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BOB JACK BARRON
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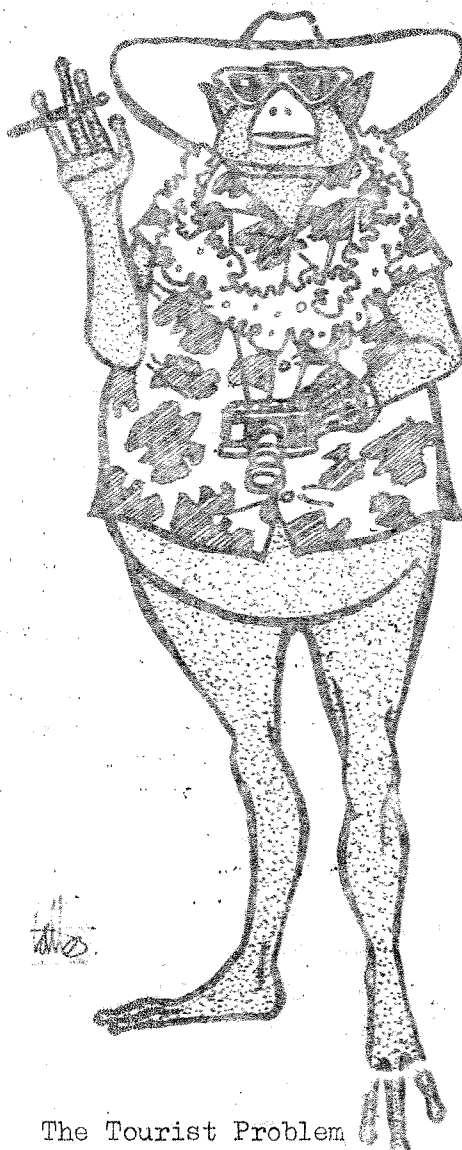
**STRANGE WAYS OF EVOL-
UTION** BY FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Speculation

DECEMBER 1968

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The Tourist Problem

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THE SPECULATOR GOES OPTIMISTIC

1968 was memorable, if a somewhat anticlimatic year for all speculative genre; 1969 promises to be much better. My reasons for optimism arise from the number and nature of 'fringe-activities' rather than events within the incestuous inner-circle of the SF field. The influence of science fiction, or of SF-derived ideas, ripples out into a number of media-forms, which is only natural considering the high 'potential energy' of any such body of literature which has encouraged the development and use of curiosity and imagination.

But these reasons could be equally symptomatic of a greater and more subtle shift in the attitudes of the 'outsider' public. The average intelligent outsider is fast becoming conditioned to New Wave outlooks (although these are not labelled as that, of course, nor even as SF itself) - and perhaps equally predictable (in retrospect) is the inertia of the motherfield itself, the reluctance of conservatism to acknowledge its heirs.

Surrealism has always been associated with SF, if only because there are two logical ways to accommodate its paradoxes - if you haven't the intellectual tools or the inclination to unravel the complexities of symbolism, then it is equally valid to assume the action takes place in another world, or dimension, or is fantasy/illusion, where the Laws of Being and Interaction manifest themselves differently. So, whereas the 'outsiders' might balk at an SF-label, the non-SF-aligned can accept the same principles of curiosity, imagination and creative expression under a surrealist banner. And while the bickering continues, these people are receiving an increasing number of films, books and records that have SF connotations if not SF derivations.

Many of these films, for instance, will be initially limited to 'art' circuits, but should be available eventually. Films like Huntz 'Le Grabuge' (Hung Up) about the fantasy escapes of an heiress gang-leader; Peter Skyes' 'The Committee', with Paul Jones as the Central Figure in a surreal fable who is called to account for beheading a man and sewing the head back on. Barry Shear's 'Wild in the Streets' (already released) shows the consequences of a youth-revolution - the vote at 14, a pop-idol President, and compulsory retirement to Homes for the over-30's. We already have 'Seconds', and the Ballardian imagery of 'The Swimmer', and there is 'Charley' from our own field's FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON, a moron's brief trip to genius... and back.

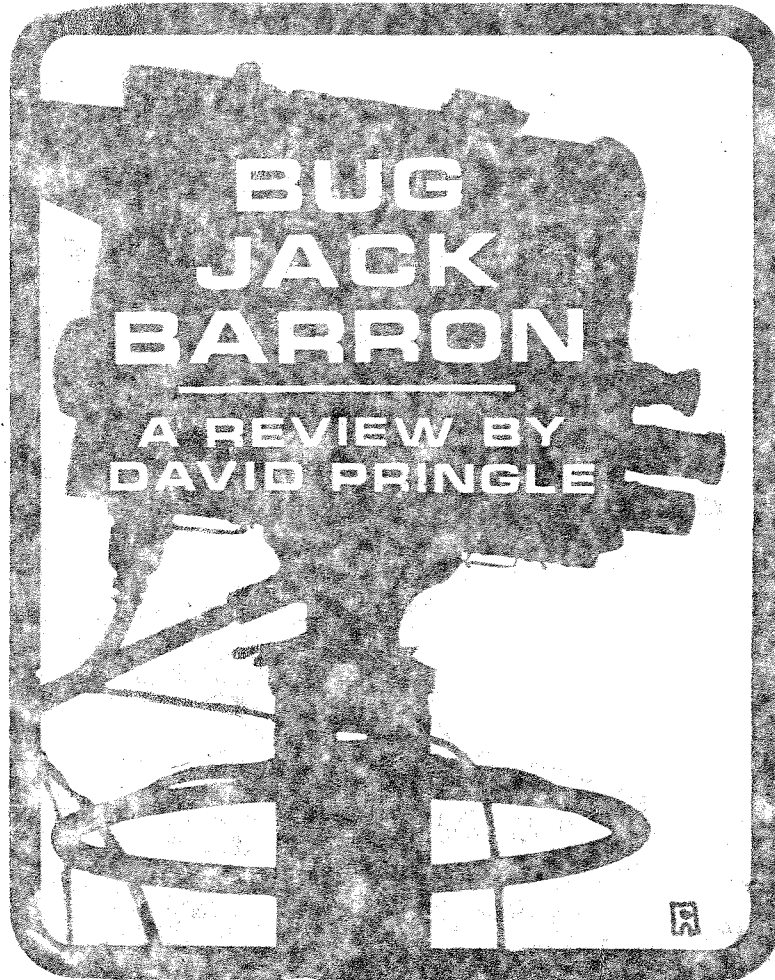
There have been some interesting 'fringe' books, too, ranging from the speculative (THE BIOLOGICAL TIMEBOMB and IF THE SUN DIES) to the historic (THE DAWN OF MAGIC) and the fringe-fiction (like MYRA BRECKENRIDGE and THE NIGHTCLERK). Other publishing ventures like Oz, International Times and Gandalf's Garden owe nothing to SF but deserve a mention for being fringe-SF output. And there follows the whole experimental-music scene and some brilliant and beautiful LPs which present by far the most moving of contemporary SF fronts; (I'm sure those Peelian patriots out there know which they are!).

So much exciting expansive stuff around can only be the portent of a good year ahead, and I for one hope this tender bubble of uncoordinated enthusiasm does not prematurely burst.

Have a good Christmas (although it will probably be the New Year before you read this) and be ready for 1969 !

Bob Rickard, 14/12/68.

BUG JACK BARRON - Norman Spinrad's controversial new novel - has already been reviewed in SPECULATION by M. John Harrison (last issue) but David Pringle has brought up some further points which deserve comment. After this review, the author of the novel has some remarks to make about the book.



This novel has already been reviled by some critics, notably Donald Wollheim, who described it as a "depraved, cynical, utterly repulsive and thoroughly degenerate and decadent parody of what was once a real science fiction theme". That, at least, is an opinion. Mr Wollheim's main objection to the novel (as outlined in his LUNACON speech, quoted briefly in SPECULATION-19) seems to be that it is a 'dangerous vision', that is, a frightening glimpse of a nasty future. Presumably, therefore, he considers 1984, LIMBO 90, and similar dystopias to be cynical, repulsive and decadent, too.

What Mr Wollheim and many other people who object to 'pessimism' in modern science fiction fail to grasp is that SF has a very important scatological function. The nightmare is every bit as necessary as the sweet dream, and as psychologists tell us, it can be highly therapeutic. All science fiction is a literary dream-process. It helps to visualise modern man's hopes and fears: it creates a symbolic mythology for our times, both horrific and glorious. The two qualities are inseparable; it is the paradox of man's progress.

If there are more 'dangerous' than 'wondrous' visions in modern SF, it is for the same reason that a man who is passing through an upset in his life will experience more nightmares than sweet dreams. The whole world is passing through an 'upset' at present, a bewildering transition phase. As life progresses, so possible disasters multiply, and we can exorcise these possibilities by dreaming about them, by writing SF novels about them. In BUG JACK BARRON, Norman Spinrad takes many of the collective nightmares (and dreams) of present-day America and forms them into a scarifying vision (though perhaps ambivalently so) of life twenty years hence. A note of optimism does come in at the end - despite Mr Wollheim's complaints, Spinrad is in fact writing about a struggle between Good and Evil. Good wins, as in Tolkien's LORD OF THE RINGS (which Mr Wollheim says he admired for that reason).

But BUG JACK BARRON is a more important book than LORD OF THE RINGS, because it deals with a world of present problems rather than some loosely-symbolic never-never land. Here the whole issue of 'realistic' SF versus 'escapist' SF comes to a head. Too much modern writing is of the latter sort; it carries the reader away on a self-indulgent romp and doesn't really benefit him aesthetically, intellectually, or socially. To use Spinrad's own terms, much SF is a 'cop-out' on life in the present; it panders to ready-made dreams, gives us a static, simplistic and insipid vision rather than one that moves with the whole complexity, horror, and beauty of living. Yet science fiction, which allows so much escapism, is also the ideal vehicle for the 'realistic' kind of imaginative writing; it is the most 'mind-blowing' of all literary media, at least in the 'popular' sense. (Remember, I use 'realism' in the widest sense, meaning anything of relevance to the human situation and the fullness of life).

Norman Spinrad realises this, and he is honestly trying to produce fiction of the 'realistic' sort. BUG JACK BARRON deals square-on with life in our times; it stands above most SF simply because it is fully engaged and fully committed to the world of now. The author is highly receptive to events and tendencies in America today, and he shirks no issue, however complex, however distasteful. Spinrad has said: "I'm a writer. Good or bad, I consider myself as an artist and I don't blush at the word. An artist's dedication if he is to be something more than a whore, must be to the truth as he sees it. Nothing less. Speaking the truth is not always easy, painless or self-serving. It is merely necessary."

AMBITION SEEMS TO MAKE THE BEST WRITER

This can't be passed off as deluded egotism. Indeed, the principal fault of some science fiction-authors is that they don't take themselves seriously enough. Unlike Spinrad, they do blush at the word 'artist'. At best, most SF writers think of themselves as 'craftsmen' and 'entertainers', on something like the same level as John Creasey, C.S. Forester, or Nevil Shute. Ambition seems to make the best writer; that is why Thomas M. Disch is better than Roger Zelazny. To be really good, an SF writer must try - and that doesn't mean his work need be 'pretentious'.

Norman Spinrad's first two novels, THE SOLARIANS (Paperback Library, 1966), and AGENT OF CHAOS (Belmont Books, 1967) were pieces of formula SF, almost unreadable, and notable only for their energy and the optimistic fervour of their endings. His third novel, THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE, (Doubleday, 1967) was more serious and idiosyncratic, written out of a concern for 'the truth'. However, it is with his fourth novel, BUG JACK BARRON, that Spinrad really comes into his own. This political story of America in 1987 is written in an incredibly energetic style - a compulsive flow of American idiom that takes no regard for grammar or 'taste'. No doubt it is this style that has caused many people to react unfavourably to the book.

Yet this style is essentially Spinrad's way of expressing that 'truth' he talks about. He is writing about America, its fears, neuroses, myths, dirty secrets, and heroisms. The uncompromising style allows him to get into the spirit of America, into the terrifying heartland where the important battles are being fought. In a way (like Meiller in AN AMERICAN DREAM and Burroughs in NOVA EXPRESS) he is dealing firsthand with the American unconscious -- nightmare in every sense. And the style makes us constantly aware of 'truths' that lie behind the actions of the characters. There is an explicit equation between the power-drive and the penis, for instance.

Spinrad has described BUG JACK BARRON as "a coherent NOVA EXPRESS". Indeed the villain, Benedict Howards, is another incarnation of Burroughs' Mr Bradley Mr Martin, or Dick's Palmer Eldritch. He is one of "those men who know the Big Secret: we can all be bought." Howards is the symbol of addiction, illusion, manipulation; he is the characteristic devil of our times. He is also a product of the System (American politics, capitalism, consumer economy, other-direction, etc) and it is the System that has turned the once-idealistic Jack Barron into a cynic. No code or ethic can stand up to the harsh pragmatic necessity of living with the system, and Barron, like almost everyone else, has succumbed. Yet, at the climax of the novel, he works out his own new ethic:

"He stared at the meaningless commercial on the monitor as the prompt-board flashed '30 seconds' and knew that in half a minute his image, a reality that was realer than real, would burn into a hundred million eyes as if they were in the room with him.

"No, they would be sucked in deeper than that, they would be in his head, behind his eyes, seeing and hearing only what he wanted them to, nothing more and not a phosphor-dot less.

"And in the strange reversal of perspective, he saw that they were all a part of him, the image -- Jack Barron was also a part of them. What he had always avoided had come at him from where he least expected it -- 'Bug Jack Barron', like it or not, was power, terrible, unprecedented power, and with it came the unavoidable choice that had faced every power-junkie since time began; to have the sheer gall to fake being something greater than a man, or cop-out on the millions who poured a part of themselves into your image and be something less.

"And as the promptboard flashed 'On The Air', Jack Barron knew that there was only one way he could play it...."

Barron has the freedom of an existential choice; to play along with the System, or to attack it with 'the truth'. His position as the compere of a powerful television show enables him to destroy the whole evil power-structure of Bennie Howards 'Foundation for Human Immortality'. So Jack Barron becomes a new kind of hero. He has lost his life, his self-respect -- and his complacency; he has gained the satisfaction of a kick at the devil.

The plot of the novel is complex and fast-moving. The moral situation remains equivocal throughout, and it is not until the last chapter that the issues crystallise. On the way Spinrad deals with all the problems of American life, the hippies, drugs, black power, violence, political corruption, image-thinking, fantasy and reality in sex, and so on. These subjects become part of the style; they are part of the language of America today, and it is the language that Spinrad is trying to capture, above all, in this novel. BUG JACK BARRON is a totally-committed book, and as a result Spinrad does attain a vision of 'truth'. This novel is more 'true' than almost anything else in American science fiction.

Cont/d....

Some people will complain that the book is too long and the style repetitive. But the reader must submit himself to the style, not fight against it, and then he will find the novel exhilarating. The book has some faults - a slight note of false sentimentality comes in at the end; at one point the plot relies on coincidence - but these are compensated for by the author's energy and sincerity. BUG JACK BARRON has impact, and few people can remain unmoved by it.

David W. Pringle, 1968

IN REPLY by Norman Spinrad.

"Here in America, one sees reviews of science fiction at the level of quality of the M. John Harrison (SPECULATION-19) and David Pringle pieces on BUG JACK BARRON once or twice a year, if it is a vintage year and one is lucky. So to see two such reviews of my book (and from what seem to me to be two quite different but equally valid viewpoints) in the same publication leads me to believe that I have either been extraordinarily lucky or that in the literary universe at any rate the rumours of Britain's decline as a world power have been somewhat exaggerated.

Both articles seem to me to be eminently fair, reasonably exhaustive, and largely correct in their assumptions of what I was trying to do; therefore these comments of mine are only in the way of annotation and amplification of some of the points made by Mr Harrison and Mr Pringle, and perhaps a further comment on one issue which they seem to have both strangely ignored, although it is an integral part of the theme of the book.

Mr Harrison's quite correct contention that, apart from my approach to the material, BUG JACK BARRON is a perfectly ordinary piece of SF is an insight that it may seem strange to hear me applauding. What I set out to do was to write a novel that fulfilled all the requirements of the conventional SF-genre novel while also dealing with the realities depicted with the honesty, rigour and stylistic freedom generally associated with so-called mainstream literature. It is in this sense, not so much as in the sense of thematic similarity, that I described the book, as Mr Pringle says, "a coherent NOVA EXPRESS". Which is not to say that I quarrel with Mr Pringle's equation of Benedict Howards with Mr Bradley Mr Martin and Palmer Eldritch; I merely want to make it clear that this perfectly valid interpretation is Mr Pringle's original insight and not my own.

Another minor error that seems to have crept in to both articles is something that is perhaps inevitable in British criticism of such an "American" book. the idiom I use in BJB is not quite the idiom of any segment of America circa 1968. It is an attempt to extrapolate the American idiom or idioms of the 1980's from the idiom of today; in other words, the idiom too is science fiction. Since the book deals with the near future, and since the difference between the American idiom of 1968 and that I have postulated of 1988 is probably a good deal more subtle than the difference between present-day American and British idioms, it would really be asking too much of British reviewers to pick up on something like this.

Barron's own language-style is not pure hip -- it is a synthesis of hip, show-biz and the New Left idioms, a synthesis which as I write this is still an extrapolation. However, at least one extrapolation -- the Negro word "shade" for Caucasian -- that I invented in the book seems to have actually passed into use while the book was being serialised ! Today's extrapolation becomes next morning's reporting...

Another extrapolation that seems to be in the process of becoming fact is that which Mr Harrison calls the "whimsy" of Acapulco Gold (pot, that is) being sold in packs like cigarettes. Mr Harrison complains that this concept loses its whimsy the fourth time around. I'm afraid I never intended this to be whimsical. This too is a serious extrapolation (see my article on the social implications of drugs in America, 'The Ecology of Dope' in Knight magazine). It became even less whimsical when, again while the book was being serialised, the R.J. Reynolds tobacco company quietly copyrighted the trademark, "Acapulco Gold".

I found Mr Harrison's caution on my use of adjectives quite well-taken and useful from my point of view, particularly since the model he held up for my study, Brian Aldiss' Charteris pieces (which I understand are parts of a forthcoming novel) is one for which I have immense admiration. In the final book version of BUG JACK BARRON I have thinned down my adjectives in some places. However, while I do acknowledge the influence of Kerouac, my theory of use of adjectives owes more to McLuhan, and of all people, Homer. I tried to use adjectives as epithets, in the Homeric sense, that is, not so much as non-modifiers but as continuous restatements of certain attributes of my characters. Thus, the repetition was conceived as a device for characterisation, not as a crutch to hide imprecise choice of description.

This does not necessarily invalidate Mr Harrison's critique of the effect of my use of adjectives, but my reasons for this particular employment are based upon a complicated theory of writing too involved to go into here. Suffice to say that it is my belief that a novel has a real existence as a series of effects in the reader's minds, not as marks upon paper. The reader experiences the world in a non-linear fashion while prose seems to be confined to linear description. Therefore, I tried, by use of strings of adjectival epithets and by the use of punctuation as a means of controlling the rhythm of reading, to give the reader the illusion of non-linear reality, of gestalt-perception, by causing a pile-up of images and therefore a non-linear perception of those images at the end of certain paragraphs. Or as Sam Delany once said to me, "the paragraph is the real unit of thought in the novel." Reading back over what I've just written I'm not sure it's possible to make sense of this idea except at great length.

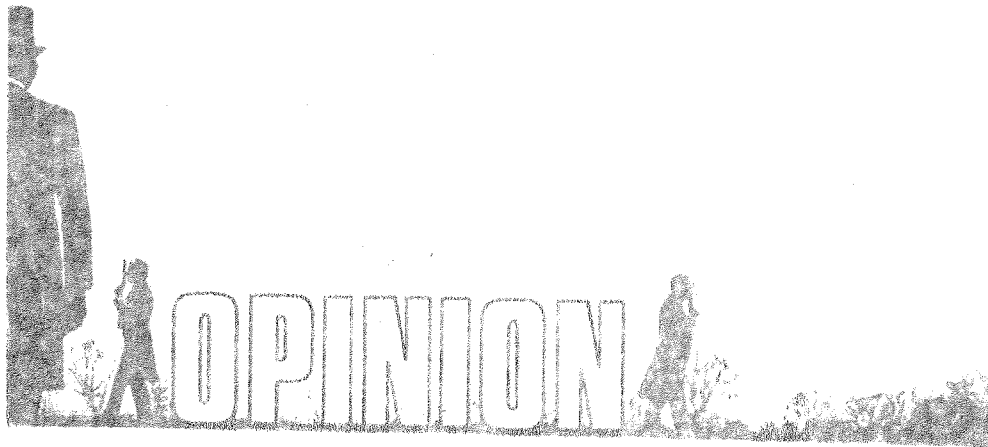
Finally, I merely note in passing (because I don't know why this aspect of the book has been so studiously avoided) that both articles do not even mention that a major theme of the novel is the effect of television on human consciousness and upon American Presidential politics.

But again, let me express my gratitude for these intelligent critiques. Perhaps I am speaking from the wasteland of American criticism of SF, but it is a pleasant surprise to see reviews which are not only understanding and perceptive but which, particularly Mr Harrison's piece, leave me with insights that I shall surely find useful in the perfection of my craft.

Norman Spinrad, 1968

* BUG JACK BARRON has now been purchased by Walker & Co. for hardcover publication in the U.S. in the spring, simultaneous with the Avon paperback edition.*

The JSFA's GALACTIC FAIR 1969 will be held at The Randolph Hotel, Oxford, over Easter, 4-6th April 1969, with Guest-of-Honour Judith Merril. To join the convention send 10/- part-registration fee to the Treasurer, Anne Keylock, 67 Shakespeare Road, Hanwell, London W.7. Full literature will be sent.



13: GENERAL CONTRACTION OF STORY-VALUES (David Redd)

"...I recently read 'Satan's World' in Analog, by Poul Anderson. Archaic imagery (dragon attacks castle), alien fleet reduced to a single alien, another irradiated world, Satan's World reduced to a single avalanche, psychological drama avoided by killing Latimer.... In short, a general contraction of story values. No, I'm not proposing Anderson for a World's Worst honour. But won't you ask Mr Busby to tell us why he liked Satan's World?"

14: NO QUESTIONS ANSWERED AT ALL ? (Gregg Benford)

"...Bob Silverberg's THE MASKS OF TIME is probably one of the best novels of the year, even though it is flawed by inadequate resolution and a lack of narrative drive. It is principally a novel of character, and Silverberg succeeds as very few SF authors ever have in drawing detailed, interesting, thoroughly human people who move in totally believable fashion through the world of 1999. He has attempted to follow his religious novel, THORNS, with another theme more closely related to the impact of faith (in all its ugliness) on society; because he chooses to let the reader make most of the conclusions himself (perhaps a laudable aim) he cannot sustain any dramatic effect at the climax. At one point he resorts to the rather weak impact of a homosexual encounter (one that was completely predictable, mostly due to Silverberg's own competence at characterisation), but it is insufficient to resolve the brooding threat that hangs over the later chapters of the book. One closes the volume not quite sure whether any questions have been answered at all."

15: LACKING IN OBNOXIOUS CHARM ? (J.B. Post)

"...We all seem to take Norman Spinrad as our whipping boy - Norm can be a fairly good writer at times, but he suffers from the belief that every word he writes must never be changed or his 'art' will be prostituted. MEN IN THE JUNGLE was rather good in conception but he used current slang needlessly and in a lot of little matters the story could have been cleaned up. He doesn't have Harlan Ellison's obnoxious charm (which permeates everything Harlan does) to make one say "Oh well, you know Harlan" as an excuse. Norm we expect to measure up, and when he doesn't we are disappointed and he is upset with us for not recognising his great talent. He could be a good writer if he weren't so hip & in. I am eagerly awaiting BUG JACK BARRON to see if he has improved or degenerated. All the furour over four-letter words is irrelevant as far as I am concerned."

16: BEATING A DEAD HORSE (Richard Delap)

"...Worst short story of the year has to be J.G. Ballard's 'The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race'. Ballard's story presents the ultimate in poor taste and sheer, stabbingly mindless stupidity. The author has absolutely no respect for the mechanics of the English language or literary form. I am all for trying new ideas and methods, but when all efforts persistently fail I find it a bit ridiculous watching an author beat a dead horse. In fact, the only story I liked by Ballard was 'The Drowned Giant'. A fluke ? "

17: CROWN FOR RIDICULOUSNESS (Franz Rottensteiner)

"...Most treatments of overpopulation in SF are bad; even Harry Harrison's **MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!** is propaganda more than anything else, containing a number of grievous dialectical errors. The crown for ridiculousness belongs without doubt to John Brunner's **THE DREAMING EARTH**, where he offers the solution of an emigration to a parallel Earth via drugs; naked, without tools, and without prospect of return. To undertake that sort of colonisation you must not be so much an adventurous type; you must be mad. But it is very easy to write things like this when you can sit in your armchair and neglect all common sense. I would like to see what John Brunner (who has probably never seen a forest untouched by the hand of man) would do on a completely virgin world." (extracted from a longer text)

18: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS (Richard Gordon)

"...There was a period, specifically that in New Worlds from perhaps 1964 to 1966, when editorial policy lumped both 'Old Guard' and 'New Wave' together without overt discrimination; so that readers of the magazine devolved into two axes; the Jeevesites and the Ballardites, if one may call them so. You had this genuine conflict so long as editorial policy forced Old Guard and New Wave to share the same bed; now that New Worlds is solidly 'New Wave' and in fact dissociates itself from the title 'science fiction', that conflict is over and done with. Finished. Now it exists merely on the level of personal readership allegiance to particular preferences.

The fiction that is written by authors such as Disch is classified as 'SF', as is that written by Heinlein and so forth. The conflict is semantic - the usage of the term 'science fiction'. There can be no literary conflict because the two poles of fiction lumped under the same title are so far apart as to be irreconcilable. But they are still regarded as bedfellows and each is supposed to strive to kick the other out." (from correspondence)

19: A BEDROOM ROMP (Gerald Bishop)

"...FIVE TO TWELVE by Edmund Cooper is an excellent book, very readable, with good characterisation and a passable plot made better by good writing. That's more than can be said for the author's last book, **A FAR SUNSET**, which I found unreadable. FIVE TO TWELVE is somewhat reminiscent of another of Cooper's sociological stories, **ALL FOOLS' DAY**, with the main factor being an altering of the stability of Nature, or rather, of man's artificial nature. The sexual side of the story is handled very well indeed, and where most authors might turn this into a romp around the bedroom, it would be painfully obvious that it was just that. Cooper has his romp, but it blends in with the scenery, as it were. A very good book."

With so much present discussion of new trends and techniques in science fiction writing, it is easy to forget that the majority of our favourite reading matter is still being written in the traditional patterns. What are the strengths of conventional SF, or perhaps more important, what are its weaknesses? In this somewhat iconoclastic article Franz Rottensteiner makes some relevant observations, based on the failings of a recent SF novel.

STRANGE WAYS OF EVOLUTION

BY FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

WHAT IS THE single most important thing to look for when examining the work of any particular author? Is it the strength of characterisation shown, or the skill in plot-development, or perhaps with a science fiction story it might be the depth of original thinking shown? I prefer to take a somewhat different view: I ask, 'What questions does this author ask?; are they intelligent, useful, original questions; and are they important?'

The great philosophers of the past owe much of their repute to their formulation of new, deep questions, and not necessarily because of the answers they gave. They were able to see problems in things that others had taken for granted until then as matters of course.

So that when we find an author asking stupid questions, we need hardly be surprised to find him arriving at stupid answers. I think it was Damon Knight who once said that SF is a literature that gives answers; he might have been more correct to say that SF is a kind of literature that ignores all the important questions, or answers them badly, and which deals instead with a lot of trivial questions to which it gives pseudo-answers.

To digress for a moment, there might presently be considered to be three groups of science fiction fans so far as literary taste is concerned. The first of these doesn't want any literary values to be introduced into SF, for then they might miss many of the clichés of pulp fiction that are so dear to them.

The second group, whose outstanding example might be the fore-mentioned Damon Knight, if we are to judge from his recent BOSKONE speech, want SF to be 'literature', but just a little, please. They require only a minimum of stylistic accompaniment and logical plot-development from their favourite reading matter, and have a pious belief in Sturgeon's Law, that consolation invented by mediocrity for mediocrity, which states that 90% of everything is rubbish. Damon Knight seems to be happy that SF authors produce so much - if they can only turn out enough rubbish, perhaps, there is bound to be an accompanying 10% of worthwhile material?

A final group might be led by Michael Moorcock, who argues that science fiction not only can be a kind of literature, but that indeed, it could become its leading form.

(I believe this last argument is something of a wild dream, for there simply isn't enough talent in the field. Much of what Moorcock and his associated authors are doing in New Worlds has been done by the dadaists, futurists, surrealist and others, several decades ago, and done better. And even then, it wasn't particularly good - is there a writer among the SF New Wave as good as Hugo Bell or Hans Arp or Kurt Schwitters ?)

As with these other literary movements, the manifestos and proclamations of the 'new SF' make rather better reading than its fiction or poetry. But in at least one aspect Moorcock is right, and that is in his stress upon subject matter, a stress not shared by the more orthodox critics such as Knight or Blish.

Craftsmanship is not a quality to be belittled, and I'll readily admit that science-fiction could use more of it. However, I do not believe for a moment that the ability to write readable prose and create 'reasonable' plots is in itself sufficient to make good science fiction.

Conversely, an idea alone isn't enough either, because a story is more than just craftsmanship plus idea. A story should be a total unity of thought and form, the one being impossible without the other. And so this brings us back to our starting point; What questions do our SF craftsmen ask in their stories - and what answers do they give ?

CAREFUL CRAFTSMEN IN SCIENCE FICTION

In an excellent article in YEAR'S BEST SF, 1967, Brian Aldiss listed a few of the people he considered to be careful craftsmen in our field. His listing included Poul Anderson, Algis Budrys, John Brunner and Robert Silverberg, along with Gordon R. Dickson, about whose novel SOLDIER ASK NOT I intend to say a few words.

It seems to me that a good many of these 'careful' craftsmen' give this impression only because they say practically nothing in their fiction; I suspect that they would soon stand exposed as stutterers if they tried their hands at something important. Algis Budrys is an important SF writer, but is the Poul Anderson of today an original craftsman ? Or Silverberg ? (with the possible exception of 'Hawksbill Station' I have regretted reading any story of his that it has been my misfortune to encounter . TO OPEN THE SKY in particular showed only too clearly that Silverberg doesn't know the least thing about the appeal of religion.)

Gordon R. Dickson has written a number of competent, if uninspired SF stories, but lately he seems to have acquired the bad habit of asking stupid questions. For instance, what would you think of a popular novelist who claimed that the discovery of the Americas did away with all the conflict among the nations of Europe ? Any schoolboy would recognise that this was untrue, but in Dickson's MISSION TO THE UNIVERSE however, much the same claim is made for the discovery of new inhabitable planets; all matters of conflict between the USSR and the USA are supposed to dissolve in the vacuum of free space, as it were.

Any book containing such 'thinking' would be bad, even if the characterisation hadn't been as lousy as it actually was. Dickson tried to create a new, dangerous 'lebensraum' mythology of the space age; he wished to pretend that space travel would reform human nature. It is these wild claims of the apologists of space travel that make you suspect their aims.

In Dickson's THE SPACE SWIMMERS, part of mankind returns to the biggest womb of all, the ocean, where they develop marvellous properties after four generations in the great mother-fluid. These include an ability to travel along the 'magnetic force-lines of our galaxy', and even more astonishing, an 'evolutionary ethic', whatever that may be. This anti-rationality is appalling. And now Gordon R Dickson has done it again and has presented SOLDIER ASK NOT (Dell, USA), another crossbreed of modern pseudoscience with pseudomysticism.

First he postulates the story, as one Padma (a wise man) puts it: "The human race broke up in an evolutionary explosion at the moment in history when interstellar colonisation became practical. This happened for reasons stemming from racial instinct... Out of that explosion came cultures individually devoted to single facets of the human personality. The fighting, combative facet became the Dorsai. The facet which surrendered the individual wholly to some faith or other became the Friendly. The philosophical facet created the Exotic Culture. We call these Splinter Cultures."

Well, don't you suppose some splinters might be missing from the list given by Mr Dickson? What became of, say, the whoring facet of mankind? Why not planets full of whores? (I can think of at least one good reason; the taboos of the American publishing industry. Mr Dickson wanted to write a good clean book about acceptable violence, and not one about good clean and non-acceptable sex.

WHAT ABOUT THE WHORES?

When Denis Diderot in what was probably the first anticipation of Huxley's test-tube babies, (in a passage from 'Reve de l'Alembert'), wrote of the artificial creation of specific human types, he didn't forget the prostitutes; "A warm room, on whose wall will stand little phials, each of them labelled; soldiers, clerks, philosophers, poets, courtesans, kings..". But he was speaking of an artificial process, not of the results of some unfathomable process of nature, and of course he didn't suppose these people would be clearly separated in space, on different planets.

But taking this example of the 'whoring facet' of mankind simply serves to show how ridiculous the concept has become. Who would the prostitutes serve, you might ask, or perhaps 'Who delivers the milk to the philosophers of the Exotic cultures'?

In our experience we know of nothing which could cause such a differentiation; there is simply no conceivable 'evolutionary explosion' which could produce such arbitrary Splinter Cultures. Although science fiction deals with the unexpected and the unknown, there have to be some limits. Nature is not a magician with a hat, ready to pull out such non-logical magic. Why soldiers if not prostitutes? Why religious fanatics and not managers? Why only philosophers but no artists? Are these neglected splinters any less important or less basic to the human race?

If an author postulates such strange ways of evolution, it is his duty, damn it, to explain a) the mechanism of the process, and b) its limiting factors. What decided Nature, in her wisdom, to stop the process after the production of soldiers, philosophers, fanatics and so on? Why not continue the process, splinter the Splinters, the philosophers could fill planets of Kantians, Bergsonians, Freudians, Aristotelians, Cartesians, etc. If SF were a genre that took itself less seriously but was instead about more serious subjects, some other writer would probably satirise Dickson in that manner!

The natural destiny of such concepts is to be ridiculed, and nobody need answer with the old cliches about 'suspension of disbelief' and 'sense of wonder'. There needs certainly to be a suspension of disbelief, but I simply refuse to do it if I have to sacrifice my intellect in the process. I can see no reason why we should adopt any old spate of nonsense as the premise of a story; If we are going to have non-sense, non-logic, we might as well admit the non-scientific, anti-scientific nature of much science fiction.

One further point so far as all this is concerned; at the end of SOLDIER ASK NOT we are told that a remodelling will come "when the Splinter Culture peoples turn back to recombine with Earth's basic stock into a new, evolved form of man." This reunion seems to be a pet notion of the author, for in THE SPACE SWIMMERS we have the same splitting-up and recombining; strange indeed are the ways of nature !

I can only wonder how she will go about the remodelling process. Perhaps She will arrange for laws to be passed for compulsory marriage between individuals of different Splinters ? For some strange reason Nature has yet to crossbreed the white and coloured peoples on the scale that seems indicated.

VOICES IN THE HEAD !

So much for the 'genetic' background; now to our hero, who is yet another self-righteous superman of basic Earth stock, full to the brim with hate for all other people. He has the talent of manipulating people with a few words; after having understood them, instinctively, by means of some sort of mystical rapport. His talent is first recognised when he visits "The Final Encyclopedia", an institution serving the purpose of collecting the total knowledge of Man and inferring from it a "blind area" in which supposedly something is to be found, 'a quality, ability or strength', something that has been lost by the development of the Splinter types.

Our hero, one Tam Olyn, visits the Index Room of the 'Final Encyclopedia' where he has a mystical experience; he hears voices, millions of them, which is something nobody had ever been able to hear before. It was not reported that the secret of his brilliance was also an ability to hear voices; should I ever begin to hear voices in the head I would go and visit a psychiatrist; the characters in Dickson's book take it as an indication that Olyn is a superman and therefore the natural leader of the Encyclopedia.

(It is hardly necessary to add that nowhere in this novel does the hero show that he has the intellectual equipment to supervise such an intellectual enterprise; his speeches can hardly be called 'inspired' and indeed he is more of a Big Fool than anything else. I can only say that it is very nice of Mr Dickson to put in a few good words for learning, even though he has not tried to characterise a ;earned man.

There is one way to judge such elements in a story; do they serve any integral function within the totality that constitutes the story ? Or can they be replaced with something else ? I maintain that all the talk about the Final Encyclopedia is wholly irrelevant. If you were to exchange it for a passage saying that the hero's talent (not counting the voices in the head) enabled him to sell groceries, nothing important would be changed in the novel, and it would be so much more fun to read it that way !

The manipulation of people with a few words is the sort of nonsense that may delight the kiddies, who like to see people reduced to mere puppets on the strings of some superman, but it's hardly something that can interest anyone else. Let's take a look at how Mr Dickson goes about characterising a man for whom this talent comes so easy.

The hero first uses his powers to prevent his sister from marrying a Friendly. In the circumstances his advice seemed only sensible; moreover, since her brother appears to be the only person Eileen Olyn knows well, it hardly seems surprising that she should take his advice. So why is the fool, our hero, so proud that he had learned to manipulate people? This is something which could have been achieved without any particular talent, but in any case the silly girl runs off shortly afterwards and marries another man. Tam then joins the News Service, an interstellar organisation for the collection of impartial news.

QUAINT NOTIONS OF WARFARE

Later, after our hero has helped his sister's husband to escape from some mercenary troops fighting on a planet, the husband henceforth serves as the hero's assistant on the battlefield. Mr Dickson's notions of modern warfare are quaint enough, reminding you of the Middle Ages. Our hero merrily travels between the front lines of opposing forces, never suspecting that he might be shot, either accidentally or otherwise, always trusting that the cloak of the Interstellar News Service will protect him. It might be mentioned that modern weapons aren't that careful where they strike; they're not selective, and in any event the notion of one newsman reporting upon a planetary war (and interviewing both sides) seems peculiar indeed.

Both Olyn and his brother-in-law are taken prisoners by some fanatical Friendly Groupman on the battlefield, he in violation of his privileged status of newsman. The brother-in-law is shot with the other prisoners and Tam's talent is unable to protect him. It is useless, it can only influence the course of the universe, not save an individual life. This death is what sets Tam Olyn on his course towards the destruction of all Friendlies.

The scene is worth analysing because it is crucial to the whole book. Mr Dickson has been careful to give sufficient reasons why Tam could not save his brother-in-law; he is sorely wounded and benumbed with shock, so that he didn't recognise in time what the Groupman was up to, but nevertheless we cannot see what he could have done, even with full control of his powers. He simply never suspected anything like this could happen. The hero doesn't have our sympathies in the end; the Groupman, although a mass-murderer, comes off better.

This latter individual is a man of principles and dedication, prepared to give his life for his goals. Foremost he is a man of consequences. He knows that his deed is a crime (by mundane laws) and that he will be found out and shot, but that doesn't matter to him, he doesn't try to evade punishment and he accepts his responsibility. Olyn on the other hand, potentially and intentionally a mass-murderer, is in fact more of a fanatic although he himself doesn't recognise the fact. For the crime of one man he wants to murder the population of several planets. He is unable to assess guilt and punishment, instead falling back on primitive group-thinking and identification. Also, what he plans to do involves no personal danger for him; he'll just push people around with magic words. He is a monster.

Here, I think, is the place to say a few words about inter-personal relationships, sex, and science fiction.

Tam Olyn is surely one of the most unsympathetic characters that ever graced the pages of an SF book; foolish but cocksure, without sympathy or love for others, and without understanding of them. A hero may be a thorough villain and yet be sympathetic, when we feel that we ourselves might be capable of the same crimes. This is not the case here.

It is quite clear that Olyn neither loves his sister nor her husband, (although the other has saved his life he thinks of him as a weakling and a fool). He is upset by the death of his brother-in-law for only one reason; because his self-love was hurt. The Friendly proved to him that he was unable to protect a man, and so questioned his competence and insulted his ego. Mr Dickson is quick to call on Homer for false testimony, but Olyn is not Achilles, Dave Hall not Patroclus, and he not Homer.

THROW SEX OUT OF SF !

Now and then we'll find some innocent proclaiming in a fanzine; "Throw the sex out of science fiction," or "Don't let them spoil our nice clean literature!" These people maintain that whereas general literature has become concerned with prying into the lives of homosexuals and similar things of horror for true men, SF is the last bastion of cleanliness, where heroes

are sane, healthy people without a trace of sickness. If you want to hold this view, of course, it certainly helps if you are ignorant of psychology. The sorry fact is that the typical SF hero is a narcissistic male who is quite unable to love anyone beside himself. What little love of which he is capable, he saves for the end of the book where he marries a beautiful and innocent girl in the customary happy ending of cheap literature ("and they lived happily ever after" - and begot many children because someone has to carry on the bloodline or the valuable genes of all those supermen would be lost!)

The narcissist, because he loves himself, therefore loves at least one member of his own sex, with the strange result that a kind of literature which prides itself on being clean and full of perversion is peopled with submerged homosexuals, who substitute violence for love.



For all its shrill voice, fans would do well to read Gershon Legman's LOVE AND DEATH; A STUDY IN CENSORSHIP, on the relationship between love and violence.

Where sound philosophical speculation is regarded as mere play with words, the cranks have their way; and where love is excluded the perversions creep in. So we have the combination of sentimentality and its cousin, sadism, in the work of Sturgeon and Ellison, for example, and an uncritical acceptance of stupid violence in the work of most other SF authors.

When girls are treated as objects (or subjects) of sex (as they are in pornography), all prudish minds begin to howl; but the violent death of a human being appears to them as the most natural thing in the world, or so it would seem. The gun is the penis of the sexually and intellectually impotent, and the 'progressive' literature of science fiction is full of supermen who are just a little subhuman. It is truly as Karl Kraus wrote: "Superman is a premature ideal, for it presupposes man".

A BRILLIANT INSIGHT

Our little narcissistic superman proceeds to win the confidence of the Friendlies, in SOLDIER ASK NOT, by writing favourable articles about them. At last he is offered the chance to meet their leader, the ruler of several planets, Eldest Bright himself, who tells him:

"The Lord would not choose a fool to be Eldest over the Council of the Churches." (Rulers always speak like this in science fiction). And what does our hero think?

"I stared at him, almost blinded by the sudden brilliance of my own understanding. Yes, I knew it now, and in knowing it, suddenly saw how he had delivered himself out of his mouth into my own hands...."

"He was able to perceive and deal in shades between - in shades of gray, as well. In short, he could be a politician when he chose - and as a politician, I could deal with him..."

I thought this realisation was indeed brilliant! Who but a superman would have suspected it? The ruler of several planets is a politician! Although it does seem a little incredible to me why such a politician should wish to divulge such dark secrets as that, and so undermine the basis of his authority. And did Stalin, perhaps, tell H.G. Wells that he was not really a Communist, but only a dictator, fearing that H.G. Wells might otherwise think him a fool? Does Tam Olyn assume that holding a firm belief of some sort or other is incompatible with being a politician? Such are the insights into the human condition that we gain from reading science fiction!

But although the book as a whole is so false, it must be said that the ending is surprisingly effective, something you would have hardly suspected after what went before.

The hero recognises the error of his ways, marries the girl he has been rejecting all through the book, and takes the post as Chairman of the Final Encyclopedia. (After he has been told so often that he has the talent for it, he had simply come to believe it himself, I suppose, nobody having told him that he could also sell groceries). At last he learns to recognise the fine qualities in the Friendlies, and knows what a better man would have known all along; that all human beings are valuable in their own right and have the same right to live.

But the ending hardly makes up for what has gone before. Jamethon Blake, who appears but briefly in the book, is the only wholly rounded human being in it. The rest are murderers, fools, and glamourised soldiers, and Olyn's talent is ridiculously characterised. I suppose that the readers who don't much care what an author says, and who just want to be entertained will find SOLDIER ASK NOT an exciting book; part of it has already won a Hugo. You just shouldn't try to take the novel as seriously as I have done here, or you might get a little depressed at the state of modern science fiction.

VICTIMS OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

It is hardly surprising that so many people continue to speak contemptuously of SF, when you take a close look at what it offers as a substitute for 'thinking'. Science Fiction is by and large irresponsible in two ways; first, its heroes have some unfair advantages, like superpowers that no normal man could have. Second, responsibility is refused, man is conceived as the victim of his environment, or of the 'inevitable' processes of nature and history. What mankind ought to do is subordinated to the miracles done for us, by such means as Nature, in THE SPACE SWIMMERS, provides a mysterious 'evolutionary ethic'.

It only remains for me to offer some explanation for the success of SF. Why is a literature which offers such nonsense (even in its better examples) so very popular today?

I suggest that even the 'average' man today feels the need to be informed about science and wants to think 'scientifically'. Science has destroyed the old 'magic', but it has not destroyed human nature and has not destroyed the needs of the human animal for the supernatural. Science fiction is easier to digest than science, it is sugar-coated, and it allows its readers to feel that they are 'thinking men' without involving them in the need to do some actual thinking, which remains hard work. This is, has been, and always will be a dangerous, difficult and painful experience which doesn't even lead to 100% guaranteed results.

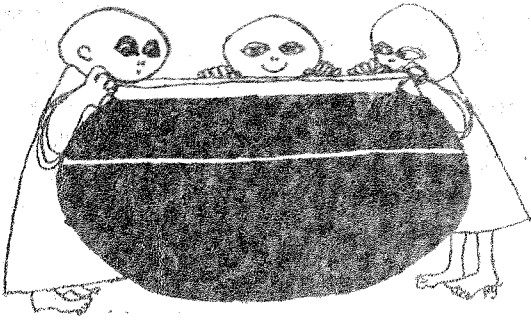
Magic in science fiction, thinly disguised as science, contains all of the old thought-patterns and offers all the pleasures of thinking while including none of the pains. The name has been changed, but the essence has remained the same; and even those people who don't really care to think can now regard themselves as thinking men.

Franz Rottensteiner, 1968.

OPINION 20: IMPRESSED WITH BALLARD (Thomas M. Disch)

"...I didn't really get to read any Ballard until I got to England. I started to read one of his anthologies on the boat, on the way over here, when I knew I was going to meet him. I was just astonished. I was just so impressed that somebody, in the context of science fiction, was doing work that was obviously first-rate, and as good as, if not better than, anything being done anywhere at just that moment." (from an interview in VECTOR-51, DISCH ON DISCH, with Michael Kenward.)

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MELTING POT

THE MELTING POT is SPECULATION's most important department - for what is the use of publishing a magazine that doesn't draw comments? Lest the presence of so many 'names' puts you off, please remember that Bob and I welcome letters, cards and what-have-you from everyone. But do write as early as you can! PRW

John Brunner, London

Dear Peter,

"...Thank you for the September issue of SPECULATION. I don't have much time to comment on it, but I do want - hurriedly - to take issue with Tim Hildebrand on a couple of points. My hackles rose considerably while reading his account of this here Secondary Universe Conference, particularly when I got to the bit about the talk by Chip Delany ("He used the wrong words, so I don't think anyone understood what he was saying, at least I didn't"). I suspect that any intelligent person, especially one who's read Chip's novels, will at once realise that the defects must have been on Hildebrand's side, but I'd like to say for the sake of the record that Chip - whom I know extremely well and with whom I stay whenever I'm in New York - is indeed very hip, notably to the relationship between SF and other forms of writing, and that his views deserve a better hearing than Hildebrand seems to have accorded them.

"He's very erudite, don't you know? I wondered why the hell he's an SF writer, if he knows that much about literature." Oh, lord... What's good about a writer being ignorant? We've been plagued for years with writers, and readers, who are not only pig-ignorant about general literature but arrogantly proud of the fact. It sometimes seems to me to be pure luck that we've kept afloat long enough for people like Chip - who do know what they're talking about, who don't turn tail and run when someone mentions Joyce or Partisan Review - to arrive on the scene and single out some of the things worth keeping which have evolved within SF in spite of the celebrated ninety per cent rubbish overlying them.

Yes, Mr Hildebrand, it is (as you say) hard to talk seriously about SF, but it can be done, and it would be a sight easier if it weren't for people sniggering on the sidelines. And what in the world does Judy Merrill's personal appearance have to do with the views she was expressing? "

Jannick Storm, Denmark

Dear Pete,

"...When SPECULATION came today I stopped working on my translation of THE SPACE MERCHANTS and plunged into the essay on Brian Aldiss. I didn't find it as profound as one might have expected, but it is nice to see some preparing work for

the major analysis of Aldiss' work which still has to come (and which has to come soon). The trouble is, of course, that the right critic for this task would be Brian Aldiss himself. The memorable SF HORIZONS in its latest/last issue threatened to put out an all-Heinlein issue; put out an all-Aldiss issue, Brian!

I regretted seeing that Richard Gordon only spent some twenty lines on GREY-BEARD. Clearly because he didn't like it, - he might have let someone who did write about it, then. GREYBEARD is a very complex novel with several layers and intertwining ideas. When I commented on it in a Danish literary magazine I stressed the symbolic journey down the Thames, with their passing through historic periods of time. I was very fond of my interpretation of the book until recently when I started reading the back-issues of New Worlds I bought in London this summer, and found out that Mike Moorcock had written exactly the same about the book (and expressed it a lot better, too!). Also, I think one should notice the built-in satire on disaster novels; the people in GREYBEARD hating the way they have to live, but conscious, too, that they have escaped from a horrid society.

In some ways I think that GREYBEARD is the first SF novel showing that SF is, finally, growing up. Some of the astonishingly-good novels published since may obscure this fact, even some of Aldiss' own work. Like the Charteris-stories, which I hope to publish in Denmark at the same time as the book is published in Britain and the USA (although how we are going to translate it I frankly don't know! If we succeed it should secure us a place in the history of Danish literature for ever!) "

* Somebody else said to me, recently, that the best reviewer they knew was Brian Aldiss. Apart from a momentary aberration in SPECULATION-13, however, Brian has steadfastly kept clear of any entanglements with our review columns! *

Norman Spinrad, California

Dear Peter,

"...Actually, there was a great deal in the magazine worthy of comment. The general level of the criticism in SPECULATION is far above that of any American fan magazine (except perhaps Riverside Quarterly, which has yet to discover the year 1960). In fact, the general level of criticism is way above that found in the American professional magazines - the Aldiss piece in particular stands out as the sort of thing we just don't get over here, period.

Reading the piece on Aldiss reaffirmed a feeling I've had since I started reading the 'Charteris' stories in New Worlds; that Brian Aldiss (with the possible exception of Philip K. Dick) has over the past half-dozen years or so been the most under-rated man writing SF in English. That such a critique could be written on merely a portion of his work is a statement in itself. I have a great deal of respect for J.G. Ballard, for instance, and I think he is moving in unknown waters that may lead to the production of something really great and unique, but if you set the body of Ballard's production beside that of Aldiss.. Somehow it reminds me of the situation of R.A. Lafferty over here. For years, the man was one of the few prolific and genuinely original short story writers in U.S. SF, and for years he was ignored. Now, with the publication of PAST MASTER, Lafferty has suddenly been 'discovered'.

I have the feeling that when the Charteris book (BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD) is published, Aldiss will be 'discovered' in the same manner. No doubt he will be terribly irritated at this, and with cause. I don't mean to say that Aldiss is an unknown; but after reading the article and thinking back on the Aldiss fiction I've read, I came to the conclusion (which seemed self-evident when reached) that

Brian Aldiss, by any reasonable criteria, is one of the three or four most "important", "significant", "talented" writers of SF alive today. I don't think this has been generally acknowledged, at least in the States. Most important, Aldiss is not a "promising" newcomer, but a writer who has actually produced an enormous body of work worthy of his talent. It seems to me that there are few SF writers about whom that can be said.

Perhaps the reason why Aldiss has stirred less fuss than some other writers who have not yet produced a body of work comparable to his lies in the one flaw that bothered me in all of his pre-Charteris work; a lack of passion, a certain cerebral detachment from his material and characters. This is a very hard thing to define. I don't mean to say that Aldiss' books have been unemotional; but the overall emotions conveyed in an Aldiss novel seem to be the emotions of Aldiss reacting to his characters' plights, rather than the emotions of the characters themselves. Aldiss has been characterising from the outside in, rather than from the inside out. The reader does not identify with the characters but with the world-view of Aldiss superimposed on the story. Aldiss himself is in the forefront as author rather than letting his characters tell their stories. Thus, while he has written many memorable works, he has created few if any really memorable characters. The same thing might have been said about Lafferty's shorts; the author is the most interesting character in them.

This is not to say that this is the "wrong" way of going about it. The same thing could be said about the work of Cordwainer Smith, or Ballard, or even to a lesser extent Dick. But somehow it seems to be characters that live and breathe which most excite readers. Perhaps I am reading some of my own theories of the novel into this, which may be unfair....

But the real point is that the Charteris pieces seem to represent a radical departure for Aldiss in the same way that 'Riders of the Purple Wage' is a radical departure for Farmer: he is now writing in the idiom not of Brian-Aldiss-as-writer but of his characters. The distance between characters and author has disappeared, and with it the distance between characters and readers. The Charteris pieces have enormous immediacy; this, more than the stylistic brilliance, is what makes them for me a quantum jump over Aldiss' previous work.

So while I acknowledge the enormous body of fine work that Aldiss has produced I still somehow feel that he has suddenly emerged as one of the "new-old" writers (Farmer, Leiber, etc) who are making enormous strides beyond the body of their previous work. What makes the future of Brian Aldiss so exciting is that the body of work he is leaping from is one of the most impressive yet produced in SF. But for Chrissakes Mr Aldiss, if you are going to claim that the Acidhead stories are not SF, then you are reducing the term SF to total meaninglessness! It seems to me that the Charteris stories embody the very essence of adult SF; honest portrayal of the interaction between the totality of man's external environment and the totality of his psyche. "

Richard Gordon, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Dear Pete,

"...I'm very glad to get SPECULATION, though I must admit it had largely slipped my mind that sometime the climactic moment would be attained when the Aldiss article would be exposed to your readership. I must admit to slight unhappiness about it; maybe the thinking is muddier than it ought to have been. Also, reading it again with a six-month perspective; it is apparent that the whole essay is very much one for those people who have already read the books and formed their

own opinions - it's worse than useless for those who haven't read Aldiss previously. Still, it's there, muddy thinking and all, and I'll bet you're glad to get it behind you: - I'll be very interested to hear any comments.

But upon reading this SPECULATION and rereading the last one, I'm struck by a number of facts which emerge when you take these issues as a whole. One is that in some cases, the standard of reviewing is so high that when the reviewer is enthusiastic, this enthusiasm is communicated to the reader as an over-expansion of the book's merits. In other words, sometimes the reviews are better than the books! In particular I'd consider Michael Harrison's review of THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION in this light. I read and enjoyed the book a year or so ago, but while it communicated an emotional beauty and wildness, I'm fairly certain that it didn't merit the eulogising the review gave it; in effect the book was transmuted into something greater by being refracted through the prism of Michael Harrison's talents - no doubt quite unconsciously on the latter's part.

Another thing that interests me about SPECULATION is the manner in which you as editor have become orientated to the writing which two years ago was called New Wave and which is today simply accepted as an aspect of modern literature. A large fraction of the books reviewed in SPEC will now receive mainstream review in the papers, like as not; while at the same time as this insensible process has taken place the standard of SF writing has risen equally as insensibly. For so long science fiction was judged by its own incestuous standards; now, in New Worlds, and SPECULATION at the very least (I don't read any other British fanzines currently) the comparisons are wider, the authors invoked for measurement extend outside the SF field, both from the viewpoint of SF authors and their critics. Thus Aldiss mentions Robbe-Grillet, various of your reviewers make casual side-references to Mann, Hemingway, and so on. Great! I'd have thought that's where literary criticism is at, comparison which invokes the highest and most difficult standards, not the sterile rubbish where one Poul Anderson novel is compared with another Poul Anderson novel. And if you baulk at the idea of 'literary' criticism, well, surely that's what you are publishing now. CAMP CONCENTRATION, BUG JACK BARRON, THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION, REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, and so on, whatever their flaws, are manifestly literature in the widest possible sense.

I could never really understand the mewlings of certain people that the so-called New Wave was cutting itself off from an audience by its pretensions and literary aspirations - see a recent article in the fanzine Odd in which Ted White forwards just such an argument, unfortunate in its banality - since in the final analysis it's the Disch's, Zelazny's, and Aldiss's of this world who're embracing the literary world in their experimentation, and the straight SF authors are the ones who're cutting themselves off from potential audiences by their general refusal to expand their boundaries or to consider such expansion."

* The word gets around on good things of course, and M. John Harrison is now firmly installed as book review editor for New Worlds. At the moment I'm still hoping this won't curtail his reviewing for SPEC, but it does mean we have a pretty full house of NW writers under our roof, from Mike Moorcock himself on downwards! So far as Brian Aldiss is concerned, see what he says-*

Brian W. Aldiss, Oxfords.

Dear Pete,

"...First, might I just comment on the review of Bob Silverberg's THE TIME-HOPPERS? I entirely disagree about its merits. Although at first it may seem just a standard length of SF yard-goods, closer examination reveals it as a very craftsmanly work, and perhaps more than that. For instance, a standard time-

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travel ploy is combined with a standard super-metropolis ploy; but aren't they matched so that each provides credibility and function for the other? Doesn't the very juxtaposition stand as convenient symbol for the confusions of our own day (one of the great unadmitted functions of SF)? And the characters - though they seem pretty standard, aren't they all observed faithfully and with sympathy, aren't they constructed so that even the most base - the dictator - is not entirely base? And even if there is not one person who enjoys life, makes life better for anyone, says anything worth remembering or accomplishes a clear-cut triumph - doesn't the novel in toto (by its lucid prose, its picture of fallible humans, its civilised and melancholy unspoken acknowledgement that life never quite comes up to youthful expectations) make its readers enjoy life, make their understandings better, and in toto say something worth remembering, even if it isn't quite a clear-cut triumph?

In defending TIME HOPPERS I'm also thinking of my own AN AGE: for that last labyrinthine sentence begins with the sneer my enemy Budrys cast at AN AGE - quoted in the last SPECULATION with editorial approval - glee, indeed. You ought to know (those of you following the correspondence in Psychotic will know) that Budrys is far from impartial, reviews his own books, and attacks me. And his standards of attack are wrong; it is not a valid criticism of a book to say its characters do not enjoy life, etc... Budrys pines for an Enid Blyton world, or affects to, to discount AN AGE, which seeks, like TIME-HOPPERS, to probe a few present discontents.

I think in most of my fiction I have been preoccupied in probing such discontents. In the beginning, the discontents were mainly personal, as Richard Gordon says. Latterly as my life has become very much more happy and secure, I've looked more widely. Now that's a simple statement. It makes more sense to me (though it may not to readers) than Richard Gordon's debates over Intellectual versus Emotional, Speculation versus Story, and Entertainment versus Cerebration, which form as it were, the chorus of his song. I'm now speaking more freely, that's all I can say. For me, his distinctions about me are artificial.

They seem particularly remote when he speaks of AN AGE as a sort of three-cornered battle; speculation versus entertainment vs. character study. I don't see where the conflict lies. Not that I think AN AGE flawless, let's make no bones about that! I was interested in the speculative side, but I was more interested in Bush and his father and the girl, and in the theme they act out. I found the SF' got in the way. I believe it would be a better book just set in a totalitarian future with all mind-travel firmly labelled as Bush's delusions; there they could work out their destinies without distraction from the hyper-natural fireworks. That's why I may seem a bit touchy about AN AGE. Because I believe it may be my last SF' book in the formal pattern. Of course, I reserve the right to be inconsistent.

The article would have interested me had it been about some other author; it told me the sort of things I would want to know. I don't believe it is up to me to criticise it further, though I differ on many points. Some acute things are said about the Acidhead Charteris stories, but I'd like to just set one thing right - the stories are appearing in any old order; 'Serpent of Kundalini' is an early sequence and tells of Charteris' first arrival in England; guidelines of thought are established there that work usefully in their place, but would be a bit otiose later (where Richard Gordon seems to imply it fits). The language gets progressively more elaborate as we go along - my old habit of taking care that the duller children keep up; great in the classroom, fatal in the arena!

Cont/d....

I'm sure many interpretations can be read into REPORT ON PROBABILITY A. To me the exercise was not the exercise in hopelessness he found it. I felt intensely for G, S, and C. G's just a broken-down guy, a faithful retainer perhaps made unfaithful by those he retained; S is a bit of a shit, in the vernacular "a crafty bugger", but C is a brave and loving man. So I saw them and by deliberately not conveying these qualities in so many words hoped I put in a pent-up force expressed in the general static situation, where love and fear are suspended. Okay - perhaps they didn't crystallise out. But I am not convinced the people are "not human beings"; true, they are abstracts, as the whole matter is an abstraction; but they have not entirely dropped out, they have a toehold in society still, and not only an optical one. They still connect with the 'lower orders': Watts, who keeps the cafe and the unnamed maid of Mrs Mary's. But of course the extra bits I added in order to get the book published tend to obscure this aspect and heighten what Richard would call the teleological aspects.

Here's what's coming; BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, a thorough rewrite of the collected Charteris stories into a novel. Even less SF, really, than REPORT ON PROBABILITY A (where the SF bits were tipped in long after the book was written as matching the theme of the rest), though most decidedly speculative fiction. Then, or maybe even before, THE HAND-REARED BOY, a straight novel about the joys and miseries of a small boy discovering sex and love. You may, my friends, recall that I have already written two novels about sex, THE PRIMAL URGE, which is pretty poor, and THE MALE RESPONSE, which is pretty amusing. THE HAND-REARED BOY will be the first of four novels in a series. There's a faint chance, too, that GREYBEARD may be filmed. I hope Richard Gordon will at least enjoy the film!"

Michael Moorcock, London.

Dear Pete,

"...Graham Charnock's review (of THE FINAL PROGRAMME) and stuff; While of course delighted that Graham liked it, I was not attempting satire in any accepted sense, nor was I using symbolism to give an underlying didactic message to the thing. I'm rather bored with both symbolism, as such, and didacticism, personally. Essentially the book should be read for what it does for you, and is happily offered as pure entertainment or anything else you happen to get from it. It is at once, perhaps, a more private and a more public book than Graham imagines. I was also a little astonished at his comments on my other books. I'd be the first to admit that I've written some stinkers, true, but I would not have regarded books like THE SUNDERED WORLDS as formula-written and with nothing to say --- far from being slickly written, books like that were very clumsily-written attempts to say a great deal. The only novel that was ever formula-written in the sense that Graham probably means was THE FIRECLOWN, which I was never happy with, was written on commission, and written cynically, though even this attempted to say something about politics and the like. I would, therefore, have dismissed my stinkers as clumsy attempts to come to grips with content, rather than contentless and slickly-told. It's very weird, looking at myself through Graham's eyes - though I look, I must add, without rancour.

Dav Garnett is the first to spot something that I rather hoped others would spot. The opening chapters of FINAL PROGRAMME are, indeed, something of a joke, a rewrite of the first Elric stories in modern terms. I saw FP as being the breakthrough I needed to get some of the ideas I had been trying to deal with in the Elric stories (unsuccessfully because the S&S formula swamped the ideas) across in a better way. A private joke and a public one, again. The story hopes to defeat attempts at formal traditional analysis! Dav missed the bits about the underground cavern (one paragraph was lifted bodily) from 'While the Gods Laugh'.

Cont/d.....

It's funny, by the way, how a bit of misquotation gets perpetuated. Your brief reprint from Vector (which I gather angered at least one Vector reader) quoting me is somewhat out of context. I was specifically replying to Conquest's rather bland dismissal of NW stories as being often 'incomprehensible from the first line.' I replied that stuff by VanVogt and others was also incomprehensible in that it was hastily written so that whole paragraphs made little if any sense. The word I used in my anger was 'pig ignorant' not 'idiot', and my point in fact was that if these people had not been so illiterate we might have got more from them, that they might have developed rather than declined, for their imaginative gifts were first-rate. I prefer writers like Hubbard and Van Vogt to the later generation whose emphasis on writing technique rather made them forget about the imaginative content of their work. I might add that people like Pohl are also capable of incredibly sloppy writing (cf PLAGUE OF PYTHONS, reviewed by Lang Jones in SPECULATION-13) and that if NW writers are 'incomprehensible' it is not because of careless writing.

I reacted to Conquest somewhat hastily, as I always react against people who speak constantly of 'craftsmanship' without having the slightest idea of what good craftsmanship involves (see THE EGYPTOLOGISTS which is a travesty of construction). What we aim for in NW is imagination plus skilled writing, but the emphasis is on the imaginative factor in our choice of writers, because we believe that decent writing can always be learned while an imaginative gift is rare.

Tim Hildebrand seemed a bit sour about the Wisconsin conference - it read rather like Charles Platt's first convention report! These conferences are always disappointing in that nothing is ever 'achieved' by them. Their function - if function they have - is really to liven people up, remind them of their various standpoints, and so on, and as such they work pretty well. Hildebrand's report seemed to me to be a bit negative, since he didn't actually report what Delany's "complicated sentences" consisted of, or indeed, what Judith Merril actually said.

The Richard Gordon piece on Aldiss was very interesting and a worthy attempt to see Aldiss's work in perspective. I wouldn't like to tackle the job myself, and think Gordon very courageous in his attempt. If I disagree with some of his analysis, I'll hold my peace for it would take a lengthy letter to establish just where my disagreements lie. I, for instance, believe that AN AGE was the crossroads book and that the Charteris stories represent some sort of culmination. I'm also unsympathetic to words and phrases like 'irrelevance' and 'obscurity and totally degraded pessimism' when the critic has failed to establish his yardstick for what is 'relevant' and so on.

As for the HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION in review, I don't know why anyone should spend so much time on so trivial a writer whose publisher once admitted to me that he was at a loss to understand why 'so meritricious a writer' was so popular with the SF fraternity. Heinlein seems to me to have the same faults as Fleming, and to be just as unreadable.

In answer to Franz Rottensteiner - I don't think he does Harlan Ellison credit as a writer. Quite a lot of Ellison's non-SF (in particular) is excellent, and I recommend his latest hardcover collection LOVE AIN'T NOTHING BUT SEX MISPELLED. Rottensteiner will find some very fine short stories in that. I think Harlan's talent is often curtailed when he writes SF in that he does seem to feel that he has to torture a 'logical' ending out of an otherwise excellent story. If Ellison is sentimental, then so are the other writers Franz mentions, though they perhaps present their sentimentality in a form more acceptable to him. Perhaps it is really romanticism, or even true concern for injustice.

Terry Carr, New York

Dear Pete,

"...SPECULATION-18 is its usual fine self, but I do have a small cavil. In your review of the Harrison-Aldiss YEAR'S BEST SF you say, "Harrison and Aldiss really have attempted to pick science fiction, the best science fiction, science fiction published in the year (1967). Which is more than any of this volume's namesakes sometimes do."

As co-editor of WORLD'S BEST SF, a competitive volume which you've praised yourself, I protest, sir. The specific policy of WBSF is precisely as stated for the Harrison-Aldiss book; no fantasy, only science fiction; and no retreads from previous years, only up-to-date stuff. We've set aside this policy only twice in the four years we've done the book. The first year, as a result of orders from the publisher to include as many stories as possible from foreign countries, we included two admittedly borderline SF-fantasies from Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands; by my definitions we haven't published a non-science fiction story in the remaining three volumes. In our second volume (1966) we broke the "no previous years" rule by including a very fine Arthur C Clarke story that had appeared in Boys' Life the year before; it had never been seen in a U.S. science fiction publication at the time we bought it, so we considered it a worthwhile exception.

That's our record over four years. In their first volume, how many fantasy stories do you count in the Harrison-Aldiss book? In particular, how do you account for the inclusion of James Thurber's 'Interview with a Lemming'? Is that science fiction? And did it first appear in 1967 --- or was it more like 1941? (And in how many previous science fantasy anthologies has it appeared?)

I'm not trying to knock the quality of the Harrison-Aldiss book. I don't think it's as good as ours (if DAW and I agreed with Brian's and Harry's choices all the way there'd have been a complete overlap between the two books, rather than just one or two stories), but it strikes me as a respectable effort. And I'm emphatically not knocking the quality of the Thurber story, which is one of my long-time favourites in the fantasy field. It's just that one doesn't look forward to reading his long-time fantasy favourites in an anthology specifically claiming to print only the best science fiction from the previous year."

* There is an explanation of my comments, of course - I was talking out of a hole in my head. As said last time, "Ace seem to pick those stories which really do epitomise a year of magazine SF". Both the Harrison-Aldiss and Carr-Wollheim are first-class pieces of work; my comparison was intended to be with the Judith Merrill collections, which are now an altogether different kettle of fish.

Dav Garnett, Liverpool.

Dear Pete,

"...I'd have thought worst SF of any year, apart from countless pulp novels which don't matter, was by Christopher Anvil. (Still can't get over how you managed to write enough for 2 issues of Zenith on the guy!) Last year I managed to give up the Analog habit after 2 years' addiction. Out of 26 issues, 13 had Anvil "stories" (Plus 6 Mack Reynolds stories and 3 novels by him).

* I wrote a lot about Anvil for the same reasons that Phil Harbottle wrote about John Russell Fearn, (I think). This is a convenient place for some "We Also Heard From" mentions:- Joe Green; Joanne Burger; James Blish; Jerry Lapidus; Archie Mercer; Jerry Lapidus; Carl Brandon. and one or two others. *

Alexei Panshin, New York

Dear Pete,

"...I particularly liked the piece on the Secondary Universe Conference. I know both Chip Delany and Judy Merril, and I've watched them both speak. It was interesting to see descriptions of them from such a different perspective.

I've got one quibble to make with Richard Tiedman - and an error to point out. Tiedman claims that the statement, "Starship troopers are not half so glorious sitting on their butts polishing their weapons for the tenth time for lack of anything else to do," is unreasoned and flip. Flip it may be, but not unreasoned. My experience of service in a peacetime army was that a great deal of time was given to perfunctory, ritualistic care of weapons and equipment for lack of anything more constructive. Heinlein's case for his soldier-citizens would be seriously weakened if he were forced to show them without benefit of war. As for the error, Tiedman says, "It is certainly going far, as Panshin does, to call Heinlein an emotional sophist." If I had, it would be. What I did call Heinlein tentatively and qualifiedly, after a full chapter of argument based on all that was said in the previous 150 pages, was an emotional solipsist.

You asked what I thought of Budrys in Galaxy (on HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION). I thought he wrote an extremely-provocative review, but it was much too personal. Budrys' review was written from the point-of-view of a man who feels he has mis-reviewed another book (THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS) and wants to correct his errors. The result was a rather unusual and special picture of HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION. But I did gain some insight into book from the review, which makes the review valuable to me. I didn't feel I'd learned anything from Tiedman, on the other hand."

* With a new, rigid page-count to adhere to, this seems to be the end of MELTING POT this time, although some long and interesting letters have arrived from all sorts of people. These will appear in the next issue, out soon, when we will be printing comments by; David Masson, Harlan Ellison, Charles Platt, Bob Parkinson, Avram Davidson, Dan Morgan, Terry Carr, Piers Anthony and a number of others. We have also heard from Dav Garnett, M.J. Harrison, Mike Ashley, Tony Wilson, R. Barycz, Vic Curtis, Michael Kenward, Graham M Hall, Gerald Bishop, Brian Stableford, Greg Benford, Chris Priest and John J.H. Williams, Fritz Leiber.

"Budrys just hasn't the perception to understand CRYPTOZOIC!, (AN AGE)", says Franz Rottensteiner. "It's curious that Wollheim should find BUG JACK BARRON 'cynical' when he has published Piper's LORD KALVAN OF OTHERWHEN, a truly nauseating piece of political stupidity."

"The best item in the last issue was Mike Moorcock's MY STRUGGLE", said Jim Linwood, "he filled me with despair at the mire of the publishing field and the near impossibility to getting any magazine on to the newsstands not aimed solely at making a profit. (How about a Boycott W.H. Smith campaign?). Most of the Smith branches around Kensington display NW openly, and have always done so, since the banned issues. I am surprised that NW never seems to appear in the book shops I would expect it to; shops that sell Ambit, Oz, and the small literary mags. Mike could always peddle NW up and down the Kings Road like the publishers of IT and Black Dwarf."

"Is David Redd British?" asks Richard Delap, "I had never heard of him before I read a story titled 'Sunbeam Caress', which at this moment is my choice for next year's Hugo. Mr Redd's 'A Quiet Kind of Madness' in F&SF runs a close second. This man is great! I keep grabbing each new SF magazine, hoping for a new story from him. If possible, let him know someone is waiting! "

SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE

This is a very brief potted summary of some books published in the months since the last issue. Some of these titles undoubtedly deserve more detailed review, and we will be glad to receive any comments prompted by these mentions.

PICNIC ON PARADISE by Joanna Russ. Ace 'Special' title, 60¢

This is one of the more successful entries in Ace Books' new 'Special' series; unfortunately it is only barely a novel. Saddled with a plot so linear it allows for virtually no innovation (band of people are led to safety over an ice-world by a tough woman from ancient Crete), it nonetheless manages to illuminate quite well the conflict of values of modern (read: decadent) society and the tough-minded virtues of the past. In a way it is SF merely by definition; there is no reason why this couldn't have happened to a band of plane-crash survivors in Greenland; most of the supposedly-outre characters would not attract undue notice in Manhattan today, thought they are supposedly ultra-sophisticates of 200 years in the future. Altogether, Joanna Russ has shown a sure grasp of people, but little imagination. Greg Benford, 1968

TO BE REVIEWED IN FUTURE ISSUES:

PAVANE by Keith Roberts, Rupert Hart-Davis, 25s.

UNDER COMPULSION by Thomas M. Disch. Rupert Hart-Davis, 25s. (collection)

RESTOREE by Ann McCaffrey, Rapp & Whiting, 25s.

STAR WELL by Alexei Panshin, Ace Books 50¢ ('An Anthony Villiers adventure').

PAST MASTER by R.A. Lafferty, Rapp & Whiting 21s., also Ace Books, 60¢ (We regret the delay with the earlier-promised review of this title).

DAUGHTERS OF EARTH by Judith Merrill, Gollancz 30s. (Three novellas).

BLACK EASTER by James Blish, magazine version 'Faust Aleph-Null'.

THREE BY LAUMER.

Following last quarter's Faber collection NINE BY LAUMER, Dobson Books have now brought out three more Laumer titles, bringing their listing to five by this author (earlier books were WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM & OTHER SIDE OF TIME). GALACTIC ODYSSEY (18s) is a grand space-opera, very reminiscent of EARTHBLOOD. Laumer writes this type of fast-moving adventure yarn very well indeed; he should be studied by anyone who wants to break into writing for the 'Men's Magazines'. Of course, there is absolutely no depth to this sort of story, it is pure action-adventure, which of course can be perfectly enjoyable in its own right. Naturally, being Laumer, his plots fall apart in the middle (see my comments last issue), and GALACTIC ODYSSEY is no exception. This story was serialised in If, May-July 1967 as 'Spaceman'.

THE MONITORS (18s) is a poor-man's CATCH-22, and appears to have absolutely no redeeming features. Pointless, silly, it is neither funny nor anything else.

THE OTHER SKY (21s), This is a collection of four Laumer novellas, all much the same in that the hero is the same super-competent individual in each case (although with a different name). Each story is about a disaster of some sort that has happened to Earth, or is about to happen, and the day is saved by this one Superman. It is a great pity, reading this stuff, to realise how great Laumer could be; strange that Chris Priest once thought he was Heinlein, while I thought he was a pseudonym for Fred Pohl!

THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY by Mervyn Peake, Ballantine Books, 95¢ each.

Just published by Ballantine, these are handsomely-produced volumes with a one-piece cover painting across the three titles. Besides text (TITUS GROAN, 560pp; GORMENGHAST, 592 pp; TITUS ALONE, 304 pp) they contain Peake's own black-and-white caricatures plus a glossy-paper section of character portraits. In an attempt to repeat the success of the Tolkien books, the trilogy is being accompanied by a full-scale promotional exercise. Out-and-out fantasy, these books were 13 years in writing, and are thought very highly of by enthusiasts. My own brushes with the works of Peake have left me feeling immensely depressed.

SOME TITLES FROM ACE BOOKS:

THE TWO-TIMERS by Bob Shaw, Ace 'Special', 60¢. THE RING, by Piers Anthony and Robert E. Margroff, 'Special', 75¢. THE BROKEN LANDS by Fred Saberhagen, Ace 50¢ (nominated for Nebula Award); THE MOON OF GOMRATH by Alan Garner, fantasy, 50¢. THE OUTLAW OF TORN by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 75¢. THE MOON MEN by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 50¢. TARGET TERRA by Laurence M Janifer & S.J. Treibich/THE PROXIMA PROJECT by John Rackham, Ace 'double', 60¢. WILD TALENTS by Charles Fort, 60¢ (set of four titles on 'strange happenings'): DIMENSIONS BEYOND THE KNOWN by John Macklin, 60¢.

SYNTHAJOY by D.G. Compton, Ace 'Special', 60¢. (This appears to have been previously published in the UK, and is more of a straight novel of tomorrow than an SF story. It concerns the invention of a device to record and transfer thoughts and emotions.)

SWORDS IN THE MIST by Fritz Leiber, Ace 60¢. This is third in the very highly-recommended series of 'Grey Mouser' stories which Ace is putting into book form. Following the novel, SWORDS OF LANKHMAR and the linked stories SWORDS AGAINST WIZARDRY, this new book is somewhere between the two in quality. It includes six linked novelettes and short stories, with connecting material written for the book by the author. These are: 'The Cloud Of Hate' (1963); 'Lean Times In Lankhmar' (1959); 'Their Mistress The Sea' (new); 'When The Sea-King's Away', (1960); 'The Wrong Branch' (new); and 'Adept's Gambit' (1947, previously abridged in 1964). This last story is the only one to show its age.

THE CITY AND THE STARS by Arthur C. Clarke, Gollancz 1968, 25s. Although twelve years old, this is still one of the most far-ranging of SF novels, set in totally-alien and yet oddly-familiar surroundings. It is probably Clarke's most developed work of his 'poetic' phase; what a fantastic film it could make!

THE PALACE OF LOVE by Jack Vance, Dobson 18s. Third in the 'Star-Kings' series, this is probably the poorest, being a hunt for Viole Falushe, 3rd of 5 Demon Princes. Involved and a little slow-moving, but still unusual writing.

SENTINELS FROM SPACE by Eric Frank Russell, Dobson 25s. A novel written in 1953 and concerning the psi-powered inhabitants of the planets and the behind-the-scenes Powers who threaten Earth. One of the most gripping, witty, and imaginative of all this author's books, it certainly does not show its age.

A GIFT FROM EARTH by Larry Niven, Ballantine 75¢. Published recently in If as SLOWBOAT CARGO, this is a very fast-paced novel chock-full of new ideas. The hero, Matt Keller, has one unusual power but lives on a most unusual world under the all-powerful shadow of the Organ Banks. Half a dozen different threads come together into an incredible ending; great stuff; a great future for this author.

THE LONG WINTER by John Christopher, Gold Medal 60¢ (WORLD IN WINTER, 1962)

THE GARBAGE WORLD by Charles Platt, Panther 3s6d. (serial in New Worlds)

BEST FROM F&SF No. 13, ed. Avram Davidson, Panther, 5s.

A TRACE OF MEMORY by Keith Laumer, Mayflower 5s. (from 1963 Amazing)

CAMP CONCENTRATION by Thomas M. Disch, Rupert Hart-Davis, 25s. This novel recently appeared in New Worlds, and has been extensively discussed in SPEC-18. THE SECRET SONGS by Fritz Leiber, Rupert Hart-Davis, 25s.

Fritz Leiber is rapidly becoming my favourite SF author, and it is amazing that until quite recently he was hardly considered as a 'major' author. On looking back, Fritz has been turning out superior work for twenty years, and only now has the rest of the field caught up! With 3 Hugos under his belt, Fritz Leiber will attract attention in this country with this new and excellent collection. From Judith Merrill's informative introduction, the 11 stories are all fine, although in very different ways. 'Coming Attraction' and 'Pail of Air' are the most widely-known and the nearest to conventional SF. The others are: 'The Winter Flies'; 'The Man Who Made Friends with Electricity'; 'Rump-Titty-Titty-Tum-Tah-Tee'; 'Mariana'; 'The Moon Is Green'; 'Smoke Ghost'; 'The Girl With Hungry Eyes'; 'No Great Magic'; 'The Secret Songs'. (A word on presentation - the 4 books from Hart-Davis received this quarter are unusually handsome in their metallic-ink dust-wrappers, and are very finely-bound additions to the bookshelf)

NEBULA AWARD STORIES 3, edited by Roger Zelazny. Gollancz, 30s.

There is not a lot to say about these stories, except that - by nomination - they represent the best of a year's output. 'Aye and Gomorrah' by Samuel Delany, 'Gonna Roll The Bones' by Fritz Leiber, and 'Behold The Man' are the 3 actual Nebula winners, the other four stories are runners-up: 'The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D' by J.G. Ballard; 'Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes' by Harlan Ellison; 'Mirror of Ice' by Gary Wright; & 'Weyr Search' by Anne McCaffrey.

APEMAN, SPACEMAN edited by Harry Harrison & Leon E. Stover, Rapp&Whiting, 35s.

This is a big book, 350 pages, in the tradition of the old Groff Conklin 'theme' anthologies. The theme this time is that of anthropology, the science describing the development of the family of man. 26 stories are included, with odd bits and pieces and a long afterword by Leon E Stover, commenting upon the themes developed in each story. Like Judith Merrill's anthologies, the book dips into 'mainstream' sources, and I was particularly pleased to see the inclusion from Roy Lewis' wonderful THE EVOLUTION MAN. There are too many items to list, but suffice to say that the book contains such old favourites as 'Throwback' by L.Sprague deCamp; 'Omnilingual' by H.Beam Piper (his best story?), and 'Of Course' by Chad Oliver. In some places my own choice would not be that of the editors, and I think they missed a few good stories, but even so, first class!

NEW WRITINGS IN SF, 13. ed. John Carnell, Dobson 18s.

Probably the only other UK SF magazine besides New Worlds, this is confusing in that it is edited by the founder of New Worlds, contains stories that belong in the old New Worlds, and even sounds the same in title. This is one of the better issues, freer than usual from modernistic gloom, and with some interesting new ideas to offer. For instance, 'The Divided House' by John Rackham is an unusual concept, although totally mishandled and over-simplified. David Kyle has a sharp yarn in 'The Ferryman on the River', as does John Baxter with 'The Beach'. (SF fans make the best writers!) Only average are 'Public Service' by Sydney J. Bounds, 'Testament' by Vincent King, 'Representative' by David Rome, and 'The City, Dying', by Eddy C. Bertin. 'The MacBeth Expiation' by M.John Harrison is probably the most unusual and stylistic of the lot.

BALLROOM OF THE SKIES by John D. MacDonald, Gold Medal 60¢. (1952); After the Atomic War, when India controls the globe, everyone chases the almighty rupee, and there is war after bloody war.... WINE OF THE DREAMERS, by John D MacDonald Gold Medal 60¢ (1951); imaginative, with much the same theme as the first of these two titles, a theme also explored by E.F.Russell and Charles Fort. THE FAR-OUT WORLDS OF A.E.VANVOGT (Ace, 60¢): a new collection of 12 stories.

THE SPECULATOR VIEW FROM THE REAR

I suppose I must have wanted to be an editor of some sort for more years now than I can remember, and in October this year I produced the first issue of 'Shapes', a quarterly review for the five companies in the BSA Metal Components Division. I began my own little magazine in 1963, and I'm quite sure that the experience I've gained from that has come in very useful for 'Shapes'.

What started this project rolling was an engineering paper which some of you may have seen, called 'Inco Nickel'. Published by International Nickel Ltd, this is what is known as an 'external house-journal', because it circulates to people outside the company concerned. Used as a sales-aid, this sort of thing usually features some of the more interesting and unusual products of a company.

At BSA several things combined to help my suggestion of beginning our own magazine. We wanted an altogether new (to us) way of publicising the division, we had some good news stories on hand, and clinching the decision, we were to exhibit at the Earls Court Motor Show where 'Shapes' would be a cheap give-away.

The actual writing of material was no problem, because I've done technical brochures and written a whole lot of press releases, but I found layout very different from the fanzines ! The 5000 papers arrived just in time, on Press Day (and you should see those expensive, high-powered models; the girls I mean, not the cars!) and now I'm deeply entangled with the next one. I've had some smart headings made up in the very same Letraset face I use for SPEC., and if Buz Busby and Mike Moorcock will bone-up on their knowledge of castings, I might even be able to take on a couple of columnists !

But as far as this issue of SPECULATION is concerned, you're probably thinking you've been cheated; that it's only half the magazine it used to be. So in the best traditions of modern merchandising I'll hasten to explain what a great improvement this is to get half as much for no increase in price !

Although intended to be Bob Rickard's very own production, this issue didn't work out quite that way. With Bob sweating at temporary night-work until he gets settled in Industrial Design, we decided we had to re-think our plans and set a new page-limit of 30 sides per issue.

We can save both on materials and postage costs, of course, although this isn't the reason for the cut-back. You see, we've been wasting time in producing Bigger-and-Better issues, putting something of everything into each number. The sheer effort of handling so many pages has been time-consuming, and by publishing smaller issues with a variety of contents, we should be able to produce more of them. At least, that's the theory !

Already the next SPECULATION is just about complete for stencilling, with Bob Parkinson, The Plough column, long reviews and 'An Interview with J.G. Ballard'. After that there's Al Lewis on Philip Jose Farmer, the Michael Moorcock column, and an awful lot more besides. So stay around - now we've applied for a grant from the Arts Council (two can play that game!) things might start to get very interesting indeed !

Peter Weston, December 15th 1968