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JULY 1966

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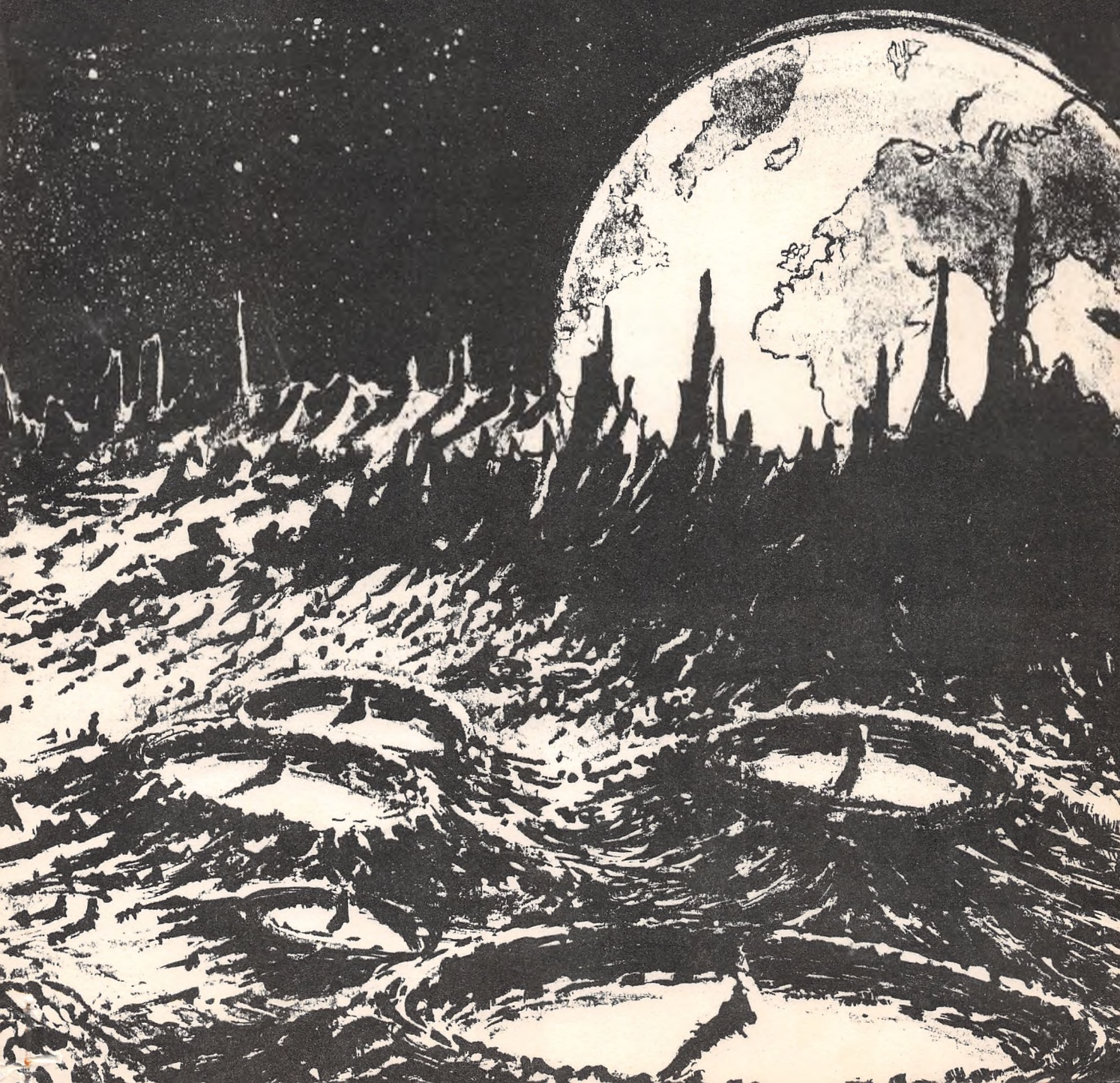

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Zenith SPECULATION

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EDITORIAL by Peter R. Weston

During the past three months the publishers have seemed determined to swamp us under a deluge of new books. Beryl & Archie Mercer have been unable to handle the load, and a number of other reviewers appear in this issue. No strangers are Richard Gordon, Chris Priest and John Boston; deserving special note and thanks are professionals Brian Aldiss and Langdon Jones. And it is surely unusual when even a notoriously lazy editor finds himself reviewing books !

Another newcomer is F.M. 'Buz' Busby of Seattle, who has agreed to do the occasional revival of his 'Plow' column from the defunct 'Cry'. First installment appears in this issue, to give new ammunition to those who claim that Zenith is the elephant's graveyard where old columns come to die ! Illustrations this time, for the second issue running, are mainly by Pamela Yates, that rare thing a true artist in fandom. We have a lot more of her best work to hand, including a cover.

After that big build-up last time, we had better mention that just before deadline the official nominations for the Hugo balloting came in. There is still time to join the World Convention and vote on these titles. (UK & Europe, - $1.00 to Box 1372, Cleveland, Ohio, USA.)

For Best Novel, nominated are; AND CALL ME CONRAD, by Roger Zelazny; DUNE, by Frank Herbert; SKYLARK DUQUESNE, by E.E. Smith ; THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS, by Robert A Heinlein. For Best Short Fiction, nominated are; "Repent, Harlequin, Said The Ticktockman" by Harlan Ellison; "Doors of his Face, Lamps of his Mouth", by Roger Zelazny; "Star Dock" by Fritz Leiber; "Marque & Reprisal" by Poul Anderson; "Day Of The Great Shout" by Philip Jose Farmer. For Best Professional Magazine are nominated: If; Analog, Galaxy, F&SF, & Amazing. For Best Professional Artist are nominated; Frank Kelly Freas; Gray Morrow; Frank Frazetta; John Schoenherr; Jack Gaughan. For Best Dramatic Presentation: No Award. For Best Amateur Magazine; ERB-Dom; Double-Bill; Niekas; Yandro; Trumpet. For Best All-Time Series are nominated; LORD OF THE RINGS SERIES, by J.R.R.Tolkien; BARSOOM SERIES, by Edgar Rice Burroughs; FOUNDATION SERIES, by Isaac Asimov; LENSMEN SERIES by E.E.Smith; FUTURE HISTORY SERIES, by Robert A. Heinlein.

And finally, we may break our own rule and make promises for the next issue. Alex Panshin, whose "Non-fiction of Robert A Heinlein" appeared in April, has agreed to let ZS publish the second chapter of his book, "HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION" in the October issue. Entitled "The Period Of Success", the MS runs to 18,000 words, and will be published complete. It will not be published elsewhere. F.M.Busby has a criticism of Robert Heinlein's latest book, THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS, also due to appear in October, and much more material is on hand. Since October will mark our 3rd anniversary of publication, Issue 14 could be something special.

The Editor.

All Flesh Is Grass

by Clifford D Simak

Reviewed by Archie & Beryl Mercer.

(A) The hallmark of Clifford Simak is to write SF in a special folksy-wolksy style, wherein the most incredible happenings are by some mysterious alchemy that I don't altogether understand (not that I want to, all that much) reduced to the level of the utterly humdrum. Against such treatment, the sense of wonder doesn't have a chance. No matter what may transpire, the result for me is not far short of complete boredom.

And so it is here. Once again the author trots out the procession of parallel universes of which he is so fond. And once again he is simply tedious about it all.

The story starts all right, with a blazing bit of fast action. This, however, very soon gives place to a thick stodgy chunk of flashback that is all the more infuriating for having got in the way just then. However, the action wasn't anywhere near the real beginning of the story, so I suppose, having attracted the reader's attention in the way he did, that the author more or less had to go back for it. By the time events caught up with themselves again, nothing of particular interest seemed to be happening anyway - and continued not to happen for most of the rest of the book.

As for the title - "All Flesh Is Grass" - this is about as vague and nebulous a title (even in context) as can be arrived at, and is thus no more than the book deserves. (A far better title, to my mind, would have been "The March Of The Flowers" - but of course it would have been wasted on such a novel.)

To be fair, the book does contain enough material for an excellent short story. Nothing, however, that to my mind justifies treatment at anywhere near 260-page length.

(B) After reading books like this, and Daniel F Galouye's "The Lost Perception" (see ZS.12), I am strongly tempted to wish that well-known authors would not write best-sellers and/or Hugo-winners. One tends to expect them

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* ALL FLESH IS GRASS, by Clifford D Simak, 260 pp. 18/-, Gollancz, 1966.

to continue to maintain that earlier high standard. Which, since they are Only Human, is patently unfair.

Reading "All Flesh Is Grass", I found myself constantly harking back to the originality, beauty, and sheer power of books like "City" and "Way Station". Clifford Simak's new novel falls lamentably short of either of these. On the other hand, since this is a Simak book, there are passages of beauty, and the much-harped-on pastoral element is also present. The writing is as polished and professional as one would expect, and the story, having most (if not all) of the best ingredients, holds the attention tolerably well. Yet my main feeling after reading it was an indefinable disappointment.

So what went wrong ? For one thing, the ending strains credulity. I have a fairly high opinion of the human race in general, despite its many idiocies and cruelties, but even so I doubt if Simak's solution to the problem posed by the story would work - at least, not for long. I'd very much like to think that it would work - I still cherish certain ideals - but, regretfully, I must continue to doubt.

Another thing is that the story is written in the first person singular. Simak doesn't seem quite at ease with this method of narration. He seems to write much more easily and fluently when he himself adopts the role of observer; interested and compassionate as a spectator of what his characters are doing, and why.

Having said which, let me stress that this book is, like the curate's egg, by no means all bad. Many people will doubtless enjoy it very much - some simply because it is a Simak novel, others in spite of the fact that it is not one of his best. After all, even Simak-in-a-minor key is still Simak - a first-class story-teller, and a fine descriptive writer.

Archie & Beryl Mercer, 1966.

PAPERBACKED BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Children of the Lens, by Edward E Smith. 254 pages, 60¢, Pyramid.Books.
Last of Pyramid's reprint of the 6-volume Lensman series.

The Skylark of Space, by Edward E Smith. 160 pages, 60¢, Pyramid Books.
A Pyramid reprint of the first of the 'Skylark' series.

The Impossibles by 'Mark Phillips', 160 pages, 50¢, Pyramid Books.
Appeared in Analog as 'Out Like A Light'; Garrett & Janifer.

The Wonder War by Laurence M Janifer. 128 pages, 40¢. Pyramid Books.
An original novel, reprinted.from January 1964.

Conditionally Human by Walter M Miller, Jr. 174 pages, 3/6, Panther PB.
contains the title story, 'Dark Benediction', & 'The Darfstellar'.

Waldo & Magic,Inc. by Robert A Heinlein. 192 pages, 60¢, Pyramid Books.
two short novels from Robert Heinlein, third reprinting in paperback.

SECOND THOUGHTS

CRITICISM OF CRITICISM

by Ben Solon

As I write these lines, the year is barely three months old; and I have yet to read the article.

But I'm not worried. I know it will be written.

It is always written; every year, year after year, with the infallability of a swallow returning to Capistrano.

Anyone who has been reading fanzines for more than a year will know what article I'm referring to. It will appear (at least once) between now and December 31st, 1966. It will be couched in strong and scathing language. It will come in the form of a proclamation; its author has discovered a Great Truth.

He has found out what's wrong with science fiction.

The basic premise of this critique will be that science fiction as a field of literature is pretty blaah. The author will then proceed to pillory Pohl, flay Farmer, crucify Campbell and mutilate Moorcock. He will end his diatribe by saying something to the effect of ; ".....and that's why an entire field of literature is so stinking rotten, lousy...."

Maybe so. Or maybe not. I always pause after reading such an article to wonder why the author, if he thinks SF is such a waste of time, bothers to read the stuff in the first place.

I'd be among the first to admit that a goodly percentage of current science fiction leaves something to be desired; but any genre that can support ten magazines - six of them monthly - can't be all bad. On the contrary, the average quality of magazine SF, if anything, is improving. Sure, clunkers are being published; but that's inevitable; magazine editors work by the kitchen sink

method; the best stories submitted (that these are good stories doesn't necessarily follow) will be bought. Not because they're gosh-wow great, but because they're the best items on hand when the deadline rolls around. Sad but true.

But if the fellow who says "SF stinks" is wrong; so is the lad who thinks science fiction is the only branch of literature worth reading.

The truth lies somewhere between these two extremes.

Science fiction's main trouble is not editors (bless their stony hearts) who can't or won't do their jobs; but a simple lack of competent criticism.

As most of you probably know, a reviewer's objective is to express his reactions to a short story or novel in such a way that his readers will know whether or not they want to read it. A critic, on the other hand, attempts to measure the work by more lasting and more nearly absolute standards. It is his job to determine its place in the art (and make no mistake about it; SF writing <u>is</u> an art) of which this work is a segment.

A good critic is as indispensable to an art form as a good artist. He defines limits, describes goals and lets the spectators know if the players came close to scoring or if they struck out. And, if you think this isn't necessary, I suggest you read some of the reviews THE BLIND SPOT received when it was first published in book form back in 1950 or thereabouts.

A bad critic is worse than no critic at all; he leads the art form nowhere and discourages the artists.

Good criticism, like good writing, is an elusive thing to pin down. However, it will do no harm to remember that criticism, like science fiction, means what we point to when we say it. There are, however, three basic questions every good critique should answer: (1) What was the author trying to say ? (2) Did he succeed or fail ? (3) Was it a good thing to attempt in the first place ?

To answer the first two questions the critic must exercise discernment; to answer the third, judgement. They are not always the same thing, and they are not always found in the same critic.

(II)

Possibly the worst professional - and I use the term loosely - book review column in existence is Judith Merril 's in F&SF. In the September 1965 issue of that magazine, for example, she reviews Philip Jose Farmer's DARE; she says of it: "This time /Farmer has given us/ a plot out of PLANET STORIES by Charles Fort, which might be all right in its way, if it were not abruptly cut off in the middle, and hastily synopsised in the last few pages - peopled by colourful cardboards cut right out of the book club ads for historical novels. "

This double-talk tells a prospective reader nothing about the book save that its somewhat reminiscent of good ole PLANET STORIES, and it uses some of good ole Charlie Fort's ideas, and that the plot is choppy. Fine. Except

it's all she has to say about the book. Oh, she makes a few remarks about Farmer's ability as a scenearist; but the above quotation is all she has to say about the book.

In the same column, she reviews Keith Laumer's GALACTIC DIPLOMAT. She says a great deal about Laumer's abilities as an adventure story writer; she calls him a - brace yourself - "heroic writer", but she doesn't say anything about the book.

And she's in consistant; not many people would knock a story (DARE) for cardboard characterisation, and then a page or so later praise an author's (Laumer's) ability to create pasteboard heroes. She says of him; "Maybe what jars me most in the Retief yarns is Retief himself - such a fine figure of a fellow, full of moral and intellectual, as well as muscular and social virtues ---" What she doesn't seem to realise is that Retief is every bit the cardboard that Farmer's characters are; and that the only thing that saves him is Laumer's talent - not as a "heroic writer" - but as a slapstick writer.

And, there's more.... In the January issue, Miss Merril sees fit to discuss the state of British SF, and William Burroughs... Now this may mark me as some sort of intellectual pygmy, but I don't think very much of Burrough's writing ability (and before you ask, I don't think much of Superman or Edgar Rice Burroughs either); but even if I did, I would still object to his presence in what is supposed to be a science fiction book review column. Likewise, the report of British SF; it's all very interesting, but it's not book reviewing.

Miss Merril is up to her old tricks in the February issue of F&SF; in a review of Charles Beaumont's THE MAGIC MAN, she says a great deal about Beaumont's abilities as a writer but very little about the book in question. She also reviews Poul Anderson's THE CORRIDORS OF TIME.... Of it, she says, " All the best bits here are vivid passages of early English and Danish history." That tells a potential reader quite a bit about Anderson's novel, doesn't it ?

Of course, all of Miss Merril's reviews aren't as bad as those quoted; but they aren't that much better, either.

To skip across the Atlantic for a moment, let's take a look at NEW WORLDS... On the whole, the quality of the book reviews in NW is better than those found in F&SF -- much better. But if NW has published some excellent reviews during 1965, it has also published some that I doubt any respectable fanzine editor would touch with a ten foot pole (but then, who ever heard of a respectable fanzine editor ?) *

Alan Forrest's roview of STORMBRINGER, for (horrible) example....

Mr Forrest evidentally belongs to that school of thought which holds that one should never call a spade a spade when one can call it an instrument for the implementation of terrestrial excavations.... To compound the felony, he

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* This remark I strongly contest ! (Editor)

also possesses Miss Merrill's habit of saying (writing, rather) a great deal about the book in question's background, but very little about the story itself. Mr Forrest's review of STORMBRINGER is full of sound and fury, but it signifies very little (he is describing Moorcock's "secondary world"); "There are dark battlefields where bloody men come screaming out of the night; black cowled midnight horrors with fixed grins; ghastly, wailing, winged women /Awfully apt alliteration, eh ?/ running amok with their wings clipped; doom-laden seas /Now there's a metaphor to conjure with.../ where black, rat-infested warships fill the air with fireballs."

Thankfully Mr Forrest seems to be the only one of his kind engaged in professional book reviewing in England.

For the most part, NW's book reviewing appears to be in competent hands; Michael Moorcock, Lang Jones and "James Colvin" are doing an excellent job -- I don't always agree with their conclusions, but if nothing else they're the most carefully thought-out wrong opinions I've ever come across.

Possibly the best SF book review columns in existence are P. Schuyler Miller's "Reference Library" in ANALOG, and Algis Budrys' "Galaxy Bookshelf". These men are just about the only reviewers in our field whose opinions are always worth reading. Sadly they represent a vanishing breed.

Three columns to evaluate an entire field of literature... that's not too many....

Compare the present state of affairs with that of the Golden Age of book reviewing in the magazines. In those days, people like Anthony Boucher, Schuyler Miller, Damon Knight, Frederik Pohl, Lester del Rey, James Blish and Theodore Sturgeon were writing SF criticism; today only Miller remains. And that criticism is missed, believe me.

If a field of literature is to grow, it needs competent criticism. A critic's job, as I mentioned above, is to define limits and describe goals; or as James Blish would have it, (THE ISSUE AT HAND; Advent Publishers, $5.00 -- read it ! This has been an unpaid political announcement) :
" The function of a critic in this field... is two-fold; First of all, he must ask that editors and writers be conscious of the minimum standards of competence which apply to the writing of all fiction; secondly, he must make reasonable clear to his non-professional readers what these standards of competence are. "

We're not getting much of this today. The professional reviews are dated to the point of uselessness by the time they're published; often they are crowded on to a few pages in the back of the magazine. And while I feel it's better to cover a few books in depth than a lot of books in shopping-list reviews; it's impossible to properly evaluate the SF field in the few pages the magazines allow their reviewers.

Now, what can be done about this ? In the otherwise excellent THE ISSUE AT HAND, James Blish suggested the re-instatement of prozine letter columns as being a solution of sorts to this problem.

Well, I don't know.

In the first place, there are very few people - in or out of fandom - who are capable of writing competent criticism of science fiction - or anything else. Secondly, I have seen very few letters in the promag letter columns that went beyond the "Poul Brunner's story was good..." sort of thing; most prozine letter hacks during the Golden Age were far more concerned with being clever, witty devils than with writing technical criticism.

If lettercolumns aren't the answer, what is ?

I wish I knew, it would make writing the closing lines of this article a lot easier.

Seriously, the answer to this problem is simple; if SF needs competent criticism -- give it criticism. This isn't much of an answer, I quite agree; but we have to start somewhere.

Ben Solon, 1966.

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Close to Critical by Hal Clement. 190 pages, 16/-. Victor Gollancz Ltd.
This is one of Clement's novels about strange alien worlds - it dates back to 1959-60 in Analog.

The 8th Galaxy Reader, edited by Frederik Pohl. 250 pages, 21/-. Gollancz.
12 stories from Galaxy, being; Comic Inferno, Brian Aldiss; The Big Engine, Fritz Leiber; A Day On Death Highway, Chandler Elliot; The End of the Race, Albert Bermel; The Lonely Man, Theodore L Thomas; A Bad Day For Vermin, Keith Laumer; Dawningsburgh, Wallace West; And All The Earth A Grave, C.C.McApp; Hot Planet, Hal Clement; Final Encounter, Harry Harrison; If There Were No Benny Cemoli, Philip Dick; Critical Mass, by Frederik Pohl & C.M.Kornbluth. (plus introduction).

The Anything Box by Zenna Henderson. 205 pages, 18/-. Victor Gollancz Ltd.
14 stories by the author; The Anything Box; Subcommittee; Something Bright; Hush !; Food To All Flesh; Come On, Wagon!; Walking Aunt Daid; The Substitute; The Grunder; Things; Turn The Page; Stevie & The Dark; And A Little Child-; The Last Sleep;

S.F. Showcase. edited by Mary Kornbluth. 264 pages, 21/-. Whiting & Wheaton
12 stories, being; Ticket To Anywhere, Damon Knight; That Low, Theodore Sturgeon; Or The Grasses Grow, Avram Davidson; The Man Who Ate The World, Frederik Pohl; The Long Remembering, Poul Anderson; The End Of The Beginning, Ray Bradbury; A Work Of Art, James Blish; The Cold Green Eye, Jack Williamson; Med Service, Murray Leinster; Expendable, Phillip K. Dick; Mantage, Richard Matheson; Nightmare Number Four, Robert Bloch.

Time In Advance, by William Tenn. 174 pages, 3/6. Panther Books.
contains the title story, and "Firewater", "The Sickness", "Winthrop Was Stubborn".

STAR FOX

Poul Anderson's new novel reviewed by Richard Gordon

THE STAR FOX, Poul Anderson's latest novel, consists of three novelettes which were first published in F&SF last year.

The story is typical Anderson work, immediately recognisable. The swashbuckling hero Gunnar Heim is a first cousin to Nicholas Van Rijn, an interstellar privateer who could as equally well have existed in Elizabethan England as in Anderson's future.

The basic situation is pretty stereotyped, but this is unimportant in the light of the book's aim of entertainment. Earth and a rival civilisation the Aleriona, have met in space and have observed an uneasy truce until the latter provoke matters by taking-over a colonial outpost of France's,"New Europe." The Aleriona claim that all the humans on New Europe have been killed, but Heim's intuition tells him differently. His suspicions are confirmed when he meets an itinerant Hungarian minstrel, Endre Vadasz, a kind of latter-day Allan-A-Dale, who wanders round the planets singing for his living.

Heim tries to go through legal channels to have Earth committed to a showdown with the Aleriona at all costs. However, the powerful Peace Party is entirely committed to ruinous appeasement; and they will go to any lengths, however brutal, to stop Heim and prevent the war. Harried by the Peace Party, himself discredited, Heim goes to the French goverment (the backing nation of the captured colony) and persuades them to commission him as a privateer with the somewhat flimsy legal right to make one-man and one-ship warfare against the Aleriona

The latter two thirds of the book are not nearly as interesting as this first section; most of the action is entirely unnecessary to the basic theme of the book, and amounts to little more than padding, designed to fill out the pages until the inevitable conclusion is reached. This latter part is a disappointment after the interesting political intricacies of the first third of the book.

Some of the book is rather more interesting than are most space-operas - the songs of the minstrel Endre Vadasz, culled from various traditional sources, are continually interposed whenever the action threatens to flag; to add to this, half of the songs are in French - particularly where Vadasz is attempting to woo the inevitable maiden fair with soft music and fair words.

THE STAR FOX, by Poul Anderson, 18/-, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1966.

The aliens, as characterised by their main delegate, Cynbe, with their elaborate musical speech, and courtly and inflexible manners, are of some interest, but are hardly original.

As a book, STAR FOX failed to hold my interest after the first part; I constantly had to re-read a section I'd unconsciously missed during the latter 150 pages. The characters aren't very memorable, and although Heim and Vadasz are interesting, they are still stereotypes - stereotypes not of SF in the main, it is true, but of the stories of Raphael Sabatini and his ilk about the swashbucklers of the seventeenth century. Vadasz in particular is an entirely mediaeval figure, although this does make him more interesting than the average SF character.

This isn't the best book Anderson has written by any means; although the first part is by far the best section of the book, the rest fails to stand up to the promise of this in any way. As a whole, STAR FOX is a good run-of-the-mill space opera, which is a pity, because it could have been a lot more had the political engineering of the first section been made the principal part of the story and the somewhat unoriginal space-opera/swashbuckling of the latter two thirds been cut down considerably. As it stands in its entirety, this is a middle-class Anderson novel, neither his best nor his worst. But in view of the promise of the opening chapters, this is a disappointment.

Richard Gordon.

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

The Dark Side edited by Damon Knight. 240 pages, 21/-, Dobson Science Fiction 13 stories, being; The Black Ferris, Ray Bradbury; They, Robert A. Heinlein; Mistake Inside, James Blish; Trouble With Water, H.L. Gold; The Golem, Avram Davidson; C/O Mr Makepeace, Peter Phillips; The Story Of The Late Mr Elvesham, H.G.Wells; It, Theodore Sturgeon; Nellthu by Anthony Boucher; Casey Agonistes, Richard McKenna; Eye for Iniquity, T.L.Sherred; The Man Who Never Grew Young, Fritz Leiber.

Star Fourteen edited by Frederik Pohl. 240 pages, 21/-, Whiting & Wheaton. The 'best' of the Ballantine 'Star' series, containing; Whatever Happened To Corporal Cuckoo ?, Gerald Kersh; The Advent On Channel Twelve, Cyril Kornbluth; Disappearing Act, Alfred Bester; Twin's Wail, Elisabeth Mann Borgese; Country Doctor, William Morrison; Daybroke, Robert Bloch; The Deep Range, Arthur C Clarke; A Cross Of Centuries, Henry Kuttner; The Man With English, H.L.Gold; Sparkie's Fall, Gavin Hyde; Space-Time for Springers, Fritz Leiber; Dance Of The Dead, Richard Matheson; The Happiest Creature, Jack Williamson; It's a Good Life, Jerome Bixby.

The Furious Future by Algis Budrys...174 pages, 3/6. Panther paperback. Contains 9 stories by the author; Silent Brother; Between The Dark And The Daylight; And Then She Found Him; The Skirmisher; The Man Who Tasted Ashes; Lower Than Angels; Contact Between Equals; Dream Of Victory; The Peasant Girl.

The Maker Of Universes by Philip Jose Farmer. 190 pages, 40¢. ACE Books. A new novel by Farmer, almost a fantasy and certainly very unusual!

Return of the Plow

The SF field turned over by

"Renfrew Pemberton"

THE SCIENCE FICTION FIELD PLOUGHED UNDER

The original incarnation of this column, under the Renfrew Pemberton by-line, began in CRY No. 82, July 1955, and ended with its 50th appearance (the last 48 were consectutively, relentlessly and toward the end of it intolerably monthly) in CRY No. 132, October 1959. Oh, a few more sporadic Plow and semi-Plow columns popped up within the next year or so, but the spell was broken. That is to say, I was emancipated from the hypnotic tyranny of full coverage for a monthly deadline. The problem was that it had gotten to the point that I could not enjoy reading the stuff any more; rather than following the story I'd find myself thinking of what to say about it in the next Plow. (Reading some professional reviewers, I shouldn't wonder but what they may have somewhat the same trouble.)

Well, now; so much for ancient history. Our very own Kindly Editor, Pete Weston, has suggested that something not unlike the old Plow column might find room in these hallowed pages. I'm not sure it can be done any more (by me) but I'm willing to try, and to see how it goes, if you are. Complete coverage of the magazine field (as available here) is probably too compulsive an effort, and in a quarterly zine would make for much too large installments, particularly since much of the subject material would be well on its way to limbo in the reader's consciousness by the time the Plow reached his own field of attention. Further, there is a great deal more original SF in book form (both PB and bound) these days, than was the case 6 or 10 years ago; I'd like to dip around in that also, rather than trying for full coverage on any specific aspect pf the field.

But for a starter, let's do look at the magazines. Things have certainly changed; at one time, perhaps around 1955-56, there were over twenty SF titles on the stands, excluding Fringe-Interest Stuff, such as Fate and all that; I see by an old log-sheet that 16 of these were covered in CRY 99, Feb '57 -- and I do not even recognise some of the abbreviations. Sic Transit Gloria Extramundi, I guess.

Today my favourite newsstand carries exactly seven titles; 3 monthly and 4 bimonthly. Of the former, at hand are the May '66 issues of Analog, F & SF, and If. Of the other, we can eyeball the May Fantastic and Worlds of Tomorrow, the April (40th Anniversary) Amazing, and the June Galaxy. Well; why not ?....

Amazing's Annish-40 is 100%-reprint, although the usual policy of the new publisher of the former Ziff-Davis zines is One New Story and the rest reprints. There is a lot that can be said about reprints, and some of it is even printable. Here we have 8 items, copyrighted 1926, 1927 (3), 1939 (2), 1940 and 1951. Call it nostalgia, but the '39-40 items seem to me to stand up quite well, while the '26-27 pieces are dry and creaky, and the '51 entry a bit on the slight side. (OK, one guess as to when I started reading the prozines regularly) "Beast of the Island" (Alexander Phillips) still grabs me, with its gimmick of an incredibly ancient sun-powered robot left over from - well, you name it - Mu? - as the Monster who terrorises and kills intruders on its isolated island. "Pilgrimage" was originally "The Priestess Who Rebelled" when Nelson S Bond wrote two (or is it three ?) stories just before War-2, about a postArmageddon matriarchal society; despite the flood of later imitators (of course, Bond drew from Benet's "By The Waters of Babylon", but he drew well) this still holds up nicely. And I'm glad to see Don Wilcox's "The Voyage That Lasted 600 Years" in print again. As the editor's blurb proclaims, this one predates Heinlein's "Universe/Commonsense" and van Vogt's "Centaurus II" , all of which develop further the ideas that Wilcox

threw grandly into just this one novelette. Wilcox was never great, but he could be fascinating to say the least, and this is perhaps the best thing he ever did, as far as ideas are concerned.

Wallace West, Doc Keller, Ed Hamilton and G. Peyton Wertenbaker (I'm not joking!) make up the 1920's contingent, and I will not say that the stories are bad in themselves. But they are dated and aged pretty badly in the light of later works - which can happen to any writer who is forced to tolerate successors. And H Beam Piper, writing in 1951, tossed off a peace-by-fiat gimmick tale that obviously missed his usual market (Campbell) or Ziff-Davis would never have seen it. But I feel a digression coming on, the Editor permitting....

The trouble is,(he digressed), that some of our former stalwarts are not only living on their laurels, but are cannibalising them. Was it 4-5 years ago that James Blish was determinedly padding out his old (circa late '40's) TWS novelettes into full-length paperbacks ? Let alone Eric Frank Russell, and most of van Vogt's output since 1950 has been this sort of hashwork, (though let's do note that he is on a new series now); he put "The Changeling" together with the two Pendrake stories, whether they fit or not (and they really did not), to make "The Beast" in the S.F.Bookclub edition. He used a large heavy mallet to pound the three superb Ezwal/Rull stories and the two competent Yevd stories into one set of covers as "The War Against The Rull" He expanded a short story ("The Great Judge") into THE MIND CAGE, the least coherent full-length work the man ever put his name to. And "Centaurus II" (ah yes, now you see where this train of thought began, if you were reading carefully, back there), plus a couple of other stories not quite consistent but still dealing with the Lesbees and the Goudys, et al, was recently conglomerated into ROGUE SHIP, which somehow misses having the impact of its original components, as do the other cited examples. I hate to see this sort of thing; I dug greatly just about everything vV ever wrote from 1939 through the following decade, but this regurgitation of a previously-digested cud - no matter who is doing the burping - does very little for me.

OK, Fantastic, May: The non-reprint is Avram Davidson's "The Phoenix and the Mirror", a Quest Bit with considerable flavour and whammy, which will doubtless show up in PB with a flyleaf saying "A shorter version appeared in.." -- another practice that is beginning to get Awfully Old around these parts -- that is, I do get tired of paying twice to read the same story in two moderately different versions. I like to read the magazines and I like to read the same story in two moderately different versions. I like to read the magazines and I like to read full-length versions of good stories, but do they have to rub the double-exposure bit in quite so much ?

Of the reprints, I suppose B. Traven's "The Third Guest" (1953) is Liter'chur but I enjoyed, more, Simak's "Seven Came Back" (1950), which has a Fierce Flavour On It. The other two items are a War-2 Wallace West using Slavic superstitions to Win The War, and a somewhat-later anti-war tearjerker by Walter M Miller Jr. Neither of these sent me very far, personally, but that could be subjective and maybe is.

Analog for May; One of these days I or some other right-thinking person will catch up to the bastard who binds stiff cardboard commercial return-postcards and return-envelopes into the reading matter for which we pay our own good money for our own reading pleasure - or supposedly, we do this - and we will find out

why it is necessary for this junk to be bound-in so that its removal risks tearing up the binding altogether. Advertising will just have to be taught its place, is all.

The best piece in here is Gordon Dickson's (short story) "Call Him Lord"; it has all the requirements; a slowly-revealed fascinating milieu and a snapper ending. Chas Harness' "The Alchemist" (and its series-stories to date) are just a bit too tortuous for my taste, but that's a purely personal reaction. The other three in here (by Paul Ash, Christopher Anvil, and Joe Poyer) are all perfectly-OK stories that only strike me as being perhaps a little *thin* because I had to look into the zine to rediscover what they were about, less than two weeks after initially reading them. They all read OK the first time, but I can't imagine rereading them unless they just happened to be handy on top of the nearest stack, or something. Of course, this is the case with the majority of everything that any of us read; it's no indictment.

The May F&SF; My good-and-evil friend and fellow-ogre Mr Boyd Raeburn of Toronto has categorised F&SF as the Magazine of Silly Pointless Vignettes. While this is neither wholly fair nor wholly accurate, the good-and-evil Mr Raeburn doth have a point. The magazine does feature some clever items that are sort of Pointless on purpose (as Ron Goulart's "Breakaway House" in this issue), for effect, in the traditions of Schoenfeld's "Built Up Logically" in a very early issue. But also, unfortunately, the idea of Plotless Stories has more of a hold on F&SF than the readers really deserve to have happen to them; many items get into those pages, I tend to feel, because the editor (or rather, the succession of editors since Tony Boucher left) can't quite decide whether a given piece has a plot to it or not, so therefore it must fit in well with all the other like pieces previously printed. If a plot does chance to obtrude itself (in the shorter works particularly), it will not be vigourous enough to sweat much and thus produce a noticeable aroma. (The longer items, and particularly the serials, have always been quite another bucket of clams -- except that I can't think when or what the last really potent longer work in this zine might have been (Well, a quick check shows Zelazny's "And Call Me Conrad", Davidson's "Rogue Dragon", and Anderson's "Star Fox" series within the past year, so colour me forgetful.) At any rate, F&SF from the original Boucher-McComas days seems to have been as hipped on style-over-content as ASF/now-Analog is on message-over-content, every time JWCjr gets a new bee in his helmet.

But to give a little credit, due or not, Greg Benford this time ("Flattop") does a workmanlike job on the Surprising Alien Menace theme, and Ed Clinton's "The Third Dragon" is not supposed to have a plot anyway. I don't know about John Shepley's "Three for Carnival"; I suspect that Raeburn would creeb and grotch at it, and perhaps with good reason; it does not make much overt sense, and Boyd and I are sort of hooked of Sense in our reading, regardless of the concensus.

If, May '66; If used to be the wastebasket of the Galaxy chain. Then it went monthly and has continued to improve and pick off better material as it goes along. Following Heinlein's "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress" (more on that one later) we see the Laumer-Brown collaboration "Earthblood", which is a gutsy tale so far as I've read it to date. Van Vogt's "Silkie" series, (which as aforementioned will likely show up collapsed like neutronium into hard covers) also appears; this does not stack up to thr pre-1950 vV, but at least it's New Stuff, so let's keep up hope.

I'm not particularly addicted to the theme that The Monsters Win because the Humans don't catch on fast enough (Robert Moore Williams "The Hide Hunters") or because they (the Humans) are Rank Clods ("The Historian", Carroll J Clem) or even Just Greedy ("Golden Trabant", R.A. Lafferty, though actually no sentient monster this time). I prefer stories like Gene Wolfe's "Mountains Like Mice", in which people can either win or lose, depending on whether or not they are Good Heads (survival types).

Worlds Of Tomorrow (oh, we have to abbreviate that; make it WoT), for May. Another new van Vogt story, and I'm trying to figure out why it disappoints me. I think it is because vV does not bother any longer to characterise so that his protagonists hook into the reader. His "The Ultra Man" is first described as a fattish slobby-looking fellow, and (unlike, say, 'Waldo') he does not come through much better as the plot progresses; he becomes more competent perhaps, but lovable he ain't - nor, to be more relevant about the whole bit, does he dredge up much of any kind of reader empathy except that minimum that is reserved for nearly any of the Good Guys. And this is too bad, because the situation is well-done (though the solution is not).

Phil Dick's "Holy Quarrel" is a fascinating scene spoiled by a very-standard blah ending. "The Worlds That Were" (Keith Roberts) must've escaped from F & SF or something, because of plot there is no semblance at all; mood yes, but plot, no. But there are goodies; Vreeland's "Spy Rampant.." has a couple of delicious twists to it. "Delivery Tube" by Jos P Marino fooled me on the kicker, but is well-worked and maybe the author's punchline is better than the one I expected at that, though I did feel that I was Led To Believe, etc... And C.C.McApp's "Trees Like Torches", while a little obscure in places is generally satisfying with its picture of an unknown world, gradually and expertly revealed.

And the June Galaxy; Beginning is Frank Herbert's serial, "Heisenberg's Eyes"; this one has a lot of potential, but I wouldn't dare try to evaluate it from this first installment, because there are, (thank Herbert!) too many unrevealed aspects left hanging to date. The revealed gimmick (a world in which gene-surgeons keep the race dependant by allowing no independantly-viable people to be born) is an original, I think. Now if this just does not turn into another Overthrow-the-Rulers bit, I'll be much relieved and appreciative.

Bob Silverberg has a good thing going with his Vorster series, of which his "Open The Sky" in this issue is possibly the fourth but not (with luck) the last. The first two were a little obscure, but unlike some other novelettes-converted-to-novels, I'm sure these will fit when put between covers.

"The Eskimo Invasion" (Hayden Howard) is in spots as obscure as they come, but despite its lack of what is usually defined as Plot, it is redeemed by the imagery and atmosphere brought to bear on the situation (which is, in itself, pretty Silly & Pointless, being determinedly unexplained and almost farcically presented). I wish this guy could try all over again with added Plotting. Two more Essentially Pointless Pieces; Forgas' "Priceless Possession" and "When I Was Miss Dow" by Sonya Dorman. Well, I am oversimplifying which is nothing new. Forges has a plot, but it's one of those downbeat foregone-conclusion things, particularly if you aren't quick enough to see

the blurb and look past it without reading it. And Miss Dorman, or Dow, displays a wealth of imagination but absolutely no eye to punchline; hopefully she will correct that deficiency, being (it would seem) a newcomer not addicted to Silly Pointless Vignettes, as yet.

I did mention "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress", didn't I ? I've read the magazine version but let's wait for the book version before commenting, because the author says there's considerable edge in length and content for the latter package.

I will not, by the way, be psychoanalysing the writer (in the fashion that has become popular here and there in the microcosm). Beginning with STARSHIP TROOPERS, many if not most fan reviews of Heinlein books have leaned heavily on the apparent (and quite diverse, if you do not happen to be a committed idealogue) Message of each successive book, rather than on story value, depth of background or the like. I do not go along with this approach, and oddly enough these same fannish reviewers don't either, with other authors who do not happen to hit their own personal Panic Buttons, if that is not too lewd an allusion for this Family-Type Readership.

My main objection about STARSHIP TROOPERS is that it is an interesting episodic narrative but that when all is said and done the reader cannot find any plot to it. In STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, it is not made entirely believable to me that nothing less than Christlike self-sacrifice would advance the aims of Valentine Michael. In GLORY ROAD I'd have welcomed a little less unexplained magic and a little more viable rationale. And so on... I forgot to mention FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD; there, too, was more magic than one really felt at home with in the context.

But the majority of fan-reviewing has been somehow hung up on ideology rather than on story value; TROOPER... was called not for lack of plot but for Fascistic or militaristic "tendencies". STRANGER.. was hammered for sexual irresponsibility or something of the sort, and GLORY ROAD much the same except that somehow the author was also suspected of being anti-Freeways (perish the thought..). And as for ..FREEHOLD; I knew the holler of Racist would be raised, but I was not pleased to be so right about that pessimistic view of the brains of this-and-that fan. (The eager competitiveness of Fan in the Standing Conclusion Jump is a source of wonder.)

And so it goes. When the ...MISTRESS book shows up, I'll try to review it as non-ideologically as some other of these fellas could do if they were not so afflicted with whatever Itch perturbs them.

The magazine cross-section does not seem to be the best approach; there are too many PB books and not enough space (this way) to tangle with them, even briefly. But for a first try at reviving the Plow or some equivalent, it probably wasn't the worst way to go about it, either. Next time a few changes perhaps -.

F.M. Busby, 1966.

THE *ALIEN* WAY

by Gordon R. Dickson. Bantam PB, 50¢, 1965. reviewed by John Boston

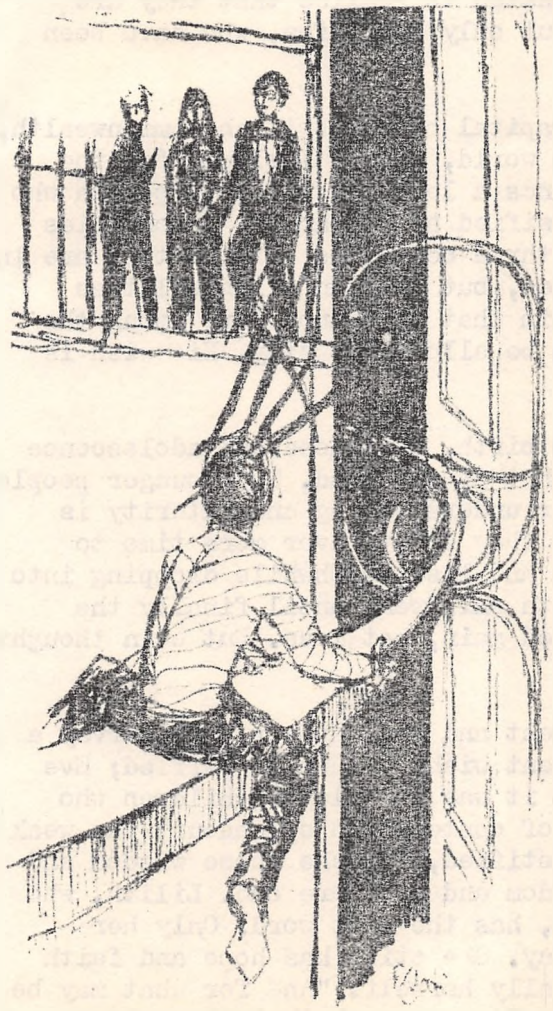
It is a truism that a competent writer can build an excellent story of the most worn-out plot material, as witness A C..NTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ and THE PUPPET MASTERS. Gordon R Dickson's THE ALIEN WAY is another such book. Dickson has taken his very well-done novelette "The Hard Way" (Analog, January 1962) and expanded it into a novel that stands head and shoulders over most of the current output, although it is still another variation on the theme of Menacing Aliens. A brief summary of the rather complicated plot is in order. Kator Secondcousin Brutogas of the family-oriented Ruml People encounters on a scouting voyage a wrecked spaceship from Earth containing a dead earthworm. Handling it, he is invaded by virus-sized mechanisms that allow zoologist Jason Barchar to live in Kator's mind undetected and perhaps gain valuable information on the Ruml and their world. From here we are told two parallel stories, - Kator's path through the baffling maze of Ruml culture towards personal conquest of Earth; and Barchar's struggle against the humans around him to keep them off the path to inevitable war with the Ruml.

The project is independantly financed and operated by a professional and scientific foundation. Barcher's first problem is to keep it from being turned over to the military; then, he must keep the sheer alienness of the Ruml from making peace impossible, while he studies them to learn how man and Ruml may coexist when the basic drive of the aliens is conquest. Working against him is the lack of confidence of his fellow workers, and then of the military. Barshar is right and knows it; but he cannot explain the totally alien to those who have never experienced it, never lived within the alien frame of reference as he has. And allied with this is the growing suspicion that Barchar himself may be influenced and controlled by the alien.

In the story of Kator, Dickson has attempted something rare in SF; true alienness. He doesn't entirely achieve it, of course; even if a writer could conceive of the truly alien, he could not communicate it through words on paper. Even so, the attempt is worthy of consideration. Most fictional nonhumans, even those considered most realistic, are merely humans with telepathy or an exaggerated fear of heights or equally-exaggerated class consciousness. Clement's Barlennan would have been perfectly at home on the bridge of a New England clipper; we all recognise ourselves and our neighbours in Tolkien's Hobbits. Dickson has tried to make his Ruml People alien individually as well as socially, and though there are holes in the picture, he has done a good job. From a single basic premise he has built up a complex and consistent civilisation in which the drive toward survival takes a different course from humanity's. THE ALIEN WAY makes no great pretence at literary excellence. Its characters are typical SF-stereotypes and its theme is no profound message of alienation or nausea. But the skill with which the story has been woven together makes this an achievement in popular fiction and one of the best SF novels of 1965.

GBS back to methuselah

A SHAVIAN EVALUATION by MARTIN PITT



It is not generally realised that George Bernard Shaw wrote science fiction. As a philosopher, he was deeply involved in the mass of ideas, theories, concepts and discussions which followed Darwin's Theory Of Evolution, and his interest in politics and allied subjects led him to become a learned student of human society, and societies. It is not therefore so surprising that he should have written a well-integrated, logically-developed history of mankind from its beginning almost to its end, which comes well within the category of SF.

Shaw called his essay " a metabiological pentateuch", which means, roughly speaking, a study of evolution in five parts; a modern version of the Five Books of Moses in the Old Testament. This is not to say that Shaw has given the sort of pseudo-explanation story, with the antics of chaps in flying saucers being misinterpreted by the natives, which Mike Moorcock discussed in TANGENT-2. Nor is it like C.S.Lewis' moralistic world of devils and demons. The story is original although familiar in context, and has something to offer in the way of creative thought. It has been said that "Back To Methuselah" made all the following literature on

future society, such as "1984" and "Brave New World", irrelevant and unnecessary. Whilst not agreeing with this remark (I think our literature would be the poorer without these two latter works), I have little doubt that Shaw's work lessens the power of the social comment of these novels by comparison. It does, however, completely negate all those cruddy stories ending "Let there be Light" or something similar.

The book starts in the year 4004 B.C. (the year which the Church used to consider the Bible gave as the date of Creation) in the Garden of Eden. A few centuries later, we find Adam & Eve outside the Garden, their neglect of the weeding having resulted in an impenetrable jungle, and human history well on the way, with enough people around for wars, etc...

Then there is a big leap forward to what was for Shaw the Present Day, when two old men propound the theory that human life will have to be prolonged to three hundred years. They are, of course, misunderstood; they decided that it must be happening, not how it would happen. 250 years later, we move on to a Britain administered by Chinamen and Negresses. China, by the way, is administered by Scots. The British Goverment is still democratically elected, but its members are too pompous and self-opinionated to realise that they are superfluous. Long lifetimes have arrived, but only for a few, who have been forced to conceal this fact.

In the year 3000 a gentleman from the capital of the British Commonwealth, Baghdad, is visiting a remote corner of the world, namely Ireland, for the Traveller's Club to which he belongs. He finds a land inhabited by people who talk of children of sixty, and who are classified as primaries, secondaries or tertiaries, according to which of their three centuries of life they are in. He attempts to explain civilised life to them, but his own illogicalities defeat him. Eventually his stay convinces him that he cannot live among the childish short-lived people, and he begs to be allowed to stay. His wish is granted and he dies happy.

The 320th Century reveals a world where birth, childhood and adolescence are done away with. The only childhood is that of the mind. The younger people indulge in the arts and sciences until their understanding and maturity is such that these tools are no longer needed. They devote ever more time to thought, and it becomes ever more difficult and less worthwhile dropping into the crudities of language to communicate with children, until finally the power of speech is lost for ever, and counted gain, not loss. But even thought has its limits.

The ghosts of Adam and Eve and the Serpent and Cain appear, and survey a world which has turned out as only the Serpent wished. Adam is baffled; Eve sees that there is now no pain in life, but it was the clever children who accomplished in the end; Cain sees the end of contest and splendour; the weak have inherited the Earth; the Serpent is justified, for she chose wisdom and the knowledge of good and evil, and now wisdom and good are one. Lilith, who tore herself asunder to create Adam and Eve, has the last word. Only her curiosity has kept her from sweeping all away. She still has hope and faith that Life will supersede Matter, and eventually herself. "And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond. "

Now this may not be orthodox science fiction, but there is little doubt that it is genuine. It succeeds perhaps because Shaw was not interested in InterGalactic Civilisations and adventures on Other Worlds and other similar themes for "Future History" series. Even stories such as "Billenium" which deal with more mundane future life fail by comparison since they do not cover their subject completely enough to become something more than a story.

"BACK TO METHUSELAH" succeeds, I think, first of all as three main stories rather cleverly connected in five episodes; secondly as a study of human character, motives and society; thirdly as an exposition of Shaw's philosophy and observations on life, and fourthly (the sum of these) an intellectually satisfying piece of entertainment. It is not, of course, perfect. For a start G.B.S. was not a natural scientist himself, and his references to the sciences betray his lack of understanding in this field. Some of his future developments too, seem a little unconvincing in the light of more recent happenings, but this is the bane of all prophets. The character is not always completely delineated, but serves merely as a mouthpiece for a particular point of view; again, it has always been difficult to argue with oneself.

With, however, all its fault, the piece has a great many merits. We may not agree that it is good science fiction, yet we must agree that it is some form of science fiction. We may not agree with Shaw's view of the world, yet no-one who is concerned with the context of speculative science fiction can afford to ignore it.

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

I Can't Sleep At Night edited by Kurt Singer. 238 pages, 21/-, Whiting & Wheaton. anthology, containing; The Watchers, Ray Bradbury; Outside of Time, Carroll John Daly; The Family, Margaret St Clair; Skydrift, Emil Petaja; Mistress Sary, William Tenn; The Dead Man, Ray Bradbury; The Lost Day, August Derleth; The Man WhenCried "Wolf" Robert Bloch; The Smiling Face, Mary Elizabeth Counselman; Welcome Home, Charles King; These Debts Are Yours, Arthur J Burks; Ship-In-A-Bottle, P. Schuyler Miller; Please Go Way And Let Me Sleep, Helen W. Kasson.

World's Best Science Fiction 1966, edited by Donald Wollheim & Terry Carr. 288 pages, 60¢, ACE BOOKS, New York. A new collection, containing; Sunjammer, Arthur C Clarke; Calling Dr Clockwork, Ron Goulart; Planet Of Forgetting, James H Schmitz; Becalmed in Hell, Larry Niven; Apartness, Vernor Vinge; Over The River And Through The Woods, Clifford D Simak;"Repent, Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman, Harlan Ellison; The Decision Makers, Joseph Green; Traveler's Rest, David I Masson; Uncollected Works, Lin Carter; Vanishing Point, Jonathan Brand; In Our Block, R.A. Lafferty; Masque Of The Red Shift, Fred Saberhagen; The Captive Djinn, Christopher Anvil; The Good New Days, Fritz Leiber.

FANORAMA

by Harry Warner Jr.

Quick, now, where can you get a listing of all the science fiction stories written by Bob Silverberg ? Has anyone published a really complete index to Science Fiction Plus, containing more than the basics such as the titles of the stories and their authors ? Which issue of The Fantasy Collector, published that L. Sprage de Camp bibliography, and who was the editor, just in case he might have a copy for sale.

If you can answer more than one of those three questions, you must have built up an enormous collection of material about science fiction, and most probably keyed that collection to IBM cards so you can retrieve information instantly. If you're like the rest of us, you can't answer those questions and you don't know where to get the answers, either. You might write to a dozen authorities on science fiction before you'd find a clue.

All this is leading up to a metter that seems obvious to me but has been overlooked by everyone, up to now, to the best of my knowledge. We need an index to indexes dealing with science fiction & related matters.

I know that you hear complaints on all sides that fans aren't scholarly enough, that they don't tackle bibliographic and research projects as they should, that they fill their fanzines with ephemeral trivia. But the fact remains that over the years, an imposing amount of work has been done to reduce to index form a substantial proportion of the English-language science fiction literature, and special aspects of it. A minute fraction of these indices or indexes have appeared professionally or are so monumental that everyone knows about them. The vast majority of them are buried away in extinct fanzines, or appeared in such modest form or such small editions that their very existence is almost forgotten.

There is only one possible reason why we haven't already had an index to fantasy indexes, from some energetic fan. The project seems futile in a sense because of the total unavailability of the majority of these indexes. You can't advertise for a specific issue of an old fanzine, or for some one-shot leaflet in a book dealer's periodical, as you would advertise for some youthful novel by John Dickson Carr. What would we do with an index to indexes if there was one ?

There are several answers to that question. One answer involves egoboo for fandom as a whole, because publication of such a reference work would show fandom to have been more diligent than its critics believe. In the course of research for my History Of Fandom, I took notes on all indexes and listings that seemed likely to be useful to my purpose. Those listings, most of which consist of only a few dozen words, occupy ten single-spaced, closely-typed large pieces of paper, and I feel confident that I didn't find more than one-third of all the important indexes, maybe not that many.

Then there's the fact that fanzine collections do occasionally turn up for sale. If the Howard enthusiast, or the specialist in pseudonyms knew where to look, he might find the index he wants at a WorldCon auction that he would otherwise have failed to attend.

Most important of all, there is some kind of curse hanging over the major indexing efforts in fandom. This evil spell decrees that almost all of the pioneering projects of real scope run into some kind of bad luck; inaccuracy, in some particular aspect, or incompleteness because the researchers didn't know of the existence of some materials, or inadequate distribution once published. Second efforts at the same research topics are usually very well done. If the curse is there, we might as well try to live with it by making it possible to know of the existence of pioneer efforts, so that the second shots st the same targets can profit by the mistakes of the predecessors. Without an index to indexes, it's quite probable that a fan will start from the beginning again on something that had been done partially in the past, simply because nobody with whom he's in contact knows of the first effort.

I'd like to see an index to indexes that would contain the essential data on all the important indexes that have been distributed to this point, preferably with some hints about accuracy or lack of same on each listing, where known. It would include such things as the long series of listings of mundane fiction magazines of the first half of the 20th Century, that Bill Evans drew up years ago; any fanzine articles that purported to include a complete survey of a science fiction writer's published work; the pitifully small number of indexes to the contents of famous fanzines; the even more microscopic quantity of indexes to fanzine writings by certain professional authors; and the lengthy lists of new fantasy books issued in a given publishing season in the United States or in Great Britain, which you'll find occasionally copied in a fanzine from a trade publication. My notes on the matter, from the Fan History, are at the service of anyone with a couple of thousand hours to spare, and confidence that all science fiction won't have turned into fact by the time he could compile an Index to Indexes.

Harry Warner Jr.

Editor's note;

This may be a case of "steam-engine time", for within the past month since this article was received, two other sources have mentioned the possibility, quite independantly, of producing an "Index to Indexes". These are Harold Palmer Piser, and Roger G. Peyton, the latter contemplating such a project under the auspices of the proposed B.S.F.A. Checklist Foundation.

THAT DAMNED BRITISH RESERVE !

INTERSTELLAR TWO-FIVE by John Rankine. Dobson Books, 1966, 184pp, 18/-

reviewed by Pete Weston.

Some quality about an average 'British' science fiction novel is subtly different from any other. Better critics by far than myself have attempted and failed to pin down this quality, and I hardly expect to do more here than suggest that there is a lack of something rather than any hidden virtue in a 'British' story. Certainly the colours of such a novel are muted, toned down into pastels rather than the flaming reds and black violence of a Bester or a Vonnegut. Certainly the characteristic carries through the works of Tubb and Temple, Wyndham and Christopher, into a score more. It is present, heavily disguised in J.T.McIntosh's shallowness; in Arthur C Clarke's essentially stolid prose, camouflaged with the occasional and carefully-timed perfectly poetic phrase.

John Rankine has written what is to my knowledge an original novel for Dennis Dobson Books, and his book, INTERSTELLAR TWO-FIVE has the blandness of all those other 'British' novels. Although all the barriers go down between the characters in the story, an insubstantial foggy thickness shuts the reader from the author's imagination.

This is a very enjoyable book, a good book that leaves but the one lingering regret; that it could have so easily been made into a really excellent book. Easily that is, for an inspired writer, a brilliant writer, and I do not think that Mr Rankine rises much above competence.

The plot is simply stated and lends itself to easily-exploited action, along the lines of BIG PLANET or even more after a boy's african adventure. The spaceship of the story, Interstellar Transport Two-Five, lands and cannot take off again. No explanation is given, can be given, as to why the ship landed, and what was wrong with it. I'd also quibble with the ease with which the ship is broken into sections, and at the author who transports 90-foot, 100-ton cylinders through jungle on wooden wheels and a cargo-trolley.

Characterisation is annoyingly inconsistent. Just as a puppet begins to take on the overtones of reality, his strings are pulled and he changes back into rice-pudding. The complaint is of lack of depth, lack of more than a single facet to each personality, of the worries and follies and hopes and fears of you or I. Rankine's people are so damned inhuman between their occasional bout of colour and animation.

For instance, the love-, or if you wish, the sex-interest obtrudes in the book in a lukewarm and unreal manner. A cardboard nympho enters in scene I, to turn into a romantic schoolteacher by the third chapter. A luscious

girl falls in love with our hero almost immediately, and despite their moments when hope seems lost, despite her lack of clothes throughout most of the book, neither of them even think of things forbidden. Even that ridiculous row of dots and "Next morning.." would have been better !

A long time ago I castigated Arthur C Clarke for using the writer's rule-book a little too obviously in A FALL OF MOONDUST. Every chapter in that book ended on cliff-hanging climax, every chapter-opening relieved tension. It was too much of a good thing, spoilt the impact of tension through over-use. And here Rankine has done the opposite, has failed to let tension mount in progression to be relieved after the fires of interest have been stoked. His pacing is wrong.

Rankine does not have an ear for climax and anticlimax. His tragedies do not happen to living characters, they are told dryly through an impersonal, unmoved spectator. He misses the potential impact in every case, allows his 'people' to accept death after death with an indifference that is not even fatalistic. What should be the high-point of the book is given an irregularly-paced buildup, comes too early and is too easily overcome. All sorts of wonderful ideas, splendid pieces of imagination, are introduced matter-of-factly. There are bold concepts aplenty, but rather than thrown at the reader for him to chew upon, are almost disguised rather than used for effect.

TWO-FIVE is a highly entertaining, enjoyable book, even worthy of second reading. It is not outstanding, it begs for blue pencil and splicing, editing and rewriting. The inconsistencies of the plot do not matter the potentialities are all there, patiently waitinv and ploddingly missed. When a non-writer like myself can see so much that could have been done, something is wrong. Perhaps this points to Rankine's own lack of experience, perhaps he too is a novice feeling his way through the world of prose that gets horribly stilted in transit from mind to paper, of concept that slides from bizarre to mundane in transcription. Experience is the only virtue lacking here, and the book is recommended for reading.

NEW WRITINGS IN SF 8 edited by John Carnell. Dobson Books, 1966, 188pp,16s

Without wishing to appear too dogmatic, I'll say that this is one of if not the best of the "New Writings" series to date. Certainly I enjoyed the book a good deal more than some of its predecessors.

Theme of the collection is more-or-less space travel, and four out of the six stories fall into this category. Colin Kapp's "The Pen And The Dark" is the very best work I've seen from this author (Caution; I've not read all of his work!), and while an essentially 'mechanical' plot, without particular depth or characterisation, is nevertheless as imaginative as SF has been for a long time, and it held my attention all the way.

This story is followed by a dull little clunker whose hollowness rings out immediately. "Spacemen Live Forever" by Gerald W Page just doesn't belong in the company it's keeping - or anywhere except the reject pile.

Third story is unusual, came as a surprise to me. It is a very-neatly done little barbed piece, "The Final Solution", by E.W. Mackelworth. Next, John Rackham comes up with "Computer's Mate", which is annoyingly unplaceable. Personally I didn't like it, but have the sneaky feeling that others could find it enjoyable, and that someone will review it as being excellent Probably worth reading if only through curiosity.

John Baxter's "Tryst" is pretty poor, I think, because it is all about nothing in particular, and is completely without plot or even very much of anything else. It would be a 'mood piece' if it created any mood - it would be called 'deep' if there were anything remotely unusual present. As it stands it is an over-long vignette that didn't come off.

Keith Roberts ends the book with a long story, "Synth", the attraction of which was lost for me by it being a too-close derivative of J.T.McIntosh's "Made In America", which was published in Galaxy fifteen years ago. The two stories share a plot and about the same level of competence, and Keith Robert's in particular has some very nice touches of description and good writing. I think this is the closest thing to a story in the collection, it is certainly the most well-balanced and developed. I liked it very much.

A batting average of two duds and four more than average short stories is a reasonable score. The inconsistency in quality of these stories remains a mystery, since I'm assured that the New Writings idea pays higher rates for material than does the former top market of Analog. I'm at a loss to explain away the clunkers - and also wonder at the preponderance of British authors.

FANTASTIC VOYAGE by Isaac Asimov. Dobson Books, 1966, 212 pp, 21s.

This book gets reviewed under the heading of "Damn British Reserve" mainly because it suffers from the same lack of the other two books. But perhaps I jump ahead and synopsise. A blow by blow review will tell the tale.

Fantastic Voyage is not, despite Mr Dobson, Isaac Asimov's "first new novel in ten years". It is also not "undoubtedly his most outstanding work of fiction to date", and I am sure that Mr Asimov would agree with me here.

The book came about through an unlikely combination of circumstances, and the story has it that Isaac Asimov "wished he'd thought of" the basic idea of the plot. The skeleton of the book was drawn in by Otto Klement & Jay Lewis Bixby, and was adapted for screenplay. As you can see, this is not so much an Asimov book but something in which the Good Doctor had very little choice in action and description.

Machiavellian complexities resulted in "Asimov's" novel being no more, - and no less-, than a splendidly-done "book of the film", much as Theodore Sturgeon did with "Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea", and as many others have done with films such as "Forbidden Planet" and "20,000 Fathoms Under The Sea", to name but two.

Although the film has not yet been released, I have seen some stills from the picture, and it would certainly appear that FANTASTIC VOYAGE will be really an outstanding film. The sheer imagination of the settings will arouse that old sense of wonder in the most cynical of old timers, what it could do to the film-going public will be interesting to hear.

Isaac Asimov has been faced with the job of translating the colour and wonder of the wide screen into cold print. He has on the whole done a competent job, although it is difficult to judge this book on usual grounds, since Asimov was so obviously limited to following the story-line. The purely personal touches that the author might have put into one of his own works are thus missing in the most part. This book is well-done, concisely-written, and yet to me still lacked impact. The slow beginning I attribute to the film script, yet even in the middle of what really should be a fascinating trip through the human body, I found myself strangely unmoved. Why this should be so is puzzling, and I can only offer my opinions in explanation, for every element necessary to a good SF story is present here.

Possibly the book lacks character - the prose, while adequate, is never very personal, and failed consistently to reach out of the page and take my attention as it should. I found it impossible to really 'believe' in this story (or perhaps I mean 'suspend disbelief' rather than 'believe').

Asimov's style has never been obtrusive - his work has sometimes been said to have the cold immensity of deliberation of a chess game, and even in his very best works, such as THE CAVES OF STEEL (which must, I fear, be taken as the author's high-water mark in excellence) no great vividness ever came through to the reader.

This is an enjoyable, successful book. The plot is exciting and very imaginative, the characters are as well-drawn as you may expect, and more so perhaps. My only wish is that Dr Asimov would write a new novel of his own, that long-awaited sequel to CAVES OF STEEL, set on Aurora.

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

TRIVANA 1 by R.Cox Abel & Charles Barren. Panther PB, 1966, 170pp, 3/6d a new novel from Panther Books, seemingly first publication.

BEST FROM F&SF 11 ed. Robert P Mills. Panther PB, 1966, 190pp, 3/6d. contains the stories; "The Sources Of The Nile" by Avram Davidson; "Somebody To Play With", Jay Williams; "The Machine That Won The War", Isaac Asimov; "Go For Baroque" by Jody Scott; "Time Lag" Poul Anderson; "Shotgun Cure" Clifford Simak; "The One Who Returns", John Berry; "The Captivity" Charles G Finney; "Alpha Ralpha Boulevard" Cordwainer Smith; "Harrison Bergeron" Kurt Vonnegot; "The Haunted Village" Gordon Dickson.

the watch BELOW

by James White

reviewed by Brian W Aldiss

THE WATCH BELOW by James White. Whiting & Wheaton, 1966, 192 pp. 18/-

The ways in which one can write fiction are constantly changing; frequently, they are dictated by the changing circumstances of the world. The prose of Jack Kerouac is an instance of the latter case; though Beat itself may be regarded as something of of a passing fashion, Kerouac writes in a way that ideally expresses it. In this manner, Kerouac passes back to the movement some less transitory thing which gives that protest against a closed society significance it might not otherwise possess.

Kerouac's world, with its jean-clad junkies ever rolling from town to town, is so strange by earlier standards that if his best-known book, "On The Road", or his latest, "Desolation Angels", (just out from Andre Deutsch at 30s) could be posted back to the thirties in a time machine they would read like science fiction there. In particular, their hazy structure of beliefs, partly Christian, partly Buddhist, would appear unlikely; today we see those beliefs as part of the world process, which at once fragments and unifies.

This is not quite so far from the case of "The Watch Below", as it may seem. Every living novel must belong to its time, in rapport, reaction or exegesis, unless its author happens to be a towering genius like John Cowper Powys. James White is no towering genius, and his novel belongs to the longest time ago there is on the literary scale; a couple of decades. This is a Forties book.

I am referring to theme and treatment, but it is no coincidence that "The Watch Below" begins in 1942, in the days of World War Two. It concerns a specially designed oil tanker, "Gulf Trader", which is sunk in the Atlantic with three men and two women trapped aboard. The early chapters, which concern more or less known and experienced things, are well done and vivid; the presence of the women aboard is adroitly explained, while the tension of the situation helps to conceal the paucity of characterisation.

It is when these five people are inarguably on the sea bottom that the novel takes a plunge. At this point, it might have become several kinds of novel. It might, for instance, have become a drama of character; it might have become a dip into the strange pools of the mind; it might have become an essay in degradation, similar to Clebert's "The Blockhouse"; or it might have become a sex novel.

It becomes none of those things, though there were moments when I hoped the author was going to take the plunge into one of them. Early on in the novel, we come across a passage that, - despite the lapse in grammar at one point- holds promise of something pointed and chilly. It refers to some persons in suspended animation on board ship. "In a way all these people were dead. They had come willingly, even eagerly, on board ship ten years ago and died. Life had stopped for them then, and, should some unforseen catastrophe occur and the crew with their complex, foolproof timers be unable to revive them, they would remain dead. There was no way of them ever knowing when they became permanently instead of temporarily dead.

Or were they truly, physiologically dead in their cold sleep? Was it not possible, despite the halting of all life processes, that they dreamed ? It might take a whole decade for a single thought or a mind picture to form, and as long again to dissolve, but <u>something</u> must be going on in the frigid subconscious of those frozen minds, incredibly slow and faint though it must be - something which furnished a tenuous link between an outwardly dead body and the living souls..."

Well, the book is not about that, either. It remains strictly the old type of SF. The chaps pair with the girls, and their children and grandchildren live on to populate the part of the ship that is air-filled, sowing seeds to generate plants that keep the air cycle going, rigging electric circuits, and so on.

After the first generation, the characters are sketchy indeed, but I guess that a dedicated novelist of the Defoe school could have made the whole question of survival fascinating indeed. White's main invention in

this field is the Game, which the survivors play for hours on end, structuring time and maintaining sanity by doing total recall of scenes in their childhood. They also indulge in what is termed "airy persiflage", although from the few examples given, it would not see them far along the road. They also enjoy 'sparkling conversation'; this seems somewhat surprising, to judge from the samples vouchsafed us.

Here is a quotation which sums up the main occupation of the incarcerated generations; "The Game had become so much a part of their lives that it would have been harder to have stopped playing it than it would have been to stop breathing. With their children they made the great metal tanks echo to the songs of Bing Crosby and the tunes of Gilbert and Sullivan, or acted out famous plays or sometimes quite trivial incidents from their own past lives, or they had deep philosophical discussions regarding the probable background motivations, and future fictional actions of some very minor character in a remembered story.

"They had a lot of fun when the discussion revolved around a minor character from one of Wallis's stories, a character who was not even human. But oddly enough it often happened that such humourous and ridiculous philosophisings became the most serious of them all. Even so, their lives were not all singing and sparkling conversations and fun...."

Okay, as far as it goes, although the diet of Bing Crosby and G & S sounds pretty repugnant, while the name of the naval man may prompt us to wonder if this is not perhaps a roman a clef, with the denizens of Northern Ireland fandom trapped down there on the ocean bed. But if this Game obsession is what the novel is about, - and it would be a valid subject, for nobody has yet dealt centrally with time-structuring - it should be enacted for us, developed, and not handed out in cold summary.

"The Watch Below" has received much praise on both sides of the Atlantic while its publishers have been as enthusiastic as its reviewers. Even the staid "Times Literary Supplement" was admiring, and particularly liked the idea of the Game. Regretfully I have to record that it was here the novel seemed to me to fail. The Game is a good idea; but it is never expanded as it should be because the author is intent on doing something else. I suspect that that something else is recreating an old pattern of gosh-wow SF that is by now as dated as those deteriorating stacks of wartime "Astoundings", in which the Golden Age is turning brown.

The outline I have so far given of the novel may indicate that here is sufficient material for a book, possibly a splendid book. But White has had the sheer maniac inspiration of writing another novel and interleaving it with the story of the "Gulf Trader".

This second story is about an interstellar ship travelling towards Earth, manned by an alien race that breathes water. The first quotation above, the one concerning the people in suspended animation, is a description of the alien set-up. The aliens are beset by the usual troubles facing people on interstellar journeys, rioting and mutiny and all that. Despite this reviewer's respect for duty and ZENITH, he caught himself skipping a few of these passages

Perhaps it could be demonstrated that these two intertwined themes help each other; I found them only distractions. There is some interest to be derived from seeing how and aliens meet, since it is apparent from the start that they must, so complementary are some of their attributes. They encounter one another on the sea bottom, when the aliens and humanity in general are about to come to blows because they fail to understand each other. But luckily the Game has so improved the memories of the submerged humans that they can get the alien tongue off pat soon enough to put matters straight.

It is not difficult to see why "The Watch Below" will be popular with SF readers. It is so reminiscent of the great old stories of the great old days. There's something here of Van Vogt's "Far Centaurus", something of Frank Herbert's "Under Pressure", and something of Bertram Chandler's "Special Knowledge"; nothing of anyone like Kerouac, of course.

Apart from the characteristic SF habit of saving yourself working out one theme properly by pushing in another, White exhibits another mannerism which will endear him to the addicts of the forties. A brief quotation will demonstrate. The Surgeon-Lieutenant (who is referred to as 'Doctor') is talking to Wallis about one of the women;

"I'd even go so far as to say that her nightmares and general fidgets during the sleeping periods are partly the cause of Wellman looking for a new sleeping partner. Only partly, of course. But the fact remains that, without the comfort and reassurance of Miss Wellman, the Murray girl's sleep is likely to be seriously disturbed, which means that ours will be likewise. So I was thinking - "

"You can stop thinking!" Wallis burst out, with feelings close to panic. "Dammit all, Doctor, are you trying to organise an orgy or something.."

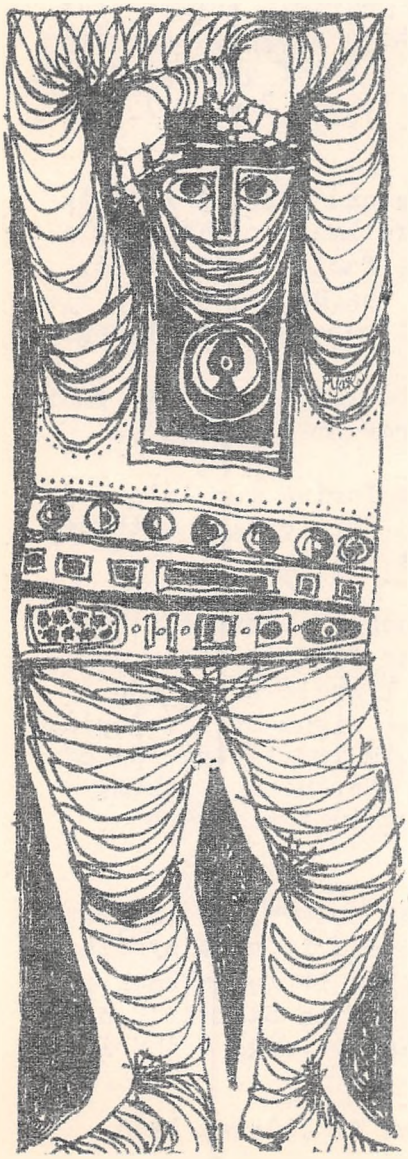
All references to sex seem to set these bold seafaring men 'close to panic'. They can hardly mention uh menstruation or uh fornication without stuttering. Even in the forties, sailors weren't that prissy.

For one SF writer to criticise another is a melancholy business, but critics are in short supply in this neck of the woods; for all that, dog eating dog does not necessarily enjoy the taste, and I would have been happier praising James White's novel. White shows some signs of developing into a rather more mature writer than before - even his irritating way of skirting round the most interesting topics shows his awareness of them. Certainly he is good enough for us to regret his being lumbered with a worn-out zeitgeist.

And for all the fault I have found with "The Watch Below", it is pretty readable, even if it offers little more than can be told in plot synopsis. Its central failure seems to me to lie in its timidity ; it looks back to old stale models instead of ahead to new ones; the watch is backward, not forward. It could have been written in the forties, and belongs essentially to that uh generation.

Frederik Pohl's

a plague of pythons



A PLAGUE OF PYTHONS by Frederik Pohl, Gollancz 1966, 158 pp, 16s.

Many people have become tired of the oft-reiterated argument that Amis, in NEW MAPS OF HELL, in ascribing the more creative part of the Pohl/Kornbluth collaboration to the former author, was demonstrating his lack of knowledge of the field. This book however, shows that this is an argument that cannot be repeated too loudly or too often.

Gollancz' blurb gives a precis of the story with its usual excited enthusiasm. It begins by assuring us that Pohl is virtually responsible for 'holding together' the science fiction field, and that thus we are deprived of the dazzling gems that he would have produced, had he not been so importantly occupied. Then follows the synopsis; a story that appears so banal and conventional that one scratches one's head and reads the first paragraphs again. Still, one reflects, perhaps Pohl's idea is to use conventional themes and settings, and to mix an original story out of these commonplace ingredients. One is reassured somewhat by the blurb, which finishes with the triumphal shout; "Vintage Pohl indeed!"

We see from the start that we are in for a story of stark realism. On the very first page someone tells someone else to go to hell, and someone picks his nose. On the next, we become aware of some peculiarities in the writing:

Review by LANG JONES

"Five years before, back in the old days before the demons came, when he was helping design telemetry equipment for the Ganymede probe, Chandler would not have believed his life would be at stake in a witchcraft trial. Not even that."

Not even what ? Not even a witchcraft trial ? Not even his life ? Not even the Ganymede probe ? Not even the old days ? The first proves correct, and we see from the outset that Pohl is one of those writers who like to keep their readers guessing.

As we progress through the book, we gradu·lly become aware that the writing is very peculiar indeed. I am still trying to guess how it came to be written, and how Gollancz could publish it without a thorough re-write job being done on it. The story is roughly as follows:-

Our hero, Chandler, finds himself, at the opening of the story, to be on trial, being accused of rape. However, this crime was committed while his mind was occupied with something else (one of the demons mentioned earlier). Normally, when people are possessed by the demons, it is acknowledged that they are not responsible for the crimes their bodies commit. But in this case, Chandler's mind was taken over while he was in a medical plant - a place where the demons never usually strike (a point, incidentally, that I do not remember being exolained.) But Chandler, we realise, is a good, clean-living guy - he wouldn't commit rape under his own steam. One can't help reflecting that if he had, perhaps a more interesting story might have developed. However... owing to a fracas at the court, he manages to get off with an 'H' (Hoaxer) branded on to his forehead, and goes wandering off having been banished from town.

He then meets up with a cranky sect, which appears to have found a way of combating the demons. Among this group he meets a girl with a face that is "drawn into a tight, lean line". He doesn't seem to notice her disfigurement, and in fact seems to find her quite attractive. He decides to go along with this group, but at his first meeting he discovers that they were wrong about their method of resistance when they all get killed off, and it all comes to nothing. Chandler, however, miraculously escapes, and continues on his way. This whole episode occupies 23 pages, and is there merely to provide a motivation for the next part of the story. It contributes nothing that a halfway skilled hack could not have put in using a page or two.

His mind is then taken over, and after being forced to go to Hawaii, he finds that the demons are really human. The rest of the book is concerned with his efforts to avoid death by entering the heirarchy, becoming a demon himself, and ultimately overthrowing the whole society with great panache.

The story is told in an interminably boring way, and the writing is on a level with the lowest of hack journalism. Here are some juicy examples, taken at random from a section of twenty pages:-

"Chandler craned his neck. His curiosity was becoming almost unbearable. He opened his mouth, but - "I said 'Shut up,' " rumbled the cop..

The policeman slammed the door behind him, ripping rubber off his tires with the speed of his U-turn and acceleration back towards Honolulu.

Chandler's mind yelled and flinched... as they rounded blind curves, where any casual other motorist would have been a catastrophe..

She chattered away as the little car dug its rear wheels into the drive and leaped around the green and out of the gate."

....One can go on, and on...

There is a foreigner, presumably Russian, although he speaks like a mixture of Einstein and Al Johlson. He says things like this:-

"Ve got here someplace - da, here is cirguit diagrams, an de specs for a sqvare-vave generator. You know vot dat is ? Write down de answer.. Okay Den you build vun for me. I areddy got vun but I vant another. You do dis in de city no here. Go to Tripler, dey tells you dere vere you can verk, vere to get parts, all dat. Couple days you come out here again, I see if I like how you build."

The only really authentic description is where Chandler is reported as walking "woodenly to one of the benches". If there was ever a wooden character....

The final 'punch' of this story is so incredibly banal that it is not worth relating here; it just confirms that the story may be regarded as a failure on all counts. The philosophising is crude, the writing terrible, the story hackneyed. If I sound a little more bilious than usual, it is because I am getting a little annoyed at some of the poor quality stuff that is being published in sf nowadays. This novel doesn't come near to succeeding, even as a simple adventure story, and it doesn't deserve publication, either in America or here.

Even if you do not like what is being produced by the younger British SF writers, you will surely see that here is a novel in the old style that doesn't even succeed as escapism.

Not recommended.

Lang Jones, 1966.

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW FROM COMPACT BOOKS:

THE SYMMETRIANS, by Kenneth Harker, Compact Books 1966, 160 pp, 3/6d.
--- an original novel.

NEW WORLDS 163 (June) Begins THE GOD KILLERS by John Baxter. 5 other stories
NEW WORLDS 164 (July) Seven stories - editorial & reviews by J.G.Ballard.
IMPULSE 4 (June) eight stories, inc. "Hatchetman" by Mack Reynolds.
IMPULSE 5 (July) eight stories - appearance of a "Critique" column by Harry Harrison, which will become a permanent feature, we are told.

PLAGUE
from space
reviewed by CHRIS PRIEST

PLAGUE FROM SPACE by Harry Harrison. Gollancz 1966, 208pp, 18s.

This novel is the story of a disaster that never quite made it.

Purely on the strength of the title I gathered a whole wealth of pre-conceived notions about the plot, supposing it to be just another calamity in the long history of SF-Cataclysm. On examination, however, it turns out to be Alien-Invasion with Dr Kildare overtones.

On her return from Jupiter, the spaceship Pericles lands at Kennedy Spaceport with a dying crew. One member of the crew, Commander Rand, manages to survive long enough to warn the hero, Dr Sam Bertolli, of a plague on the ship. Although the ship is sealed off almost from the start, the plague escapes and spreads rapidly across the American countryside. Rand's Disease, as it comes to be known, is spread in a number of different ways, most of which go against the commonly-accepted laws of medicine. Bertolli's girlfriend Nita, another doctor working on the problem, eventually contracts the disease and it becomes a personal race for Bertolli to solve the riddle before she dies. Not surprisingly, a serum is obtained (by a method which comes as close to abuse of artistic licence as any) and all ends happily.

Thus it is that PLAGUE FROM SPACE is not a disaster-novel.

In this book Harrison has used a technique of setting up his own theoretical puzzles, and proceeding to knock them down again. This method of devising a novel is unfortunately rather obvious in this instance. Instead of starting with a trait inherent in all human situations, Harrison has conceived of a totally artificial (albeit convincing) state of affairs. Because of this, the book neither demands nor gets total sympathy from the reader. This is the book's major fault, and although it detracts little from the superficial pleasure that such a novel can give, it prevents it from making a really marked impression. After reading this book I found myself profoundly lacking in any kind of feeling for either

the protagonists or their new enlightenment. It becomes difficult for the reader to tell whether the actions of the characters are either logical or likely, because there is no way of experiencing their moral or sociological background.

Without this point of reference, the book has no real depth. Sam Bertolli comes over as a well-rounded character, as does Nita and one or two of the other protagonists. The scenery and backdrops are described well, and I have no criticisms whatsoever of the pace and movement of the plotting. But when I'd laid the book aside, I felt as if I'd eaten a meal consisting of tastily-cooked can-labels. Within the framework that Harrison was working, the novel is an excellent example of well-written science fiction. It is an entertaining, well-researched and almost plausible story of a different kind of alien invasion. But it is very little more than this.

THE SALIVA TREE & other strange growths. by Brian Aldiss, Faber & Faber, 1966, 232 pp, 18s.

Without any doubt at all, Brian Aldiss must now hold the title of the leading stylist at present working in science fiction. Over the years his work has gradually toned itself down, working from the gimmicky fireworks-display of SPACE, TIME, & NATHANIEL (at present in print in a new paperback edition) through the sheer creative brilliance of NON-STOP, the puns of THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, and thoughtfulness and mood of GREYBEARD..... to the craftsmanship and readability of the present collection.

Every collection contains its variety, and this is no exception. Within the clothbound walls of this book you will find the gently-archaic fantasy of the title; already a prizewinner and probably destined to win more. There is "The Source", a kind of science fiction exclusionary demonstration of Karl Jung's theories on dreams and memories... "The Lonely Habit" and "A Pleasure Shared", both slick and sick examples of modern crime/perversion writing.... "Day of the Doomed King", an historical fantasy written with such a joy for the use of language that it is a tangible pleasure to read .... or "The Girl and the Robot with Flowers", a short, chatty story about the ways of an SF writer.

These are merely examples of the stories in this book. Varied only in styles that Aldiss has used, they are all prime examples of the shorter work of one of the leading contemporary SF writers. Although it is probably only a stop-gap between novels, this book has been collected with care. As, indeed, the stories were evidently written.

Chris Priest, 1966

THE MELTING POT

READERS LETTERS

All letters must be received on or before September 3rd 1966 in order to be considered for publication in the next issue.

Dear Pete,

....I have read the past five issues of Zenith SPECULATION and certainly approve of your attempt to establish a serious review, and have found them all of considerable interest. I thought the previews of the Hugo candidates was an excellent idea. I found Alexei Panshin's article on Heinlein, like previous excerpts, vapid. He has nothing to say. All he is "selling"is the interest of the name Heinlein, and he contributes nothing but a school-boy itemisation along the lines of "and then Heinlein wrote.." It may be useful to some as a reference, though not complete. Your reader's letters are unusually punchy. Apparently ZENITH does not invite neutrality.

Sam Moskowitz
Newark, New Jersey.

@ You can see how many of our Hugo "choices" actually were nominated! (Page 2). However, the critiques proved an interesting exercise and will quite likely be repeated in 1967. In defence of Alex Panshin, I'd point out that his article in ZS 12 was prefaced with the words "non-critical" & "descriptive";- that article was not intended as criticism. It also seemed to me that Panshin's piece in Riverside Quarterly Vol II, No.I had a lot to say; as will, I hope, his long piece in the next issue of ZS. Your letter would appear to follow the trend you observed - punchy and far from neutrality !

Dear Pete

....A few comments on the April ZENITH. After reading Moorcock's defence of Ballard, I'm convinced that Ballard is so literarily aware that I wonder what he's doing writing science fiction. (Of course, I've been wondering that ever since I read his second novel. And I see Mike seems to agree with my opinion that THE DROUGHT was simply a rewrite of THE DROWNED WORLD, though he doesn't put it quite that way). After reading Mike's explanation of Ballard's use of "landscape", I still agree with Patrizio; it was meaningless in the context given. A broken marriage has damned little to do with Man And Nature. I suppose symbolism is a great thing, but I've read too

many instances where critics found all sorts of symbols in a book that the author hadn't put there. (My favourite literary quote comes from, I believe, T.R.Fehrenbach; to the effect that if the audience needs a psychology course in order to understand a work of art, then there is something wrong with the work of art).

Incidentally, can Mike tell me why he thinks reasoned criticism is better than emotional criticism when the work under discussion is aimed at the emotions ?

Just finished reading Sheckley's MINDSWAP, which is even closer to Vonnegut than THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH (and which makes just as little sense). Sheckley is still worrying about reality; I can't say that I share his interest.

Glad to hear the BSFA is doing a good job, but I don't intend to join. Mostly money; for $2.20 I can get lots of things that I want worse than I do membership in a fan club, and these days I don't have all that extra cash to spread around. The only satisfactory means of recruiting over here has been articles in the promags - Terry Carr's article in F&SF a year or two ago brought in dozens of new readers, and Lin Carter's recent piece in If seems to have brought in a lot more. About the only effective recruiting in between these has been Seth Johnson's Fanzine Clearing House, which has kept an irregular trickle flowing. It would be nice if some organisation like the N3F (or BSFA) would advertise regularly in the promags and send a good introductory fanzine to everyone who replied.

Robert Coulson,
Hartford City, Indiana.

@ Both the British Science Fiction Association and ZS have brought in a number of new readers through our Science Fiction Book Club, & through regular advertisement in New Worlds, for example. One big advantage that the BSFA has over the N3F as far as recruitment goes is that the BSFA Journal, Vector, is attractive, regular, and worth getting - thus the Association has something to offer the new fan straight away. I refuse to comment upon the Ballard Business, I long ago said Too Much. Would agree that Sheckley's MINDSWAP is a confusing book - Gollancz are publishing it over here, to my regret since I don't think it deserves bound form.

Dear Pete,

....I enjoyed Robert Heinlein's THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS; but if the opinion of the local fen is any criterion, I'm part of a definite minority. The concensus in these parts being that MOON is a far better story than either FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD or PODKAYNE, but that it isn't nearly as good as RAH's pre-STARSHIP TROOPERS efforts. In any event, MOON should, if nothing else, trigger some lively discussion; people tend to take Heinlein's pontificals far more seriously than their author apparently does.

You know, if anyone else had written THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS, it would probably be discussed in one or two fanzine articles, and then be quietly forgotten. But because Heinlein wrote it, and because there is still -- in spite of GLORY ROAD, PODKAYNE, and FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, -- a Heinlein cult, the book will literally be talked under the table. Ghod knows why. THE ALIEN WAY and DUNE are every bit as controversial, but they haven't -- and they won't -- receive half the attention MOON will. Just you wait and see....

Your editorial complaint (in ZS 12) about the incomprehensibility of THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH, and, indirectly, about DUNE, is one I've heard before. And it makes me wonder... I found DUNE clear-cut enough though I'm inclined to agree about STIGMATA; but if people find these books so bewildering, why do they (rather, why will th y) vote for them as "Best Novel"?

Ben Solon,
Chicago.

@ Of the four books in the final nominations list, MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS gets my vote. It is imperfect but probably the most deserving title on this year's slate. It will be 'talked under the table' because there is so much in it to be talked <u>about</u>. And this applies to any of the later Heinlein novels. In spite of your distaste, I still think the books you named have many virtues; you'll remember that last year I published a favourable critique of FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD - and still like the book. I still like STARSHIP TROOPERS immensely, even though a Brian Aldiss review told me exactly what was wrong with the book. Next time we have a criticism of MOON in this magazine - let us hope it will give us something to think about. You'll see that I <u>didn't</u> say DUNE was incomprehensible- I merely said that I found it impossibly boring to read (an opinion shared by many, I might add) As for people voting for what they don't understand - evidently they didn't, for STIGMATA... was <u>not</u> nominated!

Dear Pete,

....I wish I'd inserted the following material into my article on Philip K. Dick's THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH in <u>Zenith</u> 12. I'd be grateful if you would insert it in your next issue;

I don't know whether Dick has read any of William Burrough's books, but it seems apparent that PALMER ELDRITCH could have been strongly influenced by Burrough's highly personalised brand of surrealism. Burroughs' books are almost entirely concerned with the subjective world of the drug addict, and in DEAD FINGERS TALK, which has recently been published in paperback in this country for the first time, a parallel situation occurs where a couple of cops named Hauser and O'Brien walk into Burroughs' apartment and try to arrest him because they have caught him injecting himself with 'junk'. He

shoots them dead. Now Burroughs has had a pretty rough career; in 1950 he shot his wife in Mexico City while trying a William Tell act that didn't come off, and he has been a drug addict for the better part of twenty years. In the context of the novel therefore, one accepts this incident's happening. It isn't until ten minutes later that we discover that the entire episode was a drug-induced illusion, as Burroughs as himself calls up the local police and asks for the two cops he shot. The cop on duty of course says that they don't exist. Burroughs writes "I had been occluded from space-time like an eel's ass occludes when he stops eating on the way to Sargasso - locked out, - never again would I have the key, a Point of Intersection...relegated with Hauser and O'Brian to a land-locked junk past...."

Although the style and probably the intention is different, the basic situation is the same, and it wouldn't be surprising if Dick had got his basic idea for PALMER ELDRITCH from one or another of Burroughs' books. Burroughs has developed the idea as deeply or even more so, but in a purely subjective direction; he rarely steps outside the illusion which pervades the very writing - a mixture of Apollinaire, Beat, and Burroughs. While Dick is writing objectively of subjective problems. It is, of course, impossible to know whether Dick did borrow any ideas from Burroughs short of asking him, but it seems very likely considering the nature of the book (STIGMATA...) Even if he has, he develops the idea in a totally different direction, presumably a direction which has totally different aims, also. There is also the point that Dick deals specifically with hallucinogen drugs, and Burroughs with heroin, cocaine, etc, which will apparently cause the same effect in the user.

Richard Gordon,
University of Newcastle.

Dear Pete,

....I wish you well with Zenith SPECULATION, but do not get too disheartened by my apparent, or indeed, actual, lack of interest. My reaction may be of interest to you, but of course, I am by no stretch of imagination a trufan. I seldom pay hard cash for fanzines, indeed, in many cases I grudge paying hard cash for prozines. For instance, I would not pay a tanner for a second-hand copy of NEW WORLDS, and I can pick up many of my wants at ridiculous prices. I happily pay out my sub regularly to Amra because I am a keen fantasy fan, and because much of the material is by professionals whom I respect writing about topics I can enthuse over; & the art work is of special value to me. But then there is a vast difference between this, and, say, Joe Patrizio's opinion of Ballard. I know Joe fairly well and he's a nice genuine guy, but I am not interested in paying to listen to his opinions. I trust I make my point. First I would rather read SF than SF criticism, and secondly I prefer my critics to be of professional status or standard.

Ian Peters,
London.

@ I was going to use this as a pivot for an editorial, Ian, but then I just didn't have the heart to answer your letter point by point. Your

opinion I respect, and your attitude I can appreciate, you mean Scot you ! However, don't you think that Zenith - or any other fanzine of a halfway serious nature- has more to offer than the opinions of another amateur ? To begin with there is the occasional professional we lure into our pages. Then again, many 'fans' have as valid opinions as professionals, and can often write as well in criticism. We are rooting out the last vestiges of amateurism in presentation of written criticism & attempt to maintain a fairly high standard. Zenith can offer you news - a chance to weigh a multitude of opinions - an audience for your opinions, even. It is a two-way communication between readers and writers. There may be other values, but perhaps those readers who do enjoy Zenith might write in and tell us both why they do enjoy it.(Lastly, of course, and most important to me - this magazine is an excellent hobby).

Dear Pete,

....I agree with Harry Harrison (as if he cared) when he says that it isn't necessary to identify with a character; a little thought is all that is required to accept this. But I do not agree with him in his criticism of Beryl's comment about Bill (in BILL THE GALACTIC HERO, reviewed in ZS 11) not being believable. For a start, Harry cheated; he did a little shuffle - believable equals "real" equals real - and attacks something that Beryl didn't say. Believable and real are not the same. Yes we know that Harry's characters are figments of his hot and fevered brain and so aren't real, but this is no reason why they shouldn't be believable. Jason dinAlt was believable because he acted as Jason dinAlt would have if he had been real; Bill, presumably, didn't. An author must make his characters believable if he wants his book to be read; if the reader doesn't give a damn about what the characters are saying or doing, then he won't read the book. (This may not necessarily be true when an author is trying to say something important rather than trying to tell a story, for instance, LAST AND FIRST MEN, in which a different set of rules apply) I get the impression from the rest of what HH says that any criticism of the 'new wave' SF writers now has the standard defence that 'they don't know, don't understand, what we are saying'. This may be true, but it demands that, before an aloof posture is adopted, the author considers why the reader doesn't understand.

It's all very well for Willem Van den Broek to say that criticism should try to "analyse the merit of writings on the basis of universal standards for good literature", but if you try to take this all, or even most, of the way with SF then you just aren't going to start writing criticism.

Joe Patrizio,
St Albans, Herts.

@ Your sentiments re Harry Harrison's spirited defence were echoed almost exactly in sentiment by Carl Brandon Jr, of Sweden. Willem Van den Broek's statement is probably theoretically correct, I seem to remember that best of all critics, damon knight, saying that he tried to review according to accepted standards of literary criticism.

Dear Pete,

...Joe Patrizio's critique of SQUARES OF THE CITY is reasonably well-done, but he seems to have overlooked one (if not the) glaring fault; the chopped-off ending. Brunner brings events in Cuidad de Vados to their logical climax, then leaves them there. It's as though he suddenly got tired of writing, and decided to leave the story as swiftly as possible and to hell with all the loose ends left dangling in the air. I can't speak for anyone else, but I'd certainly like to know what happened in Ciudad de Vados during and after the riots, and what did Maria Posador accomplish or attempt to accomplish after Hakluyt gave her the lowdown? I don't know, and Brunner doesn't tell us. He's left us hanging. Cheat.

I fear I must concur with John Boston's opinion of Archie & Beryl Mercer's book reviewing (or criticism, as you will); their comments are almost useless to anyone who hasn't read the book or books in question. The purpose of a review is to tell the prospective reader whether or not he wants to read the book in question; the purpose of a critique is to not only let the reader know whether or not the book under analysis is worth his time, but why it is or isn't. Archie & Beryl fail in this respect; they say too much about minor details (Who cares if Arrakis or Dune is the name of the planet in question ? It doesn't have the slightest bearing on the plot.) and not enough about the major aspects of the story in question. The pity of it is that Archie & Beryl have well-developed critical faculties and allow them to be side-tracked on relatively unimportant issues, resulting in reviews full of sound and fury signifying next to nothing.

Ben Solon
Chicago

---------- LETTERS FOR THE NEXT ISSUE BY SEPT. 3rd LATEST ----------

AN APOLOGY TO HARRY HARRISON

In the April issue of ZS we published a letter from Harry Harrison concerning the review of his book, BILL THE GALACTIC HERO, which had appeared in a previous issue. In his letter, Harry set forth a convincing argument which made use of a certain four-letter word. Being old-fashioned at ZS we chose to omit the word and substitute something similar (Top of Page 3). Harry wishes to say that this alteration affected his argument. We wish to say that we altered the passage without permission.

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