

Speculation

Number 32

Spring 1973



'Digesting her first Heinlein novel'
Inside: Alternatives to Worlds – Larry Niven

Speculation

'I enjoy reading Spec because it nearly gives me a heart attack' - Doug Barbour.

Issue 32 (Volume 3. Number 8.)

March 1973

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Cover Girl: 'Digesting her first Heinlein novel'
(Alison Weston, aged nine months at the time of the photograph,
is now fully aware of the world and would just love to
get her teeth into my collection of SF books and magazines!)

SPECULATION-32 is produced by Peter Weston, 31 Pinewall Avenue, Kings Norton, Birmingham 30, UK. (Tel: 021-459 1573). Published irregularly, available for trades and contributions. Letters are liable to be published unless otherwise requested. Opinions within are not necessarily those of the editor. 20p (50c) per copy, 5 for £1.00. Overseas subscription is 4 for \$2.00; please send cash rather than cheques since these are subject to surcharging. Copyright 1973.

PROBLEMS, ALWAYS PROBLEMS.

A large part of this editorial will appear at best only tangential to the study of science fiction, but I am at present rather preoccupied with personal problems and by understanding these you may be able to more fully comprehend this package of thought which is Speculation.

In my editorial last time I explained why the previous few months had been difficult and rather depressing for me. I explained why I had rejoined the BSA company and said that there was still a chance that the whole thing could go * bang*. It did. On Wednesday 14th March the bottom dropped out of BSA shares on the London Stock Exchange and dealings were suspended.

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MAY 23 1973,

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You can imagine how unsettling this sort of thing can be to someone like myself struggling with the far more important business of publishing a fanzine. Certainly this has caused me to lose a week or two of valuable time, although now, at the end of March, the situation looks a little more hopeful with the Government taking a stake in rebuilding a new company out of the wreckage in order to create a viable British motorcycle industry.

Not that I care: my part of BSA does not make motorcycles, is in fact a very profitable unit. We appear to have been sold to someone else in order to realise desperately-needed cash, and what makes life so uncertain at the moment is that the new owners may very well want to transfer management to their own headquarters at Ipswich. I am definitely not going to move to Ipswich!

Although I am hoping to move somewhere else very shortly. Also in my last editorial I mentioned that my wife Eileen and I had been looking for another house, and we finally found one at the end of February. Did I say it would very likely cost £12,000? It will in fact cost £13,000 and we consider we have a bargain at that. The big problem, however, is that I have decided to move at the worst possible time in view of the BSA business. I shall press on regardless and hope to get the mortgage I have applied for, but the prospects of these extra commitments without long-term security is rather worrying.

So far as house prices are concerned, my revelations last time brought predictable shudders from some correspondents. Bruce Gillespie said that the sort of price I quoted was about the same level as in Melbourne, but salaries there were twice as high. Sandra Miesel said that UK prices seemed double those in Indianapolis - and we all know that Americans earn much more than we do in Britain. Whichever way you look at it, fellow countrymen, we are losers! And just one parting thought; Birmingham house prices are generally considered low in relation to most other parts of this country.

HOB-NOBBING WITH THE UPPER CLASSES

You might expect London to be an expensive area to live, but a recent visit to Tom Shippey and his wife Sue made me realise how much houses now cost in other cities such as Oxford, where prices seem to be 25% above Birmingham levels.

Tom left Birmingham last Autumn and has miraculously stepped from a mundane existence as a lecturer at redbrick Birmingham University to the status of Fellow at St. Johns College, Oxford. At 29 this is a splendid move for Tom, and it must have meant entry into a different world for him. It appears, you see, that this particular college is about the wealthiest of all Oxford halls of learning, and it owns vast tracts of property including Southampton Docks (yes, I know it seems odd but marshland was bequeathed hundreds of years ago to the college and then people went and built docks there...)

This all means that the college doesn't quite know what to do with its money, and one of the nicer things in this situation for Tom is that a house is thrown in with the job. Not just any old house, either. When Eileen and I went to visit the Shippeys we found their address to be a huge Victorian ivy-encrusted pile, and yet extensively modernised and very comfortable.

Excuse my going on about this, but the Shippeys have two reception rooms of the general order of size of the Con. Hall at The Blossoms last year, laundry rooms, cloakrooms, a huge kitchen and no less than six bedrooms. I don't think it will cause any embarrassment to Tom to mention that the rent for this mansion is about as much as one would normally pay to hire a garage in normal circumstances!

Tom has arrived, in fact. He took me into his teak-veneered room at the college and described the Persian carpet he intended to acquire; Sue Shippey told us of the tea-party she attended at Lady Somebody's house, "What does your husband teach?" she asked another guest. "He's a bishop, actually" was the answer!

And, lest you think that by this time I was overwhelmed with envy, I must say that this good fortune couldn't have happened to a better man. Tom knows his stuff and must be one of the leading authorities on his subject. He writes well - even his textbook on Old English is lucid and moderately comprehensible even to me, and in fact it has become a best-seller as such textbooks go. What a good thing for us all that Tom is so firmly enthused of science fiction.

I remarked some months ago (when trying to prove that Speculation was an Educated fanzine) on the large number of my contributors who seemed to be University lecturers of one sort or another. Tom Shippey, Brian Stableford, Tony Sudbery, and Jack Cohen, who hasn't contributed much directly to the magazine but who is one of my closest acquaintances in the local area. Jack, too, wants to move house and he insists on looking for something out in the country. He says (at least half-seriously) that we are going to see trouble within our own lifetimes and he wants to set up 'Cohen's Freehold', complete with generators, well, and (presumably) minefield.

PERMANENT STATE OF CRISIS

A comment made by Tom Shippey during our visit was that a lot of fanzines seemed to try and convey the impression of a 'permanent state of crisis' existing within the SF field. I wouldn't deny that, although I don't deliberately try to create crisis and "controversy" (that beloved word of C. Platt) in Speculation. But it certainly is true that much of the success of magazines like SFR was due to the impression it created that here was the place where everything was happening.

One of the problems incurred by a prolonged period of minimal activity in fanzine publishing is that one very easily tends to drift away from the mainstream where all the interesting arguments are taking place. Spec has always been a little outside the tight-knit world of U.S. fandom, to my regret, through reasons of sheer distance and time-lag (and incidentally, transit time of fanzines sent surface post to & from the USA seems now to have stretched to a staggering $2\frac{1}{2}$ months!) but this has developed into a real problem recently.

I worry a lot about Spec and this isolation bothered me, as I entered 1973 full of good intentions as I was to return to publishing with a vengeance. Either the science fiction field had fallen very flat, or I was out of touch, because there didn't seem to be any particular topic likely to arouse even the smallest amount of agitation. The 'new wave' business had long since grown boring, the 'pacesetters' of modern SF had apparently ceased to set the pace, and I could see no clear direction in which to aim Speculation.

Direction, that's a good word. I came to the conclusion that what I needed was a new direction for the fanzine (you can see that this is all related to that heart-searching I did a few issues ago re. the fannish/sercon division). It is not enough - it never has been enough - merely to plonk down two or three unrelated articles on science fiction and to expect any sort of lively result to emerge. I had to decide on a policy, I realised, particularly at that moment when competition in Britain for SF-oriented material had never seemed so strong.

The competition was - is - threefold. At the academic level a new journal, Foundation has emerged, opening the doors to prestige publication in printed form, and capably edited by Peter Nicholls. Although irregular in frequency of appearance (all good magazines are irregular!) Foundation appears likely to pinch authors over which Spec has previously held a near-monopoly.

On the fannish level, a new seriously-oriented fanzine, Cypher, has found its feet and look set to gnaw away at my position from the other extreme. And, if we are to regard the science fiction criticism business as a matter of tooth-and-nail rivalry, most serious threat of all to the decadent Weston regime is posed by the Malcolm Edwards-edited Vector, journal of the BSFA. (30p from Malcolm at 75A Harrow View, Harrow, Mx.)

So, I thought, what tack do we take? I wasted quite a bit of time asking people this question, until I thought to look back through previous issues of Spec itself. The whole perhaps can be greater than the sum of its parts; I believe that unconsciously a direction has already emerged for Speculation, a far more natural thing than any abrupt and artificial change of policy.

It seems to me that a gradual evolution has taken place over the 30-odd issues so far, one which has established a level at which both contributors and myself, as editor, can work. I have come to the conclusion, too, that I am far too close to the thing to be able to judge whether any individual issue has "worked" in the way I might have wanted it to work. Only you, the reader, can judge the success or failure of any particular package I publish, but I hope that the composite impression will create some sort of unique 'flavour', through the interrelationship of the various people who write for the magazine.

Perhaps I shouldn't continue further with this rather introspective analysis but should mention instead that this year - 1973 - is an appropriate time to stop and take stock, for it will see the tenth anniversary of Speculation. Few fan magazines survive that long, and most editors come to their senses after their first few issues. That I haven't is a matter of some puzzlement, and yet I cannot honestly imagine the time when I shall finally stop publishing. Like Dick Geis, Richard Bergeron, Ethel Lindsay and one or two others, I will probably keep plodding along, missing a few months here and catching up there, until I grow a whole lot older or some major catastrophe intervenes.

I will celebrate the complete ten-year stretch in October, and assuming 1973 will be a fairly good year for publishing (despite the upset of house-moving) my tenth annish will probably be No. 35. That will make a rough average of $3\frac{1}{2}$ issues per year over the period - which is not too bad.

It would be a nice idea to try and make this forthcoming anniversary issue a bit 'special' in some way, and I hereby give notice that suggestions or contributions will be very welcome.

Other forthcoming attractions will include an expansion of Brian Aldiss's talk at the recent conference at the U.S. Embassy irreverently titled "Yanks and Limeys". Tony Sudbery has an article in prospect for the past three months at least in which he hopes to look at the "ABC" of SF, taking new works by authors Asimov, Blish and Clarke. There are other items lined up, too, all for publication well before October but these will have to give precedence to a special essay which, because of its bulk, has been delayed for some time. This is John J. Pierce's mammoth history of Cordwainer Smith, the man and his work, originally published in John's private magazine Renaissance, and running to 23 foolscap pages there. I hope to produce this, with illustrations, in the near future.

SPECULATION

AROUND AND ABOUT THIS ISSUE

I have tried to preserve a rough sort of balance with the contents of this issue, oscillations in the direction of heavy criticism being more-or-less countered by 'personality' pieces in a lighter key. The first article this time must come under the latter heading, as John Brosnan plays for laughs, to some extent, in his account of trying to become a professional writer.

Yet there is substance under the surface of John's account, and although I doubt if he will thank me for saying so I suspect he takes writing a good deal more seriously than he might pretend here. Since several other regulars (Redd, Stableford, Adlard, etc) have also penetrated the sales barrier fairly recently and others are probably building their own collections of rejection slips, I think there is scope for further accounts along the lines of John Brosnan's. I would be very interested to see other people's descriptions of the trials and tribulations of becoming a writer and their 'breakthrough' into professional writing. I suppose you might consider that a very broad hint!

A couple of other matters; On Page 12 I mention Tom Clareson's CHECKLIST OF SF CRITICISM but do not give price or address of the publisher. That can now be rectified - the book costs \$7.00, from the Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio, 44242. As I said, this one is recommended.

Another publication of Clareson's; on Page 68 I refer to his Doubleday collection A SPECTRUM OF WORLDS, and mention the excellent introduction to this volume, which is a history of science fiction in brief. A separate publication has now appeared, apparently based on this Introduction, titled "SF - A DREAM OF OTHER WORLDS", and this is in the form of a 20-page bound monograph from the Texas A&M University Library, College Station, Texas. No price is given but I do recommend that you obtain this booklet if you cannot get the hardcover book; Tom Clareson's essay is excellent, and very useful for silencing people who do not fully realise the long tradition of fantasy within the body of literature.

Finally, another latecomer arrived today and deserves an immediate mention. You have probably already heard of Vertex, a new professional SF magazine, and here it is, slick, 100 page, looking much like an issue of Playboy (without the girls). If this sells the magazine could be a quantum jump away from the slowly-dying, faintly 'tatty' SF magazines as we know them. This could open up a vast new readership for science fiction, if it can become established. I think Vertex deserves your support for what it can become - even though the first issue is already extremely attractive and has some interesting material. I believe that the magazine will be stocked in the UK by Roger Peyton (see back cover) but if not copies can be obtained from the publisher, \$1.50 per copy, \$8.00 per year in UK. The address is VERTEX, 8060 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90046, USA. (Editor, by the way, is Don Pfeil, and I think he has done an excellent job).

TALKING ABOUT EXCELLENT PRODUCTION JOBS...

.....I think the moment is right to bore you with some of the difficulties that have been overcome to bring you this issue of Speculation. No, let's go back a bit and tell the full horrible story of that last issue, which I referred to briefly in my last editorial. Production problems are the stock-in-trade of fannish editorials, and they are as relevant in a thirtieth issue as in a third - and when luck runs out one can do nothing but slog through!

The major cause of delay with the last issue was the time spent in making three separate attempts to have my cover printed successfully. A fantastic run of bungles almost reduced the printer to tears before he finally completed the job; he must have lost £'s and no doubt never wants to see me again. The other problem involved my trusty Gestetner duplicating machine, which simply would not accept the paper I had bought. I had to hand-feed the paper, almost sheet by sheet, all 25 reams of it. Enquiries afterwards disclosed that it was in fact cross-grained paper, which may not mean very much to you, but it certainly made a lot of difference to me! Moral of the story is, don't buy cheap stationery.

This time I took no chances; I bought the best 'Croxley' paper (the price is quite reasonable if you accept 100-ream lots) and I even bought a box of stencils for about the first time ever (they usually stick to my fingers). But disaster struck nonetheless; the machine is held together with spring-steel bands on each side of the silk screen, and one of these broke with a musical *twang*, right at a crucial stage.

I wasn't going to summon a repairman in a hurry, because his last visit cost me £9.00 for similar troubles. I decided to have a go at fixing the thing myself, and with the aid of a pair of needle-nosed pliers and a bit of wire I probed into the inky vitals of the machine. Half an hour later I emerged inky but triumphant; I had lashed the broken ends of the band together again. I switched on the power with some trepidation but to my surprise this precarious jury-rig arrangement has so far held together for 38 stencils, 500 copies off each. How's that for using one's initiative and saving money!

PSSS...YOU GOT ANY UNUSUAL PICTURES?
=====

During the autumn I gave a series of 12 lectures for Birmingham University, with Jack Cohen, and this series may be repeated next year. At the same time I have been delivering quite a number of capsuled one-hour talks on science fictional subjects, for various local societies, colleges, etc., using a collection of slides which I have painstakingly gathered over the past two years.

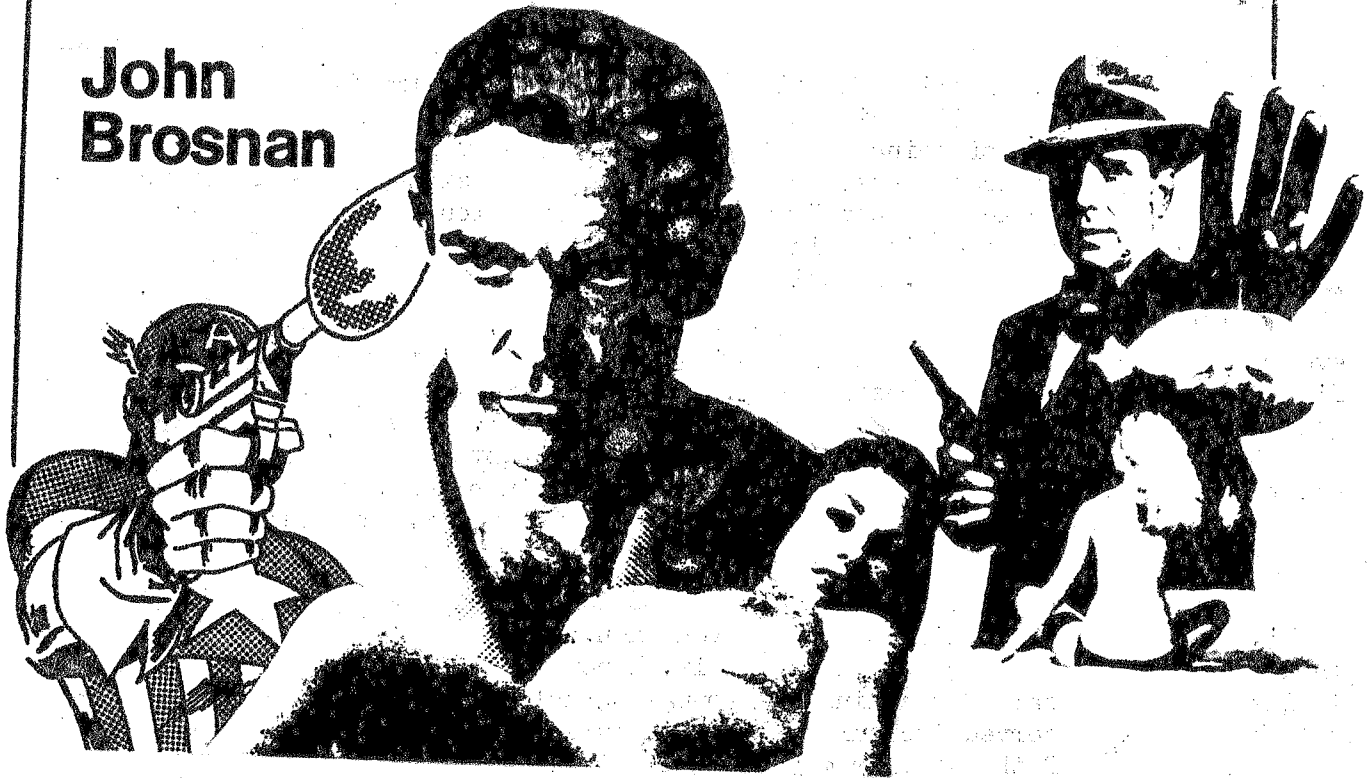
I would now like to ask the help of intrepid Speculation readers in extending this collection, and I would be happy to supply a copy of any slide in return for the loan of suitable material. My lectures come under two broad headings; - the straight descriptive "history of SF" type talk, and a more ambitious attempt under the heading of THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE. This latter subject entails looking at previous views of the future, sometimes from centuries ago, and then considers our own future as visualised through SF and in some of the more with-it publications such as those emanating from Herman Kahn, etc.

I need slides for both. For the SF talk, I am interested in illustrations from Candide, Gullivers Travels (the Lilliput adventure), from other 'prehistoric' SF stories, and particularly piquant scenes from the early pulps. I also need any illustrations from more modern SF outside the category-magazines, such as from BRAVE NEW WORLD, 1984, etc. For the "futures" lecture I am completely open to suggestions - I would especially like any illustrations which deal with the future as we might experience it, whether it be projected as better or worse than present conditions. Please get in touch if you have any ideas or material I could use.

And finally, I must remind you that I am agent for the Hugo-winning news magazine, Locus. This is published every two weeks and is sent airmail to the UK. It is absolutely indispensable for the true SF enthusiast. Subscriptions to me, please, 10 issues for £1.50, 26 for \$3.00. - Peter Weston, 25/3/73.

Happiness is a warm rejection slip

John
Brosnan



THIS ARTICLE has been more or less inspired by John Brunner's piece on writing in Speculation-30. Its purpose is to reassure those struggling would-be writers who may have been disheartened by some of what Brunner said. I want to demonstrate that lazy, untalented people, such as me, can break into the professional world. I hope my story will inspire other lazy, untalented people not to give up hope.

One of Mr Brunner's qualifications for being a successful writer is that you should have a compulsion to write. As he put it '...you're a compulsive writer if you stay home and pound the typewriter instead of giving that beautiful bird you met at a party a buzz'. Well... if ever such a choice presents itself to me, I somehow have the feeling that my crummy typewriter will lose out. A compulsive writer I'm not (my motivation for writing this piece, for instance, is based on guilt. I feel guilty because Pete Weston keeps sending free copies of Speculation but I never respond in any way) but I am in love with the image of being a writer, which is obviously not the same.

My ambition to be a writer goes back a long way. Its origins lie in my being born a sickly weakling in Australia. Sickly weaklings are rather conspicuous among all those Bronzed Aussies, so one is forced to compensate at an early age. When you're a hopeless failure at Aussie Rules footy, or behave in the surf like you're simulating the Thresher's last dive you've no choice but to try and dazzle the natives with tricks.

An early trick of mine was to say that I was going to be an atomic scientist when I grew up. Atomic scientists go down big in Australia and I reaped quite a lot of respect with this tactic. Among my mother's circle of friends I gained the reputation of being a child genius without ever having to actually demonstrate this mythical mental prowess, though I occasionally drew complicated pictures of atomic reactors that I made up as I went along. But I knew I'd never be able to keep this deception going when I reached high school, so I was forced to devise a new smokescreen. I decided to be a writer.

"I'm writing a book," I started telling people. In Australia writers are even more frightening figures than atomic scientists, so it wasn't long before I'd gained an even more impressive reputation. "There goes John Brosnan, he's going to be a writer," they were soon saying at school. I was so convincing that even the teachers started saying the same thing. It got so I was forced to actually start writing a book. I wrote about five chapters, in pencil, on ruled note-paper. I never let anyone read it, just showed them all the paper. It certainly looked impressive.

The book was called 'The Vanishing Boomerang', and was to be a 'children's book'. I was a condescending bastard, even then. I can't remember much about it though I know it had a lot of sadism in it. I never completed it because of my laziness, so my dream of becoming the youngest published author evaporated. Nonetheless the book served its purpose and I'm sure that my old school-mates, riddled with sunburn and VD though they may be, still think of me as John Brosnan-the-writer,,, if they ever think of me at all.

It was, I think, in 1962 that I discovered Max Shulman. For the uninitiated, Shulman is an American humourist most famous for creating Dobie Gillis (Dobie who?) and writing 'Rally Round the Flag, Boys'. I can forgive him for these two major flaws because of the books he wrote during and just after WW2. Books such as 'The Zebra Derby' and 'Sleep Til Noon'. I haven't looked at these books for years, they're probably very bad, but at the time they had tremendous effect on me. On reflection, it was like finding a writer who combined the best of Spike Milligan Woody Allen and Monty Python (if, after reading this, anyone digs up one of these books and decides that Shulman didn't combine the best of the above... I don't want to know). Immediately I decided I was going to write like Max Shulman. I wrote several stories in this vein and even sent one off to a professional magazine. They returned it with a polite note. Being a woman's magazine it was possibly not the best of choices, but I had no idea where to send that sort of material. I still don't.

The following year I discovered Ian Fleming (six years after everyone else) and decided I was going to be the new Ian Fleming. He thoughtfully died the next year so the path seemed to be clear of obstacles. I wrote a story with an imitation James Bond as the central character and sent it off to Man Junior, a terrible Australian girlie magazine (no nipples). They sent it back saying the plot was too involved for a short story. I began to think about expanding it into a novel. A year later I started. Laziness had once again intervened.

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By that time I was being bored to death working in a warehouse. They wanted to make me into a travelling salesman but I refused to learn how to drive which rather confused them. Then, in '66 or '67, I happened to meet a travelling salesman by the name of John Bangsund who had come to Perth, West Australia, to sell books. I don't know how many books he sold but he certainly brightened up my life during that visit. I had shown him a couple of my SF shorts (written in my Max Shulman vein) and he said he thought they were good. So I started thinking about submitting them to pro SF magazines. John also left a copy of ASFR with me and, by doing so, introduced me to a whole new world.

It was in ASFR that I read that Ron Smith (the American BNF of the late fifties/early sixties who published INSIDE) had taken over as editor of an Australian publishing company's paperback division and was looking for material. I sent him my imitation James Bond novel which now had a title, - AN ECHO OF JACKBOOTS.

It may just possibly be the worst novel ever written. The plot concerns the activities of a group of Nazis, using the Ku Klux Klan as a front, trying to take over Australia. My hero saves the day by killing vast numbers of people. Of course the big flaw is obvious.. who would want to take over Australia? The best thing about it is a torture scene in chapter eight. Really sick.

Ron Smith greeted the arrival of the novel manuscript with a great deal of silence. I didn't want to pressure him so I didn't write and ask what he thought of it. Instead I casually moved from Perth to Sydney and dropped in on him at the office one day. It took him a long time to dig my book out from under the great stack of unread manuscripts he had beside his desk. "Errrr" he said with an American accent. Then he suggested I try Curtis Brown, the literary agency, and gave me the address of their Sydney representative. With a certain amount of resignation I followed his advice.

Strangely enough, the man at Curtis Brown was quite enthusiastic about it. The only drawback was that he wanted me to rewrite it... preferably like John Le Carre. He spurred me on by saying things like "You could make 20,000 dollars from this. There's a good chance I can sell the film rights." I began the rewrite immediately but I didn't attempt to write like Le Carre, which was probably my big mistake. But I was too busy fantasising like crazy. 20,000 dollars! TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS! There I was, a callow youth of twenty (I wasn't even sure what callow meant, but whatever it was, I was it) and I'd made the big time already! Where were all those years of hard wrk and heartbreak? Where were all the rejection slips?

For the next 3-4 months I idly tapped out the new version of JACKBOOTS, I didn't really improve it any.. just changed some of the killings to mere woundings (the agent had complained that he lost count of all the murders) and expanded it somewhat. He had wanted me to include more technical detail.. he had been very impressed by my description of a helicopter attack in the last chapter until I told him that all the technical info had come from a single page of Time magazine. But I found research to be a tedious way of spending a lunch-hour so I abandoned the idea.

Not surprisingly, he rejected the second version, saying in a brief, cold note that it contained all the faults of the first manuscript. It could have been a very depressing period in my life if it wasn't for the fact I was an alcoholic. Realisation that all my dreams of easy wealth and lying about on fur carpets were shattered didn't penetrate my foggy consciousness for several weeks and by that time I had other things to occupy my mind.

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My writing career meandered somewhat after that. During the following year I became involved in the famous double-decker bus project (from Australia to the German HEICON), which provided me with new outlets for fantasising, etc. The only thing I wrote during that time, apart from the odd fannish piece, was a dreary novelette about the population explosion (I'd just heard that there was one...). I sent it to Galaxy and they returned it with a little booklet that gave instructions on how to write. I took the hint.

Always on the look-out for ways of cashing-in on my vast talent, it occurred to me that the bus trip should provide ample material for a funny book. So I decided to write a book about the bus trip as-it-happened. All went well until I reached page three... we were in Delhi by then... I ran out of money and had to sell my typewriter. It was sort of difficult after that.

On reaching England I attempted to complete the epic (after buying another typewriter) but it was just too tedious and boring to even contemplate, even when drunk. It still lies uncompleted in a drawer, all those laff-filled incidents lost forever. I then rewrote a few of my funny-SF stories and started sending them to various magazines. The result is one of the biggest collections of rejection slips that ever graced anyone's wall. It amuses visitors anyway. My favourites come from Moorcock... "If we weren't on a bi-monthly schedule we would have accepted this" ... and later, "If we weren't on a quarterly schedule we would have accepted this"... and later, "If we weren't on a bi-annual schedule we would have accepted this". I'm afraid to send him anything else.

At this point you are probably saying, why doesn't he give up? Why doesn't he throw in the towel? It's obvious that he's never going to sell anything, what keeps him going? The answer is apathy and sheer habit. I've been in the habit of pretending to be a writer for so long it's too late to change.

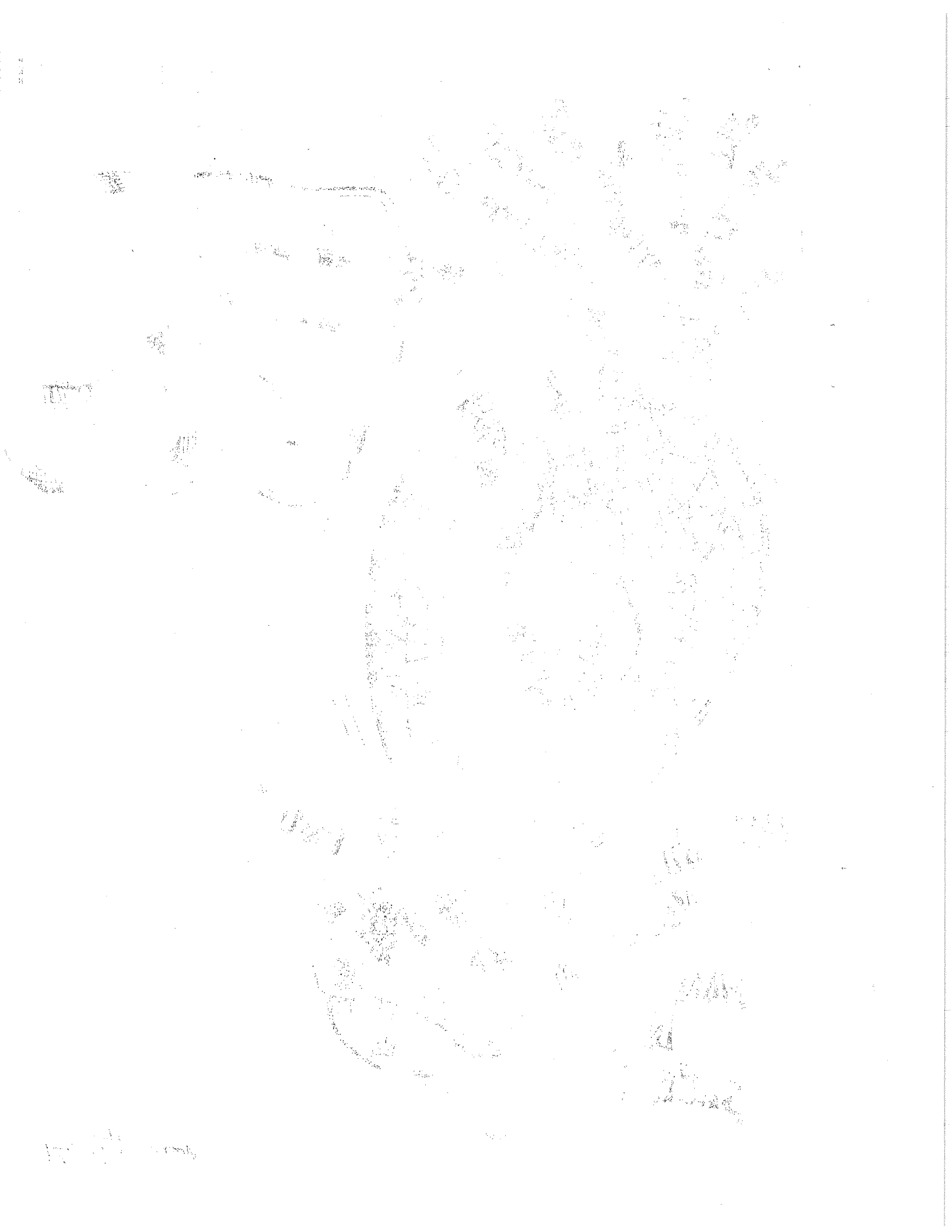
I started to think again.. what area of writing would be most vulnerable to an assault by me? My saviour came in the guise of another Australian, John Baxter, (and a real writer). John had been making his name by writing a series of books about the cinema, a subject he is well-qualified to write about having been a filmmaker in Australia with the Commonwealth Film Unit. What film subjects haven't been written about, I wondered. "You Only Live Twice" had just been re-released and it occurred to me to check and see if there had been anything done on James Bond. There hadn't, and so I had a subject.*

I wrote to Tantivy Press, a publishing company who published some of Baxter's early books, and suggested my idea. To my great surprise the editor, Peter Cowie, wrote back all enthusiastic, asking for a sample chapter. This was the scary part... what would happen when he discovered I couldn't write? "Don't worry" said Baxter, "he won't notice". Or words to that effect.

He didn't. JAMES BOND IN THE CINEMA was published last May. It may possibly be the worst film book ever published, but I don't really care, yet. The important thing for me is to have had something published at long last. And also the fact that it opens up further possibilities. Once you get your foot in the door you have a chance of getting a kneee or thigh in as well. If it doesn't work out that way, well at least I've proved something. Just what, I'm not sure.

— John Brosnan, 1972

* What about Amis' THE BOND DOSSIER ?



I closed last issue's essay on Robert Silverberg with a note to the effect that a postscript on THE WORLD INSIDE might be appropriate when I had seen the book. Pete Weston, in a footnote, expressed a hope that I would also comment on DYING INSIDE, and THE BOOK OF SKULLS. As that same issue of Speculation contains a quote from Silverberg which indicates that THE BOOK OF SKULLS marks the end of a phase in his writing, followed by a hiatus in his career, and as these three books are all important within the context of my discussion, I felt that it would be appropriate to try and write some kind of conclusion to the essay. - B.M.S. 27/2/73

postscript to **THE COMPLEAT SILVERBERG**

BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

In THE WORLD INSIDE, the four Urbmon stories that were separately published make up chapters 1-4. Chapters 5 and 7 are a split episode whose concern is Siegmund Kluver, the whizz-kid of Urbmon 116. Chapter 6 takes the reader outside the Urbmon into the wide open spaces to meet the communes whose concern is planetary cultivation. There is an overflow of characters from chapter to chapter, but the episodes are essentially independent, building up a many-angled picture of Urbmon life.

This is the only competent portrait of an overcrowded population that SF has given us. Neither STAND ON ZANZIBAR nor A TORRENT OF FACES (let alone THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT or THE CASTLE KEEPS) really contains any conception of what increasing population density will mean in social and cultural terms. THE WORLD INSIDE is the only story to consider the total abandonment of privacy and a complete renaissance in the philosophy of personal life-style.

Although I insist that this portrait is competent, I must also insist that it is totally impossible. The historical perspective provided by Jason Quevedo in chapter 4 is a shallow fake. There is no way that the human race could get from here and now to THE WORLD INSIDE in 2381. As a representation of a possible future, THE WORLD INSIDE is cardboard-and-glue. It has torn down history and started again from scratch.

In literary terms - in terms of the statement contained in the book - this aspect is quite irrelevant. What the book contains is not a vision of the possible future - neither an expression of hope for the human race's continued ability to cope with the population explosion, nor a dire warning of what will happen if current trends continue.

It constructs, instead, a vision of human beings in a situation which is carefully designed and contrived to have a whole series of implications with reference to contemporary concerns. It is a step beyond satire or allegory as a social commentary, because it remains far truer to its hypothetical reality-construct than either of those forms.

The ultimate fate of Siegmund Kluver (represented throughout as the exemplary Urbmon citizen - Quevedo's hypothetical Homo urbmonensis) is not a moral for the book, or a climax to a plot, or a pessimistic expression of hopelessness in the face of the human situation. It is a simple statement of the fact which emerges from Silverberg's analysis of his fictional situation. Its relevance to you, me or the common man, and its validity or otherwise are not my present concern, as I have said previously. Suffice to say here that THE WORLD INSIDE does not deal with the doom or deliverance that might await us in the future, but with the cost which Humanity might be asked to pay, and might be paying her and now.

DYING INSIDE and THE BOOK OF SKULLS take place a long way from the 2381 of THE WORLD INSIDE or the planet Belzagor of DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH. In these books Silverberg abandons his other-worldly reality-constructs altogether and returns to here-and-now in order to continue his exploration of the nature of humanity.

DYING INSIDE is the story of David Selig's return to the human race, and is intricately involved with the question of why he was ever apart from it. David Selig, telepath, is dying inside himself, and will ultimately devolve into David Selig, common man. The book is a first-person account, and the narrator is one of the most intensely human characters that has ever been presented in a work of imaginative fiction. His biography is minutely detailed, his personality sensitively explored. The novel goes to all possible extremes to illuminate and underline that David Selig, telepath, is human within himself. And also the fact that he is not allowed to be human by those outside himself.

David Selig, telepath, is an alien because the human race makes him an alien. Selig is denied his humanity by his sister and his lovers, more by those who do not know his secret than those who do, and by the whole pattern of the society in which he exists. He is the definitive model of the alienated man as described by Marx and explored by Colin Wilson in THE OUTSIDER. He has obvious affinities with the protagonists of Barbusse's L'INFERNO, Sartre's LA NAUSEE, and Camus's L'ETRANGER -- all definative portraits of Wilsonian "outsiders". The essential difference is that Silverberg has, by the use of a science-fictional contrivance, sidestepped all the difficulties of the raison d'etre of alienation which Wilson failed to find and Marx failed to conceptualise. Silverberg renders himself free to explore the nature of alienation in terms of the nature of humanity, simply because he is writing SF.

One might consider Selig's telepathy as purely symbolical of the heightened sensitivity which Wilson attributes to his outsider, and this would make DYING INSIDE a part of the mainstream of 20th Century literature instead of science fiction. I think that such a contrivance is unnecessary, or should be. DYING INSIDE remains what it is, whatever view one takes of its method of imaginative reality-construction. And what it is is a brilliant novel, one of the most impressive I have read.

THE BOOK OF SKULLS is equally full of craftsmanship, plotted with the same delicacy. It is less successful by some distance, possibly because it is somewhat over-stylised. Although THE BOOK OF SKULLS contains nothing which is actually "impossible", it is actually more distant from the social world than

DYING INSIDE. It is false in form, almost ritual. The Book of Skulls of the title is a magical document holding the secret of immortality. The honesty of the document is in constant question, and we never see the promise fulfilled or failed - that is beyond the book's concern. As a literary tool within the novel, the Book of Skulls is a device for measuring men.

There are four characters, each of whom gives his account of his motives, his ambitions and his fellow men. The situation provides for two to live and two to die, in a deliberate and difficult fashion, so that a great deal of significance is attached to the rationale of the choice. The choice is not really one for the characters to make - they are forced by the contrivances of the plot. The choice is for the writer, and the conclusion is inevitable - Silverberg has long ago rejected the value of such archetypes as the ultra-physical son-of-the-American-soil hero, or the sophisticated and ruthless inheritor-of-the-capitalist-world. We know that Silverberg is campaigning for the humanity of the Jew and the homosexual, and we know who the stylised plot is going to kill and who it is going to promote to hypothetical (but possibly valueless) immortality.

THE BOOK OF SKULLS is, in a way, a close-to-home summary of the statements which Silverberg has been making for some years. This is what it was all about. But the possibility of real immortality reminds us that it is not all that it was about. (I must reiterate here that I say all this solely in terms of the content of the books - I am not trying to judge Silverberg's intentions.) The statements which are at their simplest here do have implications for the year 2381 and the planet Belzagor, and Silverberg is concerned with these things as well as with the present. His image of man is not restricted to the twentieth century but goes a long way beyond that.

The stylised mode of THE BOOK OF SKULLS and SON OF MAN, and the science-fictional context of DYING INSIDE, THE WORLD INSIDE, and DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH may interfere with the immediate applicability of the statements which Silverberg makes, but the statements are nevertheless clear and he is by no means a difficult writer to understand. It is a great pity that the five works mentioned above are doomed to be lost in the SF trash-market (despite Scribner's and Ballantine's efforts in not labelling BOOK OF SKULLS and SON OF MAN).

That THE BOOK OF SKULLS marks the end of a phase of Silverberg's writing does not, of course, mean that he is done with his present concerns. His quoted intention is to "rethink some of my basic premises about the art of fiction". A certain dubiousness has been reflected in his last few works: In TOWER OF GLASS and A TIME OF CHANGES, statement is submerged in plot. In THE WORLD INSIDE and DYING INSIDE, plot emerges wholly from statement. SON OF MAN disposes of plot and THE BOOK OF SKULLS mechanises it.

It is difficult to believe that a man of Silverberg's talent will fail to come up with a mode of expression which will allow him to say what he wants to say in the way he wants to say it. However, it is equally difficult to believe that he can ever reach a receptive audience via the science fiction market. I think that all the books I have looked at in this postscript will be failures within the SF world - recent eulogies in the American fan press which Pete Weston has been kind enough to show me have not served to modify this opinion.

The whole trouble is that Silverberg has premises about the art of fiction and he has statements to make, and he has found effective ways to make them in an imaginative format which is not merely allegorical or symbolic.

Above all, Silverberg is not a purveyor of hack trash, which makes it all the more unfortunate that the bulk of his readers are readers of hack trash.

One of the most expressive quotes concerning the SF field is that of Fred Pohl to Algis Budrys in the speech reprinted in Speculation-31:-

"I don't mind your having people settle all the great problems of humanity in your stories, but can't they do it while they're dodging fire-lizards on Venus?"

The implication (and there is no reason to doubt its truth) is that the SF reader is interested in fire-lizards on Venus, but not in humanity. (Is it, I wonder, the SF reader and not the common man who needs to take note of the title of Chad C. Mulligan's book in STAND ON ZANZIBAR: "You're an Ignorant Idiot" ?).

Perhaps I'm being pessimistic, and Robert Silverberg is really hope. Maybe these books will become best-sellers. But what do you think? Can you see it happening?

Robert Silverberg is the only writer of any stature to emerge from (as opposed to within) the SF field since the Gernsback pogrom exterminated artistry within the genre. But I can't believe that most of the people who are reading him are in the least interested in good writing or in humanity.

- Brian M. Stableford, 1973

THE CRITICAL BOOKSHELF

One particularly important item received is Tom Clareson's ANNOTATED CHECK-LIST OF SCIENCE FICTION CRITICISM, published by the Kent State University Press. This volume contains an up-to-date listing of a wide selection of major works on the SF field, including both separately-published books and articles which have appeared in various magazines, papers, etc.

The fanzine world is not well represented other than Riverside Quarterly, and I see (grump) that both Speculation and my 1969 Books & Bookmen article on Heinlein are not included. Despite these notable omissions, the index is really tremendously useful because it allows you to trace all sorts of fascinating items and then, suitably armed with references, one can go to the reference libraries and dig them out. I have noticed a lot of material which I otherwise would have missed. (The volume gives a brief synopsis of the subject matter of each listed entry). Clareson is editor of the academic Extrapolation.

No price is given, but the volume will be available from a specialist SF bookseller, and it is heartily recommended.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW INDEX, 1970, 1971

Unaccountably missed in the past few issues of Speculation, these two slim volumes complement Clareson's work. The index lists all critical items from the commercial SF magazines, selected fanzines, and general sources. A third volume is on the way to cover 1972. Again, this reference work is recommended, and it can be obtained from the editor, Hal Hall, 3608 Meadow Oaks Lane, Bryan, Texas 77801, USA. Cost is \$1.00 per volume, postpaid.

TONY SUDBERY apparently upset several people in his review of SOLARIS in Speculation-30, by daring to criticise the attitude toward science shown, or apparently shown, by Stanislaw Lem. My own footnote last issue asked how severely one should challenge any writer's science, particularly in the more nebulous 'frontier' areas, and now Tony returns to pick up this point at more length, along with one or two fresh conclusions of his own.

TO CRITICISE THE CRITIC

or, How cheeky Charles Eric toppled the heavyweights

BY TONY SUDBERY

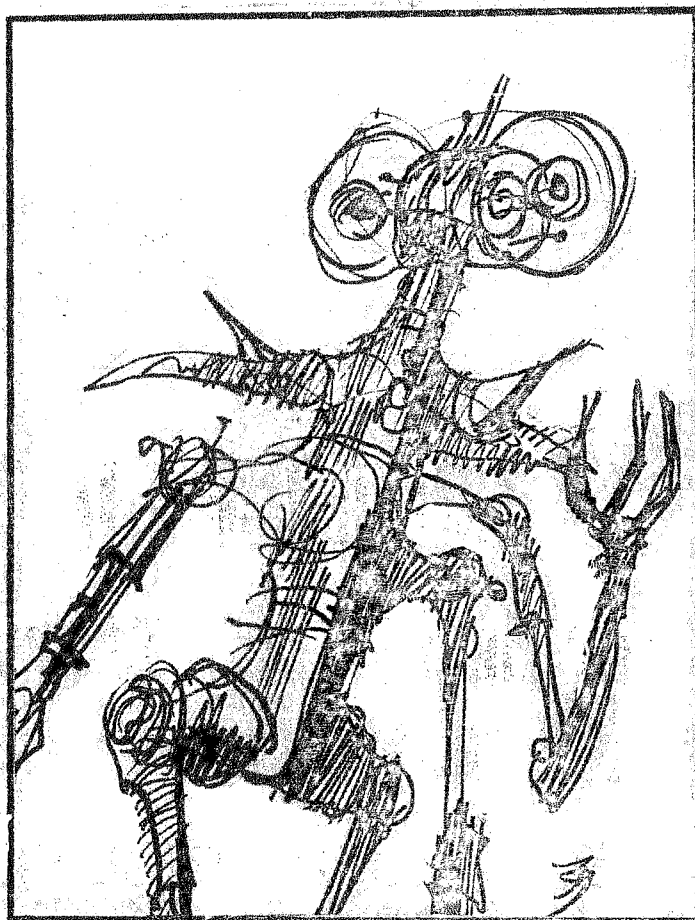
THERE ARE some authors we don't need to bother with. Like Charles Eric Maine, for instance. The criticism of Damon Knight and William Atheling Jr. has definitively eliminated him from serious consideration, hasn't it?

Or has it? Let's take a look.

The chief charge against Maine is the inadequacy of his scientific knowledge. However subjective other critical judgments may be, this one at least would seem to be open to conclusive proof; and indeed in IN SEARCH OF WONDER we find Damon Knight giving a pretty conclusive demonstration of Maine's ignorance as revealed in HIGH VACUUM. Yet Knight's performance is not flawless.

In this section of his book (the chapter called "More Chuckleheads") he first discusses TIMELINER; although he castigates Maine for his ineptitude on scientific matters, nearly all his criticisms of TIMELINER are literary. Some of these are undeniably just, others are more arguable, but I don't want to take issue on them here. At the end of the review, however, Knight makes a point with a scientific element in it, and here he stumbles; his sneer at Maine's term "dimensional quadrature" is based solely on his own wrong guess at the meaning of "quadrature".

There follows the demolition of HIGH VACUUM, which is done by means of a two-page-long list of scientific howlers perpetrated by Maine. It comes as something of a shock when this efficient performance is interrupted by a spectacular pratfall. Here is an action replay²:-



'On page 33, the author refers to gamma "particles", thus revealing the full, gorgeous extent of his ignorance on this subject (i.e. radioactivity).'

There's ignorance displayed here all right, but not by Charles Eric Maine. These two incidents from IN SEARCH OF WONDER were the first demonstration I'd seen of Maine's extraordinary talent for tripping up the heavyweights. It didn't do him a great deal of good in the encounter with Knight, in which he was trounced; but he used it to devastating effect in a later encounter with William Atheling Jr. (alias James Blish).

The occasion for this was Atheling's review of COUNT-DOWN (American title: FIRE PAST THE FUTURE), which has been reprinted in MORE ISSUES AT HAND. I'd like to comment on it blow by blow. The relevant passage occupies about a page³, I'll quote it in full, interpolating my own comments and, just for fun, comparisons with some excerpts from Blish's recent novels.

'As usual, Maine's contempt for science fiction, its readers and its writers is evident in elementary scientific errors, slipshod dialogue and other forms of inattention. All but one of the eight major characters (the narrative's viewpoint character) are said to be scientists, but Maine apparently has never met even one. Those in the story are constantly exchanging such remarks as "In science there is always an explanation for the inexplicable", a faith which vanished from the sciences about the time of Einstein's paper "Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies" (1905).'

Clumsy dialogue, maybe, but the sentiment is perfectly valid. If Atheling tried listening to theoretical physicists at work, it wouldn't be long before he heard them mutter something like "There must be some explanation." The reference to the genesis of special relativity does him no good at all, since what Einstein's paper did was precisely to provide an explanation of something that had previously been inexplicable.

What did happen in 1905 was that the nature of explanation changed, and the faith that vanished (from one branch of one science only) was the faith in a particular type of explanation. Faith in explanation of some sort will not vanish until science itself vanishes; but change in the type of explanation believed in is a recurring process in science, and Atheling ought to have known about it (it has been thoroughly described by Thomas Kuhn in his book THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS, and elsewhere Atheling shows that he is familiar with Kuhn's work).

[How do James Blish's scientists talk? In THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT he has a theoretical physicist refer to "fields falling somewhere within the electro-magnetico-gravitic triad".⁴ No theoretical physicist in the world would refer to the electromagnetic field and the gravitational field as three things, rather than two.]

'The science not only includes but depends upon such characteristic, long-familiar bloopers as:'

With these words Atheling introduces his scientific criticisms; in effect he uses the form of a dialogue between himself and Maine. I'll join the conversation, and introduce some other interested parties.

MAINE: Space curvature shows the presence of a gravitational field. The stronger the field, the greater the curvature.

ATHELING: Space curvature is a gravitational field, and shows the presence of matter.

EDDINGTON: Space-time curvature is matter, and shows the presence of a gravitational field.⁵

SUDBERY: Take your pick; they're all equally valid interpretations of general relativity (at least Maine's and Atheling's would be if they referred to space-time rather than space). The apparent contradictions come from the vagueness of the word "curvature". To be precise, the description of the Riemannian geometry of space-time makes use of the curvature tensor (which is closely related to the density of matter) deriving from an affine connection (which is the gravitational field). To say that space-time is curved is to say that these are both non-zero, so that both matter and a gravitational field are present. *

MAINE: But if you bend space the other way you create conditions of negative gravity.

ATHELING: Uh.. which way is the other way?

SUDBERY: Why, the other way relative to the curvature of time. Maine seems to be saying that the sign of gravity is related to the signature of the curvature of space-time, which is an intelligent guess and turns out to be right.

* Say, Tony, you could write excellent double-talk for SF space-operas! PRW 15

[Interpolation from THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT "] :-

BLISH: Remember that we have never achieved a unified field theory; even Einstein repudiated his in the last years of his life, and quantum mechanics - with all respect to de Broglie - is only a clumsy avoidance of the problem.

SUDBERY: You might as well say that THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT is a clumsy avoidance of the problem of colonising Mars. And why - apart from his aristocratic title - single out de Broglie for respect above Heisenberg, Schrödinger and Dirac, the major architects of quantum mechanics?

BLISH: These... spirits... may be such unified fields.

SUDBERY: Uh... what might a unified field be? "Unified field theory" means "unified theory of fields", not "theory of unified fields".

[End of interpolation]

MAINE: Here on Earth a falling body accelerates at thirty-two feet per second every second, and keeps on accelerating. If it could keep falling long enough, it would eventually attain the speed of light.

ATHELING: No material body, under the scholium Maine is appealing to, can attain the speed of light.

SUDBERY: "Scholium" is one of Atheling's and Blish's pet words. They seem to use it to mean "body of theory", though this differs from the normal meaning, as given, for example, in Chambers' Dictionary. (I must admit that I think the Atheling-Blish meaning suits the dignity of the word much better than the Chambers meaning.) However, as far as I can see Maine isn't appealing to any scholium but elementary kinematics, and his statement is tautologically true. Moreover, if the scholium Atheling has in mind is special (or general) relativity, then his statement is false.

ATHELING: Furthermore, a body falling to Earth from infinity - which ought to fit anybody's definition of "long enough" - would arrive with a relative velocity of seven miles per second.

SUDBERY: Oh, I see. Well, I was taking Maine's "falling" to mean, as he says, falling here on Earth, i.e. at a constant acceleration of 32 ft/sec/sec.

ATHELING: As the first example shows (i.e. the first two quotations from Maine in this dialogue), Maine is here joining the long list of authors to take a tussle with relativity, without (as the second example shows (i.e. the 3rd quotation here)) even a vague grasp of freshman high school physics. As was wholly predictable, he is finally thrown flat on his back by the Lorentz-Fitzgerald Contraction, which despite its apparent simplicity seems to be the Number One deadfall of sloppy or mystical science-fiction writers. I hope that some day such a writer will explain to me why he finds it so easy to accept that a body can have infinite mass, and why he invariably ignores the "zero length" clause that goes with the first impossible condition. However, I am not holding my breath.

SUDBERY: Light consists of material particles (gamma rays, Mr Knight), and light travels at the speed of light. So there's something wrong with Mr Atheling's argument that no material body can attain the speed of light. The argument shows that he is quite unaware of the real reason why, according to special relativity, neither material bodies nor information can exceed the speed of light. It is based on the fact that the order of

events is relative, and it is this, not the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction, that is the number one deadfall of all science fiction writers. (It's a mind-stretching concept; why doesn't someone use it in a story?)

Atheling obviously shares the widespread misconception that only velocities that are faster than light at a particular moment are forbidden by special relativity, so that if one avoids such velocities (e.g. by going into hyperspace) one gets round the restriction. In fact the whole journey is "forbidden" (i.e. paradoxical) no matter how it is performed; hyperspace is no answer.

Like nearly all SF writers, James Blish has invoked hyperspace as if it was an answer to relativity; he has also postulated instantaneous signalling (though his version, in 'Beep', is subtler than most). I hope that some day he or some other writer will explain to me why he finds it so easy to accept that a body can travel from A to B faster than light, when another observer can validly claim that the body arrived at B before it left A; I hope he will also explain what he means by "simultaneous", and why he invariably ignores the fact that this is a relative term. But I'm not holding my breath, either.

This ends the section of Atheling's review that I am concerned with here, though it doesn't end my disagreement with him over Maine. He finds some semi-literary "shreds of merit" in COUNT-DOWN, whereas I found none, as I remember. He also finds the rest of Maine's work "unrelievedly awful", whereas I think that some of his early novels - certainly TIMELINER, and CRISIS 2000, and possibly ESCAPEMENT and THE ISOTOPE MAN - are quite respectable science fiction. It's ironic that TIMELINER, which arguably shares with Heinlein's 'All You Zombies' the honour of being one of the only two logically consistent time-travel stories ever written, should have its central idea revived seventeen years later in Blish's MIDSUMMER CENTURY.

There must be a moral in this, but I'm not sure what it is. Let's try a few on for size.

1. I am still smarting from the time Charles Platt's successor at the Cambridge SF Library poured scorn on my preference for Charles Eric Maine over Philip K. Dick. (Um...)

2. COUNT-DOWN is excellent SF, for the more one knows of scientific principles, the deeper one's appreciation of Maine's resourcefulness. (Eh?)

3. Scientific accuracy is irrelevant to SF. (No, no, no.)

4. An SF writer's scientific knowledge should only be measured against that of the best writers in the field. (- making "good science" analogous to "good English"? No, that can't be right.) There's a real problem here; just how much scientific accuracy can we demand of an SF writer? Normally this is only of academic interest, posing no practical problem to the critic; as an interested layman in any branch of science, he can demand that the writer should be at least as well informed as he is, but he obviously can't ask any more. As Damon Knight puts it, at the end of his review of HIGH VACUUM:

"I don't expect any science fiction writer to do graduate work in physics before he writes a space-opera. If a writer makes a blunder in higher mathematics or theoretical physics, he is safe from me - I am no expert and will never notice it."

But if the critic also happens to be a specialist in some science, the problem begins to bite. How severe should he be on mistakes in his own speciality? The answer may be that his expertise renders him incompetent to judge SF based on his subject, though it's a hard answer, since many scientists greatly enjoy such SF and would like to offer their opinions on it.* (In practice, I think I personally tend to cheat and try to have it both ways by making the criticism and then denying that it is a criticism.)

In criticising a critic, one need have no such qualms. A man who criticises a writer's science is to some extent setting himself up as an expert and laying himself open to expert rebuttal. So if my criticism of Blish in this article is mischievous and irrelevant (offering little objection to Brian Aldiss's description of this passage in *THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT* as "beautifully and subtly inventive"⁶), still I take the criticism of Atheling more seriously. It's not the living in a glass house I object to, but the throwing of stones.

5. Ignorance in a scientist is only a venial sin; lack of understanding is the mortal sin. (I wonder if William Atheling would agree? His tendency to refer to scientists as "scholars" suggests that he might not. On the other hand, it's interesting that whereas Damon Knight chose to tackle Maine on fairly safe questions of fact, Atheling chose the riskier but deeper questions of theory.)

I think the resolution of the problem I raised in the previous moral may lie along these lines. It's not scientific knowledge one looks for in pure science fiction (or hard-core science fiction, or whatever you want to call it) but scientific understanding. I find it in Blish's stories, but I also find a measure of it in Maine's best stories.

Blish may not welcome the comparison, but Maine shares, to a smaller degree, the quality that leads me to rate Blish as the world's greatest writer of pure science fiction; a sort of intuitive understanding of science together with a scientific imagination, the ability to produce speculations whose outlines remain stimulating even when one can see flaws in their details. The difference between them is that Maine, like an entertainer, has never tried to use his gift to go beyond his first fine careless rapture, and has therefore deteriorated; Blish, like an artist, has constantly developed.

My last moral comes with no doubts or reservations:-.

6. *MORE ISSUES AT HAND* is a lovely book to argue with. Every reader of *Speculation* should own a copy.

- Tony Sudbery, 1972

References

1. *IN SEARCH OF WONDER*, (2nd edition, Advent 1967, p. 98
2. *ibid.* p.99
3. *MORE ISSUES AT HAND* (Advent, 1970) p. 108-9
4. *THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT* (Faber, 1972) p. 106
5. *THE MATHEMATICAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY* (C.U.P. 1924) p.120
6. *THE YEAR'S BEST SF No.5*, ed Harrison & Aldiss (Sphere, 1972) p.235

* That fits in with my own beliefs rather well. I've told Jack Cohen that he shouldn't criticise some authors so harshly for supposed slips in biological sciences, a field where he is an expert! PRW

Larry Niven:

ALTERNATIVES

TO WORLDS

ALTERNATIVES TO WORLDS:

Larry Niven's speech from the
CHESSMANCON Easter Convention, 1972.

JUST BECAUSE you've spent all your life on a planet doesn't mean that everyone always will. Already there are alternatives to worlds, freely-falling artificial environments. The Russian space-station may or may not have killed its occupants and the American Skylab is still forthcoming, but the Apollo craft have a good record.

Alas, they all lack something. Gravity. Permanence. The time one can spend in a free-falling Apollo craft is limited. Indeed, we may never be able to spend much time in free-fall, according to present day space medicine.

Well, let's start small and work our way up.

In the early days, Robert Heinlein wrote a story called 'Universe'. It has since been imitated countless times by most of the writers in the business, including myself. Except that I never sold the story.

Illustrations by Andrew Stephenson.



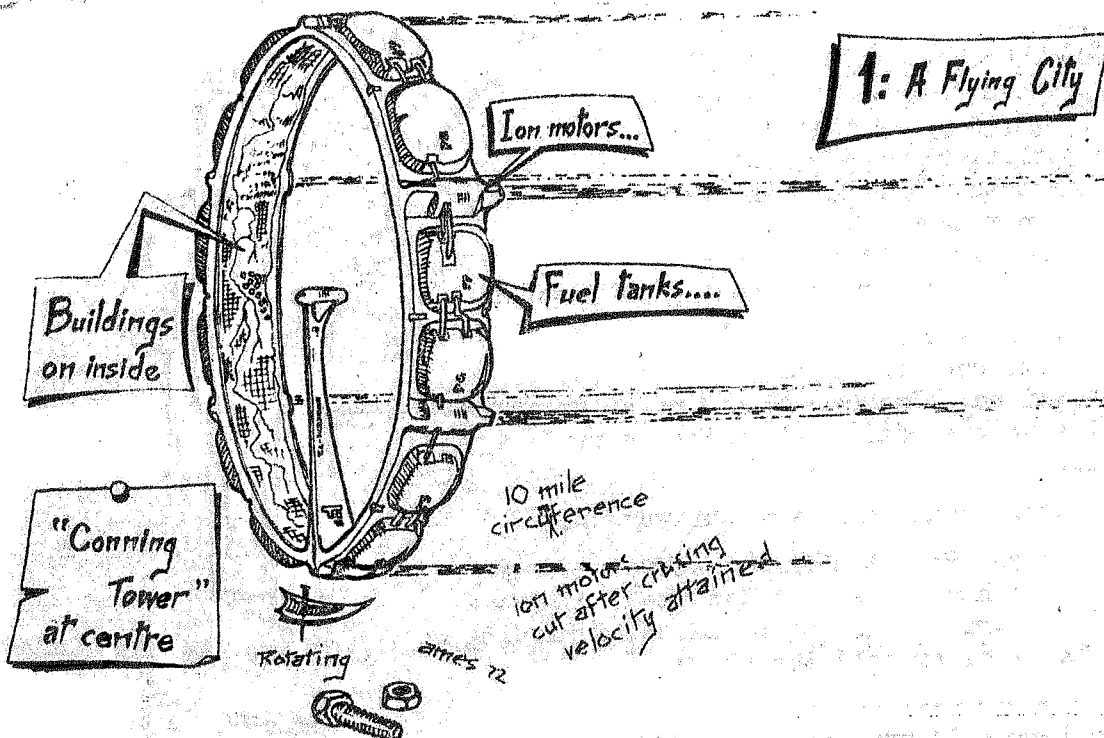
The idea was this. Present-day physics poses a limit on the speed of an interstellar craft. The ships we send to distant stars will be on one-way journeys, at least at first. They will have to carry a complete ecology; and because they will take generations to complete their journeys, they must also carry a viable and complete society. It is possible that such a society would come to regard Earth as a myth, the destination world as a vaguer myth, and the ship as the only tangible reality.

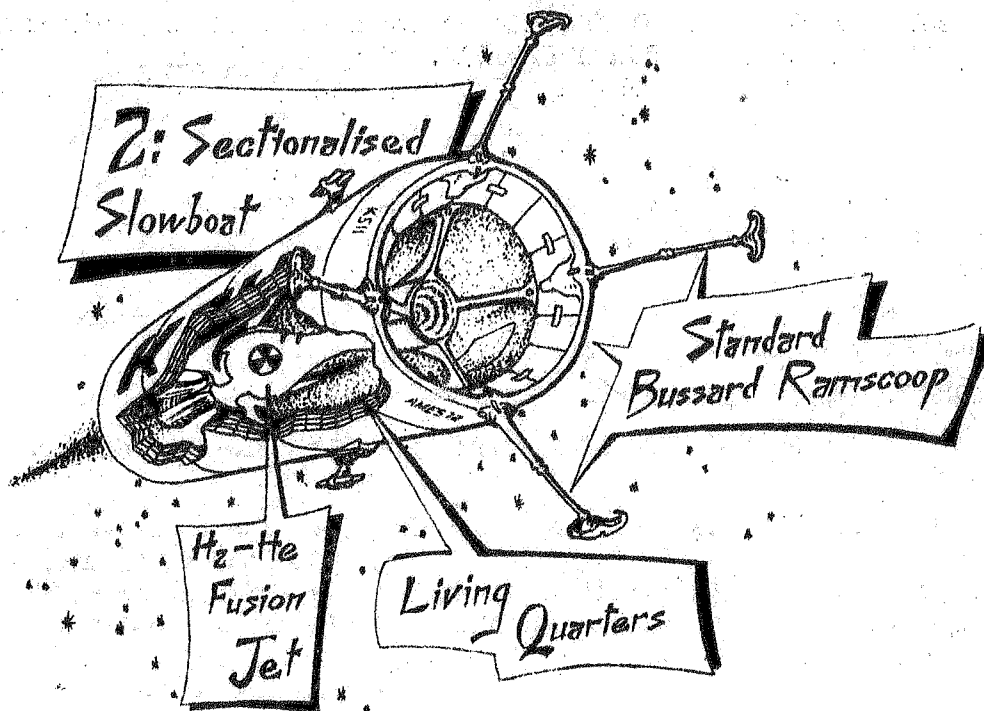
Heinlein concerned himself with the society. I want to consider the paraphernalia.

First, centrifugal force substitutes for gravity. We're going to be doing a lot of that. We spin the ship on its axis and put all the things that need full gravity at the outside, along the hull. Plant rooms, exercise rooms, etc. Things that need free-fall, like guidance instruments, we put along the axis. If we put the motors along the same axis, we will have to build a lot of the machinery on tracks because the back wall will be the floor when the ship is under power.

As I see it, there are four conceivable methods of generating artificial gravity aboard spacecraft. The centrifugal force method looks much the most likely. The second choice is to use actual mass; plate the floor with neutronium, for instance. But such a method would vastly increase the fuel consumption, if you expected the vehicle to actually go anywhere. Third choice is actually to generate gravity waves, but gravity waves have a wavelength greater than the diameter of the solar system. At present, anti-gravity looks most improbable. Fourth method is to accelerate/decelerate all the way.

James Blish did use a variant of artificial gravity in his Okie series. His spindizzy motors used a little-known law of physics to create their own gravity and their own motive power.





Furthermore, spindizzies worked better for higher mass. His spacegoing vehicles tended to be big. Most of the Okie stories involved Manhattan Island, which had been bodily uprooted from its present place and flown to the stars in one piece. Two of the stories involved whole worlds fitted out with spindizzies. They were even harder to land than the flying cities!

I once designed a structure something like a Blish Okie city, but using centrifugal force for gravity. You don't really need to fill out Heinlein's Universe ship. Instead, you build the ship like this:-

1. Cut a strip of London, let's say ten miles long by a mile wide.
2. Roll it into a hoop. Buildings and streets face inward.
3. Roof it over with glass or something stronger.
4. Transport it to space. (Actually you build the ship in space, of course).
5. Reaction motors in the basement, that is, beneath street level. Likewise fuel tanks. Jettisoning empty fuel tanks is easy; just cut the clamps. You also add recycling systems, etc.
6. The assumption is that the drive is low-thrust, high-efficiency. Ion jets? The axis could be kept clear; or a separate ship containing the guidance mechanisms could rise to the axis for sightings, or it could be supported on a slender fin, say. A ten-mile circumference implies a mile-and-a-half radius but the strain on the fin would decrease approaching the axis, so you'd get some advantages.

Of course the step before our flying city is really the 'slowboat', a ship using a reaction jet fuelled by interstellar hydrogen. This would be swept up by an electromagnetic field, along the lines proposed by Poul Anderson in TAU ZERO, and in my own 'Known Space' stories.

The next step upwards from the flying city is to hollow-out a planetoid for our own use. The best science fiction treatment of such an environment, to my knowledge, is Phil Farmer's *INSIDE OUTSIDE*. However, I got my specs from a factual book of speculation, *ISLANDS IN SPACE*, by Dandridge M. Cole and Donald W. Cox.

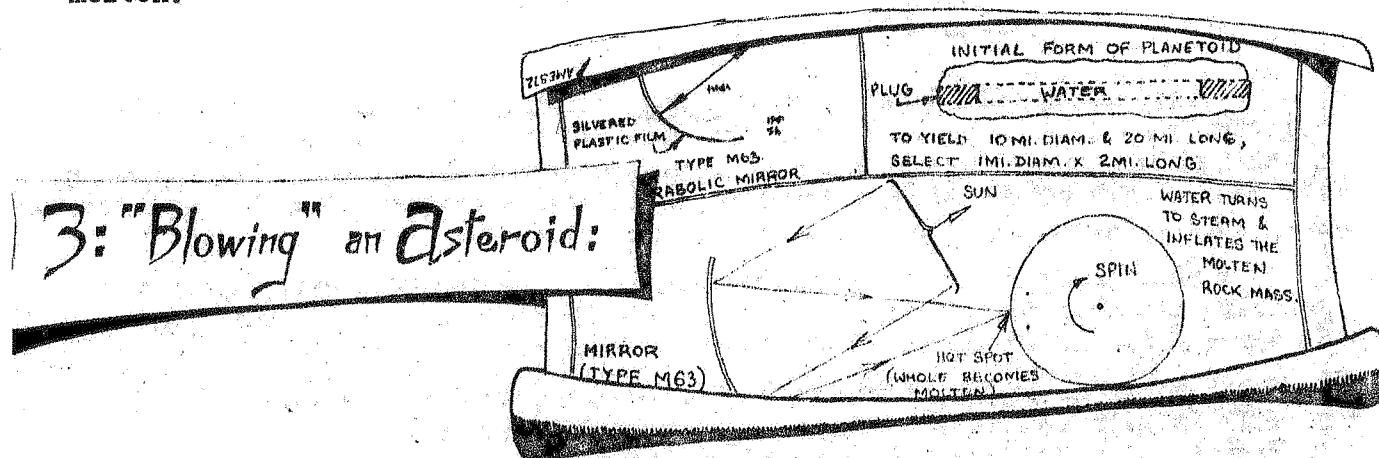
STEP ONE; Construct a giant solar mirror, Campbell style. Formed under zero-gravity conditions it could be of very light construction with the mirror surface itself made out of light, silvered plastic similar to that of the Echo balloon satellites. That stuff was no thicker than the cellophane on a pack of cigarettes.

STEP TWO: Pick a planetoid. Ideally we need an elongated chunk of nickel-iron, perhaps one mile in diameter and two miles long.

STEP THREE: Bore a hole down the long axis.

STEP FOUR: Charge the hole with tanks of water. Plug the openings, again using the solar mirror.

STEP FIVE: Set the planetoid spinning slowly on its axis. As it spins, bathe the entire mass in the concentrated sunlight from the solar mirror. Gradually the flying iron mountain would be heated to the melting point all over its surface, and slowly the heat would creep inward until almost the whole object is molten.

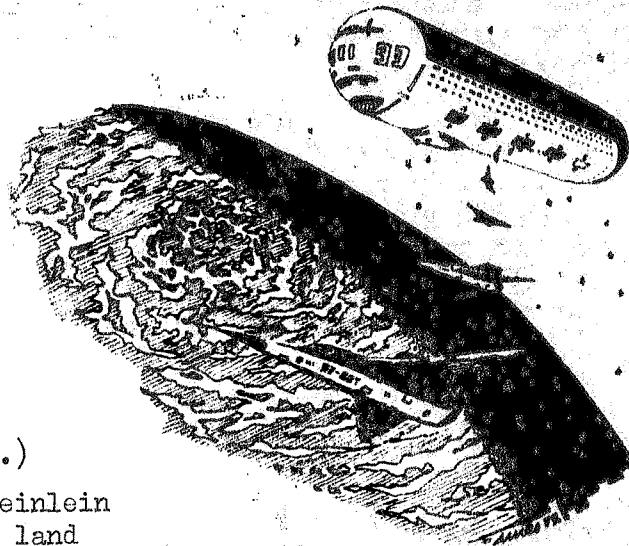


STEP SIX: The axis would be the last part to reach melting point. Then, the water tanks would explode. The steam-pressure blows the planetoid up into an iron balloon, some ten miles in diameter and twenty miles long, if everybody has done their jobs right.

The hollow world is now ready for tenants. Except that certain things have to be moved in, like air, water, and soil. It should be possible to set up a closed ecology. Cole and Cox suggested setting up the giant solar mirror at one end, and using it to bounce sunlight back and forth along the long axis. We might prefer to use fusion power, if we've got it. Naturally, we spin the thing for gravity.

Living in such an inside-out world would be odd in many respects. The whole landscape is overhead. Your sky is farms and houses and so forth. If you came to space to see the stars, you'll have to go down into the basement!

You get your choice of gravity and weather. Weather is easy; you give the asteroid a slight equatorial bulge, to get a circular central lake. You shade the endpoints of the asteroid from the sun, so that it's always raining there, and the water runs downhill to the central lake. If you keep the gravity low enough, you should be able to fly with an appropriate set of muscle-powered wings; and the closer you get to the axis the easier it becomes. (Of course, if you get too close to the sunlight, the wax melts and wings come apart..)



Let's go back a bit, to the Heinlein 'Universe' ship. Why do we want to land it? If the 'Universe' ship has survived long enough to reach its target star, it could probably survive indefinitely; and so can the Nth-generation society it now carries. We can mine new materials from the asteroids of the new system. Let the 'Universe' ship become our universe, then.

"HEINLEIN 'UNIVERSE' SHIPS"
ILLU.

Give up population control; enlarge the ship when necessary, or build new ships. Change stars when convenient. Colonise space itself, and ignore the planets; see the Universe!

The concept is called MACRO-LIFE. Macro-life is large, powered, self-sufficient environments capable of expanding or reproducing. Put a drive on the Inside-Outside asteroid and it becomes a Macro-life vehicle. The Spindizzy cities were a step away from being Macro-life; but they were too dependent on planet-based society.

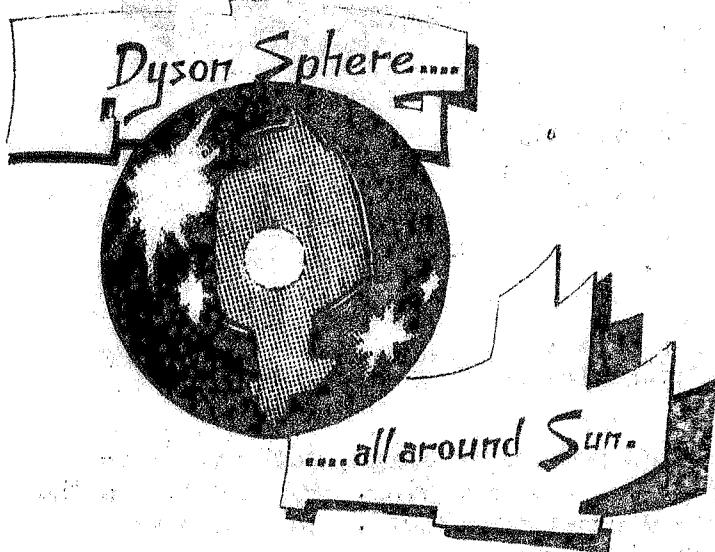
A Macro-life vehicle would have to carry its own mining tools and chemical laboratories, and God knows what else. We'd learn what else accidentally, by losing interstellar colony ships. At best a Macro-life vehicle would never be as safe as a planet, unless it was as big as a planet, and perhaps not then. But there are other values than safety.

The terraforming of worlds is the next logical step up. For a variety of reasons I'm going to skip lightly over it. We know both too much and not enough to talk coherently about what makes a world habitable.

But we're learning fast, and will learn faster. Our present pollution problems will end by telling us exactly how to keep a habitable environment habitable, how to keep a stable ecology stable, and how to put it all back together again. As usual, the universe will teach us or kill us. If we live long enough to build ships of the Heinlein 'Universe' type, we will know what to put inside it. We may even know how to terraform an uninhabitable world, having tried our techniques on Earth itself.

It's really incredible how much there is to say about structures larger than worlds, considering that we cannot yet begin to build any one of them. On the basis of size, the Dyson Sphere concept comes about in the middle, so let's jump immediately to that.

Freeman Dyson's original idea went as follows, approximately. No industrial society has ever reduced its need for power, except by collapsing. An intelligent optimist will expect his own society's need for power to increase geometrically, and will make his plans accordingly. According to Dyson, it will not be an impossibly long time before our own civilisation needs all the power generated by our sun. Every last erg of it. It will then become necessary for us to enclose our sun so as to control all of its output.



Mathematically at least, it is possible for us to build such a shell without leaving the solar system. The planet Jupiter has a mass of 2×10^{30} grams, which is most of the mass of the solar system, excluding the sun. Given massive transmutation of elements — and we'd need it, boy would we need it — Jupiter could be converted into a spherical shell, 1 A.U. in radius and maybe ten to twenty feet thick, with the sun at its centre.

Now, aside from the fact that our need for power increases geometrically, our population also increases geometrically. If we didn't need the sunlight for power, we'd still need the room. Surface area inside a Dyson sphere is about a thousand million times the area of the Earth.

Very few of the galactic civilisations in science fiction have included as many as a thousand million worlds. Here you'd have that many worlds within walking distance — provided you could live forever, of course.

Naturally we would have to set up a biosphere on the inside of the shell. We'd also need gravity generators. The gravitational attraction inside a uniform spherical shell is zero (I can prove this mathematically if anyone's interested). The net gravity would come from the sun, and everything would drift gradually upward into it.

So. We spot gravity generators all over the shell, to hold down the air and the people and the buildings. "Down" is outward in this case. Note that there are disadvantages to life on the Dyson sphere. You can't see the stars. It is always day. You can't dig mines or basements. And if one of the gravity generators ever went out...

We can control the temperature of any locality within the Dyson sphere by varying the heat conductivity of the shell at that point. In fact, we may want to make the shell bigger, to give more room, and to make the sun look a bit smaller, given that it is always high noon. All we need to do is to make the shell less conductive. If it isn't conductive enough, we may want to add huge radiator fins to the outside.

Now. Dyson's assumptions hold for any industrial society. If an astronomer were looking for inhabited solar systems, he would be missing the point if he concentrated on the visible stars alone. The most advanced civilisations in the galaxy may be found on/in spherical bodies about the size of Earth's orbit, radiating as much energy as a sun, but at about the wavelength of deep infrared. That applies to protoplasmic life, of course. Other forms of life would show different temperatures; but the Dyson spheres would always radiate in dark red or infrared.

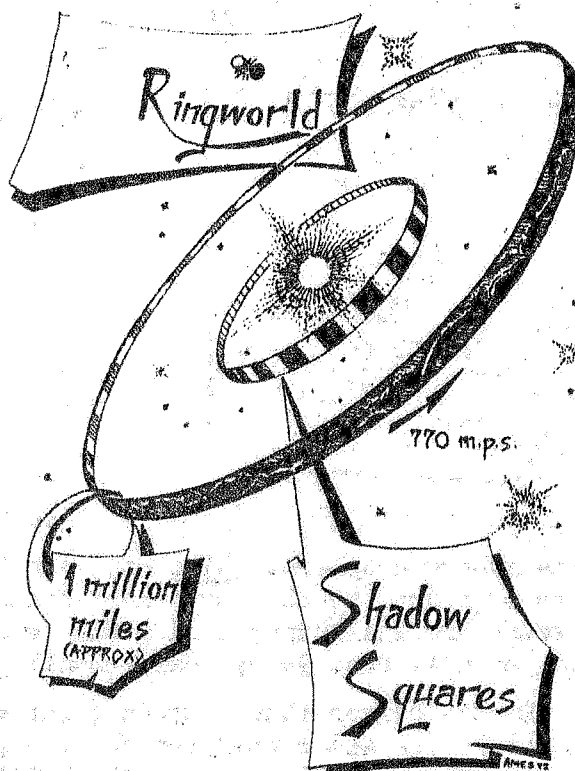
There are variants on the Dyson Sphere concept. One is to convert the mass of Jupiter, say, into as many little ten-by-twenty-mile hollow iron bubbles as will fit. The smaller you subdivide the mass of a planet, the more surface area you get. You put all the little asteroids in circular orbits at distances of about 1 A.U. from the sun, but differing enough so that they don't collide. It's a gradual process, of course. You would start by converting existing asteroids, move up to Jupiter, then Saturn, Uranus... and eventually, Earth.

Eventually you've blocked out all the sunlight. From outside, such a system would look just like a Dyson sphere; a great globe radiating enormous energy in the deep infrared. In fact, this was the original Dyson concept. The solid shell is a later concept requiring more sophisticated engineering.

In *THE WANDERER*, Fritz Leiber suggested that most of the visible stars had been surrounded by shells of worlds. We are watching old light, he suggested, light that started on its way before the industrial expansion of galactic civilisation really hit its stride. Already we see some of the result: the opaque dust clouds are not dust clouds, but walls of Dyson spheres blocking the stars beyond.

I myself have dreamed up an intermediate step between Dyson spheres and planets. Make a ring 1 A.U. in radius, which makes it 600,000,000 miles long. If you have the mass of Jupiter to work with, and if you make it a million miles across, you get a thickness of about a thousand metres. The Ringworld would be much sturdier than a Dyson sphere.

You could spin it for gravity. A rotation on its axis of 770 mps would give the Ringworld one gravity outward. You wouldn't even have to roof it over; put rim walls 1000 miles high - but see the book!



Set up an inner ring of shadow squares, objects to block out sunlight, and you could have night for whatever period you wanted. And you would be able to see the stars — unlike the inhabitants of a Dyson sphere. You could launch spacecraft just by dropping them off the ring; they would already be moving at far greater than escape velocity for that solar system. Landing a spacecraft would be somewhat more difficult, however.

As with most of these structures, your landscape would be optional, do-it-yourself. A look at the outer surface of a Ringworld or a Dyson sphere would be most instructive. Seas would show as bulges, mountains as dents. River beds and river deltas would be sculpted-in; there would be no room for erosion on something as thin as a Ringworld or Dyson sphere.

A large meteor would be a disaster on such a structure. A hole in the floor of the Ringworld would eventually let all the air out, and the pressure differentials would cause planet-sized storms, making repairs difficult.

The Ringworld is a flexible concept. I've had suggestions for various sources, mainly the weekly fanzine APA-L.

1. More than one Ringworld can circle a sun. Imagine many Ringworlds, non-coplanar, of slightly different radii.
2. Get seasons by bobbing the sun up and down. (Actually it's the Ringworld that does the bobbing. One to a star for this trick).
3. To colonise a hotter or cooler star, vary the size of shadow-squares to vary the day/night ratio, and vary radius of the Ring.
4. To build a Ringworld when the system is already colonised to the hilt, pro tem structures are needed. Pie dish with thruster underneath. Three sections of Ring, joined in equilateral triangle.

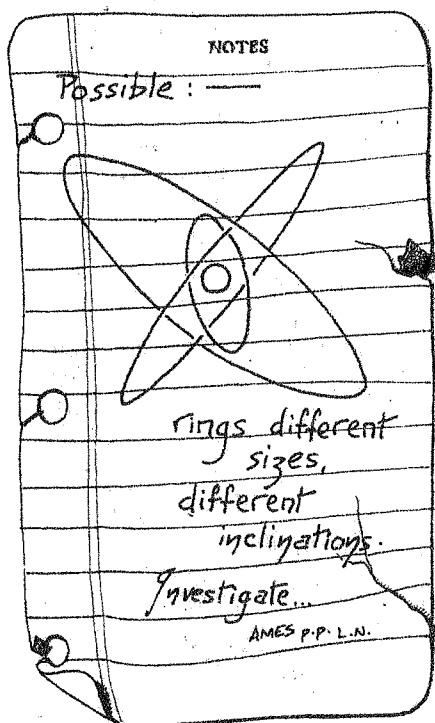
Let's go back to the Dyson sphere. Do we really need to assume gravity generators? As I was saying, they look pretty unlikely. Detail:—

1. Spin a Dyson sphere. The sphere picks up all the energy of the sun, as planned, but the environment is a Ringworld.

2. The Alderson sphere. Live with the fact that you can't have gravity. Build two spherical shells, the inner transparent, the outer (optionally) likewise. Atmosphere and optional floating, rigid structures, between the two shells. It would be fun. Query; can humanity stand long periods of free fall?

What's bigger than a Dyson sphere? An Alderson disc. (Dan Alderson, designer of the Alderson-Dyson double-sphere, now brings you —). Shape is that of a gramophone record, sun in the little hole. Radius; about that of Mars or Jupiter. Gravity is uniformly vertical to the plane, except for edge effects. Engineers have to worry about edge effects, so we build a curly wall around the hole to serve as a rim wall.

SPECULATION



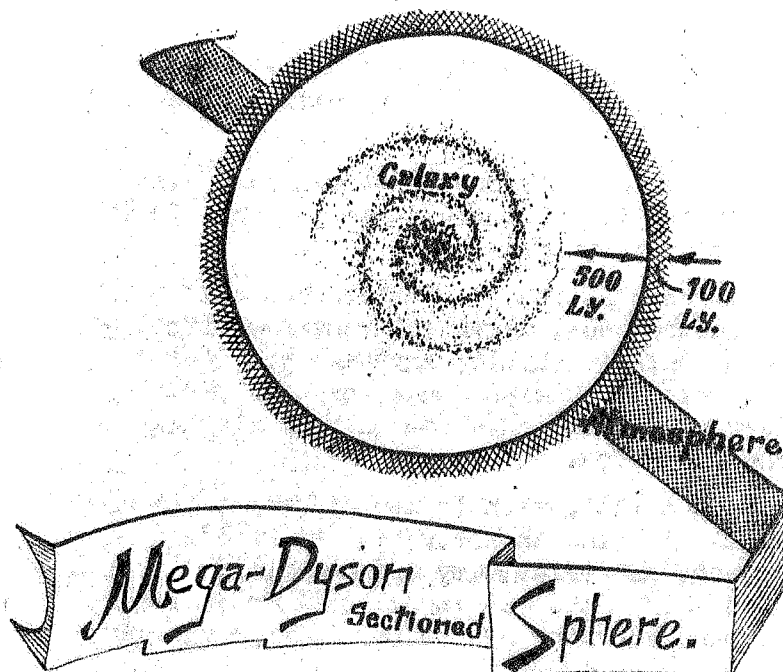
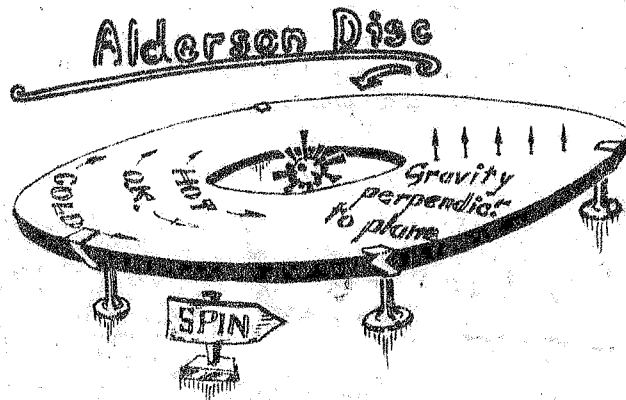
This thing is massive. Weighs more than the sun by a goodly margin. We ignore structural strength problems.

The sun will always be on the horizon — unless we bob it, which we do. Now it is always dawn, dusk, or night; a wonderful place to stage a sword-and-sorcery novel. Compounded by the presence of real monsters, because we would share the structure with aliens accustomed to hotter or colder climes.

Mercurians here, Venusians here, Terrestrials, Martians — and over the thousands of years, mutations and adaptations migrate across the sparsely settled borders. If civilisation should fall, things could get interesting.

Note: both sides are inhabited.

If the Alderson Disc seems unlikely, try this one. Mathematically at least, it is possible to build a really big Dyson Sphere, with the heart of the galaxy at the centre. You put the biosphere on the outside. Surface gravity is minute, but the atmosphere gradient is infinitesimal. Once again, we assume that it is possible for the human species to adapt to free-fall. We live in what amounts to free-fall, above a surface area of tens of millions of light-years, in an atmosphere that doesn't thin out for at least hundreds of light-years. I need not go into the problems of getting lost in such a universe!



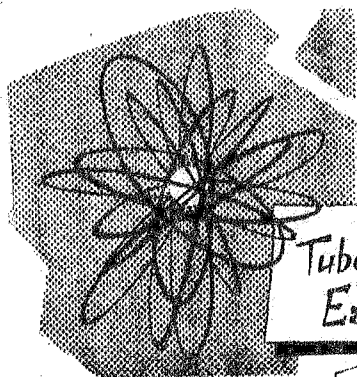
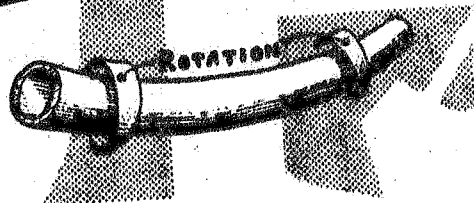
Temperature control is easy; you can vary the heat permeability of the sphere to pick up and hold enough of the energy from the suns inside, and though the radiating surface area is great, the volume to hold heat is much greater.

You can build optionally large structures within the atmosphere, even spinning structures. They would remain aloft for many times the lifespan of any previous civilisation before drifting to contact the surface.

The poetic implications are pleasant. From a flat Earth hanging in space you could reach a nearby moon via a chariot drawn by swans, and you stand a good chance of finding selenites there.

Let's back down a bit. Pat Gunkel has designed a structure analogous to the Ringworld. Imagine an inner tube six hundred million miles long and not particularly thick. You can rotate it around a central axis to get surface gravity on the inside walls. You would have to provide your own light, possibly by a fluorescent tube through the axis. For really great lengths you don't need to worry about keeping the inner-tube shape. Pat visualises a coiled and twisted tube like a ball of spaghetti, shaped roughly into a hollow sphere around a star. As the obviously insane civilisation that built it continued to expand, the coil would expand through the galaxy to fill all the space between the stars.

Tube Construction:



Tube 1 mile diam.,
Earth-orbit circumference
[approx.]

One final step to join two opposing life-styles, the Macro-life tourist types and the Restructure-Your-Home-World proponents. The Ringworld rotates at 770 mps, and given the right conducting surface this rotation could set up enormous magnetic effects. These could be used to control the sun, to force it to fire off a jet of gas along the Ringworld axis of rotation. The sun becomes its own rocket; the Ringworld follows along.

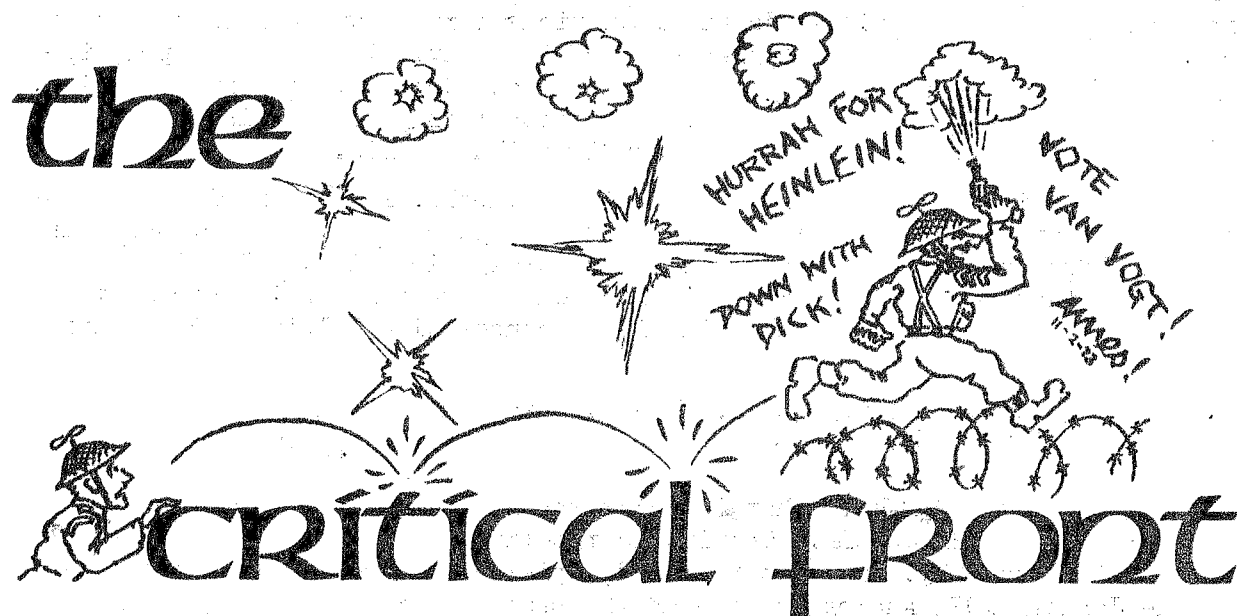
By the time we run out of sun, Ring is moving through space at Bussard ramjet velocities. We continue to use the magnetic effect as a control. The ramscoop jet becomes our sun.

Or, since the Ringworld is already rotating at ramscoop speeds, and since we need ramscoops on the rim walls to keep the thing stable anyway, we use them for propulsion. And let the sun follow along via gravity.

The Ringworld makes a problematical vehicle. What's it for? You can't land the damn thing anywhere. (Unless around another sun, using the ramscoop effect.) A travelling Ringworld is not useful as a tourist vehicle; anything you want to see you can put on the Ringworld itself.. except multiple suns, and you just can't get too close on a flying Ringworld. A flying Ring can only be fleeing some galaxy-wide disaster. Like the Core explosion.

Where do we go from here? It turns out that, when looked at from a certain viewpoint, the entire universe shows signs of being an artifact. But that's rather complicated, involving quantum theory and relativity and red shifts and some pure maths, and I'd rather not go into it here. It makes God look rather like a mad CalTech student, willing to spend enormous effort on a practical joke.

- Larry Niven, 1972



THE IRON DREAM by Norman Spinrad, (Avon 95c)

Reviewed by David Redd

I see. So this lad Hitler got fed up with politics and emigrated to the USA, where he became a well-known SF writer. Inside the covers of THE IRON DREAM we really have LORD OF THE SWASTIKA, the last and greatest SF novel written by Adolf Hitler. There's even an Afterword by a learned critic from the same parallel world.

Your reviewer's problems begin right there. After reading LORD OF THE SWASTIKA — and preparing to hammer it mercilessly on grounds of plot, style, sensationalism, technological and psychological absurdities — I read the Afterword and found all those criticisms already made. The novel's faults, it seems, must be blamed on Hitler.

I suppose it's quite legitimate to disarm critics in this way, saying that the defects are part of the superb characterisation. Clearly Spinrad deliberately wrote his novel the way crazy Adolf would have written it. But unfortunately we're not told enough about the parallel history to judge the merit of the novel in terms of its own world. Lacking a basic reference framework, the book is not art but gimmick.

Pity! It's a nice idea with some fun details. The list of Hitler's other SF novels beautifully illustrates his declining mental stability. And take this quote from the Afterword:

"It is true that although Hitler never married, he had a certain reputation as a Don Juan at science fiction conventions."

You could love the book for that sentence alone.

But now I'm describing THE IRON DREAM, and most of the book consists of LORD OF THE SWASTIKA. It could be a parody of the old pulp melodramas, and in fact is quite funny on this level. Our blond blue-eyed genetically pure hero (called Feric Jaggar!) leads his radiation-scarred mutant-infested world back to racial purity and human greatness by true Hitlerian methods, principally a series of ferocious massacres where he mows down mutants six at a time. I did have the impression he could even dispatch twenty with a single blow of his Great Truncheon, but I can't find confirmation of this.

The novel isn't all violence and phallic symbols. I was surprised to look back at the early pages and find them relatively peaceful. However, the main impression from all the blood and bodies is merely sickening. (All right, so I did write that novelette 'Sun Down' which ends with a man being hacked to pieces, but I don't provide nausea in giant economy-size helpings like Spinrad does.)

Well, to sum up: pretty yecch. Whatever happened to nice believable guys like Jack Barron?

- David Redd, 1973

* Trouble with IRON DREAM is that it reads too much like Jack Barron's predecessor, MEN IN THE JUNGLE. Continuous repetition of violence ceases to shock fairly quickly. On the other hand, Spinrad's story 'A Thing of Beauty' in the January 1973 Analog was one of the best I've read in a long time.

JACK OF SHADOWS by Roger Zelazny, (Faber £2.00)

Reviewed by David Pringle

Roger Zelazny's new novel, like most of the work he has published in the last five years, is essentially a tale of Sword-and-Sorcery, not science fiction. I had better state at the outset that I am not very keen on this genre of fantasy, since it seems to me to stand in total opposition to SF - which is my main area of interest. Nevertheless I have become uneasily aware in the past couple of years that S&S may be overtaking SF in general popularity, judging both from the new paperbacks in the shops and the comments of acquaintances.

Deciding to try some more Sword-and-Sorcery for myself, I read THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS by Poul Anderson, and a couple of novels by Thomas Burnett Swann. I must admit that I rather enjoyed these, particularly Anderson's 20-year old work. It seems to me that SF and S&S are both forms of romance fiction (like the historical adventure story, or the spy thriller) and should be judged quite differently to the novel proper, which is essentially realistic, or 'low mimetic'.

Romance, unlike the social novel, appeals primarily to the depths of the mind; its attraction is psychological rather than moral or intellectual. Built around the ancient pattern of the Quest, or the chase, and involving contests between titanic forces of Good and Evil, romance satisfies something deep and obscure in all of us. Archetypal themes of birth, initiation, death and re-birth are worked out, leaving us with a sense of some psychic goal attained.

I have said that SF & Sword-and-Sorcery are both forms of romance, but I have also said that they are opposed to each other. The opposition is in the rhetoric, or mode of presentation of the work. SF uses the rhetoric of the modern perspectives of science; Sword-and-Sorcery does not.

SPECULATION

Science fiction is a fiction of ideas; thus it can satisfy the intellect, and even the moral sense, while Sword-and-Sorcery has little to offer either. SF is a rigorously modified form of romance, whereas Sword-and-Sorcery is 'raw' romance. It is this rawness which has discouraged me from reading much S-&-S in the past. It takes an outstanding imaginative writer (Mervyn Peake, for instance) to put solid flesh on the bones of pure romance.

SF has the advantage, not only of scientific ideas, but of an agreed mythology which has been built up by many writers over several decades. The medieval writers of romance, such as those of the Arthurian cycle, also had their agreed mythology. Many of the best modern writers of Sword-and-Sorcery, Poul Anderson for example, succeed because they borrow from a past mythology, thus turning their fiction into a form of 'historical' romance. Anderson's *THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS* is set in a Carolingian world, and it gains its density and richness from the inventions of the medieval writers. Much of the pleasure afforded by the book comes from Anderson's juggling of the traditional elements. His book is mythically pure, and this gives it strength. The same can be said of Thomas Burnett Swann's books.

Of course, many Sword-and-Sorcery writers attempt to create their own mythical world from scratch, and it is here that failings of imagination become all too apparent. The result, as seen for example in Michael Moorcock's *ELRIC* books, is a bare elemental universe, thin on detail, and tending to incorporate a hodge-podge of disparate traditional features when the author's imagination flags.

Such fiction does not have the authority of lived experience which the social novel depends on, nor does it have the authority of scientific perspective and a shared mythology that SF has. It does not even ground itself in the great romance worlds of the past, as do the tales of Anderson and Swann. It tends instead to have a vague and shadowy quality, like someone's half-remembered dream - and this indeed is the case with the aptly-titled *JACK OF SHADOWS*.

Zelazny's tale is set on a world that has ceased to rotate, and which is thus divided into regions of permanent day and night, with a band of twilight in-between. This is a common enough SF situation, used for example by Aldiss in *HOTHOUSE* and by Moorcock in *THE TWILIGHT MAN*. However, Zelazny does not indicate whether his story is set in the far future or the distant past, or indeed on a world in some alternate universe. It does not matter, for as I have said this is not a work with an SF rationale but one which follows the logic of fantasy and has the timeless quality of pure romance.

Most of the action takes place on the dark side of the world, and indeed the two chapters set on the light side seem jarring and out of place. On the dark side, magic rules, and the hero is something of a picaresque rogue who employs his supernatural powers on a quest for vengeance that turns into something larger than he expected. He travels through both the night and the day worlds, frowning in awareness and ambition as he does so, and eventually he harnesses both the science of day and the magic of night to further his ends.

In an interesting book review in the latest *New Worlds*, John Clute describes what he calls the 'picaresque base paradigm', used by so many writers of SF and Sword-and-Sorcery: "the boy/man without a family or homeland, the survivor, the agile picaro who quests unceasingly for his true name, the name and identity of his father, the location of his final home, where he will be at peace...."

As Clute points out, this theme is given its ideal science fictional expression - and resolution - in Charles Harness's *THE PARADOX MEN*, where the ultimate message emerges as "know thyself, and the world is your oyster." Anderson's *THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS* is also a good expression of the theme, where the hero of mysterious birth is snatched from one world in order to become the saviour of another.

JACK OF SHADOWS fits the pattern pretty well; the hero comes to know himself in the form of an externalised 'soul' which follows him around throughout the last quarter of the book, and there is even a father-figure in the form of Morningstar, the great stone God, who on the last page is shown with outstretched hands waiting to catch Jack as he falls from the battlements of his castle. I suspect however that Zelazny, who is certainly a writer aware of what he is doing, had tongue-in-cheek throughout the writing of this book. There is little of the manic conviction of, say, Harness or Bester, or even Poul Anderson.

A certain half-heartedness, a tiredness of imagination, is the failing of *JACK OF SHADOWS*. As I remarked, the book is shadowy in quality; there is a lack of concrete realisation of scenes, insufficient description, a vagueness about the whole fantastic world that Zelazny is endeavouring to create. This is apparent when we consider the hero's magical powers; having finished the book I am still in doubt as to what exactly they are supposed to be.

As a newcomer to SF some seven or eight years ago, Zelazny became famous for his laconic and tough-poetic style. He seemed to be an SF equivalent to Raymond Chandler. Sadly, I can only report that the style has deteriorated. The action continually moves too fast, Zelazny skimps, and gives us the most perfunctory scenes. What may once have been a graceful economy now seems no more than a trick concealing laziness and shoddiness. Too often, the fights and the grand confrontations collapse in anti-climax. Of course, Zelazny does have his occasional ingenious moments - such as Jack's imprisonment in a jewel hanging around the neck of his arch-enemy, the Lord of Bats. But the overall effect of the narrative is disappointing; a succession of missed opportunities and half-glimpsed possibilities.

As with other works of S-and-S I have read, I longed for something like the richness and solidity of realisation of Mervyn Peake's *GORMENGHAST* books. For reasons I outlined earlier, it would seem to require a writer of genius to achieve this in the *Sword-and-Sorcery* genre. Peake had that genius; Zelazny, I am afraid, has not.

- David Pringle, 1973

- * Interesting that Zelazny's last three books (the above, *NINE PRINCES IN AMBER*,
* & *CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS*) should all use the theme of a character
* in some way lost, not knowing his true identity. Is this the same man who
* wrote *THIS IMMORTAL*, 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes', etc. What's gone wrong?

THE MISSIONARIES by D.G. Compton (Ace Books, 75c)

Reviewed by Mark Adlard.

"The spaceship landed on the planet Earth to bring it the message of a new religion and a new way of life that would fit the terrestrial barbarians to take their place in the great life of the Galaxy..." Thus the blurb on the cover, conveying the promise that this will be another chunk of conventional SF. But the blurb or apparent theme carries little indication of what actually happens between the covers.

In the Introduction we begin with a seriously worded extract from "the Missionaries' Intergalactic Handbook." We hear about "traxinodes, g-simulators, paralabes... terrain analysers, communicators, quangs, form synthesisers and transmateralisers.. structure controllers, hypno-conversion units, dagrameters, abreactors, portlescopes and symbolisers." We experience the pleasure of recognition as we turn over this pile of junk accumulated by the followers of E.E. Smith and displayed for decades in the windows of the magazines. We fail to observe, perhaps, that the very way in which the stuff is piled together might indicate that Compton doesn't place a high value on this Asimovian merchandise.

In Part 1 the narrative proper starts, and the ship lands near "the little Devon village of North Molten...A further eight miles away by winding lane lay South Molten, population 2,950, market day Thursday, last post 6.30 on weekdays." If the ship had to land anywhere, "where in the whole universe could be better than Exmoor, in the county of Devon, England? Lorna Doone country."

Two characteristics of Compton are immediately apparent. The first and most obvious is that he is intensely English, almost to the point of being parochial, and I sometimes find myself wondering what American fans make of some of his references. The second is his obvious delight in juxtaposing SF concept (or cliché) with our contemporary (or mundane) world. The novel is in fact interspersed with extracts from what purport to be factual accounts by 19th C. missionaries, followed by excerpts from "the Missionaries' I.G. Handbook", and it seems to me that it is this creative duality which has attracted Compton to science fiction.

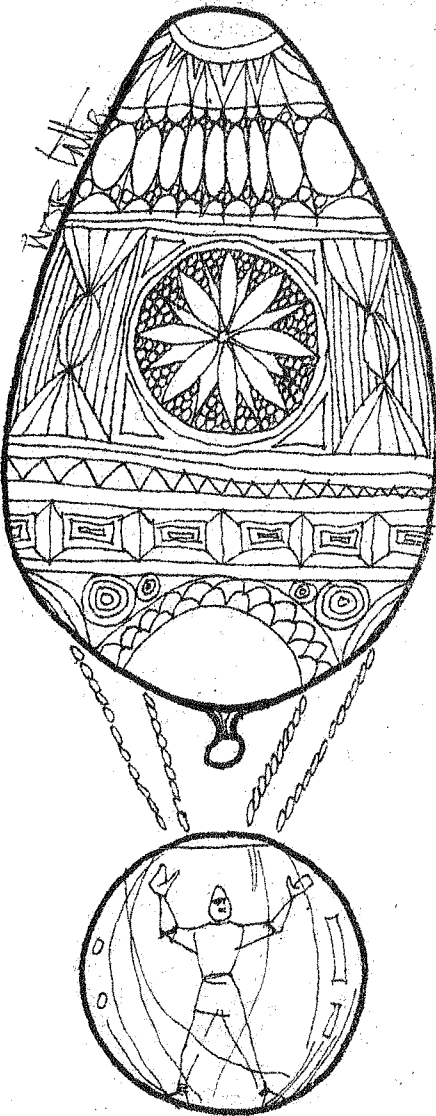
We enter a Devon pub where "Mr Wilcox served instant good cheer across easiwipe rustic bars to passing motorists, rich farmers' sons, and a few deaf and blind regulars." There is an altercation between Mr Wilcox and a couple of teenage motorbike delinquents and their chicks, which perfectly encapsulates some of the social tensions of our time.

The aliens are never described as they really are. They use some of the equipment described earlier to reconstitute themselves in the guise of the most convenient human beings to hand. (I suppose that people such as Fred Pohl would say that this is the only "idea" in the novel. In fact Compton treats this bit of invention as no more than a premise which will enable him to proceed to matters of more importance.)

It so happens that the most convenient humans to hand are the leader of the motorbike gang and one of the chicks. Consequently the four aliens appear to an unsuspecting world as four young people, two boys in identical motor-cycling gear and two girls in frayed jeans and short plastic macs. The four of them carry helmets and thick leather gloves, happily unaware of the absence of motorbikes.

The alien missionaries begin to preach the religion of Ustiliath. They are helped in their campaign by their ability to perform miracles, but the females in particular are badly handicapped by the limited vocabulary of the motorbike chick whose "thoughtways" they are constrained to use.

And so the novel continues as a social comedy - the PR campaign to launch Ustiliath ("none of those disgusting little plastic canapés"); the relationship between the different classes of converts ("Ustiliath can move mountains. And that's not just talk. I mean real mountains - dirty great 'eaps of shit and rubble."); the newspaper reaction ("Parties swing with ustiliath says deb Sandra /30 minutes daily ustiliath ends rheumatic pain/etc").



The action is given weight and consequence by a quite astonishing realisation of people as individuals. The wit and humour are directed without bias against both the idiocies of the new generation and the pretensions of their elders. As always in Compton, there is compassion, too:

"A girl blown to pieces, a silly little typist, probably some temp who didn't give a damn for ustiliath either way. A girl blown to pieces, the lives of her family, her lover, emptied -- and for what?... "

I don't know anything about Compton, except that he lives somewhere in London, but it's quite clear from the texture of his fiction that his work doesn't derive from the American pulp tradition. All the more honour, therefore, to the U.S. publishers for making him available to us in paperback.

— Mark Adlard, 1972

THE RUINS OF EARTH, edited by Thomas M. Disch,
(Putnam \$4.95, Berkeley 95c; Hutchinson £2.50)

Reviewed by Cy Chauvin.

This is a collection of "ecological disaster" stories. I suppose something of the sort was bound to be published sooner or later, but I don't necessarily regard it as a Good Thing; the ecology movement has already become overcommercialised as it is. Luckily, however, Tom Disch was able to edit this anthology; we can be sure that he was sincere in his efforts.

But I think this anthology was handicapped before it even began. The primary purpose of writing and reading SF, as Alexei Panshin stated so well in the F&SF book column (March 1972) is to present experiences different from "mimetic" or present-day reality fiction. The more different, the better. Ecology stories, almost inevitably set in the near future, must be extrapolated from a few current trends; thus the full range of alternative realities is severely restricted.

The jacket blurb make this even more clear: '...the uncomfortable truth is that these catastrophes don't require prophecies, only simple observation.' That is the absolute worst thing that can be said about an SF story; if it only mirrors present-day reality then the author hasn't been using his imagination. He has not exploited SF to its fullest potential.

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Let's examine the actual stories in the anthology, though. Six are original to the book, five from general magazines; the rest from conventional SF sources. They're divided into four sections; The Way It Is, Why It Is The Way It Is, How It Could Get Worse, and Unfortunate Solutions.

The Way It Is consists of three present-day reality stories which depict ecology problems we face right now. I think I can safely skip over these stories here. Why It Is The Way It Is attempts to explain why the pollution problem came about. Harry Harrison contributes 'Roommates', the nucleus around which his superb novel *MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!* was built. This is an extremely vivid and real story and is among Harrison's best works; the style is superb; but I do not think it is particularly imaginative from a science fictional point of view. 'Autofac' by Philip K Dick deals with run-away industrialisation; machines literally take over and run themselves without man's control. It's a strong story, and reflects in parable fashion some present-day events, without being tied to them artificially.

R.A. Lafferty is represented by a fantasy called 'Groaning Hinges of the World', which is without doubt the most inventive story in the book. Lafferty soars, swings, in a wacky style that makes his work a sheer joy. 'Groaning Hinges' has very little to do with ecology (and nothing to do with real, present-day ecological problems) but I am still glad that Disch included it. 'The Plot To Save The World' by Michael Brownstein reads like a bad parody of Sturgeon's 'The Man Who Learned Loving'; it is as bad as the Lafferty is good.

How It Could Get Worse projects present-day trends into the future. 'Gas Mask' by James D. Houston is about a giant traffic jam that never ends, and the insanity of the people who cling to their cars for days on end, unwilling to give them up, unwilling to change. Houston's story is powerful but it is only barely science fiction. It comes from a general magazine, and illustrates why SF stories from these sources are generally tame; they are not inventive. They observe reality and set it on paper, without transmuting it into fantasy, as Lafferty or Dick might do. A good story, but not really SF.

Ballard is represented here by 'The Cage of Sand', which is an odd choice since his story 'Billenium' would have fit the theme of the anthology much better. 'Cage of Sand' is a powerful story but its theme is psychological, not ecological. Martian sand is supposedly invading a portion of the Florida coast after it has been dumped as "ballast" from rocket ships. The sand gradually destroys plant life in the area, turning it into desert. A wall is built to keep it from spreading, and the story is about some people trapped inside, and the things they are escaping from. The whole idea of spaceships carrying "ballast" is scientifically ludicrous, and Ballard's explanation of this even more so. Obviously not one of his best.

'Wednesday November 15, 1967' by Geo. Alec Effinger is a plotless, rambling diary very similar in mood and tone to two of Disch's own stories, 'Squirrel Cage' and 'Come to Venus Melancholy'. It is not particularly good either. 'Accident Vertigo' by Kenneth Elmslie is Lafferty-like in parts, and has a number of very good lines, but I found it incomprehensible. Perhaps it isn't meant to be comprehensible. Daphne du Maurier's classic 'The Birds' ends this section. (This story has been dropped in the Hutchinson edition and a Disch story - also titled 'The Birds' has been substituted. The du Maurier story was dropped due to contractual problems.)

None of the stories in the last section, Unfortunate Solutions, really relate directly to ecology. 'Do It For Mama' by Jerrold J. Mundis is an unfunny farce presented as non-fiction magazine article. It chronicles a riot between the dog-lovers and dog-haters of New York City. Gerald Jonas's 'The Shaker Revival' was

nominated for a Nebula, mainly, I suspect, because it is done in multi-media style (i.e. interviews, telegrams, business letters etc, are all cobbled together to form the story). It has some interesting twists but is not particularly brilliant and has nothing to do with ecology. 'The Dreadful Has Already Happened' by Norman Kagan is an extremely subtle story, the meaning of which just hovers beyond my understanding. It has finely-honed prose and smooth, delicate description; I only wish Kagan could have been a bit more clear in what he was getting at. Fritz Leiber's 'America the Beautiful' tells of an America which has solved all its pollution problems but replaced them with a stainless, sterile society that needs outside wars to survive. It's a solid story but basically unexceptional.

Disch's introduction to all this is a curious thing. He calls it 'On Saving the World', and yet not once suggests or implies any possible solution to the pollution problem; in fact one gets the opposite feeling from Disch, that there isn't any solution to the problem. The stories reinforce this notion; there are no 'Fortunate Solutions' or 'How Things Could Get Better'. Worse, Disch knocks elbows with a possible solution to the problem, in Pohl's satire 'The Midas Plague' and just casually brushes it aside. Disch quotes from the story but does not realise that the inversion of social prestige in that satire is exactly the sort of thing that must take place in the real world if the pollution problem is to be solved.

It must become a status symbol to take a commuter train to work instead of a cadillac; to be sterilised instead of having ten children; to have a small simple house instead of a concrete mansion filled with disposable plastic junk. There must be a revolution in consciousness - and to a certain extent this is already happening; a local newspaper reported that pregnant women are now looked upon with distaste, and are even treated rudely.

Disch takes issue with the unquestioning faith that SF has had "in a future in which technology provides, unstintingly and without visible difficulty, for all of man's needs." This seems a legitimate gripe, but Disch then swings to the opposite extreme; he says that '2001' showed "with devastating clarity... that the physical grandeur of the space programme can only be achieved at ruinous spiritual cost. Technology was equated with the curse of Cain." But technology does not build bombs, tanks, missiles, etc; people do. Technology is merely a tool in the hand of man. It's not the machines themselves that do evil.

This anthology cannot be meant to warn, since it doesn't seem likely that there is anyone not aware of the ecology problem by now. And warnings seem rather useless if there are no solutions to the problems, as Disch and most of the stories imply. Out of the thirteen stories in this collection, only three (Lafferty, Dick, and Kagan) exhibit any real science fictional originality and inventiveness; the majority of the others only point to one of the worst dead-ends that the medium could take. The book is most definitely not a Good Thing, for science fiction or the ecology movement; and, as I said at the beginning of this review, we can only be thankful that someone as sincere as Thomas Disch was the editor....

- Cy Chauvin, 1972

* I might disagree with that conclusion; Disch is a downbeat writer, making for a
* downbeat collection. I'd like to see an anthology explaining how we get out of
* the pollution/environment mess - surely there are enough optimistic SF stories
* around? I'm thinking of Poul Anderson's qualifiedly optimistic article in
* Playboy last year, which was along the lines of 'Er..suppose we're not Doomed?'.
* Also, if Disch wanted really black stories then he missed his mark; he should
* have had 'We All Die Naked', and that one with the unforgettable last line, "our
* ancestors were pigs!"

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INCONSTANT MOON by Larry Niven (Gollancz £2.20)

Reviewed by Peter Weston

Elsewhere in this issue Larry Niven makes some comments on the title story of this collection, in answer to a query of mine as to whether this could be any sort of milestone in his writing career. Regular readers of Speculation will know of my own enthusiasm for Niven's work, and I would also like to remind you that I tipped 'Inconstant Moon' for a Hugo as soon as I read it (Spec-29).

Sure enough that Hugo was delivered, and as well as reaffirming my own Divinity this seemed to me to point the way towards Larry Niven's future path. I've drawn the parallel with Heinlein before, and it is an exact one. You will remember that (using Alexei Panshin's terminology), Heinlein's 'Period of Influence' only lasted three years before he stopped writing 'Future History' and essentially space adventure stories. My own theory is that not only wartime service stopped Heinlein; he began to realise the limitations of this sort of story. And now I think Larry Niven is about due to make his own transformation into a 'Period of Success'; what we have so far seen may appear, in ten years' time, as only the preliminary overtures to what will come next.

Evidence? Well, I offer several things. The increasing assurance with which Niven handles his stories, his own declared intention of abandoning the 'Known Space' stories, the fact that Larry is still only my sort of age and is still gathering experience and understanding of the World (at CHESSMANCON he remarked that he had "only begun living in the last three years" - presumably since meeting his wife Marilyn who figures so strongly in 'Inconstant Moon').

Larry has a lot going for him. His youth, the right attitude towards SF (he won't become cynical or contemptuous) and he is already tremendously popular. I think his only problem is going to be "what to write about next?", and in this context the proposed alternative to the 'Known Space' series, represented in this volume by 'Passerby', is no answer at all. I can't presume to know the solution myself, but I would suggest it may well lie in the exploration of human reactions to the disasters and successes that lie before us in the real world. As a beginning I'd like to see Larry pick up that last line from 'Inconstant Moon', "...I wondered if our children would colonise Europe, or Asia, or Africa."

Otherwise this collection contains a good selection of fairly early Niven stories, taken from the two US collections SHAPE OF SPACE and ALL THE MYRIAD WAYS. Some old favourites are here, like 'Not Long Before The End', and 'Becalmed in Hell'. All solid, entertaining stuff, ingeniously different from any previous treatments of the various themes.

- Peter Weston

VOLTEFACE by Mark Adlard (Sidgwick & Jackson, £1.60)

Reviewed by Tom Shippey

Mark Adlard's second novel picks up chronologically more or less where the first, INTERFACE, left off. Both are set in Tcity, the enclosed megalopolis somewhere in the North-East of England (Hartleppol-cum-Middlesbrough?) which owes its existence and importance to the great Stahlex plant somewhere outside it; and while the first deals with the revolt of Tcity against the plant's Executives, the second describes the attempt of the Executives to manipulate the population back to passivity, or if possible to something a little more positive.

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But apart from the continuity of setting the two books do not have that much in common. The Executive hero of INTERFACE, Jan Caspol, appears in VOLTEFACE but without any important role; and the vision of the second novel is in any case directed much more on to the masses of Tcity than on the Stahlex plant outside. Even the theme of creativity, which played such an important part in INTERFACE, hardly reappears in its successor. But this is on the whole an advantage.

To make his point about the sterile high culture of the Executives, Adlard was obliged in INTERFACE to use quite a lot of heavily-packed scenes dealing with poetry in Northumbria or Wagnerian opera or the relation between art and technology; and though these were not purposeless they did at times feel strained, especially as the author tried to extend his vision of the 'interface' between art and technology to the other 'interface' of social distinction between city and factory. But in VOLTEFACE the cultural background sets the tone for the whole book and is used to suggest something also about the unconscious emotions of the major characters - a striking improvement, and easier to follow as well, in the end.

The main literary thread running through the book consists of the references to Dante which recur continually in the mind of James Twynne, one of three Tcity men on a 'pub-crawl' together at the start of the book. He doesn't for a long time know why these keep recurring; and yet the inference to the reader is clear enough; that like Dante in the DIVINE COMEDY, Twynne feels he and his society have somewhere gone off the track (che la diritta via era smarrita). Looking at the crowds of Tcity, for instance, Twynne is struck by their number and sameness and purposeless activity, so that he sees them for a moment as ghosts in a new Inferno, remembering the lines translated by Eliot in THE WASTE LAND as 'I had not thought death had undone so many', io non avrei creduto / che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta.

This suggestion that Tcity is Hell, and that Twynne is the only live soul among the dead ones, the only man who casts a shadow, grows on the reader the more strongly for being unvoiced till a late stage, and comes through the characters rather than being stated by them - for at least some of them think they're having a good time. But the thought fits readily with the descriptions of the various futile illusions of activity in Tcity - the tridi, the Transparencies, even the attempted concert. All the characters seem to be looking for something; Carl Amory, the dominant and extroverted one, for a succession of women; Greg Smith, the non-descript, for a kickstick packet to complete his collection of 'European Cathedrals'; Twynne the Dantean for any activity that transcends the mere collector's itch of his friends.

But none of them is getting anywhere; and it's this frustration (which we recognise) which leads both to the feeling of eternal imprisonment and to the attempted breakout of INTERFACE. So the Executives make their move to cut down Tcity's infernal qualities and reintroduce a sense of purpose by giving some of the citizens work - i.e. places in a hierarchy set up to sell stahlex trinkets (the replacement, presumably, for the inner creativity that began to emerge among the revolutionaries of INTERFACE). The move is on the whole successful; but causes as many problems for some characters as it solves for others.

The trouble is that the stahlex trinket distribution is meant to be very much make-work, with efficiency not a desideratum. To add to the confusion and create more jobs and more excitement the Executives therefore make a habit of picking people on a twentieth-century criteria: i.e., with a healthy dash of incompetence, poor selection, nepotism, and stupidity. In several scenes here Adlard veers towards direct satire against the present, delivered with some verve and a lot of apparently first-hand knowledge.

There is a good scene where Greg, the nondescript (appointed as Director over better men as a simple confusion factor) succeeds in dominating the board meeting through sheer rank, regardless of sense; and the scene in which he is found dictating a wholly disastrous letter for his secretary to make as much sense of as she can is quite Kornbluthian (and one can't say fairer than that). The most memorable parts though -- because not entirely funny -- deal with James Twynne's continuing frustration by his half-wit colleagues and superiors, as he tries to do a good job. The final irony there is that as a result of the manipulations of the Executives -- of which Tcity knows nothing -- the half-wits come out looking the best. And what is Twynne to do then?

His fleeting illusion that the work was meaningful and was going to lead him out of Inferno into Paradise has disappeared; and even Gertrude, the wise secretary, sympathises with Greg more than with him, for though she puts it naively she seems to feel (as the Executives intended) that illusions are more important than reality, and that even if the work is an illusion and of no more significance than collecting kickstick packets, it serves its purpose for those immersed in it. Is this enough, though, for a man who has seen the truth of it? Apparently it is for at the end Twynne appears happier if more resigned.

This could be a depressingly limited conclusion, but gloom is held off in a way by the finish to the other main story-line, that of the girl Ventrix. Rather like the Savage in BRAVE NEW WORLD, she is, by the standards of Tcity and indeed by ours, a hopeless neurotic, warped by her crèche infancy and by missing her early course of sex-education films (so that she arrived only to be terrified by the sudden and explicit final one). Appalled by the overt sexuality of Tcity culture she is, like Twynne, a misfit. One ending might have been her successful 'initiation' by Carl Amory, Twynne's friend. But instead the Executives' intervention allows her to become a kind of Beatrice, as Twynne is a Dante; for a visiting Executive falls in love with her.

He never speaks to her, though, in his own person, for just as he realises his love he is mutilated in one of the gruesome Tcity accidents. His brain attached to her office computer, can however continue to watch her and type out messages to her. And this love -- the counterpart of Dante's for Beatrice except that in this case the 'disembodiment' is real -- is the goal of her life's unconscious search. At the end her brain, too, is disembodied and connected to his, so that he becomes (just to show I've read it too) questi, che mai da me non fia diviso, 'he who never shall be parted from me'. This could be a horrific ending, especially in view of Amory's savage epitaph, 'What the hell went on inside that little brain of hers? He didn't suppose he would be seeing her again.'

But in fact it's oddly peaceful, if pitiful. Like Twynne, Ventrix gets a limited satisfaction that would be no satisfaction at all to another person, and her ethereal love proves its power, not perhaps in rescuing her from Tcity and Hell but in pulling down the Executive from outside, and making him, in a sense count his world and his body well lost for love. The treble resignation of Twynne, Ventrix, and the Executive, Wilkins, gives the novel a good, muted ending that might remind one (as do several other things) of Vonnegut's PLAYER PIANO.

The main quibble I have about VOLTEFACE might be felt more deeply by other people. That is, a certain inconsequence in the setting. If the Executives are so intelligent, so civilised, so powerful and unhampered, one wonders why they have allowed Tcity to get like it is. And where's the government gone?

(Continued on Page 44)

ONLY IN the final days of preparing this issue did Chris Priest offer me this column, and by that time Speculation had already long-since burst the original size limites I'd expected this time. With a rueful look at the 21-page letter column and at my bank balance I told Chris yes, go ahead, write it. And I've accepted it, gladly. There was a time, recently, when I came to the conclusion that Spec just couldn't keep columnists - in my time I've had Terry Jeeves, Walt Willis, F.M. Busby, Michael Moorcock, Fred Pohl - and by the look of things, have lost them all. So, welcome back, Chris.

VIEW OF SUBURBIA

BY CHRIS PRIEST

I'm feeling a lot better now.

It came as something of a surprise to realise that the last 'Suburbia' column was written back in 1970. There was a long gap between a couple of issues of Spec, and the column sort of dropped off a bit during that time. So hello. Three topics this time: The State of the Art (groan), The State of the Pocket (sweat), The State of the Foundation (puff). First the Foundation.

At long last the SF Foundation is getting itself together, and can really offer something. There was a long period of transition when from the outside it might have appeared that nothing was going on at all. In fact, what was happening was that we were rationalising the whole business. It suffered from too many ambitions, and too few were being realised. Now this has been cut back to a more realistic programme where the undoubted energies of many of the committee can be put to best use.

The Foundation is currently being converted into a non-profit company; this will bestow a permanence onto it and a clear identity. There have been a lot of internal troubles with Foundation, the "quarterly" journal. These have been largely settled; there is now a clear editorial policy, and publishing difficulties are being ironed out and the printing and layout are more directly under control. We have also taken over the BSFA Library, which now not only has a permanent home (if a somewhat cramped one) but which will continue to be available for postal loans.

This isn't really meant to be an official hand-out of news (though I do serve time on the committee). Peter Nicholls, the Administrator, printed and circulated an official progress report at the American Embassy seminar last month, and that contains most of what you might want to know. Including, as a matter of interest, a phone-number which, if you call it, is answered by a young lady who says, "Good morning, science fiction." Which must be some kind of progress... In the meantime, a sub. to Foundation is recommended.

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Now to the State of the Art, and already I'm wishing I hadn't started this. I was reading back through the earlier "Suburbia"s and was a little disturbed to see how much of the space I devoted to complaints about how dull I thought SF had or has become. Well, I won't go into that again, although I think the situation is a little better. In the two years since I last wrote here, it has seemed to me that there is a hardcore of writers — a small hardcore — who are producing very individual and very good stories and novels (and who are all, I need hardly add, past, present and future contributors to Speculation), but there is a much larger number simply going through the motions. But then this has probably always been the case, and so I claim no miraculous insight.

I'm feeling curiously optimistic at the moment, and for a very specific reason. I believe that in the next five years or so we're going to see some SF being published which is, in the words of at least one pundit, going to blow the balls off us. And I suspect — entirely without insular motives — that these ball-blowers will mostly be British writers. The seeds have already been sown (and I refrain from mentioning names) and the fertiliser is on its way, brothers.

That particular mound of compost (I'm supposed to be swearing off metaphors) is a book which is going to be published in a few weeks' time; Brian Aldiss's BILLION YEAR SPREE, and I suspect this will be a far more influential book than perhaps even Brian realises. The extracts of it I've read in New Worlds and Vector have satisfied me, at least, that it is going to be an eminently satisfying and interesting book... but that much one could predict from Brian's proven reputation anyway. What is more important in the context of my current optimism is the effect of this book.

It's been a long time since there was a book about science fiction likely to reach a wide audience. The last, I think, was NEW MAPS OF HELL. My hunch is that BILLION YEAR SPREE will not only become a handbook for the aficionado (albeit a controversial one, perhaps), but might conceivably become a bestseller. In any event it seems likely that it will be given wide review-coverage in the press as its reputation (enthusiastically pumped by Brian) goes before it. Time will tell. If this happens, science fiction itself will come under popular scrutiny and this will lead in turn to an atmosphere of acceptability that will see more SF being published.

OK, the cause and effect of this does not lead necessarily to ball-blowers, but maybe that's a fault of expression rather than comprehension. What we will almost certainly see is a resurgence of interest in SF — and intelligent interest at that — and I hope that this will provide an amiable climate within which SF might expand. On just one simple level, perhaps more publishers will start an SF list; not necessarily a good thing to open the floodgates, as experience has shown, but I believe there's a lot of talent around and not just among those writers with an established reputation. No names (this is being written in something of a hurry and I'd almost certainly make omissions), but they are there and they are already being published. (S.a.e. might provoke a list from me).

I said earlier that the ball-blowers will be mostly British, and that this wasn't an insular sentiment. I mean no offence to our American and other friends. My reason for thinking this is that Brian is that rare and curious animal, a prophet with honour in his own country. I'm sure that BILLION YEAR SPREE will be received with little cries of glee wherever it is published, but I am thinking here of its wider influence. I just believe that that influence will be felt longest and hardest in Britain, and that the time is now right. We shall see.

Finally, to the State of the Pocket, and this is a matter I have long been chewing over. It was brought to a head by two separate items I read late last year, and suddenly things seemed to come together to make sense. What follows is, I hope, a fairly dispassionate statement and is not to be taken as a personal one. I rock the boat not at all; I love the hand that feeds me.

The first thing I read was George Gissing's novel, NEW GRUB STREET, first published in 1891. I'd known about the book for some time, and it was one of those books I'd put off reading, meaning to get around to it one day. Anyway, I eventually made it. The novel describes approximately 18 months in the lives of a group of writers in London in the early 1880s. It is substantially about two things; money, and writing for money. Of the five main writers described in the book - Reardon, Whelpdale, Milvain, Yule and Biffen, - two are dead by the end of the book, one has gone blind, one has married the moneyed widow of one of the dead ones, and the other has become a literary agent, and serves him right, too. The book shows, by exaggeration I think, the plight that Gissing himself was in, and much of what he describes in its pages refers directly to the writing of NEW GRUB STREET itself.

The second thing I read was the Winter 1972 edition of The Author, in which the results of a recent survey into writers' incomes were published. The central fact was that since 1966 (when the last survey was carried out), the income a full-time writer can hope to earn has actually decreased. The figure in question is £1,000 per annum from the sale of books. In 1966, roughly 63% of book-writers earned less than this; in 1972, roughly 67% earned less than this. (The relatively small percentage increase is misleading; think what inflation has done to £1,000 in the last six years). These figures are not, incidentally, the incomes from dilettantes; 25% of authors writing five or more books within a two-year period earned less than £1,000 per annum.

So I sat and thought about what George Gissing had said 80 years ago, and I sat and thought about what the Society of Authors was saying now... and I began to wonder why. Things began connecting up; Edwin Reardon kills himself (literally) writing a book for £75 ... and The Author reveals that the average advance for a book sold between 1970 and 1972 was just over £110. (George Gissing sold NEW GRUB STREET itself for £150... but it should be said that this was an outright sale of Copyright, whereas today publishers pay an advance against future royalties.)

Then again, Gissing's characters are tyrannised by the circulating libraries, who demanded that novels be written in three volumes of approximately 60,000 words each (customers would then be obliged to take three subscriptions instead of one) ... and on another page The Author is campaigning for a Public Lending Right from libraries to compensate the writer who is at present selling one copy of his book and reaching a library readership of about fifty readers per copy sold. (NEW GRUB STREET itself is in three volumes, and displays just those weaknesses of construction Gissing's characters are incapable of dealing with).

Nothing changes... the writers of Gissing's era were being ground down by contemporary pressures, and nothing that has happened in the 80 years since George Gissing wrote his book has substantially changed those pressures.

The writer of science fiction today is in a relatively fortunate position. In publishing terms, he has the umbrella of the genre protecting him. As has been pointed out elsewhere (in Vector, I think) a 160-page paperback selling for 30p, bound in a glossy cover with a surreal painting and with the words 'science

fiction' clearly emblazoned will, by and large, sell profitably whoever the author is, whatever its title. Consequently, the SF writer will find it slightly more easy to sell a book (hard or soft covered) than a writer without the genre-protection. But even so the system compounds against him.

Take that 30p paperback, for example. The author's income is based on a fixed percentage of the cover-price of each copy sold. The usual rate at which this is calculated is somewhere in the region of 6%. It can be as low as 4%; 7½% is a good deal, and 10% is really bloody marvellous. Sake for sake of argument that it is 6% ... which means that the author receives 1.8 pence for every copy that is sold over the counter. (An immediate qualification; if the paperback is a reprint of a hardcover, the author has to split his royalty 50/50 (sometimes 60/40) with the hardback publisher, so his royalty is down to less than 1p/copy.

But where does the rest of that 30p go? That's what I call an interesting question, and I'm glad I asked myself.

This is (approximately) how that 30p is broken down (figures in pence):

Author	1.8
Production costs (printer, jacket-designer, etc)	6.0
Warehousing/Distribution	4.5
Bookseller	10.0
Publisher	7.7
	<hr/> 30.0

The first observation people might make is that quite clearly the author gets rather less than everyone else. Well.... there's some justification for this. Some. The figures for Production, Warehousing, and Publisher are not figures for net income; out of this the expenses are met, and whatever's left over is profit. The author pays no share of these expenses. Indeed, in a sense the author and publisher are in a kind of partnership to sell the book. A partnership where, if the book does not sell well, the author is entitled to keep the advance he has been paid and the publisher stands to lose money, and where, if the book does moderately well (i.e. covers its advances, but not hugely) the author and publisher will make about the same level of profit, and where, if the book sells magnificently well, the publisher stands to make considerably more than the author. (Science fiction sells moderately well... draw your own conclusions. I've no axe to gring so far, anyway).

But what about the bookseller? (Are you there below, Vic?) At a gross income of 10p per copy sold (which, if your sums aren't up to it, is 33%... compare that with the author's 6%) the bookseller is well ahead of the field. And this is where the vague distant grumbling might be heard. Is there any case to be made out that a bookseller is worth nearly six times as much as the author?

To the reader paying the 30p, is a branch of W.H. Smith six times as important as the author he is buying? Well... the bookseller has overheads too, just like an author. The bookseller (like the author, but not like the publisher) gets a straight percentage of every copy sold. If he sells the book, he gets his cut ... and if he doesn't, he can return it for full refund. So the point I am making is that the bookseller's interest in the sale is much the same as an author's; every sale brings a fixed income. The only difference is that the percentage is considerably higher.

So one gets rid of booksellers? Who then sells the books? Or should we get rid of authors? But then what would bookshops sell? (Don't tell me, I think I know. They'd sell what they sell now; records, typewriters, paper hankies...)

But what is more, this is only one aspect of the whole situation. I haven't the space any more to go into what happens with subsidiary rights, accounting dates, the Great Review-Copy Racket, public lending right ... (But I will, if anyone's interested).

I think it's quite clear that there is money to be made from selling books. If there wasn't, then I don't think books would be published on quite the scale they are today. What is wholly relevant is this; Sales of books are increasing overall. The rate of lending from libraries increases every year. Writers as a whole are earning less and less.

And I'm sure I don't know what can be done about it. Some time last year I went to the inaugural meeting of a proposed writer's co-operative publishing venture in London. A couple of hours of that, and I came away quite convinced that that wasn't the answer, either...

But at least one thing has changed since Gissing's day. Within six years of the publication of NEW GRUB STREET, the 'three-decker' novel had all but vanished. It was killed off by the one-volume cheap edition (selling for about six shillings) which was the forerunner of today's paperbacks. So writers no longer have to write all that padding (which Gissing freely admits he and others like him did) and readers don't have to read it. But curiously enough things haven't changed all that much. What's six shillings converted into decimal currency?

- Christopher Priest, 3/3/63

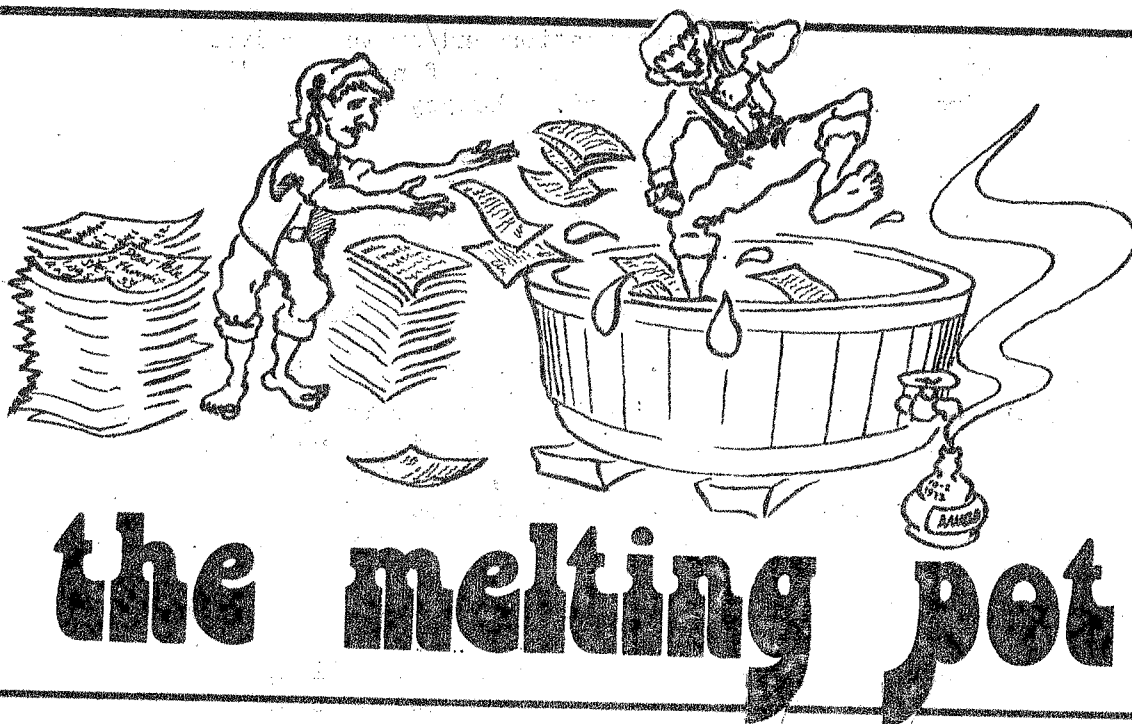
* Today I spent an hour or two with Bram Stokes in his bookshop in London, which
* must carry almost every SF title in print. It was interesting to hear Bram
* remark that in his opinion publishing today was carried on as a 'loss leader'
* for other activities of big company combines. Especially in the U.S., Bram
* says, publishers don't even try to make money; they go out of print with popular
* titles even before they reach all of the trade outlets. Interesting thought.
* Quite eye-opening, too, is the way that Bram's shop fills up at lunchtime with
* eager customers. His is an SF/fantasy specialist shop, and it must be known by
* now throughout London as the place to go when ordinary booksellers don't seem
* to be interested in displaying a full range of titles.

THE CRITICAL FRONT (Continued from Page 39)

And how does the population get so high that people can be trampled to death in corridors? In Ballard's 'Billennium', say, the crowding was explained, while in Harrison's MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! it was at least possible to imagine how things got that way.

But Adlard offers no such explanations. The setting is given as a datum, and though one may be able to accept it as that, one may not be able to help wondering. Nevertheless, readers who suppress this curiosity will find VOLTEFACE a subtle and thoughtful book, cruel in patches, that deserves the comparisons that have already been made with BRAVE NEW WORLD and PLAYER PIANO.

- Tom Shippey, 1973



OLDEST of our perpetual contests for artists, 'Melting Pot' issues a standing invitation for you to submit a title illustration. Andrew Stephenson gets the coveted no-prize this time for his work here and elsewhere in the issue.

Larry Niven, 146 N. Gunston Drive, Los Angeles, Ca. 90049.

Dear Peter, "The article by Brian Aldiss about Brian Aldiss had me in hysterics. Where was this marvelous, witty writer when REPORT ON PROBABILITY A was being written? I'm a monomaniac regarding that book, with good reason; after the Heicon I was trapped on the Amsterdam-New York charter flight for something like ten hours with no way even to leave my seat, and only that one book in my possession. I actually got about forty pages into it before I went back to staring at the ceiling. If Brian Aldiss had met me coming off that plane I'd have tried to hit him with something heavy. Fortunately I had a year and a half to cool down before I met him. (My good fortune. Big, isn't he?)

'Inconstant Moon' - I wish I could promise more stories like that one. I think it's the best I've ever done, in that length. It took me five years to write it. I was hung up until a friend put it to me that any characters I could respect would be trying to fight this thing; they would not tamely lie down and die.

But what could they possibly fight? I started thinking about that.. and it's true that our type of star doesn't go nova.. and there were those half-melted rocks the astronauts brought back.

I'm writing a novel with that friend. His name is Jerry Pournelle. The novel's name is MOTELIGHT and it's already 650,000 words long, and it's almost finished. It's not a book either of us could have written alone. We've been trading it off between us, and Jerry has it now while he writes the first draft of the last section, and I find I can't write about anything else.

So I sit and wait for inspiration and/or the arrival in print of things already sold; a novel, PROTECTOR, a couple of novellas, 'The Defenceless Dead' and 'Flash Crowd'. Work I'm proud of. The joy of seeing and reading it in print is the best reward we get, barring Hugos.

And I've tried my hand at some vignettes. Good vignettes are fun, they stick in your mind. They are short enough to tell as party jokes. The best I've seen have been several by Danny Plachta. Ideas come in lengths, and a good vignette is not a short story compressed; it is an ultrashort idea written concisely. It should not be possible to expand a good vignette into a good short story.

Oh, I'm great on theory. I've only written four in my life. "

- * Larry's comments on 'Inconstant Moon' were in answer to my own enthusiastic
- * query as to whether this represented any sort of milestone in his writing career.
- * I have quite a lot to say about the novelette, but since it has just appeared
- * in a new Niven collection in the UK, I will instead refer you to the 'Critical
- * Front' section of SPECULATION where my observations can be found.

Bob Rickard, 31 Kingswood Road, Moseley, Birmingham 13.

Dear Pete, "Regarding the response to my critique of Blish, many readers picked up on my comment that "there is a large percentage of SF readers who get very little entertainment value from much of his work, and who, on the whole, find him difficult to read and understand." It also seemed the last straw to Brian Aldiss who, in a fit of pique, deprived us of further company. I doubt whether anything I can now add to clarify the situation will bring him back from beyond the Pale, but I'll try anyway.

As Jim Blish indirectly points out in his letter (SPEC-31), the irritation is caused by the word 'entertainment', and I apologise to you Jim for a ham-brained generalisation. Of course there is no one category of entertainment especially from books like Blish's, and they are 'popular' as the sales plainly show. I was not commenting on worth, Jim, but reader-reaction after reading the stuff; and on that basis it would be interesting to differentiate between those who did derive some pleasure from them (and I admit to being among them), and those who did not. I suspect that those in the latter group were influenced in the acquisition of the book by the stature and reputation Blish has, within and without the SF field.

I would like to point out that my critique was made from a reader's point of view (not a writer's) and confined in the main to those four novels I have called Blish's serious writing. (Yes, I am aware there are others, but the purpose was to study AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE).

From such a stance it became clear to me that Blish's writing-quirks offered more to the 'serious' and critical reader than to one whose involvement was light and casual. Some of Blish's works respond to light reading - but not these four - a view based on discussions with many fans over the years. The reviews of DAY AFTER JUDGEMENT that Jim mentions (10 favourable, 2 bewildered) cannot be quoted as a 'popular' consensus, but only representative of the ever-vocal minority of 'serious' readers. It seems to me that the light and casual reader (who might be a reasonable proportion of the market) would never get as far as reviewing or LoCing - 'bewilderment' and some of its causes (that I outlined in my critique) would have switched off any critical faculties they may have started out with. I would agree that this point is circumstantial and does not prove the case.

A critique from a writer's standpoint would have demanded knowledge I do not yet possess - but I would have laid emphasis on the distinctive approaches of 'an entertainer' and 'an artist' (that Tony Sudbery hints at, at the end of his article on Maine in this current issue).

Entertainment is by nature extrovert communication, and effects are used to create impressions in the beholder, effects which need not be technically accurate but are used in quantities to saturate. Conversely, art (with a capital A) is by nature an introvert activity involving the expression of personal experience or aspiration, and effects are used primarily to recreate that experience and need to be technically accurate.

These are largely simplified extremes, of course, and bring to mind McLuhan's discussions of 'hot' and 'cool' communication, entertainment tending toward 'hot' and 'medium', with art tending toward 'cool' and 'message'. Blish's writing is dominated by the techniques and themes of the introvert artist, and the pace of his novels and stories, even in his lighter vein, is very 'cool'. Rarely does hot jazz bubble out of Blish freely, but moments in 'A Style of Treason' and DAY AFTER JUDGEMENT come to mind - a side of Blish that we should see more often.

Personally I like my reading to involve a bit of give-and-take with the author, and I get less out of this struggle with Blish than I do with Jorge Luis Borges, for example. I remember a conversation with Brian Aldiss in which he referred to Borges as 'a pedantic old sod' and to my great amusement I couldn't help but agree, even though his pedantry is framed in terms that stimulate the most intense intellectual excitement in me. Both have more in common than a tendency to pedantry -- they are both profound and sincere scholars; their techniques are reasonably similar (e.g. Borges likes to write in first person - Blish, even in a third-person story, uses heavy chunks of first-person narrative); one could also find correspondences in their subjects, drawn from esoteric and uncommon sources.

But the prime difference (to me at least) is the vitality that lifts a story out of the ordinary, for whereas Blish intellectually seems to scrupulously avoid paradox or heresy (for example), Borges is an arch-heretic who gleefully descends upon paradoxes for breakfast. This is an unfair comparison perhaps, but I'm exploring a feeling that somewhere along the line Blish loses interest in the story he's writing, and finishing it then becomes merely a technical exercise."

* At a risk of irreverence I'll quote an example which occurred at the recent conference at the U.S. Embassy, where both Jim Blish and Brian Aldiss spoke for a half-hour (in that order). Brian played the buffoon in his best speaking manner; lots of stories, gossip, playing-up to the audience for all he was worth in order to convey his arguments. They loved it, of course. The contrast was incredible between that and Jim's utterly 'straight' performance, which made absolutely no concessions to 'entertainment'. And yet, watching the audience, I noticed that they were raptly hanging on to every word, compelled by Blish's sheer force of intellect. There are few who could match that concentration of effort.
* And now, a fascinating letter from the author himself.

James Blish, 'Treetops', Woodlands Road, Harpsden, Henley, Oxon.

Dear Pete, "Fred Pohl was right, of course, in pointing out that BLACK EASTER was an experiment in content, not in style. To go even farther, when I started EASTER I consciously decided in advance that since the events themselves were going to be sensational, I would let them speak for themselves in the barest and most reportorial style possible, completely abjuring the overloaded atmospherics of most horror stories.

I followed through in the same way in JUDGEMENT until the very end, where I was confronted with a huge obstacle; I had to give Satan himself a long speech, and I just couldn't conceive of his delivering it in modern colloquial human English, or the slightly more portentous version of that which is used by and to the sub-devils. Not even I had the brass to undertake imitating Dante (and his Satan never utters a word, anyhow); but it occurred to me that Miltonics would be ideal. The latter has all the proper associations, to begin with. For another, it seemed to me to be peculiarly suitable for Satan, for its assumed grandeur (as C.S. Lewis points out is characteristic of all "secondary epics") is synthetic, its similes and other illustrations often irrelevant, and its logic frequently spurious - Milton sometimes quite deliberately uses syntactical trickery to make you think one point inevitably follows another where in fact there's no such connection. (One reviewer irritated me slightly by calling this speech "free verse"!)

So perhaps I should have cited the sequel to Fred instead, especially since it too had been serialised by one of the Galaxy group (though after his time there). But I would have done better to have stayed off novels entirely, since what I really had in mind was experimental short stories, as I insufficiently indicated by mentioning 'Testament of Andros' and anthologies. 'Common Time' would have made a better additional example of my point. The in-printness of my novels and other books (now 38) is peripheral to that (and I sadly report that one has now indeed died the death, after 14 years).

I agree with you that I exaggerated the mortality rate of my conventional short stories. I'm in over 85 anthologies at the moment, not counting collections of my own stuff exclusively, and quite obviously they can't all be reprints of my relatively few experimental pieces. You cite 'Surface Tension' and you couldn't have picked a better example; it's the most anthologised story of any I've ever written - and thereby hangs a tale, though maybe not one of much interest to anyone but me.

Parenthetically you quote me, quite accurately this time, to the effect that I didn't think much of that story when I finished it, and in fact I didn't. It's been said elsewhere that I actively dislike the story, but that's untrue and was untrue even then. I did recognise even then (1949) that it was unusual, in that it explored a background - fresh-water microbiology - I knew very well and hadn't to my knowledge been used before by anybody else. But that wasn't new ground for me; the story was, in fact, a commissioned sequel to one first published in 1942 (which I later incorporated as 'Cycle One' of the version which most of its modern readers know).

In all other respects it struck me as being, to be blunt, a creditable piece of hackwork - and the editor who had commissioned it wouldn't even give it that, saying that he wouldn't take it unless I cut it by one-third, which I refused to do. And it took three years and the addition of a prologue, still in it now, to get it into print, by which time it was my 78th published work; the story to which it was a sequel was my 11th. It can be understood, I think, that when this did happen my only emotion was relief at having finally placed an old turkey of an idea, plus a little fear - not much, because I had no emotional investment in it anyhow by then - that the readers would recognise and dismiss it as such.

Its subsequent history astonished me, and continued to do so until last year. I didn't dislike it, and still don't. But what I did dislike, more and more, was that it came to be and remains almost everybody's favourite Blish piece (see, for instance, Vic Hallett's comment on P.36 of Vector-62, the last 1972 issue). To many fans I met at conventions and elsewhere, it was the only story my name brought to mind, and there were even more who remembered the story but could

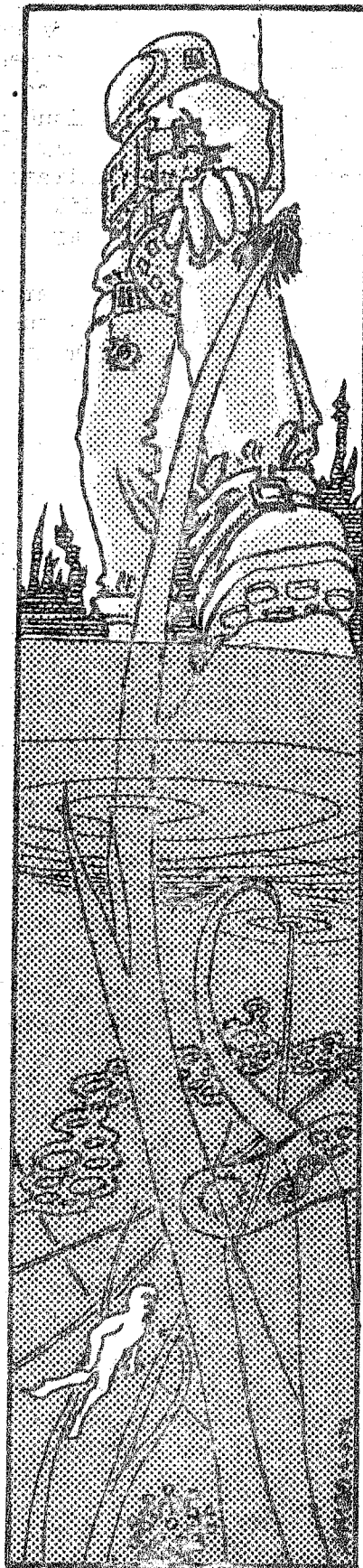
not remember and had never heard of the author. And I couldn't see why. Not only had I written other things I thought better on almost every count — no author's favourites ever match item-for-item those of his readers and critics — but if the readers were going to make a favourite of one of my scores of conventional SF stories, why had they settled so overwhelmingly on this one?

I began to ask this question not only of fans, but of other writers who knew much of my other work and yet felt the same preference without getting any farther toward an answer than what I already knew was there; the unusual backdrop, the occasionally charming little critters, the inch-long spaceship, in short, small ingenuities of the same kind I'd used as stock-in-trade in half a hundred other conventional stories that had made no such dent.

Once, again on commission and for a far fatter fee, I made an exhaustive analysis of the story from general structure right down to individual word-choices, and then wrote another one which followed the analysis exactly, even including elements of it that I'd otherwise have tried to do better, or even omit — after all, since the whole thing was a mystery still, maybe the secret was hidden in one of its mistakes! This act of critical mimicry dropped dead on publication day, and I've never since consciously tried to repeat a success, let alone that minutely.

In the meantime, in Huxley's phrase the Absolute's tail was still unsalted; and though by this time I was visibly wincing every time anybody said 'Surface Tension' in my hearing, it wasn't from pain, or even dislike of the story itself, but simply because of 20 years of mounting bafflement over what could be so compelling about it (or 30 years, if I took into consideration that the germ of it was that old, and that the germ itself had proven popular enough to move its editor to ask for a sequel after a lapse of seven years).

In 1972 we had Darko Suvin as a house-guest for a few days, as he had several times earlier, and by then I'd known him long enough and had talked to him about so many different kinds of things, always to my benefit, that I made a last hopeless attempt at asking this question. And miraculously, he had the answer. Though as a Marxist I'm sure he wouldn't so describe it, it was to me like a Eucharist.



It explained not only the popularity of 'Surface Tension', it also explained the popularity of some other conventional works of mine, the reason why the larger number of my conventional pieces had quite failed to be memorable, and a good many other things too. To put it briefly, 'Surface Tension' shared with the other successes a unique attitude toward all their disparate backgrounds and devices that I'd completely failed to detect in it (hence the utter failure of my dissecting attempt to imitate it). I'll never forget that evening's discussion, which was to me indeed like the Descent of the Dove, but for every good reason I'm keeping it close to my chest until I think I've digested all of it (which may be never).

What does bear on the challenges both you and Fred offered me is that it simultaneously accounts for the success of every one of my experiments, whether they were experiments in style or in content, and thus accounts for 'Surface Tension' and accommodates it on the same terms as it does something like 'Common Time' which readers and editors admire despite its inclusion of a whole chapter written in a language not one word of which I understood while I was writing it and understand only slightly better now. (Damon Knight's analysis of that language I thought illuminating at the time, and I still think it enormously ingenious, but I no longer believe it to have any bearing on what the story's about, or why this murky passage had to irrupt into the tale exactly at that place and no other.) (see IN SEARCH OF WONDER, Chapter 26)

My point, then, remains what it was when I improvised it so fuzzily as a question from the floor to Fred at CHESSMANCON: that SF readers were ready to entertain and to like experiments in style as well as content, a long time before editors like Fred felt it safe to do more than dabble in it, let alone actively promote it as Ellison and Moorcock have since done. In my own practice, both 'The Testament of Andros' and 'Common Time' appeared in 1953, both under the editorship of Bob Lowndes; and though Fred had known of, and expressed admiration for, and as my agent had tried to sell, a wildly surrealistic novel of mine - still in process - even earlier, he didn't bring himself to publish even a fragment of it until 1962, after that fragment had been skilfully shaped and regularised by Virginia Kidd into something like a standard, self-contained fantasy.

And even there he missed the point; Virginia's title for her recension, every word of the text as well as the title of which I admire and approve, was 'Intersection with Change of Light', which was perfect for what she had done with the material; Fred re-titled it 'On the Wall of the Lodge', by which it's been known ever since, though this title is apposite only to a part of the whole work known only to the three of us and isn't more than a convenient tag for the part Virginia turned into an independent story. For another example, consider the first part of A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, published by Larry Shaw in 1953. I recognise that this was primarily an experiment ^{in content}, which Fred specifically favoured; but it contains a section in which a conversation overheard by a sick man is presented in play-script form, as far as I know a stylistic innovation in SF back then. Objections raised: zero.

Another subject; though I recognised a surprising number of faces in the EUROCON photopages, I do wish Herr Kumping would not organise such things as montages, as he (or was it somebody else?) did with the HEICON photos too. They don't seem to have any value as compositions, and while they do save space, they are confusing and must be hell on the caption writer. Back to the old pictures-in-a-row or Jay Kay Klein system, say I.

Douglas Barbour's review of AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS, acknowledges early on that Harlan had several major goals in compiling this major book, but he then proceeds to judge the contents according to only one of them; whether the

"visions" are or are not truly "dangerous" in the reviewer's eyes. Not without praise, which is duly appreciated, he rules out Judy's and my story, among others, for failing to pass this test. But for both these volumes, Harlan also specifically asked for stories that couldn't possibly see publication anywhere else.

'Getting Along' is -- as is elaborately emphasised in the surrounding editorial matter -- in part an assemblage of parodies of fantasy writers of varying degrees of obscurity; can Mr Barbour suggest any other editor who would have welcomed this esoteric exercise, with its accompanying subsidiary fannish in-group jokes? (Something depends, too, on how quick the reviewer is to spot "danger"; 'Getting Along' also embodies a fairly wide spectrum of sexual irregularities, which gave it its title and ending and indeed its overall plot, without which it could simply have gone on and on until we ran out of parody targets or Harlan out of patience.)"

* Since I last published I've now received a copy of AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS,
* and I'm sorry Harlan but I'm finding what I've read so far to be fairly hard
* going. Oddly enough the story which most moved me (possibly because of my curr-
* ent Involvement with babies (see front cover)) was Piers Anthony's 'In The
* Barn'. Or rather, the last three pages of the story; Pages 357-380 were missing
* in my copy. Talk about fanzines being badly collated.
* I was really extremely interested in your tribulations over 'Surface Tension',
* Jim, because I'm another admirer. I may even be responsible for yet one
* more appearance for the piece, since I was recently asked for suggestions for
* 'undersea' stories for a new collection to celebrate Arthur C Clarke's chairman-
* ship of some oceanic conference this Autumn. Naturally I recommended 'Surface
* Tension'. But as I asked you in my last letter, I'm intrigued by the "carbon
* copy" story you wrote; won't you tell us which one this is because I have no
* idea. Also, do the Suvin Revelations mean that you have the secret of prize-
* winning prose from now onwards? Will other authors have any chance?
* You may be right about photomontages, although I see from the new Cynic that I
* am belatedly getting some praise for my paste-up job on the Worcester convention
* photographs, eighteen months ago. Perhaps for the Bristol photopages this year
* I will indeed present the pictures 'straight'. It would be a lot easier that way
* although so many people are likely to be left out. And you, Jim Blish, never
* seem to be in front of the camera at these things!
* One last observation on whether or not SF readers were 'ready' for adult writing
* or not, and this provoked by Darrell Schweitzer; how come science fiction fell
* so low that it has taken this long to get back up? Take it, Darrell....

Darrell Schweitzer, 113 Deepdale Road, Strafford, Pa. 19087, USA.

Dear Peter, "SPEC-30 is one of the best issues yet. I was especially impressed by the Strick piece. It's amazing how much good writing there has been on Heinlein in SPEC in the last few years, especially considering that RAH is supposedly written-out, passé, etc. Still, with all this I think everyone has missed the main significance of Heinlein's writing.

It's very simply this: Heinlein was what should be called a "Reformation Writer" in the 1940's. He more than anyone else managed to single-handedly repair most of the damage done to the field by Hugo Gernsback and his cronies. If standards today have superceded Heinlein, it would not have been possible for such a thing to happen without Heinlein.

Back up a bit. Conventionally, science fiction history begins with the founding of Amazing in 1926. Papa Hugo is the father of science fiction.

So much for convention. Even a quick glance will reveal that prior to Gernsback, science fiction existed and in fact flourished. It was widely read in national magazines like Cosmopolitan, Everybody's, Argosy, etc, and published in hardcovers by major trade publishers. Standards were about equal with those of other writing of the day. SF as such was not identified as a genre, but it existed, the stories were being written, and the field was in pretty good shape. Yet by 1940 no hardcover publisher in his right mind would touch the stuff, and neither would slick magazine editors, the same slick magazine editors who published it thirty years earlier.

What happened was Hugo Gernsback. He did not found science fiction; he very nearly killed it by lowering the standards to an almost infantile level (I say that from the experience of having read the Gernsback magazines themselves, and not just selected reprints) and ghettoising it. The whole sense of story was lost. Even the crudest of the Argosy writers, say Burroughs and Cummings, were far ahead of the Amazing/Wonder crew. Like the survivors of most Atomic Doom stories, everything had to be re-invented from scratch. E.E. Smith re-introduced the plot with SKYLARK OF SPACE and even made some crude attempts at characterisation. David H. Keller re-introduced serious social and moral content. 'Don A. Stuart' re-invented the mood story.

Then comes Heinlein. The ultimate significance of Heinlein is that he re-invented nearly everything. He wrote modern adult science fiction when such a thing was nearly impossible. He made enormous innovations in technique by taking the future for granted, thus eliminating the long explanations for everything that were found in previous, and even contemporary SF (e.g. in Asimov's 'Nightfall' you'll find characters asking each other dumb questions for the benefit of the reader). Probably the most famous example of this is a passage from BEYOND THIS HORIZON which says: 'The door dilated'. Nothing more. No explanation of the who's, what's and why's of dilating doors. With a couple of words the reader is quickly transported into a future world.

In other words, Heinlein streamlined and modernised SF. I doubt whether there has been any other writer that influential, Wells included. People like Ballard may deny it, but chances are if there had been no Heinlein or someone like him, Ballard would have found himself caught in a tradition that demanded him to explain where that oversized dead body came from, or why the world crystallised.

Heinlein's influence cannot be over-estimated. It is best shown by looking at something outside the Western tradition, something that hasn't been "Heinleinised". Something like SOLARIS. Now I greatly admire this book, as it seems to contain more thought than any ten dozen American SF novels, but in format it is embarrassingly crude. The Gernsbackian lectures are still very much present. Lem never picked up Heinlein's more graceful method of presenting large amounts of information to the reader. He lectures, he clumsily sends his characters to the library, totally interrupting the story, in order to fill in the background. Intellectually the book is brilliant, but in a literary sense it is rather crude.

As for what the book meant, which is what matters in the long run, it seems to me that the most important, and genuinely shocking thing about the novel was that it popped the bubble set upon us by the Astounding school, whereby men with the proper tools can do anything. It never seemed to have occurred to anybody that there might be a few things in the Universe, such as the ocean of Solaris, which men cannot understand. Not because There Are Things We Are Not Meant To Know, but simply because man hasn't got the brainpower to do it.

A chimpanzee, for example, cannot understand the workings of a computer. No matter how long you teach it, that chimp will never understand. Its mental capacity isn't great enough. Likewise it is very possible that men do not have the ability to understand Solaris, regardless of what they do. Hence all the anthropomorphisms, and the cult of Holy Contact. Such an idea is such an affront to human pride that it is absolutely unacceptable. Lem suggests that man can't go out into the Universe until he better understands what is hidden away in his own cranium. One thing to be understood is that the human intellect has its limitations."

* Agree, although (nitpicking) I think SF has at least skirted the idea that some things are too big for us. ROGUE MOON is one. And another thing about the planet Solaris that interested me; if Contact was ever achieved, then what? what does an intelligent ocean have to discuss with an anthropoid ape?

* I was very pleased with your comments on Heinlein and I think you are absolutely right. They say that the true facts of History don't start to emerge for 50 years, and I think it is coming more and more to be accepted what a liability Hugo Gernsback was. Those old pulps were incredibly bad; I read some recently and was struck not only by the awfulness of the stories (which I'd expected) but the downright illiteracy of the editorial meanderings, right down to faulty spelling and meaningless sentences. In this case the man to blame was one of Gernsback's 'cronies', as you put it, T. O'Connor Sloane. (I set a question in a recent quiz for the Brum Group and asked who Sloane was; one of the keener members of the Group was determined to find the answer and rang up Birmingham Reference Library. After ten minutes they said they didn't know either, but that there was an individual in the city who might be able to help. They then gave my name to the enquirer! True Story).

* All of which has nothing to do with Heinlein, and it is here that your letter is oddly opportune, Darrell, because the day before I heard from you I had been asked to write an introduction for a new collection of Heinlein stories. I had been looking for a 'hook', something to start with, and you've given it to me.

* Thanks very much, and if the piece is accepted I'll make sure you get credit!

Margo Skinner, 811 Geary Street, San Francisco, Ca. 94109, USA

Dear Mr Weston, "I came to a sharp halt on the 'Not Heinlein Again' article by Philip Strick in SPECULATION-30. While Heinlein is one of my favourite writers too, the following is not quite accurate: "...he has the distinction of having won four Hugo awards* ". Footnote: *"A record unequalled by any other writer except Harlan Ellison".

Surely not. My recollection was that Fritz Leiber had received at least that many (and some might regard him as "the Grand Old Man of SF"). I checked with him, and found that Leiber has received five Hugos, for the following works: THE BIG TIME, THE WANDERER, 'Gonna Roll The Bones', 'Ship of Shadows', and 'Lean Times in Lankhmar'. Two of those ('Gonna Roll the Bones' and 'Lean Times in Lankhmar' also won Nebulas."

* Quite right, and my apologies to Fritz Leiber who must surely be one of the greatest of all SF writers. So good in fact that I don't even mind him beating out Heinlein on the number of his trophies! Actually that footnote has caused me a lot of grief by exposing my ignorance of who has won what. Over the years I've rather lost track - and Roger Peyton hastens to remind me that Ellison has in fact won five Hugos (if you count 'Dramatic Presentations') and Poul Anderson has also won four. Some others, such as Niven, Bob Silverberg, are coming up fast.

Philip Michael Cohen, 726 Golf Course Road, Aliquippa, Pa. 15001.

Dear Peter, "Brian Aldiss is a writer I respect more than, perhaps, any other, even though (now that I think of it) his philosophy sometimes strikes me as being as far out as Heinlein's is deplorable. He has always had a distinctive style, and in recent years his are among the few 'New Wave'-flavoured stories that I found accessible and good. For this reason I found Shippey's review of THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE (in Spec-30) unsatisfactory; at times it almost seems that a dislike of the author's assumed motives is allowed to override the impact of the stories. Take 'Confluence', in my opinion one of the most delightful unstories ever written. Does he really think that Aldiss is afraid to state outright the theme of the piece? That he is unwilling to defend it? That the piece could possibly be improved in any way by making everything explicit? I certainly don't. And the same could be said for many Aldiss stories. (Shippey notes the point but doesn't seem to agree.)

I haven't read all the stories mentioned, so perhaps Shippey is correct in saying that Aldiss sometimes merely uses non-SF conventions. But even if so, I cannot understand how this can be considered a drawback, though it's an argument I've been seeing for years. To use (well) a style or plot new to SF is to enrich SF, even if that style or plot is merely conventional Outside. After all, wasn't one of the seminal influences on modern art the borrowing of conventions from primitive art? Much better is the review of A VERY PRIVATE LIFE, a well thought-out slam.

If Shippey doesn't think Campbell was racist he must not have read any of the Analog editorials of the five-odd years preceding his death. I particularly remember the one that went from a comparison of Jamaica and Scotland to the conclusion that darkies may not be bright, but they sure do have rhythm! "

* I said earlier that maybe the true facts of history don't become apparent for
* fifty years. What will future generations make of Campbell's era - will they
* still honour him for creating modern SF; or will they blame him for holding it
* back. I'm not saying that myself, you understand - to me Campbell was as God
* for many years - I'm just wondering....

Doug Barbour, Department of English, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Dear Peter, "Whoo boy! Where to begin? There's so much I want to argue with (in Spec-30) or more pertinently just plain say, that I don't know where to start, but a confession may help. I am not a fan. I am indeed one of those consigned by Tom Shippey to the lowest circle because I've spent my summer writing a Ph.D. thesis on SF, specifically on Le Guin, Russ, and Delany (may the gods smile on them all). However, although I did find some nice patterns in their work (what I think should be found in any good fiction) my main point was to argue that their work, as representative of the best in SF (and I would add quite a few writers to that list including Aldiss, Ballard, and from the early years, Bester before all) was worthy, on its own terms, of close critical study. This can be fun if it isn't deadeningly academic, and while mine may have been, it was fun to do.

Anyway, though Shippey is right on the whole about THE UNIVERSE MAKERS, I found myself wondering, about it and some of the letters, like Alex Eisenstein's remarks about "the sterile garbage purveyed ad nauseum by ORBIT, NEW WORLDS, QUARK, et al" which, despite his agreement with my last letter, I must take umbrage at. We haven't been reading the same volumes, or something.

That is, there have been some bad stories in those anthologies, but only because the editors are willing to take chances and risk things, which will be for the best in the long run. What bothered me most about *THE UNIVERSE MAKERS* (I am sticking to the point!) and what would likely bother me about fandom (though the one fan I know, Charles Cummings, a librarian at the U of A, is one of the most erudite fellows I've met and a joy to talk with), is Wollheim's proud assumption that SF should stay aloof from literature, or mainstream as he calls it. In a ghetto, therefore, but as Alexei Panshin has been saying for a year or two now anyway, it needn't nor shouldn't do so.

I find in truly wondrous fictions some of those feelings of entering 'other time', which Tolkien talks of in his very important essay; in, e.g., *NOVA*, which I take to be one of the finest SF novels ever, and Delany to be, as Algis Budrys so correctly said, the world's best SF writer. I have read all his books from *EMPIRE STAR* onwards at least 4 times and as many as 7 times, and they have not palled, they remain fresh, they still reveal new joys; that's what good writing is all about, and why Delany was so very right in "About 5,175 words" when he said "Put in opposition to 'style', there is no such thing as 'content'", and why he and Marilyn Hacker were absolutely correct in their 'forward' to *QUARK-3* when they said "the problems of entertainment are aesthetic problems".

I re-read Delany because he has never given less than his best to his readers in order to 'entertain' them, and his best represents such a monumental talent that the entertainment value is just bloody damned high, that's all. His work is more complex (rather, multiplex) than just about any writer's working today, inside the ghetto or out. And that's why I read it with so much joy. And Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin give me some of that joy, too, almost as much in fact. Which leads me to Russ's stories in *QUARK*, *ORBIT*, etc, as a point about "sterile garbage", for I've read nothing yet by her that didn't send shivers up my spine; she has it, and she knows how to use it; her fictions are also full of delights that can be savoured repeatedly.

I disagree with your comments, Peter, on *THE LATHE OF HEAVEN*. It does add to Ursula Le Guin's work in many ways, and I'm glad to see that James Blish (whose noted dislike for Delany bothers me) saw much of the goodness in it in his *F&SF* review. Mrs Le Guin uses the *Tao* as a philosophical base for her work; it pervades everything she has written since *CITY OF ILLUSIONS*, including *A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA*. *LATHE* is a Taoist primer, as well as a first-rate investigation not only of 'reality' but of the morality of power.

Alex Eisenstein is right to say that a mere attack on Poul Anderson's "politics" is pretty useless if other naive political philosophers are let off the hook. Of course we are returned to Delany; it's the words that embody the ideas, it's the writing that counts, and maybe Anderson has been attacked occasionally because he has written some pretty banal novels as well as some very fine ones. But Alex's comment about 'an ersatz Orient' bothered me. Mrs Le Guin's future cultures (and surely one of her glories as an SF writer is that, outside of Jack Vance, no-one has created such interesting alien cultures) are based on an Oriental philosophy not just on Oriental ways of life; and perhaps we in the West are beginning to realise that the *Tao's* relation to the environment may be a superior one to ours. That's what marks the difference between Haber and Orr in *LATHE*, and it's an important one. Moreover I was genuinely moved by the love story of that novel; in Heather Lelanche, Le Guin has created a woman of great personality, and everything Heather says or thinks reveals her wit and intelligence, which is another sign of continued growth of the artist in this book. I won't even mention Le Guin's use of Dement's theories of dreams (see Aldiss's *THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS*) all relevant to Mrs Le Guin's recent novels.

Although I am not a fan I have read a lot of SF, but there are areas I avoid, and therefore I am not able to defend everything I say with examples, but the writers I like are those who have a style (and it has been this way for a long time; in my teens when I first read SF, Sturgeon and Bester were my favorites, because, I now suspect, they wrote better, were better stylists). I was one of Wollheim's drop-outs, and didn't return to SF until a few years ago, which meant I've had to do a lot of catching-up.

I started with DUNE, because after Tolkien someone told me that it had some of that completeness of invention. Yes, it's very good for that, but Panshin is right to accuse Herbert of pulp style; DUNE's effect is a process of accumulation. And I'm afraid I dislike STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND so much, not for its ideas which I find interesting and worthwhile, but because it's so Godawfully badly written, I was in pain much of the time.

Which brings me to Philip Strick's argument that Heinlein is worthwhile because his writing in STRANGER and even in EVIL will break down "if only in small part, the barriers that prevent many people from the simple toleration of the concept(s)". I turn again to Delany. Heinlein argues his theories at you until you could spit with frustration because they are so one-sided and refuse to entertain any opposition. And Strick's point that he doesn't show because that's not his purpose (at least that's how I take the argument) is dead wrong because if Strick means that, he has conclusively argued Heinlein out of fiction, for you do not tell, you show in literature, which, to get to my point, Delany does.

In BABEL-17 we, along with Appleby, are presented with ways of life in transport which are very different in terms of not only their sexual mores, but of their general lifestyles. Appleby thinks transport people are perverts, but Rydra gives him the opportunity to meet them, know them, and the book beautifully argues how necessary something like "tripling" is if startravel (in this "secondary universe") is to work, because navigation demands such a close physical and emotional relationship among at least three people. There are no Heinleinesque arguments, because arguments don't have any effect. We are shown people living (well) by other, 'different' mores, and we emerge from the experience of that novel widened by it, with perhaps just that greater toleration Strick mentions.

There were other things I wanted to argue (I enjoy reading Spec because it nearly gives me a heart attack, my blood pressure boils so often, but I couldn't take a steady dose of this sort of thing, I obviously get upset too easily!), like that Delany's first novel did have "a fundamental point" (see the review of INTERFACE), and one that has remained in all his novels since, though continually deepened by a maturing artistic vision. In THE JEWELS OF APTOR, Geo learns to live in the chaotic world by seeing, in himself, the possibility of order. Delany's intense interest in the double figure of the criminal and artist began here, and has continued ever since; it is a deeply moral interest and his continually ambiguous resolutions of the problems the figures represent reveal that as an artist he has not frozen stiff in the way Heinlein seems to have done.

All this talk about how good the old stuff was brings me up to Judith Merrill's marvelous comment in her essay, "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?", where she says she was able to read the best early forties stuff in the fifties and it stood up to the new work, but she wouldn't do it today because what she remembers fondly about it is ideas, not style. I don't go that far, I've read some of the early stuff and found it interesting, almost in spite of itself. Larry Niven is fun to read because he is a better writer than those people were then, and yet for me he is not good enough for me to return to his work in the way I do to Delany.

But style alone is not enough; Zelazny has style, but somehow he doesn't put it to the deep use Delany, Russ or Le Guin do. But I disagree with some of your comments on his recent work. He can write well, as some of his shorter fiction shows (I don't think he's at home in the novel, at least not usually), also NINE PRINCES IN AMBER, which is a lot better than JACK OF SHADOWS, and I for one would like to see him continue the story.

Moreover he has written one story, novel, with 'insides' (Joanna Russ's wonderful comment on LORD OF LIGHT: "Will Zelazny ever write the inside stories of his stories? Can he?" seems to me the most pertinent piece of criticism on Zelazny that I have seen) and that is ISLE OF THE DEAD, where for once I care about his hero and there, interestingly enough, he doesn't merely retell some Earth myth but invents one.

Further, on style, Aldiss, whom I admire greatly, says in THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS that the great fault with the 'Foundation' trilogy is that a grand idea lacked its verbal (necessarily grandly verbal) superstructure, and therefore the book failed, at the level of literature. How I'd like Delany to rewrite the ideas of that book, for he could pattern it sufficiently and use the properly grand style to convince me of its deep truth. Asimov, admire him as I do, couldn't (and I don't think he could even now, though he could sure do better) and while it is right and proper to think about the Foundation books and the sweep of the ideas, I don't think I could get through them again unless I was determinedly out for VERY light entertainment indeed. Delany's long-awaited five volume novel (which I dearly hope he is still writing and near completing) will, if it marks the kind of step forward that every other novel of his has marked from the one before, be the grand work the Foundation trilogy failed to be. What a marvellous possibility!

I suspect my obvious likes will strike some very hollow notes with many of your readers, but I do think SF must now, because now it can (for a long time it gained from its separateness; no longer) not so much move back into the mainstream, as make room for it in the mainstream. They're coming to you, guys, for a lot of their thoughts, but it isn't a one-way street; it never is. "

* Phew! Where to start, what can I say? Nice to see the 'ghetto' credited for bringing some advantages, Doug; that's the obverse of the 'kick Gernsback' coin.
* Delany interests me, too, although for a couple of years he rather left me cold. I don't think he is an easy writer, I don't think he has the smooth and easy gift of some others who play with words, but Delany is worth the effort because he has such new things to say. Remember the sweet-sucking scene from NOVA? What I don't like are affectedly "stylish" writers who appear to have very little new to present; that is why I found myself turning guiltily but boredly away from AGAIN DANGEROUS VISIONS to pick up INCONSTANT MOON.
* Zelazny continues to worry me as he progresses ever downward. I look again at the brilliantly-compressed description of 'This Moment of the Storm', 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes', and I can see no similarity between these and the dull writer of JACK OF SHADOWS. It's not even a question of style; JACK is written in a very straightforward way. And as for NINE PRINCES IN AMBER, well, I'm surprised at you, Doug Barbour.

Malcolm Edwards, 75A Harrow View, Harrow, Mx.

Dear Pete, "Alex Eisenstein seems to take it as a personal insult that anyone except himself should dare to venture an opinion on THE STARS MY DESTINATION, a novel on which I understand he purports to be an expert. No matter that I was actually defending Bester's book against what I still believe was a rather hurriedly-written and poorly-thought-out Chris Priest discussion.

Eisenstein rushes to defend Bester with all the righteous wrath of a prophet smiting the unbelievers. Poor old Bester, though; 'I kill you deadly' turns out to be merely a stupid redundancy. Why can't I see this? Well, Alex, partly I think it may be because the fact that killing is, of necessity, a deadly activity is not quite the point. Bester doesn't use the word in that sense exactly. 'Deadly', you see, is in its common usage an adjective; Bester, however, uses it as an adverb. It may be, of course, that Bester is simply trying to show us that Gully Foyle doesn't know how to Speak Proper, but I doubt it. If you look in a dictionary you may find that in this sense the word can carry a slightly different meaning. For example, it may have the sense of 'extremely'. What's so irrelevant about that? Further, the phrase in the U.K. edition has a cadence which the alternative ('I kill you filthy') entirely lacks. This may make all the difference between a memorable phrase and a rather ponderous one, and I'm inclined to think it does. Enough of this point, however; it all reminds me somewhat of arguments about the number of angels on the head of a pin.

As to the change in Gully Foyle's character being told rather than shown, well really. What Bester does in that little quote I used (in Spec-29) is say, look here, reader, this is an Important Bit, this is where it all starts. Again, I'm not saying it isn't effective; indeed, what I was saying was that it is. However I think it's unarguable that the point is established by the simple expedient of grabbing the reader and shaking him up and down until he remembers it. This is a commercial writer's shorthand, hardly really worth noting one way or t'other; and indeed, I only remarked on it in passing.

And no, Alex, despite your entirely laudable efforts to put words into my mouth, I didn't say that SF was politically naive relative to my own erudite certainty (ah, a neat bit of irony there, Alex), or other literature, or present-day mainstream, or indeed a stuffed goat. I said it was politically naive period. These idiotic comparisons are entirely your own invention. What I meant was that SF is politically naive compared with political sophistication. Okay? And when I say that I do not mean, although you will doubtless try to say I do, that I am an example of this sophistication. Far from it.

My complaint against much of Anderson's stuff is that it takes political assumptions which have already been shown to be non-workable in our present society (though they may have been workable once in the past) and assumes that if you jump enough years in the future, no matter how humanity may have advanced in other ways, you will find it reverting, regressing, devolving to these systems. It seems to me to be naive to take a system of mercantile capitalism, say, and project it on some entirely imaginary future world, and say in effect, hey guys look, it may not work too well just now, but if you had this and this and this it might work, so it's a good system, so let's not jack it over yet, eh?

Of course, if Anderson is building up an alien culture he is perfectly entitled to do it under any set of assumptions he cares to make. But many of these examples are not from alien cultures but from dominant future human ones; and in any case it is not the assumptions themselves but the conclusions he draws from them that I feel are untenable. Assumptions themselves are entirely neutral. Which is one reason why it may not be relevant to criticise Ursula Le Guin for the background of her cultures. Another reason might be that this is not really the problem that Mrs Le Guin was discussing.

I notice that Mr Eisenstein's wilful misrepresentation also extends to Graham Charnock's comments on Wells. I feel I must point out that Eisenstein's objections have no apparent connection to Graham's comments, which were:

1) that other Wells books than the SF ones are still read, as Pohl would have seen if he wasn't so blinkered in his attitudes, and 2) that THE NEW MACHIAVELLI has more content to justify re-reading than does THE TIME MACHINE. Now point 1. is patently true, despite Eisenstein's attempts to deny it (One wonders, parenthetically, what Wells would have thought of admirers who could only praise his SF work by saying that nobody read his other stuff!) I know many people who have read KIPPS, MR POLLY, etc, and many of the books are still in print. Admittedly many of them are forgotten, but then so are SF books like THE SEA LADY, or ALL ABOARD FOR ARARAT. Eisenstein totally misrepresents the second point by claiming that Graham prefers ANN VERONICA to THE TIME MACHINE. He may do so; I don't know. The point is that that's not what he said, so Eisenstein's comment is just ignorant abuse. "

* Apologies to all those who, lacking the last three issues for hasty reference,
* will have no idea what this tangled controversy is all about. Actually it is
* even worse than that, the origins of the TIGER, TIGER heresy going back to a
* chance remark by Tony Sudbery in the September 1970 Speculation (No.27). But,
* I did let Alex Eisenstein have his head and must now follow the rules of the
* game and allow Malcolm and Chris Priest (below) to disagree with him.

Chris Priest, 1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Mx.

Dear Pete, "I expect that like most of your shoddy correspondents Alex Eisenstein is a well-meaning guy, but I do wish he wouldn't attribute statements or meanings to people (especially me) that never existed in the first place. Abrasive Alex tells me that I was really fishing for a left-wing doctrine (in my column in Spec-28) ... well I suppose I was. But I was also fishing for right-wing dogmatism, or namby-pamby liberalism, or nihilistic anarchy, or middle-class conservatism or any other label. (I didn't think of 'egalitarian populism' I must admit... that's a new one on me).

The whole point of political content in a novel is not the the fact of labels, but of some overriding commitment. I suppose TIGER! TIGER! is really a bad book to talk about in this context because it's mainly a very entertaining adventure story. It is just one book on many SF books which does not pay attention to political motivations. As I think I said in the original article - so-o-o long ago now - this doesn't mean that the characters have to go around reading Marx or making speeches about immigration, but simply that the book as a whole should have as much an acknowledgement of a political system which affects its protagonists' movements as it does of a social or technological system.

You can argue back - in the context of TIGER! TIGER! - that Gully Foyle is engaged in a battle to the death with capitalism, or some such, but the fact remains that for the most part Foyle's actions are initiated by a powerful and consuming desire for revenge. The book describes a political system, I suppose, but it is no more used as a valid aspect of a plot than, say, the backdrop of an imperialist/capitalist system which has produced a galactic empire. In this way TIGER! TIGER! is not much more than a rather lurid and extravagant science-fictional spaghetti western, with a wronged hero out to slay the baddies.

The other thing that arrogant Alex said that bugged me was his calling me a 'critic', based presumably on the various stupid things I've said in Speculation in the past. Well... all I can say is that I don't think I've written anything here in the recent past in which I've attempted to establish objective critical standards.

The 'Suburbia' column, when saying critical things about SF, was written very much as reactions; either specific works or generalised assumptions. I haven't the capacity to write as a critic, and I fear and admire those who do.

Incidentally, Pete, I would take exception to one of your own remarks on this subject. (I suspect you said it provocatively). Speaking of Franz Rottensteiner and John Foyster, you imply that their status as non-writers of fiction invalidates them as critics. This is nonsense, as you must know. I can think of many critics and reviewers who have never written - or who haven't written for years - and they still make good critics. I can think of several fiction-writers who are good critics, and I can think of some who are not. The two activities are not necessarily linked.

But does one need evidence of ability in order to criticise someone else? I think that a critic is slightly more worthwhile if he is also a writer, because he talks the same language, but surely the whole thing about fandom (or part of fandom's whole thing) has been that it provides a platform for non-writers to discuss books. Speaking personally, if I see the name Franz Rottensteiner at the top of an article I quietly skip the next few pages. But this is only because I find his Teutonic phraseology more soporific than the sides of cereal packets. I haven't read much of John Foyster's work lately, but I would certainly respect his opinion. I would say that he is as good a critic as Tony Sudbery; idiosyncratic, certainly, perhaps a little bigoted, but very perceptive and articulate and, what is more, persuasive."

* Okay, okay, so everyone jumped on me for daring to suggest that fan-criticism is
* inherently worth less than critical work produced by a professional writer (and
* incidentally suggesting by implication that there is little point in running a
* critical fanzine like Spec.) Can I go back a bit and re-state my objections,
* which were really to the brand of contemptuous, heavily-sarcastic abuse gener-
* ated by Rottensteiner and others on occasion. Criticism, yes, but it must be
* tempered by an appreciation that it is a lot harder to create than destroy. When
* Franz can turn out a novel which gives as much pleasure as DOUBLE STAR, for
* instance, then I'll let him get away with 'Chewing Gum for the Vulgar'.

Graham Boak, 6 Hawks Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey.

Dear Pete, "Brian Stableford's article on Silverberg left me with a distinctly disagreeable feeling, which I am unfortunately unable to reproduce for this letter. I can only say that it seems little more than a catalogue with impressions. I've yet to see a satisfactory article on Silverberg, the writer, undoubtedly partly because of the man's vast productivity! He is the most exciting writer we have at the moment, yet no book ever seems entirely satisfying.... possibly because of some as-yet uneradicated hack styling caused by the speed of his work?

I can't put my finger on it, though. Perhaps you should push Tony Sudbery in that direction and get him away from this ridiculously-long Dick discussion. Dick was the Great White Hope of the early Sixties, but has failed to develop strongly enough to meet the promise some saw in him. Maybe Silverberg is the GWH of the early Seventies (much as Zelazny was of the late Sixties and is now derided because he developed in a different direction than anticipated)."

* Yes.... downward! But I think I know what you mean, Graham, though I hesitate
* to try and put my own finger any more closely on the missing ingredient. Bob
* Silverberg seems such a fine writer - and by repute and correspondence, a Good
* Person, that it almost seems churlish to comment further. Eh, Ian? ...

Ian Williams, 6 Greta Terrace, Chester Road, Sunderland, Co. Durham.

Dear Pete, "Stableford on Silverberg was interesting, but unfortunately he hasn't read what I think are two of Silverberg's more fascinating works - THE BOOK OF SKULLS and DYING INSIDE. Both are very much novels of character with, in the former certainly, only marginal SF features. SKULLS is an absorbing book, if only to try and guess who will still be alive at the end. It also seems to me to show the one fatal flaw in Silverberg in that he is a fine technician, a craftsman, and undoubtedly the best SCIENCE FICTION writer. It is a masterpiece of technical skills with an intention of genuine artistry. And it is in this last item that the author fails.

Because in all his works of recent years there has been a certain undefinable lack, something that is hard to pin down but something that is fatal. Silverberg is a fine writer but he is not an artist. His flaw is a reversal of Blish's, in that Silverberg has the empathy and the intelligence but somehow lacks the kind of intellect that an artist must have to create a viable work. A TIME OF CHANGES has been compared, and rightly so, with THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, and this highlights what I've been saying because CHANGES is a fine work, while DARKNESS is a work of artistry. DYING INSIDE, by the way, just misses the mark so I have hope that Silverberg may yet produce a mature piece of writing that will make me change my mind on the above. But he hasn't produced it yet."

Sandra Miesel, 8744 N. Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240.

Dear Pete, "Brian Stableford's essay is all right as far as it goes but is not especially 'complete' since it studies only one angle of Silverberg's writing. There is nothing on his characteristic (and to me, repellent) brand of sensuality, his preoccupation with immortality, redemption, community, or mention of his by now obligatory incest motif. As fond as I am of Bob personally, I find his fiction an ordeal to read, with the notable exception of NIGHTWINGS. But if anyone is unacquainted with his non-fiction, do try his masterfully elegant MOUND BUILDERS OF ANCIENT AMERICA.

I agree with Brian that critics ought to confine their attentions to what is written and not probe the psyches of writers - consider the enormities perpetrated on Heinlein and Lovecraft! But I insist on retaining the option of disapproving or disagreeing with the opinions expressed in books I examine.

And in answer to Chris Priest; yes, Silverberg does want his work understood.

Now, I realise it serves no useful purpose to dash out in alarm like an old fire horse every time someone takes the name of Poul Anderson in vain. Not that Tom Shippey's review of OPERATION CHAOS fits into that category by any means. At least he recognises Gnosticism for the ghastly creed it is. The rising tide of Gnostic anti-rationality in the U.S. is an altogether proper subject - mutatis mutandis - for an SF novel, but this movement is not confined to New Left politics. It is interesting to note that the Johannine Church survives in an innocuous form after the removal of its puppetmasters, just as the Espers did in 'No Truce With Kings'. The Johnnies' tenets reminded me of the 12th Century EVERLASTING GOSPEL of Joakim de Flora.

Re. Hitler as a demon prince; some people have seriously proposed the theory that he was diabolically possessed, but Poul hadn't heard this fable until I mentioned it to him. He felt such a hypothesis quite unnecessary to explain Nazi depravity.

Complaints against the Matuchek's tactics in rescuing their daughter (which any Jesuit worth his keep ought to be able to rationalise in a trice) strike me as absurd preciousness. One wonders what the complainers' stand is on terrorism in the pursuit of 'liberation' -- in fiction or real life. Ethical solutions in Anderson stories often require the end justifying some (but not all) means and generating terrible guilt thereby. James Blish describes the Andersonian tragic hero as "the man who is driven partly by circumstances, but mostly by his own conscience, to do the wrong thing for the right reason -- and then has to live with the consequences." He goes on to cite the particularly cruel example 'Sister Planet' in which the hero murders his best friends to prevent planetary genocide against the natives of Venus."

* Since you pick up a reference I quoted so vaguely last issue, Sandra, I really
* ought to have been able to pin-point its source by now. I've looked through a
* huge pile of fanzines without luck; I think I must have read the criticism of
* the actions of Anderson's heroes in something like Dave Hulvey's Afan, copies
* of which (along with a lot of other stuff) I donated to the NOVACON auction
* **last** November. Tom Shippey hammers me on this point, too...

Tom Shippey, 10 Crick Road, Oxford.

Dear Peter, "At the end of my review of Anderson's OPERATION CHAOS last issue you added (as is your un-endearing custom) a note of your own, in which you said a) that Anderson's comparison between the 'Johannine Church' and contemporary peace movements wasn't going to make him very popular, and b) that in any case he contradicted his own philosophy by allowing Matuchek to break into the Johannine cathedral, thus condoning violence and the principle that ends justify means, just the things he was condemning in his enemies. The first point is true but obvious, the second, I think, wrong.

We are after all pretty familiar by now with stories that make the kind of point your friends were getting at; that violent action may seem to be justified and be perfectly well-intentioned and yet have a way of running off with its perpetrators. Graham Greene's THE QUIET AMERICAN centres on this, so does ANIMAL FARM, in a more cynical way, and the theme's not unknown in science fiction (see for instance the end of Pohl's A PLAGUE OF PYTHONS).

After Orwell's violent and successful attack on W.H. Auden's poem 'Spain' -- which includes without irony the line approving 'The conscious acceptance of guilt in necessary murder' -- I would have thought that most authors would be aware of the dangers of letting their heroes justify themselves too easily by appeals to an imaginary future. So that if Anderson made the kind of mistake your quote suggested, it would be a pretty bad one. But of course I don't think that he has made this mistake, and it seems to me that the criticism you quote is just an instance of picking up a familiar thought, a ready-made blunt implement, and using it indiscriminately.

There are two reasons for thinking that Anderson has seen the possibility and covered himself from attacks of the type you suggest. One is, that in spite of the examples I have myself suggested above, it still seems basically silly to suggest that no ends whatsoever can ever in any way justify dubious means, and I think that Anderson is aware of that. It's true that power corrupts and true also that one can be wrong about one's unconscious motivations and so on, but still there are some cases where the risks are small and the rewards great, and some cases also where principles have to be subordinated to necessities.

In the case Anderson proposes — rescuing a child from Hell — I think that any sensible person would condone not only the housebreaking and hamesucken which Matuchek commits but probably a good deal more besides. So getting at Anderson over that incident seems strained at least. However I also think that he may have been aware of the possibility that people like your friends would get at him over such an incident, and that is why he has piled on the horror of the situation at that point, and also the lack of any other choice for Matuchek.

The second and more important objection to the argument is that I do not think that what Anderson is condemning in the 'johannines' is exactly a confusion of ends with means. This is where the little priest Marmiadon comes in. It's true that he excuses his actions up to the curse placed on the Matucheks on the ground of ultimate purpose (see the start of chapter 27), but then Anderson (and Matuchek) accept that as being at least sincere, and remind us at the end that once he is given a true vision of the means he uses he can be cured. No: I think that the real menace to Anderson is the existence of people who — unlike Marmiadon or the quiet American or Auden's imagined Communist — hardly have any defined end in view at all, and consequently are immune to any argument or clarification.

The dangerous Johannines are not those prepared to bend morality a little for a good purpose, but those who recognise neither morality nor purpose but only their own instincts, backed by the shadowiest fantasies — of a world forcibly purified of evil so that Christ could return in the body and the Holy Ghost dwell in us all (the medieval millennialist or 17th century Shaker), of a world where there are no social constraints and 'the Divine Light which is always shining within yourself' is free to express itself (I quote from a pamphlet given me in the street in Oxford a few weeks ago). Against people as unpredictable as this, a revolutionary with a fixed purpose seems at least manageable. This is what I was suggesting when I mentioned the dangers of people with a theological (rather than rational) sense of their own virtue, and it is in this that I think Anderson's parallel between medieval fanatics and bits of contemporary America consists.

I suppose I have spent so much time on this letter because the technique of your unnamed critics (if it wasn't really you all along, Weston, you slapdash paper-filling issue-blurrer you) seems all too familiar. I've been, for instance, in situations where there has been every attempt to provoke a violent reaction — verbal abuse, written abuse, threats, intimidation by press of numbers — apparently with the intention of turning round if you did lose your temper with the cry 'Ha! that shows you're a fascist'. Isn't this what our reviewers are saying about Anderson's Matuchek? ('He may have been a little provoked but then he did break into the cathedral'). If so it's pretty ignominious.

As for the suggestion that it's got something to do with the Peace Corps, that strikes me as sheer criticism-by-random-association. There are arguments that could be levelled against Anderson — for instance the 'stink bomb' scene is perhaps too close to wish-fulfilment, rather like the scene in 'Bhowani Junction' where the Moslem troops are ordered to piss on the Hindu demonstrators. But even if these arguments were made, I think they would miss a basic and rather unhappy point; that the tone of Anderson's work has changed markedly over the ten years or so during which OPERATION CHAOS was written, and that although it has become more serious, it's also more pessimistic. What has pushed Anderson in this direction, of distrust of all hierarchies including the FBI and the heavenly one? That's what one would like to know. I don't think it was the Peace Corps. "

SPECULATION

* The facetious answer to your last question, Tom, is "age". But seriously, I
 * think it remarkable that Poul Anderson has remained as cheerfully optimistic
 * as he has in his stories. It is not that he is blithely unaware of the prob-
 * lems facing us; on the contrary Poul is one of the few who have suggested (in
 * a Playboy article) that we may find some way out of the present seemingly-
 * hopeless situation. Since I tend to be optimistic myself, though for no very
 * solid reason, this impresses me. Interesting too that Poul has shown, in THE
 * BYWORLDER, how the so-called 'counter-culture' could actually work, although
 * his theme is that we need more technology, not less, if we are to survive.
 * All this has nothing to do with your letter, Tom. I imagine the incident you
 * refer to in connection with 'provocation' was that student demo which you had
 * to face out last year on the steps of your college. And, as a means of revenge
 * for your various slights I might remind you of Tom Shippey, man of peace, and
 * the disgraceful incident in your study when we visited you last month. There I
 * was, happily agreeing to print your letter in Speculation, when suddenly I was
 * rigger-tackled and thrown to the floor. An undignified struggle ensued until
 * your superior brute strength won out and you wrested the paper from my grasp.
 * And all because you thought you could improve the letter in some places! Wars
 * have been started for less, Shippey.

Tony Sudbery, 5 Heslington Croft, Fulford, York.

Dear Pete, "I must say that Brian Aldiss has a remarkably tasteful and enter-
 taining way of peddling his ego - the postcards at CHESSMANCON were
 a rare lapse - and that I'd like to see Mark Adlard develop his reply to Frederik
 Pohl at greater length. I feel there is a certain amount of stereotyping going
 on; 'Invent a new kind of mousetrap and Pohl will beat a path to your door' - is
 that really true to Pohl's editorial practice?

Mark is right about style and content, of course, but the theme
 could do with illustrating by reference to specific examples. This might bring
 out the poverty of Pohl's notion of 'content' - when he says that "there has been
 more attention paid to the 'package' than to the content of the story" he seems
 to be regarding 'content' as simply synonymous with 'plot'. A couple of sentences
 later we have "Once you have decided what you want to say and who it concerns and
 where it is all happening and when, then that style which most economically and
 completely conveys all these things is the right style for your story".

The mystifying phrase here is "what you want to say"; I don't see
 how anyone can decide what he wants to say until he's said it. Except for certain
 rare cases (like a writer working from a specific visual image, or from the mem-
 ory of a specific emotion), "what you want to say" is a sequence of events, an
 attitude, an argument or so on, which only exists when it has been formulated in
 words. Changing the words then changes what is being said, unless it only affects
 the clarity and precision of the statement.

This is a theoretical account, but I think it gives a fair picture
 of the actual practice of writing. It shows a writer starting with a first attempt
 either in his head or on the paper, which he then alters so as to make it clearer
 or more precise, or else because he realises that it wasn't quite what he wanted
 to say. Far from starting off from what he wants to say, he ends up with it (if
 he's lucky) when he recognises it in the right form of words. Frederik Pohl on
 the other hand shows us a writer starting out with a bald 'unmannered' statement
 of what he wants to say (since "what he wants to say" doesn't exist without such a
 statement), and then inserting this 'content' into a 'package' consisting of a
 style (mannered or otherwise). Does any writer really recognise this method?

SPECULATION

On SOLARIS: I wish you'd printed Lem's letter. I've seen a copy of it and it forces me to withdraw my charge of ignorance. I still think his neutrino structures won't stand up, but he and I can argue about that privately. I should have remembered I was reading a translation; Lem's other scientific solicisms (of which some didn't get mentioned in my review, and others were cut by you to save space) may all be due to mistranslation, but if so I suggest that Franz Rottensteiner would be better occupied in finding decent translators than in making hyperbolic claims which reviewers are bound to overreact to. "

* Fred Pohl's speech was in itself something of an overreaction to make his point.
* I remember from New Worlds a story by Giles Gordon titled 'The Scream', which
* was a (mercifully brief) stylistic treatment of a man/woman screaming. Faced
* with such as that there very definitely is such a thing as 'content' or lack of
* same ! I'm disappointed there are not more letters on Pohl's speech last time.

Robert E. Briney, 245 Lafayette Street, Apt 3G, Salem, Mass. 01970.

Dear Peter, "I was pleased to see the brief mention of SF BIBLIOGRAPHIES. Ed Wood and I are beginning work on a revised and enlarged second edition, for publication sometime next year (we hope). We would be interested in learning about any items omitted from the first edition. - particularly any UK checklists or bibliographies that did not manage to filter across to the U.S.

The second edition will include checklists and indexes which appeared as parts of larger works (e.g. as appendices to biographical or critical works) as well as material from professional or amateur magazines. Since we could not conceivably list all of this material, even if we had all the data, we will be somewhat selective about what gets into the final book.

You ask if it was Harry Warner's suggestion in Speculation-13 which led us to attempt the bibliography. Unfortunately no. Both Ed and I had been compiling such lists for years, for our own use; during a holiday visit at his house I discovered our duplication of effort, and during the subsequent discussion Ed's wife came up with the suggestion that we consolidate the lists and publish.

A number of reviewers have commented on the fact that most of the items listed in SF BIBLIOGRAPHIES are not in print, with the implied question as to why unavailable items are listed. However, no-one has ever suggested that the science of bibliography should be restricted to material currently in print; that would defeat the major purpose of such record-keeping. It is also possible -- though unfortunately it hasn't happened yet -- that having some of these out-of-print items called to their attention might spur enterprising publishers into reprinting them. (Someone did eventually reprint Bleiler's CHECKLIST OF FANTASTIC LITERATURE, after a gap of twenty-four years. With the current increased academic interest in SF and fantasy, the market for bibliographical works is stronger than it ever was.)"

DEPARTMENT OF THE DELAYED LETTER: We-also-heard-from a few others, but not so many are held over this time as usual. Thanks for writing, Andrew Stephenson, Eric Lindsay, and John Brunner. Bits of letters still remain to be used from Cy Chauvin, Mark Mumper, Brian Cox and Houston Craighead. Of course, publishing promptly for once has caught you all off-balance; there are probably scads of letters even now on the way to me.

WE DIDN'T HEAR FROM DEPT.: Fred Pohl, Peter Nicholls, Bruce Gillespie, John Foyster Nick Perry, Graham Charnock, John J. Pierce, Philip Strick, Jack Cohen. Do write!

SPECULATION book guide

New books received during the quarter and not reviewed elsewhere in Speculation.

FROM GOLLANCZ:--
=====

GRAY MATTERS by William Hjortsberg, £1.80. This souped-up version of 'Donovan's Brain' comes to us with hearty recommendations from the New York Times and with the Playboy fiction of the year award. The plot deals with the first brain preserved outside the body, and ends up with wholesale brain Depositories for just about everyone. So far, so good, and it is an interesting novel. But none of these concepts are particularly new to science fiction, and the narrative isn't that powerful. I'm sorry but I don't see the great enthusiasm this book appears to have generated, although it is worth reading.

THE TIME MASTERS by Wilson Tucker, £1.80. Unless I'm misinformed I believe this to be a revised version of an old novel by Bob Tucker, which makes it a bit unfair for Gollancz to call it 'new'. That aside it is very enjoyable reading and puts a **lot** of new life into a fairly old theme.

TOMORROW LIES IN AMBUSH by Bob Shaw, £2.00. Bob Shaw has made his name quite recently in professional writing; so far I don't personally think he has entirely fulfilled his promise although some of his novels have been very well handled. This collection of eleven stories is a mixed bag; some are superb, others a little weak. Short 'snapper' items are interspersed between more thoughtful longer stories, making a very varied collection. Generally very good.

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS by Gene Wolfe, £1.90. The title story of this book is from ORBIT, and has been nominated for a Nebula Award, and it has been joined by two further, related tales to make a novel. To be reviewed.

THE FARTHEST SHORE by Ursula K. Le Guin, £1.60. Final volume of the 'Earthsea' trilogy, published as a juvenile although now winning some very handsome praise for the series. To be reviewed along with first two novels, next issue.

THE EARLY ASIMOV - Isaac Asimov, £2.75. Exceptionally good value as a book, with 540 pages in a special 6" x 9" size. It contains 27 previously uncollected items by Asimov, thus bringing almost his entire output into hard covers. Possibly the most fascinating thing about the book are the introductions by Asimov, which complement those in the collection NIGHTFALL and explain how he began writing along with lots of other recollections. The quality of the stories varies, from that you would expect from a 19-year-old new writer for a cut-price magazine, through to polished work of the matured Asimov. The stories span ten years from 1940-1950 and historically this is an intriguing collection. Here's the rub, however; for good historical reasons the stories appear here exactly as first published - and some of them are pretty raw. To be utterly candid, the reason most of them haven't been reprinted before is that they are not really good enough, now, in 1973, to be reprinted and published along with more modern work. However, I quibble. Most of the stories are fun, the introductions are witty and informative, and for Asimov completeists (and there are many!) this is a 'must'.

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FROM FABER:-

A CLASH OF CYMBALS by James Blish, £1.75. Reissue of the final 'Flying Cities' BEST SF STORIES OF JAMES BLISH, £1.75. Reissue of 1965 collection; /book. eight stories, the last two ('How Beautiful with Banners' and 'We All Die Naked') replacing the earlier novella, 'There Shall Be No Darkness'. Excellent value. HEART CLOCK by Dick Morland, £2.35. Extremely interesting, very "English" first novel by a new writer. This one needs more thought; review next issue. PASSAGE TO PLUTO by Hugh Walters, £1.30 Juvenile from local man Walter Hughs. He has written so many reasonably good juveniles we hope to ask him to a BSFG meeting

FROM SIDGWICK & JACKSON:-

EARTHLIGHT by Arthur C. Clarke, £1.75. Reissue of one of Clarke's earlier and I think better novels of that period. Still extremely entertaining reading. THE PROBABILITY MAN by Brian Ball, £1.60. Another new novel. A CHOICE OF GODS by Clifford D. Simak, £1.75. A new and rather unlikely novel. THE BEST OF JOHN W. CAMPBELL, £2.25. Now that Campbell has gone, publishers seem to be scrambling to re-publish his work, no matter how dated it may read. The best of Campbell is to be found in two books of short stories from Lancer, because after all, he only wrote about one story after 1938. This collection is ostensibly issued under the aegis of the Science Fiction Foundation, which means only, I suspect, that George Hay thought of the idea and Jim Blish was persuaded to write the foreword. Of the five stories, the most memorable is 'Who Goes There', but several of the others are embarrassing and, I think, better forgotten.

FROM DOBSON:-

FOURTH MANSIONS by R.A. Lafferty, £2.10. Review next time, Tom Shippey willing! DREADFUL SANCTUARY by Eric Frank Russell, £2.10. Reissue of 'golden oldie'. DEATHSTAR VOYAGE by Ian Wallace, £1.80. A better than average space adventure.

FROM HUTCHINSON:-

MACHINES AND MEN by Keith Roberts, £2.75. Ten stories. For review.

FROM DOUBLEDAY:-

This publisher seems to have gone for big, hefty volumes in a major way. Besides the recent huge AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS, we have four more big books below:-

THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME, VOLUMES 2A & 2B, each \$9.95. Following the best-ever novelettes, as chosen by the SFWA and edited by Robert Silverberg, we now have the Ben Bova-edited selection of 'greatest of all time' novellas. Total wordage is immense - 950 pages, hence the 'A' & 'B' volumes. Contents include 'Baby Is Three', 'Who Goes There', 'Ballad of Lost C'Mell', 'Universe', 'Rogue Moon', 'Big Front Yard', 'Midas Plague', 'Earthman Come Home', 'Moon Moth', 'The Martian Way' - 22 stories in all. You name it, it's here; the best of the best!

THE EARLY ASIMOV, \$10.00. The same giant collection as issued by Gollancz (above).

THE ASTOUNDING--ANALOG READER, ed. Harry Harrison & Brian Aldiss, \$7.95. Another 530 pages of the best of the good old stuff. Trust these two enterprising anthologists to collar this assignment; a sort of memorial to John W Campbell, and a 'definitive' historical anthology of the greatest SF magazine. The stories are well worth preserving, although many are available in book-form elsewhere. One of the best parts of the book is the fine introduction, presumably by Brian and Harry in tandem (?). I notice, too, that this is Volume I; presumably further massive tomes will follow. Contents include 'First Contact', 'City', 'Nightfall', etc.

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FROM DOUBLEDAY (Cont/d)

A SPECTRUM OF WORLDS ed. Thomas D. Clareson, \$5.95. This is a good one. With Tom Clareson I share an interest in the development of SF from a far older literary tradition. In an excellent 24-page introduction Clareson traces this development, and has then chosen stories to illustrate his theme (although he goes back only to 1918 and most are well-known items). Very much recommended.

THE GLORY GAME by Keith Laumer, \$5.95. Another new novel.
BEYOND THE RESURRECTION by Gordon Eklund, \$5.95. Promising new writer. Review to
THE GOD MACHINE by William Jon Watkins, \$5.95. Second dreadful book /come.
by this author. One of the worst - and silliest - SF novels ever.
COUNTRY LOVE AND POISON RAIN by Peter Tate, \$5.95. Very 'British' (or do I mean 'Welsh' novel of the near future. Interesting... and not really SF at all.
THE OVERLORDS OF WAR by Gerard Klein, \$5.95. Always difficult to judge a novel translated from another language. The author's prose seems to be stiff and lifeless, his scientific ideas stale and almost silly. It may be me, of course!

FROM DAW BOOKS:- (all at 95c)

MENTION MY NAME IN ATLANTIS by John Jakes, 'Conan' spoof; ENTRY TO ELSEWHEN by John Brunner, three long stories from 1955-58. Entertaining. THE GREEN PHOENIX by Thomas Burnett Swann, fantasy. SLEEPWALKER'S WORLD by Gordon R Dickson, an original novel. THE BOOK OF BRIAN ALDISS, nine recent stories. MIRROR IMAGE by Michael Coney, getting good mentions, this one. UNDER THE GOLDEN STAR by Lin Carter, Burroughs 'John Carter' revamp. THE HALCYON DRIFT by Brian Stableford, new novel. TRANSIT TO SCORPIO by A. Burt Akers, new novel. THE WANDERING VARIABLES by Louis Trimble. BAPHOMET'S METEOR by Pierre Barbet, translated from the French and not too bad at all. DARKOVER LANDFALL by Marion Zimmer Bradley, latest of a series. A TALENT FOR THE INVISIBLE by Ron Goulart. THE LION GAME by James H. Schmitz, from Analog, a 'Telzey' story. PLANET PROBABILITY by Brian Ball.

FROM ACE:

QUEST FOR THE FUTURE by A.E. VanVogt, new novel, 95c. THE WORLDS OF ROBERT A. HEINLEIN, 5 stories, reissue, 95c; SCIENCE FICTION: THE GREAT YEARS ed. Carol & Fred Pohl, \$1.25. Seven familiar stories. THE MOON IS HELL/THE MIGHTIEST MACHINE, by John W. Campbell, two 'classic' novels from way back, each 95c. ALIEN PLANET by Fletcher Pratt, 75c. Another novel "from the Great Years". BACK TO THE STONE AGE by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 75c. A Pellucidar novel. FALCONS OF NARABEDIA/THE DARK INTRUDER, Marion Zimmer Bradley, 95c. BADGE OF INFAMY/THE SKY IS FALLING by Lester Del Rey, 95c. PERRY RHODAN 20 & 21, 75c each.

FROM BALLANTINE:

ALPH by Charles Eric Maine, \$1.25 Rewrite of WORLD WITHOUT MEN. WOLFWINTER by Thomas Burnett Swann, \$1.25. EVENOR by George MacDonald, \$1.25. SYZYGY by Michael G. Coney, \$1.25. A WEREWOLF AMONG US by Dean R. Koontz, \$1.25.

OTHER PUBLISHERS:

ISLE OF THE DEAD by Roger Zelazny, Arrow 35p; SOLARIS by Stanislaw Lem, Arrow 35p. MACROSCOPE by Piers Anthony, Avon, \$1.25 (reissue); THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula K. LeGuin, Panther, 35p. GOLD THE MAN, by Joseph Green, Pan 30p. TOWARDS INFINITY ed. Damon Knight, nine stories, Pan, 35p. THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT by John Sladek, Panther 35p, Pocket Books 95c. GRAY MATTERS by William Hjortsberg, Pocket Books \$1.25. A CAULDRON OF WITCHES by Clifford Lindsey Alderman, Pocket Books 75c; WINTER BLOOD by John Roc, Pocket Books \$1.25. Non-SF, chilling.



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