

— VECTOR — 13 —



VECTOR 3

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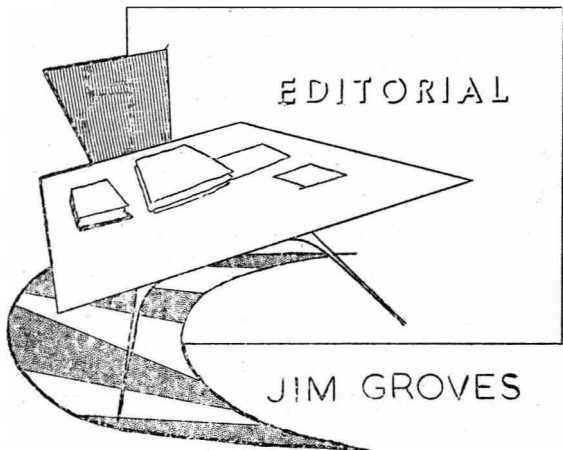
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WHENCE FANS?

One of the more interesting items from fandom in the last few months is one called "Why is a Fan?", published by a couple of American fans. It contains the results of a poll circulated to a number of fans and has some very interesting conclusions in it. But before I go into them I'd like to repeat a couple of definitions I printed in VECTOR 8 to clarify what I am talking about.

First Fandom and Fans. Fans are sf readers who, brought together by this mutual interest, correspond about it and other subjects, write for, edit and publish amateur magazines (fanzines) and hold annual conventions. Fandom is in fact a world wide group uniting people of similar interests. Fans are therefore not only sf readers but also members of a loosely organised group whose activities cover a very wide range of interests.

On the other hand by Readers I mean those people who read and enjoy sf but who do not belong to Fandom. Therefore one could say that Fans are Readers but that Readers are not necessarily Fans.

The ESFA contains both Readers and Fans.

And now to the survey. Fans have always considered themselves different from other people, possibly due to the attitude to their devotion to sf that was, and still is, taken by outsiders. Many suggestions as to what this difference consisted of have been put forward, some seriously, some intended humourously. James O'Meara, of Chicago, has spent some time questioning fans about their backgrounds in an attempt to find some common denominator. After

some time he produced what has become known as the O'Meara hypothesis - that fans are either first or only children. The survey that resulted in the above publication was aimed at checking this hypothesis among other things. It was, in that respect, a resounding success - of the fans who replied 87.7 percent were either first or only children. This figure is too high to be due to chance alone. What was not resolved was why this should be so.

Several suggestions have been made as to why this situation occurs. The one I consider most reasonable is that which says that first or only children are more likely to be heavy readers, hence more likely to discover and read sf, and hence become likely to enter fandom. I've not been able to find any surveys of the type and extent of children's reading that considers their reading in relation to their place in the family so I can't check this idea that way. The only possibility left for me is to conduct a poll of my own. This I intend to do. The BSFA contains in its ranks both sf fans and readers, and offers a good place to check this idea of heavy readers being firstborn.

With this issue of VECTOR the British members of the Association will find a postcard questionnaire - I would appreciate it very much if you would complete it and post it off. I'll go through the various items on it for your benefit.

Firstly the age group and sex items are; I think, self explanatory. The next item, family position, requires a little explanation. From left to right the positions indicate from oldest to youngest child. Mark them with symbols as follows:- B for boy, G for girl and an X to indicate your own position. Now to the details of collections. I've divided these into three - sf maga, sf books (including pbs) and other books. Please indicate which of the categories your collection of each falls into, with where possible approximate numbers. The final item is whether or not you are a fan. For this please consider the definition I have quoted over the page - and if in difficulties remember, if you are a fan you'd know it, if you are doubtful then you're unlikely to be one.

The results, when I've worked them out, will appear in one or other of the Association's publications as well as elsewhere.

Now I have great pleasure in announcing a sizable increase in the library. This is due to the generosity of one person, Sergeant Peter Chappell. He has been a collector for some years now but just recently he decided that since he wasn't going to leave the RAF in the near future there wasn't much point in collecting and just having the stuff in store, so he offered the lot to our library for free! Naturally our Librarian, Peter Mabey, accepted with alacrity, and received some 26 big cardboard boxes of magazines, books and paperbacks. Among these items were, for instance, all of Doc Smith's books in the US hardcover editions, all the issues of Fantastio Universe bar one and a dozen or so of the big US anthologies, and much, much ore. I feel sure you will all join me in offering our deepest thanks to Sergeant Chappell.

I have the results of the voting on the new constitution to hand - 19 votes were received and all were for the constitution.

SECRETARYS

REPORT

JOE PATRIZIO.

Hello again! Well, this time round your Secretary's contribution threatens to resemble a gossip column, rather than a report to the membership of a literary society. I have no really main item on which to base my article for this VECTER, just one or two bits of news that I think might be of interest to you, and even though some of them may be covered by our Editor, you might like to hear my point of view, anyway.

Starting off on a completely personal and self centred note, I will proceed to give you some details of the most important thing that has happened to me since I last spoke to you all. This is my engagement to Ann Temple, daughter of William F. Temple.... ...and you will all know who he is. I suppose that events leading up to my engagement started about three years ago when I joined the BSFA. Joining the Association brought me into contact with Ella Parker, our former Secretary, and it was Ella who got me interested enough in the activities of the Science Fiction Club of London, to come to London to work. And if I hadn't been in London four months ago I wouldn't have been at the party to which Bill brought Anne. So there you are, perhaps it's a rather round about way of reaching a conclusion, but you can see that I have at least one reason for being glad that I joined the BSFA.

As our Editor has probably mentioned elsewhere, a group of us saw our ex-Sec. Ella off on her trip to the USA, where she attended the World Science Fiction Convention at Seattle. So far we have had a number of letters from Ella, but very little information. All she says is that she is having a wonderful time, and is enjoying herself enough for six people.

It is slightly ironical that the two BSFA meetings held at Ella's prior to her going away, were the two most successful that we have had. Ella put a great deal of work into making these meetings a success, but unfortunately they were attended only by a handful of regulars and only very occasionally did we see any

other members. And it was to give members the opportunity to meet the Committee members who were resident in London, and also each other, that these meetings were started. With very few exceptions this aim met with little success....that is until we had those last two meetings. I won't attempt to name everybody who was there, all I will say is that it was a full house, and all seemed to enjoy themselves. I, for one, am looking forward to the time when the Friday night get-togethers start up again. We, at this end, will let you know when this is to be, and we hope that you will all take the opportunity to come along.

Transferring my attention to science fiction for a moment, I've heard that Ted Carnell is going to run a series of guest editorials in New Worlds. Bill Temple has had one accepted, and in it he deals with Woman's place in sf. In doing so he has something disparaging to say about Heinlein's seeming attitude on the subject. Which looks like becoming a trend these days...disparaging Heinlein, that is. In saying this I am going by what was said by Orville Prescott, of the New York Times, in reviewing Heinlein's new novel **STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND**. I have heard from other sf fans in the States that this latest Heinlein offering was even more controversial than **STARSHIP TROOPERS**, which would make it quite something. This opinion, however, is not shared by Mr. Prescott, as you will see from these quotes from his review:

"This disastrous mishmash of science fiction, laborious humor, dreary social satire and cheap exoticism."

This evaluation comes right at the beginning of the review, leaving you in no doubt as to what he thinks of the book. But this is not a review by someone who has no knowledge of sf, Prescott shows that he has done some other sf reading when he goes on to say:

"A Democrat and a Methodist, he takes a dim view of politics and religion in this country and expresses his sardonic opinions with violence and gusto in 'Stranger in a Strange Land'. Unfortunately he has failed to write an even passably mediocre novel and he has not come within light years of his 'Green Hills of Earth'..."

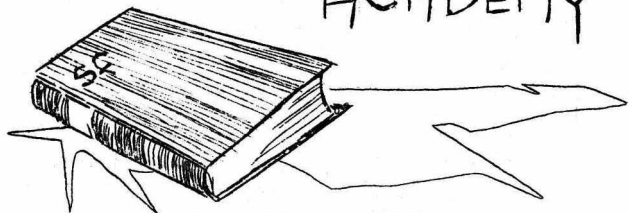
Nothing very flattering to Heinlein yet, and Prescott goes on: "...his satire...is singularly ineffective, crude and tedious. Mr Heinlein has little gift for characterization, a flippant and heavy-breathing style, a ponderous sense of humor and a sophomoric (High school, not college) enthusiasm for sex."

But Mr Prescott does not slate Heinlein all the time. No indeed, he devotes three whole lines to telling us that the beginning of the story is "adequate". However, in case anyone should think that he was going soft, he finishes up with:

"It is difficult to tell whether Mr Heinlein thinks that his monotonous variations upon an erotic theme are funny, or whether beneath all the verbiage and leering lubricity there is supposed to be some serious plea for the 'innocent' promiscuity of Smith's cult. In either case, much of 'Stranger in a Strange Land' is puerile and ludicrous."

"....when a non-stop orgy is combined with a lot of preposterous chatter it becomes unendurable, an affront to the patience and intelligence of the readers."

AN ALIEN IN THE ACADEMY



by GEOFFREY D. DOHERTY.

As a schoolmaster, a teacher of English to be precise, who happens to have a taste for sf, I have certain difficulties to contend with that would never occur to the average addict - whoever that may be. For instance, as a guardian of the moral virtue of the young and a custodian of the ancient monuments of Eng. Lit. I have certain responsibilities to the Establishment which make me very sensitive to some of the more obvious weaknesses of sf.

It is easy enough for the addict who is only concerned with his own amusement etc. to brush off or turn a deaf ear to those attacks on sf which deride and criticise such elements as:

- (i) obscene sexual elements,
- (ii) sensational overwriting,
- (iii) mere escapism,
- (iv) interstellar cowboys and indians,
- (v) lurid presentation,
- (vi) general puerility,
- (vii) vampire horrors, and so on.

The list could be extended ad nauseam. Of course, we all know such ideas are firmly based, for the most part, on ignorance. What I have to contend with in school, however, is the evil image of sf which exists in the academic mind. Evil image, note, not bad name. There are considerable advantages, financial and social, in having a "bad" name, like Brendan Behan, for instance, or the "Angry Young Men". It's a good thing to know (sort of) about avant garde stuff. Sf, unfortunately, is neither that nor on the O.K. list of Eng. Lit.

This is probably because it has never shaken off its associations with pulp magazines and those deliciously provoking, technicolour pictures of monsters, hirsute, tentacled, bug-eyed, dragging off some naked pneumatic wench to a fate obviously worse than death in a polyhedral space-ship poised for blast-off on some unlikely lunar orag. It is bad lifemanship to be caught scanning such confiscated titbits by the Senior Mistress.

Carrying out a bit of frank self-analysis, I can well recall the day when I used to smuggle tattered copies of "Astounding Science Fiction" or "Weird Tales" into a secret box under my bed. Except for the pictures they were very disappointing as pornography even in those days. Now "Astounding" has been transmogrified into "Analog" it conceals a decline in sf standards behind a socially acceptable cover in semi-abstract style. More and more sf is published in hard-back format and even finds its way onto the shelves of the more progressive public libraries. Penguin Books have smiled upon John Wyndham and are, it is said, soon to publish a new anthology of sf short stories. Despite these moves towards respectability, however, the image I have referred to still remains.

Regrettably, it must be agreed that there is plenty of cause for these reservations. For instance, what do I do when I find one of my girls reading a passage like this?

"She rose, and down about her in a cascade fell the squirming scarlet of - of what grew upon her head. It fell in a long alive cloak to her bare feet on the floor, hiding her in a dreadful, wet, writhing life. She put up her hands and like a swimmer she parted the waterfall of it, tossing the masses back over her shoulders to reveal her own brown body, sweetly curved. She smiled exquisitely, and in startling waves back from her forehead and down about her in a hideous background writhed the snaky wetness of her living tresses. And Smith knew that he looked upon Medusa."

It gets worse, much worse. Is this the sort of stuff to put before a young virgin of sweet sixteen? Of course, this is taken from a book by a well-known writer of FANTASY not sf, as any fan would complain when confronted by this criticism. Almost all horror stories provide a happy hunting ground for the Freudian analyst, but this book is described as Science Fiction in the blurb. Bad publishing helps to sustain the bad image.

Then there are certain stylistic weaknesses which recur with depressing regularity in sf stories, both long and short. The most irritating of these is the crushing platitude stated as though it were a philosophical profundity:

"What was the common factor?"

"I could give you many examples -"

"Wait a minute!" Poos halted. "I can see the common factor! Inferiority complex! Am I right?" He turned to face A'Kren, realisation lighting his eyes.

He smote his brow with the heel of his hand. "I'm a fool, we're all fools!"

They began to talk again.

A'Kren told him. 'Inferiority inspires greatness, through deformity, ugliness, failure, lack of stature, a thousand causes.'

The effect of this is somewhat akin to the bathos peculiar to sf, which is produced in those stories where a complex plot leads to a huge climax through which, you think, some new truth will be revealed. No such luck, the story turns out to be a gimmick, and all those interesting questions: who were the aliens, why did they..? etc., remain forever unanswered. Theodore Sturgeon, well-known in the field and no mean writer, commits this crime in a story called "The Golden Helix". We meet an interesting group of humans who are just waking up out of cold-storage after a long star-hop. Eventually they find they are on a new world at a very early stage in its evolution and, horrible realisation, they are hundreds of light years away from where they ought to be. Well, they were put there by the mysterious intervention of a super-race. How? Why? Any moment we expect a revelation of philosophical truth. It never comes. Of course, at the plot level they have been planted there in order to provide a productive seed in the evolutionary cycle of a new world. The most interesting implications are never resolved - very frustrating - and in retrospect some of the highly wrought poetic style seems overwriting:

"April said later that it was like a cloud....To Tod, the object had no shape. It was a luminous opacity between him and the sky, solid, massive as mountains. There was only one thing they were agreed on, and that was that it was a ship.

And out of the ship came the golden ones."

There are many other weaknesses that could be illustrated, as, for instance, a frequent descent into crudity or sentimentality when dealing with emotions rather than ideas. The supposed lack of interest in characterisation in sf is notorious. However, one of the most difficult hurdles for the non-addict is the plethora of bewildering conventions which the fan calmly takes for granted. Concepts such as psionics, hyperspace, stasis, time-warps, are gibberish to the uninitiated, but as common-place as radio and television to the regular reader. It would be quite easy to explain how and why these conventions arose if this were a treatise on the history of sf. Here, however, it is sufficient to say that too much reliance on this kind of gimmicky approach soon causes mental indigestion in the reader, and it is true to say there is now plenty of good sf in which they do not appear at all. At the same time, the general reader will not get very far with sf without a working knowledge of astronomy and general science - a point in its favour I should have thought.

I have tried to point out some of the particular failings of sf: it would be easy enough to dwell on general literary weaknesses that apply equally well to any kind of popular writing today. To be constructive is a good deal more difficult. Before we go any further, I think sf should be distinguished to some extent from fantasy - horror, supernatural, out-of-this-world by magic or pseudo-science. Generalising wildly, in all true sf, there is a

scientific or technological factor integral to the story and very often the story will have some sociological or philosophical interest as well. For the purposes of this definition, I would accept psychology as one of the sciences. The best sf today is closely related to Utopian literature and the old philosophical tale. Occasionally sf and fantasy have so much in common that it is impossible to distinguish them. Indeed, it is a well-established hardic function to convert mankind's inner fears and frustrations to legend and myth. This kind of material is easily debased, and in sf and fantasy, just as in any other kind of contemporary writing, some authors make the worst use of their material for the worst reasons: "Shamblau", "A Voyage to Arcturus", and "The Lord of the Rings" exist in parallel, so to speak.

Having trimmed and carped like this in deference to academic scepticism, we are left with a considerable body of worthwhile reading, of which, I think, Wells and Verne were the true progenitors. They were the product of an age. How does the imaginative man, agnostic but not unaffected by "those thoughts that lie too deep for tears", react to an age of scientific materialism? Who will deny the poetic element in, say, "The Time Machine"? This is typical. The future symbol refers back in some way to the present. It would be pleasant to expand upon the "poetic" symbolism of sf. We might just say, however, that the imagery of sf is drawn from a 20th century urban and technological civilisation, and is consequently valid for, and available to, an ever widening audience.

Perhaps my defence of sf has now become more clear and my reasons for its inclusion in the Eng. Lit. syllabus in school more understandable. Not the least important of the English teacher's many functions is to induce his pupils to consider themselves, their society, its problems moral and philosophical - in other words to become thinking human beings. Sf is frankly popular fiction with a high entertainment appeal, but at the same time it opens more interesting vistas than all but the very best in accepted literature. Many will go on reading sf - few will even start reading the latter.

Of course, one has to know where to look for good material and what to advise one's pupils to read. Personally, sf has given rise to some of my most interesting lessons - some excellent classroom dialectic, particularly in the middle school. Impartially, I observe its growing popularity, even amongst the forms I do not teach!

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by
BERT LEWIS

He looked rather strange as he stood by the bar of the country pub and, as far as I knew, he never spoke a word apart from the time when he asked for a drink, a glass of tomato-juice.

This he sipped slowly as if enjoying every drop and, having done that, called for another one. They were the only drinks that I saw him partake of during the brief half-hour he spent there.

If he never spoke to anyone, he made up for it by following the trend of the various conversations which were going on around him. He seemed to listen intently as each member of the crowd aired his views on his own particular subject.

In spite of the fact that he was apparently a complete stranger to the district, he never once gave any sign of being out of place. He was lithe in build, face that was as clear of hair as a full-blooded Red Indian, but with fine cropped hair peeping from underneath a close-fitting cap, hair that was of a tawny shade, contrasting against his skin that was pale, yet at the same time had an almost translucent quality.

His clothes too, were rather unusual, of a fine woven texture and seemed to be entirely devoid of buttons or any other form of fastener, almost as if he had been poured into them.

I tried to place him in the ethnological sense, but found it very difficult. He looked a fine specimen of humanity, and then,

with somewhat of a shock, I found myself unable to think of him in the same terms as the people around him.

I tried to get a closer look at him, to look at his eyes and the lines of his face. It was some minutes before I was able to get a direct view and when he did finally look in my direction I was able to see that his eyes were deep green, but the pupils were not those of a man, the centres were merely slits.

He must have caught me staring at him, I half expected him to show some form of resentment, but instead he gave the merest suggestion of a smile and then looked away.

I felt a slight embarrassment at this, but he simply ignored the incident and continued to survey the little knots of people grouped around the room.

No one appeared to take any notice of him as he stood by the bar slowly sipping his drink, but I could not take my eyes off this strange being, who had stepped out of the night into this little haven of friendship, so beloved by the local folk after their day of work.

It was whilst I was watching him with his simple drink that I noticed something else that gave me a mental jolt. As he lifted his hand to drain his glass, I got a good look at his hand. The back of it was devoid of the usual veins which mark most men's hands, the skin had the same quality as his face, but from the base of his fingers to the sleeve of his garment, the back of his hands seemed to be covered with fine fur, the same colour as his hair.

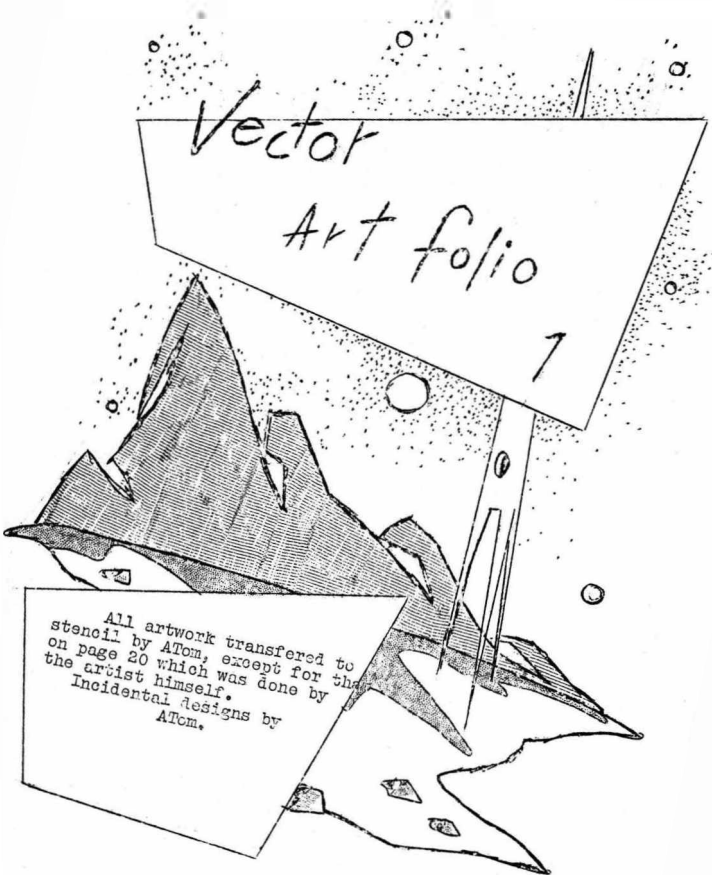
What kind of person could have such strange characteristics? I had heard of strange people in foreign lands, with hairy coverage on their limbs, but somehow, he did not seem to match up with anything else I had ever heard.

At that moment, he finished his drink, slowly put down the glass, then without hurry made his way to the door. As he did so he turned and looked slowly around at the gathering of people and then with the trace of another of the sly smiles he had given to me, he turned and walked through the door into the street.

For a few seconds I stood with my eyes fixed on the wooden portal and then almost dropped my glass of beer as it dawned on me that he had passed through the door without opening it.

EDITORIAL continued from page 4

And now to draw your attention to two recent sf productions from the BBC. Both of them start in the first week in October and both are serials. First is the television production "A for Andromeda" by Fred Hoyle. This is Hoyle's third sf venture and was scripted directly for television. It tells of the consequences of our receiving messages from outer space. The second is a radio production "Shadow on the Sun", and from the cryptic introduction it looks as if it is about the next Ice Age. "A for Andromeda" is on at 8.30 pm Monday, and "Shadow on the Sun" is on at 8.00 pm Friday on the Light Programme. Try them,

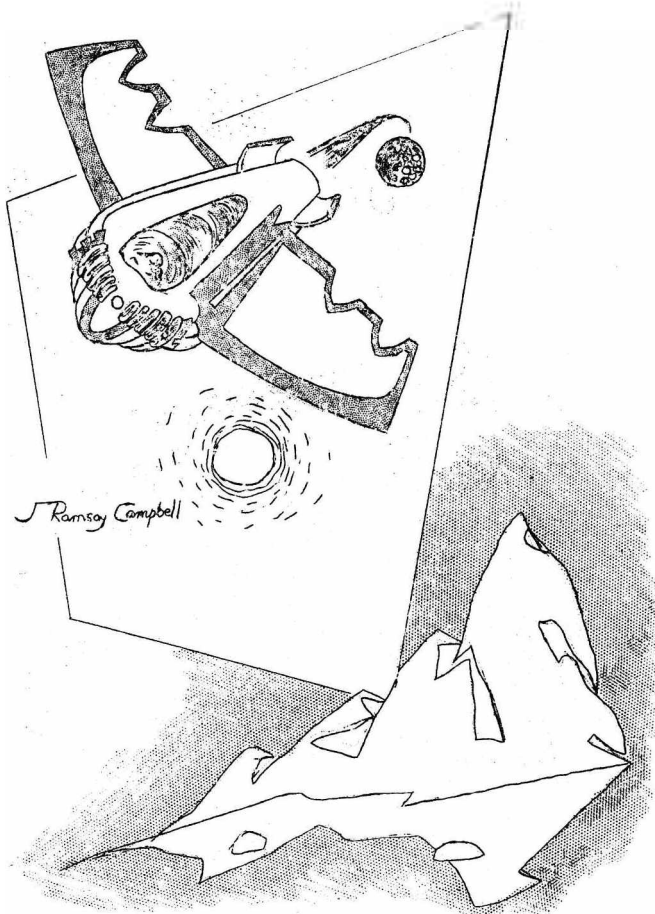


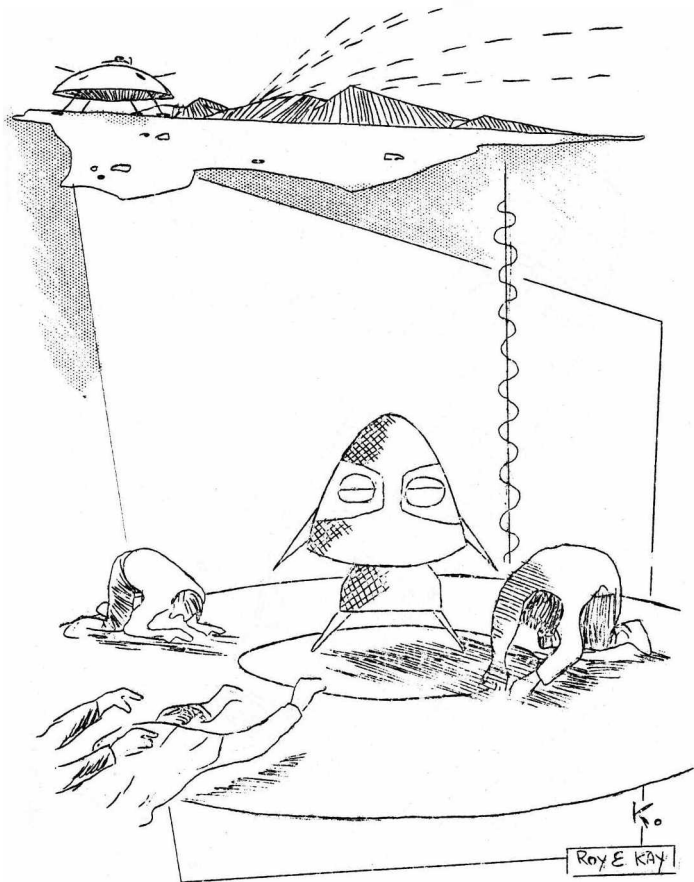
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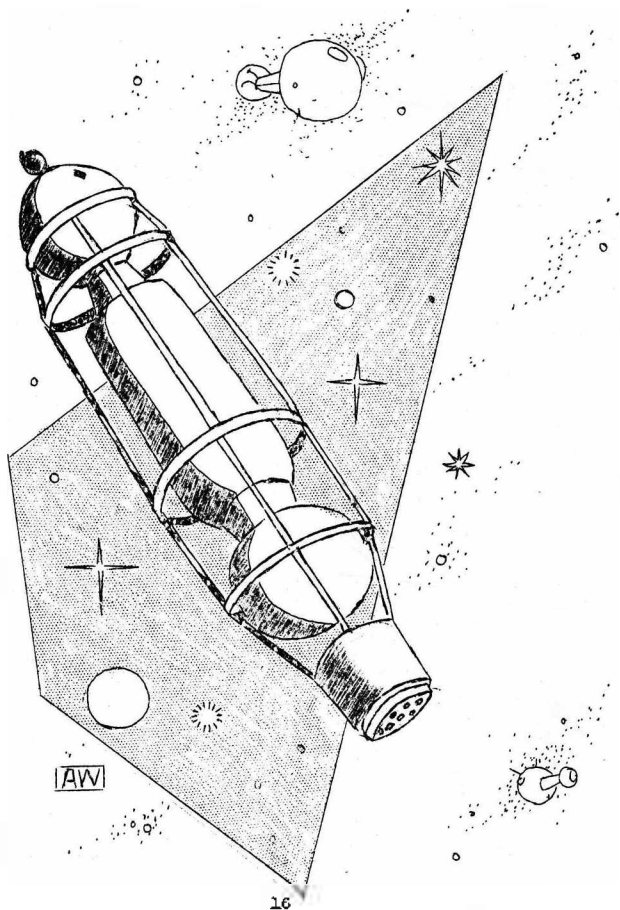
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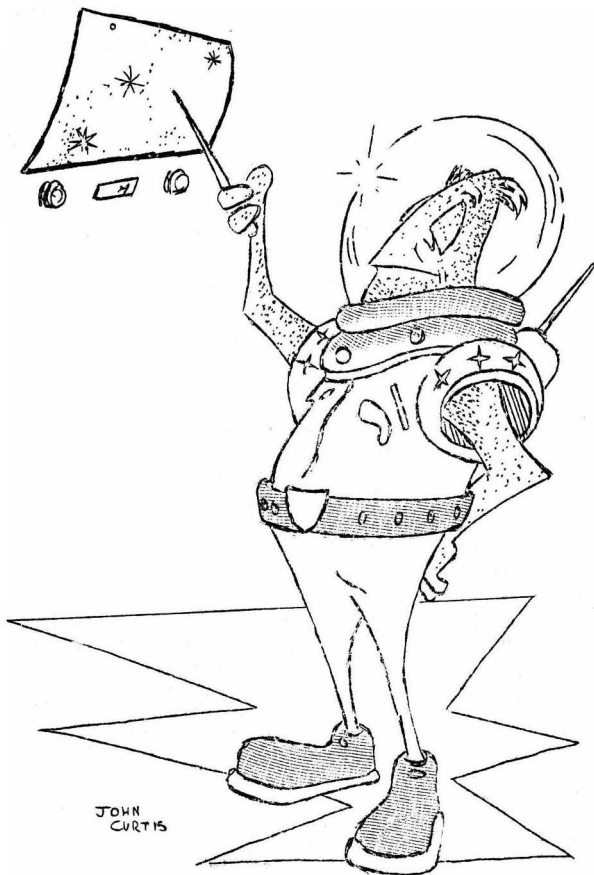
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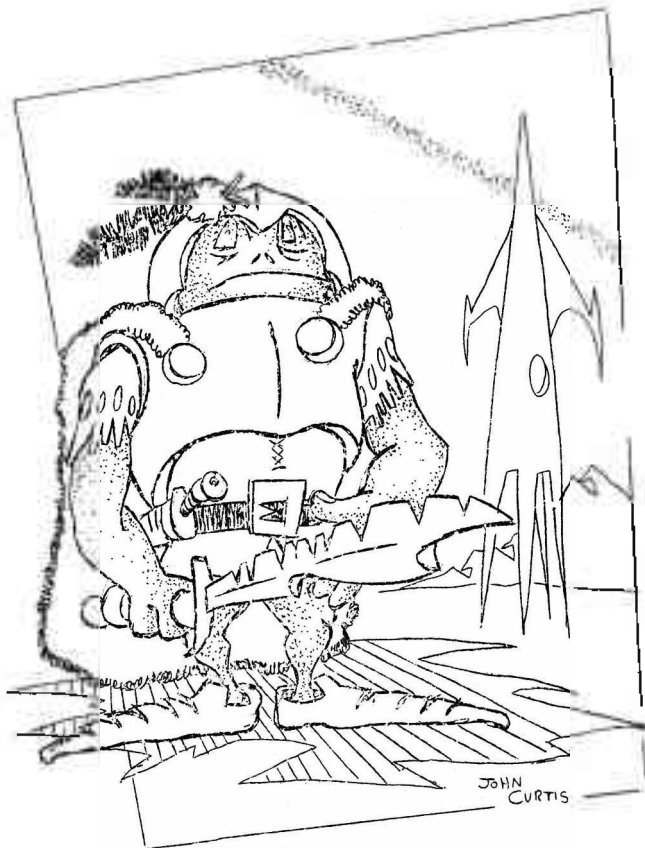
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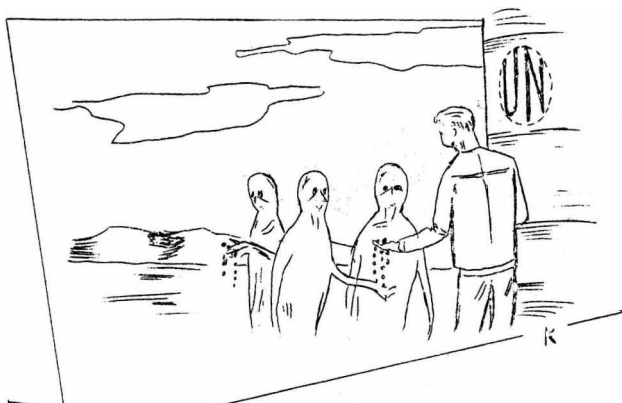








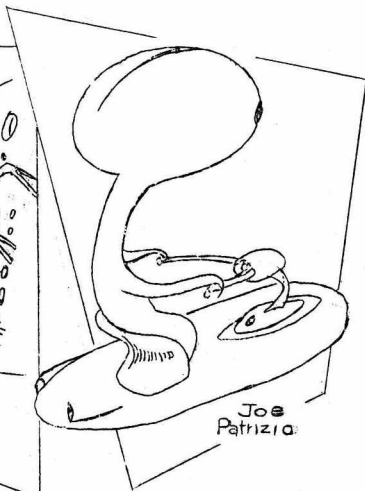
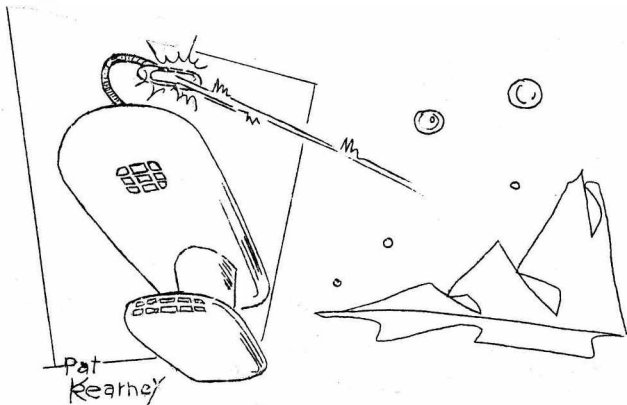




Harry
Douthwaite



FILE/INTRE





STARSHIP TROOPERS by Robert Heinlein. Four Square Books, 2/6d

This is the second-rate novel about which there has been all the third-rate talk.

Most of the comment I have seen on "Starship Troopers" suggests that it glorifies war. A careful study of the text (a truncated version of which appeared in F&SF) suggests this is not the case at all. Although warfare certainly enters the book, its chief subject - the one on which Heinlein works up his most delicious sweats - is the subject of harsh discipline.

Only by keeping this firmly in mind can any critic, amateur or otherwise, talk meaningfully about the novel.

The tale is told by Juan 'Johnnie' Rico. Because it is therefore in the first person, we must be careful to distinguish between Rico's attitudes and those of his creator, since the two may differ considerably. Rico begins by telling us something of his life at high school and how insulting his teacher, Mr Dubois, was ("He would just point at you with the stump of his left arm (he never bothered with names) and snap a question"). Rico blossoms under such treatment and graduates. After graduation, he and his best friend go to join up. So does a girlie classmate of theirs, Carmen Ibanez, although Rico is quick to disclaim her: "Carmen wasn't my girl - she wasn't anybody's girl."

Spurred on by insults and obstacles, the trio joins up for

two years. How do Rico's parents take it? "Father stormed at me, then quit speaking to me; Mother took to her bed." Never mind, Mother will pay for that lack of understanding of the male mind later.

So Rico joins the services and trains to become a Mobile Infantryman. Thus we lose our last chance of a glimpse at the world of 5,000 years in the future - from now on we are confined to camp. Our peeps at it so far have been hazy but suggest a world amazingly like the present, with Ming vases still miraculously surviving and a teaching system so unreformed that tyrants like Mr Dubois still flourish. We have learnt little of the sociological system, except that newspapers and cigars are still in fashion, and that you have to serve a term in the services before you can vote; or, as it says here, "the franchise is today limited to discharged veterans".

With Rico in training, we enter the main body of the book. It seems to me that the freshest point Heinlein makes in "Starship Troopers" is that however far into the future you go, or however deadly your weapons, there will be a place still for the infantryman. In other words, plus ça change... which unfortunately applies also to the training course; apart from the addition of a few colourful details - and a not able absence of humour - Rico's squaddie days are personally and boringly familiar to thousands of us.

We hear little of the other trainees. Sergeant Zim is the man who takes Rico's fancy, Zim the old fire-eater, Zim with his perpetual flow of orders, energy, and invective. "He described our shortcomings, physical, mental, moral, and genetic, in great details. But somehow I was not insulted," says Rico. Naturally he was not insulted; being disciplined and degraded were meat and drink to him.

This explains why we hear more about flogging than about Rico's equals. It also partially explains a strange remark Rico makes about his power suit.

The suit is a nice sf invention, well described and understandable; here Heinlein really draws the detail for which his admirers praise him. Oddly - and since his subject is not warfare I think also significantly - he devotes little time to the M.I.'s actual weapons; they remain far less vivid than, for example, the splendid armoury toted by the colonists in Harry Harrison's "Deathworld". Anyhow, Rico loves his suit - in a burst of sentiment he says, "If I ever find a suit that will let me scratch between my shoulder blades, I'll marry it." One reader at least felt that this would be a perfect match.

Grim day follows grim day. A glimpse of the outside world is afforded us with a letter from Mother ("A thousand kisses to my baby") and a far nicer one from old Dubois. For all his nastiness, old Dubois is okay. Now at last we have the explanation of his "snotty superior manner" - he too was in the M.I.

Even Zim has a misty moment at the thought of it.

Soldiering on, Rico is appointed to a ship and becomes one of Rasozak's Roughnecks. We had a foretaste of him doing his stuff with this outfit in the first chapter. Events become rougher. Rico signs on for twenty years. Despite what Father said on page 24 ("We're outgrown wars") a war is in progress, the Bug war, and Rico sees action. He loses his mother when Buenos Aires is smeared

but - well, hell, that's war. Far more wounding is when Rasczak himself is killed, Lt Rasczak, "the head of the family from which we took our name, the father who made us what we were."

After that, if anyone in the outfit did anything wrong, the sergeant had only to say "The Lieutenant wouldn't like that," and "it was almost more than a man could take". Even a big strong masochist like Rico.

It is nearly time to leave Rico, still learning "how to be a one man catastrophe". He is a Lieutenant himself now, and it's a stroke of luck that his name begins with R, so as not to ruin the old alliteration now that his outfit is renamed Rico's Roughnecks. More joy: Father has joined up since Mother was smeared, and wins promotion in the same mob, so that Rico can legitimately hug his platoon sergeant before they go into action...

We end with martial music: "To the everlasting glory of the Infantry".

I have said enough, and Rico too much, to show that this soft-centred soldier should have been recommended for a psychiatric report rather than promotion, and that from a Freudian point of view, "Starship Troopers" is a shower of hoarse horse laughter. Rico longs to be humiliated, searches for trouble and a substitute father figure, both of which he finds of course in the M.I. - referred to significantly as a "Paternalistic organisation".

Evidence shows that this was not the portrait of Rico that Heinlein intended. There is no sign of awareness (as for instance there was in that fine and authentically tough film "End As A Man") that this sort of military establishment breeds bullies and bastards and toadies; nor could there be, for the whole novel - whilst passing itself off as a semi-documentary by eschewing plot - is too far from reality.

Consider how much sentimentality has warped it from the truth in the scene where Rico fights an upish squad leader, Ace. They fight hard and rough in a locked shower and Rico is beaten. Fine. He comes round to find Ace reviving him and begging to be hit. So Rico hits him. Ace collapses and says "Okay Johnnie, I've had my lesson".

This does not ring true, nor does the scene where officers almost weep over a flogging they ordered. In the words of the old joke, these people aren't tough; they only smell strong.

Such fogging by sentiment gives us a very cloudy novel about soldiers. Here are the old cliches of the genre: the tough low able serge, the cub who makes good, the over-heated loyalties, the velvet hearts in iron gloves. But more tolerable cliches (i.e. cliches more in line with fact and the eternal verities of soldiering) don't appear. Such items as swearing, boozing, shirking, brothel-going, etc, come not within Rico's straight-jacketed gaze.

About the sf side of the novel, which is slender, I find little to say apart from what I have already said about the weapons and the powered suit. The two enemy races named, the Skinnies and the Bugs, are hardly portrayed, the latter in particular being no more than pulp BBS, there merely to provide targets. How should we learn more of them with a narrator as coldly inhibited against anyone or anything outside uniform as Rico? When he blasts a Skinny

building, "I didn't know what it was I had cracked open. A congregation in church - a skinny flophouse - maybe even their defence headquarters". It's all one to this ill-starred trooper.

Finally, what of that unimportant point on which some people have concentrated: is "Starship Troopers" pro-war? Purely as a guess, I'd say Heinlein wrote this in disgusted reaction against the soft aimlessness that threatens democratic countries as severely as Communism. He knocks over a pair of straw dummies, the old platitudes that 'violence never settles anything' and that 'the best things in life are free', but what's controversial in that?

No sir, this novel is guaranteed not to harm a fly, despite a few unhealthy mother- and father-things floating in its shallows. It's quite drinkable, but very small beer.

Brian W. Aldiss.

THE CLOCK OF TIME by Jack Finney. Panther Books 2/6d

Finney has one anthology to his credit already, published long ago in the US Science Fiction Book Club series, by Rinehart. To save you the disappointment of thinking this is a new one, let me say at once, it isn't. This is 'The Third Level', with the first two stories interchanged.

Finney has a tremendous nostalgia for the 'good old days', presumably the times of his youth .. a common-enough syndrome with U.S. writers.. and it goes along with a fervent fear of whatever the future may bring. It is seen, here, in seven out of the twelve stories. The neighbours who have fled back from the future; the friend who travelled back to the past from the non-existent Third Level of Grand Central Station; the candid fear piece about the clock of time getting out of joint because so many people hate the present; the missed chance to escape to an unspoiled world; the ghost of a man who took a wrong decision in his youth; the gem of a story about the air-plane flying cavalry-man .. and the restored antique car that went back to correct an old error.

Plus some fantasy, some very wry slants on romances between really ordinary people .. and a real mood hair-raiser to end with, of what happens to a man who let a piece of paper blow out of the window. You may have seen the way Hitchcock treated this, in one of his T.V. half-hour shows. Finney has the better ending, I thought.

Nobody does much, nothing very much happens, and there is little science, and even less attempt to explain, in any of these stories, but Finney has an easy, persuasive style, and a gentle, intimate approach that makes him very easy to read. The trouble is, this stuff is like candy-floss. A nice taste, but no good to make a meal of, no matter how much you have. This is a book to dip into, not to spend a whole evening on.

John Phillifent.

COSMONAUT YURI GAGARIN by Wilfred Burchett and Anthony Purdy.
Panther Books 3/6d

A difficult book to evaluate, as it tries to serve three separate purposes, and mingles them pretty freely and confusingly.

There is a briefly comprehensive history of Yuri Gagarin himself, with sidelights on his character, and comparisons with 'typical' Russians. There is a highly selective 'history' of Soviet rocketry, its aims and intentions. There is an attempt to relate and compare the Soviet ethic with its Western counterpart. Each theme, in justice, could fill three books, and each book would appeal to a different readership.

Presumably the authors intended to catch as many as possible of all three groups. It would have been an aid to clarity if the three levels of interest had been kept separate, and not, as here, mixed up any old how. The result is confusion. For example, chapter one is a graphic description of the 'welcome home' given to Ga garin the successful, the 'first'. Chapter two begins with an April morning in 1901, and the execution of Nicolai Ivanovitch Kibalochich, with a hint that he had written, and left, something that was going to set Soviet feet on the way to the stars. Then we are abruptly switched to Ga garin's pre-flight routine and his ultimate take-off. Chapter three switches again to a cursory examination of the reasons why the USSR is ahead of the US in this field, and ends with the magic of the name Tsiolkovski. Through chapters 4-7 we are taken on a tour of the growth and development of rocketry in the USSR, getting back to Ga garin by chapter 8. Then we are told of his youth, his advancement, his training, his experiences in flight, his interviews and opinions, all interspersed with political comments, and studded with his guesses (and others) as to the future. There are some attempts to speculate about Mars, Venus and points far-out. There is a very brief chapter on Soviet SF, making it out to be very muscular and realist, sternly eschewing any fantasy element.

It is anybody's guess who this book is aimed at. Those who have kept up with such reports as appear regularly in the daily press will find very little new here. Long-time SF readers will think it very ancient hat. Those who take a delight in the scientific and technical side of things will find little here but superficial generalities. It's a once-over-lightly glance at a whole spectrum of what could have been very interesting material. After reading it, you'll know a little bit more about quite a lot of things, but not much more about any of them. Which seems to be the general trend, these days. At any rate, it's readable. The illustrations are about what one would expect. The index is something of a frill, as this is anything but a reference work.

John Phillifent.

THIRD FROM THE SUN by Richard Matheson. Corgi Books 2/6d.

Back in 1955 and 1956, the English publisher Max Reinhardt made a brief and abortive entry into the sf field. Of three titles announced, only two saw daylight. The second was a collection of thirteen short stories by Richard Matheson and - woops, here it comes again!

For this paper-back edition, the title has been switched from "Born of Man and Woman" to "Third from the Sun"; otherwise it is identical even down to the misprint on page 184, "It had to be a group thought" (where thought should be "though", since this is

not a gestalt story), which has been carefully carried over from the hardcover edition.

With a zeal I hope nobody will think excessive, I propose to summarize some of Mr Matheson's themes.

Born of Man and Woman is written in the first person very singular by a child of eight who lacks conscience and is abnormally strong. His parents have even less conscience, keeping him chained in a rat-ridden cellar. A dog attacks this baneful bantling. "I grabbed the living thing tight. It made sounds I never heard. I pushed it all together. It was all lumpy and red on the black coal."

This extract illustrates at once Mr Matheson's theme and shortcomings. Madness, violence, insanity: those are his unholy trinity. To ask why the parents here never handed the child over to the authorities is irrelevant: the parents are puppets, like every other human in the book. Shock interests Mr Matheson, not people. He is, if I may say so, bored of man and woman.

And an obvious shortcoming here is that in his attempt to persuade us of the little monster's ignorance, he pretends it does not know the word "dog", although words like "coal" and "cellar" it not only knows but spells correctly.

Minor stylistic flaws? Possibly. Perhaps it is only a minor scientific flaw that in the interests of melodrama this child - born, as the title insists, of man and woman - has green blood.

Third from the Sun. An escape theme. The people are oppressed. "In a matter of years, maybe less, there's going to be another war, a terrible one". And then what will happen? Why, "In a few years, probably less, the whole planet would go up in a blinding flash." So the people with their kids escape in a stolen spaceship to another solar system - to Earth.

Get it? They weren't humans. When you read this a second time (i.e., when the punch line has lost its swing), you see how much more powerful the story would have been if the parallel between this world and Earth had been more strongly drawn. The story would then have had a function apart from its punch line - for instance, it might have shown that Earth isn't the only dump in the universe where war seems inevitable and diplomats aren't diplomatic.

Stand back for the lust-lumbered saga of Lover When You're Near Me. A longer story this, presenting the case of David Lindell, landed on a trading planet by a trading company whose previous operatives have always gone bonkers there, because of the horrible Gneez women, who are telepathic. The company acknowledges this trouble by leaving David for only six months instead of the customary two years.

If this company had really existed, they would have sent two men instead of one; or they would have read the station log in the main office - after all it must have been kept for the company's benefit - in which are kept all the gruesome details of encroaching insanity. But no. For twenty years they've let this loss of men go on without doing a thing about it. Why? For no reason; or rather for the worst reason, because otherwise the story would not have been written.

Anyhow, to David's growing disgust, he finds this Gneez woman loves him. She does a strip tease for him, a sort of "Gneez Up

Mother Brown". He flees. But not only is Lulu telepathic; she can get through walls! She does so when he is asleep, climbs into his bed and seduces him. He wakes to find his bed "warm and moist". Over to you, Sigmund Freud....

The story has a happy ending. David survives till the relief ship arrives. They take him back to Earth. "And they shot more sedative into his shrieking nerves to make him forget. But he never did."

Sturgeon might handle this theme with power. C.L. Moore did it well in her "Shamblesu". Matheson's weakness of touch is shown by the way (even given the initial illogic I have mentioned) he has to endow the woman not only with telepathy but with this absurd ability to sneak through concrete.

Mad House. The longest story in the book, and the best. Chris Neal is slowly overcome by his anger. It has collected in the walls and furnishings of his house and bounces back at him. It costs him his loving wife and - eventually - his life.

That Chris is doomed is apparent from the first page, and the sequence of events marches forward with a grand inevitability, unmarred by inconsistencies. The way in which the house turns against him is powerfully drawn.

F... has ingenuity. Time travel: Professor Robert Wade shuttles into the future and arouses disgust by the objects in his machine. He is arrested and interrogated by a police commissioner whom we find pouring over licentious postcards. It transpires that Wade has reached a time when, because bacterial sprays have ruined Earth's fertility, food has taken on the sort of salacious connotations with which the more proverbial Victorians regarded the sex act. The variations on this are many and amusing; the dirty postcards, for instance, turn out to be pictures of half-clad girls holding up lettuce leaves and tomatoes.

To Fit the Crime. Heaven knows where I parked my sense of wonder. I can't believe in a semanticist who says "Avaunt" and talks like Max Miller's idea of a poet: "Pouring your honoured blood into the sewers of commerciality", etcetera. Anyhow, this one dies of temper and senility and finds that in the afterlife his punishment - yes! - fits the crime! Totally negligible.

Nor do I ever want to return to Return. Here comes prof Wade again, larking about through time, only this time it does for him. His wife is resurrected from the dead and disintegrates before his open eyes. He escapes to his own time and disintegrates before her closed eyes. If this were transposed faithfully into a movie, you'd all say "Look at the way Hollywood mucks up sf in the name of sensationalism!" Friends, before I sink down baffled into the two and nines, let me set you one exam question on this story: "Discuss why Wade's time machine, out of all the time stories you have read, should be the only model fitted with a combination lock on the outside, and explain what connection this lock has with a) the plot and b) feasibility."

Shinshape Home. The last story and an interesting one. Ruth suspects the janitor of the apartment house of being odd or, in her own immortal phrase, "The man is a creep". Turns out that things are odder than she thinks. Her husband too becomes

suspicious because the rent is so low.

They investigate the basement and find engines there. The husband, telling the story, says, "I just stared. Engines, all right. Fantastic engines. And, as I looked at them it came to me what kind of engines they were." Well, not to keep you in suspense, they were space-ship engines and, before the story ends, they carry the house into space - as the title practically insists on telling you. And they knew they were right about the janitor when they saw he had eyes in the back of his head.

Van Vogt could have made this more plausible. It's not bad, but the clue about the rent being so low seems so meaningless. To suit Matheson's ends, these puppets would have been just as suspicious had the rent been too high. And how did the husband recognise the engines? He could have seen nothing like them before.

For all that, the moment when the engines start up and the people try to get away by the fire escape has genuine excitement. It's followed by a final irony, effective despite its outrageousness, that I have not revealed.

So. Those are the stories, and a blood-smeared lot they are. In this book, Matheson shows an absurd obsession with horror. His sentences are either flat and automatic or over-ripe. Only in "Mad House" does he write at his best; then, it seems to me, he is genuinely moved by the terror he has evoked, rather than trying to bludgeon the reader. "Mad House", in fact, has a viable and plausible horror-fantasy idea. And the other better ideas, in "F..." and in "Shipshape Home", produce the best stories. The rest are as empty of ideas as last month's matchbox.

Cannibalism, mayhem, miscegenation, tinged occasionally by a nodding lack of acquaintance with science... No, this seems to me, apart from the few bright spots I have mentioned, to be a dull and reprehensible collection. Whatever the opposite of 'odour of sanctity' may be, "Third from the Sun" reeks of it. To label it, as Gorgi does, 'Science Fiction at Its Best' is to relegate sf to a sort of delinquent kindergarten. Matheson's later collection, "The Shores of Space" (also in Gorgi) is much better - less immaturity, thud and blunder under control, great improvement in writing and fooling.

Brian W. Aldiss.

ADVERT.

Wanted - FESF Autumn 1949, Autumn 1950.

June, Aug., Sept. 1959.

ASF Used June 1948

May, July 1947

September and before 1946.

Fantastic Story Magazine - before Nov. 1952

Charles E. Smith,
61 The Avenue,

Faling,
London, W.13.

In some of the early issues of the fanzine ORION there appeared a column by a London fan, Doris Harrison. In ORION 12 she castigated fans for talking about space-travel and the like but not attempting to support it in any way. She continued:-

"There is one thing about SF, though. It does cover aspects other than space-travel, and one of them is ESP. That's a one thing we can do something about HERE and NOW. If you've read Fred Brown's "The Lights in the Sky are Stars" you will recall that a character named M'Bassi - the last of an African tribe, who became a Buddhist - reckoned that man could reach the stars by the power of the mind alone - by teleportation.

Here is something, I feel, that we can all take part in and I for one would like to start on telepathy experiments right now.

The idea is this: I have a pack of 25 Rhine cards made up of five sets, each showing one of the symbols depicted on the form. On the dates shown and at the GM time indicated I will shuffle and cut the pack. Then I will draw one card and try to transmit the symbol shown on it to you. I'll concentrate on it for two minutes, then take another card and repeat until I have taken five cards."

Among the results of this experiment was this article, reprinted from ORION 13.



ONE

I settled back on the bed, pencil and paper and clock at the ready and let my mind rove free. Away it soared on the wings of the wind....Hey! This is no good, I thought, and brought it back to Earth with a crash. Gotta be ORGANISED about these things. So I started again, deliberately fixing the Mercatorial mind on the matter in hand....

"Calling Doris Harrison," I sent out. "Calling Doris Harrison. Come in Doris. Over." And the echoes went ringing away through the ether or whatever it is that thought echoes go ringing away through. "Calling Doris Harrison....Harrison...Harrison..."

Gradually a definite Shape seemed to - well, ~~shape~~, what else? - form itself before my half-closed eyelids. Angularly it wavered to and fro - a harsh, zigzag sort of Shape with an occasional vertical feature. Half guiltily I opened my eyes and looked at the clock. Two minutes were up. I jotted down the fifth symbol as being the nearest, closed my eyes and concentrated again...

Immediately I did so the Shape came back, strong and clear. I looked at the clock again. No, the first two minutes were definitely dead and gone. I struck down the fifth symbol a second time then watched the clock lazily till the four minute mark. Then I closed my eyes again, concentrated, and WHOOSH! That Shape.

That night I received nothing else.

I was walking to work the next morning when I tumbled to it. I sauntered down Station Road as is my wont until I came past the last of the new bungalows into the open and - I saw the Shape again. There it hung, sharp, clear and definite in the morning air - the long, familiar row of zigzag roofing with the legend HARRISON'S MALLEABLE CASTINGS writ bold on the side.

I'd been receiving the Malleable Ironworks.

TWO

This time I was determined not to repeat the fiasco of the night before. So on the dot I settled back, closed my eyes and immediately started sending again; only this time I included 'Doris' in my concentration instead of over-emphasising the 'Harrison' as I'd done the night before. I was immediately rewarded. "Hello," boomed a powerful voice into my mind, "is that Doris Harrison?"

Oh, oh! A traffic jam or crossed wires or something. "No, it's not," I snapped back. "Who the hell's that?"

"Temple's the name," came the response, "but if ---"

"If you mean you're Bill Temple," I interrupted, "you're going the wrong way. This is Lincoln."

"Oh, blast and dammit... Hey, did you say Lincoln? Not that Archie Mercer character who lives in a caravan, is it?"

"That's me." And we were away on that plane of mutual bliss attained only through the intercourse of great minds such as those of a persevering author and one of his favourite readers. Three hours later we were still at it and Doris hadn't been able to get a symbol in edgeways.

Oh, well. At any rate I was getting nearer.

THREE

All the ensuing week I went about trembling in a fever of anticipation breathlessly waiting for the advent of Monday evening. At five minutes to ten that night I was a nervous wreck. Frantically I took my thoughts firmly in hand and forced them to concentrate calmly - CALMLY, DAMN IT - on the forthcoming session. At one minute to ten I was still a nervous wreck.

At ten o'clock I was TWO nervous wrecks.

"Hello, hello, hello," the first one thought, trying to beam itself the while in as southerly a direction as it could manage.

"Nervous Wreck Number One calling Doris Harrison... Nervous Wreck Number One calling Doris Harrison...."

"Get off the line, Nervous Wreck Number One," interrupted the other. "Nervous Wreck Number Two calling Doris Harrison - over to you, Doris - over...."

"Over like hell," N.W.No.1 retorted. "Over my dead body more like. Calling Doris Harrison..."

"Hello, there."

Both nervous wrecks pulled up with a start. "Hey!" said one of them, "is that Doris Harrison?"

"No," answered the new voice. "This is Chuck Harris, son. Who the blazes is that?"

"This is Nervous Wreck Number One," said Nervous Wreck Number One. "How the hell are you and get the hell off the line. Calling Doris Har -"

"Get off the line BOTH of you. Nervous Wreck Number Two calling Doris Harrison -"

"Grr." "Gertcha." "Drop dead."

"Did anybody call?"

"WHO'S THAT?" everybody shrieked practically at once.

"Tubb's the name. Somebody want somep'n?"

"Hey," said Chuck, "just the very person I was looking for. What's all this drip about Fandom Not Being What It Used To Be?"

"Well, is it? I tell you it's rotten to the core - nothing but Trufen to be seen whichever way one turns..."

"Yes," put in N.W.No.2, "and why pick on -"

"Shut up." "Turn blue." "Get off the line." "Take a powder."

"Oh, wrap up." "Calling Doris -" "give me the name of your undertaker -"

With a heavy sigh I cut out of the circuit and disconnected altogether, leaving the four of them arguing away hammer-and-tongs. For all I know they may still be at it.

FOUR

The following evening, ever the little optimist that I am, I tuned in again as usual. "Calling Doris Harrison," Isent. "Calling Doris Harrison Rhine Test, fourth session coming up - calling Doris Harrison. Rhine Test...."

Suddenly the ether was full of song:

Full auf der Stein

Mit besten Wein -

Klink ! Klink ! Hech ! - Fraulein !

Huh? I thought. What the ...? But it continued:

Trinken mit mir, verschlagen Schwein -
Der gut, rot, rot, gut, rotgut Wein

This, whatever it was supposed to be, was obviously impossible.
With difficulty I shut it out and tried again : "Calling Doris
Harrison, Rhine Test"

Trinken sein eigen, Klott, nicht Wein.

Ach - gehen Sie spring in dem Rhein!

Then I got it. Of course - the River Rhino! A slight case of
semantic maladjustment or something. But the singing had stopped-

"Was ist das?"

"Uh - oh - oh - das ist mir - wir geht's?" I stammered.

"What - who are you?"

"Was?"

"Oh, to hell with it," I decided. "You're not Doris Harrison,
anyway. That's who I'm looking for."

"Was is Doris Harrison? Wer ist das?"

"Oh - er - I dunno - schliessen Sie auf - dropen sie dead -
anything, only get off the line, Rhein."

"Nein."

"GET OFF THE LINE!"

"Schwein."

"Oh, I resign." And with a mental shrug in the direction of
Edgware I disconnected and switched off for the night. Another
evening wasted.

FIVE

Which left one to go. Strangely enough I approached this
final session in complete confidence. The series was as good as
over anyway; another ten minutes or so and my mind would be my own
again, no longer subject to the slightest whim of any suburban
housewife who felt the urge. So I settled down calmly and sedately
at the appointed hour, sent out my call-sign and - presto! I was
in! It was as easy as that.

"Hello, honey," came the voice in my head. "Whuffo'yo' call-
ing me?"

"Done it!" I exclaimed triumphantly. "Is that really you
Doris? Doris Harrison?"

"At your service, honey-child," came the rich, throaty thought.
"Doris Harrison in person. What ya' want?"

"Well - er - fine, splendid," I stammered. "Go on, then. I'm
ready for the symbols."

"Symbols?" The voice seemed distinctly puzzled now. "What
symbols ya' meanin' honey? Ahn't got no symbols hereabout. Ma'
man Henry, he plays the ghee-tar -"

It was my turn to be puzzled. "D'you mean - isn't that Doris
Harrison - Doris Harrison of Edgware, Middlesex?"

"Ah'm sho' sorry, honey. This ain't no Doris Harrison of
where-ya'-said. Ah'm Doris Harrison from Bunning Ham, Alebam'..."

"Uh - sorry, wrong number then." And I hastily disconnected,
cursing the lack of organisation that permitted more than one Doris
Harrison to exist in the world at the same time. Two seconds later,
flat, my invective was interrupted by a clear penetrating call:
"Doris Harrison calling Archie Merceer! Come in Archie! Over!"

"Er - speaking," I replied, a trifle doubtfully.
"And about time too," the voice continued. "Where have you been all my life? I've been looking for you for the past fortnight."
"I wasn't born yesterday," I quipped. "I was born two wee-"
"Shut up and concentrate. OK? Now got this?"
"What? How - hey!" I blurted.
"OK, got it? Now this then."
"No - I - er - what the -"
"All right, now this."
I collected my highly confused mind with an effort. "I - I'm not with you, Doris," I complained.
"Not with me?? You mean you didn't get those symbols I just sent you?"
"Not a sausage."
"Men!" she exclaimed, disgustedly. "Men! And it's ten past now - too late. If only - here, I can't stop, the kettle is boiling. I must fly. 'Bye - see you at the Globe next year."
And she was gone.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above it is with the greatest reluctance that I am forced to the inevitable conclusion that the Great Experiment was a one hundred percent failure.
I guess we're just not ready for it yet.
Or something.

SECRETARY'S REPORT continued from page 6

Well, there you are. That is what one critic thinks of Heinlein's latest. Personally, I don't know what the story is like, as I haven't been able to get a copy of it yet, but I thought a 'neutral' opinion would be of interest to you.

And all this goes to show only that you may think Heinlein writes all great stuff (like our editor does)...you may think that he writes well, but has a twisted sense of values, and a warped outlook on life (as I so think)...or you may just run screaming from his books...but you must admit, you have quite a job ignoring him.

Well that just about winds it up for this time. I will probably have something to say to you in the Newsletter, until then I'll say goodbye, but before I do I must remind you to write and tell us what you thought of this VECTOR.



Roy Kay, 91 Craven St., Birkenhead, Cheshire.

I like Mr. Carnell's suggestion about an anthology competition. It would be quite something if we could have such a book published, with say a forward explaining the work of the BSFA to the general reader. Pipe-dreams maybe, but it would be worth running the competition anyway...if the book idea fell through we'd still have some interesting conclusions on the types of stories most popular with members.

"Towards a Better Definition", John Phillifant's article seems to take up a rather strange opinion of the writer.

First of all, about this 'social responsibility' of the writer. Although I am as much against low-morality fiction as most, I can't agree that authors should be compelled to uphold and protect convention as he suggests. Granted there are types of fiction where this is essential, but there are also types of writing that demand freedom of expression and thought. That, after all, is democracy.

And if you are writing a story, science fiction included, it isn't often that the story, as it were, breaks free of you and solves itself of its own accord. Even if set in a necessarily

constant background, a story is still a part of its creator, and therefore will follow faithfully his ideas. This, in my opinion, was where the article's arguments went wrong.

Your own definition is one of the clearest I have seen, and it seems to work. Although fantasy and sf seem to my view to be very much divided from each other. A story about a three foot tall elf, and another featuring a complex scientific utopia, do not have very much in common.

Sf and fantasy could both be classed as 'imaginative literature', but their difference comes from the kind of imagination that is used. In the latter the range of imagination is a large and virtually unhindered one. In the former, although the range may be as large, the resulting concepts will demand logical rules to back them up...even if the logic and the rules are pseudo.

(* This 'social responsibility of the writer' thing seems to be encroaching on the recent "Lady Chatterley's Lover" case. For my part I feel that, given adequate protection of the young according to the current moral code, the writer should be unrestricted (apart that is from items like the law of libel). No organisation has the right to wrap saults in cotton wool - one of our greatest freedoms is that of making our own mistakes.

The examples you give are the extreme ends of the sf/fantasy scale - the two forms grade imperceptably into one another. Even fantasy must have logical plotting, the difference is that in pure sf the basic concepts are near to those of our 'real' universe whereas those of fantasy are not. Illogical plotting produces crud, often entertaining but still crud.)*

Terry Jeeves, 30 Thompson Rd., Sheffield 11.

Many thanks for the superlative issue of VECTOR. In spite of all the carping critics, this issue doesn't shame the BSFA in any way as a production. I wonder what those critics expect for their money anyway? Anyway, this issue was beautiful. Atom's stenoil work is a delight and joy to behold.

In the AGM minutes I was slightly croggled to see my name as BT Jeeves, I even began to wonder who the guy was for a while. Ken Slater I always enjoy. John Phillifent I agreed with most of the way, but couldn't see why he separated sf and crud as NOT being part of the same thing. Surely, a story can be sf and still be 'crud'. I've always taken sf to refer to the type of story, and 'crud' to refer to its quality. As for a definition of science fiction, many good men have scuttled on this reef. My own working definition is simple as I feel any comprehensive definition must be... sf must involve (to a greater or lesser extent) some scientific element or extension of such an element. That last little bit takes in psi, super-science, time travel and the lot... Can Mr. Phillifent think of a story that doesn't fit?...admittedly, he can no doubt think of many a story which fits and yet is not accepted as sf. Must no detective story take place on a cowboy ranch in Texas without becoming a Western? Or into which class would you put a cowboy 'tec who solves a murder mystery...Western, crime, detective..and if he uses a satellite relay for a 'phone call does it become sf? The answer is obvious; and about time somebody

stated it. Many stories fall into their niches with solid plunks and fit perfectly...but there must always be the borderline case, claimed or ostracised by many. Why should sf be different and try to devise a go- no-go gauge for itself....you'll not find a hard and fast one anywhere else in the branches of literature any more than you can draw a line say about figures..these are little ones, this pile of numbers are big ones, and these are whacking big ones. I is a little'un certainly, and a googolplex is a whacker but where do the medium efforts start and finish?...and the same applies to types of stories.

Incidentally, your own definition doesn't work at all as many a recent sf story concerned present day atomic power plants and accidents therein. Present day- no new invention- no new ideas..therefore not sf according to your rules. How about it?

Book reviews...agree with Doherty..Sturgeon shows increasing evidence of a 'dirty' mind.. or to avoid semantic arguments over 'dirty', and moral issues immediately after that, let us say he shows an increasing interest in off trail sex behaviour and commentary thereon not designed to appeal to most people who consider themselves normal..e.g. Venus plus X.

Bob Tucker's 'Fan Mail' was very enjoyable, and the letters a well mixed bag, particularly Andrew's Con letter. In other words an excellent issue. Keep it up.

*(** How about that sf story? Nothing in the rules says that sf must contain only sf. If Campbell wants to include some contemporary fiction (or even some fairy stories for that matter) I can hardly be held responsible.**)*

John Phillifant, 103 Clem Attles Court, London, S.W.6.

Thanks for the preview of your editorial. It was a nice gesture, at least. But nothing more than that, I'm afraid. You seem to have very carefully missed the basic point of my article, which is, quite simply, that it is impossible to define SF by content. That is, by specifying what it is about.

This has been obvious to me at any rate, for many years. The only reason I chose to make it into an article at all was because I got weary of waiting for someone else to say it. Contrary to general belief, I do not like thrusting my opinions down other people's throats, although it may seem like that, at times. In this case the thing is so obvious that, even now, I find it hard to believe that other s don't see it. It can even be proved, in a way. Like this.

Assuming, first of all, that SF is definable .. which is probable, since we all know what we mean by SF and argue only about the 'fringe' items .. assuming so much, it follows, also, that SF can be, and should be, about anything and everything, past, present, or future, here, there and everywhere. Just as in science itself, there are extremely few matters which can't be treated in a scientific manner, to some extent, and I know of a few authoritative purists who would go so far as to say that everything .. literally ..can be so treated. Certainly, there are very few matters of concern to every day life which are immune to scientific study.

So .. SF can be, and should be free to include everything and anything. The taboos which exist, and there are some, are solely the result of editorial choice, preference, and some nebulous ideas as to what 'the reader' wants.

Therefore .. and how anybody can miss this I just do not know .. it is impossible to define SF in terms of subject matter. It is like saying a dictionary should be a book full of words, which means precisely nothing.

In my article I have suggested that a definition might be arrived at by considering the treatment, or the form .. the way in which the subject is handled. This seems logical. I'm not claiming .. at least, I hope I haven't .. that this is the only way. I do suggest that it is one, satisfactory, way. One, furthermore, which includes all SF, crud, classic or space-opera .. good and bad .. and which draws a sharp line between SF, science-fantasy, and 'pure' fantasy. You may not think there is any clear-cut demarcation between these, but if you do go ahead and publish that opinion, I feel pretty sure you'll get a lot of letters telling you different. And, by adhering to that belief, and your form of definition, you run into the same difficulties that all the rest have met.

I see, for example, that you include 'magic' in your fantasy section, on the grounds that magic differs from reality. You might spend a moment or two defining what you mean by 'magic', and then wondering how you arrive at such a definition .. that is, where did such ideas come from, in the first place, if there wasn't some basis for them. And I happen to know quite a few authorities who would give you a strong argument about the 'reality' of magic. For me, at any rate, magic is that set of phenomena which happens (and I've seen some) but which defeats all attempts at explanation .. so far.

Still, don't mind me. You go ahead and run whatever you want. It should be fun to watch. I do agree with you that the discussions in VECTOR seem to die very quickly. Personally, I'd like to see VECTOR a monthly, and I can't see any good reason why it shouldn't be, apart from finding someone willing to make the effort to bring it out. There should be no shortage of material for it.

(* Your argument is good and logical John, but there's a flaw in your basic premise which throws it all out. If sf is, as you say, about any- and everything, then there is no need of a definition - everything ever written is sf. Actually the major clue is in the very name - there is Western fiction, Romantic fiction, Crime fiction and Science fiction.

Science is the self-consistent system of laws by which we think the universe is governed and upon which our interaction with the universe is based. Magic is likewise a self-consistent system of laws by which a universe may be governed - some people hold that our universe is governed by such a system (I don't, but that is neither here nor there). If you believe as I do, then magic is classed as fantasy - if not, then it should be up with the pure sf themes. You play your money and you take your choice.

Incidentally John is referring to a chart I drew up showing my interpretation of the graduation from pure sf to pure fantasy (with appropriate stories cited as examples).

Monthly VECTORS - well, after this VECTOR I'm only putting out one Newsletter between VECTORS (mainly to save postage and because there's so little to go into each Newsletter) and transferring some of the reviews to it - so that we'll have a six-weekly publication - maybe my successor will develop that further.*)"

Peter Gooch, 58 Mirador Crescent, Upton Lea, Slough, Bucks.

Nudged on by Mr. Patrizio's subtle innuendos about 'passive members' and having been privileged to watch VECTOR grow from it's beginnings, I thought I might be bold enough to make some comments on # 12 and life in general.

VECTOR itself, I find highly satisfactory, though I think the cover would be better with a static design, and any art work (which I would be only too happy to see) could perhaps be wrapped around the contents on the first page in - no offense to any artists I hope.

The only other thing I'm worried about are the book reviews. I like to read a good review and I agree that the reviewers should come from as broad a field as possible - but I feel that the real reviewing should be confined to sf that has for some reason or other made a splash on the market. Books or stories of lesser or as yet unacclaimed merit might be let off with a brief mention rather than a review.

Now to come to the point which interested me most in # 12, 'Towards a Better Definition'. I think both Jim Groves and John Phillifent put up pretty good arguments, but neither convinced me I'm afraid.

To say that a writer of genuine sf is unable always to uphold current social mores because he is governed by 'natural laws' (or at least his story is) is really a bit hard to swallow. Surely a good story teller in any genre is able to make ANY situation plausible and to direct the sequence of events to point ANY moral. Many good sf stories have been written about the future five to twenty years ahead. All have begun with a basis of 20th Century science and mores - common ground - but the resultant stories have very little in common, either in science or morals. So it seems that a given set of basic assumptions are open to a multitude of different extrapolations.

Going on to your (Jim Groves) well characterised arguments I would like to comment on each of your characteristics of sf.

1(a) and (b) I agree with though I spent half an hour looking for exceptions.

2 I think is unnecessary since human nature is seldom regarded as logical and even if it was then the stories would have to be logical anyway.

3 I'm afraid means little to me and the little it does suggest could be included in 2. But its a lovely phrase and I very much hope its not copyright because I think I might make it a personal motto - "the basic concepts of the story universe must be self-consistent" - de-licious!

4 Here again I can't really agree - I can understand that this characteristic would exclude space-opera - but the setting is often subordinate to the story.

5 Well this is a bit difficult - what do you mean exactly by 'arbitrarily acceptable etc'? We seem to be getting dangerously close to Mr. P's public morals and scientific integrity.

Still on the whole I think its a pretty legit. characteristic.

I think your classification is a step forward but it still leaves af awful cloudy round the edges.

*(I wonder how you'll react to the current cover? No, that phrase isn't copyright; I've always been addicted to this type of phrasology. It means in effect that you can't state or imply on page 4 that nothing can travel faster-than-light, and then on page 60 get from Sol to Sirius in half an hour. Number 4 doesn't necessarily exclude space-opera, only bad space-opera. It was designed with a particular story in mind actually. I have, mercifully, forgotten it's name and author but the plot haunts me still. It was a long distance lorry driving story transferred to space and the future, complete with highways in space, invisible 'mountains' round which the highway runs, cafe stops and pull-ins on asteroids and so on.

Number 6 is aimed at those stories where the ending is manipulated to give a result that will appeal to the reader contrary to the logic of the plot. The best example I can think of off hand is the contrast between the book and film versions of 1984. In the book Big Brother triumphs whilst in the film Smith repents of his conversion and dies with Julia, defiant to the last. Incidentally I gather there were two endings made, one upbeat the other downbeat, we got the up beat one and America got the other. I wonder why?)*

Archio Mercer, 454/4 Newark: 1984 North Hakeham, Lincoln.

I'll just tear briefly into Phillifent's piece. I presume that somebody so obviously intelligent as he is would not make such a hassle of misleading statements without some reason, I further assume that the reason is to draw comment, herewith my one bit's worth. (I haven't time for two).

However one attempts to define it (if at all, natch), surely the term "science fiction" (not to mention any other term at all) must be held to include both good and bad examples. A story is "science fiction" if it's written in what is generally accepted as the "science fiction" idiom, whether or not it happens to be worth reading is beside the point. (As to this, the question as to whether or not any story is "worth reading" can depend on such an imponderable as the fact that somebody may have already, unbeknown to the author, written another story on the same idea).

"Society has a right to demand that the writer will protect and uphold conventions" - society may on occasion THINK it has such a right, but must be strenuously opposed in any attempt to exercise it.

"In sf, once the basic postulates are made, the invention duly invented, the discovery made (etc) the plot action must proceed according to 'natural' law....This, strictly, is the one thing which sets sf apart from all other fiction...."

The above being another Phillifent quote. Consider a possibly typical love story. The protagonist (female) loves Man A and he returns her love, but due to circumstances beyond her control she

looks like having to marry Man B instead. Right, where do we go from there? It is a basic postulate of that kind of story that True Love always wins in the end. Therefore, perfectly logically, whatever may happen in the middle, by the end of the volume the protagonist is definitely and irrevocably paired off with her own True Love, Man A.

That's just one instance. (Hypothetical, I might add). But surely once characters have been postulated, their circumstances delineated and like that, ANY type of story could be held to require them to "proceed according to 'natural' law", to react to their circumstances as their individual characterisation dictates, and to succeed or fail according to the reaction of all the various postulates together. They may not in any given case appear to actually DO this, and probably don't - but ideally they SHOULD.

*(* But True Love stories aren't sf. *) *

WEALS HEARD FROM.

Jill Adams (Southampton) and John Campbell (Liverpool).