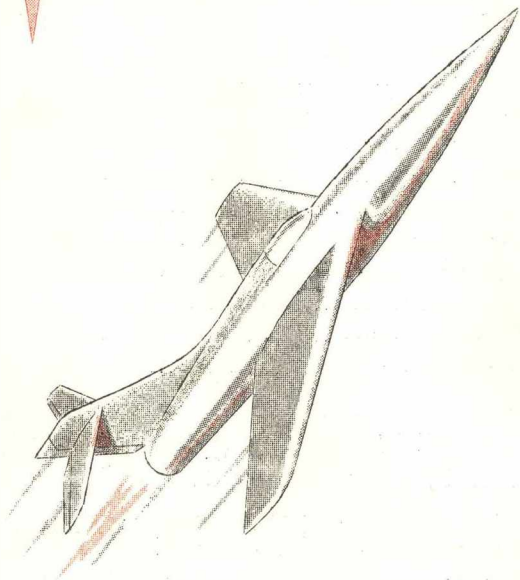


# VECTOR



No. 1

# VECTOR

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# Editorial

When Hugo Gernsback launched Amazing Stories back in April 1926 he started something new. For many years stories of a fantastic nature and dealing with odd aspects of science had been published in various magazines but, until Amazing made its debut, there had been no vehicle specialising in such literature. But Gernsback did not call his new magazine a 'science fiction' magazine - that term had yet to be coined.

Hugo must have felt the need of a specific generic term for he ran a competition in order to find one. The prize went to 'Scientifiction', apparently the best which could be devised and for a time his magazine ran that word as a banner on the cover. It didn't last long. It was too unweildly, too openly a manufactured compromise. It died and science fiction took its place. Now it is too late to change. Science fiction is what we read and that is the name it is stuck with.

I use the term 'stuck with' advisedly. Unfortunately it has acquired such a bad odour among certain critics and other 'experts' that they use it as a term of derogation. George Orwell, they will take care to point out, wrote a wonderful book when he wrote 1984 but, of course, it isn't science fiction. Huxley's Brave New World is superb, nothing like that trashy science fiction. Wells and Verne wrote - what? Not, according to the experts, science fiction. Even the B.B.C. when they put on a play about men in a rocket ship took care to make sure that their listeners knew that this effort was not to be confused with science fiction. Science fiction, to these critics and experts, is something no adult and certainly no one of intelligence and discernment, can or would be bothered with.

Why this should be so isn't hard to discover even though it is grossly unfair. Science fiction is a new baby and is considered by many to be an illegitimate one. To them it is trash, rubbish, utter nonsense and it is condemned because of the medium in which it first appeared. Pulp magazines have never been considered the vehicles of good literature and they are not. But Westerns aren't damned because the majority of Western writing appears in pulp magazines. Detective stories aren't considered rubbish because there are magazines specialising in them. And the same applies to Romances. Why, then, should science fiction be treated differently?

The answer is that it shouldn't be but it is. Science fiction demands a certain amount of co-operation from the reader and no one without imagination can enjoy it. The 'experts' are usually men without imagination. They are experts only because they adhere to the norm. They will praise a thing if their

4 fellows praise it and they will damn it if their colleagues so decide. It takes imagination to have the courage to walk alone and it takes imagination to criticise something new.

Science fiction is usually criticised for being what it is not. Stories are judged, not on the basis of what they set out to do, but what the critic thinks the author should have done. Books, novels and short stories which are, by any standard, science fiction, are never called so by those, outside the field, who praise them. It would help, perhaps, if the 'experts' had a definition of what science fiction is so that they could judge such material on the basis of what it sets out to do. There have been many attempts to define it. H. J. Campbell did so and, I think, fairly:-

A story is science fiction if it deals with the development, extrapolation or disproof of phenomena which are the source material of scientific enquiry and experiment, in such a way that the ideas, claims and assumptions are not at variance with current scientific knowledge and speculation, unless such variance is explained and supported by logical reasoning or experiment.

That is a definition of science fiction. It may not be your definition, but it is a good one. It is not a definition of fantasy. Fantasy can be entertaining and even acceptable to the critics but science fiction is not fantasy. Fantasy is the modernisation of fairy stories in which magic replaces science. They can be fun, yes, but only as ghost stories are fun. And no critic that I can remember has ever condemned ghost stories because he didn't believe in ghosts. It would be nice if they could be as tolerant towards science fiction

Partly, of course, the field is to blame for its own reputation, but only partly. Perhaps, if the new baby had watched its step a little more carefully, there would have been time for it to have grown 'respectable!'. But it was a new medium and, before the hard-cover books could be produced, the authors had to learn how to handle it. Now we have the hard-cover books, we have noted authors who first appeared in the pulps but who now, so say the experts, do not write science fiction. The difference even the authors couldn't tell you.

True, there has been the most outrageous rubbish printed under the name of science fiction. There have been comic strips which would make any scientist recoil in disgust - and stories which drives anyone with any sense of reason and logic into head-beating frenzy. There have been covers which, apparently, have tried to sell anything but the stories they are supposed to represent. But equally so the same applies to

Westerns with their chronological distortion, their Absurd characters and ludicrous plots. Detective fiction the same. Romances also. All three fields of 'superior' literature have produced as much rubbish as our own. Why then is science fiction judged only on the worst of its kind?

I think that it could be because the ratio of good to bad is far lower in science fiction than in any other field. Let's face it, no other medium has supported so much sheer crud to so little notable work. It is nice to claim that we who are possessed of the imagination needed to enjoy science fiction have also the critical faculty for assessing its real worth. We haven't. We have accepted poor writing, terrible characterization, creaking plots and outworn situations in our hunger for literature that is 'different'. Like a mother defending her child we have been unable to face self-criticism and have tried to protect the new baby against outsiders. Now, when we are at last getting the type of story we have been waiting for, we must allow the critics a little time in order to re-evaluate their concepts.

We must be as tolerant towards them as we would like them to be towards us.

In this time is on our side. Science fiction seems to have a boom and bust cycle which, on the face of it, is not good but which is having a rather peculiar effect. This effect is very noticeable in this country, at least. I am referring to the constantly rising spiral of better writing reflected in our magazines.

In order to survive, to stay in business, science fiction magazines, books, anthologies and pocket books have got to sell. Pocket books regularly give up the ghost. Anthologies depend on a backlog of good material. Hard-cover books follow the trend. Only the regular magazines are faced with the sheer necessity of finding good material or going out of business. And I think, in this country at least, the editors are finding such material.

Read the magazines of five years ago and compare them with today's. Go further back and the trend is even more noticeable. The stories are getting better, the writing is improving, the plots and characters are more believable. They have to, there is no longer a market here for bad material. Perhaps, during the next boom, the demand will again exceed the supply but it doesn't matter. Once a standard is set it is not easy to persuade editors and publishers to lower it. And each cycle of boom and bust raises the standard just a little more.

The signs are healthy. Science fiction is growing up.

# Handbook for Beginners



by  
e.c. tubb

One of the perpetual troubles which plague editors is that they are always short of material. Every editor has his own idea of the stories he would like to print; too often he has to print what he can get. An editor has, in his mind, a rising spiral of desirable quality. The acceptable of today he wants to make the rejected of tomorrow. The demand is for brilliant ideas coupled with smooth writing, real characters with real emotions, tense plot development and believable situations. Stories which will be praised and remembered for years to come.

But, because of the rising spiral of desirable quality, he will never get enough of them.

Science fiction is peculiar in that it is both easy and, at the same time, very difficult to write. It is easy because, with all of time and space to play around with, confined only by his own imagination, and unhampered by any accepted mores, an author isn't bound in any way other than by the limits of good taste and scientific knowledge.

Good taste because that applies to any story no matter on what subject. Scientific knowledge because he has to know what he is writing about. It is this latter which provides the usual stumbling block.

A story, no matter how well-written, is laughable science fiction if it ignores what is known of the physical universe. No couples strolling bare-headed, hand-in-hand on the moon. No ignoring of the effects of acceleration when taking off in a rocket. No casual using of the radio to call a friend on Sirius. Not ordinary radio, that is, and certainly not on Sirius which is

a somewhat hot star. Unless, of course, he has made provision for his friend to be protected in some way.

These complications, to an author who knows nothing of science fiction, can become more than irritating trifles. Each time he drops a brick he reveals his own ignorance and it is surprising the number of good writers, good outside the field, that is, who have written hopelessly poor science fiction because of that. An author must not only be able to write but he must know what he is writing about.

Research is, to a writer, a tedious, time-consuming and irritating business. It can hardly be expected that a writer who knows nothing of rockets and their effect, limitations and capabilities, is going to sit down and read a dozen books on the subject before he writes a story centered around a rocket ship. Not a short story, and not for low rates. It just wouldn't be worth his while.

Authors then, tend to write about things of which they have knowledge; they specialise. This may not be a good thing for a writer to do, in fact it isn't, but it does gain him a name and it does help the editor who knows that his contributor can write sense even if he can't write all that well. And writing well is something that can be learned.

It is no accident that the reader-turned author percentage is higher in science fiction than in any other field of literature. Science fiction demands an active imagination if it is to be enjoyed and an active imagination is the one thing an author must have.

But, unfortunately, an active imagination isn't enough.

A story is, in essence, a means of communication. You, the author, are trying to tell the reader something; to communicate an emotion, perhaps, or a mood, or depict a strange civilisation, anything. No matter what you are trying to say, if the reader doesn't understand it, then you have failed. A piece of poetry may be the ultimate in style and form with tremendous emotional impact and a haunting grace but, if it is written in Chinese and the reader doesn't understand Chinese, then, to him, it is so much waste paper.

So an author must have something to say and say it so that others can understand. He must be able to communicate without any possibility of misunderstanding.

But even that isn't enough.

A story can be crystal clear and without the slightest trace of ambiguity but, unless it is read, then it will be a failure. A story then, must also entertain. That, after all, is what stories are for. Unless you can persuade your reader to get beyond the first page then all the rest is a total waste as far as he is concerned. The reader doesn't owe you anything, remember, he isn't going to wade through your prose at the expense of boredom. If he finds that the story bores him, then you have, for that reader, failed.

So your story must say something in a clear and concise manner. And your story must entertain.

Now a clear and concise story does not have to be written in Basic English. An entertaining story does not have to depend on the shock treatment of four-letter words. And it does not have to deal with hate, fear or sex. It also does not have to cause belly-laughs or sniggers. We are talking of entertainment, not humour. There is a difference.

Apart from having to communicate what you have to say in a clear, concise, entertaining manner you also have to avoid insulting the intelligence of the reader. You don't have to preach at him - you are not writing a text. You don't have to educate him - you are not writing a text-book. You don't have to patronise him - he is doing you a favour by reading what you have written. Your sole job is to entertain him and, if you can give him a few facts he didn't know before or open a door to a new concept for his imagination, then he won't object. But he will object, and strongly, if you try to tell him something is right which he knows to be wrong. Then he will lose patience with a writer who doesn't know what he's talking about - and you'll lose a reader, and rightly so.

So your story must say something. Your story must entertain. It must be interesting and it must not insult the intelligence of anyone who reads it.

That is, if you want to write a good story.

A story can be broken down into three basics; plot, presentation and padding. Plot is what happens, presentation is how the author tells the story and padding is most of the wordage between the first word and the last. Authors are paid by the thousand words, so padding, obviously, is of no little importance.

Anything, literally anything, will do for a plot. A rule-of-thumb working is that the lighter the plot the shorter the story. This becomes obvious when you think about it. After all, if you haven't anything to say and take a book to not-say it in, then practically all you've written is sheer padding. Some padding is essential, the essence of true literature, but unless skilfully handled it can clog up the works and arouse boredom.

Plots can be broken down into main-plot, sub-plot, sub-sub plot, etc. You can have your main characters doing what you want them to do and minor characters doing the same, and so on. From a purist viewpoint, everything anyone does and every word that is written should have a bearing on the main story. In actual practice, many minor characters are sheer padding.

The ordinary plot formula for commercial stories is: character in a spot, tries to get out of it, fails, tries again, succeeds or fails. If he succeeds it is a happy-ending story. If he fails it is a sad-ending story. The longer stories simply repeat the try and fail business as many times as necessary to get the length. A shining example of an author who uses this type of plot formula is Jack Williamson. It is an easy formula to handle because, actually, there is only a very thin plot and plenty of episodes. Any



of which could be cut without harming the plot fabric. These episodes do tend to make the story appear far more complicated than it is but, at the same time, they provide for fast movement.

Not mentioned as one of the basics but probably more important to a good story than anything else are characters. More stories have been rejected because of their lack than for any other reason, and I speak of the entire field of writing, not just science fiction. Stories, basically, are about people, not about things. You can't write a moving story about the moon; only about the people who are affected by it. You can't feel sympathy towards an inanimate object: you can only feel sympathy towards people.

People are real, characters in most stories are not. Do not depict men and women as you have seen them depicted in other stories. If you do it well, you are imitating - if you do it badly, you have created a stock character. Create your own people, that is the art of an author, and it is one of the rewards of fiction writing. Make them speak and feel as they must if they are as you have made them in the situations you have provided. Let the reader feel for and with them, let them have human weaknesses and human strength, do not make them shadow-shapes, names, gestures or people fashioned from cardboard. Hard? Perhaps, but you are surrounded with models. You live, work and exist surrounded by real, living characters. You are one yourself.

Presentation, the way you decide to tell your story, is something experience will teach faster than any rules. But any story can be presented in any manner and style. You can use the long, flowing, involved sentence style beloved by Dickens - though you probably won't sell it if you do - or the short, snappy, machine-gun style favoured by some authors. A safe medium is to use a swift-moving, smooth flow of words with short sentences mixed with long, but not too long or too involved. Your style is something specifically your own - Bradbury is a good example of an author with a definite style and so is Dr. Keller. A static style for an author, like specialisation, is not a good thing. It may make him popular and well-known in his chosen field, but it dampens his versatility. It is better to be able to write about many things in many styles than of one thing in only one style.

But it is better for a beginner to stick to one style and presentation until he gains experience. Too many variables can only confuse the issue.

Style then, is the manner in which you use words. Presentation is what you do with your plot and how you tell your story. There are many ways and devices but they can be boiled down to two. Flash-back - the system of telling a story from a vantage point in the future - or the direct, in which you begin at the beginning and carry on until the end.

Flash-back has the advantage in that it provides a ready-made opening but it is, in effect, a story within a story. Someone is telling about something that happened either to himself or to others. When used late in a story, it can cause confusion and, worse, the flow is broken. Unless skilfully done, it reads amateurishly.

### Examples of using flash-back:

I well remember John Merrill. The first time I saw him was on a hot afternoon in late summer. I'd just come out of the briefing room and bumped into a tall, wavy-haired man with laughing blue eyes and an easy, self-assured manner. Little did I know then that, all too soon, he would .... but let me tell you the story.

or;

... the ship exploded in a gout of electronic flame.

When Carter Smyth had left Argentis, Lucy Piggot had made up her mind to see that he was taken care of in the worst possible way. She had gone to the Chief Ginzmo and had braved the taloned guards, demanding an immediate audience on the plea of Empire Security. Faced with the dreaded Chief Ginzmo, her courage had faltered.

"Well?" growled the scaled, lizard-like thing.  
"What does an Earth female want with the Chief Ginzmo?"

"I demand vengeance", said Lucy.

or;

Blake was an old man, too old for his years, too young for the age he carried in his eyes. Once he had been fit, wealthy, happily married with a fine future and glittering prospects. Now he was space-scum, a homeless, unwanted, unloved fragment of human drift swept by the space lanes to this, the ultimate stopping point. But it hadn't always been so.

Fifteen years before, Commodor Blake had been ...

These are examples of what not to do rather than the reverse. Flash-back and direct can, of course, be mixed as in the second example, but mixing necessitates a change of tense, from the present to the past: it is this change of tense which can cause the confusion. Sometimes the reader just isn't sure as to what was supposed to happen and when.

There are good stories in which both techniques have been used to great advantage. There are, unhappily, stories in which they have been used at their worst. In the latter case the author has used them, as in the second example, because it provided an easy way out.

Good writing is never easy.

Coupled with presentation is tense - the time in which you decide to tell a story. There are only three tenses; past, present and future. These are used with first, second and third person singular. They can be plural, of

course, but as such are almost never used. They can safely be ignored.

First person past:	I lit a cigarette.
" " present:	I light a cigarette.
" " future:	I will light a cigarette.
Second person past:	You lit a cigarette.
" " present:	You light a cigarette.
" " future:	You will light a cigarette.
Third person past:	He lit a cigarette.
" " present:	He lights a cigarette.
" " future:	He will light a cigarette.

Simple? Naturally, it's just following the elementary rules of grammar.

In actual practice, most stories are told in the past tense. A notable example of using first person present tense is the late Damon Runyon. You know the kind of thing:-

I am walking down the Main Stem when I see Harry the Horse coming towards me. I stop and light a cigarette in order to hide my face because I know that this Horse character is going to put on the bite for a fin or maybe a sawbuck and that sort of lettuce is not the sort I am passing to no Harry the Horse. But I am polite and I light a cigarette ...

Second person is rarely used but when it is it usually is in the present tense:-

You hear the knock and rise and cross to the door. Someone stands outside, you know that, know too that they will want to come in. You take a deep breath and open the door. It sticks a little and you use more force than you need. The panel swings open with a rush.

Mary stands outside.

She looks at you and you look at her. You don't say anything. You feel that you can't say anything. What can you say to a woman when you have just killed her husband? But you know that she will expect to be asked inside.

Third person present is almost the same:-

He hears the knock and rises and crosses to the door. Someone stands outside, he knows that, knows too that they will want to come in. He takes a deep breath and opens the door. It sticks a little and he uses more force than he needs. The panel swings open with a rush.

Mary stands outside.

She looks at him and he looks at her. He doesn't say anything. He feels that he can't say anything. What can he say to a woman when he has just killed her husband? But he knows that she expects to be asked inside.

Unusual treatment and presentation can be effective but the danger is that it is very easy to go wrong. Such stories can contain a high irritant factor to the reader - he gets annoyed with the author for not telling a straight story in a straight manner. Different treatments have their uses and can be combined together with other techniques in a wide variety of combinations. That they are not more commonly read is due to the fact that readers do not want to indulge in mental gymnastics - they want to be able to sit and enjoy a story without having to admire the author's cleverness in handling tenses and styles.

So the majority of stories are told in the past tense, either first or third person. Of these the majority are third person and there is a reason for this.

First person treatment has advantages but it also has disadvantages. The most obvious is that, when using the first person, you are confined to knowing what goes on from the viewpoint of your main character only. He can either find things out for himself or someone has to tell him. Author intrusion, that is, the author stepping in to give information, has to be confined to what the main character can be expected to know.

Raymond Chandler in his Marlowe stories manages this very well. The late Peter Cheyney, on the other hand, did it very badly in his later books. In these, a great deal of space was devoted to the main character telling other characters all the story up to date. This led to repetition, and repetition is the most objectionable form of padding.

Another danger is the deceptive simplicity of story telling inherent in the first person singular. 'I' am telling a story. 'I' have no other name by which to call myself unless I speak of myself in the third person - an unhappy compromise. So great care has to be taken that the 'I' does not get out of hand. Usually, a story written by an amateur using this presentation is a forest of 'I's'. For example:

I walked down the street. I did not expect to see Mary that day but I did. I stopped and she looked at me. I stepped forward and, as I did, she turned as if to walk away. I caught her arm.

"Mary", I said. "I was hoping to see you."

"Please", she said, and looked at my hand. I removed my grip. I felt sorry that I had hurt her. But I wanted to talk to her. I had hoped to meet her. I had, if the truth be known, lain in wait for her. Now I was not going to let her go. Not before I had said what I had to say.

"I want to talk about John", I said.

In that example of just over 120 words the word 'I' is used 20 times. That is one 'I' each six words. No-one can be expected to enjoy a story of which one-sixth consists of one word. The proportion is all wrong.

The single great advantage of using the first person technique is that it creates a greater affinity between the reader and the main character than by any other method. Well done, it enables the reader to become the character, to feel with him, be hurt with him, to feel pain and fear and joy as if they were something personal. This reader-affinity is very important in character development and plays a tremendous part in the enjoyment of a story.

Even though first person presentation can make for greater reader-affinity and, if care is taken, can be simpler to write and capable of greater depth of mood, yet it is not as popular as third person presentation. The reason for this is basically simple. With first person technique you have only one main character; you can only hope to gain affinity with that character and, if you happen not to like him, then you lose that much enjoyment from a story.

With third person, on the other hand, you have a multiplicity of characters all of whom can be developed. With a larger range of characters the chances of reader-affinity to one or more of them is increased. You can enter their thoughts, discover their motivations and their impact one on the other. You are not confined to one outlook or one viewpoint. Your canvas can be larger even at the expense of minor detail. And author intrusion is far easier handled and more readily accepted. It is no accident that the majority of successful novels are in the third person.

Successful padding is an art in itself and, when done as it should be, doesn't seem to be padding at all. There hasn't been a story written which couldn't be padded to greater length and the converse is also true. Padding is simply the extra words used to spread out the plot and gain the required length. However, not all writing is padding and should not be confused as such. The test is, is it essential to the story either for the development of mood, atmosphere, character or action. If not, then it is padding. The operative word being 'essential'. If it is essential then it cannot be dispensed with. Padding is always expendable.

The most common fault is the overuse of adjectives:-

He slowly, carefully and with infinite precaution applied a light to the tip of the white paper tube filled with dark, fragrant tobacco.

What he has done is to light a cigarette but we have taken 23 words to say so, and even then there is a doubt.

The other most common fault, is repetition:-

"Is the door open?"

"What you say?" Mark glared at Sam.

"I said, is the door open?"

"Eyes bad?" Mark glared towards the open door. Sam flushed at the other's tone.

"I asked a question", he snapped. "How about answering?"

Mark grunted, not replying. Sam took a deep breath.

"Is the door open?"

This time we have used 49 unnecessary words and come back where we started from. This method of cross-talk can be so painfully obvious that it almost becomes a farce. It would be excusable only if, in the above example, Mark wanted to assert his authority and chose this trivial point to do it. But, in that case, it should have been made clear what his motive was. As it stands, the entire passage is something to stay away from at all costs.

Words are the flesh which clothe the bones of plot. Padding can be likened to the unwanted fat.

One of the great faults of beginners is that they are very inclined to operate under the assumption that each part of a story is of equal importance. This assumption, in effect, leads directly to padding. It also ruins tempo and produces a flat, even, uninteresting story.

Each part of a story is not of equal importance - not if you hope to hit high spots, gain dramatic episodes and achieve smooth flow and movement. The parts of minor importance which are given the same wordage as those of major importance are suffering from padding.

Tempo is the movement of a story and can make or mar it. When action is called for it is not a good thing to treat it exactly the same as the building of atmosphere, for example, or the descriptions of places or things. A story tends to speed up when reaching a point of action. Sentences tend to become shorter, dialogue more crisp, author intrusion is cut to a minimum or cut out altogether. But it is impossible to do this if everything is treated exactly the same.

A study of any published story will make this clear. A character does something, eats a meal, catches a cab, lights a cigarette, makes a phone call. Unless these actions have a tremendously important part to play in the story they are glossed over, dismissed in brief lines. They are not allowed to gather padding and slow down the tempo. A man eating a meal is not regarded in the same light as the same man faced with death, or planning a murder, or developing the plot. For the same reason, clothing is rarely discussed at length, a pace by pace description of a short walk is not given, and it is regarded as absolutely unessential that anyone should ever need to use the toilet.

The latter is dictated by good taste as much as anything else, but, on the same plane, breathing, washing and dressing are usually things the reader assumes have been, or are being done. The author does not give a second-by-second report on all of his characters.

Unless the important parts of a story are isolated, highlighted, so to speak, from the mass of padding strangling them, then the story will lack impact and satisfaction.

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule and there are examples of stories which seem to contravene the above. They only appear to do so. Apparent trivia, in such stories, isn't trivia at all. Apparent unessentials, in a mood story, for example, are not unessentials.

Remember. Padding is unessential either to the development of plot, mood, character or atmosphere.

Every story depends on conflict. It need not be actual, physical conflict but conflict is there just the same. A man can be at war with himself just as easily as he can be at war with others. Conflict can be as simple as a man trying to come to a decision or it can embrace the galaxy. And everyone is in conflict with life.

Most stories, then, are about people trying to do something. If they succeed, we have the up-beat story, the happy ending; if they fail, then we get a down-beat story, the sad ending. They can also succeed and, at the same time, find that their success has cost them too highly. That, again, is a down-beat story. Any sad story is down-beat, any happy story is up-beat.

Stories can, of course, be about anything at all. Literally anything. And science fiction stories can be about things that don't even exist.

There is a danger here, though. The great advantage of writing science fiction is that there are no boundaries aside from good taste and adherence to not denying what is known. This apparent simplicity is deceptive. Once an author steps beyond the real world-as-we-know-it into a world of his imagination, then he has to work that much harder to make it seem real. He has to try and build up a logical pattern based on the framework he has provided. Few writers manage to do this. Most of them paint over or ignore the glaring inconsistencies of their imagination-worlds. Most depend on speed of action to cover grating illogic.

There are, of course, excuses for this. To depict an entire imaginary civilisation would require a book and it would read like a treatise. The best the author can hope to do is to avoid the most obvious bloomers and, by his skill, enable the reader to build up his own concept. He depends, in other words, for a great deal of help from the reader in order to create conviction.

Every reader of science fiction, in order to enjoy it at all, has to be willing to 'suspend disbelief'. He knows darn well that there is no regular service to Mars - but he must be willing to accept the author's contention that there is. He must be willing to accept the author's say-so on a host of similar matters and not until then can he enjoy the story. It is this willingness to suspend disbelief which makes a science fiction reader. The great majority are unwilling to meet the author on his own ground and they, with reason, cannot see any sense or satisfaction in science fiction at all.

Even in our own field we get the different degrees of reader co-operation. Astounding Science Fiction is so specialised as regards story content, and it demands so much from its readers, that quite a few people who can enjoy other magazines find Astounding unreadable. Many authors have devised what almost amounts to a shorthand. They mention FTL and leave it at that. The veteran reader knows they are talking about faster-than-light drives and they know the reason for it. Outsiders do not understand and they become irritated because of that.

Remembering that the job of the author is to communicate then, to those readers, those authors have failed in their job.

And, if science fiction is to survive and grow into a recognised form of literature, it is those readers to whom we have to look.

Writing science fiction can be a tremendous amount of fun and, since almost every avid reader will, sooner or later, try his or her hand at a story, we shouldn't have to worry about a plentiful supply of good material.

Unfortunately, we are also up against the fact of the rising spiral of desirable standard. This is an excellent thing from the standpoint of the reader - he wants the best that is going, but it does mean that the would-be author has to work that much harder to get into print. And that, too, is a good thing - if the potential author has what it takes to make the grade.

Some have, that is the only way to account for the high percentage of reader-turned author in the field. But, and we have to face it, it is a small field. In small fields, it isn't hard to become a big fish in a small pond. What we want are big fishes in a big pond and the only way to get it is to increase the field. Which means more and better stories from more and better authors.

And the authors will have to come from the readership we have at present.

Now, it isn't hard to write. Every reader has that ability and every reader has a groundwork in what science fiction is, wants, and can use. Everyone who has written a holiday letter has, in effect, written a story. He has glossed over the low-spots, accentuated the high-points, fictionalised a little in order to gain drama and all the rest of it. This is done subconsciously whenever we write anything to anyone. No-one has ever written a completely honest letter - and fiction is not honest reporting. In fact, no-one has ever done any honest reporting - the best they can do is to report honestly what is told to them.

Saying that you always write honest letters is like saying that you invariably speak the truth. You are dishonest when you say it.

So everyone who isn't illiterate can write. But saying that isn't the same as saying they can write well.

It would be interesting to know just how many science fiction readers have flung down a magazine in disgust and sworn that they could do better than this crud!



It would be even more interesting to know just how many have tried and learned the hard way that it isn't as easy as it seems.

But the ability to write a readable story isn't an inborn talent. It has to be acquired. It has to be learned. And the best way to learn to write - is to write. In fact, it is the only way.

Every story has to start, of course, and it isn't always easy to find a beginning. The beginning is very important, far more important than at first seems the case, but the reason is obvious. If the opening does not make the reader want to continue, then the rest of the story is a waste. Because of this, a short while ago as these things are dated, the hook-line was all the rage. A hook-line is just what it implies, a beginning which is so startling that the reader just can't help carrying on to find out what it is all about. The most well-known such beginning is that used by Lewis Padgett in his Fairy Chessmen:-

The doorknob opened a blue eye and looked at him.

Now a hook-line can be anything - the more startling the better. The sole purpose being to attract, and hold, the attention of the reader. Rarely used now, none can mourn their passing. Use of the hook-line is similar to beating a man across the face so as to make him look at you. There are less violent ways.

Dialogue is also important. Dialogue is what the characters say to each other. It is talk and, as such, should be natural. The following example is one of the worst manners of treating dialogue. It is artificial and loaded with padding:-

"Space!", growled Mark. "The Ginzmos!"

"Where?" yelled Sam. His face whitened as he stared at the screen. He drove a hand through his hair.

"Can we escape?" husked Lorna. Her eyes had grown until they seemed to fill half her face.

"I doubt it", groaned Mark. "I ..."

"You mean that there's no hope?" gritted Sam.

"There must be hope", whispered Lorna.

"We're surrounded", snapped Mark.

"But there must be a way out", hit Sam.

"None", barked Mark. He snarled at the screen.

Lorna jerked towards the radio.

"Let's call them", she hissed. "Let's try the ..."

"Impossible", squealed Sam.

"Impossible", echoed Mark. "There's no hope."

And so on and so on and so on. Growls, yelps, husks, groans, grits.

whimpers, snaps, bites, barks, hisses, squeals, echoes - everything but plain, honest sayings. From the dialogue it would be a natural error for the reader to assume that the crew was composed of animal life.

Together with the animal chorus come the nervous twitches. Characters are always rubbing their chins, pulling their ears, rumpling their hair, scratching, jerking, jumping, springing, all the rest of it. They jerk from their seat and growl an order. They spring to the control panel and bark a warning. They hiss threats, snarl defiance, grit promises of instant destruction. They are the worst type of cardboard character and they, their dialogue and their actions should be avoided like the plague.

We need neither mourn nor emulate them in any way. Reader-affinity is impossible with them or, even if achieved, only results in the reader wanting to twitch, scratch, jump, jerk, and all the rest of it.

Another danger when using dialogue is for one character to go to great pains to tell another character something he already knows. This is used in order to put the reader in the picture, as it were, but usually it boils down to obvious padding:-

"You know, John", said Mark. "We've been in space for two years now. That's a long time."

"Two years", agreed John. "I never thought when we left Earth that we would be away so long."

"Two years," Mark was thoughtful. "You with a leg gone and Harry left behind and Edward ... well, we know what happened to Edward."

"Shot himself on the way out." John nodded. "But it was worth it, Mark. You know why we left, it was to find new planets for all Earth's millions. A new clean world on which they could settle. What is a little discomfort when compared to that? We had to do it, Mark, you don't need me to tell you why we had to do it. With things the way they were we had to do something and ..."

John then carries on for the next page or so telling Mark just why they had to do what they did. Now this would be permissible only if Mark didn't know anything about it - as he does the whole passage is laboured. A better method to put over the information would be by author intrusion - that is, the author steps in and tells the reader:-

For two years the ship had travelled space and now they were returning home. Mark glanced at John, hesitated, then remained silent. Words, at a time like this, were unnecessary. They had done what they did because it was the only thing left to do. With Earth overpopulated, a new planet had to be found. They had found a new planet. The cost, when compared to the gain, was small. Harry left behind, Edward a suicide and John with one leg less than he had the right to expect.

It is, of course, impossible to be dogmatic about these things. Writing is not and should not be stilted - the trouble is that beginners invariably tend to use the wrong techniques or the right techniques in the wrong way. The most anyone can hope to do, when beginning, is to make his work at least read smoothly. No-one expects brilliant cleverness. A good story reads easily. A good story has a deceptive simplicity - deceptive because such a simplicity is very hard to get. An author, especially a young author, has to be constantly on his guard against letting his words run away with him.

It has been stated that a good story will write its own length and, from a purist viewpoint, this is true. If a certain framework is set up, certain characters introduced to a certain situation then, theoretically, the story will take just so long and no longer to relate. In actual practice, authors tend to write to certain lengths and they are wise to do so. A commercial short story for a science fiction magazine is usually not under 3,000 words in length. Ideas can be written in a hundred words - it takes 3,000 to turn that idea into an interesting story.

There are exceptions, of course, but stories well below 3,000 are usually vignettes, snippets and not really stories at all, not in the sense we are using the word. Upper limits are dictated by the policy of the market. Novels can be from a minimum of 60,000. Novelties in magazines usually have an upper bracket of 20,000. Serials, three-part serials, again are usually 60,000.

Length is a flexible medium and no editor is going to reject a story which is of a usable length - not if it is a good story. But it is a waste of time to submit 500 word vignettes to a magazine which does not use them. It is also a waste of time to submit a 80,000 word novel to a magazine which neither uses serials or wants them. It is up to the author to write his story to a saleable length. Contacting the editor is, obviously, the best method of determining what lengths are required.

There are also other forms to be observed when preparing and submitting manuscripts - or typescripts, as it should be.

The story must be typewritten on one side of quarto paper, and double-spaced. (Quarto is preferable to foolscap.)

Pages should be numbered and each submission must carry the name and address of the author, the length of story in thousands of words, the title and non-de-plume of author if one is wanted.

Return postage, together with envelope for return, must accompany each submission. In this country, of course, you use a stamped addressed envelope. For overseas, you include an addressed envelope and International Money Coupons for the value of the return postage.

Paragraphs must be indented and it is usual to allow three spaces after full stops, two after colons and semi-colons, one after commas.

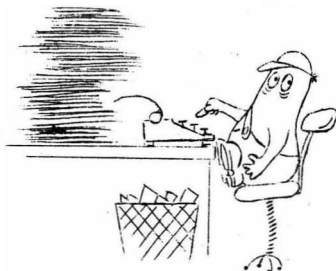
A surprising amount of would-be authors suffer under the conviction that,

no matter how they send in their story, the editor will both read and accept it. This just isn't the case. Unless a story is prepared in an acceptable manner it brands the author as an amateur. The percentage of amateurs who manage to turn out usable work on their first effort is way down low.

If the manuscript can't be read, then no-one is going to ruin their eyes trying to read it. Handwriting is out - it is a waste of time submitting a hand-written manuscript. For one thing, it has to be typed before it can be sent to the printer - and the editor isn't going to do it for you. The editor also wants to know the length of the submission - he has to fit it into his magazine. No editor is going to wade through a mass of oddly shaped pieces of paper and count the words one by one.

Word counting is easy when you remember that you only have to take an average. Using a pica-faced typewriter, allowing an inch margin on either side and typing double-spaced on quarto paper, you will, if you type 26 lines to the page, have produced an average of 250 words. If in doubt, count the words on several lines, divide by the number of lines counted, multiply by the number of lines in the story, and there you have it. But don't claim, say, 2,957 words - you can only find that out by actually counting each word. Amateurs do that, professionals never. Take it always to the nearest 250 words.

Ready to start? Then what are you waiting for?



# COMPETITION

This is a challenge to all would-be authors. Having read the preceding article the temptation to sit down and crash into the professional field is probably overwhelming. One of the things which will probably stop you is the desired minimum of 3,000 words - which is a lot of words when taken one-by-one. It is much easier to write at shorter length - say 500. It is good training, too for though a story cannot really be told in such a restricted space, it is long enough to discover errors and develop an idea.

With this in mind we are going to set a problem and offer a prize to the one, in the estimation of the editor, who has produced the best result.

To make matters even simpler we will give you a thing about which to write. Anything will do but, to make it interesting, we will chose an object with speculative associations. The object chosen is:-

A knife

It can be any knife, of any shape or form or purpose. The story idea must be of science fiction content but for this competition we will allow fantasy. One point, entries must be in story form, not essay. By that we don't want the history, manufacture, symbolic uses and ceremonial tradition behind, say, a stiletto. What is wanted is an idea, in 500 words, which contains within itself everything needed to make a story of 3,000 words. A vingette, in fact, something which, in itself, is interesting and entertaining to read.

All entries must be typed, double-spaced on one side of quarto paper. No entries will be returned. All entries must be received by the end of August. Potential writers must treat this as a professional submission to a professional magazine. All entries to be sent to the editorial address.

As interest the winning entry will be published in this magazine together with comments, suggestions, criticisms and advice together with a complete rewrite, if necessary, to show, by example, how a polish can be put on even so short an effort.

This competition is open to all members but no one member may submit more than one entry. The editorial decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered into.

The Editor.

# Films

J. Ratigan

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BLAZING A TRAIL TO THE STARS. (U.S.S.R.)

Production Co; Leningrad Popular Science Films Studio.  
Director; P. Klushantsev. Script; B. Lyapunov and V. Solovyov.  
With G. Slovyov as Tsiolkovsky. Runningtime; 40 minutes.  
Photographed in Sovacolor.

Beginning at the turn of the present century with the life story of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, an obscure Soviet schoolmaster who devoted the greater part of his life to investigating the principle of rocket propulsion, the film follows the progress of rocket research in the Soviet Union and elsewhere up until the present day Sputniks and incorporates also many of the early film records of German and American experiments. While records and documents relating to Russian research in rocketry show that they have done a great deal in this field, and may well claim to having been responsible for much of the groundwork in the future of space travel, very little of this is shown so that the layman may be forgiven for considering their claim as invalid.

It is not until the launching of the Sputniks, dealt with very briefly, that we see something of the achievements of the Russian research workers. The beginning is further hampered by the unconvincing acting of Slovyov as Tsiolkovsky who is not at all at ease in the part. It seems a pity that a country with so many fine actors to its credit could not have found someone with a little more acting talent.

From fact Klushantsev turns to speculative fiction and here he appears more at home, certainly the film becomes more interesting and shows far more imagination though, at times, one is given the impression that he is striving after dramatic effect both unnecessary and unwarranted in a documentary of this nature. This is particularly noticeable in a drawn-out sequence of the launching of the first manned ship into space, and, while he does not descend to the banality of a count-down, he seems to have taken it for granted that every other visual cliché ever perpetrated in space films is necessary for this type of scene. A series of excellent shots of the building of a station in space is followed by a 'Grand Tour' of the finished product. No

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clinical, utilitarian world this, here we find pile carpets, chintz curtaining, flowers and, in residence, even a smug, self-satisfied cat. One particularly delightful shot shows a member of the crew watching a performance of 'Swan Lake' on her television screen with the dark reaches of space seen through a port-hole beyond.

It would be tempting for readers to dismiss the film at this point as so much rubbish, but it has to be admitted that, viewed in this fashion, space travel becomes far more attractive than it has been hitherto.

The closing sequences deal with Man's first voyage to the Moon, first with a robot ship to circumnavigate the satellite and take pictures of its surface, and finally man himself. The film ends with the first landing. While presenting nothing new to those with knowledge of the subject the film does provide an excellent introduction to space travel for the laymen.

#### DRACULA.

Hammer Films. Running time 85 minutes. Christopher Lee as Dracula. Technicolour.

This version of an old faithful comes from the same stable as the producers of Curse of Frankenstein and, apparently, has been shot in the same locale. The photography is excellent, the actors, with the exception of Lee, are capable, but the very thing which made Dracula a spine-chilling book and a spine-chilling film in the old version with Bela Lugosi, is missing. There is no eeriness, nothing to make you grip the side of your seat, no sense of horror. There is blood, yes, buckets of it, but the whole thing verges on the edge of the ludicrous. And this isn't helped by the name part at all.

Lee is not sinister and bloodshot eyeballs and overgrown canines dripping with gore can't make him so. He is too suave, too handsome, too average. He is also, for any self-respecting vampire, too careless. Yet with unbolted doors and no attempt at guarding his helpless, sleeping form, he practically begs for a stake through the heart.

Peter Cushing as the know-all doctor is satisfying aside from his casual references to 'allergies' in 1887? The pictorial effects of young women turning to old women when stalked are gruesome and the make-up artist deserves a truck-full of medals for the final dissolution of Dracula when, trapped by the hero, he is exposed to direct sunlight.

But oh, for the sinister, the touch of the unknown, the Gothic castles and thunderstones and cobwebs! Maybe the modern trend is all for psychological horror but me, I prefer mine neat.

# NO NEED FOR CRAMP

D. Buckmaster

Many people are saying that the successful launching of a satellite has finished science-fiction; that space has been conquered and s-f is no longer an awesome and fascinating dream but a hard reality and that all space fiction now appears an anachronism.

This is like saying that when the Wright Brothers succeeded in getting a few feet off the ground in their first contraption, air travel had been conquered and no more speculation about it was worthwhile. There is no need to belabour the point that it was a far cry from this bundle of wires and wood to a super strato-jet of today, and nothing of its like was envisaged even some years after aeroplanes first came into common use.

Our puny efforts to throw a few pounds of metal outside the atmosphere have just about as much to do with interplanetary flight as that.

But this is not all.

The conquering of space is not the only legitimate subject for science fiction. What proportion of s-f stories so far have been concerned only with getting into space? So far as I know, nobody has counted up but, at a conservative estimate, I'd say not more than a third at the very most. Another third (say) has had space travel as a background only but the main theme a different problem.

Take the most popular and often used background : Mars. Do most of these stories deal with getting there or even the problem of surviving there? Very few with the former and a small number with the latter. Most deal with the many possible life forms, human contact with them and the physical, intellectual, moral and sociological problems involved.

Have all these fascinating aspects lost interest just because we have at last found the strength to sit up in our cot, throw back the covers and peer over the side? It's still a mighty big job climbing out of the cot, getting across the floor and finding a way into the next room to see who and what is in there



That still leaves another large chunk of science-fiction that we haven't even considered and which has nothing to do with space travel or Mars or the rest of the Universe.

There is time travel, the microcosmic world, dimensional speculation, future developments of present forms of society, psychology, biology, psionics..... the subject matter is endless.

If we all had to sit for an examination paper on the subject of 'Time' even our greatest scientists would get nought out of a hundred. For the simple fact is that not only do we know nothing about time, but we haven't yet proved that it even exists outside of our imagination. Here, then, is a vast empty area where we can build all sorts of fantastic mud castles to our hearts' content, secure in the knowledge that nobody can knock them down.

Psionics is even better. No s-f reader needs to be told that nine tenths of our minds are not being used. In the real world we are only just beginning to experiment in this field. So here is another deserted place where we can play around; this one strewn with the most interesting and queer shaped bits of building material which can be made into the most fantastic and satisfying constructions.

Who can forget such classics as "A Martian Odyssey", "Slan", "By His Bootstraps", "Last and First Men", to name only the first that come to mind. None of these are affected in the slightest by our satellites and rockets.

Just to make sure, I have (Between writing the last paragraph and this one) gone up to the boxroom, turned out 'The Pocket Book of Science Fiction', found "AMartian Odyssey" and read a few pages..... at least I meant to read a few pages; I started out standing there just intending to refresh my memory. Half an hour later I got up from a comfortable position on the spare bed reluctantly discovering I was on the last page.

Oh no. Science Fiction hasn't lost its interest yet. And it never will just as there's something about himself or the Universe that man doesn't know.

That should give us another lifetime or so anyway !

# THIS QUESTION OF CHARACTERISATION

L. Sandfield

For some time now the subject of characterisation has been thrown back and forth in discussions, editorials, articles and the like. Mainstream critics have taken the creators of science fiction to task on a charge of poor characterisation among other faults that it is said to possess. These will go by the board for now; they all add up to one thing. Science fiction is not like mainstream literature; SF novels are not like mainstream novels; SF short stories are not like mainstream short stories.

Neither should they be.

It is no business of the SF writer to, in any way, imitate the work of the mainstream novelist. The best of SF writers never attempt to do so. The pathetic attempts of mainstream authors to invade this medium have succeeded in making the devotees of SF laugh while gaining the contempt of those who stick to their own medium.

The same thing applies to this business of characterisation. In SF one can count the number of memorable characters, the equivalent of, say, Doctor Watson, on the fingers of one hand. I mean people like Giles Habibula and The Great Lorenzo. Gully Foyle does not enter into this for he was not a character in his own right, but rather a fleshy robot slavishly responding to the forces of his environment.

Right. That's a statement of theme. Now let's look, a little analytically, at what we've grown up with. We've grown up with a technological culture, ever in a state of flux as such a culture must be, and with a new art form with, like the culture it springs from, is also in continual flux. Now, make no mistake about this; SF is a new art form. A form which, as yet, has not quite ceased to develop from the stage of formula that precedes the crystallisation of a new art. A good analogy can be found in the development of Jazz.

SF has brought together the extempore yarn-spinning of the amateur story-teller and the formalism of the literary creative

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artist. That is the astonishing achievement of the science fiction writers. A lot of SF's creators do it for a living; or it is a part of their way of gaining a living. Inevitably a certain amount of commercialism has entered into the picture but there is no reason why good and sincere work should not be produced.

It should be clearly seen from this that the men who make SF are very different from those who make other literature. This means that the whole school of writing demands critical evaluation from a standpoint different from that of mainstream literature. From its own viewpoint, in fact. Writers who have not grown up with SF just can't go ahead and make a good job of it.

Therefore, logically, what the writers of SF know to be right when they do it, is a far surer guide than any mainstream critic who tries to tell them what they ought to do. SF has its own thing to say; the writers their own way of saying them and we, the readers, our own way of understanding. The business of a writer, so I have read, is to hold a mirror to everyday life. Why should it be? The job of the fiction writer is to entertain his readers, not give them a looking glass. Even if it were the job of a writer to reflect everyday life the job of the SF writer would be to extrapolate, not mimic. And here is where SF differs from mainstream literature. Aside from expecting him to entertain, no science fiction versed critic of SF would presume to tell the writers what their job is. It is tacitly assumed, and correctly, that the writer is free to do whatever job he wants to and, if it entertains, so much the better. In mainstream literature so much depends on the conflict of character that this is all important.

In SF characterisation is so secondary that it hardly matters at all.

Bester's Tiger Tiger is one of the strongest, fieriest, most impressive books that I have read. Was this because of the characterisation of Gully Foyle? I do not think so. Foyle was a raging, humourless, robotic *deus ex machina* who, at no time, acted like a human being. Yet he burned, almost literally, through the whole book and wrought changes in his environment which affected his entire civilisation. The book wasn't a matter of character-conflict; it was a war of opposing, elemental forces and its scope was wider than many a mainstream novel.

Take Childhood's End. This is an excellent work of SF. Where is the characterisation? Where the need of it? It isn't necessary and it isn't there. This story dealt with ideas and social matrices. It didn't require characterisation, the conflict necessary to entertainment was there without it. The strange, fragile joy of Childhood's End would have been ruined by the personality of any developed character. The brooding

tragedy of its climax depended entirely upon its cosmic impact on the mind of the reader and on no sense upon the animistic reactions of some overdeveloped characters.

Then, in an SF story, the precolonising team touches down and commences research, the important thing is not the effect of the team-commander's character on the rest of the crew but the impact of the new ecology upon the team's technological advancement and group psychology. The Voyage of the Space Beagle was far less a conflict between the characters of Kent and Grosvenor than it was a conflict between two different attitudes towards science itself. In fact Grosvenor was about the least developed angle character I've ever come across. Yet Space Beagle was a very good piece of work. Why? Because it was SF with no concessions to any of the watchwords of the mainstream boys. The episodes flowed naturally in and out of each other and each, in itself, gave a feeling of completeness and satisfaction. A legitimate criticism of this book would be just that; it is episodic. Right. That's where I can throw right back at the critics their contention that a writer must mirror life. For life is episodic. Each new friend, each new contact, each new dawn is another episode in life. Therefore a flowing novel with continuous development from chapter one to the end is false to life.

No. SF does not need characterisation to any greater extent than a swimmer really needs trunks in order to swim. It is necessary for the creators of SF to stick to a line of SF development not to vitiate the medium by crossing with elements more suitable to romantic playwrighting. This sort of purism is purism in its best sense because it does not seek to fix the art at one particular point in its growth, which, of course, would be fatal. But if you want to breed tea-roses then you've got to stick to tea-roses, not bring in pollen from a Rambler.

One might argue here that it is the interplay of ideas between different schools which make for artistic development, and one would be right. But right here, in SF, are several schools of thought and enough different markets to support them. When outside forces intervene too much in a young and vigorous art the result is, all too often, vitiation and fruitless dissipation of the new force.

So out with characterisation and literary construction and the whole business of traditional writing methods. If SF is to remain strong and remain SF then it must build its own tradition and interference from outside is unwelcome and unwanted.

So is characterisation!

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It would be nice to have, at hand and yet not taking up any room, every issue of every science fiction magazine, fantasy magazine and every pocket book, hard-cover book, article and amateur magazine ever published in the history of SF. Such a concept is, probably, within the reach of any millionaire but how many of us are millionaires? Instead the obvious solution is to borrow such material from a library and the BSFA library service exists just for that purpose. But with over a quarter of a century of publishing output to gather, help is needed. So why not turf out those old mags, books, pocket books and what have you and send them along? You'd be helping yourself and you'd be helping us.

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# NEWS & VIEWS

One of the things which has always struck me as slightly odd is the way in which so many first issues of magazines manage to have a letter column. How do they do it? One way, of course, is for the editor to write them all himself; another is to get his friends to write them and yet a third to trust that the small but vociferous group of those who always seem to know just what is happening, even before it has happened, will rush to the rescue. But, even allowing for all that, what can they find to say? Well, congratulations on the new venture are always welcome.

Venture was welcome, as a top-class companion to the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction it ran really adult stories and it with the usual sinking of the lower regions that we hear on the grapevine that it is due to fold. Science Fiction Adventures, the companion mag to Infinity has also felt the axe which is doubly unfortunate because Nova Publications launched a British Edition. However, knowing Ted Carnell, we can rest assured that he won't let far-distant events throw him off his stride in developing the field on this side of the water.

This seems to be a bad period for science fiction. From Germany comes news that Erich Pabel's Utopia Magazin went from bi-monthly to quarterly and now his Utopia Kriminal series has folded. The Krim series ran such stories as 'Sinister Barrier', 'Ice World', 'Syndic' and the like. To offset that glum news comes word that the Australian customs have taken a more lenient view of the import of SF mags. The American scene, too, shows the usual bubbling of the SF pot, what with changes of editors, titles folding and other titles taking their place.

Synthetic of this bubbling is Avalon's policy of not, apparently, knowing if they want to publish good SF or what. For no good reason they resurrect such items as Coblentz's

'The Blue Barbarians' which first appeared in the old Amazing Quarterly way back in 1931 and is re-published with only minor adjustments. Not that it isn't a good enough story of its type, back in the 30's it was considered to be a biting satire, but that was almost a couple of decades ago and things, including writing technique, have changed a lot since then.

Martin Greenburg of Gnome Press suffers a little from falling behind in schedule but his output, as regards quality both in material and price, remains high. 'Second Foundation' will be available again in the late summer but for those wanting a less expensive copy Avon have produced a slightly abridged version for 35c. This means that all three of Asimov's 'Foundation' books are now in pocket book form; two from Ace and one from Avon.

British hard-cover publishers are leaving the field alone though both Faber and Faber and Michael Joseph still have some titles, both original and reprint, in preparation. Gorgi has put out Arthur Clarke's 'Red Sands of Mars' and Panther the 'Currents of Space' so that we still have a trickle of reprints produced in the UK. Almost everyone, however, would like to see a step back to the 'good-old-days' when new titles broke out like spots in summer. Only a step though, and by that we want new titles, yes, rehashed crud, no.

Group activity within the organisation seems to be at a low ebb. Liverpool, taking time out from the production of films, tape recordings, and their eternal search for a modern elixir of life (strictly alcoholic) gathered a bunch of like spirits and investigated Brussels. Cheltenham, still, so I understand, working on their mammoth colour SF film when not investigating the possibilities of psionic machines, have been fully occupied with getting the library into working order. London, apparently still in numb apathy after the 15th World Convention, has done little but talk about the possibilities of finding a permanent place in which to hold club activities. From Claton, Manchester, Cardiff, Glasgow and other groups comes not a word.

New Worlds, looking stranglely American, with the new cover lay-out on the 73rd issue, promises to provide a stern contender for Asf's claim to being the most popular magazine and Nebula, still sticking to plenty of interior illustrations, is promising to become a worthy rival - friendly rival, we hope, with so few British mags there should be plenty of elbow room without the necessity of toe-breeding. But Nebula will have to get covers to match the contents if it wants to do full justice to Peter Hamilton's ambitions.

# AMERICAN MAGAZINES

## GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION

Ratings on a scale from A to E

### June 1958

Mars By Moonlight.....Flehr C  
The Gentle Unpeople.....Pohl B  
The Minimum Man.....Sheckley C  
Last Letter.....Lieber D  
Gun Without A Bang....O'Donovan D  
Perfect Answer.....Stecher E

### July 1958

Back of Our Heads.....Barr D  
Bullet With His Name..Lieber C  
Innocent at Large...  
.....P & K Anderson C  
We Never Mention Aunt Nora..  
.....Flehr D  
Man In A Quandary....Stecher C  
Blank Form.....Sellings B

Galaxy's art work has annoyed me for many a long year. It grates on my idea of what s-f art should be. The stories, on the other hand, never grate - they cloy. One issue of Galaxy is pretty much the same as another. They all have that same indefinable air of 'niceness' and righteousness found in Reader's Digest, without the propaganda of dragging in the Almighty to supply an up-beat ending.

Mars By Moonlight, very nearly does this, in detailing the life of a penal colony on Mars. Later on in the story, we find the colony is neither penal, nor Martian; but an alien survey method right here on Earth. What could have been a good story, falls flat when the 'prisoners' are saved by the miraculous appearance of a 'free' Earthman. They escape to freedom (where?) down a laundry chute, in much the same manner by which the Almighty supplies a happy ending in Reader's Digest.

Pohl's contribution defies analysis, other than to state very baldly that it concerns the impact of a tough spaceman on a very civilised civilisation. I found the story a sheer delight. One of those pieces of whimsy which Galaxy tries so often....the difference this time, is that Pohl manages to pull it off, and in a manner almost a blend of Sturgeon and Lewis Carroll.

Minimum Man sets an accident prone to open up a new planet on the theory, that if he comes out alive, future colonists needn't worry. A robot which compensates for his gradually emerging self-confidence, adds the remaining ingredient for a yarn of almost B standard.

Last Letter concerns the effect on some future postal system confronted with the problem of handling a real letter instead of



32 mounds of advertising matter. Another Galaxy whimsy, only this time it falls flat on its face.

The O'Donnevan deals with a disintegrator that is too efficient, it doesn't even bang. This results in unforeseen complications for the hero who has to test it. Luckily, he finds that not only do bows and arrows twang and hiss, but they also clutter the place with bodies, thus scaring away the opposition.

Perfect Answer brings up the evergreen theme of an all-knowing Oracle...This time, discovered by two spacemen. Naturally, this presents a terrible menace to Earth. Naturally, greed rears its ugly head. Also, very naturally, this yarn rates an E.

The July issue starts off with a peculiar yarn concerning an alien surveillance of Earth. Told mainly in a series of vignettes, the all-seeing intelligence finally loses itself in the manner of the Oozum bird...at least as far as I could tell. Anyway, it just ain't there no more.

Bullet with His Name, is another alien yarn. Once again, Galactic civilisation is within our grasp...if we are worthy of it. This time, the test is wrapped up in one average man, who is handed several unusual gifts. His reactions as he discovers these, form the basis of the story. Sad to say, Mr. Average man is a bit of a clot, and we just don't make it into Galactic Heaven.

The Anderson collaboration presents a Martian colony, so pushed for funds, that they have evolved many queer (and fascinating) ways of raising the wind. Still falling into the red, they decide they want a 'con' man to help out, and proceed to send an Innocent to Earth to lure one into their clutches. His method makes for interest, but cuts the props from under the story, as our Innocent is able to give the Earth sharpie Aces and Kings, and still come out on top.

The Flehr, is a dressed up version of the alien who tours Earth (and its maidens) leaving a trail of offspring behind. They turn out to be monsters (what else?). After detailing one angle of this grand tour, the story winds up by plonking the monster in your lap, as an ending. Oh Hum.

Stecher almost performs the old impossibility of producing a silk purse from a sow's ear. He lets us sneak a look at the letter of a rich man with a problem. The punch line is well hidden, and the whole fantastic plot almost believable.

Blank Form is an interesting Essay on how to find the true shape of an alien capable of assuming any. The solution is almost too obscure, but nevertheless logical, and very rewarding for the psychologist who finds it.

#### ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

##### April 1958

Basic Right.....	Russell	C
Revolt .....	Anvil	C
Pair Of Glasses.....	Stopa	D
Man Who Counts...	Anderson	B

##### May 1958

Special Feature.....	de Vet	C
The Question.....	Dickson	D
You Take The High Road...	Herbert	E
Fool Killer.....	Mullen	D
One -Eye .....	Rackham	D

Over the last few years, Asf has gradually lost its sparkle. It still rates as my number 1 s-f magazine, but mainly on its consistency. Bad stories seldom appear in Asf, but the same tends

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to apply to good stories as well. The magazine weathered the era of atomic doom, hurdled Dianetics, and is currently tilting with ESP powers. Somehow, the stories drop more neatly into their pigeon holes, or maybe editor Campbell has reduced the number of pigeons. Whatever the cause, the recent spate of 'Earth versus the Dumb Alien' yarns, culminating (I hope) in 'Basic Right' fully exposes this tendency to flog a willing horse. Russell has never really deserted this alien invasion theme, but until he discovered the selling power of the Dumb Alien, he did vary his stories quite a bit. With 'Basic Right', he plonks his aliens on an earth so united as to defy belief. From the word 'go', all Terrestrials act so much like doormats, that they only lack the greeting 'Welcome' in red, across their foreheads. Suspicious at first, the aliens soon get so accustomed to wiping their feet on Terrestrials, that after six years, they no longer have any doubts as to who is boss. This is when the doormats prove how united they are, by taking back their own planet in two pages flat. Sad to say, the Russell pitcher has made one trip too many to the well: only the fluent style saves it from a rate worse than 'C'.

'Revolt', by Anvil, who I strongly suspect to be a pseudonym of Russell, deals with a machine which fits its operators so well, they don't want to leave it. There is also a clash of wills on the staff level, between two old friends. Our hero, the typical, good, symbol-ridden officer also finds time to straighten out a brash lieutenant. The story winds up with one of those symbols which the Americans love so well....a pair of pliers. This means that any chain is only as strong as its weakest link, in this case, the securing bolt. This bit of gimmickery robs the story of most of its power.

Pair of Glasses is an outstanding example of the worst kind of sci story. Friend walks a long, long way to visit an old friend. Old friend then teleports a thousand miles to borrow a library book. This proves that old friend chose the right way to make progress, and mere friend didn't. Again, the gimmick. This time, friend sees better with a new pair of glasses.

Anderson saves the side, with the concluding instalment of the serial. A few loose ends float about, but not too badly. I particularly enjoyed the rich merchant castaway, van Rijn. He gradually emerges as the 'Man Who Counts', while the obvious hero never quite makes it. Some of the Diomedan customs seem a bit sharply defined, but even this is skilfully woven into the yarn, and gives us a bit of real s-f as distinct from the gimmick variety.

With the May issue, barrel scraping seems to have been in order. The de Vet yarn deals with a cat woman (Yes! in asf) prowling through a city, studded with TV eyes...the city, not the cat woman. Her carnivorous doings and final death form the special (TV) feature as moulded by a supervisor. The police seem either unwilling, or unable to barge in before the third killing, which happens to be of more concern than the previous

34 two. Even then, they have to give a deadline for their intervention. Pentizel, the cat-woman, in addition to her carnivorous habits, is also a telepath of sorts, and flew herself here in her own spaceship. Nevertheless, this formidable opposition is routed by the introduction of a mysterious 'Assassin'... 'a self appointed dispenser of justice'. Only a crack beneath Superman, he rubs out Pentizel, and the programme finishes. The story never explains why Pentizel came here in the first place, now how the TV ridden society evolved to the state portrayed here. No one watches it in the story apart from the producer and the police. The whole thing lacked realism, and far more suited to 'Action Adventures of Space' than asf.

The 'Question' again involved alien invasion, but this time the Earthmen are dumb. Why they fight to the death against insurmountable odds is the question puzzling the aliens... it never gets answered.

The Herbert, is one of those clever-clever, trainee and trainer efforts. Trainee misses all the signs, but comes out on top because the trainer is a good Joe after all, and after a sermon, hands out the boy cadets badge. I'd still like to know why ridge-roads, telescopes and playing fields owned by a horse-and-buggy culture can constitute such a menace to a galactic civilisation.

Fool Killer hinges on a punished murderer being proved innocent... He also gets killed, and resuscitated as a bonus.. He is then awarded one free murder as compensation. This award, made by a giant calculator, so scares everyone else, that they take the Boy Scout's Oath, rather than be on the wrong end of the 'free rub-out'. Reforms spread like scandal at a tea party, apparently under the assumption that getting it for free is worse than via a hired 'hatchet-man'. Anyway, all the baddies decide to be goodies, and you get the hint that it might be a good idea to dish out further free murders from time to time. If you get one, start with the author.

The Rackham, has been written many times before... usually in a lot better manner. The problem of a moron with psi talent. Naturally, he runs into trouble. Naturally, he doesn't get out of it, and of course, gets compared with the one-eyed-man in 'Country of the Blind' As usual with these pot-boilers, they pack up when the going gets tough.. this one signs off by One-eye killing himself.

Also in the May issue, is Part.1. of 'Close to Critical' by Hal Clement. Once again, we have a planet being explored by remote control robot, but this one raises a tribe of natives to help it. The story line strains, when two children visiting the orbital station with their diplomat fathers, get accidentally ferried down to the planet. Locating and rescuing them takes up the rest of the story. As well written as is usual for this author, but another sad case of one man... one plot, for once too often...C

Edge of the Sea .....	Budrys.....	D
The Tall Psychiatrist.....	Batschel....	C
Eve and Twenty-Three Adams ...	Silverberg....	C
There Ain't No Other Roads....	Warner .....	C
Intruder .....	Berry .....	C
Virginia .....	Kornbluth ..	E
The Game Of Glory ....	Anderson ...	C

Venture still totters with us, and regularly presents an unpredictable assortment of stories. Sooner or later, Venture will hit its proper stride, but so far it is difficult to say whether or not it will be good or otherwise. In the March issue, the Budrys piece deals with a 20th Century nomad who finds a barnacle encrusted rocket on the Florida keys. To keep it, he fights a hurricane and a State cop. In the current mode of flop endings, the rocket is reclaimed by the owners, and our hero tags along too, thus fading out the story at its most interesting part.

Tall Psychiatrist details the phobia of a man 4'10" tall, who always chooses tall psychiatrists for his tale of a near human world - you find out why, and wonder why you bothered.

The Silverberg attempts to appease the sex urge of 23 spacemen, by appointing a 'crew girl' who needs a bit of drug persuasion. Presumably aimed at the 'more sex in 3-f' brigade, it at least manages to take up several valuable pages.

Warner exhibits flashes of a van Vogtian approach, with this tale of a Galactic police robot, but the limited scope of the canvas also limited the story value.

Intruder is yet another annoying example of a story which ends at the point where the old masters were just beginning. An experimental FTL ship skipping around the cosmos, has trouble with 'alien-dream' contact. The pilots crack up. To end the story, the aliens break through, and start to come home with the rocket.

Virginia, is a real high-grade pot boiler. Rich young man inherits more riches..gets bored..GOM of business exile him to asteroid..Virginia is populated with 'self perpetuating virgins so rich boy stays there.

Game Of Glory brings back Captain Flandry, who squashes a rebellion in a setting which mixes 'Fury', the 'Zemba' stories and a touch of aqualung Clarke. Another of these action-packed yarns, but for once, Flandry doesn't seduce the heroine.

The

**BRITISH**

MAGAZINES

by Roberta

Wild

**FOR ALL THE NIGHT.** John Wyndham. This is the first of four novelettes which will eventually be published between hard covers. In this novelette we have John Wyndham in his John Beynon Harris mood of writing for this is more science-fiction opera than the "Day of the Triffids" style of writing. "For All The Night" is the story of a man (secretly married as High Command disapproves of such tränge) and his determination to prevent a "rogue" missile destroying the space station on which he is based. It seems impossible for John Wyndham to write a bad story but this - above average for its type - cannot be compared to the "Triffids" or the "Kraken Wakes." **RATING: B.**

**THE HOUSE OF LIGHTS.** Donald Malcolm. The author is fairly new to science-fiction but if this story is an example of his writing he can go a long way. It is not a masterpiece but a very probable extrapolation of the far future, in which operators (men who have had their emotions removed for their tour of duty) and empaths deal by use of electronic switchboards - with wars taking place many light years away. **RATING: B.**

**THE MACAULEY CIRCUIT.** Robert Silverberg. This young man is one of the most prolific of the American writers but he seldom turns out a bad story. This is one of his better yarns, although not one of his best. It is the story of a cyberneticist who loved his work and then realised what a certain circuit would do. It is what happens when man finally persuades a machine to re-create his own emotions thereby stealing his soul and leaving him only one path to take - extinction? **RATING: B.**

**TRACK 12.** J.G. Ballard. The best thing about New Worlds is that it prints stories dealing with all aspects of science, not just the spaceship variety. This could be called a mystery story, but the idea is the most original I have yet encountered. It's all done by microsonics and although we have the "mad scientist" (or one very much off-balance) the new twist lifts the story completely out of the rut. **RATING: B plus**

#### NEW WORLDS 71

**WASP.** Eric Frank Russell (Reviewed complete). This issue contains the last part of the serial "Wasp". Eric Frank Russell is a master magician with words - he can be unabashedly sentimental or have you chuckling quietly and then tense and on the edge of your seat. "Wasp" is the story of a one-man battle. Terra and the Sirian Combine are at war and although the former have the advantage technologically, the latter have more men and materials. Then someone on Earth conceives the idea that whereas an army can be seen and defeated one disguised agent would be as big a nuisance as a wasp and just as elusive to catch. James Ivory is the agent and this is the story of his adventure on the Sirian home planet of how he persuaded the Sirians to kill each other and created a non-existent

underground party to oppose the Sirian equivalent of the Gestapo. There does not seem to be a lot of background to the story, but "Wasp" is highly entertaining. **RATING A**

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**TABLEAU.** James White. The story of a war memorial - two, in fact. The one an alien culture received when it first came into contact with Man and the one received over two centuries later, and the reason why. James White with a fine economy of words makes one know that other culture and understand it, and know why it faced Man as it did. **RATING A**

**COMPANION.** John Ashton. The editor says that the author is a newcomer to the pages of "New Worlds" and I can believe that as he has made the usual beginner's error. This tale is the "oldie" of a space-ship crew touring the galaxies in search of life of their own type. It won't be giving anything away to say that the crew is, of course, alien, as it is obvious from the first page. Despite the fact that the author cheats "by hand was suddenly irresistibly pushed back my fingers were cold" - this is from the middle of the story. "I shudder, pressing the tips of my tentacles to my head" comes in the last paragraph. Both these remarks were made by the first person hero. **RATING D minus.**

**IN THE BOX.** Bertram Chandler. The author in a light-hearted vein. This is another story of the crew of the "Eupeptic Dragon" and how they persuaded their two telepaths to take part in a T.V. quiz on a "hick planet" and the interesting results of their efforts. **RATING B**

**ROUTINE OBSERVATIONS.** E.R. James. This was slow in starting, but once in its stride carried the reader along. The story of a guard-ship and its search for a number of escaped prisoners on a planet as big as earth and what happens when the Commander finds himself stuck with an ecologist who just won't think along military lines. **RATING B plus.**

#### NEW WORLDS 72

**IDIOT'S DELIGHT.** John Wyndham. The second in the series of the four "Troon famill" stories. Mankind has now reached the moon but remains just as senseless in other ways. This is the story of Ticker Troon's son, commander of the British moon base and of how the cold war suddenly became the hot one. It also brings up the interesting point that Britain will not become the second or third rate power that is the usual prediction for her. In this Michael Troon holds the low cards, but handles them like an expert poker player, fending off mutiny and pulling off the most gigantic bluff. This novelette reaches the level of the first "Troon" story. **RATING B plus.**

**ABSOLUTELY INFLEXIBLE.** Robert Silverberg. A time-paradox story and not up to the author's usual standard. The idea is good - sending time jumpers to the moon because of all the diseases they are liable to bring with them and the population is no longer immune. Here we have the impossible situation of a man coming face to face with himself.

and the problem just cannot be explained away because if the thing is carried to its logical conclusion the moon would eventually be overcrowded with the same man. **RATING C plus.**

**RINGSIDE SEAT.** James Brody. There have been many stories of what will happen when normal people find there are mutants in their midst and how the latter will be persecuted. This is the story of mutants who are supermen compared with homo sapiens (the mutants aren't monsters which is a change, for they are only affected mentally) and who then find they have to deal with a mutation of a mutation - again mental, for this time it is three dimensional thinking. And in between is what is left of homo sapiens. **RATING B plus.**

**THE WAYWARD SHIP.** Sydney J. Bounds. This is a charming little story, but more fantasy than science-fiction. The ship is named Katherine of Padua and takes umbrage at the new commander, who is obviously a spaceways Petruchio. Once the name of the ship is mentioned the story is fairly obvious. **RATING B.**

**ONE FOR THE ROAD.** Robert Presslie. This is a conversation piece, but the author puts over his point. It is a conversation between five derelicts sharing drinks and who are suddenly faced with a vital decision. The alien among us is not a new idea, but Presslie does bring a fresh and entertaining treatment to it. **RATING B plus.**

**THE STAR GAME.** Dan Morgan. An author who improves with practically every story. This story deals with how Terrans overcome faster than light travel by the use of Venusians who, however, are otherwise immature and are taught they are just playing a wonderful game with the Terran astrogator. Then an electronics man is sent to them as an observer and the "Star Game" relates his effect on both the Astrogator and the Venusian, the crisis he unwittingly causes and how it is overcome. The three main characters are believable, which is not so rare in science-fiction as it used to be. **RATING B plus.**

On the whole, No 72 was the most balanced issue of the three "New Worlds" under review and, incidentally, it has the most eye-catching cover (artist Brian Lewis) that I have seen in a long time.

#### NEBULA 29

**SOLITARY.** Robert Silverberg. Once more, Bob Silverberg is extrapolating on a future in which men rely too much on computing machines. This is the story of a how a machine, so logical that it cannot comprehend the random factor (Man), files a crime as "unsolved" and how a man who wants to some original thinking solves the crime and in doing so sees the appalling result of logical machine thinking. **RATING B.**

**SHIFT CASE.** Philip B. High. This is psychological s f. and deals with how a group of psychiatrists, who thought they had a case of possession on their hands, slowly realise that it is not possession, but a terrifying racial memory and the dreadful thin men will have to face when they reach out for the stars. **RATING B.**

**NECESSITY.** Robert J. Tilley. The plot creaks. I have lost count of the number of times that future over-population of the world has caused crises and the births of babies only at the expense of older members of society. **RATING D.**

**VERDIOT.** Robert Presslie. A story of how machines will run the future and of how departments will be so centralised that one does not know what the other is doing. The author has realised that, in a final and fateful decision, the instinctive illogicality of emotional man will never accept the logical decision of a machine if his whole life has been altered. **RATING B plus.**

**FORGIVABLE ERROR.** Stuart Allen. Whether the error is forgivable depends, of course, on whether the reader is an enthusiastic fan of swoonmaking morons who think they can sing. A story of alien possession - the laine thinks it has possessed a political leader and is horrified at his moronic outlook so does something about it. The writer is still in the tiresome stage of giving his aliens unpronounceable names - the names probably will be, but it is an outworn gimmick that only annoys the reader and is liable to distract his attention. **RATING C**

**THE TOUCH OF REALITY.** E C. Tubb. The story of soldiers on the moon and their struggle to get back to a main base when their own has been destroyed. The plot of the cold war becoming an undeclared one with most people unaware of it is not new, but the way the plot is treated can lift it out of a rut. This one is treated with "a touch of reality" - it could so easily happen, and it relates how an alien world can affect men who are prisoners in their pressure suits. **RATING B plus.**

#### NEBULA 29

**ADVERTISE YOUR CYANIDE.** Kenneth Bulmer. This story is frightening because it is what so easily could happen in the distant future through the wastefulness of today. Man has reached the stars and is now negotiating with their ambassadors but in reaching them Man has made himself bankrupt. But the ambassador must not know this nor know that Terran fanatics wish to have nothing to do with him or his world. Earth is poverty stricken and from tranquillisers and pep tablets has gone on to other drugs. The story is written in a style that conveys the feverish, nerve wracked world of an only too possible future, willing victim of Advertising and Waste. **RATING B plus.**

**GOOLING, GO HOME.** Robert Silverberg. Bob Silverberg yet again. A tale of men who live in the faster than light world where time is relative and centuries fo by in a few days. These men are set up as gods on primitive planets and then leave the worlds to make their own way



after a promise to come back in so many years. This tells of how a man regarded as a god, returned to a planet and found that the world had progressed to a point where it no longer needed him. A paradoxical tale of how failure can be regarded as success. **RATING B.**

**END PLANET.** John Kippax. A group of aliens and a group of Terrans investigate a planet at almost the same time. The aliens are ethereal and know something about the planet that the Terrans do not - that one death can cause many. The atmosphere of the world is conveyed very well and the author has clearly delineated the way of thinking between the aliens and the Terrans. **RATING B plus**

**MOTIVATION.** Bertram Chandler. In this the crew of a spaceship find themselves pressganged into service to help a colonial planet fight an interstellar war. The planet in question has been colonised by incubator babies who unfortunately all think alike and are losing the war because of this. And then the pressganged space captain has an idea that changes their thinking. **RATING B plus.**

**OLD MACDONALD.** Robert Presslie. Presslie again and still consistently good. The tale of how one man, opposed to political thinking forces the opposing politicians to agree to his terms. All logically worked out and very very possible. **RATING B plus.**

#### NEBULA 50

**JOURNEY TO THE INTERIOR.** Brian W. Aldiss. The writer makes another welcome appearance with one of his highly original stories - there seems to be no end to the plots his fertile mind can produce. This is good although not up to the standard of his "Non-Stop". The tale of a world where professional brains are the hierarchy and lesser people the slaves. Medicine has made tremendous strides, but because of this a doctor who tries to cure a man of hard radiation lets loose on the world the final stage of evolution and mankind will have to vacate the throne of master. **RATING B plus.**

**P.S.** Eric Frank Russell. Only just science fiction, but that master magician with words, EFR, can never fail to entertain his readers.

**RATING B**

**NOTHING FOR MY NOON MEAL.** Harlan Ellison. A story of despair and hope and the incredible adaptability of the human form. A man is stranded on a hellish planet and such is the instinct for self-preservation that he becomes adapted to his strange world, but not without cost to himself. **RATING B.**

**TRAINING AREA.** E.R. James. The story of a man who wanted to visit Earth and who could only do it by volunteering the penetrate the atmosphere of Jupiter, and how he is trained for this and his eventual decision. The description of Earth's ocean depths and Jupiter is very well done. **RATING B.**

**LONE VOYAGER.** Donald Malcolm. The theme is aliens looking for their own kind on a strange world. The error is making the aliens exactly like one of the earth life-forms which has already proved it is not built to fly spaceships. The author doesn't cheat - the clues are obvious - but the story if built on an impossible premise.

**RATING D plus**

THE YANTON JADE. E.C. Tubb. The theme of a wrecked starship is not new, but once more the author has shown how it can be given a fresh approach. Three people are left alive in the livable parts of the starship and one must die. Not quite up to the standard of the author's "Touch of Reality", but still well-told and it does what it sets out to do - keep a question mark in the reader's mind. **RATING B.**

THE COVETOUS. H. Philip Stratford. This is a combination of a "transplanted" thriller story and alien possession. It is the story of interstellar crooks, their planetfall on an earthlike world inhabited by furcovered humanoids, their desire for the alien jewels, of how they obtained them and never realised until too late the jewels were seeds which would destroy humanity. **RATING B.**

Of the covers of the "Nebulas" under review only the last one is good. (D. McKewen).

#### SCIENCE FANTASY 28

WEB OF THE NORNS. Harry Harrison & Katherine MacLean. This story follows the style of the defunct but very much lamented "Unknown Worlds" and would have been worthy of inclusion in that magazine. The hero is snatched into a parallel world because the Norns misplace a thread during an argument and this other world he finds his spirit and an explanation of the fits that have bothered him in his own world. The authors are to be commended for the "other worldliness" they have infused into their tale. **RATING A.**

THE LOCUSTS. R. Whitfield Young. This is a tale from "Down Under." It concerns an alien invasion and the accidental discovery of the weapon which will destroy them, with a sub-plot of illicit love thrown in which should have been thrown out - it wasn't really necessary to the development of the story. **RATING C plus.**

AN AFFAIR OF GRAVITY. Edward Mackin. Another tale of the author's rule of thumb genius. Hak Belov. This time he accidentally invents an anti-gravity machine, thereby confusing those unfortunate enough to be near him at the time. **RATING B plus.**

RETURN VISIT. E.C. Tubb. Ted Tubb in a lighter vein than is evident in his straightforward sciencefiction stories. If you want to know what happened to the magicians in the middle ages after they called up demons read this. **RATING B PLUS.**

THE CAMP THAT ONCE. Brian Y. Aldiss. I have never yet read a bad piece of writing by this author, but there is something about this pseudo article that seems to be just a little too nonsensical. **C plus.**

OUT OF CONTROL. Kenneth Belmar. The author is primarily an action writer and this little fantasy of the future is no exception. It concerns a man of the far future when psi powers are accepted as the norm. This man is one of a number of people who can levitate and like his fellow psis runs himself as a taxi service. If he had only gone to see about his aching teeth - but this would give the plot away. Read it for yourself and find out what happened to crooks who got themselves mixed up with a levitator suffering from toothache. **RATING B.**

**EARTH IS BUT A STAR.** John Brunner. This is one of the finest tales the author has written. The story is based in the very far future when many civilisations have risen and fallen and the people of earth have lost their burning curiosity to find out what is beyond the stars. There are exceptions, of course, and this story is of the exceptions who seek a solution to a problem they are afraid will destroy their beloved world. The hero is a combination of Odysseus and Hernu Penny, who was convinced that the sky had fallen. At first, he tries to find people to mourn with him at Earth's passing and he gradually comes to realise that he should do something concrete instead of merely regretting the destruction of the world. In his travels he and his friends meet strange races and stranger mores. The "alienness" of this distant future civilisation is beautifully conveyed and though at first some parts of the story appear distasteful, on re-reading it is found that those parts help to accent the strangeness of that world. **RATING A plus.**

**WHAT HAPPENED TO LODWICK.** Clifford C. Reed. Frankly, what happened to Lodwick didn't move me in the least. The story concerns a mutated sheep that can talk and its effect on its owner. **RATING D plus.**

**BLIGHTED PROFILE.** Brian W. Aldiss. This tale is set in the far future where the world is gradually being reclaimed from the effects of a devastating war. The style of writing gives the whole story a beautiful dreamlike quality that ends abruptly in a reality which compares the longings and gentleness of extreme age with the savagery of extreme youth. It also gives a grim warning of the effect that total war is likely to have on human nature. **RATING A.**

**THE CHAMP.** Robert Presslie. Here the writer has slipped a little from his usual standard. It is about boxing in the future and what happens when an android who knows all styles of boxing is matched against a human opponent who has learnt the style of all past champions of boxing by hypnotapes. There is an element of danger in this method which is revealed as the story proceeds. The tale is touching in places but maybe the blood and guts put me off. **RATING C plus.**

**FRESH GUY.** E.C. Tubb. Again, Ted Tubb is in one of his lighter moods. The plot of humanity going underground after an atomic disaster is old hat, but this concerns the being left above ground. The werewolves, vampires and ghouls are having a very thin time while all their potential victims are safely billeted half a mile inside the earth's crust and, of course, these beings have a Gentlemen's Agreement not to feed off each other. This is the story of a man who suddenly finds out he is a vampire and his meeting round a campfire with others of the same kind. One can guess what is going to happen to him eventually, but the story is extremely well-told. It could be called a comedy-chiller because when you read it you discover that in spite of your smile you hair has a sudden tendency to stand on end. Ted Tubb should write light-hearted fantasy more often. **RATING A.**