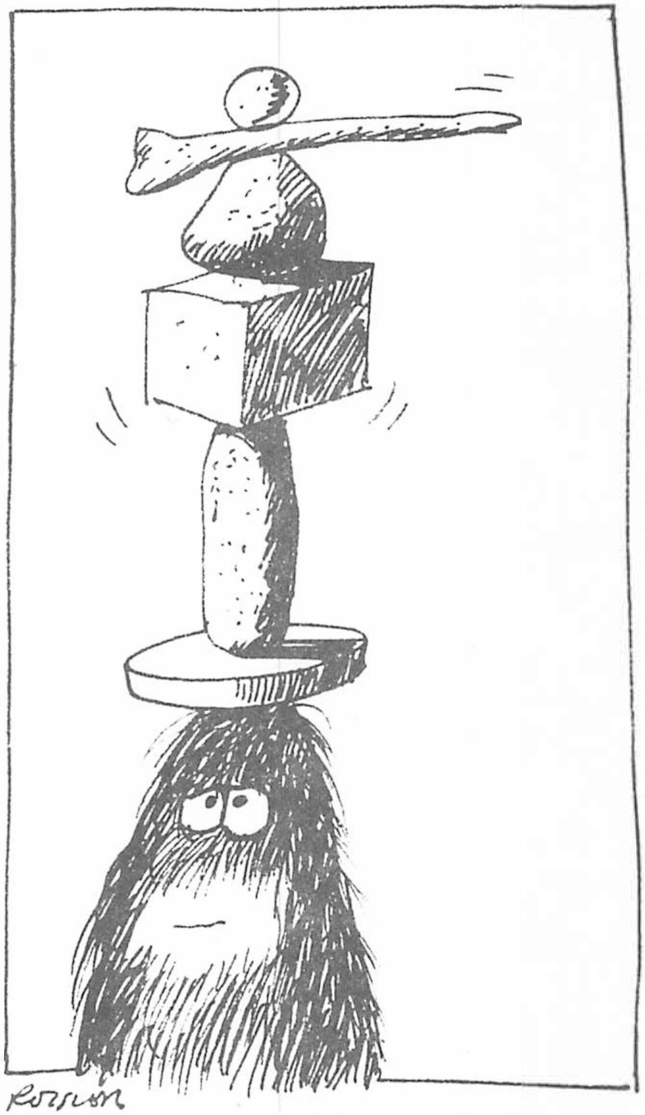
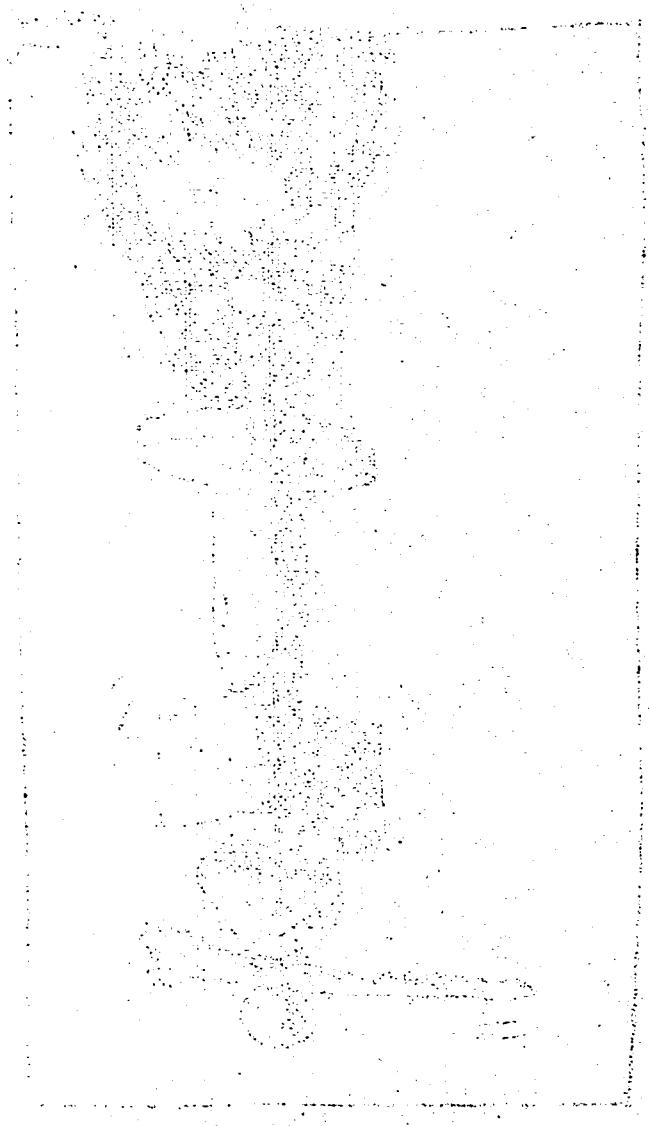


SUPERSONIC SNAIL 4

The Privileged Person's SFC



SUPERSONIC SNAIL 4

The Privileged Person's SFC

This is the OCTOBER 1977 edition of SUPERSONIC SNAIL. Officially, that is. Actually, it's the August edition, since the last stencil was typed on 2 August 1977. But this issue is scheduled to appear in the October ANZAPA mailing.

Edited, typed, printed, published, etc, by Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone: (03) 419 4797. Cover art: Bill Rotsler. 90 pages.

WHY YOU RECEIVED THIS ISSUE: (1) You are a member of ANZAPA. (2) You are a contributor, of either an article or letter of comment, to either SS or SFC. (3) You are a contributor to *SFC 52*. (4) You are a person from whom I like to receive letters of comment and contributions.

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU RECEIVE THE NEXT ISSUE: (1) Respond to this issue. (2) Respond to *SFC 52* or *53*. (3) Send a contribution. (4) Become a member of ANZAPA.

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES...

SUPERSONIC LETTER COLUMN

In reply to Supersonic Snail 3

ROBERT BLOCH

2111 Sunset Crest Dr, Los Angeles, California, USA

Naturally, I was impressed by 1977 - both versions. Shave off a few years - let's make the date 1957 - and you might well have come close to approximating some of my own thoughts. Close enough, anyway, so that your writing caused a sense of deja vu. And for me to be able to tell you that it's not always that easy to predict (or rely on) drab reality. About 90 per cent of my life occurred after I passed the age of 42 - and is still occurring. Be very interesting for you, I think, to reread these two pieces in perhaps ten years' time.

(6 June 1977)

brg Before going onto the rest of the issue, I should say that so far in 1977 (today is 25 July), none of my wish-dreams for the year have come true, and my expectations about the real course of 1977 have been only too true - but worse. The one variation is that my marvellous cat, Flednap, is no longer alive, since he was killed by a car after I moved house to Johnston St. I'm sorry to tell that to all those people who sent greetings to Flednap, who deserved your best wishes. *

ROB GERRAND

863 Hampton St, Brighton, Vic 3186

I enjoyed your 1977 as you would like to live it. For a while you had me. Perhaps it was my speed reading, but I was suddenly thinking: My God, Gillespie's won Tattslotto! I didn't know he went in for that sort of bullshit. He surely knows the odds against winning are oppressively alarming. And yet he's gone and won it! Norstrilia Press, you are viable! It was nice while it lasted. It seemed to me that if you were ever to pull off such a coup, then that is the way you would announce it - delayed news through a fanzine. And what better than to allude to it cryptically by using a daydream? Sure, and no one would take it seriously, and no one would be apestering you for the wherewithall. Smart lad, that Gillespie...

(25 April 1977)

brg Entering for Tattslotto is not bullshit if you realise that you don't lose much by losing consistently - and you only need to win once.... *

KEITH CURTIS
26 Underoliffe Rd, Earlwood, NSW 2206

I could kill you slowly and with venom. Your blasted wish-away-year-dream of the 1977 "demure young lady with a wan face, long black hair and an expression of some distress", coupled with "an American accent" knocked nearly two years off encrusted memories. Goddammit, I chased around the world after such a one and returned home none the wiser, only broker. Your piece stopped me cold.

That dream reminded me too well of things I'd allowed to settle in the not-so-near memories of the mind. And what memories... It's best shown by quoting a couple of poems. The first is an extract from a series of poems by a young Denver poet, John Lucas, I met at MidAmeriCon:

...words,
like turquoise chips,
spill easily,
quickly,
forming patterns
to cry over.

Patterns of blood
Heart cut upon the page
- each abstraction
a variation
of
earlier incisions:
each bruise
is
sliced, penned and mounted,
one tiny moment
frozen
in ink.
- from "Corridor", c. 1967.

The second extract is from the foreword to a privately printed collection of poems by Kirk Anysund. According to the biog., Anysund is very particular about the pronunciation of his surname. "Ahn-uhzoondt", no less. Ex-merchant seaman, folk-singer, and soulptor, Anysund lived in New York until the late 1960s when, according to the evidence, he became "disenchanted with formal government" and moved to the Orkneys. For all I know, he's still there. Although privately printed, the edition of Fair Hair, Fair Wind I have is marked as a reprint edition. Anysund's poems are strange; wandering at times from the haunted emptiness of a derelict freighter to the zany gusto of a whore and her pimp in the Canary Islands: "Luggers and buggers".

Anysund used some of his fragments in the foreword and, despite the title of the collection, included this...

I read of all
the past "remember whens?"
and
remember when.

Each new poem, each new line
leaves
my legacy, my testament
to the
dark-haired
lady stranger.

She visited me one night
and
never really left.

(19 April 1977)

brg My ideal 1977 was, of course, 90 per cent memory of things lost, not entirely fantasy.

It's quite possible that that piece was embarrassing to some readers. Certainly, Steve Campbell's reply, below, is embarrassing to me: *

STEPHEN CAMPBELL
82 Blessington Street, St Kilda, Vic 3182

BRUCE GILLESPIE'S ALTERNATIVE 1977 - A REAL ALTERNATIVE

"What's going on?" said Bruce. "Something happened to me in 1977 and I'm not sure what it was."

"If you like I'll tell you," I said.

"Okay," said Bruce.

"You could say it began," I said, "when early in the year you had a talk - or should I say, a lecture - from a friend in regard to your personal dilemma concerning your association - or dissociation - with the opposite sex, namely, females. You argued and said that there was no way you could cope with the problem, and that your destiny seemed to be set for you and there was nothing you could do to prevent the inevitable knockbacks and ensuing grief followed by boredom, etcetera, etcetera. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. Go on."

"Well, following this talk, you went home, made yourself a cup of coffee and went to bed. A fatalist reaction, if anything.

"The next two weeks went by quickly and quietly until, one particularly boring evening, you decided suddenly to eat out at a restaurant nearby and ruminate about an idea that you had for a short story you were writing at the time. Arriving at the restaurant, you looked around for an empty table, but all the tables were occupied, except for a table for three at which was sitting a lady of about twenty-seven years, reading a copy of the VSTA publication The Secondary Teacher. The female attracted your eye first, and then the magazine she was reading. You stood for a moment near the doorway, not quite comprehending the situation, because it seemed contrived that the only place you could sit in the restaurant was at the same table as this female who happened to be reading the magazine of which you were co-editor.

"Fighting the impulse to turn and get through the door as quickly as possible, you stood your ground, looking confused - which is not too abnormal. At that moment, a zealous waiter ushered you further into the room and saw that the only table at which there was a spare place was the same as that where the aforesaid female was seated. He asked her with practised precision if she would mind having someone seated with her. Taken aback momentarily, she answered automatically that she wouldn't mind, and then

looked you directly in the eye. Starting to wither perceptibly, and weakening in the knees, you decided to sit down at the proffered seat before you melted into a heap on the floor. You wondered whether you should start a conversation, since the situation seemed to demand some sort of spoken word, if just to acknowledge thanks for the seat. You were not quite sure whether you were thankful to be pushed, as it were, into this type of circumstance. You had imagined many times before meeting a female stranger, alone, in a restaurant or cafe somewhere, but certainly not under these indecorous or unorthodox conditions.

"There was, of course, the magazine she was reading. Here at least you had a focal point for a conversation. Fearing vaguely some metaphysical catch, you formed an introductory sentence carefully in your mind, then threw caution ot the aromas of food in the air, and said, 'Excuse me, I couldn't help noticing the magazine you were reading. Have you...' At this moment the waiter handed you the menu and told you he would be back to take your order in a short time. Stupefied by this ill-timed interruption, you blushed to your toes and, wishing you had the power to disappear, looked all too closely at the menu without reading a word of it. Looking up over the menu slowly, you realised that this woman was looked directly at you.

"Fumbling with the menu, you gave vague apology, to which the woman replied, 'It's all right. The waiters here are always that rude. They have a tendency to think that their functions are much more important than indulging in mere manners.' You felt a consuming surge of relief. She went on, 'What were you saying about the magazine?'

"'It's just that I'm co-editor of the magazine, and I wondering what you think of the articles. I don't get much of a chance to ask anybody what their reactions are, or whether they think that the magazine needs other things.' Your sentence echoed in your head, and seemed to sound stilted or wrong, somehow. You plunged on regardless - you had gone too far to renege now. You elaborated on your statement, but your coherency seemed to be disappearing rapidly. You stopped suddenly and looked at her. A pause that was filled with noise dominated your/her table, then she proceeded to answer to your rush of words with intelligence and interest, giving suggestions freely and criticising carefully.

"Your next three hours spent in that restaurant were filled with an excitement you had not often felt before. Conversation too little time with the magazine, switching to the general state of the education system and evolved along a variety of subjects til it touched upon a personal level where, with quiet voices, you both talked with little inhibition, both of you happy that you had manipulated each other onto the intimate level that you both wanted to explore.

"Looking to the end of the evening with no little anxiety, you became increasingly nervous. High with adrenalin, you asked Felicity - for that was her name - where she lived and found, to your great surprise, that she resided no further than seven blocks away from your own house, and her flat was closer to the restaurant. That meant you had to pass her place to reach your own, suggesting a variety of actions to take. In a moment of slight panic, you thought of taking your leave quickly and rushing home, but she suggested first that you both depart together. Trembling with anticipation, you agreed, for the woman seemed to be interested in you and her actions suggested to you that the night held more promise than just going home to sleep in your own bed alone.

"The events that actually followed were: you arrived at her flat, both said goodnight and thanks for the interesting conversation and oh well see you around sometime goodnight. You felt disappointed and sure in the knowledge that it would obviously have turned out that way, since nothing ever turns out right

for you, you went home to bed."

"Yes, I remember the events following directly after that," said Bruce. "I couldn't sleep at all that night. I just lay in bed and didn't know whether to feel ecstatic that somebody - a female - had just spent an evening talking to me and actually seemed to be interested, or feel totally dejected because I hadn't been invited up to her flat for coffee or whatever. I waited impatiently for day to come so that I might see her again, but fell asleep.

"I was woken only a few hours later by a knock at the door. Stumbling out of bed and down the stairs, I opened it to Felicity standing with a large bag in her hands. Fortunately I'd fallen asleep in my dressing-gown, because I'd given no thought to clothes at all. She apologised for getting me up and said that she was going to the market. She thought that I might like to go along. Awkwardly, I invited her in and ran upstairs to dress. While I was dressing, I had that feeling again of being in some contrived situation that I had no control over at all. We went to the market and spent most of the time walking, talking, and drinking coffee at three different restaurants, taking time to eat at one of them. I spent a good part of the day wondering why the newly formed relationship was progressing so slowly. We had known and enjoyed each other's company for close to a full day and we hadn't even held hands or kissed. By that time, of course, I couldn't feel the sinister beginnings of falling in love again. Towards late afternoon, we caught a taxi back to her place, and this time I was invited up for coffee.

"After such a tense and relatively easy day, I felt awkward again, and thought now that the moment had finally come I would be sure to blow it somehow. We got upstairs and drank coffee and talked for awhile but nothing seemed to be happening. I felt that the electricity that was present during most of the day was draining away with the coffee. I decided I would feel bolder on home ground, and suggested that we both go to my place and she could look at S F Commentary, about which I had told her the night before. She agreed to the idea, so we set off, me lumbering along with a bag full of groceries with Felicity laughing beside me. I felt more confident then.

"We arrived at the house and went into the lounge-room where I introduced Felicity to a puzzled Frank and Elaine. I felt embarrassed and quickly ushered Felicity upstairs to my room."

Interjector: If this keeps up we won't get past the first kiss. Suffice to say that inbetween readings of S F Commentary, Bruce and Felicity did finally get to kiss. What's more, they also got to sleep together - Felicity's initiative. Did I say sleep together? Let's be honest and say that they went to bed and screwed, and why not? That sort of thing happens between people all the time. A person doesn't need any special qualities (other than the usual physiological machinery) to have sex with another person. A chance meeting, moot interests, and a bit of patience. The question is now; how can they stay together?

"Bruce's problem was that he was not just content to have a lady sleeping with him; he wanted to fall in love as well. This takes far more effort and concentration. However, Bruce's concentration was directed more towards his literary ventures rather than to any person. Felicity, however, seemed content to just sleep with Bruce occasionally and chat with him, giving little thought to falling in love.

"An s f convention was scheduled to start in a week. Bruce hoped that the contact with fandom, an important part of his social life (although he doesn't really like to admit it) might bring Felicity closer to understanding him and enrich the relationship. (Some time earlier he had accompanied Felicity to a party of her friends; that ended in near disaster, with Bruce becoming very

drunk on Southern Comfort and breaking two glasses.) Felicity liked the idea of a convention and, although she hadn't been too impressed by the few fans she had met already, was certain that not all fans were unsociable and sometimes downright impolite.

"At the convention, Felicity and Bruce came under some speculation by the other attendees who knew him. They were first approached by a trendy-looking, [illegible] bearded fellow whom Bruce introduced as one of Australia's foremost science fiction writers, who, after a rudimentary greeting to Bruce, talked to Felicity for the next fifteen minutes, mainly about how nice it was to see more ladies coming to s f conventions. Escaping, Bruce and Felicity made their way over to a small, vibrant lady gesticulating wildly with continental gusto to a tallish, long-haired, and bearded man who stood listening grimly.

"She greeted Felicity like an old friend and told Bruce that she was pleased at seeing him with a lady on his arm, privately taking some credit for herself at having helped engineer the union. (Whether or not she did was debatable: she was the friend who had lectured Bruce earlier in the year on how to be just himself and let women come to him without pushing himself on to them too much. How much of that advice Bruce had followed she did not know but assumed, under the circumstances, that he'd exploited some of that information.) The slim male with her leant against a wall, smiling slightly.

"The convention, like most others, proceeded fairly quietly, except for the nightly room parties, where most of the important and gratifying discussion took place. Felicity, however, left these parties early, accompanied by Bruce. All but a few people had treated Felicity with coolness, even disdain. When she'd felt subtle nudgings of tentativeness, she declined to participate in the last day's proceedings, Instead, she spent the day with a friend in the Dandenongs, leaving a frightened and insecure Bruce wondering what he had done wrong.

"Bruce visited her the next day. She explained to him that she had been annoyed the day before, not so much at him, but at most of the people she had met at the convention. She was told by a few of the members that fandom needed to have more females involved and interested for a variety of reasons. What she could not understand was why, when she did arrive at the convention as a possible new member of s f fandom, she was ignored or treated in an offhanded way. It seemed a little strange to her that those people rejected so strongly the thing they said they wanted most.

Felicity and Bruce's relationship progressed slowly to the point where Bruce tried too hard to elicit undying love from her. At that stage, the couple separated for a short time. Bruce went through vast throes of self-exploration and emerged, scarred and solemn, to try to regain what he considered his last chance at true love. That failed, but he did manage to find in Felicity a regular bedmate once more. That arrangement suited her, as it had previously, and Bruce, in his apparently more mature state, found the situation as it stood agreeable, if not quite the original plan. He managed to write more, his personal problems ceasing to clutter his mind as much, producing a few short stories and completing part of his novel.

"So you see, Bruce, there was no magic wand involved at all. You were prepared to work hard at writing. You didn't seem to realise that it takes more work to establish and, more importantly, to keep a relationship with another human being."

"Well, thanks for telling me all that. It's nice to sit and hear someone tell you how you overcame all possible odds (namely yourself) and came out smiling. Anyway, it's getting late, so I think we'll off. Goodnight. Coming, Felicity?"

brg I'm not sure that I find the above version any more likely than my version. Especially that part about Felicity reading T. Secondary Teacher. [illegible] *

SNEJA GUNEW

Dept of English, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, NSW 2308

Thank you very much for Supersonic Snail 3. I got it in the midst of a rotten cold and it speeded the recovery.

Great minds must really think alike. Every fortnight (payday) I trot out and buy an Opera House lottery ticket, calling each one by ever more esoteric names and spurred on by the illusion that if one has great philanthropic aims (eg, buying my own printing press) then somehow one is more entitled to win. It's like calling on God to prove himself by blaspheming (substitute Fortune for God; I was always more in touch with the Renaissance). Lightning's gotta strike sometime. Don't think I'd buy a house though (had two and that was quite enough), though I rather like your evocation of communing-private living.

Actually, I found that whole first piece struck very much of a sympathetic chord - the search for like-minded souls and conversations that ignite moribund brain-cells. Think of how much more frustrating it is here in Ockerland. I spent my undergraduate days in Carlton and was filled with nostalgia reading your piece. What I wish I could do is transmit some of those vital first awakenings of thought-processes to the students here. It is depressing to see them (eavesdrop on them) half-stupefied glued in front of the Union tv or at best talking of ways to beat the system. No sense, or very rare, of wanting to enlarge their experience by reading challenging things or testing their mental resources against anything.

(18 April 1977)

brg I'm glad that you saw that my piece in SS3 was, as much as anything, a lament for lost Carlton. Of course, I can pass through the place, but that's not the same as living on Carlton Street. I didn't discover the joys of Carlton life (of which I've sampled very few, really) until long after I left University. The reason for buying a house would be to get a permanent base from which I couldn't be chucked out. I don't like moving house, and especially I don't like moving house from a place that suited me so well as 72 Carlton Street. *

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 ODA, England

SS3: David Pringle is one of the best critics over here (apart from a minor blind-spot about my stuff!) and I was glad to see you printing his article. God, it's a hell of a lot better than most of the stuff you print in SFC (he says provocatively...). We don't share the same high opinion of George Turner's work as a reviewer; I can't really put my finger on it, but much of George's reviewing strikes me as self-conscious. I must read more of it, because I like George in person. (And must write to him...) Getting back to Pringle's article: why not print it in SFC as well? It deserves a wider readership.

That paragraph was provoked by the remark in SS, that George Turner's reviews always go to the top of the SFC pile. That strikes me as a little sad, if it means relegating work as first-class as Pringle's article.

brg I wouldn't run Pringle's article in SFC because of the type of article it is, rather than how well it is written. It is an article which generalises a lot. I would prefer for SFC articles that looked at particular authors or books in much greater detail. I have a feeling that much of David Pringle's sociological theorising is probably correct, but he does not offer much actual data or many detailed case histories. *

Reading your 1977, as you would like it to be... It was more fun (in the voyeuristic sense) reading between the lines. I know you didn't mean the article to be taken too seriously (although you had me kidded for a few moments, and I thought you really had won Tattslotto; nostalgic, that word), but I wonder if carrying your heart on your sleeve, so to speak, in print in SS is the right way to go about Getting Laid? Or the way to True Romance.

brg No. But it makes a good way of writing an article when I have to do something for ANZAPA; and it provides a dose of Positive Thinking for all the ANZAPA members who demand same. And it's no less successful a ploy than any other I've tried. *

If you pull that one off, you'll make history. It's always struck me that fanac is a bit of a nooky-substitute...and that giving it all up is the only sure way to find the woman of your dreams.

brg But giving it all up (fandom, that is) would leave me with nothing at all. *

It's a strange experience, reading mailing comments in an apazine, when you've no idea what the other zines have said. Of course, my name leaps out at me from a couple of places, and I can't help wondering what it is you're responding to. Merv Barrett said that I was England's David Gerrold? Well, coming from New Zealand's Gene Pitney, that's pretty good. And your comment to Robin (Johnson?): that Vonda and I survived pretty well. We had a good time, that's what. I was getting pretty damned homesick in the last week - but at the same time, I was feeling more at home in Melbourne - and I was beginning to feel that perhaps people had had enough of me... but apart from that, there was no real problem, on my side of it. Probably the most disconcerting aspect of the trip, for me, was that I spent more time in the company of people than I normally do. I hardly had an hour to myself...and as I often go two or three weeks at a time without seeing anyone apart from Pauline, that was strange. And of course, working at home, and living alone, one gets used to one's own company. It didn't bother me much while I was there - although I was aware of it - but once I was home, and had recovered from jetlag, I locked myself away for a week and talked to the wall.

Yes, I expected to see more of you while I was there, and was sorry I didn't. I remember that lunch in the Greek restaurant we had, on my first full day there, with Rob. I liked Rob, by the by. And it was good to meet Gerald and Catherine Murnane. (Give them my regards, incidentally.) I've written a thing called "Wombatworld" for Leigh Edmonds, which you might have seen. I wrote that within a few days of getting back, and I can't imagine now what it says...

(3 June 1977)

SYD BOUNDS

27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, England

Thanks for Supersonic Snail 3 (I like that title). I was sitting reading this last evening with the radio tuned into a broadcast from the Royal Festival Hall. Playing was a selection from the Gilbert and Sullivan operas; and it occurred to me how very English they are. And if they're played (and appreciated) in Australia? G&S has been popular here as far back as I can remember, with all kinds of differing people. And still are. I would like to see a bit more on Australia. You might, for instance, explain your Box number. Does all your mail stop at a main post office and you go to collect it? Or what exactly?

brg If it wasn't for the fact that I'm running up against the ANZAPA deadline, Syd, I would begin an article here on "Life in Australia - Or What You Would Really Like to Know About Oz But Nobody Dared Tell You".

I don't have the time, but I could say a few things. The cynic's view of Australia is that those aspects of the country which are not English are American. Post office boxes are [illegible] an American innovation, I suspect. In the GPO in Melbourne there are great walls with little doors in them. You go up to your own little door (5195AA), put the key in, and turn. If it is a good day, the long box is filled with mail, and there is also a notice for you to collect parcels at the window. If it is not a good day, you look through emptiness into the mail room, where somebody puts letters into all the boxes. I got a box in 1971 because I wanted to have a permanent address if I moved house. This proved a sensible idea. Lots of American fans, you might have noticed, also have box numbers.

But, when Chris Priest was here, he said that there are entire streets around Melbourne suburbs which look just like similar streets in England: lots of small shops, narrow main roads, English-looking trees. The Australian Broadcasting Commission (whose decease is expected daily) modelled much of its programming on that of the BBC. G&S is very popular here. So is Elton John, Fleetwood Mac, and Boz Scaggs. Posh people in Australia talk with what they think are English accents (an illusion which disappears quickly if you hear them in England). Real people, and New Zealanders, talk with Australian accents. Many of the trees are gums (eucalypts) except for all the places where European trees grow. Country roads are not lined with stone fences which you can't see over. Also, people tend to be thin on the ground in Australia after you leave the suburbs. (And I should have said that the suburbs of Melbourne that don't look English look very American, with expressways, Target stores, ranch-style houses.)

What I'm really saying, Syd, is that you ask the questions, and I'll answer them in my own inimitable way. Then other members of ANZAPA will send you long letters telling you just where I was wrong, and what things are really like. It seems as if you will just have to come out here yourself, although probably you have as little money to make such a trip as I have to travel the other way. *

SS3 seems to me a much more difficult mag to comment on than SFC. (In general, it seems to me you're in danger of running the lugubrious Bruce clear into the ground.) Enough is enough, as somebody must have said. ((*brg* SS3 lugubrious? It was my Positive Thinking issue (as defined by Ambrose Bierce: Positive = Mistaken at the top of one's voice).*)) I prophesy that your 77 will lie somewhere between "as you would like to live it" and "as you expect to live it".

Pringle's article is interesting and, undoubtedly, jazz, Hammett and Chandler, and s f have had an enormous effect over here. Comics too, nowadays. But he doesn't explain why. Fiedler's quote to the effect that s f is a largely jewish product is a bit startling at first; but, looking back, I can see there might be something to it.

Education: Did anyone ever doubt the aim is to "create a pool of docile unskilled workers"? (I have a theory that Authority encourages pop music to stop young people thinking... who the hell can think with that row going on?)

I, too, found Silverberg's Dying Inside unreadable; nice to know I'm not alone in this. And we share a liking for Maya in common.

(26 June 1977)

MARK LAWRENCE
46 Combermere St, Essendon, Vic 3040

I enjoyed reading your "1977 - As I Would Like to Live It". As a piece of fiction, it was good. But, while I sincerely hope it all comes true, somehow I feel that "1977 - The Way I Expect to Live It" is the more likely to eventuate. Ah well, life wasn't meant to be easy, you know. (I couldn't resist putting in that line; sorry.)

I was absolutely lost for words after reading David Pringle's article. It was bad beyond description. You summed it up quite well yourself and, if it wasn't for the fact that I have been engaged in writing this letter for an entire week now, I'd have a go at it myself.

I liked all your book reviews, though the Patrick White one appeared the most interesting. I often curse my limited knowledge of literature which is, of course, due to having read so little. I have never read a Patrick White novel and, until reading your review of A Fringe of Leaves, had never intended doing so. That situation has now been changed and I intend to get a hold of some of his stuff and read it. A Lifetime on Clouds also looked interesting. Maybe I'll have a go at it too.

(10 June 1977)

brg A good idea: both getting hold of some Patrick White novels (begin with Voss and The Tree of Man, and you can't go wrong), and reading A Lifetime on Clouds. Gerald Murnane's first novel, Tamarisk Row, is now in A&R paperback, and I suggest buying that. *

ANGUS TAYLOR
Fleerde 34, Bylmermeer, Amsterdam, Netherlands

I'd just like to say a few words about David Pringle's article. I've quite admired his s f criticism in the past, and the current issue of Foundation (11/12) contains a couple more good things by him. However, I think his "Science Fiction as an American Popular Art" is full of holes. David asks: "Why, then, has American s f been so dominated by immigrants? Why indeed, have the American popular arts in general been dominated by various minority groups within American society?" The answers to these questions are really extremely simple: (1) because all Americans are immigrants, and (2) because there is no majority group within American society. David has been working furiously to batter down an open door.

I have found this before: that Europeans find it hard to understand - or perhaps just fail to be aware - that the New World is a world of immigrants. There is no native population except for the Amerindians. The only people to call themselves "native Americans" or to be called "native Americans" are these Amerindians (and even they are immigrants from Asia, if you take the long view). Last year in England I was talking to one guy who wanted to do postgraduate work in Intellectual History, and was considering going to Berkeley or somewhere in the States, because of this particular academic superstar, whose name I forget. Anyway, my friend was complaining that, of course, these Americans didn't really have any good professors of their own; all of them had come originally from Europe. I suppose I should have answered him: Where do you expect them to come from - Mars?

And David seems to be under the illusion that there is a WASP majority in the US. Not so at all. I seem to remember reading once that no more than 30 per cent of the American population is of British descent. In Canada, the

proportion is 40 per cent - slightly higher, but still a minority (and in Canada over half the population is - nominally - Catholic). And who are the American WASPs? True, some of them are part of the power-elite, but many of them are to be found among the poor whites of the Appalachians and the Deep South - all those Billy Joe McAllisters jumping off bridges, as David will no doubt recall from the Bobbie Gentry song. All those George Wallaces and frustrated rednecks. And have they contributed nothing to the popular arts? How about country-and-western and folk music - two of the most important and vital strains around, and a contribution of the WASP minority - descending from English folk ballads, and the sound of the bagpipes translated into fiddle music? The fact that James Earl Carter sits in the White House today is indicative of the new rise of the Afro-WASP South.

If the WASP proportion of American society is, say, 30 per cent, I would challenge David to demonstrate that WASPs are not responsible for at least 30 per cent of popular art - though I'm not sure how one could quantify a thing like that. David has invented an imaginary "majority" ethnic group, and then is surprised when he can't find evidence for it. The thing that makes North America fundamentally different from any European country, and that makes it such an interesting place, is that there are no majorities, and few, if any, natives. Perhaps one of your American readers, Bruce, could send David a few random pages from their local telephone directory to get the point across.

(16 June 1977)

STUART LESLIE

Hollydell Farm, Whalans Pde, Forresters Beach, NSW 2260

brg Some astute readers will have noticed a resemblance between Supersonic Snail and The Metaphysical Review, which ceased publication in (I think) 1972. Perhaps no better evidence can be found that there is a resemblance than the following letters. I had long arguments in print with Stuart Leslie in almost every issue of MetRev. I've answered this letter already - but long-memoried readers will be interested to catch up on The Further Adventures of Stuart Leslie... *

You seem, like me, even when in a good mood, to have that dark-winged raven, that shadow, ever hovering somewhere in the background. It never goes away entirely, its presence insisting, even in the midst of one's rarest highs, that it won't last, that this is only temporary; the gloom will descend again; everything will bugger up for certain any time now. ((*brg* And it did.*))

I have considered the (likely) possibility that this is self-fulfilling prophecy. That our fears and expectations create the very glooms we are afraid of. People seem to live an in-built pattern over and over again in their lives. Mine and, it seems, yours, happens to be a manic-depressive sort of cycle. Anyway, I have found no way to break out of mine, so I just ensure that I never get too high, because that just makes it further to go down when I do. And perhaps that is the value of being aware of the immanent shadow. It is a warning, a safeguard even.

I haven't read A Fringe of Leaves yet. But shall. The penultimate paragraph sums up what all of White's novels are about better than anything I have read about him. All those critical exegeses are precisely hot-air, mainly because they are written by academics, 95 per cent of whom are fuckwits, so caught up in the process and mechanics of criticism and ideology that they can't see what White is saying. White is a man who has lived and experienced very deeply and profoundly, more so than most of humanity, so the utter lack of comprehension

on the part of his critics is not surprising.

I suspect that white himself, while admitting to this, would deny that his experience makes him any better a person. He does not suffer any less; is no happier or more content. Indeed his degree of wisdom and insight only makes him more aware than most of his own failings, weaknesses, and frustrations (see The Vivisector).

I, too, keep slipping from one self-perception to another. I am a thousand different people, especially in my relations with others, and am continually aware of the changing roles I am playing. There must be some sort of "untouchable identity" in me somewhere, because I hang together somehow and I ain't in the bin anymore, but what it is I don't know nor want to. Close examination may cause me to fall apart again, as it has in the past. Meanwhile, I am surviving, which is enough.

I find much in The Aunt's Story relevant to me.

Sex, male-female relationships, seem to be a feature of your frustrations. You are probably aware that even the best relationships, after the first fine rapture, create as many problems and hangups as they satisfy. The reality never matches the desire nor the imagination.

I have gotten much of what I dreamed of, but, by the time I have gotten it, or even by the process of getting, the meaning has disappeared. In terms of happiness and contentment, I am no better off at all. I suspect that all human wants and desires are but substitutes, avoidances, of one central longing - completion, wholeness.

Even a lot of money would only create more hassles, as wants increase in proportion to one's ability to satisfy them. Winning a lottery or something is an old fantasy of mine, but, looking at it realistically, I know it would only increase my choices drastically, and thus give me that much more to worry about.

Your outright indulgence in childish fantasy is as enjoyable as any, very like mine in times past and probably many other insecure and lonely fans. At least you are getting them to admit it openly, a very valuable service, by your own honesty. ((*brg* well worth doing - but small compensation for not being able to do anything about achieving the most urgent of those wishes.*))

I seem to have given up such fantasies. I just can't believe in them anymore. Also sex. My sexual desire is almost nil, which is not to say it could not be aroused. But it does not become aroused, or hasn't for a long time, apart from occasional wanking to discharge a physical tension. Sex does not drive me. I fear it somewhere because of the multiple symbolism the act can embody, the terrible possibilities of destructiveness, domination, and brutality it may hold. Like Theodora in The Aunt's Story, I am barren. My body is male but my psyche is androgynous, caught between genders, seeing and being masculine and feminine, unable to be one or the other. And thus unable to engender.

Having lived not one life but several, I have no single life to live. I can never be complete. I can make no artistic statement for I have no point of view but many. I see all sides and thus have nowhere to stand. I know all the ecstasies of art and am torn by its agonies, but am not creative. I have not the ego to believe I can express myself in objects, to turn the inexpressible of my individual experience to a fixed thing. Yet I see very clearly. There is much I know, though I cannot trace the paths of my arrival. So about that knowing I cannot speak.

I guess I'm lucky about living with people. The couple who have moved in with me could not be more perfect. We each live in our own parts of the house. We come and go in each other's rooms quite freely to borrow whatever, yet there is never any intrusion. We each respect the other's desires and are all sensitive

enough to see the others' desire, to talk or socialise or to let alone. The boundaries are natural and unspoken, and thus more real and non-irritant. Haven't had a fight or even strong words in two months. They want peace and quiet, and so do I.

I haven't worked (job/money type work) for nearly two years now. Been on the dole for about six months now. I often get feelings of futility and uselessness, but then I have suffered the same in all of the dozen and a half jobs I have worked at. Finances supplemented by parents' sudden access of generosity in their old age, gifts of $100, $200, many odds and etcs at Christmas and birthday. Jesus, I'm 30 now, over the hill. Getting a lot more conservative in many ways as I get older, too.

Flow seems to have dried up, so I'll end here, wishing you all the best glooms for the rest of the year.

(May 1977)

brg I wouldn't mind being able to "accept", as you say you can. But acceptance of anything comes hard for me. Fight the bastards! is a good motto when They are there waiting to be taken on. But most of the things I can't accept are those things which can't be changed by any conscious action. That's much of what that wish-dream in SS3 was about. Also, I don't have anybody to help me if I just dropped out. Come to think of it, I don't even have anybody to help me financially (except indirectly, as many people like Rob and Suzy and Steve have done) keep SFC going. Still, I was always taught that the essence of faith is to keep going even when you have no evidence that you will get anywhere, or even that you will have the means to keep going. So I must have some faith somewhere. *

I WISH I'D THOUGHT OF IT FIRST

Disco music...encourages the listeners to do nothing more than wave their limbs around and jump up and down rhythmically until they kill themselves or the band goes home for the night.

- Leigh Edmonds, in Ornithopter

I WISH I'D BEEN THERE

(...At the National Playwrights' Conference, Canberra 1977):
Gough Whitlam burst in the door, gigantically unnerved. "What do you call people from Salzburg?" he demand breathlessly. "I urgently need to know." "Salzburgers," responded John Osborne levelly, over his cigar. "You know, like people from Hamburg?" "Hamburgers," said Whitlam uncertainly. "Yees," murmured Osborne, his dark eyes aglitter. Whitlam looked at him with deep loathing. "You," he said, "are becoming very confused." And he burst out the door again. "A great man," said Osborne later, "Under evident strain."

- Bob Ellis, "Look Back In Chastity", Nation Review, 23-29 June 1977

Bludnok: I've been through hell to get here.
Neddie: There must be a cooler route.

- The Goons.

GENE WOLFE
Box 69, Barrington, Illinois 60010, USA

I'm not quite sure why you sent me SS3, but thanks anyway.

Since I read it, I cannot resist (and that's really the truth; I am succumbing to a temptation) writing to correct David Pringle's assumption that the majority of the US population "is white-skinned, British in origin, and Protestant in religion". It just isn't so. Only about 60 per cent of the American people are Protestant at all, and that 60 per cent includes virtually all the blacks, all the Scandinavians, and more than half the Germans. (I am using those capitalised terms to indicate descent, of course.)

As I think you know, I am on the staff of a technical magazine here. Perhaps a breakdown of the ethnic origins of its staff will give you (and David Pringle) a better appreciation of the diversity of even the better educated segment of the US population. Our publisher is Irish; the sales manager WASP; the editor Jewish; the managing editor Irish. There are eight senior editors - two are WASP; two German; two Poles; one Italian; and one (myself) Dutch.

When I say that I am Dutch, I mean that my father's father's family was "black" Dutch - the Dutch-Spanish mixture resulting from the occupation of the lowlands by the Duke of Alva's army. My father's mother's family was Swiss, from the area around Lake Constance. My mother's father was Scottish, and her mother's family was originally Welsh. We have been around long enough to have had a soldier on each side in the US Civil War (the father's of my grandmothers).

(24 July 1977)

* brg* Nothing much I can comment on this matter - except to introduce Mike Shoemaker, who has similar thoughts on the subject. (You got SS3, Gene, because I thought you would read it and send a letter of comment. Thanks for doing so.)

MICHAEL SHOEMAKER
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Pringle's article is pretty assinine. He gets most of the details right, but he has no comprehension of their significance. Of course, his trouble is that he is not an American. He says, "the American popular arts in general have been dominated by various minority groups within American society". This is true because America, more than any other country, is ethnic multiplicity. There aren't any real Americans except American Indians, and there are not even that many pure-blooded WASPs; we are, nearly all of us, mixed ethnics. I'm 50 per cent Polish, third generation (can you guess that by my name, smart-ass Pringle, hell no, because that 50 per cent is from my mother's side), as well as Scottish, English, French, and little bit of German. By the way, Murnau and Stroheim came to Hollywood long before the rise of Hitler. Murnau came to America because Hollywood (that is to say, one of the studios) promised him a free hand, with unlimited time and budget, to create a work of art. The result was Sunrise, one of the most visually beautiful black and white movies ever made.

So is there any such thing as a uniquely American contribution to culture? If there is, it lies in the amalgam of ethnic origins. In other words, jazz is uniquely American exactly to the extent that it doesn't sound the same as African war dances. And so on for the other arts. The point is that America is ethnic multiplicity, something that Pringle and others like him will never understand because they have not lived their whole lives with it, or gone to

school with it, as we Americans have.

The first time I read your lead piece, "My 1977", I must not have been reading very carefully. I hate to admit to this, but at the same time it is a great compliment to the quality of your writing: I thought for a long time while reading this piece that it was true - autobiographical. I must not have been paying much attention, must have skipped right over the title, etc, etc. The descriptions are realistic, first-rate, the emotional content, which renders the daydream believable, is no doubt true. This is a great piece. It has enough autobiographical content to make it believable, but enough passionate hope and desire to make it poignant fiction. Your descriptions of the woman are the best part. Such people probably exist (what is the old line about, "There's someone for everyone"?), but the chances of finding your dream are certainly much worse than the chance of winning that lottery.

You are quite justified in being annoyed at Christine McGowan's comment, and your answer is about the best one possible under the circumstances. Not that you should expect it to convince her or those of her ilk. There are basic philosophic outlooks which are irreconcilable, so I find it quite understandable that the contented and happy may never be capable really comprehending the discontent or unhappiness of others. Likewise the reverse, perhaps. I have never much cared for the joyous writing of Susan Wood and others. I can't help feeling a touch of insincerity in it, but no doubt I just don't believe it and/or am jealous.

We disagree violently on Dying Inside, easily one of the best s f novels of the last decade. It has a psychological depth, and an introspective characterisation that is quite rare for the field. What Silverberg did in this novel was go back to Wells' principle about extrapolating from a single fantastic premise. Silverberg's great achievement here is to show realistically the psychological effect of telepathy on its possessor, something that has never been done by anyone else.

I'm in a rage right now because I got my AFI film schedule a month late, and consequently missed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see all of the thirteen Keaton features and fifteen of the thirty shorts in the most complete Keaton festival ever staged. Luckily I did catch The Cameraman (1927) last night (one of the three or four funniest comedies of all time IMHO), and I will see Spite Marriage this Sunday. More on all this in the next The Shadow Line.

I mailed you TSL 5 in June. Therein, I talk about Synge, who is my favourite playwright next to Shakespeare, and The Children of Paradise, which has supplanted The Best Years of Our Lives as my favourite movie.

Because I do take my friends' recommendations seriously, I gave Nielsen yet another extensive listening. I now like the Nielsen 5th (Horenstein) very much, but the other symphonies still don't do much for me,

(28 July 1977)

brg Writing that "My 1977" piece certainly gave me some ideas for writing fiction. Whether I write such fiction is another matter. Much of Australian fiction has suffered from a "skipping over" effect. People tend to write books about the outback, or Carlton, or Redfern, or "the suburbs" as if the audience already knows what these places look like. The effect is like an in-joke. By contrast, The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney is Australia's greatest novel, I suspect, because Richardson was herself such an outsider to this country that she took the trouble to see what it is exactly like. So... that's I would like to do for Carlton, insofar as I've been able to give some idea of the place in "My 1977". As for vivid people... perhaps I should keep trying to invent people I would like to meet, like the lady in my story. *

Snailspace:

THE OLD DARK HOUSE

Film reviews by
BARRY GILLAM

(EDITOR: This column of film reviews ran regularly in SFC for about three years. Its regular appearance became derailed when SFC did. Meanwhile, Barry had sent many more film reviews than I could use. Somehow, all these reviews never appeared. The result is that most of these films have not only disappeared at cinemas, but have appeared on television many times. This fact hardly diminishes the generally high quality of these reviews.)

THE ORCHID

a film by Samuel Delany

In Heart of Darkness, Marlow describes the manager of a trading station in the Congo:

> "He was a common trader, from his youth up employed in these parts - nothing more. He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust - just uneasiness - nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a... a... faculty can be."

I take this as a starting point for a review of Samuel R Delany's movie, The Orchid. For the predominant impression is one of unease, which implies, to use a stronger prefix, disease. The film follows a business man as he is annoyed by a smiling young boy. The man is white, the boy black. They go out into the streets, which are generally deserted and look like the fringe of a factory district. At one point the man is "interviewed" by a "radical", who speaks of himself rather than asking questions. Several more "commune" types take up the pursuit from the boy and confront the man with their nakedness. At the end, the man smiles (for the first time) and reaches toward the sky. I must apologise for a lack of specific details and for any mistakes in description, as I have only seen the film once, some time ago at Noreascon, and the conditions under which it was received left much to be desired.

The themes of Delany's previous work can be seen here. The business man obviously cannot communicate with his nemeses. The boy is like a dark shadow to be ignored, a force of chaos for him. The "commune" group seems to be in harmony, but their harmony is revealed through geometric patterns in which they line up, first in a room, then on a roof. The interviewer will never get through to the business man, first because the radicals are too different, and next because the radical is no more interested in the businessman than vice versa.

Questions of identity are also evident. The businessman is shown to exist in the context of his occupation and, when pursued to the street, loses his reference points, his security, and his sense of self. The interviewer, as mentioned, is overly egotistical. The commune group suggests, by the divestment of their clothes, that clothes hide rather than reveal. These people have no need of such covering. They wear masks to parody the businessman's dour, single expression and again to point out that most people do prepare a face to meet the faces that they meet. The cutout figures, simulacra of people, reinforce the problem. In addition, Delany, quoting Jim McBride's My Girlfriend's Wedding, uses a mirror to show the viewer the camera and, if I am not mistaken, Delany himself. There is also a series of photographs of faces, which fit into this theme, as they look very much alike.

A question of dependency is clearly at the centre of the film, as the title indicates. In the businessman's office, he has a cheeseboard, arrayed with various engineering tools. The boy disarranges them. The man checks his tools like the work with the clocklike machine in Metropolis, but can't seem to keep them in place. Originally he used them, but now is being used by them. I think we must infer a further comment: the "establishment" used the blacks, but now finds to its dismay that they will not stand still and bow down any longer. The impish boy works on a level that the businessman is unaware of, because he has blinded himself to it. As in Ellison's Invisible Man, Delany posits structured layers of awareness, and suggests that the blacks can move below that of their erstwhile masters. The whites, like an orchid, have fed off them, but they are declaring their independence. This decay and parasitism comes up again when the interviewer says to the businessman: You don't work mornings. You just got here. You don't work afternoons. I've been working all day.

Also, and here is one of the things that most offended the audience at Noreascon, there is a sequence with the commune group, in which they walk in line above the camera, so that it photographs their genitals. Obviously Delany is intent on the shock effect he obtained, for if you are shocked, you are partly blind, like the businessman. In addition, though, this continues the theme of the orchid, for the genitals are one of the most fragile and defenceless parts of the body. However, as they appear in The Orchid, they are repugnant rather than beautiful. Delany seems to be interested in this paradox: that which gives the most pleasure is the most ungainly, the ugliest part. The grotesque angle of observation, from below, assures this response. The other orchid, the businessman, is alike in his lack of the orchid's beauty.

It is hard to know, in a director's first film, how much to ascribe to deliberate tension and how much to the awkwardness of inexperience. The film is, and means to be, rather tedious and difficult. Delany has forced the viewer to experience the businessman's discomfort and lack of understanding. On only that one viewing, I would rather not commit myself, but I think that one of the discrepancies of The Orchid is its tendency to rely on verbal metaphors and symbols rather than visual ones. In SFC 19, page 48 (EM 5, page 9) ((*brg* also Best of SFC booklet 2: Delany*)), he reveals his doubts about the real value of film when, mentioning examples of collaboration in the arts, pop music, and film, he qualifies them, "by many considered our most vital arts today". Does Delany himself consider film as a vital art? The Orchid is a kind of answer, but only a partial one. I will, nevertheless, look forward to more films from Delany as I look forward to more fiction from him.

- May 1972

THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

Directed by Peter Duffell; screenplay by Robert Bloch; director of photography: Ray Parslow; produced by Max J Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky.

A film buff has to accept certain things. Such as the fact that a film entitled I Walked With a Zombie can be a poetic masterpiece. However, I still balk when presented with a title like The House That Dripped Blood. Even Robert Bloch's name in the credits isn't sufficient to send me to see it. But the daily press liked it and I went - and I hereby recommend it as a fine way to spend a couple of hours some afternoon.

CAST: (First Story) Denholm Elliott (Charles), Joanna Dunham (Alice); Second Story) Peter Cushing (Philip), Joss Ackalnd (Roger); Wolf Morris (Waxworks Owner); (Third Story) Christopher Lee (Reid), Nyree Dawn Porter (Ann), Chloe Franks (Jane); (Fourth Story) Jon Pertwee (Paul), Ingrid Pitt (Carla); (Framework Story) John Bennett (Holloway), John Bryans (Stoker).

1971. 101 minutes.

The House That Dripped Blood is an anthology of four Robert Bloch horror stories. It is the latest in a long line of such British packages of the genre, the most notable of which is the superb Dead of Night. While The House That Dripped Blood is no Dead of Night, Bloch's stories and the film-makers have come together to create an enjoyably scary movie.

The connection between the stories

is the house of the title, which has acquired notoriety as a result of some unsavoury occurrences there. These deal with Bloch's usual stock in trade: madness, witchcraft, and vampirism. There is no real use in relating the plots, as most are the substance of the stories. I must note, however, the many fine actors who contribute to the film. Denholm Elliott, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Nyree Dawn Porter, Chloe Franks, Jon Pertwee, and Ingrid Pitt are all effective and, if none is given the chance Michael Redgrave had in the ventriloquist sequence from Dead of Night, none can be censured, either. The photography is also very good, and the music is most persuasive.

This would be the extent of an ordinary notice, but it does not exhaust this film. Robert Bloch has written not merely a quartet of his twisty tales, but a whole script whose subject is, I propose, not a physical house, or the supernatural, or fear itself, for that matter, but film.

He cues us in with the last shot of the title sequence, which shows a skull atop a copy of Lotte Eisner's The Haunted Screen, a study of Expressionism in the German cinema. I attribute the moving force to Bloch because the references are mainly textual (ie, one doesn't find visual "quotes" from great horror films) and because Bloch has on several occasions revealed his love of the movies. Most recently, in "The Movie People" (F&SF, October 1969), he conjured up a marvellous fantasy about extras and their lives off and on the screen.

The first sequence tells of an author of horror stories whose characters refuse to remain merely ink. In the second, a wax museum figure's beauty lures men to view her again and again. The third story deals with a man who is afraid of his small daughter and tries to keep her isolated. And, in the final one, we view an ageing Karloff-type star who finds that his portrayals are becoming more realistic.

Dramatically, the first story is the best and the last the least effective, but thematically they progress to a realisation of how films, and horror movies in particular, work. Thus, we are first told that a visual and verbal amalgam may be so potent that it haunts the viewer after he has left the theatre. In the wax museum we find the siren who draws men to her. She looks like a cross between Louise Brooks and Gloria Swanson and, interestingly, the first two men who go to her do so because of the resemblance to a woman both had known and desired. At the end, however, a young man enters, and he too falls under the spell of her beauty. That is, the first two were alive when the woman was transformed into the image and thus her attraction is partly nostalgic. But the life of art, and film in particular here, is such that today many young film buffs who were born after Louise Brooks' last film (Overland Stage Raiders, 1938, one of the John Wayne Three Mesquiteers series) can now discover and love this beautiful and brilliant actress.

In the third tale, a man constrains both his young daughter and himself until he meets the distorted mirror of the house, which gives him magic in return for his overstrictness. The fourth segment is out-and-out parody. It begins with a Zanuck-like autocratic actor who is escorted by a pneumatic Genevieve Gilles-like starlet. The actor is soon living his role instead of just playing it - the film haunting him, as it were. This culminates in an unfortunate flying sequence which is not quite as clumsy as that in Corman's dreadful The Raven.

However, here we also meet the antique proprietor of a costume shop, who, upon being informed that his customer is a film star, replies somewhat hesitantly, "I never patronise the, ah, kinema." In its way, it is a fine tribute to the cinema and recalls another, one of many in Dziga Vertov's Man With a Movie Camera (1929). A cameraman is standing in the back of a moving car, photographing the ladies in the car next to his. They ignore him for awhile and then one turns to him, smiles, and makes a quick, casual gesture of cranking a camera. Although the gesture is as profound as a child falling in step when a parade passes, it recognises one of the basic facts of film: the camera creates what it sees, as David Holzman later also realised.

The agent of the house tells us, in an epilogue, that we must surely have realised the secret of the house by now. You see yourself in it, he says. By this time, one realises that the House of the title is not so much an old British residence as the Old Dark House in which we sit to view the production. And thus the film comes full circle for, as in the first episode, we are collaborators in the creation of mood and horror, and at the same time the vicarious observers.

Although The House That Dripped Blood is closer to Roger Corman than to Tod Browning or James Whale, not to mention Fredric Murnau, the film is aware of its roots. I hope, though, that this exposition doesn't frighten you away, for the prime merits of The House That Dripped Blood are its unpretentiousness and craftsmanship. It is a minor, but quite enjoyable movie, and I only mean to suggest that, if you really care about film, you will enjoy it a bit more.

THE OMEGA MAN

Direction: Boris Segal; Screenplay: John William and Joyce H Corrington, based on a novel by Richard Matheson; Photography: William Ziegler; Art Direction: Arthur Loel, Walter M Simonds; Set Direction: William L Kuehl; Production: Walter Seltzer.

With: Charlton Heston (Neville), Anthony Zerbe (Matthias), Rosalind Cash (Lisa), Paul Koslo (Dutch), Lindoln Kilpatrick (Zachary), Eric Laneuville (Richie).

1971. 98 minutes.

"Memorable less for Boris Segal's direction than for the knowledgeable use of Charlton Heston's massive iconography." The comment is that of Richard Leary, the best film reviewer on Columbia University's Spectator. Segal's direction is really minimal. He is also responsible for Hauser's Memory, one of last year's crop of Universal tv movies. If anything in The Omega Man works, it is Charlton Heston, who moves through the movie like a prophet in khaki. Heston brings with him a legacy and a tradition of other, better (at least, bigger) movies. The part he plays, a remnant of the old order living beyond his time into a new dark age, only fosters this identification. And, with Heston's stature, even the props seem too small for him. All these factors combine to explain the success of Heston's performance (and it is hardly a performance at all) and the failure of the film.

You've probably read Richard Matheson's I Am Legend. It is a last-man-alive story with a new breed hunting the hero. A species of vampires and ghouls has resulted from a mutation. Robert Neville, the hero, barricades himself in his house, leaving it only by day, when his light-sensitive attackers must stay indoors. The first third of the book is the closest thing I've read to Night of the Living Dead, and is harrowing. Matheson expands the world of the novel as it progresses and as Neville attempts to solve his problems by going outside his own knowledge.

The changes made for the film generally weaken the drama of the novel and tend to turn it into another "Heston's last stand" movie. The novel's third-person narration gives a sense of the enormous amount of work Neville has done on his fortress to hold back the darkness. It is against this background that he drinks himself into a stupor. In the film, the precautions themselves seem too casual and Heston never drinks seriously enough to indicate any problem other than boredom. In smoothing out the range of the character, much of the point is lost. In I Am Legend, Neville is rotting within while he staves off the rottenness outside. In the movie, Heston is reckless while his antagonists are organised.

The deliberate and chilling anachronisms of the book come over poorly in the film. Neville is an intelligent, twentieth-century man attacked by vampires. Heston's foes are hooded cultists led by Anthony Zerbe. They have chalky faces and white-pupilled eyes, but the talk of "The Damioy" and the dialect speech suggest a parallel that is extraneous and annoying. Whether we are meant to think of the Family as a Manson cult or a Black Panthers group, the essential oddity of them is lost.

The movie, like the book, involves several other humans Neville finds. While he tries to save them, unrelentingly they turn into vampires. The book does well by this insidious invasion of everything around Neville. In the film, the tension is never built up sufficiently. And this is the problem with the whole film. There is physical suspense when the mutants attack Heston, but it is never more than that, except in the section when Rosalind Cash is with him. The moment when she is revealed as having become mutant is scary but, because of the context and poor handling, nowhere as effective as the similar sequence in Siegel's Invasion of the Body Snatchers. The staging of the entire film is rather crude, and suggests that the film-makers didn't have the money to take their time. Especially embarrassing is a large set piece featuring a football stadium in which Heston is almost trapped by the Family. Compare Siegel's

use of the same prop in Dirty Harry, in which the stadium is not merely a field and an obstacle but an intricate, ironic world.

Perhaps the most effective sequences are those in the deserted streets of Los Angeles. The city looks as if everyone had slept too late one morning. Heston's self-appointed mission, which is more self-preservation than conservation, is to kill the mutants while they sleep. As he does this, searching through buildings and stores, the camera reveals the dust and disuse indoors and the debris in the streets. The disorder is telling, but not really affecting.

Segal is finally just too much a tv director, relying on flabby visual trickery to keep up the viewer's interest where nothing else can. The fact that he has a great cameraman working with him doesn't seem to have improved the visual style of the film, which is, ultimately, the director's prerogative. Russell Metty has photographed two Welles films (The Stranger and Touch of Evil) as well as most of Sirk's great work (Magnificent Obsession, All That Heaven Allows, Written on the Wind, A Time to Love and a Time to Die, Imitation of Life). More recently, he photographed Siegel's Madigan, an essay in urban form from which The Omedga Man could take a lesson. All of which is to say that it's a pity that Segal was at the helm of this production.

Finally, if I hadn't read I Am Legend, I might not have disliked The Omega Man so much, but also I would have found it of much less interest. As it was, during the boring stretches, I could compare book and film and try to decide why the book had it over the film in every case. One last note to Heston freaks: in the wildest visualisation imaginable of the novel's last line (its title), Heston meets his maker by being crucified.

And that is, I will admit, the only way to kill Charlton Heston.

THE HELLSTROM CHRONICLE

Production, direction: Walon Green; Screenplay: David Seltzer; Photography: Ken Middleham, Helmut Barth, Walon Green; Music: Lalo Schifrin; Editing: John Soh. Production: David L Wolper.

With Lawrence Pressman (Dr Nils Hellstrom).

1971. 90 minutes.

The Hellstrom Chronicles is actually two movies, one unusually successful and one insufferable. The first is a documentary on insects, and the second is a science-fictional excuse to get the people into the cinema. Featuring some incredible photography, the documentary is fascinating. However, the other half, with its warning that the insects will inherit the earth, is tiresome, overwritten, and rather offensive to the intelligence of the viewer.

Dr Nils Hellstrom appears on screen to tell the audience the result of his research, which comes down to this: the insects were here before Man and they will be here after we are gone. As revelations go, it isn't exactly startling. In any case, Hellstrom preaches apocalypse. And that is the problem. When he comes on, the film stops dead and the viewer is subjected to a tirade. To be frank, if Lawrence Pressman had been an insect, it would have been much more interesting.

The insects themselves are quite interesting. They have been photographed with great clarity and are presented excellently. Except, that is, for the voice-over narration, which is a hangover from the Hellstrom sequences. The narrator cannot decide whether to anthropomorphise the insects (as he does often) or to play on their alienness (as he also does, telling us how absolutely unlike humans they are). The images and natural sound are fully effective without any assistance. Some of the facts offered are worthwhile, but their context is annoying.

There are many fine sequences and some rather frightening ones. The scenes of insects eating each other have an eerie, abstract cannibalism to them. And the viewer finds that the insects become protagonists. When they are caught by plants, one feels the claustrophobia, especially when we can see the insect struggling through the translucent "jaw" of a venus fly trap. The battle of ants and termites is minutely epic, recalling Thoreau's description in Walden.

This is one of several recent reactions to Walt Disney. Since Richard Shickel's The Disney Version several years ago, more and more people have been taking

Disney's forms and reviving them. The Yellow Submarine and Fritz the Cat are both valiant, if limited efforts. Fritz the Cat, the lesser of the two, even includes an apocalyptic sequence in which the shadows of Mickey, Minney, and Donald cheer on the jets bombing Harlem. The Hellstrom Chronicle is another such effort. And it is refreshing to see natural history presented without the halo of universal grace and light, to see animals that are not animated toys. As would be expected, both The Hellstrom Chronicle and Fritz the Cat overreact. The Hellstrom Chronicle's proposal is that nature is basically violent, even when it is beautiful. But its sensationalism is almost forgivable in view of its qualities.

So The Hellstrom Chronicle is recommended, but do not be misled by the advertising. In New York, it was sold as marginal s f. As long as you know it isn't, you're in for a fine documentary.

- June 1972

DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS

Directed by Harry Kumel; Screenplay by Mr Kumel, Pierre Drouot and J J Amiel; Photographed by Edward Van Der Enden; Music by Francois de Roubaix.

With Delphine Seyrig (Countess Elisabeth Bathory), John Karlen (Stefan Chiltern), Daniele Ouimet (Valerie), Andrea Rau (Ilona), Paul Esser (Porter), Georges Jamin (The Man), Fons Rademakers (Mother).

1971. 87 minutes.

I don't know how much of Daughters of Darkness will reach Australia. Oh the other hand, I don't know that any deletions will be in any way a tragedy, either. Daughters of Darkness gives us some sexy lady vampires, a few other perversions, some lovely photography, and last and most felicitously, Delphine Seyrig.

Daughters of Darkness takes place in an empty, off-season Ostend hotel where young newly-weds, Stefan and Valerie, are trying to work up the courage to cross the Channel and reveal their marriage to Stefan's mother. Also in residence are a countess and her companion. The vampires try to separate the honeymooners so that they can work on Valerie. Meanwhile, murders of young girls are occurring in the vicinity with a certain regularity. And a nosy policeman, who realises what's up and pokes around for evidence, is killed by the countess.

The film, in fact, is the story of a series of destructions. The husband's tastes turn out to be not quite as normal as his trusting bride had assumed and, after everything else, he grabs at the first woman to offer herself to him. Daughters of Darkness could be said to be a film about forms of perversion (lesbianism, homosexuality, vampirism, sadism) and their delimiting factors. But perhaps one should simply call its theme and method sensationalism and let it go at that. As it turns out, the husband becomes the manipulated, in a manner reminiscent of Leiber's Conjure Wife. Indeed, the one moment of terror in the film comes when he is almost buried alive.

In general, though, the film seems to work assiduously toward anticlimax after anticlimax. The pacing, and even the special effects - the one thing ordinarily guaranteed in a vampire film - are disappointing. When the vampires are caught out under conditions that would dissolve a Max Schreck, something very annoying happens. That is, nothing happens. The women get panicky, but their demises do not follow directly from their nature, as they should. Each vampire shortly meets her death in what would be a mundane accident were it not for the vamp's lack of control. Thus, there is a lack of connection between the theme (perversion is not a viable alternative to "normal" life styles) and its working-out (a vampire dies in an automobile accident).

I suppose one can hardly complain about the film's leering quality. Its revelations are presented so that even the slowest in the audience can whisper to him/herself, "She's a lesbian", or "He's a sadist". Because of this, one is disappointed in every scene by some form of over-elaboration, be it visual or dramatic.

As indicated above, the photography is good. The director has managed to create an interesting atmosphere in which to place the film. The characters move between the beach and the hotel rooms as the mood does between the restless, cold

sea and the huge, ornate, but empty hotel. And I especially like the moon ravaged by clouds which we see directly after Stefan beats Valerie with his leather belt.

Finally, one must say something about Delphine Seyrig. Her presence and mystique lend an element of solidity and a purposeful centre to an otherwise rather listless film. In Truffaut's situation comedy, Bed and Board, one of Antoine's neighbours does impressions, and we see him on TV imitating Delphine Seyrig in Last Year at Marienbad and Stolen Kisses. What comes through, though, beyond the mocking pronunciation and exaggerated grimaces, is Miss Seyrig's exquisite acting in those films. Here, she singlehandedly lends credence to the vampirism in what is otherwise merely soft-core pornography with suggestions of the supernatural.

In the end, Daughters of Darkness is a bad movie with a couple of redeeming factors. They made the movie bearable as I watched it for review, but whether they are sufficient inducement for you to go see it is quite doubtful.

BEN

Directed by Phil Karlson; Screenplay by Gilbert A Ralston; Based on characters created by Stephen Gilbert; Camera (DeLuxe Color): Russell Metty; Music: Walter Scharf; Art direction: Rolland M Brooks; Editor: Harry Gerstad; Produced by Mort Briskin.

With Lee Harcourt Montgomery (Danny Garrison), Joseph Campanella (Cliff Kirtland), Arthur O'Connell (Bill Hatfield), Rosemary Murphy (Beth Garrison), Meredith Baxter (Eve Garrison), Kaz Garas (Joe Greer).

1972. 93 minutes.

In the 1950s, Phil Karlson directed a number of well-regarded action films, including Five Against the House, The Phoenix City Story, The Brothers Rico, Gunman's Walk, and Hell to Eternity. I've seen two of these, and can attest to their effectiveness. Karlson's movies reveal an almost subversive view of America as a schizophrenic nation. The central conflict is that between the personal and the societal imperative. In Five Against the House, Brian Keith's paranoia and delusions of grandeur are so rampant that his erstwhile partners in the heist now have only one object: to keep Keith from exploding and killing them all. In The Brothers Rico, there are strongly conflicting loyalties which are only resolved in mutual destruction.

The same themes are evident in Ben, Karlson's latest. A small boy befriends a rat and protects him while the entire city of Los Angeles is searching for Ben and his hordes. The searchers want to stop the rats from any further murder or destruction, but the boy only knows that Ben is his friend. Danny has a heart condition and he cannot exert himself with normal childhood energy. As a result, he has no friends and is watched carefully by his mother and sister, who are pampering him because they know that any one of a series of operations may end his life rather than restore it. The opposition (the individual vs society) is played out by the members of Danny's family. The divisive forces are raging in a confined space.

"Raging", however, may not be the correct word for Ben, although it is for Karlson's earlier work. The problem with thematic criticism is that it has little to do with quality. Ben is a simply awful, trashy movie. One can extrapolate the disturbing scenes of rats infesting the walls of a house or the destruction they wreak in a supermarket into an anarchic theme, but the film doesn't warrant it. Even the conflict mentioned above between Danny's innocent view of Ben as a friend and society's knowledge that Ben is a killer isn't very well handled. The whole film has a perfunctory feeling to its production. The potentially interesting scenes in the sewers at the end are presented clumsily. When flame-throwers are brought in, the flames are obviously superimposed on the image of the rats fleeing.

I can't say I was very disappointed. In the 1960s, Karlson has been reduced to things like Rampage (Sabu's last film) and The Silencers (Dean Martin-Matt Helm). Ben manages to hit rock-bottom. The actors and the screenplay richly deserve each other. And the photography is rather tired, as if Russell Metty had given up on the project before he began.

Inevitably, Ben survives the wholesale destruction of his rat army. And it's

no wonder: according to Variety, Willard grossed $8,200,000 in the last six months of 1971. Ben will surely have its own revenge.

- August 1972

FROGS

Directed by George McCowan; Screenplay: Robert Hutchinson and Robert Blees; Story: Hutchinson; Camera (MovieLab Color): Mario Tosi; Music: Les Baxter; Editor: Fred R Feitshans; Produced by George Edwards and Peter Thomas;

With Ray Milland (Jason Crockett), Sam Elliot (Pickett Smith), Joan Van Ark (Karen), Adam Roarke (Clint), Judy Pace (Bella).

1972. 90 minutes.

There is a certain amount of pleasure to be derived from Frogs, a very minor movie that passed through New York this summer. Because that is more than I can say for "major" films such as Slaughterhouse-Five, I'd like to talk briefly about it.

Ads for Frogs depict a large frog in the foreground and a horde of smaller ones waiting behind it. Extending from the large frog's mouth is a human hand. And on a recent day, one New York newspaper ran the ad with the masticating frog printed in green. The movie itself is like the ad: it possesses something between a compelling and a repelling vulgarity.

Don't mistake me. Frogs is largely just another cheap movie cashing in on the recent success of "rat's revenge" films. It's worth about 85c (which is what I paid to get into the first New York showing) and has no pretence about it. I think that is why I feel lenient toward Frogs. Like so many s f films, it is really a nothing movie, a throwaway movie, disposable, no deposit, no return.

The scene is a little island in the Florida Everglades, presided over by Jason Crockett, who gathers his family there for two weeks each year to celebrate his birthday and the Fourth of July. Confined to a wheelchair, he is a curmudgeon of an old man who savours the phrase "ugly rich" and who has helped to pollute much of the surrounding swamp. A large old mansion is the centrepiece. Pickett Smith, a wandering ecology photographer, who looks like Mr Clean Living cum Outdoor Life of 1972, chances in. The phone is dead. People go out to pick daisies (or whatever it is that grows in the Everglades) and don't return.

As you can see, the plot is a Compendium Cliche Production. The acting is quite adequate, since none of the actors is asked to do much in that direction. The photography and the production are both handsome and the direction is serviceable. There is even some mist left over from Roger Corman's Poe pictures.

Before I get to what I liked about Frogs, I have to mention one further disappointment. Throughout the movie, there are comments about the frogs growing in size, but we see nothing extraordinary. And the question is: what can a frog do to you? Both of these points are relevant, because of the already mentioned ad campaign. I waited for the scene where a frog devours a man. Well, it isn't there. At the end when Jason Crockett is alone in his mansion, the frogs come to get him: they jump through the window, breaking it, and croak in a sinister, almost mafioso manner, but when the film ends we have only seen Milland's body lying on the floor (he tried to get out of his wheelchair, for reasons beyond me) with little contented frogs sitting on him and croaking away. My own thoughts went to Edward Gorey's The Insect God, but the film itself left what will happen to Milland up in the air. I suppose what the movie needed was a horror equivalent of the outrageous disclosure about clams that BC featured several years ago. But that would have called for a better script, a bigger budget, and more production time. (As it is, I was surprised to find that Robert Blees has written two Sirk films, albeit two I haven't seen: All I Desire (1953) and Magnificent Obsession (1954).)

Well, one only really thinks about this at the end of the film, because the earlier parts move along well and contain enough shock value to keep our attention fixed on the screen. Frogs is no spell-binder, but it is decently made. It divides neatly in half, the first being an anthology of premonitions

and the second a series of murders. The thing about frogs is that they are really schoolboy animals. The idea of their turning vicious is a good one. Admittedly, it is not all that well realised in the film. The killings are usually the work of spiders, snakes, and other animals which look more reptilian than amphibious. The executions, especially the ones by spiders and snakes, have a real repulsiveness to them and this is, after all, what the film is trying for.

Among the most pleasant things in the film are the visual conceits. The credit sequence has Pickett Smith photographing animals in the swamp with the stills as backdrops for the names. There is no attempt at the virtuosity of the similar opening sequence in Siegel's Two Mules for Sister Sara, but it is nice. The incongruous situations the animals get into include a snake depending from a chandelier and a frog revolving on a phonograph record. But my favourite, which appears at the beginning of the frog takeover, features several frogs jumping onto a cake which is iced in the form of an American flag. There is something so mentally simple and physically messy about that image that I cannot deny its sloppy effectiveness. Its very carelessness appeals to me. Like Frogs.

- August 1972

CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

Directed by J Lee Thompson; Screenplay by Paul Dehn, based on characters created by Pierre Boulle; Camera (DeLuxe Color): Bruce Surtees; Music: Tom Scott; Set direction: Norman Rockett; Editors: Marjorie Fowler, Allan Jaggs; Produced by Arthur P Jacobs.

With Roddy McDowall (Caesar), Don Murray (Governor Breck), Ricardo Montalban (Armando), Natalie Trundy (Lisa), Hari Rhodes (MacDonald), Severn Darden (Kolp).

1972. 87 minutes.

I was very pleasantly surprised by Conquest of the Planet of the Apes. Where Escape from the Planet of the Apes was conspicuous for the intelligence of its script, Conquest of the Planet of the Apes is outstanding for its success as an action movie. Paul Dehn is again the screenwriter, and again he does a fine job.

The film begins a number of years after Escape From the Planet of the Apes ended. The ape-child of the previous movie has grown to maturity within the confines of Armando's circus. Through a mishap, Armando is interrogated and the authorities reopen the case of the intelligent apes. During the years between the movies, several things have come to pass. First, all cats and dogs died off from a plague of extraterrestrial origin. As substitutes, chimpanzees and apes were introduced into the households of the world. Upon seeing how clever the primates were, humans trained them and now use them as slaves. The apes have risen in intelligence but are still far below the level necessary for any planned rebellion. For, accompanying the enslavement of the apes, a police state has risen in America. Conquest of the Planet of the Apes recounts Caesar's infiltration of the slave trade and his eventual leadership of the revolution.

I must admit that I am not a great admirer of Ricardo Montalban's, and I found the scenes of his interrogation rather mundane, if well handled. In addition, Montalban is given the unenviable task of explaining the plot of the series up to now. The other humans are the Governor, a hard-headed and intelligent administrator; MacDonald, his black aide; and Kolp, his sinister scientific hatchet man. A very strong parallel is drawn between the apes and the blacks. MacDonald acts as the Governor's humanist conscience, pointing out that suppression will lead only to rebellion. And some of the police we see are dressed in Nazi-style uniforms.

In the opening section of the film, Caesar is trained for his duties along with a mass of unintelligent apes. A sly, broad wit is displayed in the contrast of Caesar's rational actions and intelligent curiosity with the fumbling motions and nonrational thought processes of the rest of the apes. As this training proceeds, and after Caesar has been assigned to a job, he organises an underground, hordes weapons, and indoctrinates the apes. All this is rather farfetched, for the apes are apparently incapable of any concerted action or even any real communication before Caesar came along. The sequence is presented as a montage, and the film rushes over the questionable logic of its story-line.

The last third of the film is devoted to a splendidly staged ape revolution, and features some excellent action montage. The contrast here is one of the senses and is quite effective. The dark, marching shapes of the police, straight and brittle, are intercut with the crouching apes, supply and sly. The syncopated rapping of boots on concrete is opposed to the soft padding of the apes' feet. The soldiers use guns and flame-throwers, while the apes strangle their opponents silently. And the set, a series of large modernistic buildings and square, empty plazas, is full of straight lines, glass and steel, and symmetrically placed ornaments. It provides a fine background for the battle, but it is also a very visible representation of the monolithic power structure that they are fighting against.

While watching Conquest of the Planet of the Apes, I was reminded of John Boorman's Point Blank and Euripides' The Bacchae. In Point Blank, Lee Marvin pits his personal vendetta against a corporate syndicate, moving horizontally with a natural force through cities of vertical skyscrapers and artificial structures. In The Bacchae, Euripides presents a man who has tried to cover up his own irrational impulses with a veneer of civilisation. In Conquest of the Planet of the Apes, the Governor voices this idea towards the end when he says to Caesar: "Man was born of the ape and there is still an ape inside every man. The beast must be shackled and beaten back. When we hate you, we're hating the dark side of ourselves."

This warning against civilised detachment is further emphasised by the irony of the ending. Caesar vows that the apes will be benevolent rulers and will not repeat the mistakes of the humans. But the viewer knows quite well from Planet of the Apes that the vow will not be kept.

The film-makers use the apes' often ugly faces to provoke in the viewers the response of the humans in the film. We are put off by the apes' rather repugnant forms, but we delight in their primitive force. The humans are all rather colourless, if generally sympathetic. The actors are good, but the design of the film calls for this. Hari Rhodes projects his character the best and I remember him particularly from Fuller's Shock Corridor.

The ape masks are as pliable and well used as ever. Roddy McDowall is especially good; his silent comments well complement the wit and irony of the script. And Natalie Trundy does much better as a speechless simian than she did as a human in Escape from the Planet of the Apes.

In SFC 20, I castigated The Forbin Project perhaps too strongly for its gaps in logic. I didn't like it and enlisted that as one reason. I like Conquest of the Planet of the Apes, so I have belittled the logical faults. They are there, but I don't think they hurt a film that is so eminently entertaining.

- August 1972

Snailspace:

VAN VOGT FITS KIDS' LIDS

by GEORGE TURNER

(EDITOR: George Turner wrote this article as a review for SFC in late 1971 or early 1972. I set it aside as an article - and from there it became shunted between non-issues of SFC during 1974 and 1975. I suspect that Children of Tomorrow, the book discussed, is still around in some edition or other. If not, the general questions raised by this article are still worth discussing - especially the difference between repressed sexual attitudes often shown in science fiction, compared with the honesty about sexual attitudes shown in recent "children's books".)

George Turner discusses:

CHILDREN OF TOMORROW

by A E Van Vogt

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1972
254 pages :: $A4.95

The American paperback edition of this novel has been around for two years or so, but I don't recall seeing a review of it. Nor do I recall hearing any discussion of it, though it should have called forth some of the same sort of discussion triggered by Heinlein's Starship Troopers, and for much the same reasons. Now the English edition is here, and local libraries will be buying it. And, so Space Age Books tells me, much of the hardcover stuff goes to school libraries.

That is one reason for writing this article about a thoroughly bad novel. The other is that I would like to hear the reactions of younger readers to the thing. Perhaps they will oblige me.

** ** **

Here is that fabulous beast, a book which fails in every department yet holds the interest because of what it has to say. Van Vogt has, for the first time (unless one makes the doubtful exception of the Null-A novels) chosen a human theme and worked it out for the most part in human terms - if you accept Van Vogt's version of a human being. There isn't a superman in sight. There are a couple of aliens, but they are just a plot device to make the traditional Van Vogt ending.

And, faced with human beings as characters, Van Vogt is hopelessly inept. We always suspected this, of course, but here is proof aplenty. He has worked hard. Every character is strongly individualised - but has no existence outside his idiosyncratic features. The dialogue is tailored craftily to character - and reads like a transcription of gramophone records. Each character is carefully observed for realism - and struts his realism under the wary control of the puppet master.

It is a demonstration of the powers of a man who plainly knows the mechanics of literature but lacks the urgency of belief or involvement to enable him to record a living experience. The characters become finally unacceptable; the intellect agrees that they could - only just could - behave as Van Vogt makes them do, but the emotions reject them.

There is a saving grace. Concentration on human beings to the total exclusion of manipulated universes, planets tossed like puffballs, and time treated as a side-effect of schizophrenia has reduced Van Vogt to telling a straight story in a straight line. The reduction in mental wear-and-tear is considerable - and therefore the great, glaring hole in the plot shows up like a crack in the plaster, revealing unmistakably that we are reading Van Vogt the propagandist, that this is a novel with a purpose, and we are being seduced, and so to hell with the plot as long as the message comes over.

** ** **

In a not-too-distant future, star travel has arrived. It is centred on a single city, Spaceport, from which the starmen go out, often for years at a time, leaving their wives and children to wait in the city. (I find Spaceport an artificial conception, but it serves merely to concentrate the problem in a manageable area.)

The wives succumb (almost without exception, it appears) to boredom and its attendant distractions, psychological and sexual. The children, lacking one necessary parent, are in the broken-home position, with all its pitfalls.

The children of Spaceport take the matter into their own hands and form themselves into "outfits" composed of kids between fourteen and nineteen, who set up rules for self-government and also methods of disciplining their parents. They do this so successfully that the Spaceport situation has official and legal backing. The outfits are not vicious gangs in the tradition of so many sermons on this theme, but groups of serious-minded kids determined that their parents are not going to be allowed to fail them.

And the outfits' internal discipline is tight. They are particularly concerned about sexual matters (and so, we will see, is Van Vogt) and their rules outlaw explicit sexual contact. "Lip-kissing" is forbidden until you are nineteen, at which age you automatically leave the outfit; parents kiss you on your right cheek, "moochers" (boy or girlfriends) on your left.

And this peculiar practice is the core of the plot and of Van Vogt's concern.

Commander Lane returns home after ten years in space to discover that his daughter Susan, now sixteen years old, is an outfit member and has a mind of her own as well as mores and behaviour of her own. And that her mother, Estelle, supports and approves her behaviour. (Estelle is the only adult woman in the book who is neither on with the milkman nor sunk in self-indulgent apathy.) He discovers also that, in his absence, his character has been appraised and that he has been listed by the kids as a person unsuitable for parenthood. And indeed Van Vogt makes him unsuitable for almost anything, including command of a spaceship, let alone a fleet.

His reaction is predictable. He is not going to be told what to do by a gang of brats. He decides to wean Susan away from the outfit influence and ropes in a twenty-eight-year-old space officer, Sennes (very masucline, handsome, and amoral) to set the girl's ideas in order.

Sennes does a neat job of attracting Susan's attention but, when he attempts to kiss her goodnight, she reads him the riot act, outfit version. He kisses her by force - a lip-kiss, horror of horrors - and is seen by members of the outfit. (I can't do anything to disguise the silliness of this kind of Peg's Paper plotting; I can only say that one's interest is sufficiently involved to accept it in order to see where it will lead.)

Susan is disciplined by the outfit, though her outfit moocher protests the unfairness; she is in coventry for a week. Social deprivation is a weapon. Sennes repeats the performance, again against her will, and once more is seen. This time the outfit begins to realise that something more than mere obedience to rules is required and the members begin to question their own appraisal. (I will return to this curious scene later.)

They realise that the crux of the problem is her father, Lane, and that he must be disciplined. Lane, then, is "faced" by the outfit (seven kids plus two adult "observers") and asked three pointed questions about his attitudes. To these he furiously gives all the wrong answers and threatens to remove Susan from Spaceport.

So the squeeze is on. (No violence; at least Van Vogt won't stnad for that.) Disciplining is achieved by a sort of declaring black, which involves refusal by tradesmen to supply the Lane family with any but the bare necessities of existence. But Lane is not the boy to cave in before that sort of treatment.

Besides, he has other things on his mind, and here the parallel plot comes in to sort things out.

Out in space is an alien fleet which has tracked Lane home to discover the whereabouts of Earth, which they intend to attack because of a mistake about Earth's intentions. Also they have parent-child problems, and solve theirs by having Dad take Junior with him wherever he goes, even on a warship. (I suppose one can't logically complain about anything done by aliens.)

One of these sons, all tentacles and things, is on Earth, disguised as a member of Susan's outfit, spying like mad. (Don't ask me why they sent a boy on a man's errand. Ask Van Vogt. And he's not saying.) Junior decides he likes the way the outfit operates, feels it is better than their own arrangement, and eventually persuades Dad to open communication with the Terran fleet, commanded by Lane. Details are sorted out and interstellar friendship ensues.

It is a triumph for the kids. And Lane gives in to the kids in a scene which makes it plain that he would much rather line the little bastards against a wall and slice them slowly with red-hot razors. His capitulation is indeed the most realistic thing in the book.

** ** **

Question: What is Van Vogt trying to say? This longish quote purports, I think, to be his message:

> "The problem is that teenagers are actually capable people, and have not been used as such by society... they're going to be doing something with that capability. If we wish, it can be constructive... Back a hundred years ago we had the biggest demonstration of all. The Chinese Communist armies that overran China consisted of over eighty per cent teenagers. All through history cunning usurpers have grabbed the minds of kids because nobody else was utilising their potentialities. When the long space hikes began, the moment of that truth arrived in Spaceport. You were busy. Or you were off somewhere. And Susan was only six, so she was not yet a part of the storm. Besides, you accepted the intensive police patrols of ten and twenty years ago as normal for a military centre. But the fact is, the authorities were handling a nightmare of teen rebellion and alienation. All that is over and you should be glad, not mad."

Now this is all fairly standard on the subject, but how has Van Vogt handled it?

For a start, he has falsified his plot. The outfits are legal, government-encouraged. Yet Lane, after weeks back on Earth, has not discovered this fact. (Apparently he doesn't read newspapers or talk to anyone, and even his wife doesn't bother to tell him.) So, when "faced" by the kids, he goes into a major tantrum. Van Vogt just hasn't given him a chance to find out what the circumstances are and so behave in an intelligent manner. If he had, there would have been no novel. And no message. Van Vogt needed a savage father-figure but succeeded only in producing an automated nitwit.

But this is mere mechanics. Let's look at the outfits themselves.

First, the outfit.age group is from fourteen to nineteen. Its major business is self-discipline and guidance of younger kids whose parents do not look after them properly. No complaint about that. It devolves around the idea, not at all new, that children can be used to educate children. This is a very practical idea and one that should have been investigated thoroughly a couple of generations ago. (But the climate was not ripe. I know. I was there. It took WWII to start the cyclone whirring.)

But this self-discipline, in Van Vogt's exposition, concentrates on sex. Teenage violence, theft, alcoholism, drugging, or even mere nuisance-making are never mentioned. Not once. Does he, then, see sex as the only worthwhile problem? If so, we must look at his attitude.

Sex, in the outfits, is taboo until you are nineteen. (Do I hear a few million jeering laughs? Add mine.) In fact, even lip-kissing is a major dereliction. Shades of Victoria!

There is, in the cast, one rebellious slut, Dolores, who points out that some kids develop faster than others (she gets Sennes in the end, with a neat doublecross) but nobody listens to such degenerate commonsense. I hate to think of the sexual disasters occurring as all those nineteenth birthdays come round. The crash of the forest of toppling moralities!

So the kids have their moochers (placid peck on the left cheek) and that keeps their instincts in check. Does it? Even Van Vogt seems to have had his doubts, because there is a sweet little scene wherein Estelle asks daughter Susan if she has ever had any sexual experience. Susan says no, but, "I masturbate sometimes, as you said I could, and should."

The underlinement is mine.

Now, the old idea of masturbation as physically harmful has long been shelved. But its psychological dangers, when used as the only method of relief, are obvious, particularly in the formative years. You could find an unlovely little group of repressions and distorted attitudes arising here. Few kids have not masturbated at some time (and plenty of adults continue to do it) but to advocate it as an alternative to properly managed sexual experience is breathtaking. Even the old idea of giving a brat a quid and the address of the local brothel is preferable. I don't want to take sides on the vexed question of pre-marital virginity, but it seems to me that an unfulfilled sexual maturity is as powerful a bomb as an unfulfilled intellect. And what a snotty lot of prudish time bombs Van Vogt's outfits would tend to be.

You simply can't take an age group, fourteen to nineteen, and treat it as homogeneous. All youngster are individuals, and for my money only the parent and the skilled adviser have a hope of giving proper guidance. They they so often do not is one of our major tragedies, but I can't see Van Vogt's solution working.

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Next - in Spaceport you must belong to an outfit or be ostracised. How's that for democracy?

Can you imagine a seventeen-year-old neo-genius, or even bright kid, wasting his time going to disciplinary meetings, talking civic responsibility to rebellious ten-year-olds, and bowing to group decisions about his conduct? He'd tell them to go stuff themselves, and rightly so.

Van Vogt's herd has no rogues - the dreary crew!

What this amounts to is the formation of a despotic teenage society within society, one so narrow that it would stand a good chance of destroying all that it intended to preserve. But remember that Van Vogt is a scientologist, and that scientology, despite its pretensions to releasing the essential ego, closes its ranks against the rogue who can do his own releasing.

Come in out of the cold, child, and all will be well! (Sounds of juvenile puking, offstage.)

As reinforcement to this, there are the curious scenes wherein the disciplinary groups meet. They do, in a vague way, realise that there are problems they may mishandle. And how do they show this realisation?:

> "I confess that I allowed personal considerations to override my judgement..."
>
> "I confess that I acted without full knowledge..."

Confess! Confess!

You know the stock phrase for it - "the agonising personal re-appraisal" - and the kind of regimented despotism that it comes from.

Personal reappraisal is a good thing (and one that should not be attempted without guidance) but that word "confess" sticks in my gullet. It is too short a step from that to toeing the party line, be it Liberal; Communist, or teenage outfit. No party line is so fine as to be worth public grovelling; it is the beginning of the end of the individual.

But Van Vogt's civilisations always did have a leaning in the totalitarian direction. And have you noticed how common it is in s f? How neatly pigeon-holed the social strata seem to be, whatever the type of government? How often the benevolent despot seems to be the answer to social problems? But that's another argument, and one that should have been taken up long ago.

And, for good measure in the confession business, there is a revolting scene wherein one of the kids, who has been seduced into lip-kissing the profligate Dolores, "confesses" that only a bloody idiot could have seen anything in the bitch. Dolores should have kicked him in the balls for openers.

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There are a hundred points of this nature to be picked out of Children of Tomorrow. I have confined myself to the obvious.

But a thought nags at my mind.

I remember myself with uncomfortable vividness as I was at, say, sixteen. I remember that too much of my thinking was conditioned by ideas picked out of books such as this, and that I was all too willing to accept the lovely idea (teenage self-determination, oh boy, oh boy!) without seeing the flaws in its presentation or the whips in its application.

I don't know how the present-day teenager thinks - except that he seems streets ahead of my own day in sophistication and selectivity - because I lost touch long ago. You lose touch, if only because there is so much in the world worth doing and seeing and thinking about, that keeping up with more than a broad picture is impossible.

But I would like to know what readers of the younger generation think of this book. Perhaps some of them will tell SFC.

- George Turner 1972

ANDERSON'S "THE PROBLEM OF PAIN": SOME FIRST THOUGHTS

by PATRICK L McGUIRE

(EDITOR: Patrick McGuire has that admirable ability to make science fiction stories sound much more interesting when they are reviewed than they are when you actually read them. For example, this piece on Anderson. (And his famous long essay about "The Queen of Air and Darkness".) This article appeared first, a long time ago, in Banshee, edited and published by Mike Gorra, 199 Great Neck Road, Waterford, Connecticut 06385, USA.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Some of the ideas in this essay were suggested, in the course of casual correspondence, by Sandra Miesel. Give her about twenty-five per cent of the cr dit, and me all the blame.)

Poul Anderson has recently invented a new alien race for the Polesotechnic League/Terran Empire/Commonality future history: the Ythrians. These winged sophonts seem to have taken a powerful hold on Anderson's imagination, for he has used them already in two short stories and one novel. The novel, The People of the Wind, or at least the first third of it, which appears in the February 1973 Analog, seems to be shaping up rather nicely, but both the short stories are failures. And both largely for the same reason, I think. The climax of each comes in the discovery of some trait of the Ythrians, and ideas are the place to begin stories, not to finish them. In fact, the stories read rather as if Anderson were trying to get a little more mileage out of background invented for the novel.

The first of them, "Wings of Victory" (Analog, April 1972), is fairly straightforward. Anderson has figured out a way for a flying creature large enough to maintain an intelligent brain to exist on a fairly Earthlike planet. The problem is the energy outlay necessary to maintain a being that large in flight. The common opinion has been that this is impossible in an Earthlike environment; apparently, the limiting factor is the supply of sufficient oxygen to the wing muscles. Anderson figured out a way around this difficulty,

a gill-like "supercharger" aereating the blood immediately before it reaches the flight muscles.

The announcement of this piece of ingenuity is the entire story: In what I think are early Technic times, a ship of the first Terran Grand Survey lands on Ythri. A scouting-expedition leader is a stereotype nineteenth-century German (ie, both overly theoretical and prone to violence, but no Nazi). As he knows there can be no winged sophonts on Ythri, he has no compunctions about shooting at the large birdlike creatures that attack the party as they go prying about deserted dwellings. Fortunately our hero (who has what I think is an Armenian name) figures out the truth in the nick of time, the scouting party makes its escape, and hero gets the girl. By the way, she is Japanese-Russian, and has spent the story being Orientally feminine and demure, while contradictorally being the weapons officer.

This story has "human interest" elements kicking around the edges - our German Theoretiker gives the hero such a hard time because he is unsure of himself and does not know how to make an impression on the girl, for instance - but these do not congeal into the parallel plot so frequent in Anderson's technical-problem stories. The style is a little weak too, with allusions to Simon Templar and sundry bits of Archaic Modern English mixed in, to no obvious effect.

The next story, the one I am really concerned with here, is "The Problem of Pain", which appears in the February 1973 issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Again, the climax of the story hinges on an interesting idea which Anderson has thought up for the Ythrians. But this time he has also madw what looks like an honest attempt to tell a moving human story.

Anderson has always been moderately fond of stories with narrative frames, and he has used a lot of these devices lately. For instance, consider the very complicated one in There Will Be Time. "Wings of Victory" has a faceless narrator who does little except clutter up the story, but "The Problem of Pain" has a substantial narrative framework. First we are introduced to the marginally habitable planet Lucifer (a symbolic name), where the anonymous first narrator and the second narrator, Peter Berg, are part of an expedition conducting a feasibility study. Berg and the first narrator are isolated from the rest of their group for months at a time, so they get to know one another quite well. The narrator is an agnostic sympathetic to religion, and Berg seems to be some sort of Catholic. Perhaps not a Roman Catholic - in addition to existing divisions, Anderson has introduced "Jerusalem" Catholics in The People of the Wind - but no unequivocal differences with Roman Catholic belief are expressed within the story. One night, Berg and the first narrator have rather too much to drink during and after dinner, and they begin to discuss matters philosophical and religious. Berg lets it slip that something has made him very unsure that God is love, and once he has said that much, he determines to tell the whole story:

Just after they leave university, Berg and his new wife ship out as technical experts as part of an Ythrian survey expedition to an Earth-like (and hence, also Ythri-like) planet - they call it Gray, but it will be renamed Avalon in The People of the Wind. Berg has developed an interest in one of the two religions with a widespread following in the predominant Ythrian culture, the "New Faith". ("The Problem of Pain" describes the "Old Faith" only as "pagan" and involving "bloody rites". In the first installment of The People of the Wind, a reference is made to "sacred revels" employing drugs.) Berg believes that Christianity is valid only for humans. In fact, Anderson seems to feel that this is already general Catholic teaching, since Berg says, "'Way back before space travel, the Church decided Jesus had come only to Earth, to men.'" A character in an earlier story ("The Word to Space", by "Winston P Sanders", F&SF September 1960) says, "'The Vatican decided more than a hundred years ago, back when space travel was still a mere theory, that the mission of Our Lord was to Earth only, to the human race.'" I have had occasion to do a moderate amount of research on the subject, and have not come across anything so conclusive as this would suggest, though this line of thinking does indeed seem to prevail among Catholic (and also among, at the least, Anglican) theologians. It is hard, after all, to see what point God's becoming man could have for nonhumans, unless humankind is taken as representative of all material intelligent beings, which is rather a leap, and which still does nothing about the fact that certain other races would be forever separated from ours by space and time.

Anyhow, Berg suspects that the New Faith may be a revelation to the Ythrians

equivalent to Christianity for humans, and he hopes that study of the New Faith may enrich humans' knowledge of God. Degrees of religious devotion are about as various among the Ythrians as among humans, but one of the expedition, Enherrian, is devout, and Berg hopes for some interesting exchange.

Shortly after arrival, Berg and his wife Olga ("Olga" is the name of the spaceship in "Wings of Victory" as well - anyone for Significance-Hunting?), along with Enherrian, his wife, and their two grown children, set out by boat to investigate a patch of "atlantis weed", an immense mat of vegetation forming a floating island. (Immediately this brings to mind C S Lewis' Perelandra and its various religious connotations.) A hurricane blows up and sends the boat onto rocks. Enherrian's daughter dies saving Berg - and the survival equipment strapped to him. The others make it safely to land. At this point, Berg learns that the New Faith holds that there is no afterlife. Nonetheless, Enherrian is satisfied that his daughter made a good end, which is to say that she "had deathpride" and "gave God honour". Berg puzzles over what these concepts might signify. Next, Enherrian has a wing sliced off by what is later named a surgeon tree, one of Gray's many highly developed plants. For an Ythrian, loss of a wing means a slow death; physiologically and psychologically, the beings are meant to fly. Berg fears that Enherrian may attempt suicide, but when he confides this to the Ythrian's wife, she rejects the suggestion indignantly: "'He would never rob God of honour.'"

As their portable radio went down with the daughter, the party decides to hack a large symbol in the vegetation to attract the attention of rescue aircraft. Interestingly enough, the symbol they choose is a cross. While they labour at this substantial task, Olga tends Enherrian. Next she falls sick with a wrackingly painful ailment which is sure to kill her. Later, the difficulty is traced to another of Gray's plants, the "hell shrub", which gives off a vapour poisonous to man, though harmless to Ythrians. Berg escaped its full effects by going off to work on the signal while Olga stayed behind in camp. She is in a frenzy of pain, so Berg gives her a shot to allow her to sleep, to sleep until death comes. Then he goes off alone to confront God: "'Why did You do this to her, why did You do it?'" (It would probably be better Catholic theology to ask, "Why did You let this happen to her?" Not, perhaps, a very enormous distinction, especially considering Berg's emotional state at the time, but perhaps nonetheless a significant one.) After a while, Berg reconciles himself to this impending loss and returns to camp. Somehow, despite the medicine, Olga has regained consciousness and is in fierce pain. After an additional period of agony, she dies. But Berg is still puzzled about why Olga regained consciousness. He decides that Enherrian must have given her a stimulant and brought her back to suffer more. Enherrian, when accused, admits this so freely that Berg's first thought is that the Ythrian is trying to goad Berg into putting him out of his misery. But, of course, it is all a cultural misunderstanding, and one which serves as the occasion for the expounding of the central tenets of the New Faith.

Berg is struck particularly by their answer to the "problem of pain". A loving God who wishes to endow his creatures with free will may have to permit if they choose to do evil, but why should the world of nature also be filled with causes of suffering, whether in the rather spectacular form they have taken on Gray or in the more ordinary guise such as disease and senility? The New Faith avoids this quandary simply by asserting that God is not all-loving. But neither is he some celestial torturer. Rather, he is the Hunter, and the universe is a great hunting ground. "'He rejoices in our happiness the way we might rejoice to see a game animal gambolling. Yet at last He comes after us. Our noblest moment comes when we, knowing He is irresistible, give Him a good chase, give him a good fight... we're dead, struck down, lingering at most a few years in the memories of those who escaped this time. And that's what we're here for. That's why God created the universe.'"

Berg finds himself impressed by this belief, but not won over. He is still, five years later, wondering if it does not perhaps present a more accurate view of things than does his Catholicism. Here Berg's account ends. The first narrator suggests that perhaps he might find something useful in Job, but what he just doesn't know. And the story ends.

I think that the only level on which "The Problem of Pain" wholly succeeds is in the creation of a religion appropriate to the Ythrians. The exclusion of a belief in an afterlife may simply indicate that the New Faith is a religion which developed in a fairly advanced culture. On Earth, belief in continued existence after death seems very widespread, though usually the afterlife is not very

pleasant. Only in rather late variants of, say, Christianity, Judaism, or Buddhism (and in modern secularism) do you get the idea that this existence is all there is to it. But the idea seems specially suited to the Ythrians who, thanks to their generally high rate of metabolism, augmented still further when they are flying with their "superchargers", must feel the aliveness of each moment much more than human beings can. The concept of existence away from this world might not come easily to these sophonts. While Ythrians are a hunting people more than a warrior people, it seems not inappropriate that the New Faith should emphasise the same sort of courage in the face of an ultimately hostile universe, as did the barbarian-stage Germanic peoples. Finally, this is a convincing religion for the Ythrians as carnivores. They are one of the largest flying creatures on Ythri, and they cooperate socially. Consequently, they must almost never know defeat in the hunt. And pursuit of the game is much more ingrained into the Ythrian nature than it is in the human, despite humankind's tens of thousands of years of hunting cultures. This is illustrated in the retention of hunting motifs among the Ythrians, even in The People of the Wind, after centuries of Earth-given technology and centuries of Iron-Age-level ranching before that. And yet, the Ythrians are a sophont, social species. Like humans, they have some conception of the unity of life, and probably have passed through a period of animism. In short, they are quite likely to identify (perhaps subconsciously) with their prey, and to feel guilty about killing it. Similar feelings on Earth have led sometimes to religious vegetarianism, sometimes to rituals of apology to an animal totem, in which a hunter explains that he must kill for food, offers some sort of compensation, etc.

For the Ythrian, the problem is more acute. As he has superior natural endowments to the human plus tool-making ability, he can almost never come to harm in a hunt - certainly not often enough to rationalise it as a fair fight, as a human might with, say, a bear. And the Ythrian physiologically cannot shift any significant part of his diet to plants. Nor, it seems, is he psychologically capable of sweeping the fact of slaughter under the rug, as we do in our present society. (For that matter, butchers have low social status in many cultures.) The Ythrian, shortly, may well be burdened with guilt not only for actions which seem inevitable in the aggregate, but which are individually preventable (as is the case with humans), but for what he must do simply to live. (A similar case is humans who feel guilty over simply being alive after a disaster which has killed most of their friends and family.) It is a false guilt, of course, but that makes it no less pressing.

In There Will Be Time, a woman from a hunting and raiding culture expounds her philosophy of life: "'Sides,' Leonce said candidly, 'the weak go down, 'less they're lucky an' got somebody strong to guard 'em. And in the end, come the Ol' Man, we're all weak.' She thought a moment. 'Could be,' she mused, 'Was I undyin', I'd never kill more'n a spud an' it only for food. But I will die. I'm in the game too.'" It is this philosophy which the New Faith elaborates. For their mental stability, it is helpful that the Ythrians see themselves as "in the game". But their prey certainly does not hunt the Ythrians, nor do other Ythrians do so with sufficient frequency to make this a fundament of philosophy. So qualities of a Hunter must be impressed upon God so that he will balance the scales. If every one of life's mishaps can be ascribed to a divine Hunter who will strike down each Ythrian more surely than the Ythrian seizes his own prey, then Ythrians too are in the game, and not exercising an unfair advantage.

We can regard this as Anderson's "bright idea", and it is a good one. However, as in "Wings of Victory", it comes at the end of the story and does not receive much development. Other elements are much weaker. Anderson seems to have set up the story as a "theological problem story", analogous to his technical problem stories. Blish's A Case of Conscience, Clarke's "The Star", or Miller's "Conditionally Human" would be genuine examples of this type. That Anderson has such an intention is suggested by the story's title, and by the fact that both Berg and the first narrator discuss it in these terms. But on this level it doesn't work. Consider how much the story depends on Berg's substantial spiritual immaturity.

A man nearly thirty, experienced and well-read, who must share a one-room hut with a nonbeliever for months, and who still says morning and evening prayers aloud? It is hardly, after all, as if Berg were a Moslem and had a potentially annoying custom imposed upon him by religious law. Perhaps, of course, we see here the result of just a different culture. The first narrator does make a point of Berg's backwoods upbringing. But there are other instances. When Berg says a prayer for the soul of Enherrian's daughter, he asks himself if she

"would truly want rest", as if a state of spiritual peace were incompatible with vigorous activity. For the question even to arise in the mind of someone (at this time) well into his twenties calls into deep question the quality of his religious education... or the orthodoxy of his sect (as we have seen, it might be schismatic), in which latter case it certainly is not representative of Christianity as a whole, as it would have to be for a good problem story.

Berg's anxiety to avoid the sight of suffering, to hide from himself aspects of the nature of the universe, blinds him to certain elements of overlap which do exist between Catholicism and the New Faith. He is well enough indoctrinated to worry about the possibility of Enherrian's suicide, but he seems never to have asked himself whether he could draw any conclusions about the Christian response to suffering from the fact that this act is forbidden. At the risk of stretching this point too far, one could even ask whether it is a subconscious judgment on what he would do in a like case which causes Berg to suspect that Enherrian, forbidden by his religion to kill himself, is trying to goad Berg into doing his job for him.

During the shipwreck, Berg is mindful enough of the example of Christ's death to repeat a snatch of what, according to Luke, were his dying words: "'Into your hands (I commit my spirit).'" (In turn, Christ is quoting Psalm 31.) But later he neglects Christ's previous example of refusing the pain-killing wine mixed with myrrh offered him just before the Crucifixion (Mark 15:23). Berg desires to spare his wife pain at all costs; he would rather that she passed unknowing and unprepared into death than that she should suffer an hour's agony. This antiseptic near-euthenasia would seem more characteristic of modern technocracy (and has been portrayed as such within science fiction by, say, Bradbury or Miller) than of any orthodox form of Christianity.

A degree of spiritual immaturity, though in this case of a nearly universal sort, can also be seen in Berg's particularistic approach to suffering. Despite a commitment both before and after his experiences on Gray to the brotherhood of men - to the brotherhood of sophonts, for that matter - Berg has not been driven to the point of "not forgiving God" by the continued sufferings of people he does not know - although, once having been disturbed, he does include them in his argument. Rather, what drives him to the point of crisis is the pain of his wife, and, perhaps more particularly, his own pain at her loss. Of course, this does not destroy the force of his rational argument. Berg may be saying, in effect, that he did not know what real suffering was until it happened to him and to his friends and his wife, and that he finds a God who would allow it to be unacceptable. Still, as a general argument this is rather weak.

Berg's acceptance of the superiority of the New Faith response to the "problem of pain" would seem to stem mostly from an inability to understand, much less accept, what his own tradition has to say on the subject. Berg admits, "'What I couldn't/was forgive God.'" If he had progressed from this point to "open warfare", if he allowed his resentment to come out in the open, perhaps it might have burnt itself out, and in any case it would have been there to examine. But Berg finds this unacceptable - perhaps too much at variance with what appears to be signs of God's goodness. So, instead of God the Torturer, he accepts (for different reasons) the Ythrian concept of God the Hunter, and apparent signs of goodness in the world can be explained as the result of God's gamekeeping.

A final reason why this will not work as a "problem story" is that Anderson ignores whole areas of argumentation. Despite alleged years of reading and discussion, Berg seems ignorant of numerous lines of speculation. Even an omnipotent God cannot make a round triangle, for (as C S Lewis says) a meaningless statement does not take on meaning just because someone puts "God can" in front of it. It is at least conceivable that a universe with sophonts but without suffering entails a similar logical impossibility. (After all, squaring the circle looked possible to generations of mathematicians before it was proved a contradiction in terms.) There are arguments based on "autonomy of nature". For example, it can be proposed that natural calamities will arise in any universe operating according to consistent natural laws, and that if God intervened to stop each one of them, in essence he would be taking away sophonts' freedom of action: you can't act effectively if the rules keep changing on you. There are analyses tracing almost all of "the problem of pain" to "the problem of evil", which Berg finds explained satisfactorily by Christianity. (And not by the New Faith, which seems to be one reason he does remain within the Church.) If it were not for the activities of generations of sometimes-evil humans, Ythrians, and other sophonts, Berg might never have found himself in a small boat in the middle of a hurricane on an unfamiliar planet. Much of the disease

of primitive cultures would disappear if their populations had any regard for the minor virtue of cleanliness. Very few calamities do not have a human element in them somewhere.

Finally (so long as he does remain a Christian), Berg should have the example of God himself, in the person of Christ, that however suffering may have reached the world, once it is there it can be put to redemptive use.

This is not to say that any of these lines of argument are intellectually convincing or emotionally satisfying. That must remain a matter for individual decision. However, it is to assert that: (1) on a "plot level", it is implausible that Bert has been searching for years without encountering such arguments; and (2) that on a "thematic level", Anderson has not created a theological problem on the order of (to repeat previous examples) Blish's A Case of Conscience or even Clarke's "The Star". (It takes about ten seconds to "solve" the problem posed by the latter: The star was going to nova anyhow - that had been settled since its condensation billions of years before - and what better way to go than in signalling the redemption of fellow sophonts?... But the first impact is universal and profound, which is not the case in Anderson's story.)

What Anderson does have is the makings of an excellent character study - compare Freda in The Broken Sword, whose Christianity is also sincere but confused and who, like Berg, must contend with an alien belief system. But, thanks to the emphasis Anderson gives to problematic elements, in "The Problem of Pain" the character story does not really emerge.

The Morals of this essay are: (1) that bright ideas, particularly those that look like spin-offs from one's latest novel, should be developed throughout a story, not dropped into the end; and (2) that if the problem in one's "problem story" is problematic only to the hero, then what you really have is a tale of character, and you would do well to write it as such.

Anderson has the integrity to take on, within a framework which can be appreciated at some level by almost every reader, the really important questions of existence which too many other writers are content to ignore. It is this which makes his successes so extremely valuable, and his failures so disappointing.

- Patrick L McGuire
February 1973

MALZBERG VISITS DALLAS - AGAIN...

by TERENCE M GREEN

An impressionistic reaction to
Barry Malzberg's

SCOP

Pyramid V3895 :: $US1.25
April 1976

Scop - an Anglo-Saxon bard or poet.

- The Winston Dictionary, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 878.

"I see there are no explanations," Scop says. The truth of it delights him; pity that he is so afraid of the rifle. Indeed there are no answers at all. Why did nothing make sense? Because there was no sense. He could have glimpsed this a long time ago if he was not so stubborn; he now understands. All was causeless, unmotivated, disconnected.

- Scop, p 39

...I go through this over and again not accepting perhaps the simple message of repetition: that it will always be the same. Nothing will change and we will cycle through this over and again to the same conclusion. Nevertheless, if just once, if one time we could break through the pattern...

- Scop, p 83

What kind of Director is running this show?

- Malzberg's Destruction of the Temple, p 141

Nothing is simple.

- Destruction of the Temple, p 66

The whole art of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to reread. His endings, or his absence of endings, suggest explanations which, however, are not revealed in clear language but, before they seem justified, require that the story be reread from another point of view. Sometimes there is a double possibility of interpretation, whence appears the necessity for two readings. This is what the author wanted. But it would be wrong to try to interpret everything in Kafka in detail.

- Albert Camus, "Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka", opening paragraph

With Malone, the next Beckettian creation, the self-conscious narrator comes fully into his own, telling himself stories to distract himself from the monotony of his saying... Tristram's narrative, like Malone's also, is subject to endless digression, at the whim of any association of ideas, and retreats perpetually before the moment when, finally, something constructive will have to be said (what Fluchere has called "the continual flight before the promised subject"). In both Beckett and Sterne we have several layers of personality: the real author himself, his fictional surrogates (Malone, Tristram), and their fictional creatures.

- John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art, p 92

For of all the novels in the lineage I have been tracing, which includes anti-novels, self-conscious narrator novels, picaresque and ironical novels, it would seem that Beckett's most striking affinity is with Laurence Sterne; he lacks too completely the moral, social and political preoccupations of Cervantes, Swift, Fielding and Voltaire, to be ranged finally with them, and this perhaps is the key to an evaluation of his position in the great tradition at the contemporary end of which he stands. He shares Sterne's ultimately bitter humour and sour philosophy, and his preference for generalised, undirected laughter to counter his own black humours; like Sterne's too, his books are really amoral rather than immoral because their assumed context is a world of chaos, without system

or meaning. They are both, Beckett self-avowedly, Sterne by implication, nihilists; their wit and their irony, though always brilliantly clever and amusing, are built on little but despair... Beckett and Sterne are not interested in improvements; the world is both too mad and too cruel to be capable of change. The only refuge from misery, for them, is the sly smoking-room jest.

- Samuel Beckett's Art, p 95

If Beckett's works are difficult, it is because life is complex, a "mess", as he has said. If his writer-heroes go back continually on what they have said before, it is because no utterance can be trusted to stand up to examination more than a few seconds after its emission. All our knowledge and our science, as Newton knew, merely reveal the ocean of our ignorance. We may land on the moon, but we have not conquered death, which, for Camus, makes our lives a mockery.

- Samuel Beckett's Art, p 140

His drama takes a similar road to nothingness; there are fewer and fewer characters, plot vanishes entirely, and the dialogue degenerates into a monologue in which the last actors gabble alone. Beckett has pressed ever onwards, towards the annihilation of all literature; like the "great writers" Proust speaks of, he has "written only a single work"; a long work pushed to the limit, voluntarily destroyed.

- Samuel Beckett's Art, p 144

Scopolamine, Scop for short, forty-five years old, third level East. Scopolamine used to be a kind of drug, truth serum I believe, this Scop took his byline seriously. He was out to tell the truth. He was out to change the course of lives as if they had never been changed before.

- Scop, p 103

"All that you'll do is discover and rediscover this on your own and no one ever can make you see it yourself."

- Scop, p 58

First impact. Scattering of skin. Truly I am becoming bored with this but the pain is always the same.

- Destruction of the Temple, p 141

Desire has vanished, her buttocks are thin and marked with fine, small scars, between them I can see lurking the red heart of her emptiness and it is this, perhaps, which I want less than anything; to make an entrance into that ruined sphere as they city collapses around us is more, perhaps, than I can bear but I am committed, it is entirely too late for contemplation of this sort and so I wedge myself into her, beginning slowly to force the motions of generation.
- Destruction of the Temple, p 118

The groaning of the bedstead is part of my life.

- Samuel Beckett, Malone Dies

It's so nice to know where you're going, in the early stages.

- Samuel Beckett, Molloy

..."It's been great but I guess I'd better leave now." He does not know what this really means. Among other things, where is he supposed to go? Where is he now for that matter?

- Scop, p 45

If time frightens us, this is because it works out the problem and the solution comes afterward.

- Albert Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning"

The riots, the assassinations, the griefs and slaughters, poverty, filth, disease, decay, all of these were urban-centred phenomena and therefore we must conclude in any true study of the urban America of that period that the symptoms were indeed the problem, the cure was the disease!

- Destruction of the Temple, p 59

...It will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.

- Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable, closing lines

"Of course it's painful. Everything is painful. Life is painful, death is painful, likewise the darkness and all motions of passage. Still, I participate."

Her fingernails dig in deeply. "I don't think you so much participate as complain. Why must you complain all the time? Don't you know how tiresome it is," she says, "don't you know how tiresome you are?" and her pressure sends little cylinders of anguish through Scop, "this is pain," she says to him knowledgeably, "the other part is merely inconvenience," and he sees what she is saying, he sees her point...

- Scop, pp 17-18

"I just can't face it anymore," I say.

"Of course you can't. That's the beginning."

"The beginning of what?"

"Of understanding."

- Destruction of the Temple, p 45

INEZ: (struggling and laughing) But, you crazy creature, what do you think you're doing? You know quite well I'm dead.

ESTELLE: Dead?

(She drops the knife. A pause. INEZ picks up the knife and jabs herself with it regretfully.)

INEZ: Dead! Dead! Dead! Knives, poison, ropes - all useless. It has happened already, do you understand? Once and for all. So here we are, forever. (Laughs)

ESTELLE:(with a peal of laughter) Forever. My God, how funny! Forever.

GARCIN: (looks at the two women, and joins in the laughter) For ever, and ever, and ever.
(They slump onto their respective sofas. A long silence. Their laughter dies away and they gaze at each other.)

GARCIN: Well, well, let's get on with it...

- Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit, closing lines of the play

POZZO: The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh.

- Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p 22

"Oh Scop," I said and turned from him, "this is so boring, can't we talk about something else? Is this the only thing that you can talk about?"

- Scop, p 74

For in me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on.

- Beckett, Molloy, p 48

...As if there existed a relation between that which suffers and that which causes to suffer.

- Beckett, Malone Dies, p 242

"I am the universe and the universe is myself; when I cease to be the universe will wink out of existence."

- Scop, p 17

The night is strewn with absurd
absurd lights, the stars, the beacons, the buoys, the lights of earth and in the hills the faint fires of the blazing gorse.

- Beckett, Malone Dies, p 287

Can it be we are not free? It might be worth looking into.

- Beckett, Molloy, p 36

"It's a shared future," he says, "don't you see that?"

...Robert Kennedy looks at him with great compassion and understanding... says "yes, I see that, I see what you're trying to do, it's all right, it's a good thing, I'm glad, no one can blame you for this, you've done the right thing, just keep on doing it, you've got to keep on struggling, Aeschylus, pain like tears, the darkness, the darkness.."

- Scop, p 126

...I whose every move has always been a groping, and whose motionlessness too was a kind of groping, yes.

- Beckett, Malone Dies, p 224

This country is going to blow up.

- Destruction of the Temple, repeated half a dozen times between pp 132-5

...And as stone closes over him he knows (or at least he thinks he knows) what must happen next. And before. And over again.

- Scop, last lines

Barry Malzberg is back in Dallas.

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- Terence M Green August 1976

WHY CARBONATE STALE WINE?

by BRUCE GILLESPIE

Walkers on the Sky, by David J Lake (DAW UY1273; Dec 76; 188 pp; $US1.25)

If I had picked up this book at random from the general pile of DAW books, then probably I would not have read past about page 50. I would have struck the whole apparatus of sword 'n' sorcery - ersatz-medieval; princes; Master Traders; the lot - and not read on.

But I had been told that this book is written by an Australian - David J Lake, from Brisbane. In fact, some people from Melbourne met him when they visited Brisbane for a recent convention. They were impressed by Lake himself, and some of the notions he has planned for his books. Also, it's hard not to be impressed by the fact that Lake wrote, at one swoop, a whole batch of books, set in the same future history, and that all these books are scheduled to be published during the next year or so. He must have something going for him.

At first sight, all Lake has going for him is his ability to mould a story around the elements which Donald Wollheim likes to publish. There is the language, with its hint of mock-medieval. There is the fast-paced adventure story, which features a bloke named Sig who never really puts a foot wrong. It's easy to be a hero in a universe like this, even if you cop a few superficial scratches along the way. There's a wham-bang ending, and a sort of science-fictional explanation for the whole thing.

But from what I know about Lake himself, I find it hard to believe that he would be calculating enough to pitch his books so directly at a US market. If we reject that idea, what have we left? That a writer, working quite independently in Australia, attempting to construct a pattern for a whole series of books, will re-invent all the vast number of cliches that have plagued the s f/fantasy field for many years?

That, unfortunately, is the only conclusion that I can reach. Will somebody explain to me why an s f writer, in attempting to invent a society for the future, invariably happens upon a pattern for society that was fairly dreary even in the thirteenth century? What is it about kings and princes which gives an ineffable thrill to the mind of the burgeoning s f writer? And why an Australian s f writer, fGhodsake, living in a country where so many interesting futures might yet be tried?

There's nothing much to say about the book. Sig has a series of adventures by which he rises from a humble beginning to be the warlord. Just like in all those other dreary books. Certainly, this book is done with a lot more flair than most of the breed, and that is why I finished it, and even rather enjoyed it. The science fictional explanation for the tiered world (with force fields dividing up the sky, and allowing the inhabitants of one world to "walk on the sky") is more interesting than anything in the book, and rather wasted.

But why try to carbonate stale wine? Then will somebody - and, I hope, an Australian writer - try to invent something as an interesting possibility for a future political history? Kings and princes abound because their worlds look simpler to the beginning writer. But their worlds were actually tediously oppressive- much more so than the equally tedious collectivist "dystopias" of other books. I think that likely political futures will evolve out of present socialism, going forward, becoming more complex. Who will bother writing about that?

COMPTON: SF'S HUMAN ASPECT

by MICHAEL T SHOEMAKER

Michael Shoemaker reviews

THE MISSIONARIES

by D G Compton

(Ace 53570 :: 1972
222 pp :: 75c)

David G Compton, a late starter in the science fiction field, is growing ever more competent as an author. The style of his work is of the highest quality: perceptive, free from cliches, excellent in evoking the proper mood for specific scenes, and containing thoroughly good imagery when he chooses to use it. He still falls a little short in plot construction, however, and he lacks a flair for imaginative science-fictional concepts.

Compton's weaknesses, however, are caused by the type of novel that he chooses to write. The Missionaries, like Compton's previous novels, is primarily concerned with characterisation. His brand of characterisation is a highly realistic one. In the manner of Kafka and others, his characters are endlessly introspective. This is not to say that Compton's world or style bear any relation to Kafka - only that his characters actually think about what they say and about what other characters have said. They are constantly reacting to the world around them. I offer a random sample to demonstrate what I mean (random, to prove that one can find this on almost every page):

> "I don't believe it."
>
> If she said it often enough, perhaps they'd go away, perhaps they'd shrivel and disappear under the blast of her disbelief.

And a little later:

> "I think you're Russian spies," she said.
>
> She didn't think it but she had to think something. Now it was said, it sounded silly. Was that what she was turning into, that thing she had always despised, a thoroughly silly woman?

The plot is very simple. Four alien missionaries land in the countryside of Great Britain. Their mission is to convert Earth to the worship of Ustiliath. It will be apparent to the reader that Ustiliath is a Spinozan concept. Ustiliath is an all-encompassing whole, of which the Christian God is only an attribute. Quotes from the "Missionaries Handbook" are sprinkled throughout the novel at key points:

> The working of individual "miracles" is to be discouraged. As a means of obtaining converts its effects are very short term. As a means of obtaining easy popularity it is cheap and unworthy. As a means of genuinely alleviating suffering it is selective and inadequate. In the early stages of the Mission, however, circumstances may arise in which its use is justifiable. Integrity losses have to be balanced against strategy gains. The final decision rests at all times with the missionary captain.

The aliens take on human form and characteristics. This is convenient for the author because it sidesteps the problem of developing a truly alien characterisation for them. The author cannot be condemned for this, however, because this allows him to concentrate on his primary concern: the human aspect.

They make contact with a family residing in the countryside. Among the family are Gordon, an ageing general; Sylvia, his neurotic wife; and Dacre, their son, who leads a motorcycle gang. The characterisation of Dacre is perhaps the major flaw in the novel. At first, he is depicted as a rather despicable character in the setting of the motorcycle gang. Later development, though, is not consistent with this. Probably the author did this in order to set up an inner conflict of character, but it just does not work.

As the story continues, the Missionaries gain an ever wider influence by using good propaganda techniques (although they are not entirely unopposed). Not much of this is ever shown to the reader. The novel continues to centre on the main characters.

Towards the end, it is intimated that the Missionaries have an ulterior motive. And all turns out as expected.

Apart from trying to show an insight into human nature and emotions, the novel expresses two themes:

First, and most obviously, the Missionaries' actions are a parallel to the past actions of our own Earthly missionaries.

The second theme is expressed in the following:

> And anyway, today's people moved on. Obsolescence was a necessary part even of their enthusiasms. They were always afraid that the richness of life, the variety, the freedom, the glorious motorway of asphalt opportunity, would pass them by. So Ustiliath, which had been up, had nowhere to go.

The persistent reader of The Missionaries is rewarded with a fine literary experience. At the same reader might wish for a slightly more rigorous use of Mr Compton's imagination. - Michael T Shoemaker 1973

RIGHT COVER, WRONG BOOK

by TERENCE M GREEN

Terry Green reviews

TO THE LAND OF THE ELECTRIC ANGEL

by William Rotsler

Ballantine 24317 :: 1976
330 pp :: $1.50

I think Barry Malzberg is right. In Science Fiction Review 16, in his captivating review of James Gunn's Alternate Worlds, he notes that whatever it is that most of us wanted or sought from s f "is more visible in the reproductions of the covers than could ever be discovered in the longest and dullest seminar of the Science Fiction Research Association".

We seem to be discovering the truth of this simultaneously everywhere in the s f field at present, judging from the popularity of and interest in the many s f art books, and in such columnists as Jon Gustafson. The cover of an s f book can make us want the book, can absorb us, can promise us Alternate Worlds, can make us hope that the story will match the colours, the graphics that magnetised us. S f surely is uncommon in this respect.

I fell prey to this compulsion just recently. I purchased William Rotsler's To the Land of the Electric Angel.

Everybody who reads fanzines knows the name Rotsler. He's the gentleman who draws those funny-looking cartoons sprinkled liberally throughout fanzines everywhere; he's the gentleman who won the Hugo as Best Fan Artist in Melbourne in 1975 - a tremendously popular choice.

But Rotsler the writer?

The only piece I'd read of his was a short story in the September 1975 Amazing - a brief item titled "To Gain a Dream" - a story which left a positive, somewhat poetic aftereffect with me. And his first novel, Patron of the Arts (which I have not read yet), seemed to draw modestly positive comments from the brief nods I noticed in fanzines.

(All this as stage setting for the drama of the purchase...)

So I am standing in the bookstore, staring at the Ballantine paperback release of Rotsler's second novel, To the Land of the Electric Angel. The Darrell Sweet cover shimmers, glows, throbs; the cover script is scrolled enchantingly; the title is mystifying; the redness of it all, the brightness, the promise, the hope...

I buy it.

Now you should understand something. For me, this represents a daring and original move. I tend to wait for the reviews of new releases, reading them carefully, taking into consideration the reviewer, personal tastes, etc. Then - and only then - do I usually make a purchase. And I like to think it is, by this time, a sure thing. I don't follow this policy with the magazines (how can I?), but only the paperback releases. My dollar wants me to spend it wisely; I am sure of this.

This is why I've had to agree so fully with Barry Malzberg. The cover turned the trick.

Now the story. Ah yes, the story...

We are dropped into a world of the future that is, at first, quite interesting. Blake Mason creates "environments" - vast collages of art, artifact, architecture, interior decorating - for the very wealthy. Permissiveness and nudity and eroticism are important accompaniments of this future world - of which the reader sees only the wealthy "decadent" side.

Mason is engaged by the even wealthier Jean-Michel Voss - a gross capitalist if ever there was one, and talented user of people - to build and design his tomb. Voss is not an old man, so the reader is presented with the first touch of a mystery. This tomb will rival the pyramids of the pharoahs - in size, splendour, "comfort", longevity. Voss has picked a mountain in the Rockies which he will hollow out, the location of which will be kept absolutely secret. And he wants a "sensual" tomb!

Mason falls madly in love with Voss' devoted ladyfriend, Rio. Eventually she tells him that the tomb will not be a tomb at all, but a "storage vault" for Voss and six others who will undergo a process of cell cleansing and/or restoration which will last 88 years, after which they will all live for 400 or 500 years more!

So far, all this craziness has had a certain fascination and interest to it. Some of the assumptions are naive and unconvincing per se, but there seems to be a drive behind it all that has carried it so far. The ideas it touches are of interest: art, immortality, eroticism, enormous wealth, blind romantic love...

But it collapses totally in the future, in "the land of the electric angel". The final 200 pages are a combination of Edgar Rice Burroughs and John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. I couldn't believe that I was reading the same book. Or maybe the cover's effect was wearing off.

None of the original ideas is followed up. Each one is abandoned to some kind of childish pseudo-allegory, and to mindless action (sword fights galore). I barely finished To the Land of the Electric Angel. What can you say about a novel that ends:

They walked out toward the fountain in the centre of St Peter's Square. The moon was full and bright. Behind them they heard a choir begin to sing.

Hand in hand, they began to run.

Or what can you say about a Burroughsian hero who becomes (a) a symbol of Romantic Revolution, (b) the Pope (honest), (c) symbolically Christ (an electric Christ, of course), and who conquers, symbolically, Satan (an electric Satan, naturally)? Or about a book that re-enacts (as serious drama) the image of King Kong holding the figure of the girl; where the "hero" refers (seriously) to his followers as "children of fate"; where the villain is defeated in "the Last Judgment Room"?

Maybe I should let Rotsler and his characters have a shot at it. I seem to be hare-lipped right now. How're these?:

"Everyone probably ran for cover when this started." (page 310)

**

"We certainly are obvious." (page 304)

**

"What's going on?" (page 301)

**

Blake made a face. "Don't say 'God works in mysterious ways', for God's sake."

"You are certainly evidence of that," the older man said.

"All right, let's get this over with." (page 280)

I could only agree heartily with Blake here. And when he wonders:

What have we fallen into this time? (page 242)

What am I trying to say in this review, ultimately? Several things, I guess.

One: Rotsler should have finished the book he started. It was modestly interesting.

And Rotsler is an artist. Therefore I was interested in his perceptions about some of the future possibilities for art. I was interested in the serious speculation possible regarding the quest for immortality via moeney that was to be unravelled (I hoped).

Two: A book and its cover are distinct and separate entities. I guess we all really know this. (I still like the cover!)

Three: Maybe I'm just getting old. After all, I used to like Edgar Rice Burroughs once too...

JUST AN OLD-FASHIONED GUY

by VAN IKIN

Van Ikin reviews

TALES FROM UNDERWOOD

by David H Keller

Neville Spearman :: 1974
322 pages :: £2.25/$A6.75
Original publication 1952

David H Keller epitomises the rural ethic - the philistine tradition that believes writing is not an art but just a pass-time, something you don't have to work at. He is a naive, complacent sort of author, the kind of man who believes in his own divine calling and therefore looks upon writing not as a sweat-and-ink art but just a convenient method of imparting one's divine insights to an eagerly waiting world. To him, everything about writing is just so easy:

As a little boy, instead of counting sheep to put myself to sleep, I whispered stories... Learning to read and write, I started to write these bedtime stories on paper...

I was forty-eight when I sold my first story, "The Revolt of the Pedestrians". Having found a market for my wares, I dug a few out of the past, edited and retyped them and often found, to my surprise, that they needed little change...

When, at almost fifty, I started to write professionally, I had accumulated a mass of experience as a country doctor, a psychiatrist, and a soldier. In addition I had read the masters. The Bible had taught me the beauties of simplicity of expression and economy of words. Much of my early work shows a definite desire to imitate the style of these great authors.

It's all so simple: get the Biblical beauties down pat, absorb "the masters", toss in a little bit of imitation, then burst in all one's glory upon a waiting world.

The sad thing is that some of his stories show promise: they display the skeletons of still-born ideas. It's as if Keller's mind were occasionally able to conceive a good idea for a story, but his literary skills were not equal to the task of delivering that idea alive and kicking. Perhaps if Keller had been less self-assured, the world might have won a few worthwhile stories from his life. As it is, the tales from Underwood are an exercise in disappointment.

"The Worm" (Amazing Stories, 1929) typifies what is best and worst in Keller. It is a story of a lonely miller, living alone with his dog and working a forlorn grist mill. A buzzing noise begins to throb beneath the ground, becoming louder as the days go on, and finally a gigantic mindless worm eats through to the surface of the earth, devouring the mill - and ultimately the miller - as it gobbles into the sunset.

In a charming, naive way, the story has impact. Its structure is simple as abc: Matter-of-fact opening descriptions (of landscape, mill, and miller); introduction of the buzzing sound; escalation of the buzzing sound (together with reaction of miller and dog); continued escalation leading up to breakthrough (together with reactions); and ultimate microcosmic cataclysm. In a sense, the whole story is one long rising buzz, and there's something profound - something manic - about that. The story's structure has the straight arrow-to-the-heart logic of a psychologically significant nightmare. Moreover, there is some psychological oomph to the tale: it is clearly a projection of metaphysical angst, with the ravening worm acting as an emblem of life litself, mindlessly eating the ground from under man's feet.

"The Worm" is the kind of story that deposits its infinitesmal layer of silt on the riverbed of one's literary experience - and that is no small feat for any story. The trouble is that, unless you have to review the book (and therefore need to mull over the stories), "The Worm" lacks the accoutrements necessary to command the reader's attention. Its calling cards (straight narrative, conventional monster, unquestioned rural ethic) are all wrong for the 1970s.

Worse, the story abounds with gaucheries of style, the most glaring being Keller's ineptitude in rendering his characters' psychological states. Psychiatrist though he may have been, Keller has a very shallow notion of human emotion, and when this is combined with the flaws in his prose technique, the result is pitiful. Keller writes his stories from outside, writing as The Author Moving His Puppets. The movement of the stories is choreographed with "he said", "he thought", "he did such-and-such without realising it". The character can never speak or act for himself; his identity can never bubble up naturally and organically from within (as in a monologue); Keller conceives of "characterisation" as something to be fished out and laid bare (starkly, inartistically bare) on the page. To aggravate this, Keller uses exaggerated physical action as a correlate of mental state. To prove that his experiences have left him emotionally and psychologically drained, the poor old miller must sleep "for twenty-four hours" and run around verbalising his reactions so that the author can spell out their Inner Significance:

> He lit the lamp and paced the floor in a cold, careless mood. One thing he had determined. He said it over and over to himself.
>
> "This is my home. It has been the home of my family for two hundred years. No devil or beast or worm can make me leave it."
>
> He said it again and again. He felt that if he said it often enough, he would believe it...

A little thing like a nervous tic or a sweaty palm is far too subtle for Keller.

The same lack of sophistication and subtlety marrs "The Revolt of the Pedestrians" (Amazing Stories, 1928), a story that is curiously modern in its anticipation of automobile mania. As usual, Keller tries to delineate a subtle state of mind with broad, unsubtle gestures: he depicts a society split into two classes (the effete "automobilists", with their atrophied limbs, and the underprivileged "pedestrians", with their strong muscles and healthy minds) and - as if to underline a point that is already glaring - he has this society pass a law "providing for the legal murder of all pedestrians on the highway, wherever or whenever they could be hit by an auto".

But the core of the story is not so much prophecy as a statement of near-fascist social ideals. The fascism creeps quietly into the narrative, beginning merely as the evocation of a rural ideal. The spat-upon pedestrians gather in the countryside, living an active muscular life in the great outdoors, and happily trotting out their rustic credo:

> "We believe in work - muscle work. No matter what our young people are trained for, they are taught to work, to do manual work... For pleasure we hunt, fish, play tennis, swim in our mountain lake. We keep our bodies clean and try to do the same with our minds. Our boys marry at twenty-one - our girls at eighteen. Occasionally a child grows up to be abnormal - degenerate. I frankly say that such children disappear..."

(Never has the word "frankly" sounded so chilling!)

The pedestrians succeed in their revolt and create a new world in which "no one wanted to live in such a place as a city when he could live on a farm". Then the story takes a rapid jump, using the most incredible transitional sentence ever penned:

> It was a Sunday afternoon some hundred years later...

A father and son are sightseeing in a museum (for, in the pedestrians' new world, "It was a part of every child's education to spend a day or more in an automobilist's city") and, after visiting each of the exhibit - mastodon, bison, pterodactyl, automobilist - the

son asks (literally), "What are those funny people without legs? What does it mean?"

"That, my son, is a family of automobolists," and there and then he paused and gave his son the little talk that all pedestrian fathers are required by law to give to their children.

The story ends there, leaving the impression that, to Keller's mind, this is a vision of utopia, with everyone knowing his place, doing as he is told, living according to state-decreed plans.

The same fascist note sounds throughout a number of the stories, though never again in so explicit a form. In "The God Wheel" (a story which carries no acknowledgement of prior publication), there is much ominous talk of setting the world to rights by force, and the erring Tartar Empire (well, you could guess it wouldn't be the Americans who would err) is annihilated:

> The sun still shines on that land, the winds blow and the rains fall, but the Tartar Empire is now an oak forest. Here and there a few people live, but only a few. The rest sleep forever...
>
> If this happened to Tartary it can happen to other nations; and it will happen until the world is at abiding peace, until there is friendship and equality and love between all men. I advise you to put your separate houses in order. Only by doing so, can you survive.

Similarly, "The Flying Fool" (Amazing Stories, 1929) records a rather elitist contempt for its central character, a little domesticated man who is too timid to grasp opportunity as it flits past.

The collection is divided into three sections, according to the particular "hat" under which Keller is writing: "The Science-Fictioneer", "The Fantastiste", or "The Psychiatrist". One would expect the third section to provide some interesting fiction, but it doesn't.

"The Thing in the Cellar" (Weird Tales, 1932) - a story "written under a self-hypnosis in which I simply did the typing as dictated by my subconscious" - is a mundane tale about a child whose paranormal awareness allows him to detect a creature lurking in the cellar. Despite the "psychiatrist" tag, this is a straight - and banal - science fiction story.

"Creation Unforgivable" (Weird Tales, 1930) is also closer to s f than psychological analysis. It is a story about a writer who becomes obsessed with his characters' welfare (he can't go to a party unless he has rescued the heroine from her latest peril), but somewhere along the line the psychological speculation turns to s f. The writer leaves his characters unattended, and when he returns there is blood on the typewriter. The only psychological insights provided by this story are insights into the author's personal nature - and these insights are unintentional.

Despite the confidence expressed in his introduction, Keller is a writer who never makes the grade. Style, mode of narration, and (in the science fictional "psychiatric" stories) wayward technique all thoroughly smother any good story ideas the may have had. Tales from Underwood is best forgotten.

RICH BLOKE, BEAUTIFUL GIRL - ESCAPE WHIRLPOOL, MEET PYGMIES

by STEPHEN HITCHINGS

Stephen Hitchings reviews

THE SECRET PEOPLE

by John Beynon (John Wyndham)

Michael Joseph :: 1974
224 pages :: $A6.50
Original publication 1935

It is not difficult to see why John Wyndham - the man with such a proliferation of names that it seems safest to use the one that everyone knows - did not become famous until The Day of the Triffids. The Secret People is better than I expected, but it is in no way outstanding. It is a novel of action, one which is interesting to read, but which suffers very badly under close analysis. It shows Wyndham the craftsman at a time when Wyndham the artist had not yet begun to emerge: the ideas are all unoriginal, but they are well strung together. The moral is that John Wyndham was very much a product of his times before he became an individualist.

The year is 1964. Mark Sunnet, a brilliant, handsome, young, rich businessman on holiday in Algiers, meets Margaret Lawn, a girl hoping to meet a rich young man on holiday. He takes her for a ride in his rocket plane over the New Sea, a huge lake that has been created by the flooding of the northern Sahara. All goes well until, suddenly, there is an explosion, a crash, and they are left floating in the New Sea.

They stop briefly on an island, convert the rocket plane into a raft, and acquire a cat which they name Bast. They set off across the lake, are trapped in a whirlpool, and dragged down into an underground cavern.

They are forced to abandon ship and set out on foot, and it is about here that the novel begins to become interesting. Like many other writers before and since, Wyndham

appears to have developed his descriptive powers earlier than anything else:

> Far, far up in the roof the familiar globes were shedding their soft rays, but this time they fell on to neither barren rock nor water; they served to show a nightmare picture. From a bed of dark, soft loam which covered the ground grew a huge crop of queer forms. Most massive, and most noticeable, were mushrooms. Monstrous mushrooms which balanced umbrellaed heads larger than wagon wheels upon thick, white trunks, eight or nine feet high. Taller still reached the sleek cones of more slender fungi, yellow, red, or steely grey. Closer to the ground, among the pillar-like mushroom columns, grew great globular plants, some brick red, some dappled brown and cream, some white, like familiar puff-balls, giantly inflated. Vari-hued tendrils, fat, like gorged serpents, lay here and there, contorted and looped by their efforts to find growing space. Shapes which, but for the virulence of their colouring, might have been marrows contrived to struggle for a compressed existence between the trunks and the swelling balls. There was chaos of line and form, but still worse of colour. The brushes of a distraught painter might have dabbed into the impossible scene the sudden splahes of purples, greens, reds and yellows.

Unfortunately, when Mark and Margaret encounter a community of underground pygmies a few pages later, the author relapses into frenzied melodrama:

> He was a good thirty yards from the entrance before they moved. He saw a sudden stiffening run through them, then they were rushing headlong. His pistol spat viciously. The lead tore holes in their line. The noise of his shots in the confined space was a crashing, deafening roar which made his head sing. He could hear nothing else; certainly he had no suspicion of a hundred naked feet pattering behind him...
>
> One choked cry from Margaret was all his warning, and it came too late. He went down even as he turned, in a rush of grey-skinned bodies. His pistol flew from his hand. His flailing legs and arms were seized and pinned down. A weight of squirming bodies were crushing the air from his lungs. Small fists clenched themselves in his hair and began to hammer the back of his head against the floor. Sickening, splitting thuds. There was a pain behind his eyes, hurting like the devil. His brain felt as though it were slopping about in its case like thin porridge...

The pygmies - the secret people of the title - are a race that became separated from the rest of humanity countless millennia ago and has lived underground ever since. Their culture consists of worshipping images of cats and keeping hundreds of prisoners in an enormous pit. Mark is thrown into this pit and forgotten, but Margaret has the good fortune to be found with Bast and is revered as the cat's attendant.

The rest of the plot is predictable: the prisoners stage a battle against the pygmies; the water comes in and starts to fill up the caverns; the hero and the heroine meet, he rescues her, and they escape; and finally the lake crashes into the caverns, destroying all trace of the occupants. The secret people keep their secret forever.

There is not much more I can say about The Secret People. The minor characters are all stereotypes. The writing is amateurish. The scientific speculation is puerile. The social comments are cliches. But the novel shows a good command of its subject and a solidly constructed, fast-moving plot. Read it as the work of a promising writer who was to fulfil all his promises.

MIXED-UP

by PAUL ANDERSON

Paul Anderson reviews

INHERITORS OF EARTH

by Gordon Eklund and Poul Anderson

Chilton :: 1974
190 pages :: $US6.50

The first thing to notice about this book is that it is well bound and well laid-out. Even the cover illustration matches the theme of the novel - something unusual for publishers.

Also to be noted is that Inheritors of Earth is based on a story, "Incomplete Superman", by Paul Anderson, published in 1950. I would assume that the novelette comprises most of the first part of the book, and the second part is the result of the collaboration. This does not seem to work, as the results of the collaboration are not as good as are the works of either author.

Part 1 introduces us to Alec Richmond and his wife Anna. They are incomplete supermen, mutants "superior" to the rest of humanity, as they can sense the feeling of others. It is stated that they can dispense with the normal forms of speech required for other people:

> Between Alec and Anna - the same as

> any Superiors - direct speech was superfluous. They communicated through the means of radiations: combinations of gestures, occasional half spoken words and, most importantly, emotions.

I would have thought that the last item makes them very vulnerable, not "superior" at all. Each time that Alec meets a person in great pain and apparently dying, he is forced to kill him to stop the person's suffering. This causes some confusion when he is wanted by the police for questioning about the murder of his boss and friend, Ted Mencken. Alec was not responsible for the injuries to the man, but certainly he fired the shot that killed him in the end.

The Superiors are subject to the same limitations endured by the rest of the group of mutants. In return for their gifts, they are sterile and presumably the benefits will die with them. This restriction has not been taken too well by some of the group. They are planning to engage in a war to take control of the rest of humanity. Alec Richmond does not wholly agree with this plan, but he still works to further the war. Naturally, this would be a short-lived dictatorship, but this fact does not occur to any of them.

The plot suffers from some complications, especially concerning the Superiors:

> "We are a tiny minority submerged within a vast majority. We are alone, fearful, paranoid. Our very existence is a deep, dark secret." (page 18)
>
> **
>
> "Or consider the case of the others - the ones who had murdered Ted Mencken. The Inner Circle position concerning the existence of the others was sheer wish fulfillment fantasy. For years - ever since the Superiors had first discovered each - they had been plagued by a series of inexplicable incidents. Strange accidents. Vicious murders like Ted's. It soon became clear that someone - or something - was behind all this... The Inner Circle made no effort to answer these questions." (page 20)

Somehow both passages are given to Alec Richmond.

Why is there a change of human nature, as related in the book?:

> "I am head of this city's homicide squad. I am, in point of fact, that squad. Last year, I investigated four murders - two turned out to be accidents and one was a suicide." (page 30)

The official explanation is:

> "He had his talent - he knew what people were feeling when he passed them on the street. The average man - or woman - simply did not care enough about anything to kill." (page 22)

Again, there seems to be some inconsistency here. "Strange accidents. Vicious murders" hardly corresponds with the claim that only four investigations of possible murders were pursued during the previous year.

I puzzled over these aspects of the mixed-up plot, but continued reading anyway. A standard interrogation scene explains further details about the Inner Circle. These could have been from almost any other standard sf book.

Then, in part 2, "The Inheritors", they also have the same idiotic ideas of conquest and of superiority:

> When the war ended and humanity was beaten and it was time for the final move, Checkmate. Then Anna - and her fellow Superiors - would discover what they really were - the hybrid children of truly superior creatures. Crippled, useless forms. Like mules. (page 102)

The rest of the book has a few surprises and twists of the plot concerning the battle with the inheritor, Karlton Ford. But the victory comes far too easily and neatly, typical of the book.

Alec Richmond, the main character, is a convenient cipher to move within the plot. But one must try to understand his rationale behind an opposition to the war effort while persisting in working to perfect the war androids. There are as many inconsistencies in his character as there are in the plot. If a few of them had been resolved satisfactorily, it would have been a much better book.

The writing style lacks any quality that would keep one reading and caring what happened to the characters. I trust that this is the last collaboration by these two authors.

TRITE TRANSPORT

by PAUL ANDERSON

Paul Anderson reviews

ONE STEP FROM EARTH

by Harry Harrison

Faber & Faber :: 1972
210 pages
Original publication 1970

The whole book seems to be thrown together for a young audience. Harrison tries to catch and retain the reader's attention in his short introduction:

> But that is one of the pleasures of science fiction. It gives people a

> chance to fly in rocket ships before they are invented, use strange devices still undiscovered, meet fascinating people yet unborn.
>
> A matter transmitter is very easy to use. Just dial your number there as simple as a telephone, and wait until the ready light comes on. Then step forward, you won't feel a thing, just walk through the MT screen as though it were a door...

Through the door to the first story, which is a lightly written drama of the exploration of Mars. The plot as much concerns setting up two-way communication by teleportation devices on Mars and the "unexpected" snag that crops up.

"Pressure" is slightly better. It is a deep-sea diving story transferred to the depths of the atmosphere of Saturn. The era is advanced on that in the first story, but all the participants still seem to be working within the limits of the equipment. This provides the conflict of the story, which turns on the location of the operating controls of the equipment.

"No War or Battle's Sound" is a war action story in which the author can keep the interest of the reader without needing too much depth of characterisation. Unfortunately, Harrison begins with the cliche of the sadistic army sergeant and the combat troops. The story is done competently, but without the humour of Bill, the Galactic Hero.

"Wife to the Lord" is a comic little short. A "God" goes acourting, and we are given a tour of his world as it is shown to his wife:

> "There are many things that I must become used to."
>
> "Being wife to God is second in difficulty only to being God."
>
> "How nicely you phrase it."

"Waiting Place" is about a one-way trip to a galactic prison planet. This should have been a very good novelette, but Harrison skirts the issues implicit in the fact that such a practice is condoned by the government and the public. Instead, he confines the action to the reactions of a man sent to prison, and his efforts to bring the "mistake" to the attention of the jailers. The conclusion is rather superficial.

"The Life Preservers" is the type of action adventure story in vogue some decades ago. Here is a team of scientists, soldiers, and a medical crew sent to reopen a long-since settled planet cut off from cummication with the rest of the galaxy for at least a thousand years in which "their culture has slid back to whatever level they were capable of sustaining themselves".

The Emergency Plague Control has been formed to prevent plague from spreading throughout the galaxy:

> "We are involved in prevention, and will do anything to prevent a recurrence of the plague years. I stress the word anything, because I mean anything. We are plague preventers first, physicians second. We protect the galaxy, not a single individual or planet. This retrograde planet poses - potentially - the biggest threat I have known during my entire career. We must see to it that it stays just a threat, nothing more than that."

Contact is made. The team begins its work of setting up a modern hospital. "None of their patients died... and soon the townspeople were flocking for treatment with almost religious enthusiasm."

But the dreaded plague appears among the people. The whole matter is resolved after some of the usual heroics, and the EPC go to continue their work elsewhere.

This is a fairly straightforward mystery, just a bit too predictable for a fan or reader who is no longer a juvenile.

"From Fanaticism, or For Reward" is one of the better stories, though one of the shortest tales in the book. It begins with an assassination, follows with its aftermath, and tells of the progress of the killer.

"Heavy Duty" is another, shorter story on the reopening of an old world. This one has regressed further to a primitive semi-barbaric state of "The Family" and "The People".

Fittingly, the book closes with "A Tale of the Ending". Aliens trace back the path of Man's progress through the galaxy and through time. "I have long thought so, and during my work have traced mankind's movements backward as far as possible. Always I have found the simpler growing into the complex." The ending of this tale provides an unorthodox conclusion to the book.

The semi-related stories in this collection are all entertaining in one way or another. They would suit best the younger s f reader, but I doubt if any person raised on the Heinlein juveniles would rate these too highly. In all the individual episodes, the characters are just names attached for convenience. The writing style is simple and to the point. But many of the stories are too bland; there is little which will really retain the attention. One Step From Earth leaves me a bit disappointed, especially since I enjoy most of Harrison's other works.

INVISIBLE WHISTLING BUNYIPS

SFC 52

Here are some parts of some of the letters which were not excerpted in SFC 52. At the moment, I am assuming that 52 appears before this issue of Supersonic Snail. You might be a bit puzzled if this does not happen Most of the letters here were left out of SFC because there were too long/too difficult to take out little bits. The SFC letter column has been constricted tightly by the changeover to offset. No matter; the response to SFC gets published anyway.

I do not promise to comment on each letter which appears here. I would rather leave that to readers of Supersonic Snail.

MAE STRELKOV

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I'm finding S F Commentary a treat. I shall be reading every word henceforth, though still only skimming reviews to get a general idea of what's available in other lands - not here!

I am always delighted when people not only get acquainted with themselves but make us understand them as clearly, and you do. So, now, do your friends. Take Michael O'Brien's letter in No 46. He is utterly open and utterly lovable in consequence, therein. A real, self-understanding person.

As for Angus Taylor's "Peregrinations": I'm astounded at the way his simple phrase made those countries come alive for me in a new way. Travel articles may contain endless descriptions, yet miss the reality of "life there". He caught it, I'm sure. Wish he could bring that same gift to describe life here one day... how I'd like to see things here through his eyes, not just my own (disenchanted, by now, with local customs - the economic type; for instance, where everybody would make a buck on his neighbour, to his neighbour's cost, at any chance.)

He grumbled about the States, didn't he. After life here, I found the States, in comparison, wonderful. Imagine! I'd accepted the sorry local status quo as "unavoidable" (and "typical of life anywhere, no doubt") til my visit in 1974 to the USA.

And what a gem Reba Estra's article is. How well she can write. Your magazine is becoming "the zine of Vivid People".

(4 November 1976)

brg Mae also sent me an article she wrote for a magazine called Harbinger (Reed Andrus, 1717 Blaine Ave, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108, USA). One section of it is a sort of letter of comment to my review of View From Another Shore in SFC 44/45. Speaking of which: I'm glad to say that Seabury have released this anthology in paperback. Get hold of it if you can. *

DON AYRES

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(Re SFC 44/45): We might as well dispatch The Invincible and be done with it. I reviewed the novel for Ed Connor in S F Echo 19 two years ago, and have re-read my review for this occasion. Turner's review embarrasses me, in that it makes me question my own critical ability while reading, whereas Gillam's review and your citation of Rottensteiner's review strike me as incongruous. What Gillam saw as a striking opening was nearly enough to cause me to shout "mayday" and abandon ship. Lem's "fine story-telling abilities" were all but limited to dialogue - a playwright perhaps, but limited as a cinematographer. I do not recall any

character but Rohan receiving development at all.

Rottensteiner's remarks are actually two-fold, furthered by a loc in Seldon's Plan some issues back which referred to my review. I don't care for his claim that "almost all American authors would have ((destroyed Regis III))"; to prove his point, he goes to a story twenty years old.

Rottensteiner claims that Lem can accept the "truly alien"; but can he really? The whole notion at the nucleus of The Invincible is not in the least alien: Darwinian theory applied to robots. It is beautifully and systematically applied, but it is not alien at all - at least to a biologist. I might argue that Hal Clement's characters, being more "human" than the homo sapiens in his stories, is probably much more a case of alien intrusion than Lem's robots. But more to the point: I did not find Lem's book with any conclusion to speak of; in the review, I said it ended "prematurely"; the fact that a Jehovah's Witness is convinced the world is going to end tomorrow does not make it so, and there is no evidence that the robots of Regis III were not destroyed.

Reality is what we make of it; to hell with the "facts". It is an individual perception. When Rottensteiner read my review of The Invincible, he would later call it a "friendly" one; it was not. I entered with a rather greater bias against Lem than I might have without Rottensteiner's oversell.

Nice to see someone giving Gene Wolfe due notice (my article about Wolfe finally appeared in Don Miller's SF & F Journal 86). The Fifth Head of Cerberus certainly deserves some sort of immortality along with several of the short stories, even if Wolfe were never to write another word.

(21 November 1976)

PATRICK BLACKBURN

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SFC 44/45 was excellent through and through. The Angus Taylor and Owen Webster articles were excellent; the Christopher Priest section very good.

But 47 left me with an uneasy feeling (and you will not guess the reason for this). The feeling came about simply because Niven's Inconstant Moon was reviewed there. I see red whenever Niven's name is mentioned. The reason for this malady is that I read his (novel?) Ringworld. This is perhaps science fiction's premier example of mindless effusion written for illiterate chawbacons, Perry Rhodan notwithstanding. To see S F Commentary dabbling in this sort of thing (S F Commentary, mentioned at the back of Billion Year Spree) is alarming. Certain topics (and authors) should be tabu. (The story has a happy ending: encouraged by the fact that the reviewers did not hack the book into little pieces and urinate ceremoniously over the mess, I read the book. Not bad. Niven handles shorter work reasonably. But I'm still in Ringworld shock; the doctors suggest rest and total abstinence (from s f) for a month. A heartless remedy, but...).

(6 December 1976)

DOUG BARBOUR

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I read the letter column of SFC 47 with great interest, amazed at how much people will tell you. And interested in what they all had to say. As a confirmed obsessive gossip-listener, I enjoy reading many of those letters, but I can't help, in my more rational moments, feeling that Buck Coulson is right to suggest that getting too personal is something that may be out of place in fanzines. At any rate, I canna do it. Though I will tell you, a propos your comments in the last SFC, that just the other day I picked up a twofer of the first two Jeff Beck lps, with Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood, and they are really fine. But then I love Rod Stewart, including his last two albums. As I love Van Morrison, whose next album I eagerly await. I guess that I really enjoy two types of rock: the soft, but nevertheless tough, stuff exemplified for me by Rita Coolidge, for example, and the tough, but not heavy-metal lack of subtlety which I find in Stewart and in The Atlanta Rhythm Section and, just recently, in The Sutherland Brothers and Quiver, who both rock hard and offer real melodic invention. And, of course, the Stones (but I talked all about them in Susan's Amor recently).

I'll congratulate you on the high quality of the reviews. Mind you, when you keep

~~getting~~ getting Peter Nicholls' reviews from Foundation, it can't but help. Still, Peter's long article on Heinlein is important, and deserves as wide a circulation as it can get. I recall a letter from Jerry Pournelle to a recent Simulacrum in which he defended Heinlein as a right nice fellow and a man who has written a number of different ideas into his books. Pournelle is probably quite correct to attack those who attack Heinlein as a "fascist". The problem, which Pournelle doesn't or can't recognise, is not simply that Heinlein may have written in praise of political ideas many of us find abhorrent; some very highly regarded writers have held ideas opposite to mine, and I still admired them. I still like the Heinlein of the early books but, somewhat like Peter, I need to remind myself when they were written, and I find myself continually thinking, "What a nice fantasy, but things don't usually work that way." "Gulf", for example, is an early power-fantasy trip, the power being in the hands of the right-thinking people (one thinks of how one can respond viscerally to Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry even as one's intellectual response is to recognise that the film (or book) has oversimplified a very complex human situation).

Subtlety is not one of Heinlein's fortes. For me, there is the greater problem of the sexism of Heinlein's recent books. It's thematic, too, and yet it bothers me more than his other political attachments. Nevertheless, it all comes down to something Nicholls clearly recognises as the major problem: Heinlein's stylistic monolithic simplism. The man wants, desperately it would seem, to write in an adult manner about sexual relations among adults. He simply cannot do it. What most appals me most about the last two novels is that where I would very much like some high class erotic writing, I get pure shit. Heinlein cannot create complex women characters, as sexual beings. He has perhaps occasionally created interesting women, but in earlier novels and stories where the sexual aspects of their characters had to be left in the shadows. Looking back, I really cannot remember any women who stand out for me - in what remains one of my favourite Heinlein novels, Double Star, the secretary is important, yes, but is she an important example of his ability to draw complex characters? I don't recall her as such. I don't recall her as such. So his characterisation of women is poor, and his heavy-handedness as a stylist interferes with one's appreciation of character interaction, especially in sexual situations. It is painful, as the quotes Nicholls chooses reveal, to read the sexual scenes in Time Enough For Love. More than too much time, if you ask me.

Indeed, Nicholls is quite right to say that, for all they're sometimes silly, the "notebooks" best express what Heinlein has to say in this novel. And, I make no doubt of the fact that Heinlein remains a highly committed didactic author. He wants us to pay attention to the message of his recent books. At least that's what I get from them: that desire; but I don't get the message. And I don't because I agree with Peter that they are life-denying even as they say they affirm. They are also solipsistic, even if Heinlein is not. Structurally, each book revolves around its central character so completely that we come to see the universe existing solely on bbhalf of the main character.

George Turner is, as usual, good and provocative on The Jonah Kit, though I must admit I didn't feel as put off as he did. Knowing from my reading of his first novel that Watson was a difficult but super-intelligent and interestingly stylish writer, I read into the book slowly, taking what I could as it came. I thought, as did Turner, that there were a few overindulgent sequences, but I found the book an incredible trip. Watson, as Turner rightly points out, has ideas and explores them - ideas that most other s f writers aren't even capable of entertaining.

(20 December 1976)

PAUL HARWITZ
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I especially liked George Turner's review of The Jonah Kit, particularly the discussion of astrophysical theories.

Of course, as we all know, it was actually Eric Lindsay who created this imperfect universe on a slow weekend in Faulconbridge, which was at that time (before the creation of the imperfect universe) a dimension slightly to the left of Infinity and three traffic-lights down from Nirvana.

Eric, as we all realise, has a somewhat perverse sense of humour (anyone who likes what I write has to), so besides the imperfections which he himself devised, he persuaded Paul Anderson (currently residing in an incarnation in South Australia) to invent some excruciatingly terrifying ones. These include: the 1870 war between France and Germany, all of the wars since then, the Spanish Inquisition, and the fact that anyone who wants a job has to have 30 years of experience and be under 22 years of age. Eric particularly prides himself on the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, the Decline and Fall of the British Empire, the colonisation of Britain by its former colonies, the New Left, the New Right, fluorocarbon aerosol-propellants, the Crusades, and American television commercials (not to mention US television programming itself). Mr Lindsay is currently working on the dissolution of the United Kingdom, and when England is left, then plans to split it into Northumbria, East Anglia, Wessex, Essex, Sussex, Mercia, and Disneyland.

Mr Chandler's letter, naturally, proved extremely enjoyable. As an American, English has always been my favourite foreign language. I do speak with a rather thick Delawarean accent, but I can speak other American dialects reasonably well. In Delaware, there are only 500,000 people (not including 100,000 transients in the State temporarily here until they can raise enough money to get out), and there are well over a million dialects. (Many Delawareans have multiple personalities.) There seem to be quite a few Australians in Wilmington, Delaware, so I suppose they work for the main offices of du Pont de Nemours, Hercules, etc, and the local offices of ICI (Imperial Chemicals).

(8 December 1976)

BERND FISCHER
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1976 was a bad year compared with 75. I've seen fewer movies and I have read fewer books than last year, probably because I have a girlfriend (so on the personal side, 76 was a good year).

Films:

1 Nashville (Altman)
2 Duels (J Rivette)
3 A Day at the Races (Marx Bros)
4 Fantastic Planet (Topor)
5 Black Moon (Malle)
6 A King in New York (Chaplin)
7 Family Plot (Hitchcock)
8 The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (Wilder)
9 Silent Movie (Brooks)
10 Barry Lyndon (Kubrick)
11 Farewell My Lovely (?)

1 is my favourite Altman film, together with McCabe and Mrs Miller. 2 is the first part of the tetralogy, "Scenes de la Vie Parallele", not as good as Celine and Julie Go Boating. 11 is listed here because of Robert Mitchum. There are no German films listed here. The new Werner Herzog film, Heart of Glass, hasn't been shown in Cologne yet; the reviews indicate a minor failure.

Books (general):

1 Die erdabgewandte Seite der Geschichte (Nicolas Born)
2 Blue Hammer (Ross McDonald)
3 Der Stromer (Liam O'Flaherty)
4 Die linkshandige Frau (Peter Handke)
5 The Once and Future King (White)
6 Der Politistenmorder (Sjowall/Wahloo)

1 is a (German) rather melancholic novel about a couple of young people whose uncertainty of their experiences and feelings leads them to destruction. 3 is a collection of (Irish) short stories. 6 is the ninth Martin Beck mystery (Per Wahloo died in 75; the tenth and last novel in that series will be published in March 77).

Books (s f):

1 Dr Bloodmoney (Dick)
2 The Simulacra (Dick)
3 Imaginary Magnitudes (Lem)
4 The Wind's Twelve Quarters (Le Guin)

3 is a collection of forewords to non-existent books (thus similar to Lem's Perfect Vacuum, a collection of reviews of non-existent books). One of the books is a pornographic one: it consists of pornographic pictures taken by an X-ray camera. The foreword to this book is the most accessible; the other forewords deal with highly complicated (extrapolated) branches of different sciences (biology, linguistics, cybernetics).

I haven't read Slapstick, the new novel by Vonnegut. I'm also looking forward to Peace, by Gene Wolfe. This book was unavailable in the States, so after my return I ordered it in a foreign bookstore here in

Cologne. Harper and Row will reissue it in January 77, so I'll have to wait.

Music:

1 Desire (Dylan)
2 Man of the 20th Century (Kevin Johnson)
3 The Pretender (Jackson Browne)
4 Chicken Skin Music (Ry Cooder)
5 T-Shirt (Loudon Wainwright)
6 Hard Rain (Dylan)
7 Bread and Roses (Judy Collins)
8 Bonaparte's Retreat (Chieftains)
9 Silly Sisters (Maddy Prior and Judy Tabor)
10 Pleasures of the Harbour (Phil Ochs)
11 All This And World War II
12 An Evening Wasted With Tom Lehrer
13 The Bothy Band

I don't think that 1 is as good as Blood on the Tracks. 2 is an Australian album. 4 and 5 are better than their predecessors.

And now for something different:

In August 1976 I started off (together with a friend) for a 30-days trip to the USA. 16000 Km by Greyhound. The route: New York - Durham, North Carolina (we visited a friend there) - New Orleans (very hot; the vieux carree is a mixture of USA, Paris, and the Reeperbahn (red light district in Hamburg)) - San Antonio - El Paso/Juarez (Mexico) - Flagstaff (Grand Canyon/Monument Valley) - San Francisco - Yosemite Park - Yellowstone Park - Chicago - New York, and back to Frankfort.

Three things impressed me most: Grand Canyon/Monument Valley, Yellowstone Park, and San Francisco. San Francisco is almost the most beautiful town I've ever seen.

The most dreadful thing (except for the Greyhound cafetarias in the bus terminals and the biggest collection of kitsch (anywhere) in the "holy square" of the Mormons in Salt Lake City) was a Sunday morning in Idaho Falls. We left our hotel to have breakfast in a coffee shop, but everything was closed. We ran around for one hour: I saw three cars and three people (two of them tourists looking for a coffee shop). Perhaps some of your readers can tell me where all the inhabitants of Idaho Falls are on a Sunday morning!

New York is a nightmare. Good museums and good for shopping (though the best record shop is to be found in San Francisco). The policemen scared me; they looked like going to war. American people are very friendly and helpful. It iseasy to get into contact with them. A warning for foreign visitors to the States: American beer is no beer at all; it only looks like beer. I hope to go back to the USA someday, but this time to California (and Canada) only.

My final remarks concern Angus Taylor's "Peregrinations" in SFC 46. I don't mind if he says that the Dutch language is "much more awkward than the German"; perhaps he's right. But I do get angry about his preoccupations concerning France: "In France the food is terrible" is one of his outstanding judgments. Of course, the food in France (Paris included) is the best you can get anywhere, as everybody (outside Britain) knows. I've worked in an English restaurant for some months, so I know the lousy state of the British cuisine (breakfast excluded). The rest of Taylor's remarks concerning Paris are equally "subjective".

(20 December 1976)

DAVE PIPER

7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6BZ, England

SFC 47:...Some fascinating letters. You certainly manage to winkle out some highly personal statements by people...but I had my say and I'm sure you've had enuff of that.

I don't want to argue with Leigh particularly, but I would like to mention that all my comments spring from a subjective base (to be honest, I just can't imagine being able to view anything objectively... if the truth be known I don't believe in objectivity) which I thought was obvious and therefore I don't agree with him when he disagrees with me. Er. I'd be interested in knowing how long Leigh's had a two-person relationship going(?) because I've had one now for 12 years and I still find it as difficult as when we first got married. It's hard work, for me anyway, and 12 years of even "little things" can get awfully upsetting unless you(I) work at them. Of course there's an overall gain or, fer crissakes, nobody would bother at having relationships at all, but if you're having a blazing row about how not to put up the bloody Xmas decorations then the gains somehow get a little put to the back of your mind. My mind.

(30 December 1976)

JON NOBLE
Broken Hill, NS.

Leigh Edmonds' review of your year I'd already read ((*brg* but not in this version*)). Wearing one's heart upon one's sleeve I can understand (especially after the last few issues of SFC) but wearing it upon Leigh Edmonds'?

To see self-confessed "subversive" Angus Taylor admitting a liking for Ed Hamilton fills me with hope for the coming of the Revolution yet. I suspect that it was Hamilton who addicted me, too, to s f. Although I'd read a few Heinlein juveniles (which, at the time, I foolishly considered rather poor), and some of W E Johns' s f (because I could find no more of his Biggles books), not to mention Dan Dare in Eagle and the s f serials on ABC radio, it was Ed Hamilton's The Haunted Stars that made me an addict of s f (and made me fail history for the first (and only) time in my life). Perhaps the strangest feature of my addiction to s f was the fact that I went straight from Ed Hamilton to Samuel Delany, Roger Zelazny, and Ursula Le Guin. I had discovered all of these within a year of my "discovery" of s f, though it wasn't until five years later that I "rediscovered" these authors. In the interim I went on the standard Heinlein/Clarke/Asimov/Wyndham kick - ah sweet nostalg.a.

It seems to me that Van Ikin misses part of the point of The Female Man. The book is (deliberately) as sexist as John Norman. By giving a female point of view, it attempts (within, in my mind, considerable success) to highlight the male sexism that is inherent in so much literature (not just s f).

The Sidgwick and Jackson/Sphere "Best of..." collections, despite their collective title, are not so much "Best of" collections as "Development of" books and, in this way, they are both important and successful. On the other hand, perhaps what we need are more "Worst of" collections along the lines of those being released by Asimov, if only to show that even the gods have feet of clay.

Although I haven't read the Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF Stories, it seems to me that Van Ikin is being a little unfair. I wonder how he would rate Damon Knight's First Flight if it were presented as an original collection, and it has what are the best of the first stories by established masters (with the exception of Brian Aldiss' "T", which I don't think was his first published story). The Asimov books (The Early Asimov, Buy Jupiter, etc) show that even masters of the field serve their apprenticeships. It is too early to judge the role of Le Guin or Silverberg in s f, but they too had to serve their time as apprentices, learning their art (or craft).

brg However, Franz Rottensteiner has long since made the point that writers who have made their name as artists often do not need to offer this excuse for their first efforts. They are clearly splendid writers when they begin, and get better. S f is sometimes made to sound as if it operates by the seniority principle, like the public service - ... if you've been at it long enough, you must be good, mate. *

While The Wanderer is certainly a good story, I suspect that the reason it won a Hugo was because of its rather incestuous references to other works of s f, eg, "Even your great god Heinlein admits they're second class citizens, every bit as good as Aborigines or fellahin" (cats, that is), or the continual references to Campbell and Smith. On the other hand, it may have won because most fans are cat lovers. Or even because it is a good books.

With 146 pages of such small print, you surely don't expect people to read the damn thing, do you?

(21 January 1977)

TERRY GREEN
41 Melcourt Road, Toronto, Ontario M4S 2T8, Canada

I especially enjoyed the George Turner/Peter Nicholls Aussiecon Debate - even though they didn't di agree all that much. George Turner is a joy to read; I grow to appreciate him more with each exposure to his critical opinions. His demand for excellence in commentary surely spurs our own attempts at same and similar demands for such. He is actually a critical Giant - even though I don't always agree with specific conclusions.

I picked up a copy of Rax by Coney on the basis of the reviewing of Coney's work in this issue.

Re my own reviews for SFC 48/49/50: There was

one glaring typo which I hope only I noticed. It occurred in the review of the Carr anthology, on page 82 of SFC. As soon as I read it, my eyebrows shot up a notch. It would appear that a line of the manuscript has been skipped. What reads now as (re "Croatoan"), "The final vision is, on a realistic plane, vividly memorable and meaningful", reads in the carbon copy I have here as, "The final vision is, on a realistic plane, absurd; but on a more powerful poetic plane, vividly memorable and meaningful". There's quite a difference. The final printed version is so far from being true about the story for me that I noticed it immediately as something I would never have said about that particular story.

I learn quite a bit about very formal grammar, and about your personal preferences re syntax, and about different ways of presenting the same idea by reading the final edited versions of the printed reviews (I compare them with my carbons; it is very enlightening, and always gives me some food for thought.) But, ultimately, I am humbled, and try to digest the reason for the change. As I said, in the long run, I think I am learning much. George Turner is a good teacher in this area too.

(15 February 1977)

DON D'AMMASSA

19 Angell Drive, East Providence, Rhode Island 02914, USA

(Re SFC 47): In Leigh Edmonds' letter, he implies that you cannot have a story without characters. Well, I suspect that I know of an exception, unless Leigh has an extraordinarily wide definition of characters: "The Drowned Giant", by J G Ballard, in which we have a description of a giant rotting on a beach. I suspect Leigh might counter that this is not truly a story, but that really is a case of defining a story to fit Leigh's initial statement, in which case there is not any point in discussing it. A second alternative is Alan Danzig's "The Great Nebraska Sea" or, for that matter, Curt Gentry's "novel", The Last Days of the Great State of California.

Neville Angove's discussion of Ball's The Probability Man is very interesting, but I thought he should have put more emphasis on the use of, well, local colour, in the book. Ball strikes me as a not particularly talented writer who nevertheless is interesting because of some of the things he does with description.

And Strange at Ecbatan the Trees by Michael Bishop is not as good as it should be, but I don't believe it is fair to call A Funeral For the Eyes of Fire "inadequate". I found the latter to be quite a complex and rewarding work, despite some minor quibbles.

I'd probably give you somewhat of an argument on the value of Anderson's fiction if you'd been more explicit, but your remarks were vague enough that anything I said would be futile. I will point out, though, that I had a relatively low opinion of his fiction until last year, when a re-reading of virtually all of his fiction led me to conclude that I had been underestimating him. This does not, of course, mean that I found his political opinions any more palatable, only that I found that he blended them into his fiction better than most - certainly better than Heinlein, for example.

(22 February 1977)

MICHAEL SHOEMAKER

2123 North Early Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22302, USA

I liked your short reviews in SFC 41/42, especially because they covered so many books.

I agree with your evaluation of The Stars My Destination, but stupid generalisations like "American fans" make me mad. There are some brilliant sections in Narziss and Goldmund, especially the description of the plague, but the book has some very serious flaws, too.

Though I haven't read The Farthest Shore, it's really hard for me to believe it's better than The Castle or both the Wells books.

brg I explained carefully that my list is hardly one of "better" and "best", but strictly a list of the books I enjoyed most, or had most impact on me. In that year, The Farthest Shore won by a long way. *

The Invisible Man is my favourite Wells novel and one of my favourite s f novels, The Priest and Clarke novels, both seriously flawed, don't approach it.

Unclear generalisations like "within the limits of the harsh 'fifties film" (what the hell is that?) and "the resplendent style of the forties" (what in hell is that?), cast grave doubts upon all your film commentary. For someone who is concerned about the visual aspect of films, you pay remarkably little attention to silent films. Your loss. I think the attention to the visual aspect of movies declined with the advent of sound. One of the most beautiful looking films I've ever seen is Sunrise (1927, Murnau). But as it is we disagree on the basics. Of course I like best those movies in which all the elements are of the highest quality: The Best Years of Our Lives, All Quiet on the Western Front, The Last Laugh, and many others contain first-rate stories, acting, and imagery. But faced with the choice of only one or the other, I'm far better entertained by a good story and good acting than by a painting that moves. This explains my dislike of most modern films. It seems that all the good actors have taken to the stage these days, and good scripts are even more scarce.

brg The difference between the 40s and the 50s?: Citizen Kane, by Welles, at the beginning of the 40s, and Touch of Evil, by Welles, at the beginning of the 50s. Both Welles in top form, but the equipment used on Touch of Evil gives an ugly look to the picture compared with Welles' 40s films. The difference between eras seems to me to owe as much to equipment possibilities and limitations as to conscious style. Silents? I just haven't had the opportunity to see many of them. *

"Heart of Darkness" below three s f stories (two of which I've read)? My respect for your critical acumen may never recover from this shock.

It should be noted that Lem's letter makes no attempt at a closely reasoned, point-by-point defence, substantiated by facts, against the substantial criticisms that have been levelled at him. On the other hand, I do agree with his generalised diagnosis-prophecy on the limits of cultural growth.

I agree with Murnane's comments about how Peake's trilogy gains its power, but I found the writing so prolix that I never quite made it to the end of the second volume. As for Tolkien: I can only assume that Murnane, like some others who undervalue Tolkien, lacks an appreciation for the depth of its mythic quality.

In the last few years, George Turner has become one of my favourite s f critics. His outstanding review of 334 demonstrates why. We are rather close, I think, in the ideal we hold for s f. However, Turner seems to think that the stories in 2020 Visions were commissioned for that book, but most of the stories have had previous magazine appearances (some quite a few years ago), so it would seem that this is a reprint anthology.

I'm glad to find someone who liked "To Walk with Thunder" as much as I did. Your praise of The Big Parade is deserved, but rather comical in that that movie is merely one of many (and not nearly the best) very fine silent movies, and very fine American movies (which, we all know, BG can't stand). The correct date for it, by the way, is 1924, not 26. "And He Built a Crooked House" is merely one of a number of good stories that RAH wrote in the 40s. His decline is not unique; it is much the same as Wells'.

I was very pleased to see your praise of the Prokofiev violin concertos. Frankly, Prokofiev and his music is the object of hero-worship for me, but I won't go into that now. Someday I'll write a book about him.

One wonders where Van Ikin got the notion that "Forgetfulness" is the first published version of the work that won fame as "Twilight". In the first place, they are two independent stories, and secondly, "Twilight" was published first (Nov 34 as opposed to June 37).

(3 March 1977)

DON BOYD
129a Awaba Street, Mosman, NSW 2088

I am primarily oriented towards writing s f and yakking with other guys who write s f, but I like to admire and dissect each book I buy in terms of it being an aesthetic object, an artifact. SFC 48/49/50 therefore is good in terms of constant little improvements. The cover logo is very bold. I dig that little stylised symbol. By comparison, the logo on 47 is ho-hum. I perceive that perhaps the new logo was printed offset, so maybe it isn't all that practicable to continue this logo. Also having print on the inside front cover is good (47 was bare), and the contents page is more nifty.

One of the good things about offset is that once you've found the spare time to design a good logo, contents page, review heading, etc (which can be pasted up as a montage from different photos and clippings) you no longer have to re-type it next time. You just tear it loose and re-paste it. It really is true that if you want somebody to read an item then the best way is to put near it a tiny drawing or picture. No amount of huge bold headlines has the same drawing power. Certain archetypes work better.

I want to bring out an Australian s f magazine ultimately. Psy Aus is going okay now so I am saving a little nest egg and reconnoitering to make the move. Void does not personify the classic pulp ethos, I feel, although there may be certain economic reasons for this. I reckon Paul Collins has put too much "quality" into the physical artifact and not enough into his layout. I would ditch that thick cardboard cover and print on the cheapest grade of internal paper, the gloss cover being the traditional gloss paper. I also think the selling power of any Australian s f magazine would be in its power to reflect our own culture. This doesn't mean I'm a mad xenophobe, or that I don't appreciate what P K Dick could do for the circulation, but I feel the market for Void is saying, "Why should I buy this when F&SF prints the same stuff with more pages?"

As an editor, I really appreciate the enormous power to suck writing talent out of the woodwork. When I get a letter or article from somebody I think has potential, boy, do I go after them. Most of what I get is garbage. I'm not saying I've discovered dozens of brilliant new names, but I've got three writers whom I've been hammering to write a book. One fellow has already done this and I think I can get it into circulation through a friend's book company in the UK. Three Australian writers is three Australian writers. If I can do that every year for ten years, that's thirty writers. Of course, it won't work out in such linear fashion. But these guys are in the fact field; for fiction, I'm itching to see what's out there.

I've been corresponding with a Sydney fan named "Peter Knox" (don't know his real name) who is bringing out Boggle. He says he got a huge pile of stuff by advertising in the FAW Newsletter, but most of it was junk. However, I have a feeling he's a little like Paul Collins of Void in wanting to have "quality". The s f magazine I would bring out would be the same as the enclosed Psy Aus with a variety of letters and "bits and pieces" in addition to the straight fiction, and only 32 pages.

My interest in Fortean phenomena (I can't stand the word psychic, or any of the nutcases connected with it) is intimately tied in with my interest in s f. I learned to read on a big carton of Galaxys and Astoundings I got when I was six, and it has always been an unquestionable assumption that the galaxy is full of races who visit our planet all the time. Same goes for time travellers. My uni. background is hard sciences so I'm soaked in the paradoxes this involves. But I look back on Scientific American of 1890 to see everything they covered then is laughable nonsense today, and I fully expect all our sciences and knowledge of today will be laughable nonsense by 2020, which is my threescore and ten. I also did anthropology and political science later on, which merely confirmed my opinion that the prevailing experts were not too reliable. Remember the amateur Schliemann who, against their scorn, went and discovered not one "mythical" city of Troy but twenty? So Clarke's maxim, "Any technology sufficiently advanced beyond ours would be indistinguishable from magic" has potent meaning for me.

Two things inevitably follow on from this in my s f writing. The first is that American capitalism can't possibly figure in any story set further ahead than about 2050, because a workless society is mandatory once computers are able to visually "see" objects and take decisions upon themselves. I've seen the standard criticism made of Van Vogt, that he has his space captain land at the port in the year 3000, then go out and drive off in his three-speed manual Studebakers. Likewise we can deduce that when the per capita income in 2020 is $100,000 per year in 1975 dollars, you will have to find some other bait than money to induce an individual to spend all his life unplugging blocked drainpipes. Why? Because if you could gross $2000 per week in 1975 dollars at a pleasant task, would you go unblock drains for an extra hundred a week? Nope. And when nearly everything can be done by computerised devices the tovernment will have to dish out salaries for people to do nothing. If you persevere with this somewhat elliptical argument, you'll figure out money is actually labour, and a society where no one labours is a society where no money is

needed because there is no need to put prices on things except in terms of scarcity of resources.

The second thing that follows is that the technology which should be used in s f yarns set further ahead than, say, 2050 is not likely to be all that meaningful by today's standards. However, you can take a few guesses and stabs in the dark by looking at some of the "occult" and weirdo literature of today. A medieval writer could have glimpsed modern chemistry and astronomy by looking at alchemy and astrology. The same applies to the twentieth-century writer wanting to see what the twenty-fifth century will be like. There's a lot of chaff to be sorted through, but that only makes it more intriguing. The most interesting area lies in human psychology, motivation, our concepts of time and causality. Hence my liking of P K Dick. And, if you want to assign any credibility rating to UFO encounters and abductions, here is a rich area for s f writers to narrow down their guesses as to what might motivate a future society, what might be the basis for their morality, art, etc. They definitely won't be a lot of beer-drinking Americans in steel-hulled ships spreading democracy. In fact, their non-time, non-material aspect looms large.

(7 March 1977)

IAN WILLIAMS

6 Greta Tce, Chester Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR4 7RD, England

It was nice to see a section on Michael Coney in SFC 48/49/50. He is an underrated writer who is one of my favourites. His latest book, Brontomek, is a sequel to Syzygy, Mirror Image, and (though you don't find out until the end) Charisma. All that may sound fascinating, but unfortunately it isn't. I did enjoy it moderately, as I'm a sucker for future histories. It's certainly nice to see a review of Hello Summer, Goodbye, a book that seems to engender high praise or low condemnations. Chris Priest enthused over the book to me a year and a half back, and he isn't easily pleased. I was rather annoyed that it wasn't nominated for a Hugo, when so many minor works by "name" authors were. Had it been written by someone like Niven or Zelazny it would probably have won hands down.

It might be a good idea to have more features on those science fiction writers regarded as the "second rank", in preference to some of our more overrated writers like Le Guin and Vance. I'm thinking specifically of Bob Shaw. Bob is a constant underachiever, in that he uses some tremendous ideas with great potential, and fails constantly to realise them. This has become very apparent in his last three novels - Orbitsville, A Wreath of Stars (though that came very close - he succeeded in creating a sympathetic, believable hero whom he lumbered with the name Gilbert Snook), and his latest, Medusa's Children. Medusa's Children, in particular, could have been superb, but Bob paced the novel incorrectly and didn't spend enough time bringing out part of the background. Half the novel is in alternating sections - the first on a waterworld of almost no gravitation (bubbles of air float freely, enabling the human tribe to survive). In this section, Bob spends too long describing the world through the eyes of his female protagonist (a native). The second follows the disgruntled male hero who lives in a fishing village on twenty-fourth-century Earth. All this moves rather slowly. Once the two main characters meet, the book takes off, and also finishes too quickly. The second half of the book should have been longer, and the waterworld sections shorter. I've a feeling that Bob realised he was getting towards the sixty-thousand-word mark, had a deadline to meet, and just rushed it off.

Back to Le Guin and Vance. I don't think Le Guin is a very good short story writer. I picked up a paperback of The Wind's Twelve Quarters recently, having read it in hardback about a year ago. I fully intended to reread all of it, but gave up. There are a couple of good stories ("Semley's Necklace", "Winter's King"), but most of them are dull or confusing. I loved most of Vance's early stuff and much of his work during the 1960s, but lately seems to me to have gone downhill. Vance's prose is ornate, but not evocative, or very descriptive.

In case you're getting the impression that I just like relatively simple stuff, I'd better add that I read Dhalgren and Triton, enjoying both.

(7 March 1977)

DAVE PIPER
(again)

SFC 48/49/50: Meaty, interesting issue, Bruce ...I especially enjoyed your long look at the Original Anthologies. One thing though. I'm not completely convinced that we did "survive Elwood". Have to wait and see. That guy seems to have/have had a really fantastic power to get the worst out of everybody. Including Pangborn. I got really chocka with the Continuum series after number 2 and didn't bother with the rest of the series. I'm glad he's out and hope he/takes up walking dogs, or bus driving, or biscuit packing or somesuch. One thing, may be just me, but I think it's because he did such a good job of killing the original market that the last year or so I've found F&SF to be very readable. I'm even buying it regularly again, or maybe it's just down to Ferman as Analog seems, in the same period of time, to have become just about unreadable. It's funny really; I don't think in all these years... and years... and omigawd years of my reading this brain-rotting stuff have I ever found more than one of the magazines to be consistently readable. Except perhaps the early fifties. I generally have spells of buying one or the other but very seldom more than one. And the reasons aren't only financial.

George Turner was entertaining and interesting as usual, and the lettercol was ditto.

(10 March 1977)

ALAN SANDERCOCK
Rebenring 63, D-3300 Braunschweig, West Germany

Yes, it's actually me. I guess you didn't expect ever to hear from me again. Well, so much as happened since I wrote last that I really am at quite a loss to know just where to start. Yesterday I was lounging around my small room here in the city of Braunschweig where I am working for the next year or two, wondering just how the hell I was every going to throw off the pain and boredom of an attack of tonsilitis. I haven't been able to eat for a week or so, so that I am getting thin and weak. Anyway, there I was, as miserable as anything. Sue (my American friend and bed companion) wanted to walk to the station so I said I'd walk as far as where I work with her, and I'd check my mail. And so I was as pleased as hell to discover a forwarded copy of S F Commentary 48/49/50. There it was just sitting on my desk and yet it was a package designed to relieve my boredom for a couple of hours. I don't know how rational this letter's going to be, since I seem to be fully in the grip of the dreaded disease at the moment. Sue is lying on the other end of this silly bed at the moment reading and apparently enjoying Memoirs of a Survivor by Lessing.

I suppose things went totally chaotic for me after publication of Dream Vendor 1. That issue was produced, believe it or not, because I was feeling bored. I'd planned to have DV2 out in a couple of months, and almost did, except that I got side-tracked by the appearance in London of an Adelaide girl (whom I hadn't met before) and we just became good friends and ended up spending a lot of time together. That sort of put a stop to the completion of issue 2. And then in November I flew back to Australia to spend 3 weeks at home for "Xmas" even though it wasn't actually Xmas at the time. I vividly remember not meeting John Bangsund once during the whole time spent in Adelaide. I did meet a lot of new South Australian fans, however, and if they can control the various little feuds that happen occasionally, then interesting things could happen. I like Ortlieb (I'd never met the guy before, even though I'd read some of his material).

It was back to London for a couple of days of packing and then across the Iserlohn, West Germany, for eight solid weeks of learning German. I can't really say that I did a lot of study since it was over the Xmas/New Year period and there were many distractions. For example, over the New Year I took a train down to Frankfurt where I stayed with Cherry Wilder and family. You mention Cherry's novel and, after talking to her, it seems that she now has little trouble selling to the right markets. Of course, the right agent is one hell of a help. Anyhow, New Year was a refreshingly liquid one, and rightly so, considering that the outside weather was dismal enough to forestall any sort of healthy outdoor activity. Actually, that was not quite so, as the Germans have a tradition of celebrating the New Year by letting off fire crackers and sky rockets at midnight. So each little family has a display of light radiating out from their little plot of road outside their

particular block of flats. It's all somewhat dangerous, however, since by this time everyone has had a lot to drink and no one is all that careful about which direction the rockets are firing. For the rest of the weekend, we lounged around the apartment drinking various liquors, wines, and beers and watching old German films on the box. Oh yes, we did talked a lot about s f and fans and seemed to have a remarkable amount to say considering that we'd just met for the first time that weekend. Anyhow, it was a completely different way to spend a New Year from what I am used to.

Back to Iserlohn and my interesting large room apartment with its commanding view over the little town square. During this second half of the course the time spent at the local "bistro" began to get somewhat out of hand until it seemed as if we were there every evening until about 1 am. Classes began each morning at 8.45, so it was not always easy to get out of bed. Still, a lot of local languange and customs can be learnt by drinking with the locals, even if all the English-speaking people did tend to isolate themselves from the others. And occasionally, in between all this, a fanzine or two would turn up after being forwarded from my old address.

I became really friendly with Sue in those last weeks in Iserlohn, until she seemed to be spending most of her time in my apartment, or rather my room. I had a very tolerant landlord who not only let Sue stay, but also let me play my records and cassettes on his hifi system. Of course, it meant putting up with his loud music playing at very odd hours, but what the hell.

The course finally ended and my award then paid my rail costs up here to Braunschweig where I am now doing chemical research for the next year or two, plus a damn lot of travelling. I hope to go to the Worldcon this year, but so far I haven't made any plans about getting over there. With the money I'm earning here, however, I can afford to go without worrying too much about every penny. On the other hand, what with tonsillitis this week and sprained ankle last week, I could very well expect all my hair to fall out by then.

My film-going has dropped right off, although we went along to see Midnight Cowboy dubbed into German the other night. Ah yes, there's nothing like having a rich Southern accent replaced by an all too German voice. And they dub all the films here in Germany, damn them. In Holland, Belgium, Denmark, etc, films are shown in their original language with subtitles. I noted your film listing in 48/49/50 with some interest, especially as your taste in films really does coincide with mine. I haven't actually seen Landscape After Battle but I have seen and have been extremely impressed with a couple of Majda's o other films. I had been avoiding Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore and then I saw it as an in-flight movie somewhere, and I had to admit that, even under those trying circumstances, that it was a very special film indeed. I was just completely entertained by The Man Who Would Be King and The Cars That Ate Paris. I saw Thieves Like Us a few years ago in Adelaide during its season of one or two weeks and thought it quite a superior film. Of course, it did disastrously and sunk without a trace... Incidentally, BBC TV last year in London screened what they advertised as a complete print of Andrei Rublev. It certainly had the weird initial balloon sequence that is usually cut.

> I don't want to hate,
> I just want to grow;
> why can't I let me
> live and be free?
> but I die very slowly alone.
> I know no more ways,
> I am so afraid,
> myself won't let me
> just be myself and so I am completely
> alone...
>
> - Peter Hammill "A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers"

The music and lyrics of Peter Hammill and his group Van Der Graaf Generator are by far the most interesting for me since he always seems to be talking about problems that obsess me: eg, love, death, loneliness, alienation, doom - all those things being constantly agonised over in song after song and looked at in different perspectives through some of the most inventive rock music of the decade. The albums of Van Der Graaf Generator and Hammill are all recommended - they take you halfway to hell and then leave you there, as someone once said of them.

(10 March 1977)

((*trg* Alan suggests sending fanzines to:
Lehrstuhl B Fur Anorg. Chemie,
Pockelsstrasse 4, D-3300 Braunschweig
(G*))

PHILIP STEPHENSEN-PAYNE
"Lindon", 1 Lewell Avenue, Old Marston,
Oxford OX3 ORL, England

Thanks for SFCs 43, 46, 47, and 48/49/50...

I too have moved, and am now sharing a large semi in Oxford itself with Philippa (naturally) and a friend from my old job. At last we have room to shelve most of our books (all three of us collect them) and are within easy reach of the centre of Oxford with its masses of second-hand bookshops (6-7) and cinemas (9), the latter being a "student-oriented" cinema with a different program every day at least, and with hordes of old-ish films like Duel, Les Biches, Dr Strangelove, etc. Sadly, all its best films start at 11 pm, and as I have to get up at 6.15 am to get to work on time, I have to miss more than I would wish. One of the other cinemas, also occasionally shows the "rarer", more interesting films (El Topo, THX 1138, Solaris, etc) but more often have boring two-year-old repeats.

As well as house-moving, I've moved jobs, twice, in the last twelve months. After the incredible strain of my job from March 1975-June 1976 (most enjoyable, and rewarding, but at times hell) I decided to leave that firm. (There was not much further to go there anyway.) Sadly, in my eagerness to depart I accepted a job rather too fast, and ended up in an abysmal job with a really lousy firm, and chucked it in after 5 months. Now I'm in a far more interesting and satisfying job - with Digital Equipment Corporation, a large American computer firm - which, however, is in Reading, which is 35 miles away. Probably that doesn't seem far to an Australian - like Americans - but in England it's over an hour's journey. So that I leave the house at 7am every day and don't get back til 6.30 pm. Still, I manage to get quite a few books read on the train on the way.

So, the Tucker Issue, SFC 43... I must admit that my knowledge of Wilson/Bob Tucker is miniscule (or was before reading SFC 43 - I didn't even know the two people inhabited the same body). I read, and enjoyed immensely, The Year of the Quiet Sun several years back and, on the strength of it, bought The Lincoln Hunters and The Time Masters, but have yet to read either.

I thought it singularly telling that Tucker was a "greedy reader, and prefer non-fiction to fiction", a characteristic which, I suspect, contributes strongly to the quality of his books. Too many authors (s f authors, I mean) seem to feel that all they need to read - if that - is other s f around and the occasional fanzine. This tends to give them an incredibly narrow view of literary possibilities, and hence ties down their own creative abilities.

A few lines later he says, "Editors don't expect writers to know about spelling and grammar, and expect to rewrite every manuscript they get." This might possibly apply to "established" writers, but - in England at least - a new author would not stand much chance with the publishers if his spelling/grammar were poor. The reaction tends to be, "If he know that little about English, then he cannot possibly be a good writer". With such a prejudgement, the story/novel will hardly get a fair hearing. In a way, this ties in with my previous comment - if you have read widely (and with attention), you are far less likely to make such blunders than otherwise. Ironically, in recent months, the effect of publishers in Britain has seemed the reverse of Bob's comment, as more and more badly proofread books appear with spelling and grammar mistakes.

The whole problem of inserting vital technical information is a very complex one, that seems in general still unresolved these days. It is simple to follow Pohl's advice when dealing with a simple set-up like a Space Station (I remember Jim Blish giving me similar advice when criticising the one story I ever got published in a fanzine) - but it is far more difficult when the plot hinges on a piece of (pseudo-)scientific information. In Pohl's own much-acclaimed (though certainly not by me) story, "In the Problem Pit", he has a six-page insert of technical information just dumped in the middle of the story. (Prose that begins, "About a hundred million years before the birth of Christ, during the period called the Upper Cretaceous when the Gulf of Mexico swelled to drown huge parts of the Southern United States, a series of volcanic eruptions racked the sea that would become the Caribbean." And so on, in dry textbook style for all six pages.) To paraphrase Tucker, Fred Pohl needs Fred Pohl.

I was somewhat disappointed by Tucker's brief comments on "What good fandom is".

OK, it was a pretty daft question but, even so, the reasons are hardly such as to convince anyone who didn't already think so. I suppose, on the whole, that the biggest trouble with the interview - many of the questions were "silly". Had Tucker not been such a fascinating speaker on his own, the whole thing would have petered out very soon. (Alas, there are too few good interviewers around. The best I read in fandom recently was Chris Fowler's of Elwood in Vector 79, and that was several years out of date.)

On the whole I was not too fond of Lesleigh Luttrell's piece on Tucker's mysteries. For page after page she contented herself with brief plot summaries and very brief comments. There was no feeling of unity about the piece, no general comments on Tucker mysteries with relation to all other mysteries; just short comments on Bob Tucker mysteries in relation to each other.

The best bit, in fact, was the warning to readers at the front, a very neat idea.

One point that seems common to a large number of SFC reviews, that always irritates me, is the grouping of stories/books before a general discussion. In this case, the sentence, "The remaining two Charles Horne mysteries...stick to the Midwest for their locales, but venture further afield than Boone." So what? That tells us nothing of relevance or interest, as both books are discussed in full immediately after. Annoying too was the occasional "in" comment, such as, "The fan who has read or heard accounts of Tucker's own train wreck may find the following exchange...amusing." Perhaps he may, but that adds nothing to the article of value. In general, I got fed up with the continual comments on Tucker's fannish references, in your article as well, Bruce. So he uses a lot of Tuckerisms - interesting. Give a few examples, fine. But to append to every novel comments such as "Here we have Tuckerisms of X, Y, Z as A, B, C" is just boring after a while.

So, on the whole, a well-researched, but poorly carried-through article.

((*brg* But it still served Lesleigh's purpose in writing it - as an informational overview, rather than a literary article. I suspect it's quite close to what I asked for way back at the end of 1974. My own article was also meant to be concise, but *))

On the contrary, I found your article on the s f of Tucker fascinating, and very well-written. Consequently, as always happens, having (as I said) read none of the books mentioned within, I find myself with nothing to say about its content except that it was immensely well-written and inspired me with a desire to go off and read the two unread Tuckers I have.

The review of The Year of the Quiet Sun, I found enjoyable - though to a lesser degree. Your style has improved greatly with time. I wasn't too convinced about the chatty framing of the review. Whilst probably appropriate and enjoyable in the original appearance, I felt it might have been omitted this time around. I confess the review reminded me of what I felt to be the one really weak point in the book - "Nobody notices the one fact that eventually dooms the whole project, the fact that the TDV must have a power source." That I found thoroughly unconvincing - that any such project would have overlooked such an obvious point. (Anyway, the "man goes into future in time machine, and cannot return because there is no power for the machine" story, was already hackneyed by the time that Tucker wrote the book.)

And so on to 46 - the Special Prestidigitations issue with such a delightful cover.

However did you trace/define every s f short story from 1973? Looking at the Aldiss/Harrison Best collection for that year, I note stories from Esquire and The Sunday Times. No doubt there were others at odd times in things like IT, Penthouse, She, etc. I even remember an s f story last year in Computer Digest! Even without such oddities, I would have thought it nigh on impossible to check all reprint anthologies and single-author collections, both of which occasionally carry new stories, or the mainstream anthologies and magazines which occasionally carry s f (eg, Delany's "Unicorn Tapestry" in American Review in 1970, or Asimov's "Tercentenary Incident" in EQMM last year). Still, even if you read all the s f magazines and original anthologies, you've been doing pretty well. I tend to manage the former every year, but have never attempted the latter.

I was intrigued by your list (as I usually am) but had only read - and thoroughly enjoyed - four of them (Dozois/Le Guin/Watson/Tiptree). The preponderance of stories from

View From Another Shore was immensely irritating for, as you say, the book is now out of print. ((*brg* It's back in print, in a Seabury paperback.*)) "The Direction of the Road" is, to my mind, one of Le Guin's best stories, though possibly surpassed by "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas". This I found much more enjoyable when I read it aloud to Philippa, but I didn't really "see what it was all about" until I read Le Guin's introduction to The Wind's Twelve Quarters.

As usual, I had read few of the "Favourite Novels" for 1975. Elkin and Soseki I had never heard of, nor of Wolfe's latest novel, Peace. Fitzgerald and Joyce are on my "sometime soon" list, but I'll probably start with The Great Gatsby (the only Fitzgerald novel in the house) and The James Joyce Reader (which includes Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man). We have Ulysses, but that must wait for a while. Ice and Iron I have yet to read. Galactic Pothealer was the first Dick I read and, at the time, I hated it. Now a converted Dick fan, I would probably enjoy it more. Which leaves only The Little Prince - a delightful book that Philippa first asked me to read (sound familiar?). I'm not sure I would put it in a "top" list, but I enjoyed it immensely.

As for your runners up: I first read Lord of the Rings thirteen years ago, and it is one of my all-time favourites. The Stochastic Man is one of the reasons I don't much enjoy Silverberg these days. (Though at least it's better than the monotonous Shadrach in the Furnace. Whatever happened to the author of The Book of Skulls, Thorns, Dying Inside, Son of Man, Downward to the Earth, Vornan-19, etc?). Your inclusion of To the Tombaugh Station would probably startle Bob Tucker, who rated it his second-worst book in SFC 43. Short stories again mainly outside my knowledge. The Lafferty and Le Guin I agree with wholeheartedly. The Heinlein too is a favourite, although again of very long standing. My own favourites from that Asimov anthology are "Surface Tension" (of course) and "A Subway Named Mobius".

Of the films I had seen only The Day of the Locust - purely by accident, because it was on with Chinatown - and was very favourably impressed, particularly by the performances of Karen Black and Donald Sutherland. There seems to be a spate of nostalgic Hollywood movies (if nostalgic is the right word) around at the moment. My own favourite is Inserts, which I saw last night. If you get the chance, do go and see it. It has some superb acting by Jessica Harper (one of the few good things in Phantom of the Paradise) and Richard Dreyfuss.

As for non-fiction - that is really outside my current reading styles. What I do read tends to be Encyclopedia Britannica Year-Books, Asimov non-fiction, and J H Conway on mathematics. An exception is Francis Huxley's Raven and the Writing Desk - an incredibly twisted book about the famous riddle in Alice.

More lists, this time from Bernd Fischer. I've seen six of the films he lists, and agree on them all - except for order. They are, in my ordering, Sleuth, Chinatown, Andrej Rublev, The Passenger, Young Frankenstein, and Black Windmill. His first three book titles I would also support, though I was less fond of the Farmer and Priest books. The Wolfe is immensely impressive, but I wish I felt I understood it better. I read it first when it appeared in hardback, but now I have a paperback edition I might manage to persuade myself to reread it. (I'm very poor at rereading books, except ones which need it for a review.) The Savage God is certainly an outstanding book, another that Philippa introduced me to a while ago. As for the pop music, I just couldn't comment. My interest in/knowledge of pop has died in the past three years, and while I still listen to the pop stations occasionally, it is too infrequent to keep track of what's happening. Mind you, I used to be very fond of it - and so take exception to your comment, "Nobody outside of Australia is going to remember the Easybeats". Of course I do. They were one of the groups I grew up with, along with the Animals, the Searchers, and so on.

Poor Mike and his being labelled as queer. To some degree, I know only too well how he feels. For many years at school it was a label applied to me, but in my case with a certain amount of truth. (Which is what an all-male boarding school does for you.) After a while I gave up trying to pretend, and openly confessed it - at school - but that was no real solution. I still couldn't face it in the outside world and had a terrible time when my father found out about my school "activities". And again, when I went up to University, it was back to concealment. Things changed and I ended where I am now, a bit of both - still hiding from everyone.

As for people continually making fun of/about homosexuals: it's all part of the whole macho thing, isn't it? The most important thing in the world to most people these days is sex, and hence it is adopted as a measuring rod of quality by many people. You're as good as you screw. Now, obviously, being queer doesn't count. Obviously, no one is queer out of choice/preference. They're queer because they are unable to get any women. Ergo queer=failure. Now you don't sympathise with failures - it's not macho. So everyone, for fear they might be thought queer, makes fun of queers no matter what they really think. That is the sort of sick society we all live in.

I enjoyed Angus Taylor's "Op Leg" though, of course, he is often talking through his arse. Anyone who can confuse French bread with styrofoam has obviously got something chronically wrong with his palate. 'Tis about the best bread around, as any real bread-lover can tell you. As for Continental breakfast, it (or the Anglicised version of toast and coffee) is the only civilised way to start the day. As for lunch - what a barbaric notion. OK, so a quick sandwich (preferably made with french bread) is a useful midday snack, but nothing heavier. That's the trouble with these colonials, always overeating.

As for his comments on the British (the people God really chose), he is, of course, displaying the sort of bigoted ignorance one has to expect from foreigners. Of course we speak the English language as it should be spoken - when we want to. However, we are humane enough to put on the "colourful" local accents so that the poor tourists don't feel too outclassed when they speak to us. As for his "two favourite expressions of the English" - he is obviously as ignorant as he sounds. Our favourite expressions are really "Please" and "Thank You". But no doubt Angus was so unfamiliar with the words that he missed them. Of course we're polite - the first sensible thing he's said about us. As to why we walk on both sides of the sidewalk, it is because we have some interest in what is on the side of the pavements - we're not just automatons dashing from one location to another. (Though I confess I saw no evidence in North America of pedestrians keeping to any particular side of the pavement.)

As for his comments on Ireland; they are simply sick and stupid. "It's a form of class war" he says - what a load of balls. Exactly which class is supposed to be fighting which? As for it being "interesting" to be told there is a bomb on the Underground or whatever - I'd like to see him say that to the poor sods who've beem maimed for life by such "interesting" bombs. But then, with the mass news coverage of death and war in North America, no doubt to Angus other people's suffering is just "interesting". Let's hope an IRA bomb blows off his legs one day and see how "interesting" he finds it then.

The only amusing University teeshirt I remember seeing was from "Idontgoto University".

SFC 47: Leigh Edmonds says, "Trying to help people out with their problems is about as useless as trying to fill Port Philip Bay with a hand shovel." Unless this particular bay is very small, I must say I strongly disagree. He goes on to say that all one can do is listen, seemingly without realising that this, in itself, is often a great help. But one can, as well, offer advice and support. You cannot solve someone else's problems for them, but you can help them to solve them themselves. That's where the great advantage of all these phone-in advice services lies (I presume you have them in Australia?; Oxford currently has three).

I do agree with Leigh on the changes necessary in any relationship, though. I'm not sure it's quite a self-made change as much as a situation-invoked change. The enforced closeness, of itself, modifies one's reactions and ideas. But whichever it is, it is certainly not imposed by other people.

As for your reply; what is an illusion? I find it impossible to conceive of the meaning of a phrase like, "Happiness is an illusion." If you're happy, then you're happy. End of message - it's as simple as that. You can make generalised philosophical statements like, "The Happiness of the World is an Illusion", or even personal comments like "Fred's appearance of Happiness is an Illusion", implying in both cases that people appear to be happy, but really are not. But you cannot say that "Happiness is an Illusion" - it's a meaningless comment.

Neville Angove makes a very telling point when he says that "seeing someone else's problems can help one to face one's own problems", and it is often here that one can help someone else with problems. Whilst it can be annoying to be told, "I went through all

that years ago", it can be exceptionally helpful to hear, "Yes, I often have that problem myself". Many people's problems are very personal, and they feel that they are shut off from the rest of humanity by them. So to learn that other people share the same problems can be an immense help.

Also very telling was the opening of your reply - "I've told that life story so many times...that even I don't know which is the most accurate version." That comforts me - to know that someone else has the same trouble sifting illusion from reality in his past. To most intents and purposes I can remember nothing of my life before I was 15 (of which more later) and I am unsure how much of what I do remember is true, and how much is part of the fantasies I made up. Yet most of my friends are astounded at this, as they recount their memories of age 3 or so.

David Grigg makes many salient points in his letter. His "I don't fit in well with the people with whom I work. I don't drink beer, I don't own a television. I don't watch or play football. I'm strange, a bit funny" comes straight from the heart and echoes round mine, for all his statements are ones I make. David drinks cider. I drink lager (I'm not too fond of it, but it got too much of a hassle to try drinking vodka when everyone else is drinking pints.) And I imagine he sits there, like I, saying for the nth time that no, he doesn't have a television, and no, he hasn't got the slightest interest in football, and laughing gamely at the adolescent "blue" jokes, and wondering what happens to the people who should be intelligent, when they get in a group around a few pints. There the whole is distinctly less than the parts.

It ties in so much with his, "My best friends beat me up. And yet they were the only friends I had." It's so true. The gang mentality infests people when they group. At school I had a number of friends I could talk to on a serious level when there were just the two of us. They were serious, concerned, and often worried people. Yet when all these serious people grouped together, they became a mob and one could no longer expect concern from them.

What, really, is so horrifying about a loc on your life? It is too easy to delude oneself about what one is doing. It's a lot harder to delude oneself and somebody else.

Of course it's not easy - life in general isn't easy. But, ultimately, it cuts away the sham and deceit we all build around our lives, and leaves a healthier soul within. It hurts to go to the dentist if you have a bad tooth - but it's better than leaving it.

Your "constant struggle is to try to see myself through my own eyes". Yes, but it is easier to see oneself through one's own eyes by looking at the reflection in someone else's. We all wear masks, masks to conceal our fragile selves, masks to stop people discovering our weaknesses and thus gaining control over us by using them (like the primitive fear of an enemy finding out one's true name). Yet, if we can get there first, and discover and come to terms with our weaknesses, then our enemies have so much less power.

That is what living with someone can ultimately do. Strip down the barriers that we try to hold up to the world and enable us to face things with less sham, pretence, or deceit. It might be difficult to allow someone to see the darker recesses of one's soul, but it's a healthy exorcism.

But even in fandom we fall victim to the macho worries. "I've never been propositioned by anyone", you say, Bruce, with a wistful tone in your voice. So what! Nor have a vast amount of other people in the world. It diminishes you none - it's not a stigma to bear through your life. In a recent debate on sex in a British personalzine, the editor said sorrowfully that "her heterosexual affairs could be counted on the fingers of one hand", as though she had been missing out on life. My heterosexual affairs could be counted on the fingers of one finger! And I, even despite my preaching above, feel at times this is a reflection on myself. When are we going to get sex out of the be-all and end-all of life, and put it back as a fun pastime where it belongs?

brg Well, despite what it does or does not say about me - I do find it a humiliation that at the age of thirty [illegible] I have nobody who wants to share a bed with me and to form a couple with me. But, more to the point, I feel a great lack of living in my life. Most of the greatest moments in my life are associated with those sexual experiences that I have had. The other great experiences? Well, there are some. There just isn't much happening this year (or last year). *

Eric Lindsay injects a little sanity by saying, "I have never approached a girl with specifically sexual purposes in mind since" (I wish I could say the same), but then almost ruins it by going on to say, "That is what I mean when I say I don't need anyone." No one needs anyone for specifically sexual purposes. The Five-Fingered Widow will always do to release tension. But there are so many other reasons for needing someone - if only someone to hold your hand through the dark passages of this world. ((*brg* I agree. That's what I really want.*))

Eric would "rather be me than make the compromise necessary to have a deep relationship with another person". A very common fear. I used to have a morbid fear of losing my identity - I was terrified of changing in any way. Once I kept a diary of a period that was particularly dear to me, and I included a letter in the front to my future self asking "him" to respect my feelings and never destroy that diary because "however silly the events seem to you, they are my whole life, and without me you would not exist." I did change, but I still respect my wishes.

Micheline gives a key. "After the age of seventeen or so, one can create one's own environment and basically [illegible] oneself too, more to one's own liking." For me, it was when I was fifteen and had just reached puberty. The following term at school was the first I was in a study, and had some privacy, and there, for a term and a half, I shut myself away, crawled inside myself and rewrote what I found. I still don't really know what I did, or how I did it, but I came out of it a far healthier and more balanced person, and very different to the one I was before. Obviously, I was reacting to the environment I was in, so my characteristics were tailored to survival therein. I knew what a figure of fun someone who lost his temper could become, so I made sure I didn't lose my temper (or, at least, if I did, it would last for minutes at most). No one else would bolster my ego, so I built a cast-iron one that inherently believed in its own infallibility. All of which helped me to survive the next two years far better.

The second, and last, time I rewrote myself was in 1972 (when I was twenty) when a college friend and I spent the Summer Vac in the US. My two previous years at University had been somewhat of an emotional mess. I was still effectively, but inactively, homosexual, and I had no idea where I was going in life or what I would do. So I decided to start again from scratch, and wiped out from consideration all that had gone before, and started my life anew. And that changed me even more drastically (and I met my first girlfriend). The next term I met Philippa, and my new life started in earnest.

brg Someday I must attempt one of my excursions into fantasy and work out what it would be like for me to start all over again. The element in my life which most ties me to the past is, of course, the commitment to publish SFC itself. It's a bit like a drug. I've never quite worked up the courage to do all the paperwork involved in closing down SFC, but at the same time it continues to make ferocious demands on my life. Still, it's the only worthwhile thing I do, except for a few pieces of writing I like, so I should think SFC is the element in my life which will remain most resistent to change. *

As you say, though, Bruce, "The trick is to escape the limitations of the personality you want to be", and it's not a trick I ever learnt. All those sterling qualities I bred into myself, at one time or the other, have helped me "Get Ahead in Life", but they can make me bloody difficult to live with.

Well, you wanted to know what made your readers tick, and I guess you've got a more complete spec for me in the preceding than anyone else has ever had from me. ((*brg* Thank you.*)) I'm still crazy after all these years, but to some degree I can come to terms with my insanity. None of which, though, I guess, helps you much with your problems. How do you get a girlfriend? I don't know - it's not a field I have much experience in. How do you live with someone without having to sacrifice some of the things you love? - I don't think you can. I got so low that anything was better than where I was. Until you're that desperate, you might never take the plunge.

...Reviews: The Barry Gillam review of Laumer really went on rather too long. In-depth reviews are fine for books that warrant them, but not for something that is only "par for the course". Van Ikin's Clarke review suffers

more from being out of its depth. We are told that six stories are "short, frivolous pieces in a throwaway vein", another six are of a "flat, plodding, unpoetic, un-Clarkeish nature", another "marred by Clarke's inability to get much beneath the subsoil of human psychology", another with the "writing often below par", and three others. Yet we are told that, by one standard, the book is "near-spotless", and generally that "it is a significant and worthwhile contribution to the genre". I must say I find the arguments he uses to reach these conclusions (though I agree with them) hardly convincing.

I think Ikin and Turner are a trifle unkind to Campbell in saying that he was not "of any importance - as a writer". I'm not too fond of Campbell, but feel that his "Night" and "Twilight" are outstanding stories. Apart from that, the review was very good.

Neville Angove's review was also quite good. I couldn't see his basis for saying, "Like Brunner, Farmer condemns all modern society has to offer". Like Brunner where? Also, I think ERB would have been laughing up his loincloth to hear that "The Tarzan series was the vehicle which Burroughs used to lambast society in the best Swiftian fashion." He wrote to make money - as he said more than once. I found Angove's review of The Probability Man somewhat confusing - it certainly gave me no clear picture of the quality/content of the book. The one of Age of Miracles was far better, as was the one of A Choice of Gods.

I cannot say I was convinced by Terence Green's piece (you cannot call it a review) on The Man in the High Castle. It seemed to say a lot of nothing. But then, I'm no expert on Zen Buddhism. I would dispute his allegation that the book was virtually unobtainable after winning the Hugo in 1962. The first Penguin edition was published in 1965 and was available for many years thereafter.

Don Ashby's review suffered from the common fault of collection reviews - a long section of overbrief story mentions which tell us nothing of value. As earlier with the review of The Wind From the Sun, we end up with a conclusion that the book is very good, etc, etc, which is not backed up with sufficient evidence in the text of the review.

Glad to see you agree with me on The Many Worlds of Poul Anderson. I'm not much of an Anderson fan at best, but I thought the stories in that volume incredibly poor.

And so to the biggie with the incredible cover, SFC 48/49/50. At this rate, my loc will end up at 23 pages! ((*brg* And that's how long it turned out to be.*))

I enjoyed reading your review of Martian Time-Slip, a book I haven't read - especially as a review copy of the paperback dropped through the letterbox yesterday. The extract you quote as the "culmination of the vision" reminds me very forcibly of some of Margritte's paintings - especially the men falling out of the sky. Bring the Jubilee is one of my favourite "parallel worlds" books, and I thought you did a very good summary of its complexities.

It shouldn't really matter, surely, if books you are reviewing are by your friends. In some cases, it will be even easier as you might know what they were trying to do and so be able to judge how well they succeed. I recall the longest piece of criticism that Philippa and I ever did (40 pages) was on the first third of a novel that a friend (Chris Morgan) was writing. Sadly he never, yet, went on to do the rest of the novel. The reviews on the whole are enjoyable, though none inspired me to go out and buy the books.

The one thing that George Turner is missing, above all else, in his comments on how he would have reacted, as publisher's reader, to Dhalgren, is that it was written by Sam Delany, which guarantees it a pretty big sale anyway. Anyway, it was long. At the moment, people go for big books. Personally, I enjoyed the book immensely, though I agree that it could have been improved with a little more rewriting, and would probably have recommended it anyway. After all, Pynchon's inchoate Gravity's Rainbow sold pretty well when it came out.

Of course critics can get more out of a work than the author was aware of having put in. As much as anything, that is because a very large amount of what we write is dictated by our subconscious rather than our conscious mind. If you read a book (or story), then quite often the ending feels "right" or "wrong", and so it does to the writer. But he might well write his ending with just that "feeling" as a guide, rather than analysing why he has such a feeling. Often it can be motivated by such simple concepts as

"Good will triumph in the end" (vide Steven Spielberg's films), or that "There is nothing one man can do to change the world" (Shaw's Ground Zero Man, for instance). Because of that, the critic can often discover the reason behind the feeling, while the author was merely content to act on the feeling.

I thought Patrick McGuire made some very intelligent remarks on the Strugatskis. By the brief amount of their and other Russian s f I have read, I would unhesitatingly vote them the best Russian s f writers around at the time (I believe that currently they are proscribed writers in the USSR?). I'm not sure I would say that Far Rainbow (my favourite Strugatsky) implied a belief in an objective right and wrong. Towards the end, Robert Sklyarov says:

> "I'm a coward and a criminal. I'm worse than that probably, because I think I did right."

Gorbovsky's reply is:

> "There are no cowards and criminals. I'd as soon believe in a man rising from the dead as in one who could commit a crime."

The book is far more a study of humanity, and what it is. The incredible character of Camille, who "died and was resurrected three times", and whose reply to the question, "Are you human?" goes in part:

> "Logical methods demand absolute criticism. To do anything in science, day and night you have to think about one thing... And where can you go from your psychic prism? Away from the inborn capacity to love... You've got to love, read about love, you've got to have green hills, music, pictures, dissatisfaction, fear, envy... You try to limit yourself - and you lose an enormous part of your happiness... Then loneliness lies in wait for you."

It is a shame that the book did not have a wider distribution in English.

Nice to see Chris Priest replying to the reviewers. It always adds another dimension to a review to get feedback from the author on your criticisms. Assuming the feedback is intelligent, of course - as Chris' was this time. Rob Jackson published a review in Maya recently, explaining why Imperial Earth was not very good. It was a good review, written by Rob himself, an ardent Clarke fan, and, I must admit, I reckon it was justified. However, egoClarke (as he was known in his fannish days) replied, "The reviews are coming in and are already separating the men from the boys. Many reviewers have already realised that it's my best book, and have said so - others don't seem even to have read it." So for Clarke there are only two kinds of critics - those who agree with and praise him (the men) and those who haven't read the book (the boys). It doesn't seem to enter his tiny mind that intelligent critics might read the book and disagree with him. If we then apply George Turner's dictum, "No writer worth his salt wants you to be kind; he wants to know the truth", it doesn't say much for Clarke. I, too, used to be a Clarke fan, but now, while I still enjoy and praise much of his writing (his personality cannot affect that), I have certainly lost my respect for the man himself.

I couldn't agree more with your comments on reviewing, a la review of Fugue. The Verne review took me more like a month, as I read and reread all the other biographies and a couple of Verne novels to stabilise the picture. The Alan Garner also took a long time. The Space Machine review took about a week only, but that was because I was familiar with both Priest's writing and with The War of the Worlds.

I like Paul Walker's idea of reviewing individual short stories - I shall have to try it sometime. Certainly, anthologies and collections are the most difficult things to review. I tend to pick on 3-4 stories in detail and, where relevant, list the others, together with a set of comments explaining/summing up the tone of the whole collection. Also I, like you, agree wholeheartedly with Neville's summation of a reviewer's purpose. Sadly, too many reviewers seem not to.

Superb article by Sneja Gunew on the Le Guin books. Now that is what a good critical article should be like. Many congratulations, Sneja. Le Guin has made another "first" here by having a regular spot on Weekend (the Saturday version of Women's Hour on radio) where one of her short stories is read out. Yesterday (it's now Sunday March 13), it was "The Word of Unbinding", and was very well read.

I enjoyed the Nicholls/Turner discussion immensely. George Turner on usual good form,

and Peter Nicholls on far better form than in his Heinlein review.

"Pick the critic (reviewer) who...seems to go along with your ideas" - sound advice. As Neville said earlier, any review should enable the reader to form an opinion of a book, no matter how disparate his and the reviewer's views are, but finding someone who basically agrees with one is a quick way to find books one would enjoy. Any chance of reprinting George Turner's "On Writing About Science Fiction"? (Or of just getting me a copy?)

brg George won't let me reprint the original article, which appeared in Australian Science Fiction Review 18. He has always insisted that it needed a lot of improvements. A preliminary version of the updated article has been appearing in Yggdrasil, the magazine of the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association. The first bit of that is scheduled to appear in SFC 53, but the present space constrictions in SFC mean that it will run as a fairly long serial. A completely revised version of the new version could well be published by Norstrilia Press, if some bigger outfit does not have the sense to give George a contract before we do. I still think that the 1968 was the most concise statement, and perhaps the best, and should be reprinted in its own right. *

Certainly, a crucial point that George makes is that it is essential to determine what a particular book is trying to do and then evaluate it in terms of those aims, as well as stating them so that the reader can decide for himself if he is interested in the aims. I don't think it is a meaningful question to ask if The Skylark of Space is better than A Case of Conscience. Skylark is better space opera and Case is better sociology (no one, I think, would dispute those comments), but the relative merits of space opera and sociology are purely personal value judgments for which there can be no independent Right or Wrong. ((*brg* To that sentence, I give my Most Questionable Statement of the Magazine award.*))

It is also vital, as George says, to place a book in period and context. A reviewer should always be aware of a book's history, what else an author has written, and what else has been written on the subject then or since. For instance, I would not feel confident to do a full-length review of Ice and Iron until I had read rather more Tucker. On another tack, when reviewing the "Family d'Alembert" series by Stephen Goldin, it is of secondary importance how good/bad I think the style. Of primary importance is how it compares with Smith's own writing (very poorly).

Asimov once butted into a conversation about one of his books with his definitive opinion of what it was about. "What makes you so certain?" said one of the conversationalists. "Because I'm the author," said Asimov. "So what?" said the other. Asimov had to admit that the other was right.

I think George's distinction between critic and reviewer is very valid. (My favourite rule-of-thumb definition is that a reviewer is writing for an audience that has not read the book, whereas a critic writes for an audience that has.) It is a shame that Peter starts off talking of himself as a critic (obviously a word with more kudos) when, by the definitions just sketched, he is really a reviewer. (Thus forcing George to say later, "We'll use the word interchangeably for the time being.")

The BBC is good at producing inane s f critics. Their current favourite is Christopher Evans (whose qualifications are hardly impressive) who loves such comments as "Like most of Ballard's writing, most of the stories in this collection (Low-Flying Aircraft) are set in traditional s f settings." Recently I heard him chatting to Peter Nicholls about his recent Gollancz book, and, sadly, Peter kept to himself any feelings he might have had then about the "obviously bad sorts of critic".

John Clute is probably my favourite critic at the moment. He may not have as valuable things to say as some people, but he has a superb way of saying them. Peter's point about The Atrocity Exhibition is another valid one. I think all reviewers, those worth their salt, anyway, come across a book now and again that they honestly feel they cannot really review because they are not sufficiently sure of what the author is after.

I quite agree that there's no point in reviewing the rubbish. Some people reckon that bad books should be torn to shreds as "an example to others", but that is often sour grapes at someone who seems an inferior

writer getting published with greater ease. Certainly it is a waste of effort and time. As the publishers say, "No publicity is bad publicity."

Coney: Another very disappointing piece by Derrick Ashby. I found that the Coney article really didn't say anything at all (except about Winter's Children), but rather dahsed through the books at breakneck speed. In particular, I felt his piece on Friends Come In Boxes (my favourite Coney book) spent far too long discussing the brief Introduction and virtually no time at all explaining why he thinks it is Coney's most successful book.

On the other hand, Stephen Hitchings' piece on Mirror Image was very good indeed, with the single exception that you point out, ie, that a reviewer should be aware of what else a writer has written before making comments like, "(he) should be successful in greater things".

Neville Angove's piece on Hello Summer, Goodbye was also very good. He is definitely one of your best regular contributors. Even Van Ikin's piece was better than his usual.

George Turner made a lot of good points in his review of Nebula Award Stories 10. Certainly the non-fiction pieces in the Nebula collections (11 had as bad) are some of the worst around. He was a little overcritical here and there, however. He objects to Gunn's assertion that the genre of s f started with Gernsback, but I think this depends more on your definition of genre than on any historical evidence. There was a lot of the Jules Verne form of fiction around at his time, but that does mean there was necessarily a genre of s f then. George can disagree with Gunn, but he has no right to ridicule the man on this point. Similarly, he objects to Gunn's comment that "science fiction books were being noticed outside the ghetto" by commenting that, "S f with any literary value...has always been noticed", which is hardly the point. At the time Gunn was talking about, s f was beginning to be noticed as a genre, and books with no literary merit, but with s f merit, were being noticed.

I could not agree more, though, with his objection to Dickson's comments about "three-dimensional works of literate art". That is certainly not the standard by which Nebulas are awarded, as can readily be told by reading many of the winners. I think George overreacts rather in saying that this is all just a small example of the "smug propaganda that s f puts out about itself".

It's nice to see more discussion on Dhalgren and Triton. Why? Because now I have read them both, whereas at the time of the initial furore I hadn't.

Camilla Decarnin gets off to a bad start. "I feel that good books should be commented on by people who like them." If you think it's a good book, then - usually - you like it. The critics who pan the book are those who don't think it a good one. I couldn't follow her supposed argument on "art and sex". In particular, I disagree that Kid's notebook puts us inside the art of creation. Rather, I feel that Delany is playing, Dick-like, with reality as Kid is/becomes the creator, possessor, actor, and destroyer of the notebook. I can't say I notice my friends who are women enjoying Dhalgren in particular. Philippa has yet to read it, and all the other Delany fans I know are male.

And then Van Ikin on usual mixed quality. No matter how many people say it, I cannot see how Dhalgren is important, and certainly his brief explanation doesn't convince me. Books like Mein Kampf, the Bible, etc, can be called important, but not something like Dhalgren. To make matters worse, he resurrects the label New Wave and fits in inappropriately to the book. Books like The Atrocity Exhibition or A Cure For Cancer were "New Wave", and Dhalgren doesn't fit with them.

I think he misses the point on the "reality" within Bellona. The age difference is a demonstration of this, as is the second moon. Things in Bellona are not as they seem. The river recedes during the course of the book; the Kid crosses the street underground, and then, exactly retracing his steps, returns to a different spot. Van says that, "Society has perished, the cities are in decay", but there is no real evidence in the book that these disruptions are global. They are implied to be local to Bellona.

"There is no real 'plot' to Dhalgren." Well, yes and no. It is a quest. The Kid is searching at one level for his name and, at another, for his identity. That this occurs in a city where nothing is immutable only emphasises the loss in his soul as his quest leads nowhere.

"It is clear that the word 'to' is the same word in both places." Why? It is certainly possible that it is the same word, but there is no real reason why it should be. More telling is the episode as the Kid leaves Bellona, where his conversation with those entering mirrors exactly the one he had with people leaving when he entered. Here, possibly, is the circularity expressed. Not a lack of progression, but rather an eternal cycle of progression. Only the names are changed.

Then, amazingly, he calls Dhalgren a "genuinely realistic novel" (and later complains of boredom because of the realism). You could not get much further from reality than in Dhalgren. Nothing is what it seems - the Scorpions, the Moon, the Kid.

And so he ends up with recommending that the reader only try "150-200 pages" of the book, demonstrating better than all the rest put together how little he has understood the book. For all its length and ramble, the book is a unit. You can dip into it to see the texture (as you can dip into Ulysses), but you cannot "read" Dhalgren by omitting any of it. That is ridiculous.

Camilla's piece on Triton is better than her piece on Dhalgren, though I felt she skimped terribly the discussion of what the book was "about". The best line in the whole piece is "Triton is what your mother never told you about Dhalgren" which, at one level, is a perfect encapsulation of the truth. Certainly one should reread most of Delany before these two books, and especially the long piece, "Shadows", mentioned at the end of Triton (still only available in an issue of Foundation). In all, a good review - though it could have been much better.

David Grigg's review of Best SF 4 was quite good, though I felt he grossly underrated "Born with the Dead", which I think is the only good thing Silverberg has written in the last few years. Terry Green's of Best SF 5 was also enjoyable, especially his eminently sensible comment, "The ones I might not have included are not necessarily the ones that should not have been included." A comment more sensible than usually found in such reviews.

Van Ikin was again erratic in his Russ review. A number of valid and interesting points interspersed with rubbish. His blanket [illegible] acceptance of the "stifling trivia of womanhood" must say something about his own treatment of women. Many, if not most, have no worse a day of trivia than the men. The only real difference is that the men get paid for it, which often seems to be taken to imply that it is easier for them. I'm not sure his plaint about the whooping crane analogy is fair. It is a valid analogy (especially if one reads Wyman Guin) even if he doesn't immediately understand it. I think he sums up the book superbly in his last sentence, a grammatical translation of which could be, "This book is a polemic" - which perhaps better conveys its difficulties.

Terry Green begins badly on The Forever War. The chatty second paragraph is irrelevant to the review, and his comparing the book to The Mote in God's Eye is downright ridiculous (the latter is certainly not about "the basic space-opera concept", but merely includes that as a sub-theme).

Van Ikin again mediocre on the "Best Of.." collections. He wonders at the inclusion of two early stories in the Simak collection, seemingly without noticing that only one of the stories ("The Sitters") had appeared in any previous Simak collection at all, and hence that it is a Mark II "Best Of...", ie "Uncollected Stories By..." Both the reviews tail off badly with abominable last paragraphs. This does seem to be Van's besetting sin, an inability to write a good final paragraph.

Neville Angove's "Best Of..." review was well below his best. But then, so was the book, which doesn't help.

In his review of the Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF Stories, Van Ikin makes more idiotic comments than usual. "They suggest that the competition would have been well-published, fairly lucrative". Why? The fact that the Sunday Times was involved meant that there was no publicity in the other papers at all. The fact that Gollancz was the publisher means it was not very lucrative. (Gollancz is not doing badly these days.) From what I recall hearing at the time, the response was fairly poor. "They suggest that the judge's attitudes would have covered a reasonable spectrum of literary values." Aldiss, Bush, and Amis? Come off it. Brian's attitudes cover a fairly good range, but the others add nothing outside that range. You really need a panel of widely diverse people like, say,

Aldiss/Delany/Lem (three authors, three countries, and three types of opinions). "Garry Kilworth's 'Let's Go to Golgotha'... is thematically brilliant." It is also as old as the hills. Ideas don't come much staler. "That one detail...speaks volumes for the author's research and forethought" - yeah, he didn't need much of either. To make matters worse, he even missed the point of the story he was lauding. The time travellers weren't shouting for crucifixion as well as the Jews (thus "establishing that all mankind...crucified Christ"). They were the only ones shouting, as the Jews were home praying, thus making the story another old "man goes back in time to see history and ends up causing it" story.

Randal Flynn's Catchworld review was far too long for something that is "not a good book". He could have said just as much in half the length. On the other hand, his review of Shipwreck, which he thought a much better book, was far more competent.

Nice to see a review of Grendel - quite a good one, too,. This is a book which has tended to be ignored. I liked your review of The Wanderer immensely (repeatedly your reviews are turning out to be the best, Bruce; you really should write more), ((*brg* when?*)) although I disagree with your complaints about Tigereshka, I thought she was one of the best characters in the book. Nevertheless it has enough strengths without her, and you pointed them out adroitly. It is certainly my favourite Leiber (followed by Gather, Darkness), and I was very glad to see it back in print over her.

To partly negate my comments of five seconds ago: Bruce, we come to your piece on "The Original Fiction Anthologies 1973-1975", which I felt we would have been better without. The reader has just ploughed through 60 pages of reviews (a hell of a lot, even for SFC) and is not much in the mood for another 30 pages. ((*brg* Surely few readers have the patience to read an entire triple issue in sequence? Surely people pick and choose items?*)) After a while, the continual onslaught of mini-reviews of unexceptional anthologies gets very tedious. I think you should have split the section into two parts. One part would list all the curricula vitae of the books, together with best stories, and so on, for useful reference. The other section would be a batch of short story reviews (as Paul Walker suggested) of the best stories. Length would then have been less crucial, as there would have been more variety.

Still, despite that, I did read it all through, and a few comments were sparked. Your "rediscovery" of Pangborn, for instance. A long time ago, I read A Mirror For Observers and was most impressed, and picked up a couple of other Pangborns but didn't read them. In 1975, I read the stories in the Continuum anthologies and the Good Neighbours.. collection, and was not too impressed. In the past twelve months, however, I've read Davy, The Judgement of Eve, and The Company of Glory which, especially the first two, was a real re-discovery of Pangborn for me. At times, he is truly a superb writer. Did you know that an American fan, Steve Beatty, is putting together a fanzine on Pangborn? If you'd be prepared to write something on him (say, on his uncollected short fiction), I'm sure he would be glad to hear from you, or any other Pangborn admirer. His address is Box 1040, ISU Station, Ames, IA 50010, USA.

A shame you didn't like Nova 3. Although I haven't yet read Nova 4, the series has been my favourite one of original anthologies (except, possibly, for Andromeda, which has reached only one volume so far). The pieces I thought outstanding in Nova 3 were the Aldiss (best of all), Sheckley, and Spinrad.

Another author I have "discovered" is Thomas N Scortia. I thought "The Armageddon Tapes" in the Continuum anthologies abysmal, so I was prepared to ignore him. Then I had to review his collection, Caution! Inflammable, and I was really startled. It is one of the best single-author collections I have seen for a very long while. As well as "The Weariest River", it has such outstanding stories as "The Bomb in the Bathtub", "When You Hear the Tone", and "The Worm in the Rose".

I suspect that where Harry Harrison's taste and mine overlap is precisely where yours and mine don't, Bruce. I also enjoyed The John W Campbell Memorial Anthology. As you say, the De Camp is superb. So, to my mind, /// were Dickson's "Brothers" and Bester's "Something Up There Likes Me".

Another set of original anthologies I disagree with you on is the New Worlds series. I find some of the stories good (the Moorcock ones, "Thy Blood Like Milk", and a few others), generally enjoy the non-fiction,

especially John Clute's pieces (of which the Disch is the best) and the recent "interviews" with J G Allbard, author Rash, but the remainder (60-75 per cent of the book) incredibly tedious.

Yet another author I have recently discovered is James Tiptree Jr. Before this year, I had read only a couple of his stories, and, unlike you, enjoyed only "Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death". Then a review copy of Ten Thousand Light Years From Home, and I was exceptionally impressed with it, especially "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side" and "The Man Doors Said Hello To". I'm told his second collection is even better.

Le Guin is definitely becoming one of the best short story writers in s f, and I'm awaiting eagerly Orsinian Tales, having enjoyed immensely The Wind's Twelve Quarters. However, it sounds like there's already a need for another reprint collection of Le Guin fiction. "Schrodinger's Cat" sounds superb, and I loved "The Author of the Acacia Seeds..." when I read it.

Possibly my other contender for "favourite original anthology series" is Judy-Lynn Del Rey's Stellar series, especially after the second one. From the first volume, I enjoyed the stories you mentioned (though I felt you could have taken the time to refresh your memory and write a bit on the Niven and Rothman titles) as well as the Simak. The second volume, of course, had what were probably the best stories ever of Asimov and White.

I must join the ranks of those who disliked The Eighty-Minute Hour. I did start it when it first came out, but gave up after a while, and it is the only Aldiss s f novel I haven't read through. (Under non-s f I also haven't read The Male Response and The Brightfount Diaries). My own vote for his best novel would probably go to his latest, The Malacia Tapestry, a superbly constructed book. Other Aldiss favourites are Hothouse and Report on Probability A, as well, of course, as Billion Year Spree and The Shape of Further Things.

And so to your lists for 76. Again, I had not read most of the novels. Two I had - Dr Mirabilis, which appeared here in paperback last year, and which is probably Blish's best novel, and Bring the Jubilee, which I mentioned n pages ago. In a rash moment, I bought a paperback copy of Powys' Glastonbury Romance (it's longer than Dhalgren), but haven't yet read it. Of the "Also Enjoyed", I read and enjoyed the Asimovs years ago and enjoyed them then, but I'm not sure if I would be so impressed now. Howard's End was a book I had to study at school, which is enough to dissuade anyone from liking it, though I did end up with a sneaking admiration of it. Charisma I expect to enjoy when I read it.

Films were even worse off. I had seen only one on your list (Family Plot) and thought it incredibly poor. I did want to see The Man Who Would Be King, as Caine and Connery are each actors that I admire immensely, but I just didn't have the time when it was here. No doubt it will return.

Which is about the end of SFC, although I realise that, with all the page-skipping, I missed Leigh Edmonds' bit about your 1976, which I enjoyed immensely, especially the surrealistic image of cancelling months in the year to come. Another point, which I don't think I mentioned, was my enjoyment of your titles and subheadings.

One thing I have never started is a list of books and films seen. Instead, I make long lists of books and films that I want to read/see, and haven't, and cross them off when I do.

Hence, coupled with my very poor memory for such things, I have no real idea of what I read/saw in 1976. I'm sure I've missed out some... I haven't put them in any order, as my memory is not that good.

Best Films 1976:

The Killing of Sister George
Nada (Chabrol)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Forman)
Duel (Spielberg)
The Rocky Horror Picture Show
Picnic at Hanging Rock (Weir)
The Conversation (Coppola)
Barry Lyndon (Kubrick)
Bugsy Malone (Parker)
Gone With the Wind
War and Peace (Bondartchuk)
Serpico (Lumet)
Persona (Bergman)

Best Books 1976:

The Malacia Tapestry (Aldiss)
Davy (Pangborn)
The Malayan Trilogy (Burgess)
Titus Groan (Peake)
Dr Mirabilis (Blish)
The Squares of the City (Brunner)
Star Maker (Stapledon)
The Three Musketeers (Dumas)
Shardik (Adams)
Who? (Budrys)
The Well of Loneliness (Hall)
Friends Come in Boxes (Coney)
Triton (Delany)
Inferno (Niven and Pournelle)
The Children of Dune (Herbert)

So this loc did run on for 23 pages after all (nearly double my previous record of 13).

(12 March 1977)

brg I just hope it didn't take you as long to write in the first place as it took me to type it onto stencil. Thanks very much for the letter. *

WARREN NICHOLLS

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I didn't really like Van Ikin's review of Hell's Cartographers. He seems to be talking in circles most of the time. He has a tendency to classify the contributors into "art" (typified by Patrick White) and "craft", which applies to most of the writers concerned in the book. In my opinion, this is totally illusory. It does not seem to have occurred to him that most writers remain at the hack level simply because they are not good writers, eg, Heinlein. He will never win a Nobel Prize, but his work is always entertaining to read... What is wrong with letting time tell? He seems to forget that attitudes change over time, leading to a swing from approval and disapproval and back again, or vice versa; for an example, look at the history of the criticism of the works of Kipling. What the hell has leaving a decision on the worth or otherwise of a book to future critics and readers to do with its reception on the market?

(14 March 1977)

SYD BOUNDS

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With a vast sigh of relief, I reached page 146 of S F Commentary 48/49/50. Meanwhile, a week had passed. Not to mention the fortnight I had it on the shelf and told myself: should get around to reading SFC. You really shouldn't do these three-deckers, Bruce, they're demoralising.

Your marathon on the original fiction anthologies: Possibly you are the only person ever to read them all and deserve some sort of achievement award. ((*brg* I think that Richard Delap still reads them all; at least, he was still doing so in 1973, when I met him.*)) Not only was the article interesting in itself; it was also useful. Not only had I not seen a great many of these books, I had not even heard of them. On your recommendation, I have read George Hay's Stopwatch, and agree that this is a good one.

I agree with you on "The Asian Shore". Not s f (in my opinion) but a very fine story. :: Like Moorcock's "End of Time" stories, and think it's the best thing he's done. It will be very interesting to see where he goes next. He's one writer who does do different things. :: The Gollancz Award puzzled me. Shipwreck is so superior I don't see how they justify a joint award.

Thanks for the kindly mention of "Monitor" and "Talent Spotter".

(26 March 1977)

PETRINA SMITH

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The 1975 Australian Writers' Workshop had a good effect on me, in that I was flooded with ideas for stories/out, without the impetus of other people writing around me, I reverted to my usual lack of self-discipline and the ideas are going stale. But I'll reform - honest, honest!

You wanted to hear about the 1977 Workshop. Comparisons are inevitable. The first Workshop was more intense in every way. The isolation, the pace, the short time, all contributed to this. By comparison, the '77 Workshop was laid back. It didn't have such an immediate impact on me, nor on my writing -

in fact, what I wrote there would have been better left unwritten - but I think its long-term effects will be more substantial. After the first workshop, I practically stopped writing, as I was so cowed by the infinity of convolutions of this thing I had taken on so blithely - writing. This time, I think I worked out a more realistic approach to my writing, not expecting myself to do wonders first time off, and not despairing and giving up when I don't.

It also left me with some ideas about how a workshop should be conducted. Between you and Kitty, I've seen some great examples of it. I mentioned my interest to the president of SUSFA (Syndey Uni SF Association) and he jumped on it as a project for SUSFA. I believe you met Tony at Un con II, but I don't know if you could have comprehended the full glory of his powers. Tony is an Organiser. He Organises with a quiet ferocity that is terrifying to behold. He has decided that SUSFA should have the next Workshop. I've tried to be tactful and say, wait for the go-ahead from the people in Melbourne.

(31 March 1977)

brg Holding a workshop is hardly the prerogative of Melbourne, or anywhere else. If these plans are still in the air (and nobody here has heard anything more since March), I would suggest that the real entanglements of organisation are those involved in presenting a case to the Australia Council for help in funding. Any more news from SUSFA? *

ANDREW WEINER

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Turner's piece on the new Watson, in a previous SFC, impressed me sufficiently to make me go out and buy the previous one, The Embedding. I am much impressed with it, without necessarily liking it very much. I read so little new s f these days that Turner could take that as a compliment.

Some music you might like: Graham Parker and the Rumor, Heat Treatment and Howling Wind, second-generation Van Morrison/Springsteen/Otis Redding and very English.

I would like to say, belatedly, that I would have to agree with Lem, eg, most s f is trash. Also, his class division of the market makes sense, except that it ignores the current sterility of the "upper" realm. Also, that I prefer trash.

(5 April 1977)

PATRICK McGUIRE

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My tastes seem pretty consistently to differ from those of the SFC crowd (save on a few "transcendent" works, such as The Dispossessed), and I was not in any hurry to read Peace on the basis of your review; but Buck Coulson's promise of a roman a clef, ignoble motivation though that be, will cause me to see if I can find the thing. Some years ago, I myself ran across a novel with a character with a curious resemblance to Sandra Miesel - Weeping Cross by Henry Longan Stuart. It's an historical novel set in about 1630, written by an Irish immigrant to the US in about 1906. The novel itself has a curious history: when first published, it failed utterly of acclaim (it's a seriously psychological and religious work), but was reprinted in the 1930s with an intro hoping that at last its time had come. It got some favourable critical attention, including an essay by Sigurd Undset (which was what got me to read the thing), but again was a commercial failure. Then it was reprinted a third time in the early 1950s, with another hopeful intro, but I presume it fell flat again since I'd never heard of it until I ran across Undset's essay. I don't know whether you can find the thing in Australia, but between one or another of its printings it has gotten into quite a few American libraries, and I recommend it to anyone who can find it. The psychological portrayal is more adept than the plot, which gets a bit clumsy in the second half, but it's fascinating, even so.

My next mark comes against George Turner's statement on "the necessity of judging science fiction by its own set of values. To hell with that! If science fiction needs a special set of values then it isn't literature; it's something else." (page 44) Now, in a general sense, this is doubtless true. It is frequently asserted that the way you evaluate a work of literature is to find out what the author was trying to do, decide how well he did it, and then decide whether it was worth

doing at all. I would suggest that what s f authors are trying to do frequently differs from what non-s f authors are trying to do (and that if the critic can't figure this out he's in trouble on step 2, or even step 1), and that there may be real differences, perhaps unresolvable ones, on step 3. For instance, Ringworld is not without all sorts of flaws, including some clumsy characterisations and the great gaping hole in credibility presented by the Luck of Teela Brown but, by Ghod, the thing has Sense of Wonder. I've recently re-read it for the fourth time or so. For me, and for most s f readers, the Sense of Wonder covereth a multitude of sins. Unlike Brian Aldiss, I would unquestionably vote it a Hugo over The Year of the Quiet Sun. ((*brg* That's ridiculous! Gasp! Shudder!*))

Now, SoW is not something you find only in s f - it's quite important in medieval romances, for instance, or in epics or in certain other works, such as Gulliver's Travels. I can't think of a good example offhand, but I see no reason why SoW couldn't be important in a novel of everyday life. It would depend on the viewpoint of the protagonist. (I think Chesterton tried to bring this off, but I have only a limited sympathy - in the sense of "ability to co-feel" - with Chesterton.) But it comes up only infrequently in modern non-s f, non-fantasy fiction, and hence I think there is a tendency to underrate it in deciding whether, on balance, a work was worth writing. (I think SoW appears outside of s f/fantasy most frequently in non-fiction, in, for example, popular science books about astronomy or paleontology, or in pseudoscience like Velikovsky or quack treatments of ESP, etc). Perhaps most people would agree on the worth of a balanced work, such as The Left Hand of Darkness or The Dispossessed. Le Guin is a good stylist, her characterisation is here adequate, she introduces fascinating new ideas which she has been at some pains to research and to rationalise, etc. It's where someone is markedly deficient in certain aspects, and the argument is over how important those aspects are to the evaluation of the whole work, that one can get into real disagreement. I think "mainstream" critics, and some "inside" critics, such as Aldiss and you, Bruce, tend to put excessive emphasis on style and characterisation. These critics, in turn, think that people like me are overly concerned about non-obscurity, rationality, both in the sense of internal consistency and in some sort of connection with the Real World, etc. I don't know that we'll ever agree on how important these various factors are. (I think that in my last letter I said I agreed completely with your criticisms of "The Queen of Air and Darkness". It was just that those aspects mattered much less to me than they do to you. Similarly, it bothers you not at all that Tucker could not be bothered to fish out a map of Joliet, Illinois, and get the street names right. It does matter to me.)

brg Ringworld doesn't inspire any SoW in me, because Niven does not supply any really interesting details of his concept. Niven shows his real sense of SoW in the story "Inconstant Moon", in which the characters (and reader) are really affected by astronomical happenings. But I get my SoW from new ways of seeing old things, rather than from Big Concepts. Therefore, all my favourite non-s f books are sources of Sense of Wonder. Ditto for Quiet Sun: anything more wonderful than that detailed change of perception at the end of the book would be hard to imagine.*

George Turner again, in a new context, his discussion of various s f critics: Jules Verne did not, it would seem to me, invent a genre of s f. He invented a genre of "extraordinary journeys", which might involve marvels later classed with s f or might not. It happens that his s f works have usually survived better than his non-s f ones (except, perhaps, Around the World in Eighty Days), and so Verne's readers ultimately created a genre of s f. It can be plausibly argued that...a science fiction genre was in existence by 1880 or 1890, called "scientific romance" or whatever, so I think Turner is more right than wrong here. But let us be one hundred per cent right, comrades. And Gernsback did invent "science fiction", after the founding of (I think) Science Wonder Stories. The ghastly "scientifiction" was identified with Amazing.

I think there is something about the recent work of Delany which encourages a certain muddle-headedness. Dhalgren is "a novel of depth unprecedented in science fiction"? Leaving aside the question of its depth, in what meaningful sense can it be said to be science fiction? Similarly, with Van Ikin: "It confronts many of the buried conventions of s f, seeking to discover, expose, and

explore them... and it ends by demonstrating that s f is a genre bound down by its conventions." Now, the interpretation of The Tale of Genji which gives the novel the most unity and coherence is that Lady Murasaki is confronting the buried conventions of Heian court society, seeking to discover, expose, and explore them...and it ends by demonstrating that even a hero such as Genji, who embodies all the ideals of this society, finishes in frustration.

Now, I submit that Heian court society is a fitting subject for such an exploration. It wasn't all that big a society, but was the only society Murasaki knew, and it was generally supposed to be the best society in existence, with the conceivable exception of China. Moreover, it was a place or condition in which people lived their entire lives, and for this reason it has impact on those of us who live a thousand years later thousands of miles away from Japan. My bilingual Japanese-lit teacher assured us that the Arthur Waley translation is an excellent rendition; its only fault is that the prettified prose of English in the 1920s has crept in to some extent, while Murasaki is much "tougher" in tone in the original. So go out and read The Tale of Genji. But who the hell cares about an application of a similar process to science fiction? To the world of s f, maybe. I haven't yet read a really excellent novel about an s f writer or fan, but I see no reason why one couldn't be written. But about s f by itself? The prospect is stupifying in its triviality, or at least in its unfitness for the form of fiction. I find it remotely possible to image a non-fiction tome the size of Dhalgren discussing science fiction and coming plausibly to a similar conclusion. Now, Dhalgren is pretty stupifying, too, but I refuse to believe that even Delany expended so much wordage on so trivial an end. Oh well. Fortunately Ikin does not go on in this fashion, but Delany does seem to inspire these mental lapses in people.

I enjoyed Taylor on Hamilton. Somehow (it probably has to do with the reprint cycles of paperback houses) I missed him during my tender years. By the time I ran across some stuff, when I was in my late teens, it was already clear it was pretty bad. But then again there are those few more serious stories like "What's It Like Out There?" (though even that I haven't read in a long time). The indications are that E E Smith couldn't successfully write anything much beyond space opera. Maybe that's why his space opera is, on its own terms, so good. You can't very often "write down" successfully. If giving it your all gives you space opera, then at least it'll be good space opera. Campbell climbed up beyond his space-operatic beginnings, in the "Don Stuart" stories, and in the ideas and plots he subcontracted out (for that matter, even in some of his late space opera). Hamilton had it in him to write better stuff, as is demonstrated by a few stories and by some of the passages which Taylor quotes. The market surely didn't make it any easier for him to write well, but Campbell made it and Williamson gave it a good try. One is inclined to look for a "tragic flaw" in Hamilton. Was it just lack of perseverance, excessive adherence to writing what he knew would sell, excessive sensitivity to the rejection of pieces like "What's It Like"? Or was it that he had little control over his ability to turn out quality, and couldn't do it consistently? Ah, well. By all second-hand accounts, Hamilton was a pretty decent human being, and this is surely more important than being a decent writer.

On Joanna Russ and whooping cranes: Yes, the birds are near-extinct, but even so there are about forty of them alive, I think. (And growing.) If women were represented in proportion to the opopulation, there'd be something like 230 in the House and 52 in the Senate. I'm not sure an eight-fold disparity is enough to be striking as an image.

Last Saturday I was reading SFC after having indiscretely drunk a can of beer (weak Yankee beer, not your Aussie stuff, to be sure); and a 12-US-oz can (not one of those huge Aussie cans you can get in the US, whatever you use Down Under) on a near-empty stomach. It was beginning to go to work in a mild sort of way, and the name of one of your reviewers struck my eye - Philippa Grove-Stephenson. Wow! It sounded so English, so Aristocratic (I had, admittedly, been reading Trollope) that I started tripping on the name alone! A reasonably sensible review, once I had gotten that far, though I would assert that one can find the "solid, serious, and sociological" in Smith if that's what you're looking for. Maybe, in fact, we can put him alongside Le Guin as a "balanced" writer who is adequate (or better) in every

respect, and hence one who critics of all viewpoints admire. (At least within s f. I don't quite understand why he hasn't got more "mainstream" attention. Perhaps because he takes the s f conventions too much for granted, and a "mainstreamer" can't figure out what's going on?) Smith aside, we are still left with The Name! PHI-LIP-PA GROVE-STE-PHEN-SON. Wow! ... During that elipsis I have gone rooting through my worldly goods for back SFCs to find who the creature attached to this luminous name might be. My worldly goods are mostly stacked in some disarray in the attic, but I could find no illumination in the SFCs I did find. (Nostalgia, yes.) One hypothesis was that, by some permutation of the English hyphenated name, she is married to Philip Stephensen-Payne, who in SFC 47 mentions a wife Philippa. But in one case it's Stephensen, and in the other, Stephenson. Failing this hypothesis, the mysterious P G-S could reside with fair likelihood in any of four countries on three continents, and with less likelihood anywhere else. All very peculiar. ((*brg* And peculiar to me. The review came via Phil Stephensen-Payne, typed on his typewriter. But...?*))

Van Ikin again: The way you tell whether a story is "serious" is not by playing biographer to its author. You assume it's serious and find out whether this assumption leads you to profitable conclusions. If it does, it is, whatever the author says. If it's not, then it's either an entertainment or it's no good. The way you make this choice is by seeing whether it's entertaining (page 90).

I haven't seen Flame Tree Planet, but I would think that the difficulty in writing s f under the assumption that Christianity is true is the same as the difficulty in asking authors to write about sex. It's not that it can't be done well, but that it's unlikely to be done well to order. One certainly could, to use your analogy, put together a decent collection of science fiction about successful capitalists: "The Man Who Sold the Moon" and one of the Van Kign stories would go in for starters. Let's see: then Norman Spinrad's "A Thing of Beauty", maybe one of Asimov's stories about United States Robots, and so forth. It's just that you're not likely to get consistent quality on any assigned theme.

You could certainly assemble a series of good stories based on the assumption that Christianity is true (or, at least, including characters who believe it is true and are not contradicted): Boucher's "The Quest for Saint Aquin", Smith's "The Dead Lady of Clown Town", Anderson's "Kyrie", Bradbury's "The Fire Balloons" - if we want to give the thing yet another anthologisation -, Farmer's "Prometheus", Miller's "The Lineman" or "Dark Benediction", etc. I can even see certain advantages in criticism for studying these works separately from, say, "For I Am a Jealous People" or "Shall the Dust Praise Thee?".

I wonder, come to think of it, whether Elwood was intending to get some more mainline Protestant s f produced. All the stories I mentioned above (plus lots of others) were either written from a Catholic or an Anglican viewpoint. (Not that all the authors themselves came from such a background - Anderson is an agnostic raised as a Lutheran, and I don't know what Bradbury's or Farmer's background is.) Concordia, by contrast, is a Lutheran publishers, and John Knox Press, which brought out another Elwood collection, is (obviously) Presbyterian...

You Australian fans are an interesting lot in that regard. A very considerable proportion of US fandom seems to come from Catholic or Jewish backgrounds (though probably in a majority of cases the fans no longer practise), but, despite rather similar demographics (well, you have a lot more Anglicans than we have Episcopalians; roughly the same proportion of Catholics; and a significantly smaller percentage of Jews, so perhaps they aren't so similar demographics), you Australian fans seem to have a much stronger Evangelical-Protestant-background contingent. This all ought to Mean Something.

*brg*The demographics of USA and Australia are entirely different. Much more than half of the US population would come from non-Anglo-Saxon, but assimilated ethnic groups. Before World War II, most of the Australian population came from Britain; the leading minority group were Irish Catholics. Now there is about a third of the population who were born overseas or whose parents were born overseas. Many ethnic groups are largely unassimilated, amny not speaking English well. The small Jewish population here is still more European than Oz, compared with

American Jews, who are in many ways more Middle American than Middle America. Catholicism has tended to be a working-class phenomenon in Australia, therefore not common in science fiction circles (middle to upper-middle class in both USA and Australia). Just why four Australian fanzine editors should have had a background in one particular Protestant group, the Churches of Christ ("Disciples", in USA) has never been explained. *

Your Pangborn quote at the top of page 118 is exactly why I've never been able to get into him. That kind of mannered, polished dialogue, coming from virtually all Pangborn characters in virutally all situations, destroys the spell of verisimilitude. A lesser, but still sustantial, difficulty is that I find it difficult to accept the motivations of Pangborn characters. Too damn many of them are philosophical, independent-thinking free spirits. This mentality is not particularly common and needs more justification than Pangborn, typically, gives it.

brg I can't accept the motivations of our cats, let alone any of the people I know. And fans and cats alike are "philosophical, independent-thinking free spirits". Pangborn just knew the right people. *

I think we have to accept "The Stars Below" as fantasy-set or future-set. So far as I can recall, nobody anywhere in Europe was persecuted for being an astronomer after the invention of the telescope. For holding certain astronomical beliefs, yes, but not for doing astronomy.

I don't recall what was up the same year as "Tin Soldier", but I agree that it deserved at least a nomination. I haven't re-read it in a long time, but it's still vivid. A teeny bit contrived, though, maybe... Joan Vinge, a promising woman author of slightly sentimental bent, reminds me of C J Cherryh. I found the strange details were coming too thick and fast in the highly touted Brothers of Earth, but I was much impressed by Gates of Ivrel. Cherryh has a surer grasp of prose and plot than did Le Guin when she was at the fantasy-and-adventure-s f stage of development, so perhaps we can expect something really promising.

George Turner: Please give the devil his due and stop translating by cognates! In Polish, as in most Slavic languages, and as also in things like Latvian, fantastika usually means, and is properly translated by, "science fiction".

Sneja Gunew's essay on Le Guin seems sensible, if perhaps a trifle obvious, at least to people who have read the Le Guin fantasies (and, to a lesser extent, The Left Hand of Darkness). The symbols are so important simply in terms of plot-motivation to the characters that you can't read the books without figuring out what's going on on this level. Also, I buy the theme as set out at the beginning, viz, "whereas she cannot presume a common area of mundane experience, she can and does presume a common area of reactions to basic mythic symbols", but not in the recapitulation at the end, viz, "has overcome the barrier of reader alienation toward fantasy". I know of no evidence to suggest that children, as a group, have any such barrier. (Individual children may, of course. C S Lewis wrote several times that he did not begin to enjoy fantasy until his late teens.) I know of no evidence that The Left Hand of Darkness has enjoyed success among adults prejudiced against fantasy. If you really wanted to study how authors overcome prejudices against fantasy, I'd suggest taking Bradbury or Borges, or even Tolkein or C S Lewis as your starting point rather than Le Guin. Hmmm. The Tombs of Atuan bears a discernible relation to Lewis' Til We Have Faces, but in general I think the anthropology and mythology is laid on much more thickly and obviously in these other examples than in Le Guin's Earthsea books or in The Left Hand of Darkness. Maybe "presuming a common area of reactions to basic mythic symbols" is the way you alienate most of the general audience! Unfortunately, this has no relation to the function of symbolism within the books under study in Gunew's essay.

I've missed Michael Coney. I'll go look him up... I was going to say something about Hell's Cartographers, mainly about the in-groupishness of the writers represented therein, and how it would be dangerous to generalise about s f on their experience, but I read the book almost two years ago and memory may fail me.

Happy Easter, anyhow. Must be rad Down Under, with all the seasonal symbolism wrong.

(9 April 1977) *

brg But the Indian summer weather most Easters makes up for the loss. *

MAILING COMMENTS

These mailing comments are being typed on A-Con weekend, at the end of July. I don't know whether I will get beyond the June mailing in making comments or not. I meant to have this issue of SS ready for the August Mailing, but it won't be. Which might explain while, in everything but official date and apa appearance, this is the August issue of the magazine, and these are the August mailing comments.

APRIL Mailing - No 55

Derrick and Christine (now) Ashby: You play some really good music while you are writing mailing comments - Please Please Me. None of this artsy stuff, like all those South Australians/ I'm even artsier than you all - I don't play any music while I'm typing mailing comments. I think even less efficiently while music is playing than when there is silence. (Even the sound of the typewriter is too noisy.)

Marc Ortlieb: The Dallas Brookes Hall in Melbourne does not stop people dancing in the aisles during concerts. It's a regular happening. The most recent concert I attended there was the farewell concert of the Bushwackers. By the end of the night, half the people in the hall were dancing. (Not me, of course.) My sister Jeanette goes to lots of similar concerts: these days, I believe, you can't say that you've been to the concert unless you can also say that you've danced through half the program. :: You say that there's no future for s f based on technology. Yet it is still the technology-based s f that is bought in places like Space Age Books. People still start with Asimov, Heinlein, etc, even thought their view of technology appears naive these days. The proponents of "appropriate technology" don't seem to have entered science fiction yet. :: A good piece on fandom as a religion. I'm beginning to think that most American fans now operate in just that way. The trouble is that they seem to have withdrawn into their temples, and refuse to acknowledge messages from the heathen outside. (which is another way of saying that few American readers write letters of comment anymore, although English fans are much more active now than they were a few years ago.)

John Bangsund: My main memory of the "Stephen Campbell Affair" is that [illegible] the reasons offered for stopping Stephen from entering ANZAPA were about as appropriate as Robinson's offered reasons for shutting off 3ZZ: in other words, that all the actual reasons were left unsaid during the whole schemozzle. Not even all the facts were clear. Stephen Campbell was never a student at Ararat Technical School, where I was teaching. He was a student at Ararat High School. I met him by accident. I must be able to spot talented people anyway, although when I first met him, Steve didn't show many of the skills that he has now. He has a habit of turning up again, too. At the end of 1970, he went off to Mt Gambier and I came back to Melbourne, so I didn't expect to see him again. When he turned up at East Preston one day, I hardly recognised him, since he had grown his hair long and had made the first attempt at what is now his beard. Then he disappeared again; back again; off again to the country, etc. I'm not sure whether he's enjoying his current position as Art Director of SFC; it's more difficult a job than he thought; and it's more difficult for me than I thought to have any part of the production process out of my hands. But SFC 51 suited me fine, and 52 looks good to me. :: "Jubilating in the streets": I'm not too good at it, but it's a worthy aim. :: The "true confessions", as you

put it, are the serious bits, so they go in SFC; the light relief, such as my opinions about science fiction, are left for ANZAPA contributions. At least you noticed this distinction while nobody else did. :: I agree that it's very difficult to forget a prime minister who is dedicated, using various puppet ministers, to destroying everything that is valuable in the public life of Australia. Enough on such dismal subjects. I might write a separate whinge about current politics in Australia. :: Since it looks as if I'll never have one of my own, your "Wedding" was a fitting, enjoyable document of that occasion in your life. And Sue and Ron Clarke's "Wedding" was also enjoyable, for different reasons. :: Our mutual friend, Gerald Murnane, seems to enjoy his current role as house-bound husband. This year was tough, since one of the Murnanes' kids was very ill, and Gerald didn't do much writing for a while. But he has returned to it. He says that he listens to music on 3MBS-FM while he is writing, and that he hears some good pieces.

Eric Lindsay: I may be missing something, but I can't remember having read anything like a complete trip report from you. Maybe I'd better go and look back at the most recent Gegenschein. Thanks for the bits which you have typed so far. :: With your luck (in missing the train disaster by one station), you must have a great life in front of you.

Susan Wood: I think I told you in a letter than I received Genre Plat okay. It showed your influence, in the high standard of repro, and the sensible tone to the articles. A very good first issue, in fact, with some good stuff particularly from Bill Gibson. :: Smoke Dreams isn't all that strange. There are American bands which sound something like Captain Matchbox - the nearest I've heard is Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks. The main difference is that Hicks Licks are recorded much better than Matchbox. I've seen Matchbox in concert, and almost none of the aural excitement of their concerts has yet been caught on record.

John Berry: Nothing much I can say about your piece, except that, like most of your fanzine articles, it does give much of the "true feeling" of that event. It made me realise that I never go to large non-fannish social gatherings, for instance. At an s f convention, I know many of the people already, so the atmosphere is there from the start. I think I would be terrified at stepping into the kind of conference you describe, and trying to get some rapport. I just never know what to say in such situations. :: In Australia, various areas have decided to secede from time to time, but not from the kind of high motives that the Pacific North-West has. In Australia, the reasons given are always economic - basically, that such-and-such a region will do better by not paying federal taxes and by exporting such-and-such a product.

Mark Lawrence: A good start to your fanzine career. Much better than my start 9 years ago. I still don't have a clue about how to produce a fanzine in that format. :: When you began talking about ASIO, I thought you were talking about the real ASIO, the Australian Scientifiction Information Organisation. Ask Bill Wright about it the next time you see him, and watch him froth at the mouth. :: You came to the same conclusion (independently, I presume) as Stanislaw Lem about Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics. Lem's article on the subject appeared in 1969. :: I wouldn't call a lot of those books "science fiction". Certainly not Once and Future King, Narnia, etc. Of the s f books you list, the only ones I really like are Hothouse, Earth Abides, and The Inverted World. I think I would place the Earthsea books, as a whole, higher on any list than any s f book I've read (except The Glass Bead Game, 1984, and Brave New World, if, of course, they are science fiction).

Kitty Vigo: You were the person who once said, at Degraves, that it was your ambition to grow hair on your chest someday. Now you are drinking glasses of dry sherry so that your ambition will come true. :: When I asked you about

the February Writers' Workshop, you went mumble-mumble-mumble, and didn't say anything much. And most of the comments here in ANZAPA are intriguing, but not too informative. Anyway, it doesn't sound as if you enjoyed it very much. :: If Carey can raise $50 for a party in no time, why can't he do the same for a starveling enterprise like S F Commentary? Carey can raise almost any amount of money for any purpose, but meanwhile SFC is slowly dying of financial debilitation. So, if SFC folds, you know who to blame: it will be a protest (among many others') against Carey Handfield.

Don Ashby: The Duffmoot wasn't very interesting while I was there, but perhaps that's just because I was there. Anyway, when Miche and Stephen and I arrived, the long-haired member of the trio was determined to make trouble. He had just begun when I left, so maybe things got a lot more interesting later. :: The stuff-up about the Australian Awards could have been avoided if the Adelaide Convention organisers had asked for a preliminary report from the Edmonds Committee, instead of going ahead and drawing up the categories the same as they were the year before. :: We appeared on 3ZZ, and that seems to have enraged the Fraser Government so much that the plug was pulled. Actually, I cannot express how angry I am about the whole incident. What was 3ZZ's crime? Nobody's saying. The crime appears to be that it was successful. If you own a commercial station in Australia, you have a licence to dump shit all over the airwaves. If you're a public broadcaster, you're left alone while you are ineffective. If you get relatively high ratings (as 3ZZ did) then quality has been seen to be successful. And that's unforgivable. 3ZZ's story is the current story of Australia - huge piles of Fraser/commercial-interest shit pushing out public-interest/self-help quality. :: Driving a wombat up a tree- you'll be arrested for gross cruelty to wombats. You didn't mention the final indignity: putting Bruce Gillespie under the tree reading from his memoirs while the poor wombat whimpers at the top. :: I can't quite imagine John Foyster wandering around Jolimont elevating his spirits. Not in this cold weather, anyway. And if John has successful ways of elevating his spirits, he keeps them secret. :: Now that the legendary Brunswick Street house has broken up, you must write an article for other members of Melbourne fandom. Call it "How I Survived Carey Handfield". The book will sell in the thousands; we need a survival kit. The only trouble is that Norstrilia Press would publish it, and Carey would make all the money on it.

Peter Darling: I agree that Syncon I was one of the most enjoyable conventions ever held. It was the only convention attended by an overland bus. Do you remember sitting on a panel with me and some other people - a panel where we said that the science fiction magazines could not last more than another year or so, and that only Analog would survive? That was nearly seven years ago. If went; Galaxy's going; Amazing and Fantastic should have died years ago. But they are still here. And F&SF is picking up sales, not Analog. :: Thanks for your background in fandom. I would write mine, but everybody has heard it umpteen times, and it's boring anyway. For me too, it's all John Bangsund's fault that I got into fandom.

Catherine Circosta: You're the friendly type, so I suppose it can be expected that you would have some friends to help you over the bumpy spots in teaching. Still, a country town can be isolated, even for a friendly type. During my two years of attempted teaching, I was pathologically shy as well, and so kept going on the nightmarish day-to-day grind of teaching, without having anyone much to talk to. (Except to people in letters and fanzines; even then, they were the people who had to put up with my troubles.) :: I don't know whether you see Metro, the magazine produced by the Teachers of Film and Video. In a recent issue, a teacher was saying how useful it was to show A Star Is Born to her classes. The critics hated it, but the kids got lots from the film. Maybe you could use the same effect with your contrary kids.

Carey Handfield: Me give you money if I won Tattslotto? Joke! Joke! :: Your reasons for justifying a February Workshop don8t stand up. The 1977 Workshop should have been in January, and could have been. But I wasn't involved, so I just threw up my hands in puzzlement, as did a lot of other people, and hoped that something would succeed. Which it did, of course, except for the small numbers who could attend. ... Still you can't do much if the people who are organising things insist that they are right when everybody else knows damn well that they are not.

Bill Wright: Fitzroy isn't that bad a place in which to live. Only, it seems, outside 33 Brunswick Street, and near Gertrude Street generally. Elsewhere, Fitzroy seems to have been trendyfied already. It's not likely that this will happen to Collingwood... most of the dwellings here were built originally in weatherboard, and therefore can never be redecorated (torn inside out) to suit rich buyers. :: Whatever happened to Bill Wright? I haven't seen you or heard from you for months.

Robin Johnson: People running public radio stations must be downright scared by now, especially if their stations are doing a good job. I've heard no announcement that PBS has received a licence, and commercial stations are making completely lunatic statements about the whole thing. Why isn't somebody getting ready to staff the first pirate radio station? That's what will be needed soon.

David Grigg: I found some early copies of Yggdrasil at my parents' place yesterday. You might like to look at them. This year, I've typed the stencils for Yggdrasil, but any efforts to make the magazine more accessible have been spoiled by the strange marketing policy of the editors (Alan Wilson and Dennis Callegari). Still, they are selling copies in Space Age, and I think the copies are cheap.

John McPharlin: Quote of the Mailing: "The hardened core that is the mark of a true fan, a sort of combination of insomnia and indigestion." I suffer from both, often. Not to mention hangovers. :: Your lists of favourite music show how poor the 70s have been in this field, as in all others. During the 1970s, the Rolling Stones have produced only two first-class albums, Let It Bleed and It's Only Rock 'n' Roll. Van der Graaf Generator? People keep talking about them, but I know nobody in Melbourne who has copies of their records. Beachboys haven't done anything exciting for about ten years. Those albums you mention are decadent Beachboys. For the real Beachboys, buy 20 Golden Greats, with stuff like "Fun Fun Fun" and "Help Me Rhonda". The Pink Floyd? They started in the 60s, but have achieved fame only during recent times. Soft core, with the occasional fine album (Dark Side of the Moon, etc). Genesis? Who? Jefferson Starship? Yeech! Led Zeppelin? They were good, once upon a time. ELO? Eagles? Fleetwood Mac? Modern pop; nothing more. Now, a really good collection has in it the best of - the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Yardbirds, Cream, even the Masters Apprentices. I do agree with you about Bob Dylan, though. He's the real exception, with most of his best during the 60s, but his very best in recent years: Desire and Blood on the Tracks. :: I trust that I did meet you sometime during Monaclave. The little bit of Monaclave I attended was distressing, mainly because of the air-conditioning. I escaped as soon as possible, and missed talking to many people I would have talked to at any other convention.

Paul Anderson: You must be competing with me for the Most Boring Fanzine Article the Year award. But I give into the competition - I cannot beat your account of the relative mer s of airmail postage vs. SAL. The short answer is: SAL costs a third as much as airmail, and takes no more than two weeks longer to any one place. :: You've been seeing more plays than I have - infinitely more, so to speak. It must be four or five years since I saw a play.

Keith Taylor: Certainly the most interesting contribution in this mailing. I was going to ask you if you would add a few bits to your Maidens'n'Sword'n' Sorcery article so that it would go in SFC. Then I thought to myself: I have about half a million words in the back files already, and the magazine fits in much less than I expected, and is being published more slowly than I expected, and... oh hell. If you want to submit it to SFC, I can hardly refuse, can I? My own objections to that kind of fantasy material is that it assumes an implicit commitment to all the cliches of the genre. If you wanted to say what things were really like in such-and-such an era, then you wouldn't write about boring people like Conan at all. You would write about the poor folks who had to suffer under the extremely harsh social and physical conditions of the time. And how would you find this out? I'm not sure, since most social history seems to be the history of the top 0.5 per cent. Medieval pageantry is a lot of bullshit, anyway, a sort of "let them eat cake" to all the people who didn't have the right to wear such duds. I've just read The Sword in the Stone, which is hardly a great book, although it has some good bits. What I did like about it is the implication by White, every now and again, that this was just how things were not. That's my feeling about heroic fantasy in general; it's a guide to how things were not. (None of my objections to this sort of writing take anything away from the quality of your article, by the way.) :: I've lived in a few odd places during the last decade, but nothing remotely as bad as the boarding-house you describe. I felt isolated in my flat at Ararat, but the flat itself was comfortable, and I didn't have an idiot landlady to contend with. :: You can't be as fond of liberty as you say. You still share a house with Carey. Your piece about the freeing of Melbourne fandom was good. It bears thinking about. :: What's teaching got to do with knowing your subject? Ask Don. It's all about getting kids to shut up and look industrious when Powers-That-Be pass by. I didn't believe this when I tried teaching, so I didn't do well. And I did know my subjects. :: Funny about that. I keep meeting "deplorably honest and loyal" young ladies too. Of course, it might be that they stay that way because I am the person who chases them. I've discovered no exceptions, yet.

Stephen Bates: Everybody seems to have had a completely different Monaclave. I've received letters from Linda Smith, though not Chris, but cannot remember having met them.

JUNE Mailing - No 56

Mike Horvat: Nice bit of printing there. If I lived in USA, my best idea would be to get you to print SFC. That way, it might even look half as good as The Curmudgeon. :: Well, yes, some features of your life do match parts of my wish-dream. Your married bliss, and all that. I was able to live on about $200 a month, until inflation began to rise rapidly. Now I'm losing money on my current salary - unless, of course, I stopped publishing SFC. My 30th birthday passed with very different feelings from yours, ie, I had my usual general feelings of failure, of going downhill without ever having been at the top. :: The whole radio mixup here could have been avoided if we had some aspects of American radio. Commercial radio here is controlled by monopolies, compared with many small stations I heard in USA which survive by advertising, certainly, but don't need much advertising. I heard some rock stations which ran only a couple of advertisements each hour, yet still kept going. More sensible licensing of stations here could help solve our problems.::

The Rolling Stones, on their best records, show everything that's best about rock 'n' roll. Stones stuff is rock 'n' roll developed and extended - rock'n' roll, more so. I've always thought of the Drifters as in-betweeners, between the early rock'n'roll (Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, etc) and the rock'n' roll revival (Stones, Beatles, etc).

Don Ashby: Sometime you must explain some of the bits in your reply to the last issue of SS. All this stuff about "role models" is a bit above my head, I'm afraid. While other people were watching Patty Duke and The Lone Ranger I was reading science fiction. Befor that. I read Enid Blyton books.

:: I like your idea (re the quotation) about forgetting it all in a jug of punch. I try to do that as often as possible. :: Your reference to the APG: the Government has a current drive against reality. It's called Lynch's Economic Policy. This involves pouring money into useless armaments, supporting mining companies which send their profits home overseas, and subsidising industries which will soon collapse anyway, while at the same time withdrawing support from anybody who's doing any good (or even doing well). :: I agree that big budgets have little to do with good drama. The most recent example I've seen is the Kazan version of The Last Tycoon - hardly a whimper of drama in the whole film, but plenty of big-budget visual values. :: The aim of keeping a small membership for ANZAPA is to keep members in, rather than others out. People like me tend to contribute to save a membership, because I know that, once I am dropped, it could take a year to get back in again. :: A good distinction made between sword 'n' sorcery and historical fantasy. :: Those old washing machines which really agitated were great, weren't they? Martin had one of them at Carlton Street. I loaded in the wash, put in the soap, and went away for half an hour. When I came back, all the clothes were clean. Elaine and Frank have a more recent model, which has just a piss-weak little swisher on the side. So I can put in only a few clothes at a time, and even then I'm not sure that they get cleaned properly. The whole process is much slower.

Catherine Circosta: It was a very funny joke. :: My parents opposed my interest in s f. Science fiction was just not something a human being read. But then, nothing I did was tolerable to them; they certainly were not interested in stories I wrote, magazines I edited, etc. That's why discovering fandom was so great - because I found at least some people who liked some of my writing. :: It's cold in America in December and January. Unless you go to California, of course, or southern Texas. Enjoy yourself, anyway; I'll give you some addresses of American fans, if you like. :: How many others from Broadford came to Melbourne for the July 12 Dallas Brookes Hall meeting? Not that I'm sure about the outcome, at the moment; Shears certainly hasn't given anything away yet.

Carey Handfield: Don't try to escape from all your unfortunate character traits by blaming them on your ancestors. If only they had known... I wouldn't have much nostalgia for some of those military types, especially as they were the people who barged in and pushed the aborigines out. :: I can't work out your quote (in reply to SS3) at all. Explain it sometime. :: Isn't that reading for Capricorn appropriate?

Mike O'Brien: Thanks for all that info. about 1976's Analog. But I haven't begun reading the s f magazines for 1974 yet, so I won't be up to 76 for a while yet. I've even fallen behind on the Original Fiction Anthologies, although I still cannot get hold of some of them. Anybody have a copy of Universe 6? :: I didn't like Shockwave Rider. Neologisms, yes; content, no.

Irwin Hirsch: Welcome to ANZAPA. You're one of those mysterious people who are SFC subscribers long before I meet them. :: A sports fan in s f fandom? Never been heard of before. People from the s f religion don't usually have much to do with the sports religion. :: You make your school sound as if mainly rich types go it. :: The petrol strike did improve the skies around Melbourne. It also, indirectly, killed my cat (I think). Even on Johnston Street, the traffic became so sparse that one night, it seems, my cat tried to cross the road. And got hit by a car. Melbourne would be improved a lot if no cars came near the centre of the city. When petrol hits $1-$1.50 a gallon in a year or so, perhaps a lot more people will agree with me. :: I'm not sure why you thought I would like Songs in the Key of Life. The bits I've heard have sounded like second-rate disco music. And I can never understand the words on Stevie Wonder records, anyway. :: I still haven't heard Crime of the Century. Keep meaning to buy it, to complete my Supertramp collection. :: Where can I buy Tom Lehrer records??? I'll buy a complete set, if I can just get hold of them. :: Bill Hayden won't be PM until he pulls his finger out, and actually puts up a serious challenge to Whitlam. A long way to go yet.

John Bangsund: It's unfortunate that you hadn't seen Bottom Line before you sent in the article. Jules doesn't like articles more than 2000 words long, and he has a fairly clear idea of what kind of style he wants. Of course, the latest issue (No 4) has lots of articles which cut right across his own guidelines. Anyway, thanks for putting the complete version of the Flann O'Brien article in ANZAPA. :: But why do you resent being edited, and I don't? My view is that the editor is as likely to be right about my work as I am, and any good editor can usually improve anything but the very best prose. :: Now that I'm 30, I'll be more scared than before if a doctor starts saying things like that to me. Technically, I'm not an alcoholic yet. It just seems like a good crutch to keep stored against my old age, when I will need the solace of alcohol even more than now.

Keith Taylor: Dorothy Dunnett seems to be a cult only among certain s f fans - not among the public in general. At least, I've never heard anybody but you and Christine and Derrick and a few other s f people refer to her books. :: I can't decide yet whether I suffer from "accidie" or "anomie". There's such a choice of things to suffer from these days. :: I don't understand your mailing comment to me, either. Amplify, if you please. I'm not sending anybody up. There's my wish-dream. But it is a wish-dream, and I don't expect it to come true. As a simple matter of realism, I wrote down my 1977-as-I-expect-it. Think how much worse the year could be than that. Since there's nothing I can do about it, either way, it's nice to dream in detail. Tell us your wish-dream sometime, Keith (and everybody). That's why I wrote what I wrote: so that other people would reply in kind. :: A good definition of a marriage/unmarriage contract. :: An article projected for SS: "Neighbours I Have Survived". Your contribution was a good chapter for such a book. I've had some noisy neighbours at various places, but none as bad as that. The best neighbour I had was Whoever owned 74 Carlton Street during the first 18 months I was at 72 Carlton Street. I did not hear from Whoever once; I have it only on other people's authority that Somebody did actually live there. ::

Eric Lindsay: At last - Part 1 of the Trip Report. You're not kidding about concentrating on trivial matters. But, in a trip report, what else can one write? It's the odd little details which mark the most obvious differences between USA and Australia, anyway. Also, people get very shirty if you try, as I did, to make generalised comparisons between countries. People get annoyed that their country can be compared in any way with any other country. So it's always back to bits and pieces about this and that. Interesting stuff. :: Maybe your legs are short enough so that you can ride in a Greyhound bus in comfort. My legs are long, and I can't. :: Chris Priest has a basement apartment like the one you describe. I didn't stay in any basements in USA.

Gary Mason: What? More to life than fandom? Where? That's not just a joke. Maybe it's not a joke at all. Other people form "fandoms" as well. Usually, other fandoms are more difficult to break into than s f fandom. I suppose that if you are the gregarious type, you can swap between social groups. I find it very difficult, and so would many other fans. There are other aspects of life worth exploring, I agree. But that's what I wrote about in SS3.

Andrew Brown: Australia's new ambassador to Canada! It would be disappointing if you did not make contact with Vancouver fandom while you are there. Say hello to Mike Bailey for me when you are there. :: If the ERA SF Club existed for all that time, then how many other s f clubs exist at present and we don't know about them? But would they be interested to know about us?

Stephen Bates: I keep missing out on the Hills Family Show. My fault, of course. Maybe next time they come back to the Pram Factory.

Susan Wood: If, as seems highly improbable, I get to Vancouver while you are still there, I promise faithfully to stay at a hotel, and not take up more than an hour or so of your time. But I will insist on getting at least an hour's conversation. (You might do well to turn people down in future. The message would soon get around.)

Denny Lien: It's amazing how consistent Carey's image remains from one continent to the next (except in New Zealand). "Looming" describes him well. Anyway, Carey's standover tactics have paid off this time. I hope you stay in ANZAPA. :: I met you too - across a room party sometime during Aussiecon, and before that, at a room party sometime during Torcon. Or was it Pghlange in 1973?

Jan Finder: Readable Finder! That faint ditto had got past a joke. :: Stonehenge doesn't like visitors much, does it? Much the same thing happened when I was there. It was a sunny day til we got there. The wind blew up and the rain came down while we were actually at Stonehenge. About half an hour after we left, it was fine again. The Druids have fun.

Marc Ortlieb: I've been a Lewis Carroll fan since the age of six, and I've still never been allowed to see a copy of Alician Fields. Please? :: D&D hasn't taken over regular fandom here, yet, although the rot has bitten deep into MUSFA. But I suppose that various people have come back from A-Con with the fever running through their veins. D&D at conventions is anti-social, like watching films. :: If Elaine and Frank put up a sign, GILLESPIE LIVES HERE, nobody would dare come through the gate. As it is, nearly everybody who tries hits his or her head on the wire gate. Beats boiling oil.

Paul Anderson: I've travelled by Ansett only once. I didn't notice much difference between it and TAA. There are much greater differences between different brands of overseas airline. I went by American to USA, and it is a good airline. Pan Am is a shambles - something was shoddy, or went wrong, nearly every time I travelled on that airline. But American has stopped flying the South Pacific, and there is still only the choice between Pan Am and Qantas. Maybe Continental will be better than either of them. :: I've been enjoying my job, especially because it pays money. But it's still only a diversion from my "real" job, producing SFC. But soon I won't be able to afford that job, either. :: Death in Venice is a magnificent film. How could any self-respecting Mahler/Visconti/Bogarde fan not like that film? :: Strictly speaking, the Liberals are right about the Constitution, which will allow the G-G to get away with an awful lot. But things aren't supposed to work the way Kerr interpreted them. I don't think anybody in the LNCP realise how their own Pandora's Box could be tipped over their own heads (especially if there is a hostile Senate after the next Senate elections). :: People in Melbourne keep asking, "Where's the next SFC?" I keep saying, "Ask Steve Campbell." Not fair to Steve, but that is the situation. We'll streamline production before 53.

:: Be careful, or I'll start raving about the films of Robert Altman again. I don't know whether you've seen Three Women yet. That's about my favourite film for the year so far. Remarkable performances by Cissy Spacek and Shelley Duvall. I still have not seen Images, though. It seems to be the only Altman film not turning up at Valhalla seasons, Union Theatre, etc.

John McPharlin: As Steve Campbell realised (in his letter of comment), the bit of my wish-dream about winning Tattslotto was the least important part, and not necessarily connected with Part 2 of that piece. The importance of getting some money is that it would give me some freedom to do something - specifically, to do SFC properly. The 20/24-page format (51, 52, probably 53) is very restrictive, especially to Steve Campbell, as Art Director. But it's also incredibly expensive. Money would let me off the leash, give me a bit of freedom to really achieve something. :: People tend to forget great Rolling Stones albums like Between the Buttons. I have nearly worn out my copy. My favourite song is "Something Happened to Me Yesterday". I heard it first about ten years ago. 3XY played it at the end of a program, and didn't say who performed it. I thought it was Bob Dylan (since it came out about the same time as "Rainy Day Women"), but I had a suspicion that it was Jagger. I didn't know for sure until long afterwards, when I bought the album. I still think that "Something Happened to Me Yesterday" could have been one of their most successful singles if it had ever been released as such. Very funny song, especially the ending. . :: Blank page fandom!

Leigh Edmonds: I have FM on my radio so I don't need to listen to 3XY. So I don't. Well, hardly ever. The pop music is much better on 3CR, anyway, with a lot of Australian bands which 3XY would never play. We still need an FM rock station, though. :: I remember APA-45, too. During the last year that I was a wait-lister, Lesleigh Luttrell was OE, and the mailings averaged 500-600 pages per quarter. From 35 members. The apa started to fall apart when Lesleigh stopped being OE (and I joined the apa). Don D'Ammassa did his best to revive it, but I dropped out a few years ago, and I don't know what the present situation is. Not many apas revive from near-extinction in the way that ANZAPA has during the last year or so. :: The bad side of drinking alcohol at conventions is that it reduces endurance. Without alcohol, I can survive conventions on little sleep. Alcohol is anti-productive, over long periods. :: If fandom ever gets elitist, then I'll drop out. Elitists wouldn't want me around. Fandom should be an organism with very porous (or is the word osmotic?) walls.

2 August 1977.