (Secretary, Allan Sandercock, 1 Michael St, Lockleys, SA 5032); all of which deserve several pages to themselves.

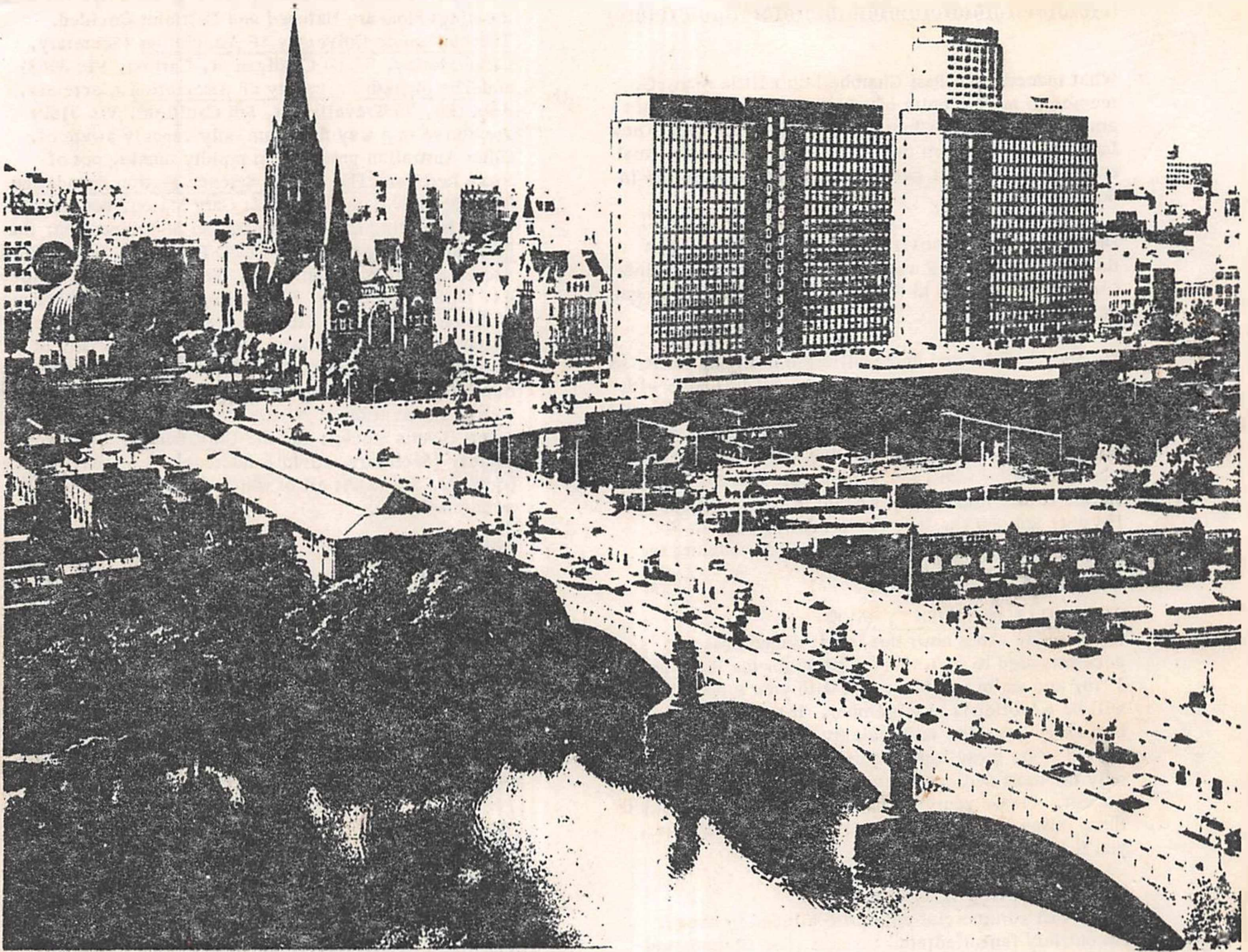
It wouldn't be too hard to prove that Australia conducted the last con of 1971 and the first of 1972, since Advention One in Adelaide started about 3pm on 31st December, continued until 3rd January, and was great fun. Coming up are the Melbourne Eastercon (Sec: Bill Wright, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne 3001), the 11th Australian Convention, Syncon 72 (Sec: Shayne McCormack, GPO Box 4593, Sydney 2001), at which the Fan Guest of Honour will be the DUFF winner, and the 2nd Brisbane convention in January 1973.

is the Down Under Fan Fund. Similar to TAFF, but the winner will be Fan GoH at Syncon 72 in August. Candidates are Lesleigh Luttrell and Andy Porter. Information and voting forms from Fred Patten, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd, Culver City, California 90230, or John Foyster, PO Box 96, South Yarra, Vic 3141.

So many these days that I will just mention titles and publishers. Bill Wright, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne 3001, will send you a detailed list if you ask nicely. SF Commentary (Bruce Gillespie) is Hugo-class; so is Scythrop (me) but I wouldn't say so myself; Chao (John Alderson); Cor Serpentis (Monash USA); Gegen-schein (Eric Lindsay); Norstrilian News (John Foyster); Boys Own Fanzine (Foyster & Edmonds); Rataplan (Leigh Edmonds); Terran Times (DUSK); The Fanarchist (David Grigg); The Mentor and Wombat (Ron Clarke); The Somerset Gazette (Melbourne SFC); Tolkien Bulletin (Michael O'Brien); Yggdrasil (Melbourne USFA); all very readable. The big project this year is Kangaroo Feathers (Bob Smith), which will concentrate on re-printing the best from Australian fanzines, past and present. Then there's ANZAPA (retiring OE, Dennis Stocks): current membership includes 4 Americans, one Briton, the rest Australians; a few vacancies if you're quick. And, finally, might I just mention a book called JOHN W. CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE? To be published by myself and Ron Graham about June, price \$2.00 (US\$2.50) from Space Age Books.



# This is the place...



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