

# VECTOR



# VECTOR

16

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## CREDITS

This is VECTOR 16, the Official Organ of The British Science Fiction Association \*\*\* Summer 1962.

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Edited by Ella Parker,  
151 Canterbury Road, West Kilburn  
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JOTTINGS -- All members are entitled to advertise in BSFA Publications.  
Any members who publish are earnestly requested to send a copy of their brainchild to the BSFA Library.  
Friday night is 'Open House' at 151, Canterbury Road.

FOR SALE -- The GALAXY check list. Price 2/6 to members.  
From the Treasurer.

and remember, the BSFA is in existence to cater for all interested in science fiction. Why not put anyone you know who reads it into touch ?

# EDITORIAL

ELLA A. PARKER

At least once a year we publish in VECTOR the entire Membership list; it will be in the next issue. Being on the committee, I have had an advance peek and I notice there are quite a few members living within easy reach of each other. This seems like a good time to come up with an idea I had two years ago with disappointing results and see if anything comes of it. When you see the list, take special note of the addresses; at least three of you live in Leeds, two in Glasgow and there are some new members in London. Leeds and Glasgow: If you'd like to meet another member, try dropping a note suggesting a meeting with one another. You may live near enough and like each other well enough to want to meet frequently. It's worth trying, isn't it? London: Every Friday night from 7 pm. I hold Open House at my home. Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided as well as plenty of talk that I'm sure you'd find interesting as well as entertaining. Do try and come, won't you? My address is on the contents page here. We'd love to meet you, really.

You will recall I told you in the last Newsletter of the photographs I took of Glenn's capsule? I am happy to report they came out very well. I am especially pleased with the ones showing the burn marks on the end of the capsule caused during re-entry. Anyone wanting prints, let me know and I'll send the negatives. When I had mine printed I asked for enprints; they are larger than the ones you got otherwise. They are in black and white.

You will notice the next page advertising our 1963 Convention. Today I had a letter from Ken Slater enclosing some sticky labels to put on any letters I write. If you would like to help in plugging the convention, write to Ken and ask him for some of them; I'm sure he'd be pleased to let you have them. I do know that at least on one occasion a postman joined a convention as a result of such advertising. He came too! Heavens! I hope it doesn't turn into a Convention of Postmen.

The VECTOR files are empty of material. I would like some articles, artwork, anything in fact except fiction, if you feel like writing for us. Artwork especially we like as soon as possible for consideration as it has to be farmed out for stencilling; unless you are able to stencil it yourselves! This is your chance to try your hand at doing something for publication, and remember, you are among friends, so don't be shy.

For this time I have nothing of great moment to say, so it might be as well if I stop here and now. Those of you writing comments on the magazine, remember you send them to Jimmy Groves as always. For this time.

*Ella*

IT'S PETERBOROUGH IN '63!

Membership in the B.S.F.A. Convention can be had for the sum of 5/-.  
(£1. in American & Canada). These amounts will be deducted from the full  
registration fee on arrival if you attend, and we hope as many of you as  
can will do so.

Each year I meet more and more of the membership and I hope eventually  
to get to know most of you this way, unless you come to London and call on me.  
I can assure that you will have an interesting weekend. Why not come?  
Send your subscription to:-

Ken Slater,  
B.S.F.A. ConCom 1963,  
c/o Fantast (Medway) Ltd.,  
75, Norfolk Street,  
Wishbech.  
CAMBS. ENGLAND.

Don't delay. Get your membership in now and make it that much easier  
for your ConCommittee to do good work on your behalf.

I hope to see YOU.

*Ella Parker.*

and just a word or two from your new "publisher" to say 'Hello!' It is a great  
pleasure to me to take up fan publishing once more; especially in this easy way of  
having an editor taking responsibility for the obtaining and arranging of material  
for each issue of VECTOR. I am also grateful to Jimmy Groves for continuing to  
compile and stencil the letter section -- which ought to be about four times the  
size of this issue's example. What about getting some good controversies going?  
May I use this chance to say how much I enjoyed meeting so many BSFA members at  
the Harrogate convention -- I will certainly try to see you again at Peterborough  
next year. Finally, any suggestions regarding the layout of VECTOR will interest  
me, but remember that literary contributions go to Ella Parker, and letters of  
comment to Jimmy Groves at 29 Latham Road, East Ham, London E.6.

*J. Michael Franklin*

BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Harrogate  
on Sunday, 22nd April, 1962

Before the A.G.M. commenced, the following two proposals for the site of next year's Convention were put forward:-

Peterborough  
London

(Proposed by Ken Slater)  
(Proposed by Ella Parker)

The main difference in the plans for these convention sites was that, should London be decided upon, no reduction in registration fees would be available to B.S.F.A. members. Later in the day, a vote was taken by a show of hands, and Peterborough was selected.

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1. It was proposed by Brian Jordan and seconded by Ken Slater that the minutes of the A.G.M. in 1961 be taken as read.
2. The Treasurer (Ted Forsyth) reported that the financial position was satisfactory. The Balance in hand had increased from £71 at the beginning of last year to over £100 now. This included some subscriptions for current year memberships. Convention fund figures were also incorporated in this £100 - the fund started with £11.6.0. from last year's convention, and now stood at £12. Library charges were mounting, and members were encouraged to make greater use of this service - at present, only 25% of B.S.F.A. membership made regular use of the library. The Galaxy checklist had so far made a profit of £8 for the B.S.F.A.  
  
Ken Slater asked if the Association had been registered for income tax purposes, and was advised by Ella Parker that an amateur association could not be registered. As some doubt existed on this point, the Vice-Chairman (Terry Jeeves) suggested that the future Treasurer should investigate the matter further.
3. The Editor of Vector (Jimmy Groves) reported that the library checklist had been circulated to all members. He had cut down on newsletters during the year as the cost of producing and circulating each edition was high. He suggested that a more permanent professional cover be found for Vector, similar to that used by the magazines Wellsian. The Vice-Chairman thanked the Editor for the excellent job he had done in the past two years.
4. The Librarian (Peter Mabey) reported that the library was now running profitably. It was intended that the profit should be utilised to purchase books not yet available in the library, and he asked members for suggestions on this point. The library had been considerably increased by a donation from Peter Chappell of his entire collection, and the transference to the B.S.F.A. of books previously held by the pre-war British Science Fiction Society. It is understood that the B.S.F.A. library is now the largest lending library of science fiction in the world. Special thanks were due to Eric Jones for helping to organise the library stock, and also to the fanzine editors who regularly sent copies of their magazines to the library.

Eric Jones elaborated on the organisational problems involved in running

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the library. During the past year in particular, the entire membership of the Cheltenham Science Fiction Circle had to devote several weeks to sorting books, and the Librarian - with an assistant - regularly spent three nights a week at the clubrooms, dealing with parcels.

Ella Parker made a formal proposal that the B.S.F.A. should pay the rent for the C.S.F.C. clubrooms, but the Librarian pointed out that this came to £52 a year. The Vice-Chairman stated that it was at present impossible to give any further financial assistance to the C.S.F.C., and a suggestion from Ken Slater that the library service be extended to non-members of the B.S.F.A. to increase funds was rejected by the Vice-Chairman on the grounds of the increased amount of work this would involve.

The Librarian stated that there were a large number of duplicate books available for sale, and Ken Slater said that he would endeavour to find a market for these.

The Vice-Chairman thanked the Librarian for his services during the year.

5. The following members had been elected to serve on the Committee for the coming year:-

Ken Cheslin	Secretary
Jill Adams	Treasurer
Peter Mabey	Librarian

Ella Parker proposed Bobbie Gray for the position of Vice-Chairman; seconded by Ken Slater, all in favour.

No nominations for the post of Editor were received. Tony Werner advised the meeting that office and duplicating facilities in London could be made available to the B.S.F.A. at no charge, but Jimmy Groves stressed that the biggest problem in producing Vector was the cutting of stencils. This matter was finally solved by dividing the editorial duties between two people - Ella Parker offered to act as a clearing house for all in-coming material, and Mike Rosenblum offered to cut stencils, duplicate and distribute the magazine. Proposed by Phil Rogers, seconded by Bob Parkinson, all in favour.

A vote of thanks was extended to all retiring members of the Committee - proposed by Bobbie Gray, seconded by Ian Macaulay, all in favour.

6. The Vice-Chairman stated that the Doc Weir fund stood at approximately £14. At an earlier Committee meeting, it had been decided that this money should be put to either of the two following uses:-

- (1) that, at each convention, a "Doc Weir Fan Recognition Award" should be made, the recipient to be chosen by vote, and that the £14 should spent on some suitable plaque or statue for this purpose.
- (2) that the £14 should be given to Mrs Weir.

Peter Mabey suggested that the award be called the "Doc Weir Memorial Award", and a vote was taken on these two proposals - all present were in favour of proposal (1).

7. The Vice-Chairman extended a vote of thanks to Ron Bennett for his organisation of the 1962 Convention at Harrogate.

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# SECRETARY'S REPORT

f r o m

KEN CHESLIN

This year's Annual General Meeting of the B.S.F.S. was

held during the Easter weekend, at Harrogate.

The various clauses of the Minutes are largely self-explanatory, but one or two points might bear enlarging upon.

For instance, the B.S.F.A. Library. Our lending library is thought to be the largest of its genre in the world. Few members take advantage of it however, I don't know why you don't, it is the cheapest and easiest way of reading S/F in the United Kingdom and the stocks, compared to the average S/F readers collection, of books and magazines are immense.

The Librarian would like to know if the members have any special preference for new titles for the library. Write to him with your suggested titles and maybe the library will be able to obtain a book that you've been after for years.

The minutes do not record the election of a BSFA Chairman this year as under the new plan the preceeding year's Vice-Chairman automatically assumes the post. A Vice-Chairman is elected. This means that each Chairman comes to his/her post thoroughly familiar with all current BSFA business etc., this having obvious advantages.

Mr Brian Aldiss, the President, holds his position on an as permanent basis as he wishes. (or until such time as the fates or an S/F editor catch up with him.

Doctor Arthur Rose Weir, D.Sc., known to all his friends in S/F fandom as "Doc Weir", discovered our fandom quite late in life. His stay in fandom was punctuated by illnesses, such as the one which prevented him from completing his term as Secretary of the BSFA. And, while still largely unknown, he died.

I only met "Doc" a few times, so I can't claim to have known him well, however I was struck by his scholarly air - and impressed by his writings in fanzines...particularly by those items written around the Lord of the Rings

please turn the page ...

## B. Any Other Business

Ken Slater raised the question of the British Science Fantasy Award. Some discussion took place, but it was finally proposed by Jimmy Groves that the problem be discussed and resolved in Vector. Seconded by Ted Forayth.

Mr T. Boardman suggested that an anthology of short stories be submitted each year by authors in the B.S.F.A. He would undertake to publish this, if acceptable, and any profits arising would go to the B.S.F.A. This suggestion was formally proposed by Jill Adams and seconded by Ken Slater.

Brian Burgess queried the position of the Nebula checklist, and was advised that there was, as yet, no information available about this.

9. A vote of thanks was extended by the Chairman (Ina Shorrocks) to the Vice-Chairman for taking the meeting on her behalf.

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trilogy - and I was saddened to hear of his death. I for one consider it a great loss not only to the BSFA and fandom, but to the world at large, it is another scholar and a gentleman less.

This is a lead in for remarks on the "Doc" Weir memorial. £14 odd was collected, (enquiries after Mrs Weir elicited that £14 would make little difference one way or another, to offer her £14 in compensation for "Doc"..... well, it was not to be thought of) so, the prime object now being to preserve "Doc's" name; it was decided to invest the money in an annual award of some kind.

Details are still being finalised, although a shield design is almost certain, and more news and details will most likely appear in VECTOR and Newsletters from time to time.

Qualifications for the award were decided in such a way as to give the widest choice.... in a few words the award will go to him/her who fits the following category ... "I think Ned Fan is the person I'd most like to see win the "Doc" Weir Award".... See? simple isn't it?

I would particularly like to draw your attention to clause 8 of the minutes.

You will notice that Mr Tom Boardman, of Boardman Books, made an offer to the BSFA to publish an anthology using only BSFA authors, (details are still being worked out), I mention the matter, not really for any BSFA authors, but to draw the memberships' attention to Mr Boardman's magnificent offer. Bearing in mind the present outleys for S/P I was wondering if you, the membership, appreciate the full significance of Mr Boardman's offer, and have mentally explored the possible results of a successful BSFA sponsored anthology?

Not that I expect that many of you will bother to write to VECTOR --- however interesting your ideas -- "The Silent Ones" unfortunately form the bulk of the membership, their lack of response driving each successive committee nearer exasperation.

Exasperating too is the annual fallout of BSFA members, for no detectable reason we shed members each year at an alarming rate. But, if no-one will write and tell us why they leave, or if the membership maintains a baffling silence, how then can we hope to know, and try to fill, the needs of the membership?

Now I had thought to encourage greater participation by offering a cash prize for the best letter in each Vector, but you all know what would happen, don't you? Yes! a fan would be bound to win nearly every time, and it would be the same few fans at that, every time ...

You know why? Of course, because only fans bother to write .. and precious few of them bother.

Something like 3% of the BSFA, on the average, comment on VECTOR, a very few more send on occasional postcard.

I want to emphasize the importance of participation in the BSFA. Ask yourselves for instance, Why are all the BSFA officers fans? Would there have been a BSFA without a fandom? Would the BSFA be able to survive if every fan in it suddenly resigned?

Because the membership - seemingly - take so little part of BSFA affairs I'd say that the BSFA could not survive without the fans .. simply because the members lack cohesion, because they do not participate.

And that's that for this VECTOR. Anyone feel like making comments now?

Yours,

Ken Cheslin

WellyounonfanMemberatthegauntlet! sbeenthrowndownwhatareyougoingtodocaboutit ??

john russell fearn

# THE FORGOTTEN MASTER

AN ESTIMATION by PHILIP HARBOTTLE

## INTRODUCTION:

When Fearn died in September 1960, science fiction lost one of its finest and most unassuming exponents. It is doubtful whether many people appreciated this fact. Certainly his passing went unannounced, indeed unmentioned, in today's magazines. Yet it was because of a devotion to those same magazines that Fearn did not win everlasting fame.

One thing should be realised at the outset, and that is that Fearn was a professional writer. When he began writing in earnest back in the early thirties, there was only one ready market, the American pulp magazine. This was a severely limiting factor to the stories of any author. Many of today's masters contributed stories they much prefer to have forgotten (are you listening John Wyndham?)

Stories written for the magazines of that day had to obey many restrictions if they were to be published. They had to be written in a lucid, fast-moving style; a large proportion of the readership was made up of teen-agers. The contents had to match the fantastic titles. For many years there was a sexual taboo in the magazines, which more than anything else prevented depth and humanity. Most of them appeared monthly too, so to all these restrictions, add that of meeting deadlines.

If a seed is sown in poor soil, it is difficult for it to reach full bloom. The potential, the ability, is there, but the medium is non-permitting. That, I submit, is a not unreasonable parallel with the early pulp of magazines. Yet if it was almost impossible to produce lasting literature, it was still possible to produce brilliant story-ideas. In this respect Fearn had, and still has, no equal. Ideas came to Fearn, wrote his friend Walter Gillings, in such quick succession that only his tremendous zest for work enabled him to keep pace with them.

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Fearn entered science fiction in grand style, with a two-part serial entitled "The Intelligence Gigantic" in the June-July 1935 issue of AMAZING. At that time, fiction in the Tech publication was at a very low ebb, and the story was one of the best appearing in its pages for some time. The story suffers from a certain amount of ingenuous philosophy and moralising, but in ideas, plotting and action, showed great promise for a first novel. Some of

the sub-plots and ideas were to become basic features in some of Fearn's tales many years later. The great idea of the story was that man uses only a small portion of his brain, and of the possibility of a full use yielding supernormal powers. It is impossible to trace all the stories that have since sprung from this concept, but among them are such modern classics as Shiras' "Children of The Atom". For this story alone, Fearn deserves a niche in any history of science fiction.

The late F. Orlin Tremaine was an editor who welcomed new ideas. New concepts, no matter how outlandish, formed the corner stone for his revived *ASTOUNDING*. It was natural that after his initial appearance in *AMAZING* Fearn should contribute to this magazine. Encouraged by Tremaine, Schachner, Wandrei, and others, wrote lead stories under the label of "thought variant". These purported to introduce something entirely new and unorthodox to science fiction, Fearn was soon to join their ranks.

There are some people who claim that the ideal sf story is built around the 'What would happen if?' idea. With his second story, published in the March 1934 issue of *ASTOUNDING*, Fearn epitomized this theme with the self-descriptive "The Man Who Stopped The Dust". It received wide acclaim, setting the seal on Fearn's success.

So far Fearn had only bordered on the fantastic. In his work there was still an air of basic reality, something typically English. Urged on by Tremaine's requirements, Fearn decided, as he himself later stated, "to go the limit with imagination." This penchant was long to be associated with him.

The opening story in this new phase was "The Brain of Light" in May 1934. It centred around a new radio-television device, which in turn led to a race of electrical beings inhabiting a realm of light in earth's Heavyside layer, world-wide disasters, and culminated in a pitched battle far out in space. On top of this we have the now old fashioned and no longer respectable device of almost every piece of conversation being a scientific discourse. At times the action took on a bizarre fairy-tale quality. Fantastic elements are introduced and resolved by the application of whole new sets of scientific laws, which, alas, exist only in the mind of the author. Fearn attempted to encompass the elements of science and magic, of fantasy and reality. It was an audacious attempt which failed. Despite this, it was highly praised by the many escapist readers of the Depression years. The more perceptive ones, however, blasted it in the letter columns.

Within a very short space of time Fearn introduced a change of style, which, whilst retaining its fantastic conceptions, was based on reality to a greater degree. This story stepped away from the usual 'story of the future', in that it had a race of alien super scientists existing many millions of years ago in "Before Earth Came". This plot has been utilised since by so many different authors as to become hackneyed.

In this story Fearn introduced his interlocking technique: (later to be developed as 'webwork' in the noted Thornton Ayre series) having several puzzling elements fall into place. Always there was a casual mention early on, and then a very clever resolution. The idea of the story was a rather remarkable one:

"To think our solar system isn't natural - and to think we are merely the perpetrators of Jirien knowledge doing things we believe on our own initiative, yet which actually have been implanted to start with." With this story Fearn became the first to seriously and extensively develop another basic sf theme: How something came about. In his creation of the solar system, the imperfections - something lesser authors left out in similar plots - is accounted for. In the midst of this welter of science, the human interest was well to the fore, completely absolving the worst fault of "The Brain of Light". Some other details such as love, hate and fear, the weakness and sensitivity of women, all dovetailed into place. The fantastic science which Fearn loved to picture was given an air of plausibility by its results being actual objects and circumstance.

Fearn's story impressed other authors, and had given birth to a number of base variations on the theme. This was the 'explanatory' story which purported to explain myths and legend. James Gunn, in his excellent series of articles a number of years ago in DYNAMIC, clearly exposed the limitations of this type of story. He wrote:

"There is a basic reason why stories of this type have not contributed anything of importance to the development of science fiction and why they are unlikely to do more in the future. The stories partake of the nature of their material; in explaining myths, legends, folklore, and ruins, they are, in effect, myths themselves, and realistic modern sf is at myth's opposite pole."

Fearn was not yet guilty of this; he wrote a story around facts, not myths, and there is a distinction. However, be it noted that Fearn himself did enter the blind alley of the myth type of story some years later.

"Before Earth Came" was probably Fearn's best story up to that time, and the scene seemed set for further advancement. But once again editorial requirements took a hand. The great success of the thought variant and associated escapist stories, which delighted the oppressed readership, encouraged editor Tremaine to commission the most fantastic stories imaginable. In this respect Fearn was unrivalled. The autumn of 1935 saw publication of his novel "The Blue Infinity" which editor Tremaine gleefully billed on the contents page as:

'A powerful presentation of mankind's control over the elemental forces of the universe - he moves the earth!'

I would say that despite its demerits, "The Blue Infinity" is a classic of its type. There is something magic in the conception of earth as a spaceship, hurtling through space to the ends of the universe at the behest of super-science, to escape the ravages of a runaway star. It's plausibility, of course, is another thing entirely.

Here again Fearn was up against the old problem: the sheer necessity of scientific invention throughout acting to negate any attempt at human interest. He almost, but not quite, overcame it; there is plenty of human interest in the story if you care to look for it, but for the most part the pseudo-science hopelessly obscures it.

But even this was not his most extravagant plot. AMAZING, which was tottering before the dominance of ASTOUNDING, commissioned Fearn to do a serial for them incorporating all the elements that had boosted the other magazine. He complied to the limits of his ability. It must be said that Fearn actually enjoyed writing this kind of story, because of the vigorous quality of the writing,

but one wonders what masterpiece might have resulted had this great imagination been slanted to a higher plane than a pulp serial. Notwithstanding, he produced what must surely rank as one of the most remarkable works of the day, the four-part serial which commenced in the May 35 AMAZING, "Liners of Time".

In this Fearn brought all his incredible facility for scientific invention to bear. There is no end to the weird machines and phenomena; there is time travel, invisibility, brain transference, the birth of a solar system, matter expansion and contraction, the transmission and reassembly of matter by radio, mental and intellectual amplification, adventure in primeval time and space, the encountering of prehistoric monsters, and a gaseous race of benign martians; a means whereby the heroine is brought back from the dead; a menace from the planet Jupiter, and that planet's eventual destruction; a living planet (this was a decade and a half before Murray Leinster's *Alyx*) and dozens of intrigues and climaxes. To encompass all of these elements in one novel was a task of gigantic proportions; its complete fusion was one of Fearn's finest achievements. The sexual taboo mentioned earlier was exercised by editor Sloane. To accomodate him, and to ensure the good taste of his plot situations, Fearn had it so that love was unknown in the far future, having been eliminated by the coming equality of the sexes. This latter was something entirely believed in by Fearn, who had a super-woman complex comparable with Weinbaum, and is shown in many of his stories.

As was its right, it was hailed with delight by most readers of the day. That the story has little claim to literary merit in the normal sense, is no belittlement of Fearn's achievement. Many authors have not produced so many ideas in a lifetime of writing. It is especially hard to produce good literature as a serial because a prohibitive amount of climax contrivance is necessary, and to incorporate so many fantastic elements was a double handicap. No-one today could have written such a story better than Fearn did. Although copies of its later book publication are still circulating freely today, its integral nature has accorded it little attention in recent times, and it is unlikely to be re-printed - a great pity, since neophytes today would find it as engrossing as the fans of a generation ago.

1936 was the year in which Fearn produced what are perhaps his most widely-known stories "Mathematica", and its sequel "Mathematica Plus". Fearn had taken to a voracious reading of the scientific works of Jeans and Eddington, who were both giants in their day. "Mathematica" was the precursor of many stories he based on their theories. The embodied conception, entirely new to sf, was that of the universe being a mathematicians thought, "mainly because everything in the universe can be perfectly explained by mathematics and nothing else." The conservation of matter and energy is akin to addition and subtraction, and the receding galaxies are a recurring decimal effect. These theories were no wild dream of Fearn, but the sober reflections of Jeans towards the end of his famous "Mysterious Universe". Fearn's fiction angle was the search of three men, Walsh, the narrator, Farrington and Palathon, a grotesque alien creature from a universe accidentally created mentally by Farrington, to find the origin of the universe. A cosmic search to the Ultimate! It is a story which must rank as unique in the annals of fiction....It is pre science fiction, and therein lies its greatness.

Of course, the transposition of the human element occasioned the use of fantasy in the story, which James Blish pinpointed in an article in *SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY* many years later. Blish claims that this fantasy has

no place in sf, but his attitude is surely a mistaken one. For instance, time-travel must be considered as fantasy, but if this were to be denied, how many classics would be lost to us? Editor Lowndes, in a footnote to the article was more reasonable: "I liked them too - irrespective of their fallacious base, they were fascinating stories. Consider this sort of thing as a kind of fairy-story, and there's a place for it. Obviously, the basic principle is magic."

Two other stories appeared in **ASTOUNDING** that year. They were "Deserted Universe" in September, and "Dynasty Of The Small" the following month. One of the novel aspects of the former was its manner of presentation, it was written by the leader of a visiting alien race, a technique destined to make its mark in science fiction. Content was summarised in the postscript when the alien wrote: "Because one mortal man endeavoured to see beyond death, he excommunicated all life. The thoughts, the aspirations, the strange ideals of those spawned cells called living beings have passed into an unknown spacial state, where they will remain forever inert, unless, perhaps, some new cosmic coincidence brings life back again to this deserted universe." The idea of life being a chance was inspired by Eddington. It was a very fine story, but in certain spots are evidences are evidences of an adverse trend. This was Fearn's seeking out of the most amazing conclusion of his ideas, which was not always logical. In this way his stories never matched the brilliance of their original conception: such were the detrimental editorial demands. His story took no cognizance of cut-off points. Only in certain specialised circumstances were his assumptions valid. It was through this narrow avenue of possibility that Fearn led his brilliant plots to oblivion.

The great Thought Variant Era was living on borrowed time. Late in 1936, rumbles of discontent were heard in Brass Tacks. Fearn was aware of this, and in "Dynasty Of The Small" he achieved a sort of compromise. In doing so he came tantalisingly nearer what would be regarded as good science fiction today.

It was obvious that Fearn had done a good deal of research on the story; instead of inventing things he was drawing on the world of nature - fantastic in itself. In this story the tempo was radically changed: it no longer unfolded from an aloof cosmic viewpoint, but through the reactions of people whose characters were drawn with considerable skill - a great step forward. Above all it was well written and concise:

"Just as each living organism represents a delicate balance of forces, so does nature; just as the forces within the organisms are perpetually changing, necessitating continuous readjustments to maintain the essential equipoise, so in nature from day to day, year to year, aeon to aeon, organisms wax and wane and the balance of life is continually changing. But, destroy one iota of that balance, remove one tiny part of it, and outraged Nature takes revenge - like this!"

"This" was the rampant growth of bacteria when a scientist inadvertently destroys protozoa . . .

"Whilst he sat detachedly eating his overboiled eggs and studying a treatise on germ cultures; whilst Captain Northern fumed impatiently in the torrid heat of Cape Town, a brine-sodden package in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean burst asunder and released into those murky silent abysses the incipient decay of all civilisation." The irony was that the original experiment was to free civilisation from disease,

Fearn's extrapolation - in context most convincing - was the gradual emergence of a giant, strangely beautiful, intelligent plant life. Be it noted that this was the original forerunner of Wyndham's 'Triffid.' Finally the plants are defeated, not by last minute fantasy, but simply from lack of space - a denouement reminiscent of "War of the Worlds".

Meanwhile there had appeared a strange, long novelet in AMAZING, entitled "Subconscious." It can loosely be termed as 'speculative.' That is, a story which purports to explain incompletely understood phenomena in sf terms.

In this case, Fearn attributes the subconscious part of the mind to the machinations of martians. Since the emergence of man on earth, we are told, the highest martian dignitaries, male and female, have been sending artificially boosted thoughts into our minds, giving controlled scientific progress. A follow-up radiation was responsible for a scrambling effect - the subconscious - to allay suspicion. Their idea was to have man cultivate the earth, then the martians, whose world was dying, would migrate across space and move in. This after destroying humanity atomically.

"Just as humans raise and fatten cattle, and then kill them off, so, in a different way, have these malignant beings seen fit, through unguessable centuries, to cause earthlings to build up a perfect world, and then, when comparative perfection is attained, they will wipe man out of existence." This theme has since become a familiar one in sf, notably Eric Frank Russell's "Sinister Barrier", which owes nearly as much to Fearn as it does to Fort.

But it is at the end of the story that Fearn really excels. This was when he had the one woman in the small group of people who were aware of the menace, take command of the situation:

"You have made a mistake in considering these martians to be a ruthless and terrible people. Immediately you decided you would try and get the man Laj to kill himself. In that you also are murderers! You are, quite unconsciously, revealing the same strain that causes wars on earth. No woman ever started a war, gentlemen - men alone do that. And will do - because they have more of the beast in them than a woman has."

She then contrives, with much suffering to herself, to implant this feminine sentiment into the female martian controller, Olania. This was something the scientific martians had seemingly outgrown. The story ends on a quietly impressive note:

"You have courage, Olania," Ral commented thoughtfully.

"To meet death does not require courage; to meet life it is that requires it," came the strange reply, and with that Olania walked across to where the dead Laj lay upon the table. Without hesitation she climbed up and lay beside him. Her right hand closed tightly; came a faint crackling sound as the capsule broke...

With slow dignity Ral went over to her, stood for some time looking down at her limply dangling hand, blood clotting the palm - then his gaze moved to her peaceful, faintly smiling face and closed eyes.

Ral raised his hand in silent salutation.

"So be it," he murmured. "Our race has run its course; it is the end." Then blackness descended...

A curious feature of this story was its variance in the quality of narration. At times it is of a very high order, but every now and then it reverts to soliloquies, and the scientific lectures of "The Brain of Light". It would seem that Fearn wrote this story for pleasure, in that he passed indifferently over the framework to get onto some choice situation or set of ideas; at times the conversation is almost childish in its urgency to impress some indicative point. It reads more like a draft than the finished job. But whenever Fearn was particularly interested, as towards the end, the writing touched on brilliance. Perhaps Fearn was the anonymous author of the Discussions letter which ran, "I write for (Astounding) as a business man, but I write for Amazing as an author, because the stories in that magazine are more inspirational"

However, the above type of story is almost invariably doomed to obscurity; it leaves itself open to flaw-finding and disproof in later years. Such stories have appeared since and may well do so in the future. On the chance that the author could point the way to some truth, they must surely deserve a place.

1937 saw the continued progress of THRILLING WONDER STORIES, under the aegis of Leo Margulies and Mort Weisinger. Like ASTOUNDING, they published new and startling concepts. In February of that year, Fearn's "Brain of Venus" was published. It was an echo of his earlier stories, billed on Brown's cover which illustrated it as "A novelette of universal destruction."

Although this story carried some brilliant touches, extravagant extrapolation has again been responsible for its virtual oblivion. The destruction of several planets in the solar system, for instance occasioned the use of "power beams" trained on the sun and nearest star to keep the earth stable for story purposes. One wonders, though, whether or not Fearn was writing with tongue in cheek. At the end of the story, Jefferson, a rather tiresome hero-type, goes into the final dangerous climax with the hypertrophied disembodied Brain - and is killed! However, the brain - one of Fearn's greatest contrivances - is also defeated, which tended to take some of the sting out of a rather revolutionary ending.

"Menace From The Microcosm" which followed in June, carried a descriptive title. It was a heavy theme even then, and despite its novel treatment and at times horrific action, it has not lasted. Fearn had sold several weird horror-detective stories in the last year to a companion magazine THRILLING MYSTERY, and "Menace From The Microcosm" had some of the same overtones. It is certain that this story was written to meet editorial requirements. But once again a novel idea was present: the invasion of humanity by microscopic beings living in the bloodstream. Robert Moore Williams was to borrow freely from this story two years later, for his first novel, "The Bridge to Earth" in the September STARTLING.

Throughout 1937, Fearn had four more stories in ASTOUNDING. Three of them were ingenious cosmic extrapolations, which have been all but forgotten because the intrinsic faults of the '34 - '35 period appeared again. "Worlds Within", published in March, was perhaps Fearn's most brilliant effort of this type, but the pseudo-science was just a little too blantant in spots. To cosmic rays, for instance, he attributes amazing metabolic properties. A nice piece of audacity that, since Fearn, like most authors of the day, had previously

written stories of its deadly ketabolic effects! In his finale, Fearn could resist 'explaining' future events. Whilst this undoubtedly lends an authenticity, it is only transient, and it must be considered detrimental from the modern viewpoint. For deftness and entertainment however, the story approximates "Liners of Time".

So far, Fearn's stories had been exclusively of his own devising. True, he was influenced to a fair degree by Otis Adelbert Kline in nomenclature and phraseology, (the Jerry Morgan adventures) and Ray Gallun, one of the better authors of the day, in plotting, but his treatment, - apart from editorial demands - was peculiarly his own. October, 1937, nevertheless saw his first conscious imitation, in which respect he was certainly by no means alone. The author was the recently deceased Stanley Weinbaum. For it, Fearn used the first in a fantastic and still largely unknown series of pseudonyms, 'Thornton Ayre'. I should like to draw attention here to Sam Moskowitz's recent article in SCIENCE FANTASY No. 47, in which he states: "John Russell Fearn, a very popular science fiction writer during the late thirties, invented the pen name of Polton Cross, just to write stories that were parodies of Weinbaum." In this he is mistaken. 'Ayre' was the culprit, 'Cross' being later used for quite a different reason. "Parodies" isn't a very accurate description, either.

"Penal World" borrowed Weinbaum's 'queer animals' technique, with the 'Johero' ammonia man of Jupiter. The story was Fearn's shortest yet, merely an exercise, an agreeable trifle which went down quite well with the readers. It was to have far-reaching consequences, however...

December 1937 ended the year anachronistically, with the first part of "Zagribud" in AMAZING, a sequel to "Liners of Time", and "Dark Eternity" the cover story for ASTOUNDING. Although it contained some astute theorising, the human interest was once again hopelessly subservient to science. The latter story ended up with the entire universe being snuffed out in a gigantic Devolution back to the Beginning. Despite being well-written it was obvious that the world cosmic doom hypothesis had had its day, as well as becoming something of an embarrassment to its authors.

So ended 1937, and for Fearn it marked the virtual end of the Era of Extravagance, as well as to science fiction generally. For many authors it could have meant the end of the road - but not Fearn. Ideas had poured out of him, had literally been drained away down editorial sinks. But the amazing truth was that he had only barely begun! The following three years were to be Fearn's magazine Zenith, in which he covered the field in thirteen magazines, employing at least seven accredited pen names.

#### END OF PART ONE

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# BOOK REVIEWS

THE TROUBLE ON TRANTOR by Brian W. Aldiss

Foundation And Empire, by Isaac Asimov  
(Panther, 2s.6d.)

The writing of science fiction holds more traps than an innocent B.S.F.A. member might imagine. These traps are multiplied when a writer attempts a sequel to an earlier work that was

justly popular. Nothing succumbs like success - as many a writer must have reflected while offering a prayer for those in peril on the sequel.

"Foundation And Empire" is, of course, a sequel to Asimov's "Foundation". Asimov had more than the plea of that earlier resounding success to tempt him into a second volume. For it was natural that he - as well as his readers - should wish to see how Hari Seldon's plan worked out after the two hundred years covered by "Foundation".

The situation, you may remember, is that the galaxy is grumbling into what threatens to be thirty thousand years of anarchy. Seldon, who developed psycho-history, foresees this, and evolves a plan to cut down the term of barbarism to a thousand years. He situates two foundations at "opposite ends of the galaxy" (Asimov advisedly puts the phrase in quotes), and loads one on Terminus with physical scientists. Soon they alone possess nuclear power and, fortified by Seldon's predictions, prepare to spread a new renaissance over the old empire.

In the volume under discussion, we see the Foundation spreading out and meeting the Empire head on; and we see it encounter a new force headed by a mutant called the Mule. Because Hari Seldon's plan had not allowed for mutants, it goes awry. The Mule's forces beat the Foundation's forces; and the Mule himself hardly seems to appear; the mystery of who he is fills the last half of the book.

Damon Knight ruled this series out of court because Asimov's Empire was so obviously the Roman Empire on a different scale, and history does not repeat itself. But in the broad essentials, the rise and decline of cultures, history demonstrably does repeat itself. My objection to "Foundation and Empire" is simply this: that the whole idea of the Mule's turning out to be who he is (to avoid spoiling anyone's pleasure, I will be no more specific) is a stroke at once brilliant and lunatic. I just will not believe that any ruler, even a mutant, would or could behave like that. And not to believe - not to swallow this monstrous impossibility with a more monstrous credulity - is to lose an amount of patience with the novel.

Asimov is a sane and consistent writer who may (don't we all!) disappoint, but who never balks. Yet he seemed so dazzled with the ingenuity of hiding the Mule under the readers' noses in "Foundation And Empire" that in the third volume, "Second Foundation", he virtually repeats the trick, only substituting the foundation for the mutant.

For me, this trick means that the story is a failure. Fortunately Asimov's failures are never unreadable - unlike many of the successes of his contemporaries. You will find in "Foundation And Empire" many minor pleasures: the prickly meeting between General Bel Riose and Barr; the Imperial planet of Trantor, with "no living object on its surface but man, his pets, and his parasites"; the much pleasanter world of Radde, its chief city "swimming in the eternal morning of an eternal June"; the way points of action are often governed by ideas (Bel Riose's defeat comes because no general, weak or strong, could

have won); and the sense, I think, that if this is space opera, then for once the galaxy is a meaningful backdrop and the arias are not all given to louts who have no voice.

Without wishing to lapse into reminiscence, I must add that this trilogy was for me an early encounter with what I thought of as sf at its grandest: dealing with mighty concepts, covering umpteen years and light years, babbling of planets as Falstaff babbled of green fields. Even now, the old enchantment lingers. They don't write 'em like this nowadays! Or perhaps the trouble is, they are still trying to, and the basic pattern is too impossibly big for anyone less than a Tolstoi to do justice to.

Asimov would have done better if he had used more of the weapons in a writer's arsenal. He relies too heavily on short scenes too little on narrative, and at many points carefully cadenced narrative would have carried an excitement and clarity that snatches of conversation do not evoke.

A novel like Vonnegut's "Sirens of Titan" succeeds brilliantly because it contains only scenes; the reader is made to work for his living; but this is part of the plan. The deficiencies in Asimov's story-telling, (for instance the gap after Chapter 18, when the Foundation has been defeated, or the dull Chapter 16, where a long scene yields us only a short fact) must have been to some extent forced on him by magazine publication. But in the early forties, there were only magazines.

If this sounds a writerly digression on this reviewer's part, may I add to my apologies a reminder that novels are writing; ideas are necessary in sf, but it is also necessary to communicate them with precision.

Spread across three books, Asimov's central idea does come over fairly forcefully: the idea of psycho-history. This must have been the first use of statistics as an sf plot idea, and it still strikes me as one of the most interesting ideas in sf. Trailing through the cloak and dagger and the planet-hopping is a discussion of how much individual behaviour matters when viewed in terms of whole civilisations.

No doubt Asimov would develop this further if he were writing the book now. He is one sf writer who has developed in the way a good traditional writer develops, increasing in understanding and subtlety and in the power to unfold a story. As the years go by, most of writers, instead of maturing, unhappily degenerate into hacks.

This may be because they think and are encouraged by their audience to think mainly in terms of conjuring up something novel - never mind how absurd, how affronting to possibility - instead of bringing increasing experience to bear on translating human fears and aspirations into new forms. In other words, the years tell against them, instead of telling for them as they should. For sf always to be youthful is fine; for it always to be juvenile would be death.

Asimov has hurdled a mere quarter century so far, but that he has done it so successfully may be due not only to his scientific background, but to the way in which he has explored more deeply into one or two pet themes. As a result he has avoided superficiality. When these pet themes genuinely grow, as his robotics series have genuinely grown from the short stories of "I, Robot", to the splendidly integrated "Rakel Sun", we have development unequalled in the sf field. On the other hand, the Foundation series was not capable of real development, so that the original brilliant idea is eked out with narrow squeaks and atom bombs under tongues; in short we get sequels.

This need for maturing sf authors may have been expressed crudely. If so, I ask readers to bear with me, for the subject has hardly been broached before. Meanwhile, they will find in "Foundation and Empire" food for reflection on sf itself, as well as on that thousand year long spot of trouble on Tranter,

The Lovers, by Philip Jose Farmer. (Ballantine Books, distributed by Thorpe & Porter, 2s. 6d.)

Those who love sf most worry about it most.

That must explain why, in my cups, I am haunted by three spectres who jibber and mew before me and ask me the true questions I least like to hear. I least like to hear them because I cannot answer them, and because I strongly object to the assumptions on which they are founded. The questions the three spectres pose go like this: "Who killed sf?" "What's become of the sense of wonder?" and "Should you have sex in sf?"

Spectre No. Three was jogging my elbow all the time I was trying to read "The Lovers". Its impertinent question would not be drowned by one that seemed to be more relevant in the present case: "Should a writer expand a short story into a novel?"

Alas, the answer to both questions is "Well, it happens." So, here goes.

In a future time dominated by a maniac sort of church, Hal Yarrow is unhappily married to Mary. Whenever he behaves naturally, she tells him he is behaving in an unreal way. To make matters worse, his gapt (Guardian Angel Pro Tempore), a fellow called Pernsen, is heavily on Mary's side.

Their involvements constitute the earlier section of the book. For me, it lacked point. It seemed slightly funny and satirical in a Thorne Smith way, but I have grown out of Thorne Smith. What I liked was the way the hopelessness of the relation between Mary and Hal was drawn, surely done, unostentatiously done.

Too conveniently, the pair get divorced, and Hal catches a spaceship to Ozagen.

To his annoyance, the gapt Pernsen follows him, but Hal eludes the man and a host of regulations to have a love affair with a native woman called Jeanette. Later, Pernsen is killed and the woman turns out to be something less than woman. (Let me reveal the plot no more clearly than that.)

I would think that Farmer - or perhaps his publishers or his public - expect me, the reader, to be a deal more shocked than I am with the idea of a man sleeping with a female of another species. On the other hand, he seems to expect me to be entirely unmoved by the idea of sleeping with a female of another planet.

He has me wrong. I am prepared to be intensely interested in the latter proposition (though it takes more than that to shock me), and happily listen to all Farmer so smoothly has to say on the subject. But having taken that step willingly, I can hardly be expected to throw up my hands and say "Lack-a-day", or whatever the morally offended say nowadays, at the proposition that she was also non-human. You know, that step seems so much less dramatic than the first. In real life it may be different, but this is fiction.

So although Farmer has me interested, I am far from bowled over. I could not help thinking how William Tenn could have stood it all upside down and made a thumping good invigorating dirty joke out of it.

Perhaps it's just that Farmer is too careful not really to offend us. Perhaps he makes it too hygienic. Or perhaps my mind .....

Anyhow, the man had a lovely short story idea.

Brian W. Aldiss

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Bradbury sometimes lapses into vacuous notions, sorrowfully over-written, but his successes can be as ironic, bright or shocking as anyone might wish; and most of these stories succeed. Some might make one wonder whimsically if Bradbury manages to sleep - or if he lies waiting for the pillow to roll smotheringly, blankets to knot in throttling coils, wind to snigger down dusty throats of chimneys devising his death, while his children remember a scolding and roll their cold eyes and creep across the landing, clutching cold spiky implements.

For pure malevolence, "The Small Assassin" is unforgettable; sometimes I recall it while glancing into a cot at some comical bundle of hands and eyes and bubbly lips - "Strange, red little creatures with brains that work in a bloody darkness we can't even guess at" - and I'd hesitate to recommend it to any expectant mother.

His portrayals of older children are less convincing, but nevertheless disturbing. With unthinking cruelty a boy invites "The Dead Man" to be guest of honour at a Hallowe'en party; children in "Let's Play 'Poison'" predictably destroy a teacher obsessed by fear and living hatred; young Douglas coolly dissects "The Man Upstairs" - justifiably, but inspiring the fancy that he might just as coolly dissect Grampa for purposes of comparison. These children evoke unease, despite their bright and bloodless unreality; but Bradbury's portrayals of children and childish feelings too often seem derived from hostile observation rather than personal memory.

Closer identification with a boy is achieved in "Jack in the Box", a tale as fascinating as any exploration of ingrown societies within some lost starship; and such identification is enhanced by first-person narration in "The Lake", a simple, contemplative ghost story whose spell lingers warmly, and with still greater impact in "The Night", a taut study in creeping apprehension which will affect anyone who has waited at dusk for someone who is unusually late.

Seven of the thirteen stories feature obsessions - justifiable ones, as in "The Crowd", or insane ones as in "The Smiling People" which has memorably superb development and shocking conclusion. "Next in Line" ends flatly, but its communication of horror is unhealthily powerful due to the lingering gloat of description. This gloating air also pervades the opening paragraph of "The Man Upstairs" - a passage calculated to convert the excessively squeamish to a vegetarian diet.

Frequently there is an asylum atmosphere - shifting eyes and bumping hearts and twittering off-track fancies. Treated lightly - or less darkly - this produces sardonically macabre entertainment. "The Tombstone" is narrated humorously but has a wrily sobering twist, and "The Handler" delightfully depicts timidity venting its spite by working indignities on the freshly dead.

A few tales such as "Let's Play 'Poison'" and "The Crowd" and "The Cistern" are too predictably handled. Some have rather over-rich passages. But despite the occasional anticlimax or stylistic excess, this anthology is worth reading and re-reading whenever a pleasurable shiver or shake is welcome.

John Ashcroft

"PLANET OF THE DREAMERS" by John D. MacDonald.

Corgi Books pb 2/6d.

For those of you, like me, like to place each story you read into its appropriate category this is a "we're property" story - with variations, of

course. And it's the variations that make it a good story. Briefly the plot background goes like this - some twelve thousand years ago the human race inhabited a planet circling a sun near Alpha Centauri, a sun that was slowly dying. In their search for another home they found three possible planets, Marith, Earth and Ormazd. Colonies were planted on each and it was decided that they should be kept separate until they had reached a high enough level of culture. To watch and guard them a corps of Watchers was created. Initially the Watchers made periodic surveys of the three planets but after a while they devised a method of visiting mentally, taking over the mind of another for this purpose. Over the years they degenerated until they came to regard the three worlds as dreams created for their enjoyment. Their original mission survived as a command to destroy any attempt at space travel by the 'dream worlds'. Due to their activities the situation at the beginning of the story is that Marith is a primitive world, Ormazd has given up technology and concentrated on the mental powers, and Earth is coming round strongly for a second attempt at space travel.

The Story opens on Earth where we meet Bard Lane, top physicist on Project Tempo, which is a blue sky project to develop what sounds suspiciously like an interstellar drive, and Sharan Inly the project's Assistant in Charge of Psycho-Adjustment. The project is temporarily halted due to sabotage by one of the most trusted men concerned with it. The stresses between Bard and Sharan, and between them both and the military men in charge of the project are carefully laid out for our inspection. A sudden jump then takes us to the world of the Watchers to meet Raul Kinson and his sister Leesa, both throwbacks to an earlier age, physically stronger and bigger than their fellow Watchers. Raul has discovered for himself some of the long lost secrets of the Watchers and has taught himself to read. Raul, on his three learner trips to the three worlds, comes to realise that the worlds are real and that the Watchers have strayed from their original instructions to guard and guide and now are only protecting their right to torture and kill the human beings they consider mere dreams.

In his trips to Earth Raul learns of Project Tempo and enters it by using Bard's body and leaving a taped message for him; Bard, fearing insanity, goes to Sharan for advice. Meanwhile Raul has told Leesa of his find and they both go to the project to try and convince Bard and Sharan of their reality. Raul from a sense of duty and Leesa with the intention of extracting some amusement from the spectacle of 'dreams' trying to comprehend reality. Bard and Sharan are convinced but Leesa is still not convinced of their reality, and uses her powers to smash up the project. Too late she realises that Earth is real and that she loves Bard Lane. The project is ended and Lane and Inly are out of a job. Raul decides that the only move left is to come to Earth in one of the patrol ships that are left and he contacts Lane for help on understanding their workings. Once the ship is under way Bard and Sharan realise that they must make the truth public so that the ship will not be shot down the moment it comes into the Earth's atmosphere. However the effect of this announcement is such that they are taken into custody and are to be given shock treatment, treatment that will destroy their 'illusions', and their personalities as well.

The above is just a bare outline of the story and doesn't convey whatever it is that makes it a good piece of sf. But it is good, and I think the best thing I can say to emphasize that statement is that I got so engrossed in the story that when I got to the end and the moronic individuals who decided that Bard and Sharan should be, effectively, killed to 'cure' them didn't get an appropriate comeuppance I was furious! When a story can get you involved to that extent it has something special. Definitely recommended.

From frontier morals and shanty-towns of a war-smashed world, Phil and Kay Calland project their minds back to Twentieth Century London, to take over the body of a man and a woman respectively; sex, approximate location and time of arrival are known; all else is the calculated risk of the title.

The opening sequences are uninspiring and lack conviction, but can be accepted for the sake of a promising situation once the cardboard future has been replaced by a more familiar London. Calland's initial stumblings in his new environment are fascinating. Baffled by traffic, Tubes and currency, lobbed into nightmarishly strange surroundings, pleading amnesia while growing used to his job, home, private life and new body, he is an ideal character with whom to identify oneself and sympathise, for all the callousness of his arrival.

A fine novel might have been based merely on his struggle to adapt - and on the plight of Kay, who has survived the transition across four centuries but in a form which makes the original plan of marriage unthinkable.

The situation is absorbing and begs on its knees for richly imaginative thinking and treatment. But, alas, the story wavers awhile and then lapses too close to the level of a Frankenstein film-script. Sad to say, Calland is due to marry an attractive fiancée, whose love is not discouraged by his "amnesia" and a conflict of loyalties arises. And here the level of plotting begins to creak and sag - for Calland is driven to the idea of marrying the fiancée, then transferring Kay's mind into her body.

After this point, Calland's ruthlessness dissolves sympathy, leaving colder curiosity - and it becomes disturbingly more probable that the solution to the problems - whatever it may be - will be unsatisfying.

'Unsatisfying' is hardly the word for what does happen at the climax: I consider it infuriating. In a gimmicky short story it might be acceptable if well handled, but in a novel it is unforgivable. Maine slides sideways out of all his obligations when the real tangle is just beginning, leaving a worse plight than ever for Calland. And a tacked-on, moralising epilogue set in the future ruination is irrelevant enough to exasperate, when the main narration has ended so flatly. The story is tense throughout: that I'll freely admit. It will provide a couple of hours of taut, often provocative entertainment, but the theme is far from fully exploited, and, to me at least, Maine's climax is almost cowardly.

John Ashcroft

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First off, don't mistake this for Henry Kuttner's book of the same name, it isn't. It is, however, quite a good book in its own right. It originally appeared in IF (Jan. '54) as "Malice in Wonderland" and later as a novel (Hardcover title "Tomorrow's World"). Amusingly enough the authors name given above is a pseudonym, but for Evan Hunter, the author of "Blackboard Jungle", not Kuttner.

When a magazine story is expanded for book publication, without substantial re-writing the additional material can take one (or both) of two forms. It can consist of additional background, incidents that amplify the author's sketch of the social background of the story, or it can be incidents that throw more light on why the characters behave as they do. Here, as far as I can recall from the original story, both methods are used, unfortunately quite a lot of this additional material is self-contradictory. But to start at the

beginning - the story is set a few years hence and concerns the battle between two ideologies, the Vikes and the Rees, for the control of society. The Vikes, the Vicarion Movement, are an extrapolation of the current tendency for people to absorb life vicariously through TV and cinema screens. Their beliefs are summed up fairly well by Van Brant, the book's Vike spokesman:

"Joe Sucker began to understand an important truth. It had been there all along, starting maybe with the now defunct comic books, working its way up through the pulp magazines, through the now extinct hardcover novels, into the paperbacks, into television, the movies, the stereotypes, and right down the line. Now he knew. The make-believe was better than reality!"

Dino Palazi, Brant's Rees opponent, on the other hand is not so dogmatic, he realises that both Rees and Vikes are sick, but in different ways:

"We (the Rees) denied what was. We denied what was, and the Vikes went us one better. We denied what was by refusing to permit representation of it, while secretly admitting it existed. The Vikes denied what was by allowing the representation to replace the reality."

He also realises that any general clean-up must start with the destruction of the Vike movement, and destroy them he does.

Having decided that make-believe is far superior to reality the Vikes go the whole hog, drug addiction, semi nudism with extensive body make-up,

"She wore her breasts pitch black, matching her hair, with silver sequins scattered from each nipple in a haphazard smear."

.. excessive sexual stimulation via screen and printed matter, and a language which is a horrible mixture of hip, beat and God knows what else. And yet withal they are very puritan,

"Moore smiled thinly. 'I'm a Vike myself. It's been ten years since I touched a woman or wanted to touch one,'"

.. and they go even so far as to avoid reproducing except by artificial insemination, and then only rarely.

On the other hand the Rees, who might be expected to be puritans are as big a collection of contradictions. They dress in a puritan fashion and are the lineal descendants of the Campaign for Decency and like organisations. Yet, in a scene at a party, they talk of nothing but sex, and this in such a sniggering tone that it rather turns the stomach.

Both sides seem rather juvenile in their behaviour, the Vike pats for instance, or the name the Rees have for their index of banned (i.e. Vike) books, their Spit List! and this perhaps is the point that the author is trying to make.

I urge you to read this book, and then look around you. In the words of the original magazine blurb - the Vike tide is rising and it's Doom, brothers, Doom!

J. A. Groves

"THE CHALLENGE OF THE SPACESHIP" by Arthur C. Clarke, Ballantine Books  
distributed in the UK by Thorpe & Porter Ltd., at 3/6d.

This collection of articles on various sf and related subjects is a complete reprint of the 1960 hardcover edition. The contents vary from straight sf settings, these covering the backgrounds of three of Clarke's 'documentary' sf stories, to some far reaching speculations on sf topics and their implications. As for instance in "Where's Everybody?" where the reasons for the apparent lack of visitors from space is discussed, or more seriously, in "Of Mind and Matter" where a possible scientific basis for reincarnation is plausibly explained. All the material in this volume is good for some hours of concentrated thinking or discussion - get it! and to wind up there is one of those typically Clarkeian paragraphs summing up the subject in such a satisfying manner.

JAG.

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# LETTERS

As you no doubt saw in the last Newsletter I haven't completely lapsed into inactivity even though I have relinquished the editorship. Actually being in charge of the Letter Column of VECTOR suits me fine, it means that I don't have to write a letter of comment and send it off, I merely interweave it with every-one else's letters! To indicate my portion of the narrative I'll use the following symbols - at the beginning \*\*\*, and at the end \*\*\*JAG. OK? And now into the first letter.

Jean Graman, 1 Wayside, East Sheen, London, S.W.14.

Let me hasten to put in an impassioned plea against G.W. McIver's proposal for more sex in sf. Don't we, to use a daring simile, get sex rammed down our throats enough in the theatre, cinemas, thousands of books and magazines and on posters, to say nothing of television?

While admitting sex is - or rather can be - a Good Thing, I feel we are well on the way to having Too Much of a Good Thing.

Women as such, that is women who are nothing but females, simply have no place in sf, except to be rescued from BEMs, and for this they need to be nothing but N.B.C. dummies, which is what they invariably are.

What kind of sex anyway: Human-Human, Human-Alien, or Alien-Alien? The last category might be interesting, but I doubt whether that is what McIver means.

Let's have women in SF, but rather like Susan, the robotics expert and not the invariably sultry full-bosomed blonde-brunette-redhead, who is so beautiful that all men after just one look throw away their wives, girl-friends and sweethearts and think nothing of running the most idiotic risks for her sake.

For the sake of all the Galaxies, please lets keep her out of sf!

Peter Gooch, 3 Ray Park Avenue, Maidenhead, Berks.

I note the demand for more and better 'characterisation' in sf and I am in agreement - I would be only too pleased to see a great sf novel in the classic tradition - but a few thoughts occur to me.

I think it fair to say that good characterisation depends largely on the correct fitting of characters into their backgrounds. To my mind one reason for the current popularity of the 'kitchen sink' type drama is that we can so easily identify ourselves with the relevant environment (no rude comments please). The author's job here should be easy - he has had first hand experience of his sets. How much harder for the historical novelist who must visualise scenes, actions and details which he can never have seen: no matter how detailed his sources it is his intuition and 'feel' for the period that makes the success or failure. Since sf may be regarded as a simple extrapolation of history the sf author faces much the same problems with his characterisation - except that in this case the author produces both the character and the environment - so his chance of successful is even more remote.

Yes, I would like to see more characterisation in sf - but I think it's far more difficult to do satisfactorily than people imagine. And I definitely think that even so there will always be a place for the brilliant plot/flat characterisation story.

I thought I might comment on Brian Aldiss' review of "Earth Abides". I agree with him except for one point. He says that the decline of Ish's children into a bow and arrow culture 'seems a good deal less than inevitable' and goes on to compare this with the state of affairs in the "Day of the Triffids". I must say that I find "Earth Abides" far more convincing. The reconstruction activities of the survivors in "Day of the Triffids", "Death of Grass", "Nordenholt's Million" etc., I find much too contrived and full of fortunate occurrences.

\*\*\*\* only comment is 'Why better characterisation in sf?' The study of a character's personality and its interaction with others can be quite adequately covered in mainstream fiction, why then confuse the issue with an sf setting, a setting which is usually redundant for the purposes of the author? The main attraction of sf is that it can consider subjects not open to the mainstream writer. It treats the human race as a unit, and hence can act as a valuable corrective to the popular superstition of the cosmic importance of the individual human animal. An author can either emphasise the character or the plot, not both. \*\*\*JAG.

R.S. Maraden, 206 Park Avenue, Hull, Yorkshire.

I have just read VECTOR 15 and was very interested in Roy Kay's letter. He moans about 'crud' stories in New Worlds (what an awful word 'crud' is), he moans about N.W. covers and he moans about the BSFA. But I can't help thinking that it is his own fault that he is no longer stimulated by sf. If one is going to understand and enjoy an sf story one must read it with an unprejudiced mind. Mr Kay expects to find bad or boring stories, expects to be unimpressed by the covers, and so he finds what he expects. The more you try to pick holes in sf (or any literature) the more holes you will find, and the less you'll enjoy it.

To my mind the best and most important part of an sf story is the idea behind it. I am not however excusing bad writing; an idea cannot stand on its own. But good writing doesn't redeem a worthless plot.

To get back to Mr Kay's letter; I endorse his constructive criticisms of the BSFA. Re-introduction of magazine reviews would not only solve one of your problems, namely lack of material for VECTOR, but would also perform a service to the genre by helping the authors. However good a review is there are always people who disagree with it, hence controversy and argument. The bad points in a story are bound to be shown up and this should help authors in future efforts.

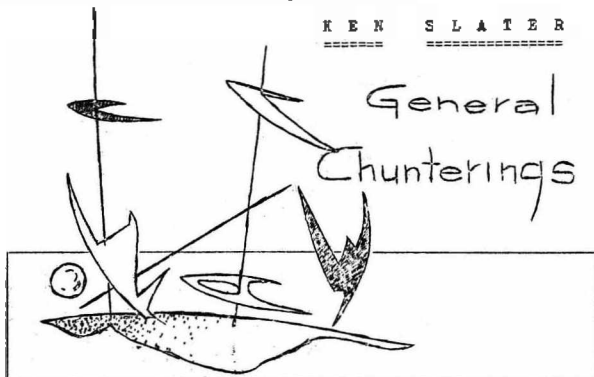
\*\*\*'Crud' - an awful word for awful writing. On the subject of the re-introduction of magazine reviews we have the same difficulty as Mrs Beston had with her rabbit pie, first catch your reviewer! \*\*\*JAG.

TEALSHEARDFROM

Ian Aldridge, who is in favour of illustrated covers.

and as a last minute addendum, the day after the Contents page has been run off, comes the current instalment of pleasant gossip about the field of science fiction from our most worthy stalwart ...

K E N   S L A T E R  
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One of my correspondents informs me that this column is now 15 years old... I can't check his facts, as I don't have a set of Operation Fantast nearer than Leicester.... But I guess he is not much out.... I'd have said it was about twelve or thirteen.... anyway, it makes yer think.... at the same time he complained that it was getting to be rather uncertain.... for that I must apologise.... it is just that trying to make a living in the book-business gets to be a fourteen-hour-a-day occupation... and I suddenly realise that a deadline has just gone by, and try to aim in some copy in time.... but usually too late.... apologies, folks.... The Mayflower SGI-FI series has scheduled Shepherd Mead's THE BIG BALL OF WAX, a delightful satire on the world of salesmanship/entertainment, and to follow that are John Christopher's DEATH OF GRASS, and THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW by Robert A. Heinlein (also known as SIXTH COLUMN in hard covered and magazine versions)..... and after that they are giving a try to an original novel, by Arthur Sellings, tentatively titled "The Gathering Light"..... not a bad line up so far, but I'm a bit doubtful over the need for another edition of "Death of Grass"... incidentally, just in case you don't know, the alternative title for that one is "No Blade of Grass".... the current DIGIT titles credit "The Wind of Liberty" to Kenneth Bulmer.... and as I know Ken Bulmer I'll accept that.... but I wonder who hides behind "Mal Rafcam", the author of "The Troglodytes"?... and is V. Ranzetta, (The Uncharted Planet - published a couple of months ago) the brother or sister of Iuan Ranzetta, credited with "The Maru Invasion" published this month ?.... problems, always problems.... it is no wonder that Al Lewis, compiler of THE INDEX TO THE SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINES, 1961, was a little uncertain whether the Kenneth of "Kenneth Johns" was Ken Bulmer.... and whether the 'Johns' part was John Brunner.... I just heard that one industrious researcher at Oxford supplied Dr. Clarke with an additional thirty titles for inclusion in "The Tale of Future" (or a supplement)

....by the by, Dr. Clarke is interested in contacting s-f authorities (in the sense of folk with a wide knowledge of works published) in Italy....and in many other countries in Europe...to aid him in research on a master index of science fiction tales of various kinds published by European publishers....if you have any contacts who might be interested in helping Dr. Clarke, please ask them to drop me a letter or card....Karl-Heinz Jakubeit, 2000 Hamburg-Altona 1, Regerstrasse 30, Germany, has a lot of German s-f to dispose of....so if you are studying German, drop Karl-Heinz a line with a couple of international reply coupons, and he'll send you a list....and then you can study German in your favourite literature...talk about sugar-coating the pill...by the by, if you address your letter by hand, you can write 2 instead of 2000 before Hamburg-Altona.... the oronic-type-genius of an electronic brain that sorts Germany's mail can only read four-figure numbers, and only handles typescript...it still takes the flexibility of the human brain to decipher single figures....and script ? ....a new title scheduled by Aberlard-Schuman for September is "Flying Saucers Paravell" by George Adamski....I wonder if the title is really apt ?.. ..and Aldous 'Brave New World' Huxley has a new, sociological, fantasy in "ISLAND", from Chatto and Windus....a post-nuclear war, post-civilisation novel from the same publisher, by Helga Harrison, is THE CATACOMBS....Arco, alongside their Fitzroy Edition of Jules Verne, are now commencing a Fitzroy edition of Jack London, first six titles being "The Cruise of the Dazzler", "A Daughter of the Snows", "The God of His Fathers", "People of the Abyss", "The Son of the Wolf", and "The Call of the Wild & White Fang"....the new American horror mag, THRILLER, appears to have lasted only three issues...the last one to hand was July, 1962....R. A. Marchant's BEAST OF FACT AND FABLE will be published by Dent at 12/6, with 14 full-page line drawings by David Pratt....talking to someone the other day we discussed the difficulty often experienced in getting refills for various kinds of felt-nib pens....I've found it best to use the types with a felt-pad reservoir, no valve, and to buy one of the several bottles of refill ink available (LePage's are one brand)...then one takes a pair of tweezers (or snipe-nose pliers), pulls the felt out of the pen, dunks it in the ink, and stuffs it back in the body of the pen, screws the top back on, and the job is done....even cheaper than refills, mostly, as the ink comes at 2/6 per bottle, and stands half-a-dozen dunkings at least....a new fanzine from Franklin M. Dietz, Jr., contains Randall Garrett's speech from the Luncheon, 1960, in which he rips at Kingsley Amis....also articles by E. Everett Evans and Ted Sturgeon....single copies 15p, four for 50p....next thing in my pile of notes seems to be a wine list...don't quite know why that got in here....currently being considered by the Restrictive Practises Court is the Net Book Agreement ....whilst it is not advisable to comment at this time, the decision reached here will have a vast effect on the book trade in this country....it is fairly obvious to all concerned that there are things to be said for both sides, and the sooner this gets settled...it has been hanging over the collective head of the book trade for longer than I've been in the business....the better.... see Star pb by Talbot Mundy, QUEEN CLEOPATRA, full text, now out...and now to my big problem .....

Those of you who attended the last two conventions will have heard me muttering in my beard (literally) about the B.S.F.A Literary Award (or something akin) and some of you may have gathered the idea was that the B.S.F.A. should give an award to the author and publisher of the "best" work of science-fiction and fantasy published in Great Britain each year. One of the big catches comes in the term "best", and I was supposed, between the Gloucester and the Harrogate conventions, to work out a system which would include both a popular vote and a "literary consideration team" best. I admitted at Harrogate that I had failed, I could not work out a system which I myself couldn't defeat by having the

majority of the "popular" vote going to one title, and the largest part of the "literary" vote going to another. One set of votes had to outweigh the other to avoid too many "hung" decisions, and that quite simply rendered the other vote useless .....

This gave three possible solutions:

one) to simply take a "popular" vote, and leave it at that. This would have the disadvantage of making the award of less importance in the eyes of the book world,

two) to give two awards. Somewhat more expensive, and always a poor solution as it really evades the issue.

three) to have the selection of titles for consideration made on a popular vote, and then to have the "literary consideration" team make their selection from this result - say the top six titles of the popular vote.

The third one seems to me the best, and so I gave it a little more thought. After some experimenting, and in the light of polls run in the past, it would seem that the best system would be to let all members of the BSFA nominate three titles for consideration, at the end of the year. These titles should be placed in order of preference....and if any member was of the opinion that a certain title so far outshone all other books published in the year, he (or she) could nominate that one title in all three places. For each first place, a title would be given three points, for second place two points, third place one point.

Now, the reason for allowing one title to be given all three votes.... from poll experience it seems that fans often hold the opinion that there is one title far exceeding all others in quality....and it is possible that if they just leave out second and third choices and thus waste half of the points they may allot, a title can creep into the total top position which has never occupied the top position on any one list. It is not likely, but possible, and the simple fact shows that either an incomplected vote form must be ignored, or else may have an unfortunate effect on the overall position. Incidentally, it is still quite possible for a second-place title on all vote-forms to make top place - but allowing the folk with positive convictions the chance to express those convictions does reduce the possibility.

Other points - for consideration for the award the book must have been published in Great Britain, by a British publisher, in the year ending the 31st December each year. This excludes imported books, but does not exclude authors who are not British. As the idea is to encourage authors everywhere to get better s-f published in Great Britain, and to encourage British publishers to publish it, there is no point in the award going to Doubleday... ..but there is no reason why Theodore Heinlein shouldn't get it. (Although, of course, the BSFA would rather see Brian Russell on the receiving end ?)

The Award - a trophy model of some kind (and please let us skip that trite old rocketship) for the author, and a nice parchment for the publisher. Personally I would rather see poor old Pegasus, imagination's winged horse, put into the harness again....but someone might have a truly brilliant and original idea. We could perhaps make the award fit the book - although that might be expensive...

There are a lot more things for consideration, but they are routine points for the committee to resolve, in the main. The things that must be sorted first are whether the BSFA are in favour of the scheme in general, and then whether they agree with the selection systems suggested, or whether anyone else has a better idea....open for discussion now....

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Best....K.F.S.

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