

# ZENITH SPECULATION

review and comment on speculative fiction

JANUARY 1966

2/-

Christopher Anvil,  
Competent Hack.

PART 2

RUSSELL

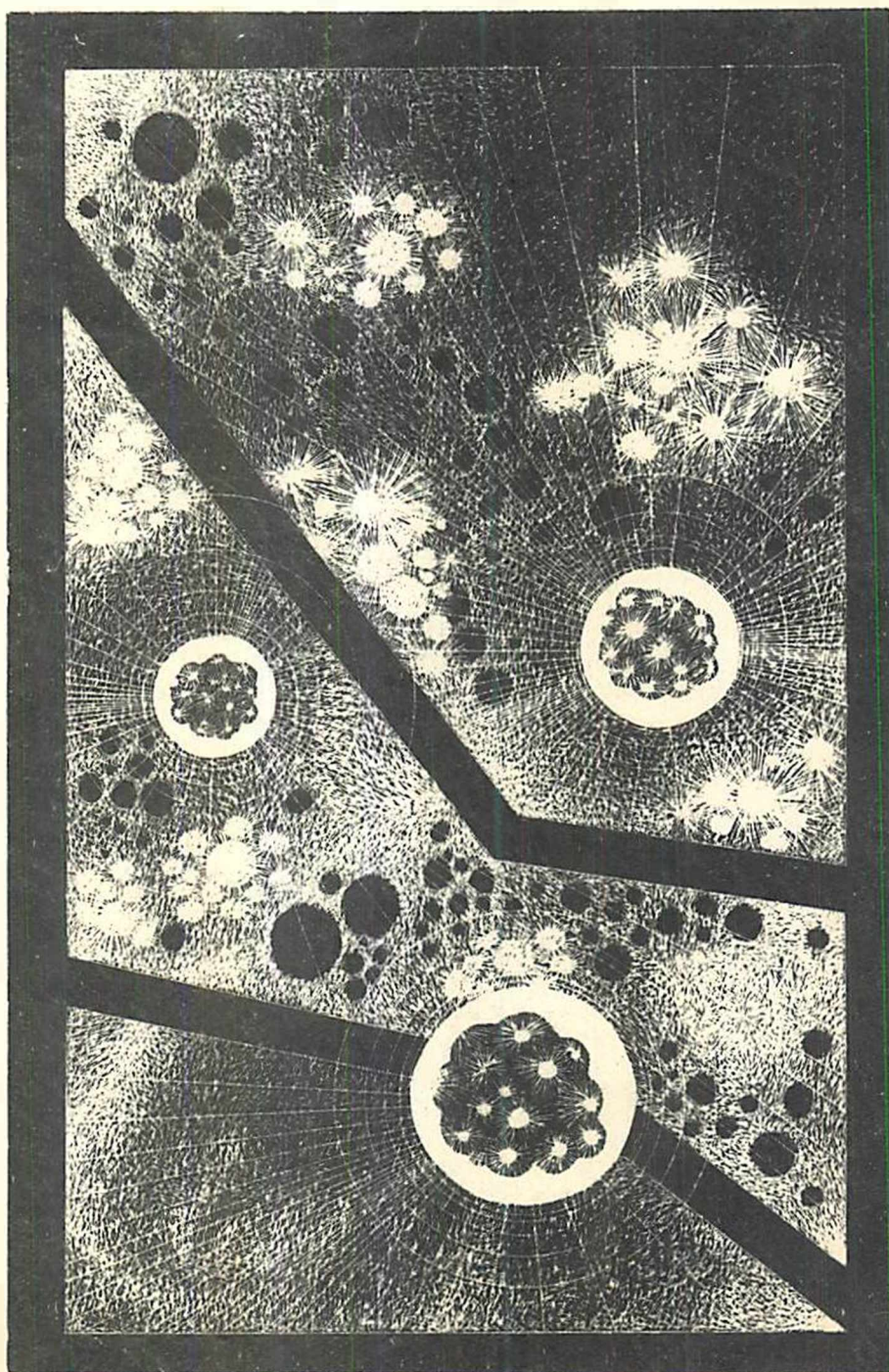
AN EVALUATION

THE DROWNED  
PLOT

( of J.G.Ballard)

AND FURTHER CRITICISM

AND DISCUSSION



# ZENITH SPECULATION

REVIEW AND COMMENT UPON SPECULATIVE FICTION

January 1966

Vol.1. No. 11

ZENITH SPECULATION is an amateur magazine containing criticism & discussion of speculative fiction

It is published quarterly from the editorial address, to which all articles, artwork, comments on the magazine, and UK subscriptions should be addressed.

No payment can at present be made for published material, but complimentary copies will be sent to contributors to the magazine.

ZENITH will be exchanged with other amateur magazines, as pre-arranged with the editor.

Subscriptions are 10/- for five issues, and should be sent to the editor. Single copies each 2/-. U.S. subscriptions are \$1.50 for five issues, and should be sent to our Agent, Albert J. Lewis, c/o 1825 Greenfield Ave., Los Angeles California, Single copies 30¢

Column advertising rates; 6d for 10 words (10¢). Rates for display advertisements on request.

## Articles

- |                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| RUSSELL                            | 4  |
| Richard Gordon                     |    |
| THE DROWNED PLOT (of J.G. Ballard) | 10 |
| J.P. Patrizio                      |    |
| ....ABOUT TELEPATHIST              | 18 |
| John Brunner                       |    |
| CHRISTOPHER ANVIL, COMPETENT HACK  | 27 |
| Peter R. Weston (Part 2.)          |    |

## Departments

- |                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| CONTENTS & EDITORIAL   | 1  |
| DOUBLE BOOKING         | 19 |
| (Book Reviews)         |    |
| Archie & Beryl Mercer  |    |
| THE MELTING POT        | 35 |
| (Letters from readers) |    |

all unsigned work is by the editor

FRONT COVER by Joseph Zajackowski

Interior illustrations by Latto, Zajackowski, & Pitt.

Edited and Published by

Peter R. Weston, 9 Porlock Crescent, Northfield, Birmingham, 31.

Copyright 1966 for the Editor.



# THE SOLITARY HOBBY

The evidence seems to be that science fiction fandom is a failure. This is a rather broad statement to make, but a wide variety of hobbies and activities have their own fandoms, and just about every one of these is more successful than science fiction fandom has been.

Our particular field has had forty years in which to develop, and in all that time no continuous effort has been sustained for more than a comparatively short time. (Some of the APAs have had a long if chequered history, but these by their very nature do not affect the majority of fandom) At last we have the BSFA and the American N3F, both of which have lasted (as their predecessors did not) for some years. Yet both are underfinanced, under-supported, both being purely amateur organisations, voluntarily staffed, with uncertain futures.

At sporadic intervals individuals have sponsored elaborate schemes and publications, such as Operation Fantast, Inside & Fantasy Advertiser, and Walter Gillings' many semi-professional activities, but all have inevitably crumbled into decay, being founded as they were on individual, unpaid effort. Contrast our fandom with almost any other -- we will choose one as unlikely as home-winemaking. They have a weekly printed magazine with a circulation of thousands and a paid staff. They have a nationwide organisation and local clubs having memberships in the hundreds at even small towns. When they hold a convention, they organise special trains, -- 3 of them, from Cardiff to Liverpool, in a recent case -- to transport the attendees. Whereas science fiction's most ambitious project was the hiring of a charter plane for the 1957 World Convention, in London. And that episode became a factor in the subsequent disorders which shattered the World Science Fiction Society, Inc.

And when science fiction fandom is given organs of expression, such as the BSFA, or SF Horizons, or even ZENITH SPECULATION, with what enthusiasm does the field greet these ventures? Precious little! From the degree of reaction to these projects, one might assume that most science fiction readers are not, never have been, interested. Why is this so?

The trouble, I suggest, lies in the fact that science fiction is a passive hobby. Whereas other interests lead their enthusiasts into action -- mountain climbing, spotting trains, making pooten, -- Science fiction can be enjoyed with a minimum of effort. The SF reader, or fan (the difference lies only in hair-splitting) does not need any measure of organisation beyond that felt by self-interest. He may find a shortage of reading matter in his locality, in which case some central authority can usefully provide books. He does not necessarily need checklists, magazines of criticism, or the friendship of fellow enthusiasts.

EDITORIAL by

PETER R. WESTON.

Science fiction is a solitary hobby. You cannot very well indulge in group reading. Time spent in attending and organising activities is actually time lost from the real pursuit of SF, which is by reading SF. Efforts have been made to persuade the SF reader that he should take part in allied activities, but in every case there is something of a fallacy involved. Science fiction Conventions, for example, are not, strictly speaking, SF Conventions. Although a sincere concession is always made to SF as a pursuit, most attendees realise that this is close to hypocrisy. Few can give, and few can listen to, an address about SF for any length of time. A Convention's real purpose is a social one, and this is not so much the pursuit of SF as a hobby as it is of being friendly with, and enjoying the company of, a number of interesting acquaintances. The almost common factor of an interest in SF makes for the start of conversation. It is useful, but this is, if I may coin the term, 'friendship fandom'. Every Convention attracts attendees who do not read SF — but who enjoy the company of those who do. These 'fandom fans' are often wives of fans.

Much the same applies for other fan activities. Those who checklist science fiction stories are not following SF as a hobby so much as they are enjoying 'checklist fandom'. They might just as likely have collected — and checklisted — records, match boxes, beer mats. And as for the fanzines, their editors are of either 'friendship fandom', — when their magazines are letter substitutes, or of 'amateur journalism fandom', — when they ascribe to literacy, attractiveness of content, etc. This second class of editors has more in common with those who edit the journals of other hobbies than with fellow SF fans.

So, then, science fiction should be read and enjoyed. There must be many thousands who do just that. A bare nucleus of a few hundred want to organise, publicise, create, — but their efforts are thwarted by the nature of the beast. All evidence indicates that this is the wrong field for creativity. And that, I submit, is why science fiction fandom will never be united, will never coalesce around one or two serious magazines of perpetual life if impermanent editors.

And now, only one thing remains to be done; — and that is for ZENITH SPECULATION to tell the lie, by gaining reader support, by thriving, by becoming a printed magazine — and by lasting.

\* APA — Amateur Press Associations, run by science fiction fans.

*Peter R. Weston*

---

## Stranger Than Fiction

" I cannot think of a story that could be written today that is not, in fact, a variation of some part of the body of fiction created by the generations of craftsman entertainers who have gone before and often well ahead of those of us who labour in that vineyard today."

Algis Budrys, Introduction to THE FURIOUS FUTURE.



# RUSSELL

---

an evaluation

## RICHARD GORDON

Eric Frank Russell has been one of the leading writers of science fiction since before the last war, and he is certainly among the most popular writers currently working in the genre. His writings, although apparently straightforward, and typically pseudo-American on the surface, presents some curious anomalies. No sooner has one read several of his stories, and decided to typecast him in his usual role as a science fictional Mickey Spillane, than something different comes from his pen, and the built-up preconceptions are shattered. For there is a great deal more to Russell than his slap-happy space opera would have one believe.

Russell was born in 1905, and was therefore about 32 when his first story, -- "A Saga Of Pelican West", was published in Astounding in February 1937. This was the culmination of a lifelong interest in SF, and the strange, and the beginning of another career for him.

As a writer of science fiction, he has gone through perhaps three main phases, all of which are distinct from the others, and easily examined as such. His first such phases, one that still lingers on in his writing, was best typified by his first, and many would say best, novel. This was SINISTER BARRIER, which was published in the first issue of Unknown magazine in 1939, giving rise to the myth that the submission of that story had occasioned the birth of the magazine, which was unfortunately not true.

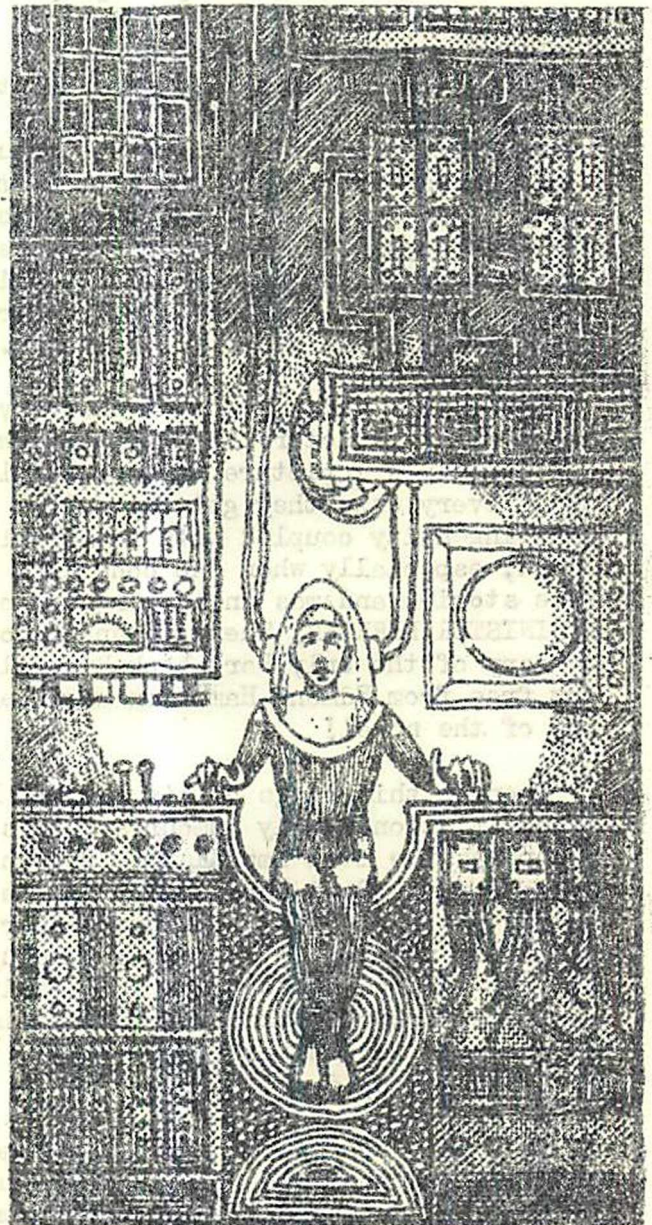
The basis of this science fiction classic is the Fortean theme that "we are property". Russell had long been interested in Fort and his writings, and the plot nucleus was secured from one of Fort's four books, LO!, published in 1931. This interest in Fort and his writings still remains today, and can be seen in such non-SF books as his GREAT WORLD MYSTERIES, and this interest forms his first and most important phase. The basic theme of the human race being the property of other races, unknown to itself, until the hero discovers the fact and proceeds to reveal the race, has been repeated in several subsequent novels, although none of them have the verisimilitude and impact of his first, SINISTER BARRIER. In this novel several scientists suffer sudden death, and the hero, smelling the customary rat, discovers that in every case they were getting too



close to some secret in the course of their investigations into similar phenomena. The rest of the novel is engaged with the discovery and defeat of a race of 'fireball'-like creatures, called Vitons, who live in the atmosphere and who control the human race much as we control herds of cattle. He makes particularly good use of established facts to create an eerie atmosphere in the book, which is derived from the fact that much of the basis of the story is true; - for all we know the entire situation may be gospel truth!

This novel appeared in 1939, and the next in this theme of man under control was DREADFUL SANCTUARY, serialised in Astounding, in 1948, where the human race is secretly divided in a manner reminiscent of Budry's "real people", into Normans and the rest of humanity. The former are the real humans, descended from Martians and so forth, who colonised Earth in the distant past, and who want to assert their "rights". Like the Vitons in SINISTER BARRIER, but in a rather more human manner, they attempt to direct human progress to their own ends. The Vitons have humanity hold wars for their own amusement, while the Normans sabotage space-shot after space-shot so that the common Earth stock should not get to the planets and discover the truth about the secret society living among them. In a slightly inexplicable ending, it seems that humanity succeeds in breaking free.

SENTINELS FROM SPACE, a novel which appears to almost satirise this theme, concerns the Venusian colony's struggle for independence against Earth. There are twelve different forms of ESP used in this book, but it is impossible for any one character to employ more than one until the hero comes along, and he, of course, can control all twelve, and



NOV 1940.



some more besides. The 'control' theme emerges again at the end when it is explained that the hero isn't really human, and that the war isn't really being controlled by humans at all, but by two warring interstellar races, unknown to the Earthmen.

And in his recent and perhaps poorest novel, *WITH A STRANGE DEVICE*, the hero, Richard Bransome, a defence scientist working in the USA, is suddenly convinced of the fact that he is a murderer and is about to be discovered. So, fairly naturally, he leaves his job and starts running. It is not until he discovers that the murder never took place, and that there are many other scientists in the same predicament, that he pulls out all the stops and starts investigating. He discovers that he and the others are being hypnotically controlled into believing themselves murderers, by the ubiquitous Others, so that they leave their jobs, and deprive the West of valuable scientists. The theme in this case is less fantastic than in the others, being almost frighteningly possible, but the basic theme of man possessed and controlled by unseen forces is still there, though perhaps it is now a bit weaker.

Apropos of this, right at the very beginning of his career, in 1937, Russell said of his characters in an interview; (*SCIENTIFICTION*, August 1937);

"Sometimes I picture them as helpless victims of forces beyond their control, but in every case they get themselves out of their difficulties by ordinary human ingenuity coupled with favourable circumstances." A prophetic remark indeed, especially when one considers that at the time he had just sold his first three stories and was in the process of working on others, and almost certainly on *SINISTER BARRIER*. There is an ad. on the back of the same little magazine for any copy of the only Fort book Russell didn't have at that time; he later got a copy free from Edmond Hamilton when he and his wife toured America on the proceeds of the novel!

Even at this stage of his career, Russell was gaining a reputation for being science fiction's only humourist. This is a reputation which has struck, and it is perhaps the most immediately recognisable trait of his writing. When he won a Hugo for the Best Short Story of the year at the 1953 World Convention, it was for his unashamedly humorous short story *ALLAMAGOOSA*, a story which owed absolutely nothing to SF in its make-up and plot of bureaucracy at its most incredibly tangled-up during a space-ship inspection by a "shore" admiral. At the same time, however, this humour humanises his characters, and makes one realise that however far in the future and in the universe man gets, he will, we hope, still be as stupid as ever.

The basic premise of Russell's humorous stories is that all authority is stupid and pompous; the enemy is stupid, pompous, and also bungling, (although basically human and endearing even when at their most callous and Nazi-like,) while the hero, the traditional lone hero, shoots through the book winning left, right, and centre, with a skill reminiscent more of Mike Hammer with a touch of the Saint thrown in for good measure, than of anything else. As such they are little more than space opera, basically, but he manages to make them into a lot more. Message-pushing is always dangerous, whether in a story or a protest-song, but Russell does it even in his most humorous stories, and his point always comes over loud and clear.

This humorous element is typified by three novels and a number of short stories, all of which are the products of the last decade. The most typical of the trio is perhaps NEXT OF KIN, a trivial though immensely amusing novel which again bears out another remark that he had made over twenty years before in his 1937 SCIENTIFICTION interview; "...the most important thing in science fiction seems to me to make it plausible. For, being a commercial traveller, I can tell thumping whoppers with complete gusto and get away with it..."

In the light of this remark it seems obvious that he cast himself in the role of the hero, the space-scout Leeming who gets wrecked on an enemy planet during a war and is made PoW, and it is also significant when one considers his complete lack of regard for science fiction's most hallowed convention, Einstein's Relativity Theory. But this can be considered later.

In many ways, this novel is no different from the floods of PoW stories that resulted from the last war, as is his other war-type novel, WASP. The SF element here derives from the psychological differences in the minds of the aliens that Leeming plays upon with such complete impunity. He manages to escape, and also to incidentally win the war for Earth, merely by his ability to tell bigger and better lies to overcome bigger and better obstacles. As such it is unimportant and merely amusing. The only target of the humour is his usual one, stupid and bloated officialdom which can never see further than the bits of red tape that tie up everything. His aliens aren't really alien at all, they are all too familiar.

This applies also with that other recent novel, WASP, which employs the same ingredients of fast-moving action and alien stupidity. The hero, James Lowry, is smuggled on to an enemy planet during a war with the Nazi-like Sirians, in order to 'soften up' the planet before the invasion of Terran troops. The reading is fast and furious, and very entertaining, as Lowry outwits his clumsy enemies all along the line and stirs up the entire planet into panic through his own unaided efforts.

The third novel of this type, THE GREAT EXPLOSION, is an expansion of his near-classic 1951 novella, AND THEN THERE WERE NONE. It describes what happens when an awakening Earth sends out an interstellar expedition to contact the colonies which left Earth hundreds of years before, during the First Interstellar Expansion so beloved of SF. The first planet they find is peopled by the descendants of criminals, who exist in a criminal code of morality. Repulsed and fooled, the ship goes on to the next planet, only to find a planet of nudists, who insist that the Earthmen deport themselves in a like manner! Russell here has a grand time poking fun at the flabby paunches of bureaucrats, but there is little more to it than that. Finally they arrive on a planet which is run upon Gandhian principles of non-resistance. The colonists' refusal to have anything to do with Authority, with such results that half the crew refuse to obey their officers, and mutiny, joining the colonists. This is amusing, but Russell is obviously also trying to put over a serious, though idealistic point. The only flaw in the concept of civil disobedience is that it won't work when the opposition is prepared to use force, which Russell's authority rarely is. It is all too often fat and entirely bureaucratic.



These then, are the principal parts of his humorous-type stories, although there are a lot more which could be mentioned. There is often an underlying seriousness under all the humour which makes one wonder just what Russell is trying to do.

It is here that the third and perhaps ultimately the most important element comes into his writing; — that of the underlying humanitarian which always seems to be bursting out of the outwardly tough-guy Russell. His villains are rarely true villains; they are usually incapable of true cruelty, and if they are so capable, they are depicted as sadistic bores who have utterly no sense whatsoever, so that one merely laughs at them.

However, some of these stories of Russell's are unconcerned with either of the other two basic phases. This I term the humanitarian aspect. Early in his career Russell said that he considered himself a rationalist, which indicates someone unwillingly to accept anything which is not made apparent by his own reason or intelligence. This seems to be the "external" tough-guy Russell speaking, for deep down he appears to have deep-rooted belief in the human being and his abilities. His aliens are never inferior because they are aliens; they may be pathetic and bumbling, but these are human faults, and they are such that they tend to endear us to them rather than the opposite. Even his humorous stories seem to be a permanent protest against unthinking and strait-laced officialdom. He is a self-admitted lover of animal life, and of life in general, and again, this is evident in this third branch of his writing. Typical of these stories are "The Witness", from *Other Worlds*, and "Dear Devil", a story which appeared in the same magazine a year before, in 1950. The latter story is particularly worthy of attention; it tells the simple and moving story of how a Martian poet, physically repugnant to the Earth children he befriends, stays behind on a war-blasted Earth for purely humanitarian reasons, and overcomes their hate and fear of his strange shape through his intrinsic humanity. Humanity to Russell is not the mere possession of two arms and two legs, and so forth, it is the innate quality of compassion and humanitarianism, and to his way of thinking, an alien is as likely to possess these qualities in equal or in greater measure than man himself.

It has been argued that such stories were not written as the highly effective calls for racial tolerance that they are, as much for the love which Russell holds for all animals; a love which seems strange in one who professes himself a rationalist and acts the part of the tough guy !

This humanitarian aspect is also evident in his stories where man deals with man in an inhumane manner. In *I AM NOTHING Astounding*, 1952, a dictator has started a war purely for conquest, and is only persuaded to call it off (because of his conscience), when he reads the pitiful scrawl of an orphaned girl on the enemy side;— "I am nothing and nobody. My house went bang. My cat was stuck to a wall. I wanted to pull it off. They wouldn't let me. They threw it away."

The fact that this sort of stimulus would be unlikely to reform a warmongering dictator is unimportant, for it gives an important insight into Russell's mind at the same time. It is admittedly dangerous to play the game of psycho-analysing authors from their writings, but it seems that in this story, as in

many others, Russell projected his own personality into the central character, the dictator, and succeeded in proving to himself (and to anyone else who cares to read messages into it), that he himself would be incapable of such action, that underneath the 'Mike Hammer' image, there lies someone much more humanitarian. It is an enigmatic and interesting question to consider which of his writings reflect his basic personality, since they vary in mood to such a great extent. I would be inclined to say that these last ones, such as I AM NOTHING, are more typical.

The only series that Russell ever attempted was the Jay Score stories, written during the early 1940's after a temporary slump in his writing. These four robot stories about Earthmen and chess-playing, tentacled Martians, the prototypes for Russell's later lovable aliens, were later collected into book form by Dobson in 1956 as MEN, MARTIANS, AND MACHINES. The humour which characterises much of his later work is there, especially in the arguments between the Terrans and Martians, who are of utterly different shapes and environments, but are still the best of friends. This too seems like an unconscious wish for equality, but perhaps one is reading too much into it there! The Martians are in fact more real than the humans in the stories, and this is another trend later continued.

His remark made in the interview in SCIENTIFICTION, earlier quoted, that "...the most important thing in science fiction seems to me to make it plausible" assumes some importance in the last main point to be made about his writings. This is his complete and utter disregard for the conventions of SF, and in particular that thorny old problem about what to do with the Theory of Relativity. Russell's answer is simple; - ignore it! While other authors are busily building complicated systems of logic to support their half-thought-out notions of hyper-space, and so on, Russell simply has his characters sail right past light-speed with the minimum of bother. There seems little point in doing otherwise until the Theory of Relativity is proven in its entirety. (Which seems perilously close to being done, more's the pity from the point of view of the SF author!)

Russell's science is nil, and his pretence of science is nil. His characters usually refer to their ship's instruments in the most disrespectful terms possible, and he makes it plain that he couldn't give a damn about even trying to think how his engines and so forth might work. This air of disrespect suits the stories, and seems in place.

His lighter stories completely belie his fascination with Fort, and his discoveries, and were it not for certain stylistic similarities, it might have been two different men who wrote SINISTER BARRIER and NEXT OF KIN. And these in their turn are entirely different from his third style. His humanitarian stories, if one must call them such, are more reminiscent of Simak and his quiet pastoral scenes than the Eric Frank Russell who refers to the human species as "homo saps" and acts as if he had transported Al Capone's world out a few light years. These diversities show that Russell is more than a mere pulp-writer, though at first one might be excused for thinking him so. Apart from Wyndham, he is the only British SF writer to have been in the field since before the War, and it seems sad that his present standard is lower than it was a decade or so ago. For Russell at his best is among the very best - his stories are fast-moving, colourful, amusing, but with a certain compassion, which at first seems out of place. It may not be till later that one discovers he is playing a dual role. The picture has been confused by his self-portrayal as a harder man than he really is.



Joe Patrizio is a well-read young writer who is fast becoming one of the mainstays of the magazine, this being his fourth article to appear in ZENITH. He prefers not to 'take sides' in the current pro- & anti- Ballard dispute, and instead seeks the best of both viewpoints. Here at last is an article that makes a serious attempt to get behind the facade of public success and critical adulation, to give us a calm and considered appraisal of J.G. Ballard's real worth as a science fiction writer.

---

# the drowned plot (of j.g.ballard.)

AN EVALUATION BY  
J. P. PATRIZIO.

---

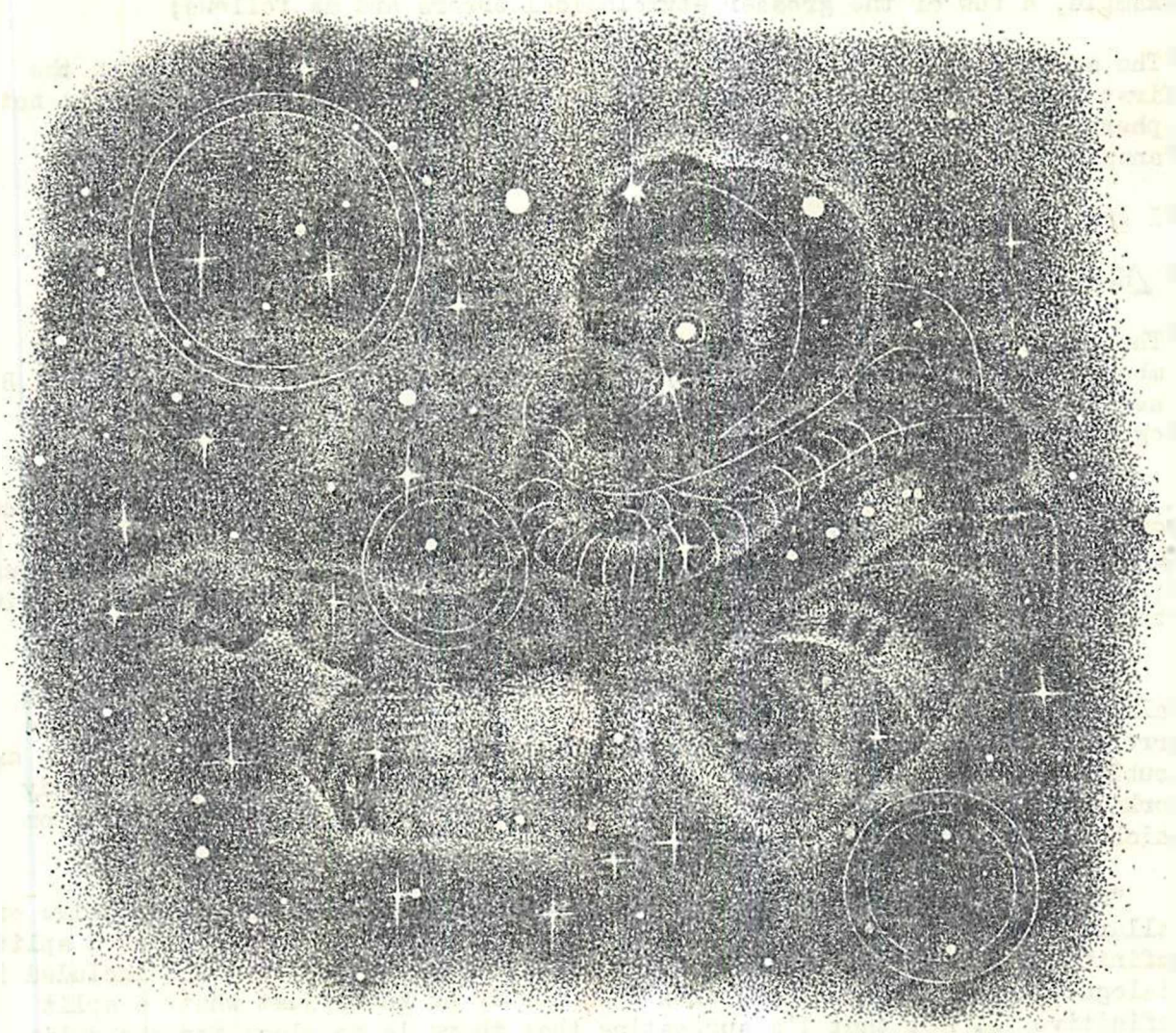
Recently there has developed a split in the ranks of readers of science fiction. This split has been caused principally by the works of one man — J.G. Ballard, — and it seems that when his name is mentioned all reason flies, laying bare blinding emotions which cause protagonists to abandon logic and to resort to insults.

Having read extremist arguments on both sides, it seems to me that a more detailed examination of Ballard's writing might be in order; if it achieves nothing else it will explain why I find J.G. Ballard unsatisfactory as an author.

## 1) Ballard The Technician.

"Ballard is one of the brightest new stars in post-war fiction."  
Kingsley Amis.





"In J.G. Ballard's book The Drowned World we have something without precedent in this country, a novel by a science fiction author that can be judged by the highest standards."

Kingsley Amis.

"We will not see its better this year."

Brian Aldiss about The Drowned World.

Any writer who wishes to be taken seriously, who is not writing just for the money, must of necessity be fluent in his own language. This does not mean that he may not venture outside the traditional limits of the language, using words in untried context, say, but a writer using words wrongly through obvious ignorance, making mistakes of grammar and perpetrating similar technical errors will irritate his readers to the extent that they may not even finish reading his work, and if they do, they may look with suspicion on any conclusion he may draw.



In The Drowned World, Ballard shows a disregard for the English language which borders on illiteracy. Time and again the reader is jarred out of his suspended disbelief by fundamental errors of grammar and word usage; in fact there are times when it is hard to imagine that Ballard owns a dictionary. For example, a few of the grosser etymological errors are as follows;

"The solar disc was no longer a well-defined sphere." ~ This occurs on the first page, and sets the grammatical scene for the whole book; a disc is not a sphere. Ballard doesn't stop at this, he more than once talks about the "annulus" of the Sun.

"I grieve for your irrevocable death" (It should have been inevitable).

"He continued to speak in a low, even monologue" (Surely 'monotone'?)

"The black bowl of the lagoon...like an immense well of amber." (Black and amber are two different colours.) But my favourite is where Kerans shoots Big Caesar, who then emits "A strangling bubbling grunt," — frankly, the mind boggles.

The Drought, which was published three years after The Drowned World, shows considerable improvement. Other than calling Lomax's house a 'folly', which it isn't, Ballard's only bad mistake is where one of his characters "...swallowed a few spoonfuls..." of food. A seven year old child might be expected to write this, but I find it indefensible in a professional author.

These mistakes would in themselves make one think twice about accepting Ballard as a competent writer, but unfortunately there is more to come. His errors of grammar carry him on even further and many of his transgressions are doubly irritating as they are almost certainly due to laziness; just shoddy workmanship. Again this is more readily apparent in The Drowned World, from which the following are selected;

"Holding the station off from the buildings.." This is representative of Ballard's major fault of syntax — he seems to be unable to recognise a split infinitive. He gets away with many of them simply because they are included in dialogue, but there are times when I wonder if he knows just what a split infinitive is. Not that I'm suggesting that there is no place for the split infinitive in the English language ("Or fill the wall up with our English dead" would be ruined if corrected), but Ballard goes too far, and this error is as rife in The Drought as it is in The Drowned World.

Sentences, too, seem to cause Ballard some difficulty, most of his stories being sprinkled with sloppy construction. Two prime examples, both from The Drought, show the confusion which can arise;

"As Ransom stepped aboard he let out two piercing whistles."

"Mrs Quilter's upgrading of Ransom's status had not yet extended to Catherine Austin."

In the first example, it is not Ransom who is whistling; in the second, it was Catherine Austin who had not yet upgraded Ransom's status. Both of these are made clear in the context of the story, but not immediately so. They require

a second reading, a stopping to think, before the meaning is apparent — and, of course, a subsequent loss in mood.

There is really no excuse for this. Ballard can convey his meaning very well; a little care and rewriting, and these irritations would not get as far as the readers.

This observation is even more pertinent when it comes to preserving continuity of plot. In fact one does not need to be a good author to achieve this, all that is required is a little proof-reading; just conscientious reading-through of the MS will always bring to light the slips like the one in The Drowned World, where Colonel Biggs explains that Strangman will get a free pardon, having just said that he has done nothing unlawful. Or, at the end of the book, where we are told that the Colt carried by Kerans contains two shells, and then that he scratches a message with "the empty .45". Or yet again, where Kerans finds Hardman "no more than a resurrected corpse", feeds him on berries for three days, which resuscitates Hardman sufficiently for him to go trundling off into the jungle (with temperatures up to 140°F). Then Ballard tells us

"For some reason he /Kerans/ knew that Hardman would soon die." For some reason indeed !

It is interesting to note that all the faults cited above are from novels, none are from short stories. The explanation for this is simply that Ballard does a better job on his short stories than on his novels; other than the ever-present split infinitive, I have found Ballard's short stories quite free from mistakes, -- remarkably so when compared with Drowned World & The Drought.

From a technical point of view I found The Drowned World read like a first draft, so much so that I would be willing to accept the explanation (if it was forthcoming), that the draft used was sent to the printer in error. Ballard, particularly in his short stories, shows a fine facility with words; I find it surprising that he allows so many juvenile mistakes to be published under his name.

## 2) Ballard The Scientist.

"Who is this that darkeneth council by words without knowledge ?"

Job XXXVIII 2.

I have it on good authority that Mr Ballard is one of those people who suggest that science is unnecessary in SF. Whilst having some sympathy with this point of view, I would not take it as far as he does, i.e. to the point of ignoring incontrovertible facts, where doing so is not an integral part of the story. What I mean by this is that in The Sound Sweep for example, science is ignored to good effect; when you think of it the whole basis of the story (residual sonic vibrations resonating in solid structures) is pretty far-fetched, yet Ballard has used the theme to write one of his best stories.

However, when the author is deliberately looking ahead of the sciences as we know them, this sort of thing is permissible, and the reader knows where he stands. It is in the little snippets of throw-away information that mistakes



appear and it is here that Ballard is as careless as many others (and as lazy; it wouldn't take much effort to check his facts.) In The Drowned World, for example, Ballard indicates that he doesn't know what scuppers are, thinks morse and semaphore are the same thing, and tries to tell us that the instability of the Sun affects the Earth's gravity; all silly mistakes. And in the same book we get, "...only one species of spider has ever been known to sting," which is as wrong a statement he could have made. Spiders don't sting, they bite; and not one species, but all (as far as I know) bite. From a man who studied medicine and so, presumably, biology, this statement is surprising.

In The Drought I found the explanation of the cause of the drought quite clever, but was not happy at the uncompromising way Ballard dismissed the distillation plants as unworkable, while at the same time having them produce tons of salt a day. There must have been a considerable accompanying volume of water produced -- and this was just one bit of the coast. Ballard's lack of basic physics jarred again when he had Ransom fill a bucket with water, which came out of the tap at a trickle -- because there was no pressure. Yet there would have been as much pressure as there always had been.

And so on, and so on; irritating faults which make the reader squirm at the couldn't-care-less attitude of the author. There is no justification, no excuse, for mistakes of this nature; the facts are there to be checked -- and why didn't Ballard do so?

### 3) Ballard The Philosopher.

Philosophy: Love of wisdom or knowledge, esp. that which deals with ultimate reality, or with the most general causes and principles of things.  
Oxford English Dictionary.

"Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance."

Keats.

I imagine some attempt will be made to gloss over over all I've said above, with the contention that it isn't important; that what is important is the themes Ballard writes about, and that the mistakes are superficial. To this I would reiterate that if a writer wishes to be taken seriously he must first show that he can write -- and then he can try to say something. But on the whole, yes, what a writer says will eventually determine the worth of his work.

It is well within the sphere of Science Fiction to present ethical, religious, and other problems in philosophy as a basis for stories. Stories always have been the means to present such thoughts to the majority of people (e.g., Biblical parables, Aesop's fables,) and to me SF seems eminently suited to this purpose. However, Ballard, in those stories which are full of symbolism, gives the impression of writing a significant work, but seems to forget that symbolism is a vehicle and not an end in itself. At best, so far as I can see, he does little but present the problem, and rarely does he attempt an answer.

Philosophical problems have to do with human beings, their relationship with others and with themselves. Ignoring the fact that Ballard's characters are never human beings, he consistently ignores inter-relationships, and generally deals superficially with a person's relationship with himself. I will now be

berated with four stories in which this latter accusation (so I will be told), is palpably untrue; The Drought, The Drowned World, The Voices Of Time, and The Terminal Beach.

I contend that in none of these stories does the hero have any real relationship with any other character; in fact, in every case the hero cuts himself off completely from everybody else -- if not physically, then mentally. This, I am sure, is meant to be significant, yet the reasons implied are shallow. Some sort of half-hearted attempt at rationalisation is made in The Terminal Beach, and this is why that story is the best of the four. Elsewhere, Ballard says very little, but says it in such a complex manner that it sounds as if it means something.

In my opinion, Ballard is generally guilty of very woolly thinking, and of presenting us with ideas that are only half thought-out. For example, in The Drought, Ransom's broken marriage is seen as "a failure of landscape" rather than of personal relationships. This 'explanation' is stated quite baldly, as though it meant something. Certainly, behaviour is dependant upon environment to some extent, but it is basic animal behaviour which is affected. Marriage is a much more sophisticated concept, and Ransom's would have broken up no matter where he was. It might be interesting to note here that Ballard seems to be unable to handle the idea of a woman. Nowhere has he established a satisfactory relationship between one of his heroes and a woman. At times he is even reduced to saying things like, "Woman's role in time was always tenuous and uncertain," which if it has any meaning at all is as valid for men as for women.

Unlike the mistakes listed earlier, Ballard has not been able to confine these clever-sounding but essentially unsound (and sometimes meaningless) philosophical pronouncements to his novels. The Voices Of Time is particularly prone to them, a typical example being Whitby's "...my absolute lack of any moral or biological right to existence, is implicit in every cell of my body.." They occur too, though not to the same extent, in The Terminal Beach, rather spoiling what could have been a good story. For instance, when describing the island, Ballard tells us, "if primitive man felt the need to assimilate events in the external world to his own psyche, 20th century man had reversed this process; by this Cartesian yardstick, the island at least existed, in a sense true of few other places." Now here, although what Ballard is trying to say is quite clear, his idea is again only half thought out (and incidentally, suggests little knowledge of basic philosophy); this fact is rather disguised in abstruse construction. But even accepting his premise, the conclusion is spurious. The island existed no more and no less than other objects. It may well be argued here that I am wrong, and Ballard right. If so, at least the author has been able to provide a philosophical discussion.

Unfortunately, this presentation of a discussable point is the exception rather than the rule. Too often Ballard will erupt with a rash of clever-sounding nonsense, as when Bodkin (in The Drowned World) explains Keran's dreams thus; "The innate releasing mechanisms laid down in your cytoplasm millions of years ago have been awakened, the expanding sun and the rising rising temperature are driving you back down the spinal levels into the drowned seas submerged beneath the lowest levels of your unconscious, into the entirely new zone of the neuronie psyche. This is the lumbar transfer, total biopsychic recall." This meaningless jargon is laughable today.



As for the symbolism in Ballard's stories, this presents a more tenuous problem. Symbolism can only satisfactorily get through to the reader if he feels that the story as a whole is worth reading; if he considers the story to be a bad one, the fact that there are symbolic undertones or overtones will come over as pretention. I feel this happens with Ballard's work. With his favourite symbol, Time, he is saying less than he could and that rather badly. From the symbolism of the sea and beach I'm afraid I can get nothing more than the obvious Freudian connotations -- this, of course, may be owing to lack of perception on my part, but if it is I would suggest that Ballard has missed communicating with the public at which his stories are aimed.

As a final comment on Ballard's approach to philosophy in his writing, I would say that he tends to go off half-cooked, and be unnecessarily obscure, and sometimes it is difficult to see if he is saying anything at all.

#### 4) Ballard The Storyteller.

"It is to be suspected that literary pessimism is usually an expression of intellectual laziness. It can be used as a convenient cover for any amount of loose thinking. Like the surfeit of deaths at the end of many a tragedy, it produces an impression of conclusiveness."

Colin Wilson.

Story-telling is something more than constructing technically correct sentences, grammatically precise and etymologically faultless; more than just getting all your facts right, and even more than saying something of worth. There have been stories which have been most satisfying to read, and which, on reflection, I have found to be completely superficial. This does not often happen, but it does help to make the point that if you have nothing else you can still have a readable story. It is perhaps significant that the few stories of Ballard's which are readable have no pretensions to depth at all, or if they do, then it would take a professional philosopher to dig out the meaning.

I have found the most consistent fault that Ballard perpetrates is that of overwriting. This pertains particularly to his novels. He will be narrating quite well, the reader will begin to get hold of the situation and get into the character; then Ballard will begin to describe some place, person, etc. I get the impression that Ballard now becomes so overjoyed at the cleverness he has displayed (and the description is often remarkably good in its imagery), that he decides to repeat the description in different terms -- then he'll do it again. He goes on interminably, hauling the reader out of the illusion he has so carefully built up, and into boredom. Even then these long repetitive descriptions wouldn't be so bad if he didn't rewrite them time and again throughout the book.

It is a most distressing fault, considering the underlying quality of the writing. When he is economical with his words, Ballard can bring alive the site of the situation he is describing; this is particularly apparent in his short stories, but does sometimes occur in his novels. One fine instance is when he describes the sea-herding in The Drought; this is one of the best passages he has written.

As well as belonging to the school of thought which says that science is unnecessary in science fiction, Ballard seems also to belong to that school which says characterisation is unnecessary. No-where in his writings is there a character who is in the remotest sense alive. In fact his characters are so stereotyped as to be indistinguishable from one story to the next. Kerans, Ransom, Powers, Travern; the name is different but the same shallow character lurks beneath.

This lack of character-depth may have its foundations in the literary technique of 'objective reality', which Ballard seems to have adopted; this is where the author describes what the character is doing, but not what he is feeling. This approach worked for Hemmingway, but at the moment Ballard does not pull it off. (On the other hand, perhaps this is not his approach; perhaps he is just bad at characterisation.) Whatever the reason, Ballard still fails to communicate his characters as people, and this state of affairs is well underlined in the lifelessness of his dialogue.

A shoddiness in plotting is another main feature of Ballard's writing. Apart from the fact that he has one recurring theme, that of the destruction of civilisation, (and I'll bet that his next novel deals with all the water in the world freezing), Ballard has a bad habit of refusing to tie up loose ends in his stories. Take The Drowned World; here we have Kerans walking out into the swamp to die -- but for what reason? Ballard didn't tell us, and the answer is not implicit in the story. Or The Voices Of Time; this was exasperatingly inconclusive. Why or of what did Powers die? Surely not because he had irradiated himself; the speed of his demise makes this quite unacceptable. Why did he build the mandala? As a focus for the powers he didn't know he was going to acquire? Laughable, but no other reason is apparent.

There is one author I know, who, when asked by others how to end a story, always replies, "Blow them all up." This is not, of course, given seriously, but it allows him to give an answer which is incontrovertably conclusive, while making no inroads into beer-drinking time. Ballard seems to seriously follow this rule; - perhaps for the same reasons (?)

In conclusion, I must say that I find Ballard a most frustrating writer. He has a facility with words and a fertile imagination which has made many people hail him as the greatest thing to happen to SF since the war. Perhaps I would feel the same way if he would discipline himself into being less boring, pretentious, and downright shoddy in the execution of his work.

---

## Stranger Than Fiction

"...in the Procyon system...the mining world called Coby."  
preface to Part III, Astounding serial form, DORSAI.

"Vega, an A0 type star, was too inhospitable to its planets, even though Coby was the fourth out from her, among seven."  
page 96, Astounding serial form, Part III of DORSAI.



*John Brunner*  
WRITES ABOUT TELEPATHIST

---

....As you'd expect (authors being a vain species) I was very pleased to see the amount of space accorded to TELEPATHIST, especially since the reviewer raises a couple of points I haven't seen brought out by anyone else.

Matter of fact I should answer them; perhaps they will interest the readers.

First is the bit about Howson's aches and pains. Muscles "only ache when they're doing unfamiliar work" ? Well — my father injured his back in a polo accident in the 1920's and has literally ever since suffered from back-pains without necessarily having to undertake exceptionally strenuous work to provoke them. It appears that even quite a small inadvertent jerking of the affected muscles can re-start the aching. I called Howson's pain "continual", I think, which means recurrent and frequent, not "continuous", which means non-stop. I visualised him as prone every day to mis-steps, impending loss of balance and similar stimuli which might at any time cause pain without advance warning.

But I suppose it depends on your definition of "unfamiliar work".

As to the deaf-and-dumb girl, your reviewer has been extremely perceptive, and I ought to have written that out — it's a hangover from the original magazine version, andazine version, and reflects a stage in my thinking which I subsequently discarded, without unfortunately getting rid of this token of it.

Way back at the beginning, I envisaged the development of Howson's and his colleagues' telepathic faculty as a by-product of a world-wide wave of mutations perhaps induced by a nuclear war. Digging around a little deeper, I came to the conclusion that a nuclear war would have set us so far back references to contemporary institutions like the UN and WHO would be irrelevant, so I simply dumped my back-of-the-mind explanations for the mutations and concentrated on the arbitrary premise that they existed in vacuo

In the original context, with unfavourable mutations commonplace, my intention was to show the girl as especially unfortunate because she had been hit from two sides at once, so to speak, the incidence of mutations having hit such a peak that it was only improbable, not inconceivable for a person to lack both proper hearing and proper vocal apparatus.

But, as I say, this line of the argument became irrelevant during the revision which I undertook to make the finished novel out of the magazine stories, and it would have been no loss — indeed, probably it would have been a gain — to eliminate this coincidence that now floats in the middle of nowhere without a chain of reasoning to support it. She could equally well have been just totally deaf, and never mind about her throat-structure. Good point. If it ever gets around to another sale, the book might well have that passage doctored out.

# DOUBLE BOOKING

ARCHIE & BERYL MERCER

## THE LONG RESULT

by John Brunner. Faber & Faber Ltd., 1965, 204 pages, 18/-

This is a very easy book to read. Brunner's style slides smoothly and almost effortlessly over the eyeballs. Having read the book through, my inclination would be to lay it aside with hardly a thought, as having made for pleasant enough reading, and leave it at that.

The setting is not all that many years in the future, and extra-solar colonies of Earth are beginning to "grow up" to a sort of interstellar nationhood. Simultaneously, humans are having to accept the presence of other intelligent races in the galaxy. The plot revolves around a series of Earthman/colonial and human/alien relationships, and succeeds in sorting them out not too unsatisfactorily. Analogies may be, and doubtless are intended to be, drawn with present day international and inter-racial relationships, concerning which the author is known to have a good deal to say -- and says much of it here. Perhaps somebody who tended more than I do to disagree with him might have been in a better position to get his teeth into this, though.

The leading character (the book is written in the first person singular) is a man who tends to under-rate his own abilities, and needs to be jolted out of a pleasantly comfortable rut in order to utilise them to the full. The main thread of the story relates how this jolt is administered and received, and the various subsidiary plots interlock neatly and readably with this. I agree with the above remarks about analogies with present-day relationships. Unfortunately it is all too likely that at least one organisation preaching the propaganda of the Stars Are For Man League (a kind of futuristic Ku Klux Klan on a much wider scale), will indeed be founded as soon as contact is made with extra-terrestrial races. One can only hope that its (or their) demise will be as abrupt, effective and complete as that of the S.A.F.M. League.

I enjoyed this book, and found its leading character a likeable personality. He is human enough to make mistakes, honest enough to admit them and seek no scapegoats, and courageous enough to accept a challenge which would undoubtedly have daunted lesser men.

Recommended.



## BEST S.F. STORIES OF BRIAN W. ALDISS

Faber & Faber Ltd., 1965. 235 pages, 21/-

Fourteen stories, reprinted from various sources, and, says Mr. Aldiss in his introduction, which represent the decade in which he has been writing for publication.

Who Can Replace A Man ? (from CANOPY OF TIME, 1959.) 10 pages.

A freed slave may relish his freedom until he realises that he must now make all his own decisions. There is nobody to tell him what he must do, either kindly or brutally, and making the necessary adjustments to this situation may prove to be beyond him. The author poses here the question; with Man gone, would robots also behave like helpless craft on the windswept waters of freedom?

Not For An Age. (from SPACE, TIME, & NATHANIEL. 1957.) 10 pages.

Sometimes a play or musical runs for years in one theatre. I once read somewhere, that after appearing six or seven times a week in the same production for more than a year, most actors and actresses have to keep a close watch on themselves in order to avoid changing their lines slightly, or slipping in ad-libs here and there. This story concerns three people who are in much the same position. The basic difference between them and present-day players in long-running production is that they are powerless to change the situation - although only one of them realises this fact. An unforeseen accident provides him with a chance to escape from the ghastly treadmill of his repetitive days, but his freedom proves to be a Mobius strip with heavy irony as the twist.

Psychops. (also from SPACE, TIME, & NATHANIEL.) 12 pages.

In spite of the implied tragedy of the ending, this is an excellently conceived and finely-written story, demonstrating with skill and pathos the truth of the cliché; "A little learning is a dangerous thing."

Outside. (from S,T,&N) 10 pages.

Members of an inimical alien race, who to all outward appearances are human beings, are threatening Earth by infiltration, and by physical duplication of the humans they kill. A slow-but-sure process of identification is worked out, based on a back-handed application of human (and even insect !) psychology, combined with tireless patience. An ingenious yarn.

Dumb Show. (from S,T,&N) 8 pages.

This one, set in a world suffering from the effects of a strange and diabolical warfare, stimulated my interest in the beginning, but the conclusion left me baffled. Perhaps there was some symbolic message in it; if so, I'm afraid it fell upon deaf ears as far as I'm concerned...

The New Father Christmas. (From the Magazine of F&SF) 6 pages.

And this is another one which is too rich a (Christmas ?) pudding for my mental digestion ! I think it's something to do with the domination of humans by sentient machines, but...

Ahead. (first appeared as "The Failed Men", in S.T. & N.) 15 pages.

Skilful delineation of character is the highlight of this story. Mr Aldiss presents a harrowing picture of a man who has travelled to the far future, where humanity is apparently doing its damndest to commit racial suicide. Their motives for doing so, however, are so incomprehensible to the members of the several rescue missions that, with the best will in the world, they find themselves almost powerless to help. Most of them are, therefore, reduced to nervous wrecks, and return as "broken" men to their respective eras in Earth-time. Torment, frustration, angry pity, and a sense of utter futility are all brilliantly dimensioned in this story.

Poor Little Warrior ! (from The Magazine of F&SF) 7 pages.

An exercise in sarcasm, directed against those who must soothe their bruised and battered egos by applying the balm of slaughtering innocent (and in this case herbivorous) animal life. It ought to make any member of the huntin' fraternity who reads it feel thoroughly uncomfortable. (I hope - though the sarcasm probably wouldn't penetrate, anyway...)

Man On Bridge. (from NEW WRITINGS IN SF 1.) 20 pages.

I read this first in aforementioned NEW WRITINGS. I didn't care much for it then, and still don't. It's vaguely reminiscent (to me) of Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD, and even has overtones of the detestable (again, to me) 1984, by Orwell. If this is the kind of hopelessness to which humanity is destined to be reduced, I'd rather not know.

The Impossible Star. (from Worlds Of Tomorrow) 24 pages.

Four men land on a planetoid which is governed by a strange and terrifying celestial body. It must be a sun, yet it can't be a sun - that's the impossible star of the title. The technical ramifications are the nucleus of the story. Some of them caused me to boggle slightly, especially the postulate that light is susceptible to the power of gravity. I thought that only things having mass were so susceptible, and did not realise that this was a factor of elementary relativity, as one of the characters insists. Said characters and their reactions to the impossible star are interlaced with the technicalities. The author probably had a very good reason (one which, again, escapes me) for creating four unsympathetic characters. Personally I thought this was rather a pity - unless (it suddenly occurs to me) the author was trying to prove that only a rabid egotist could stay sane in the face of such a monstrous threat ?

Basis For Negotiation. (from The Airs Of Earth, 1963) 44 pages.

Another very clever story, written in the first person singular, the better to illustrate the inner conflict of a man who feels that his country has betrayed him, rather than vice versa. However, I have a general aversion to stories based on political machinations, so this one didn't really appeal to me. Nevertheless I recognise and recommend its quality.

Old Hundredth (from Airs Of Earth) 13 pages.

This was at least my third reading of this story, and my enjoyment of it was unimpaired by the repetition. There is a gentle nostalgia implicit in it, the slow peace of inevitability which, despite the title of the story, has little or nothing to do with religion of any kind. I class Old Hundredth as one of the



the best - if not the best - of all the stories Mr Aldiss has written. Quite apart from its very acceptable subject matter, it presents a first-class lesson in the art of evocative writing.

A Kind Of Artistry. ( from Airs Of Earth) 26 pages.

This one also evokes nostalgia and a feeling of inevitability, but of a very different kind. Expressed metaphorically, the difference is that Old Hundredth is warm, whereas this story is cold; the former implies a peculiar kind of hope, the latter a chilling sort of hopelessness. It is essentially a difference of atmosphere and mood, expressed in each case through the lead character. "Dandi" is aware of her strange destiny, and is entirely happy to accept it; "Derek Ende" cannot even guess at his, and achieves only transitory fulfilment. Even this is negated by the reactions of other people to his success. This seems to demonstrate that in order to savour individual success to the full, it is necessary to have someone say, "Well done, - I'm proud of you." Without such commendation, any achievement can be only partially satisfactory.

Man In His Time. (from Science Fantasy), 28 pages.

I saw a film on TV some time ago, based on roughly the same "time-gimmick" as is employed in this story. I have mentioned before that I tend to get confused by time-travel stories; this one produced much the same effect. I didn't, therefore, really enjoy it because my mind kept roaming off into speculations of, "If that didn't happen later, this couldn't be happening now... but it is happening now, so the other thing is predestined... but that cancels out everybody's free will, and... and.. " It must be obvious that such mental squirrelings are anything but conducive to smooth and happy reading!

A most interesting and worthwhile collection, and a definite "must" for Aldiss fans. In his introduction he mentions that "They (the stories) are shuffled into more or less chronological order." Possibly someone competent to make deeper analyses than mine will take the trouble to trace the author's development through these fourteen stories; my only comment on the matter is that I wish "Old Hundredth" could have been the last story in the book instead of the twelfth.

## BILL THE GALACTIC HERO

by Harry Harrison. Gollancz 1965, 160 pages, 16/-

(A) The militaristic philosophy typified by Heinlein in his STARSHIP TROOPERS, is positively crying aloud to be satirised, and to satirise it seems to have been Harry Harrison's main object in this particular exercise.

Once again, though, one comes up against the syndrome that satire has to be way-out indeed in order to be significantly more outrageous than is that which it purports to satirise. Heinlein writes lovingly of a highly-trained and superbly-disciplined armed force; Harrison writes mockingly of another such. But except that other (and mostly irrelevant) bits of tongue-in-cheekery show round the edges of the latter's story, there is not all that much to choose between the two corps.

The extent to which Mr Harrison expects his readers to identify with his protagonist is not entirely clear. In a sense, "Bill" represents the type of

of unsinkable "super-ordinary" hero who is able, come what may (and come indeed it does), to ride along with events and ultimately to surmount them. In other senses, however, he represents not much more than a lay figure at whom the author throws anything that's handy. One thing - I myself find "Bill" very much on a par with Heinlein's "Rico" when it comes to identifying - I wouldn't want to be even remotely approximate to either.

The book is divided into three sections, corresponding (though with at least some textual alteration - I haven't checked thoroughly) to the three episodes in which New Worlds recently serialised the story. The first section has no title of its own, and nothing even to show that it is merely "Book One". Books Two and Three, which follow, have their own sub-titles, neither of which has any obvious significance. Book Two, "A Dip In The Swimming Pool Reactor", leaves the mainstream of the narrative to wander around satirising other sundry aspects of interstellar civilisation, though with comparatively little that's new to say. Book Three, "E : me<sup>2</sup> or Bust", returns to round off the original plot neatly if not entirely satisfactorily - and that's it.

(B) I'd heard quite a lot about this book before I read it, and most of what I heard was couched in approving terms. In addition to this, Harry Harrison's "Jason dinAlt" stories were very much to my taste. For these reasons, then, I found "Bill..." disappointing. The man himself was nowhere near as believable as Jason, and I agree with Archie that the book was probably intended as a satirisation of STARSHIP TROOPERS, - which latter I disliked intensely. The lingering traces of that dislike spilled over on to "Bill...", which is probably unfair to H.H., who was, I'm sure, doing his best to prove something - but what? Most of the situations presented were wildly exaggerated, and should have been (equally wildly) funny. Should have been - unfortunately, they seemed to me to be still too close to the grim truth of some aspects of Service life. (Sadistic non-coms and ineffectual officers are not, after all, found only in the Army.) There were, certainly, some samples of outright daftery which had me laughing aloud, but on the whole I'd say that the writer tried too hard to be funny, and in doing so he over-reached himself. Again, I agree with Archie that the ending was neat but not entirely satisfactory. To go into further details about it would probably spoil the story for those who have not yet read it.

To sum up; since so many people have enjoyed this book, and said so, it would appear to be one of those controversial things which one must read for oneself. And since there are passages in it which I found genuinely amusing, it's far from being the worst book I've ever read. I liked Book Two much better than the other two sections- possibly because this part wasn't nearly so reminiscent of STARSHIP TROOPERS, as were Books One & Three. However, even Book Two presented certain situations the possibilities of which were, to my mind, thrown away. Still - the whole book was infinitely preferable to a great many I've read.

(A) Yes, there are a number of good and valid points here and there - though they tend to get crushed under the ponderous weight of the rest. A pity, really, - some of them have a definitely deCampish ring, and deserve enshrining in some less vague setting.



## NEW WRITINGS IN S.F. 6

ed. John Carnell. Dennis Dooson, 1965. 16/-, 190 pages.

Once again, seven stories by assorted (male) authors, prefaced by a two-page editorial foreword.

The Inner Wheel by Keith Roberts, 60 pages.

(A) This story starts with (for me) the built-in advantage of being of sufficient length to provide something to get one's teeth into. Since it then goes on to provide that very thing, I enjoyed it. The foreword makes no secret of the fact that it concerns a gestalt mind, cousin to the one that Theodore Sturgeon built up so beautifully in MORE THAN HUMAN, Mr. Roberts has enough to say further on and around the subject, plus an acceptable enough angle of approach, to make the story hold the interest almost from start to finish.

(B) The reader shares in the baffled bewilderment of the hero, Jimmy Strong, to whom inexplicable things keep happening. The clues to the origin of these events are so elusive, so nebulous and subjective, that his fear of incipient insanity is wholly credible. However, he is a stubborn and reasonably courageous young man. His habit of being angered rather than frightened by the vague yet chilling threats which present themselves apparently from his own suspicious subconscious is in this instance an asset rather than a liability. He is certainly not too dull-witted to be afraid, but he will not run until he knows something about the force or entity from which he is meant to run. This entity turns out to be the aforementioned gestalt mind which is - or appears to be - psychotic. However, even Jimmy recognises the tremendous potential for greatness within the gestalt - if only it can "heal" itself.

(A) I could criticise on points of detail, perhaps. The reader sees the gestalt strictly from the outside instead of the inside, and therefore the internal cross-currents which activate its collective actions are not entirely clear. In particular the ending seems somewhat inadequately motivated. Nevertheless, this one story alone would justify the book. (The book's immediate predecessor, the only other one of the series I've so far read, contains nothing even half so satisfactory).

(B) I enjoyed this story for a number of reasons - the fast pace of the action, the somewhat unusual background of Jimmy himself, and the writer's descriptive powers concerning the town in which the story is set. Most of all I enjoyed it because it is, once again, principally the story of a lone man pitting his wits, his guts, and even his physical reflexes, against a group, each member of which is individually more powerful (and that on little-understood levels) than he is. One is aware that, working as a group, these beings with their (temporarily twisted) talents could crush him as carelessly as one might step on a daisy in a meadow. The fact that they do not is, up to the final few pages, a "puzzlement", and the explanation of this apparent anomaly makes the conclusion of the story both credible and acceptable.

Recommended.

Horizontal Man by William Spencer. 12 pages.

(B) This one is possibly aimed at those who think it would be wonderful to live forever. From this angle, it is highly effective, I suppose, but depressing.

(A) Which, to my mind, is already too many words to devote to what is nothing but a short story about eternity.

The Day Before Never. by Robert Presslie. 21 pages.

(B) The opening sentences set the mood of this rather savage yarn; "Yesterday was a quiet day. I didn't kill anyone and nobody killed me." And if you think those lines presage a kind of futuristic James Bond-type story, you're quite right, even including the inevitable sex angle. The ending is pretty ghastly, but there is at least a faint nimbus of hope to soften the edges of the horror.

(A) The story does contain one highly intriguing slant on a possible use for sex under certain specifically science fictional conditions. It also, however, contains things that don't appeal to me in the slightest. Also, why things are happening as they are remains aggravatingly obscure. I hear an unsupported rumour that beneath that name there shelters none other than Mike Moorcock. Whether or not this is true cannot be determined by the level of writing in this story.

The Hands. by John Baxter. 10 pages.

(A) To my mind, this is simply another case (among oh, so many) of a good idea absolutely wasted on a short story.

(B) I can't quite make up my mind if this one is horrible in a fascinating way, or fascinating in a horrible way. Be that as it may, the basic idea, if viewed dispassionately, has great possibilities for extrapolation. Unfortunately, these are by no means exploited as they might have been.

The Seekers by E.C.Tubb. 9 pages.

(B) Four interstellar travellers land on an uninhabited planet, where each finds his own particular heart's desire - and the result is a bizarre sort of tragedy. I thought this story was rather neatly devised.

(A) I didn't. If only the author had had something to write about, the result might have been worth reading. As it was, he didn't, and it wasn't.

Atrophy. by Ernest Hill. 21 pages.

(B) A brief excursion into the oft-explored realms of over-automation. Not very convincing, and only faintly amusing in places, although perhaps it wasn't meant to be amusing... It's hard to decide, and personally I found it not worth trying to make the decision.

(A) I think it's meant to be a satire of sorts. A very lightweight story, though.

Advantage. by John Rackham. 32 pages.

(A) This is a story about people rather than about "things", Not about the sort of people with whom I particularly want to identify, though, which is probably just as well.

(B) It isn't even true science fiction, except for a rather vague psi element. Apart from that, it could have been set in present time, in any place on Earth where some sort of new project is being launched. The characters are somewhat stereotyped; at the head of the project is the "strong man", whose apparent near-infallibility is merely an ability to utilise the talents of others to his own



unscrupulous ends. There is also the weakling, who must be pandered to because he possesses a certain giftedness which makes him virtually indispensable. And the inevitable "yes-man"; the equally inevitable feminine interest (though this is developed along slightly unexpected lines), and the usual "hook" of things-going-wrong on which the story is hung. The mixture of these elements results in what I can only class as a run-of-the-mill story.

Archie & Beryl Mercer.

---

## Other Books Received

---

### FALLEN STAR

by James Blish. Faber & Faber Ltd 1965. 224 pages, 18s.

### CENTURY OF GREAT SHORT SF NOVELS

edited by Damon Knight. Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1965. 380 pages, 21s.

### SECOND STAGE LENSMEN

by E.E. "Doc" Smith. Pyramid Books (PB), 1965, 270 pages, 60¢

### PILGRIMAGE

by Zenna Henderson. Panther Books (PB). 1965, 208 pages, 3/6d.

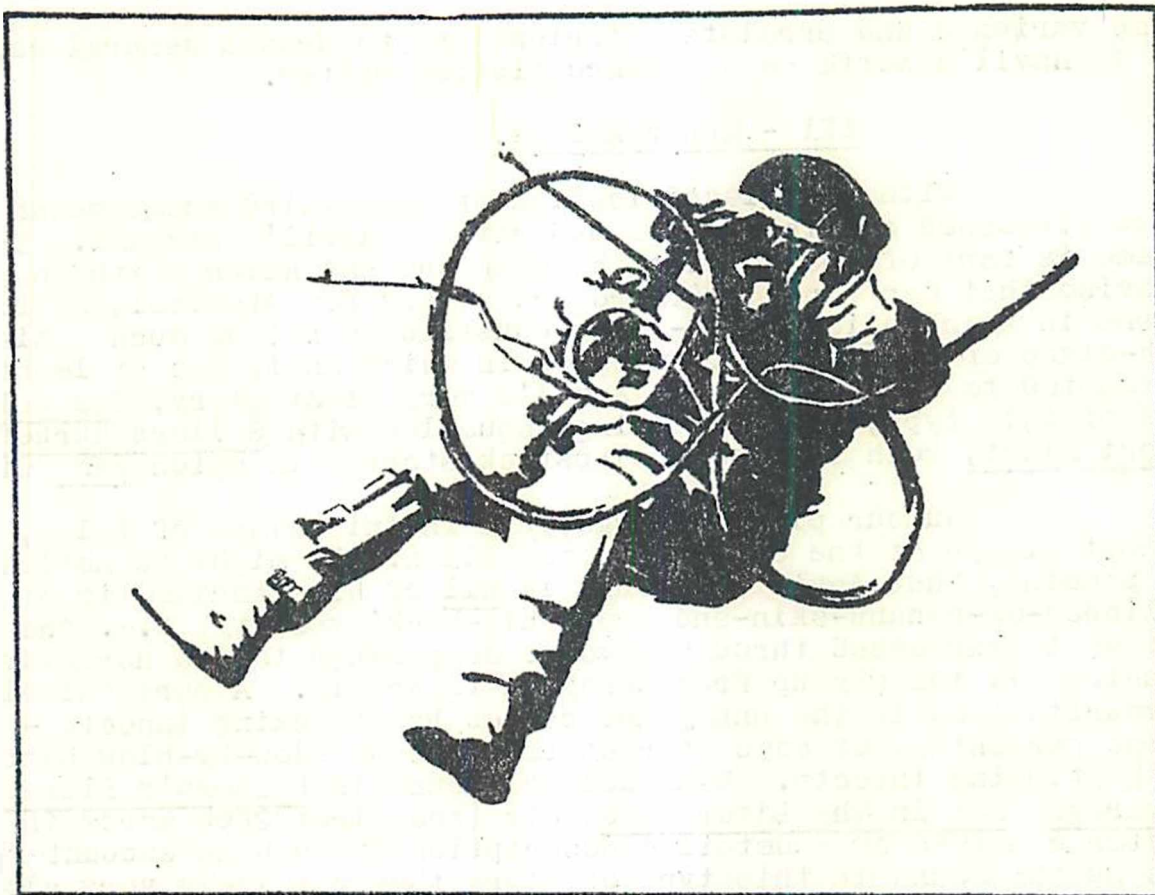
### LORD KALVAN OF OTHERWHEN

by H. Beam Piper. Ace Books, (PB), 1965, 192 pages, 40¢

TO BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE (MARCH)

### OF WORLDS BEYOND

edited by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach. Dennis Dobson Books, 1965. 118 pages, 13/6  
contains a foreword by John Carnell, and material by E.E. Smith, John W Campbell  
L. Sprague deCamp, Robert Heinlein, Jack Williamson, A.E. van Vogt, John Taine.



---

## Christopher Anvil, Competent Hack

PETER R. WESTON

— part 2 —

---

In the first part of this article we attempted to outline two of the major divisions into which the stories of Christopher Anvil fall. We classified two themes, that of the 'colonist' stories and the 'Wonderful Invention' (or perhaps 'Wonderful Innovation') stories, and by illustration and example attempted to display some of the characteristics of each type of story.

We now intend to discuss the third of the major divisions into which Anvil's stories fall, to mention



some variants and unrelated stories, and to draw a general conclusion as to Anvil's worth as a science fiction writer.

### III - Man v Aliens.

With the classification of this third theme we shall have discussed a rather large majority of Anvil's stories. The theme is that of the conflict between Man and Alien, with the proviso that Man wins. (There are a very few atypical, Anvil yarns in which aliens win - this constitutes not so much a distinct sub-class of stories, but examples in which Anvil has at least attempted to leave his rut. Anvil's very first story, The Prisoner was of this type, it later being sequelled with Sellers Market and Ghost Fleet, both inferior, slapstick stories in which man wins.

Humour plays a large part in this class of tales, almost always at the expense of the alien. It might be noticed in passing, that Anvil's humour, in all of his stories, is of the 'slipped-on-banana-skin-and broke-his-back' variety, i.e. the humour is expressed through adverse happenings to the hero/adversary ranging all the way up from annoying to tragic. A particularly favourite idea is the annoyance caused by attacking insects - a large percentage of some stories consists of blow-by-blow battles with stinging insects. Examples are found in Pandora's Planet, Leverage, Not In The Literature, etc (the first 2000 words in the latter consists of a detailed description of such an encounter). The humour found in this type of story thus parallels very closely the almost-equally slapstick stories told (somewhat more skilfully) by Eric Frank Russell in his 'Man v Alien' stories. The theme is a common one.

Humour in SF is a comparatively rare commodity, and it is to be welcomed. Yet it should be handled with care - the gently ironic humour of Eric Frank Russell found in some of his earlier tales (typified by And Then There Were None) is a particularly admirable example. Russell seems now to have turned to clumsy rewriting and expansion of his earlier successes, padding novelettes into novels by addition of uninspired material. Witness the revised Next Of Kin as compared to the fine novelette Plus X.

Some of Anvil's 'Alien' stories are directly related, as are the three 'Centra' stories; others are connected only by their common similarities, such as alien territorial ambitions coupled with unbelievable alien stupidity. Indirect relationships may be seen in many places, such as the frequency with which two alien scouts are dropped to scout out Earth, with expectedly devastating (to them) results, (Examples, The Lawbreakers, Compensation) and the very nearly rewriting of Pandora's Planet, into The Gentle Earth.

The Gentle Earth opens with the stock situation of a pending alien invasion of Earth. The aliens inhabit (by inference) the planet Venus, which, again by inference, is very wet. The opening sentence is pure Anvil - it begins with the lead character's name at the head of a short action sentence. Alien scouts have just returned from Earth, and immediately an example of foolishness arises. The 'hero' says, looking at the globe of Earth,

"What are the white areas?"

the answer comes, - "Apparently, chalk....."

One of the scouts claims to have brought back a sample but, "There is only water in his sample box....I imagine he was delirious."

Anvil has shown that the aliens have no idea that ice exists at Earth's poles. Immediately, then, he is stating that ice and even the concept of cold is unknown on Venus. (Later he attempts to justify this and other claims by stating that Venus has an even temperature, no seasons, and thus no weather; hot or cold.) Now this is to my mind absurd. Any culture capable of sending 1000 foot spaceships to another planet would have a technology advanced enough to have investigated the behaviour of water at low temperature. It is easy enough to make ice, as anyone knows. Such ignorance on the part of Anvil's Venusians is ridiculous.

This I believe, illustrates an important idea exhibited in Anvil's writings. The author has no concept of the interdependency of scientific ideas. He would appear to believe that one branch of science can advance to interplanetary travel and matter-transmission without another branch bothering to investigate rudimentary chemical and physical laws. Nowhere is this more marked than in The Gentle Earth, save in one quite remarkable story, Not In the Literature which I was honestly surprised to find in Analog. This story has an alien (but human) race on an unknown (but Earthlike) world, attempting to put a man into orbit with chemical rockets and no knowledge of electricity. This is absurd. Chemistry depends to a very large extent on the electrical properties of atoms and elements. No real progress in chemistry was or could be made before the discovery of electricity, and it is inconceivable that any culture capable of such high-level (chemical) technology as implied to have attempted orbital flight, would not have stumbled upon electricity.

All this might seem to be making mountains from molecules, but it clearly shows that Anvil is no scientist nor has more than an elemental technological knowledge. But to go back to the story under consideration.

Tlasht Bade is Supreme Commander of the Invasion Forces, but has always opposed the invasion on philosophical grounds. (This leads to two interesting speculations: (1) Would he really



be Supreme Commander if he was opposed to the majority opinion? and (2) If he disagrees with the idea of invasion, would he act as efficiently as he in fact does? These contradictions only arise because Anvil is gaining the reader's support and sympathy by putting his hero on 'our' side.

The majority opinion is evidently "It's them or us"--since the Earth is gaining on Venus at a fantastic rate of technological growth. Again, here is a standard science fictional idea - that Earth's inhabitants are far more gifted in technology than is the alien invader.

The plot, what there is of it, is very simple. The Venusians invade the Earth, expecting to conquer the planet piecemeal, with no difficulty. Instead, they meet with an incredibly spirited defense coupled with any number of 'unexpected' terrestrial characteristics which just about shatters the invasion force. In the end, after having fought for fifty pages, Venus joins the U.S.A. as another state (and Anvil even has some good reasons for this ending!)

But it is the development of the story that concerns our attention, and there are any number of little details worthy of comment. To begin with, Anvil gives very little description of the Venusians. What character they have is due solely to Kelly Freas, whose half-dozen sketches accompanying the story are made up from whole cloth.

The hero, of course, also has no real character other than presence of mind when all about him others are losing their heads. He is plagued with the ailments common to Anvil characters, however. All his emotions are spelt out in a simple and laborious manner. When things seem to be going wrong for instance:-

"Bade seemed to see the bursting of innumerable bubbles before his eyes. It dawned on him that he was bogged down in petty details while big events rushed on unheeded".

Bade's men also suffer from this unmistakable Anvil characteristic:-

"The colonel worked his mouth in a way that suggested a weak valve struggling to hold back a large quantity of compressed air. Bade looked at him hard. The colonel's mouth blew open and "Yes, sir!" came out. The colonel looked startled."

Everything about the invasion smacks of unpreparedness and incompetence. The forces are using two types of ground vehicles - one is powered by steam and uses more water than can be found locally; it is thus immobilised. The other engine is discovered, in use, to be defective in the (relatively) dry



atmosphere of earth, and is also immobilised. The invasion has to be carried out using captured Terrestrial vehicles. Although these mishaps are blamed on the perverse qualities of the Earth (in fact, the whole story is built around this theme), in actuality the disasters encountered are all such that could have been avoided with but small effort from the aliens.

Much the same sort of thing applies to the other source of trouble for the Venusians. Not only are they unfamiliar with cold and ice, but they are unfamiliar with just about every other sort of weather, including hurricanes and tornados, blizzards and snow; with the very existence of "seasons"; and with such matters as "earthquakes" and "volcanos". As we read through the story, we see the invaders lambasted with each of these troubles, and we see their stupidity in refusing to believe the easily avail-

data that explains these matters. Finally, the aliens set up winter camp on a small island, which is found to be Krakotoa. They evacuate in a hurry. (A minor note:- I don't think that Krakotoa is now active.)

All the way through the story we watch the alien's battle again the Earth - not so much the Earth's forces as against the planet itself. The very title and cover painting drives this theme home. And yet, we can see that this theme is really invalid. The Earth is not all that difficult to live with, - if you are prepared. If you choose to invade an alien planet with no real preparations, then you must expect the worst. Two conclusions emerge. (1) Anvil's aliens are stupid or (2) His plotting is basically unsound.

And this story has so obviously grown from the earlier "Pandora's Planet", which contained some sections that showed alien reactions to that incredible planet, Earth. At least the former story had a little more meat on the bones.

One thing more - Anvil's peculiarly ghoulish sense of humour is evident throughout The Gentle Earth. Nothing overtly funny happens, we are instead expected to laugh at what are really tragedies. We do laugh, admittedly, which proves something or other.



The effect of this peculiar 'humour' would doubtless be spoilt by the mention of death and disaster, in so many words. Consequently, though the story is of invasion and counterattack, of nuclear explosions and of missile attacks, there is not one documented death. About the nearest Anvil comes to true-life description is:- "In a spasm of bloody violence they fought their way in among the ships, then, confused in the dimness, were thrown back with heavy losses." No mention at all is made of the tremendous hardships and suffering that must have been endured by troops of both sides and by the civilians of the battle-areas. This battle is treated not so much as a serious life-or-death matter, but more as a game of chess.

Near the end, Anvil's hero makes a little speech, the purpose of which is to convince his opponent that his was only a scouting mission.

"Are you under the impression," said Bade, "that this is the main invasion force? Would we attack without a full reconnaissance first? Do you think we would merely make one sizeable landing, on one continent? How could we hope to conquer in that way?"

The reader is tempted to agree. How indeed?

#### (iv) Sub-classes and variants

At least two more sub-classes can probably be identified; though different in treatment, both have just about the same standard of story telling, and both are almost totally lacking in everything that should be employed to create a perfect story.

The "Newsflash" style is one found from time to time in Anvil's work. It is favoured, since all that is needed for its writing is the shred of an idea. Plotting, characterisation and dialogue can all be forgotten (none of them Anvil's strong points), and the pure 'gimmick' can be displayed in all its glory. The result is not easy reading, but can be enjoyed after a fashion, should the 'gimmick' be sufficiently novel to amuse. It is interesting to note that Anvil's first two 'stories' in Astounding, The Prisoner and Torch were of this type.

The second sub-class is one in which even Anvil's particular brand of plotting has failed to produce an acceptable skelton. His usual framework of 'gimmicks' and justified 'coincidences' is missing, and the resultant story is consequently lacking in all virtues whatsoever. Such a story begins, thrashes around for a while among a number of not only improbable but downright ridiculous situations, and ends, nothing having been accomplished whatsoever. Elements of all three major themes can be found, with story-threads of self-plagiarised dialogue and a liberal sprinkling of slapstick (slapdash?) comedy. In actual fact the treatment is really no worse than in other Anvil stories, but it does prove, I think, that Anvil's chief virtue



is the easy readability offered by a fast-moving, superficially strong plot, and where this is missing, Anvil's failings immediately become more apparent. Some examples of this rubbish are "Foghead", "Cargo For Colony Six", "The Huach", etc.

One story exists that is atypical in many ways from run-of-the-mill Anvil. It treats a sociological theme in such a way as to contain many elements of originality. "Heir Reluctant" is the story of the naturally-qualified ruler of a colonial planet who refuses to assume his responsibilities. The treatment is simplified, and stereotyped characters are the rule, but the result is entertaining science fiction.

Anvil, as we saw in the previous summary, does not appear to have a very good understanding of the principles and practice of physical science. It is difficult to reconcile this opinion with the recent novelette in Analog, "The Captive Djinn". While being an example of man v. alien plotting, this

is quite a good story, built around a rather technical knowledge of chemistry. Possibly an uneducated person might be able to glean such knowledge out of reference books, but I doubt it. Two conclusions seem indicated. Either Anvil has a reasonably broad knowledge of chemistry, in which case past blunders are inexcusable, or in this particular instance, the author received the technical details of the plot from another, almost certainly John W. Campbell.

Beginning perhaps eighteen months ago, with the dawn of the 'large size' Analog, Anvil may well have entered a more mature phase. Stories published in this period have been generally superior to his previous works, and have usually not been markedly influenced by the main themes outlined in the body of this article. While still not of any great literary 'significance', nor having any lasting worth, Anvil's work during this time has tended to be more serious, more thoughtful, better developed. His writing has taken a small turn for the better in that characters and dialogue are a little more true to life. Stories read less like parodies and more like accounts. A sense of verisimilitude appears to be creeping into his writings. Some of his ideas have had more to them than wishful thinking, with a sprinkling of psionics, some of his schemes and/or innovations actually sound as if they would actually work. It could be that they



might be possible to put into practice, - the resulting stories have occasioned deeper thought than is usual. Stories such as War Games and POSITIVE FEEDBACK are still classifiable as 'wonderful inventions', for instance, but are not principally concerned with gadgetry.

Another recent example of more lengthy and more developed story-telling was Duel to the Death which was excellent until the author wrote himself into a corner. The story's natural development called for an ending of tragedy for the human race, Rather than end on such a low note, the author attempted to contrive a 'happy ending' - and the resultant shambles caused the foregoing plot to fall in ruins. If all had been as revealed, then there would have been no logical justification for the story's ever happening. This was a case akin to Glory Road, in which the story suffered due to unnecessary prologation of the conclusion.

#### (v) Conclusions.

Christopher Anvil's writings have been analysed in this article, and we have established many of the respects in which he fails to produce a good 'story'. It is a matter of individual taste whether or not his virtues are considered sufficient to balance Anvil's shortcomings. Anvil works to routine, may often repeat himself, has limited command of dialogue and characterisation, and relies over-much on coincidence in his plotting. On the credit side, Anvil can write entertainingly, and can hold the reader's attention. His work makes no pretence of literary significance, nor has any, but is easily-read and fast-moving. (You notice the flaws after you have enjoyed the stories). And while his plots are not of the best, no-one can deny that he has dreamed up a rather impressive number of 'gimmicks', problems' and 'wonderful inventions'.

Christopher Anville is a science-fiction writer, and his failings and his virtues are in this tradition. He may quite possibly develop in ability; for the moment he is a hack-writer but above all, a competent hack.

---

Not being endowed with any undue prophetic ability, we find it hard to forecast the contents of the next (March) issue. We have high hopes of shortly being able to present articles on Philip Jose Farmer, Kingsley Amis' New Maps Of Hell, on Philip K Dick, and other material. Next issue should see the return of our fan-feature, and, for certain, Alex Fanshin writing about Robert A Heinlein.

# THE MELTING POT

## READERS LETTERS

### NEW WAVE S.F.

Dear Pete,

....I can't express my views on the current trend because I'm not up on the latest controversy on the present wave of 'new writing', but I can make a generalised comment;-

I do not think it wrong for an author to experiment or for an editor to encourage such experiments. There is no real need for every story to be told in exactly the same way and in many cases the thing the author is trying to do cannot be done in the 'accepted' form. Therefore it is good that there is an opening for various styles, methods and diversities.

However I think it wrong to go overboard for something just because it is different. A bad story, no matter how told, is a bad story. Difference does not, automatically, mean that a story is good, or better, or more entertaining. The rules of craftsmanship still apply, and should be applied whether a story is told in the old, familiar way, or in some new style.

The danger is that an unfamiliar method with its apparent breaking or ignoring of the rules of entertainment seems to be so simple and easy that the temptation for a writer to think "What the hell! Gloss it up with fancy words, forget construction and continuity, fling in a wad of unrelated scraps, and end when you're tired!" could lead to an awful lot of rubbish. After all, authors will send an editor what they think the editor wants -- and that is what he is publishing. But surely, in a science fiction magazine, there is room for more than one type of writing?

E.C.Tubb.  
London.

---

Dear Pete,

....I found ZENITH not as annoying as usual. I was amused by McAulay's rather naive view of what he calls The New Establishment -- there is no such thing, of course, -- if only for the reason that all the people named have widely differing views.

Continued overpage



His reference to Genet, the human condition, et al. show a sparse knowledge of literature, the aims of its perpetrators and what is going on in the world of literature and the arts in general, these days. Not an uncommon failing in certain quarters of SF, both professional and amateur.

Mike Moorcock,  
London.

---

Dear Pete,

....What has prompted this letter is Mr Moorcock's latest letter in ZENITH 10. I don't intend to deal with all the points his letter raises and certainly have no intention of making a personal attack on him -- apart from being, in my opinion, extremely childish, -- it serves no useful purpose whatsoever. However, I would like to say that he edits a monthly magazine in which he has plenty of scope to air his views, -- with which I entirely disagree, -- and in the few NEW WORLDS I have bought he does air them. And how ! My point is that I doubt very much indeed whether any of his ideas regarding SF contain the remotest interest to an "average" fan.\* In this context I consider myself a very average fan. As I have mentioned, I have no literary pretensions, and from blurbs I have seen on paperback covers, and comments generally, it appears that Mr Moorcock could, intellectually, "drink me under the table". Having never got further than 'O' Level, and being rather a pleb type -- Chelsea and light and bitter man -- and in this I honestly hope I have not given the impression of false modesty -- I find it impossible to understand his viewpoint. In many respects I have a similar view of John W Campbell, although in his case whilst I can hardly ever understand his editorials, -- I find, what little I can understand, to be extremely fascinating and thought provoking. Mr Moorcock's views, on the other hand, like his pro- and fan- writing seem to me to be very "precious" and contrived. Surely the basic point is that a story, whether SF or mainstream, must entertain on some level.\*\* If the story does not entertain, then however many symbolic, freudian, and psychological aspects the story contains, -- it is a failure. Ballard is in my opinion an extremely minor author on an entertainment level -- I quite liked Drowned World, and enjoyed The Terminal Beach, but a continual re-hash of the same story over and over again only shows up his limitations as an author. He seems incapable of extending his range; perhaps this is good business in that he has definitely cornered the market in stories of "inner space". Furthermore, the continued critical (and uncritical) articles about Ballard blow him up into a figure out of all proportion to his entertainment value as a writer. "Enough and no more.", "So far and no further".

David C Piper,  
London.

\* In which case, why does the average fan read and buy NEW WORLDS ?

\*\* I believe that Mr Moorcock would contend that these stories do entertain, on their own level.

---

## Stranger Than Fiction

" I'm agin SF authors sittng in judgement on their fellow SF authors. The role of critic has no lure for me, especially as I'm too prejudiced to be a good one."  
Bill Temple.

Dear Pete

....Let us look at what that definer of significant SF, Mike Moorcock, has to say.

The sort of SF you like is "repellant to any intelligent and literate adult." Any intelligent and literate adult? Now I don't find it repellant, and I consider myself to be more intelligent and literate than MM (he said, modestly). Insignificant, perhaps, but not very often repellant. That is a very strong word.

Mike may say that the difference between Anderson and Aldiss is the difference between bad melodrama and good drama (or words to that effect), but looked at from the other point of view, the difference is that between straightforward story-telling and pretention. Personally, I consider them both hacks, with Aldiss the worse of the two, since he is a good writer who should know better. I have read fairly widely outside SF, (and am expanding every minute), so I feel that I can criticise Ballard for being obscure -- because he is obscure. And not only is he obscure, but he is obscure about the same thing whenever he writes his story....as far as I can gather, he only has one story. (The Drowned World was exactly the same as The Drought; it even had the same characters, and it was equally as boring.

Joe Patrizio,  
St. Albans.

---

Dear Pete,

..... I am not sad about ZENITH because it is reactionary. I am sad because ZENITH is so inarticulate....and reactionary. I would be just as sad if it were progressive and inarticulate, sadder probably. ZENITH is unique, it's a private magazine which has a specialist and approving readership. It is serious about SF, which cannot be other than good. But it doesn't seem to say anything, all it does is hold opinions. Believe it or not, there is a difference between the two! I know you don't agree with me, but SF Horizons is a magazine which says something, yet doesn't seem to express an opinion. That SFH supports the contemporary trend has nothing to do with it at all. If it was to plumb for Wellsian stories or Butlerian utopias then I would probably approve of it just as much, simply because I am sure they would say why they like that particular kind of SF.\*

What I would approve of in ZENITH would be an article, or a long editorial, expressing in clear, articulate English just what the attraction is in the reactionary SF you appear to like. I'm not saying there is no attraction, because most of the SF I like is the same as what you like. I don't like Piper, but that's only one author. I would also like to see an article in ZENITH outlining the attraction of contemporary SF. Opinions (like Jeeves' reviews) are worthless beyond their use as a yardstick.\*\*

Chris Priest, (extracted from a private letter not originally intended for publication.)

\* There may be much in what you have to say. I would differ in my regard for SFH. The difference between that journal, and ZENITH, is as you point out,



that we have opinions, SFH says something without expressing an opinion. The manner in which this is accomplished seems to me to be dogmatic and assertive. SFH does not say that " (the writer) thinks an item is poor", but instead assumes that the item is poor, and that everyone else will automatically agree with this estimation. In effect, we are saying "we don't claim to be God; we may be wrong...but we think Robert Heinlein is the greatest of SF authors, (ambiguous and badly-defined as that statement may be)." On the other side of the fence, the writers in SFH are as likely to mention Heinlein in a fleeting passage as being "stilted and crudely written", without explanation for this remark. It seems to me that our approach is more reasonable, and more fair. We certainly do try to explain why we hold the opinions that we do. I suspect that the approach used in SFH is one of the reasons why fandom as a whole has received that magazine very badly; it is quite likely to irk, when one's most liked and respected authors are dismissed so casually.

\*\* We agree that we too would like to see such articles. However, we can only print what we receive. May we suggest the application of that old-established principle, "practice what you preach." We will be glad to see articles on these lines.

---

Our Letters Department has had to be cut short in this issue, due to lack of space, among other reasons. We take this opportunity of requesting comments upon ZENITH. We are always glad to hear from our readers, we publish and/or reply if possible. All letters for the next issue, however, must be received by a final deadline of March 5th, 1966, if they are to be considered for publication.

---

#### CAPSULED CRITIQUE: FRED SABERHAGEN.

Fred Saberhagen must be especially noted for his "Berserker" stories, in IF and in Worlds Of Tomorrow magazines. Not published in chronological order, these stories tell of the conflict between man and machine; the machine an alien nightmare of ferocious intent to destroy all life. These stories have generally been well-received, for fairly simple reasons. The majority are short, and of simple plot that does not totter into ruins, nor escalate into incomprehension. The story-background is unusual, interesting, and novel; fascinating in its concept of awesome alien machines, aeons old, a concept that sparks that almost-mythical 'sense of wonder', in its vastness and strangeness. The idea is a 'winner', and Saberhagen's repertoire of different 'plot twists' and 'gimmick' endings' has made each story fresh and original. There are two exceptions; the two long stories in the series, The Stone Place, and Masque of the Red Shift exposed the author's basic inability to write well at length, and failed in both characterisation and in plotting. One paramount fault was that these two stories dealt with dull people rather than with the intriguing Berserkers; and that the machines themselves, instead of remaining the awesome monsters of previous tales, were reduced to the petty level of human bickering. A mistake made so often by A.E. vanVogt; perhaps Saberhagen will take note.

## ADVERTISEMENTS

Column advertisements 6d (10¢) for 10 words. Box Numbers available at 1/- extra charge. (We forward your mail). Display advertisements (full,  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$  pages, ), rates on request. To, Editor, 9 Porlock Crescent, Northfield, Birmingham 31, England.

---

### BOOKS & MAGAZINES

SF HARDCOVER and PAPERBACKED BOOKS  
Send S.A.E. for list and prices to  
R.M. Bennett, 52 Fairways Drive, Forest Lane, Harrogate, Yorks.

AMERICAN and BRITISH SF, bound & paperbacks, ACE, ERE, Andre Norton, & Bibliographical publications, etc at FANTAST, (Medway) Ltd, 75 Norfolk Street, Wisbech, Cambs.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES....For SF collectors in both Gt. Britain and the USA, the F&SF Book Co, P.O. Box 415 Staten Island, New York, provide an excellent service. New and out-of-print books. Send for the extensive monthly catalogue.

EXCHANGES..You can exchange British SF books and magazines for American material, or vice versa. British & American fans wishing to trade may contact John Boston, 816 South First Street, Mayfield, Kentucky, 42066, giving name, address, type of material wanted, and some indication of the quantity of material required, if this is possible. U.K. readers are meanwhile invited to correspond with the addresses below;

Don Martin, West Main Rd, Little Compton, Rhode Island, 02837. Will want general fantasy from the UK, including much weird fiction. Can swap old Galaxys, F&SF, etc, and will buy.

C.W. Brooks, Jr. 911, Briarfield Road Newport News, Virginia 23605. Wants old hardcovers mainly, collects illustrated fantasy. Can supply new & old American material.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology SF Socy, 77 Massachusetts Ave., Room W20-443, Cambridge 39, Mass, USA Has about 3000 duplicate PBs and mags to trade; wants UK, Australian & foreign language material.

Eva Firestone Box 555, Upton, Wyoming 82730. Wants hardcovers and paperbacks, not confined to SF/fantasy. Will buy new material, in exchange, has little to trade on hand.

### ORGANISATIONS

THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION is organising the 1966 S.F. Convention at Yarmouth at Easter. Membership of the BSFA will allow you a reduced attendance fee. The BSFA offers the regular journal, VECTOR, the fiction magazine, TANGENT, postal library, bibliographies etc. For all details, write to Hon. Sec. Mrs Doreen Parker, 38 Millfield Road, Deeping St James, Peterborough Northants. Overseas readers are invited to join at reduced rates.

---

WHEN REPLYING TO ADVERTISEMENTS, PLEASE MENTION ZENITH SPECULATION.



## PUBLICATIONS

**RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY.** The U.S. magazine of S.F. criticism. Quarterly, 35¢ per copy; Ed. Leland Sapiro, Box 82, University Station, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

**A CHECKLIST OF POUL ANDERSON.** Complete bibliography of this author, 3/6 postpaid from Rog Peyton, 77, Grayswood Park Road, Birmingham 32, UK. or 50¢ from Hank Luttrell, Route 13, 2936 Barrett Station Rd., Kirkwood, Missouri, 63122, USA

**A CHECKLIST TO ASTOUNDING.** Part II 1940-50. Obtainable at 5/- per copy postpaid; B.T.Jeeves, 30, Thompson Road, Sheffield 11, Yorks.

**SPECULATIVE BULLETIN** contains news and reviews of new and forthcoming US and UK books. Obtainable at 25¢ (2/-) for four issues, from; John Boston, 816 South First St, Mayfield Kentucky, 42066. UK remittances to ZENITH, BOX 1

**THE BRIAN McCABE ART FOLIO** contains reprints from ZENITH and elsewhere, and many original illustrations. 3/6 from Brian McCabe, 2 Beaumont Road, Manor Park, Slough, Bucks.

**ZENITH ART FOLIO;** Two copies only remain, at 2/6p.p. Contains a selection of illustrations from ZENITH

**FRONT COVERS FROM ZENITH.** A limited number of copies are available, from issues 7, 8, & 10. Suitable for framing. Send a 6d stamp to the editor, for all three covers.

**RATATOSK** is a bi-weekly magazine of news, available at 25¢ for 3 issues from Bruce Pelz, Box 100, 308 Westwood Plaza, Los Angeles, California

**THE SKYRACK NEWSLETTER** keeps you informed of news, publications, and all current events. Available at 2/6d or 35¢ for 6 issues, from Ron Bennett, 52 Fairways Drive, Forest Lane, Harrogate, Yorks; or Robert Coulson, RR 3, Hartford City, Indiana, 47348, USA.

**FOCAL POINT** is also a biweekly magazine of news, but from the Eastern U.S. Coast. 25¢ for 3 issues, from Mike McInerney, 326 E. 13th, Apt 7, New York, USA.

**JACK VANCE: SCIENCE FICTION STYLIST** A very well-written evaluation of this author. Complete with bibliography, available at 30¢ from Robert Coulson, RR 3, Hartford City, Indiana, 47348, USA.

## WANTED

**WANTED: SPECULATIVE REVIEW, Vol.2., No.2.;** any issues of **INSIDE & S.F. ADVERTISER.** offers to Editor.

**WANTED: ZENITH,** issues 7 & 9. Offers to Don Martin, West Main Rd; Little Compton, Rhode Island, US 02837.

## MISCELLANEOUS

**BOOK PLATES.....** A set of one dozen book plates, professionally printed illustrated, size 3" x 3½", gummed backs, are available at 2/- per set from Ken McIntyre, 212 Commonwealth Way, Abbey Wood, London, S.E.2.

## ADVERTISE IN ZENITH

### THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FANZINES

....Is now being compiled by Harold Palmer Piser. This will be the ultimate reference work, to which Mr Palmer's reprint of the FANZINE INDEX is a preliminary project. A vast quantity of information is being handled by Mr Piser, and inevitably, many queries will arise. Consequently, Mr Piser would like anyone having an interest in fanzines to contact him. This especially includes fanzine editors, (current & lapsed), and collectors. Your offer of assistance will be welcomed, no matter what you know nor where you live. Please contact Mr Piser at 41-08, Parsons Boulevard, Flushing, New York, 11355, USA.

This is an opportunity for science fiction fandom to finally gain a handbook and reference work to what has gone before. The chance is too good to loose.

....The Editor.

### THE B.S.F.A. FANZINE FOUNDATION

....Is in many ways similar to Mr Piser's Bibliography. Each will eventually complement the other. The Foundation is the Fanzine section of the BSFA Library and contains British & American fanzines of every description. These are available on request for loan. The Foundation is not complete; it wants fanzines of every age and type. Please, do not destroy your old material, but send it to the Foundation, where it will get a good home. Fanzine-editors are urged to send a copy of all their publications to the Foundation, in the interests of posterity. FANZINE FOUNDATION, c/o C.Winstone, 71 George Rd, Erdington, B'ham 23, U.K.

### SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB.

for sf of the highest standard at the lowest prices, in well-bound volumes. Here is the programme for the next two months;

A MAN OF DOUBLE DEED	by Leonard Daventry	SPACE BORN	by Ian Wright
January 1966	15s. for SFBC 6s.6d	February	12s.6d for 6s.6d

also in January an SFBC Optional title

THE ARTHUR CLARKE OMNIBUS.  
30s. for SFBC 17s.6d. post free

Many SFBC past titles are still in print, and the whole range of famous Readers Union Optional books is now available to members of SFBC. For full details & enrolment form, please write to the address below; SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB, New Enrolments, 10-13 Bedford Street, London, W.C.2.



# FANZINE INDEX

**BOB PAVLAT & BILL EVANS** editors

Listing most fanzines

From the beginning through 1952

Including titles, editor's names and data on each issue

More than 140 pages entirely retyped

Looseleaf, indexed, stiff-covers.

\$2.50 postpaid anywhere (17/6)

A FORERUNNER OF THE

" BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FANZINES "

NOW BEING COMPILED.

OBTAINABLE FROM:-

Michael Ashley  
8 Shurland Avenue  
Sittingbourne, Kent, England  
Carl J. Brandon, Jr.  
Sällskapsvägen 7  
Stockholm 48, Sweden  
Dieter Steinseifer  
8200 Rosenheim  
Dr. Geiger-Str.1, Germany  
Collectors Book Store  
1717 North Wilcox  
Lollywood, California 90028  
and from the publisher

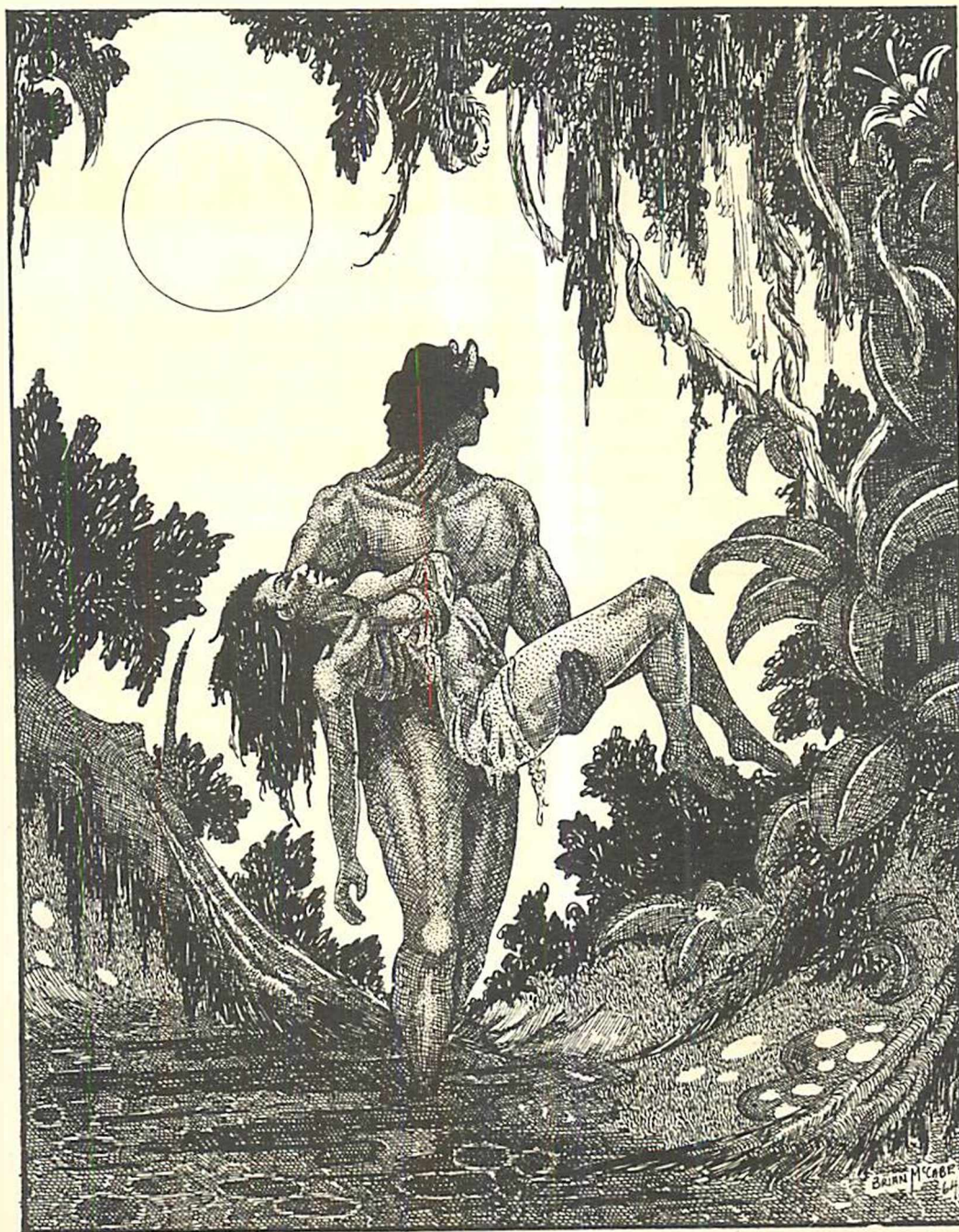
Re-printed and Published by

HAROLD PALMER FISER

41-08 Parsons Boulevard, Flushing, New York 11355  
U.S.A.

# ZENITH

speculation





# INTRODUCE A SUBSCRIBER

Get a friend to complete  
and return this form with  
his remittance. You get  
an extra issue on to your  
existing subscription.

# SUBSCRIBE

I enclose 10/- (£1.50) for a subscription to ZENITH,  
commencing with the current issue.

NAME

---

ADDRESS

---

---

INTRODUCED BY: (Where Applicable)

NAME

---

ADDRESS

---

---