

"Well, scientists aren't infallible, are they?"



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Vice-Chairman
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Secretary
Ken Cheslin, 18 New Farm Road,
Stourbridge, Worcs.

Headings by Terry Jeeves

Duplicated and published by J. Michael
Rosenblum, 7 Grosvenor Park, Leeds 7;
to whom please credit all typos, mis-
spellings, blurred reproduction and
any other malfunctions.

Treasurer
Jill Adams, 54 Cobden Avenue,
Bitterne Park, Southampton.

Next Issue is scheduled for Easter

Editor
James Groves, 29 Lathom Road,
East Ham, London, E.6.

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EDITORIAL

The beginning of a new year is traditionally the time for reviewing the dying year and awarding merits, or demerits, to anything that has taken your fancy. And so, bowing to custom, I too will survey the past year in the sf field and mention those things that have affected me in it.

By far and away the most notable event in 1962 was the emergence of a new, and important, name in the sf field. Not a writer this time, nor even an editor. Last year's biggest name was that of Victor Gollancz, the latest publisher to take to sf in a big way, and in my opinion the best yet in the British field.

Not since Sidgwick and Jackson published much of Arthur C. Clarke's sf writing in hardcover has a British publisher published so much good sf. Averaging one a month we have had a series of excellent books - the two anthologies SPECTRUM I and II from Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest, TWILIGHT WORLD by Poul Anderson an after-the-bomb story expanded from a story in ASF. And then there is Arthur C. Clarke's latest 'documentary of' novel A FALL OF HOODDUST.

One of the more exciting points about this series of sf books is the fact that Gollancz have grasped a point that seemed to pass most of the other British publishers by, that a lot of good sf is published in America and that there is a market for British reprints of it. And so we have such books as Zenna Henderson's stories of the 'People', PILGRIMAGE, Frank Herbert's DRAGON IN THE SEA, and Damon Knight's collection FAR OUT.

Among this array of talent there is even the occasional experiment. As for instance the excursion into our field of a mainstream novelist Naomi Mitchison, with her novel MEMOIRS OF A SPACEWOMAN. Though I've not yet seen a copy of this myself I gather from the reviews that it is an excellent piece of writing. On the face of it we have here an addition to that select band of mainstream writers who have made the grade in sf.

The above books have the usual Gollancz jacket of plain yellow paper with red and black lettering. Recently there has been a variation however. The cover of CATSEYE by Andre Norton is illustrated, and the advert for FARMER IN THE SKY by Heinlein on the dust jacket flap of CATSEYE also mentions that it is illustrated. These are both juvenile sf books so I suppose illustrated dust jackets will be limited to them which is a pity.

Keep your eyes on this publisher this year. If they maintain the standard of 1962 into 1963 then we are in for a real feast of delights, and if they improve on it...well! More power to their elbow.

Jim Groves.

JOHN

RUSSELL

FEARN

PART 3

"THE END OF AN ERA"

AN ESTIMATION

PHILIP
WROBOTTLE

As his activities became cramped by the grim necessities of war, Fearn's output of stories began to drop. By the summer of 1944, he was directing his magazine science fiction exclusively to the famous Standard magazines, **THRILLING WONDER** and **STARTLING**. At the same time, he was trying other types of fiction with equal success, especially in the Western and Mystery fields, where he established himself under another pseudonym. He was also working on a novel writing, with an eye to the home market. The two companion magazines, then quarterly, were the ideal foil for his art.

His initial stories in this new phase appeared in the respective summer issues, and were both under the Polton Cross by-line.

"The Devouring Tide", in **THRILLING WONDER**, was of the old school, having such details as Atlantis falling to visitors from space, but there is no doubt that it was a classic of its type. There was a definite sense of grandeur in its highly imaginative plot.

In the story, we are told that in our expanding universe, the time is approaching when the inner explosion is overtaking the outer. The inner core of non-space-time is overtaking matter at colossal speed, faster than light itself. This non-space-time expansion, moving with resistless, awful speed, is eating through all matter, so as to join the equal state of non-space-time existing outside the universe. Throughout all space, alien races, foreseeing the impending doom, are migrating to other worlds, only to be forced to move on, then on again...

In the midst of this, is the theme of Richard Carr, who becomes a super genius and aspires to the role of Creator. Ironically, he meets a stupefying fate. Outside of the dying universe, he mentally creates a new Primal Atom, which explodes, creating new stars and nebulae. But in creating a new beginning, Carr is himself subject to its material laws. He is returned to the core of the Beginning, stripped of all knowledge....

"Ego, masterful science, the longing to be a god, the ability to create and master a Universe - they had been grand dreams, all gone..."

Now he had no other awareness beyond that of a dull waiting. Waiting for the dawn of life when he could again begin to climb!

Like an echo from a lost infinity he seemed to remember something, a text had it not been?

No Other Gods Before Me!

But the rest was blotted out in the unknown."

The other story at that time was "Wanderer Of Time", in *STARFLING*. It is one of the few of his stories to be anthologised (by Margulies and Friend in "My Best SF Story": Merlin 1949). Pearn himself wrote, in an introduction to the later version, that "To encompass in 6,000 words a theory on Time and afterlife, and weld into it a prison sentence, execution, the Earth of the dim future, a termite race, and the final conflict with justice done was something of a poser, but the elements were so obviously yelling out to be treated, that something had to be done, and "Wanderer Of Time" was the outcome..."

This story, undoubtedly one of his finest, is made particularly memorable when the original villain of the piece turns up millions of years in the future as a termite, to impart an original twist when the hero destroys him by simply wiping him out between finger and thumb!

"Wanderer Of Time" is an ideal type of sf insofar as it embraces so many elements, yet all of them fit smoothly into their appointed place, thus imparting that elusive 'savour of wonder' to the reader. Each one of the ideas is capable of further ramification in the mind of the reader.

Regrettably, Pearn's technique is rarely followed today, because few modern authors possess his unlimited fund of ideas.

The fall *THRILLING WONDER* carried "The Ultimate Analysis", wherein a Professor Coltham builds a machine capable of the ultimate in analysis, a probing into the very heart of matter. In a sense it was a reworking of his old "Mathematica" stories, asserting that atoms are built up of just so many mathematical computations, sponsored perhaps by some creator who is mathematical to an infinite degree.

In "The Ultimate Analysis" we meet, fleetingly, several sets of characters. There is Coltham and his friend Kirod; Nick Black - a hoodlum, and his choric moll Fanny Reardon; Joseph Barlow, a ruthless contractor; J. Clayton Withers, murderous financier, and alternated with them is a vast alien space machine manned by super-scientific aliens, refugees from the destroyed solar system of Alpha Centauri. They are fast approaching Earth and bent on invasion.

Coltham's mathematical analyser gets out of hand, in the classic vein, creating an outflowing wave, a mathematical catalyst. It seeks out the basic element, iron, and converts it into purely mathematical forces. Each of the unsympathetic characters is affected in startling and horrific fashion, as only Pearn could imagine.

The wave finally resolves itself, far out in space, as a complete whole, a perfect sublime entity of figures, living on and within itself. An alien, thinking world in a universe of coarse matter and energy. The strange sight of it brings the Centaurian commander, the insectile Dath Raser, to a hurried decision.

"Do we continue to the third world?"

Dath Razor shook his head.

"No! I am thinking that we may have been mistaken, that on that world there may be scientists far cleverer than we are. Perhaps they created this mathematical figment to warn us to keep away. No, set the course at right angles."

Spring 1945 saw one of Fearn's most thoughtful Polton Cross yarns in **THRILLING WONDER**, a short story entitled "Mark Grayson Unlimited". Here, his interest centred on the enigma of the electron. He was intrigued as to the results of actually viewing an electron, which is seemingly impossible since the impact of a light ray upon it is sufficient to deflect it. It looks as if man can never metaphorically put his finger upon the electron's position.

Mark Grayson is a scientist who is derided when he puts forth his idea of extending electron waves, and allowing the electron to be located. Embittered and humiliated, Grayson resigns his position at the Science Association. The news of the resignation is carried by the press, and duly noted by an old college friend, now an attorney. The attorney, acting as narrator, visits Grayson and thus has an inside view on the events leading up to Grayson's final dissolution - the scientific nemesis angle.

Grayson, carrying on his electron researches, is accidentally affected by the device he has built. It causes an infinite extension of electronic wavelengths in the make-up of his body, leading to a highly confused state. The displacement produces an emission of energy, resolving itself in the form of a thin, attenuated image detaching itself from his body, immediately travelling to any spot Grayson is thinking of at the time.

Grayson is removed to prison when the eerie, haphazard appearances of his images cause public alarm. Here, he awaits confinement in an institution for the criminally insane. But as a true scientist, Grayson determines to make something of his doom - for doom it inexorably is, as his ghostly transmissions bring with them a loss of substance and weight. En rapport with his images, he wills them to places hitherto unknown to Man. His images eventually extend beyond three dimensions...

"He had in fact the supreme chance of all creation, the ability to roam as an actual thought-projected image into all the places locked so far to science.

He told me of his journeyings through the hottest suns, of his visits to the centres of blazing Sirius and Antares. Then some whim changed his course. He had all Time open to him too, as more and more electrons swept him into the multiple dimensions demanded of them.

He walked in the Cretaceous and Carboniferous Periods, saw the beginning and end of the world, established facts of history which I wrote down and stated vital facts of the future which only the passage of time can prove to lesser mortals."

By this time, Fearn was producing novels in earnest. The early forties had seen the birth of his most successful character, "The Golden Amazon", appeared in a bound edition in this country in 1944. Subsequent development was inhibited, however, by the acute paper shortage, ever a bane to British science fiction hopes, and the sequel was not to appear until 1948. Fearn went ahead in Canada however, to produce a whole string of superb novellas featuring her further

adventures, emulating - and surpassing - the galactic extravaganzas of E. E. Smith. Besides serialising his "Golden Amazon" stories, TORONTO STAR ran murder mysteries by Fearn. In England, he originated a mystery novel series featuring a schoolmaster sleuth, as 'John Slate'. These were published by Rich and Cowan, at least one of which, "One Remained Seated", was radio-reviewed.

In the midst of this, Fearn yet found time to appear in THRILLING WONDER and STARTLING, where he began to achieve his ambition of placing full-length novels: "Aftermath" in September 1945, "Other Eyes Watching" (as Polton Cross) in Spring 1946, both in STARTLING, and a short novel, "The Multillionth Chance" in the fall 1946 THRILLING WONDER.

"Aftermath" followed the old pattern of the World in Peril, but the treatment was sparkling. The basic premise was that a weakening in Earth's Heavyside layer - caused by a prolonged World War - has allowed spacial radiation to get through to the surface at an unprecedented intensity. This idea was not new, had indeed been used by Fearn (as Dennis Clive) in "The Voice Commands" appearing in SCIENCE FICTION for June 1940, but he supplied a new twist in its effects.

Fearn had it so that the intelligence of every living thing is suddenly stepped up. Poul Anderson's well-known novel "Brainwave" owes a great deal to Fearn's story; it is rather a pity that no reviewer saw fit to remark on this. The problems created by this, chiefly the revolt of the domestic animals, were dealt with in convincing style. In addition, disaster is caused when the laws of Natural Selection no longer work. The author quoted Darwin as saying that if all the millions of eggs produced annually by a single oyster or sea urchin were to reach maturity, the sea would soon become a solid mass of the creatures. This happens in the story, when the sea mites become intelligent enough to avoid the destruction which formerly overtook them.

A further complication, which even then had become a standby in sf, was the onset of sterility in the human race. An attempt is made at the creation of synthetic life, only to end in failure. Migration across space to Venus is found to be utterly impracticable because a large dose of unmitigated cosmic rays causes devolution. This "back to the ape-man" tradition was one that died hard in science fiction, and indeed still persists in some of the more abysmal horror-movies today.

It is left to an ingenious 'natural' occurrence - subterranean gas- to save humanity. The story was widely acclaimed, and ranked as 5th best story of the year in an American fan poll.

Of "Other Eyes Watching", Chad Oliver wrote that "it had a lot to it in the way of interesting ideas. It seems a shame to me that Cross was obliged to present them in such a standard corn opera. He had all the ingredients for a swell story, except a plot. After all, that trio comprising the Greedy Scientist, his Dumb But Beautiful Daughter, and the Democratic Doctor was old when science fiction was as yet unborn. The ideas were good, but the story - especially in the opening chapters - was just too corny to get by."

However, the story did get by, to be enthusiastically received by many of the younger readers. Although I feel that Oliver exaggerated the story's demerits, there was definitely something in what he said. The 'blame' for the presentation can almost certainly be laid at the editorial door. Besides this, the novel was published that same year as a paper back in Britain. Its publishers, Pendulum

Publications (who also gave birth to NEW WORLDS) were naturally chary of publishing an 'advanced' type of sf in this country, so it is reasonable to assume that Pearn wrote with this in mind.

It is worth noting a short story by Pearn in that same Spring issue, "The Unbroken Chain". This had as its theme a new slant on reincarnation, wherein the central character attains supreme evolutionary powers, and saves the oppressed remnants of a far-future humanity. He accomplishes this by an ingenious method - by destroying his myriad former selves through the ages, absorbing their knowledge as he goes. Chad Oliver said of it: "I like the idea of a complete memory a and the story was well, if not brilliantly told."

"The Multillionth Chance" received a varied reception from the readers of TERRIBLE WONDER. Pearn himself suggests the reason for this in his introduction to the story. He wrote:

"It was the thought of how many things do happen by chance that lead me to piece together the details of this novelet. Remember how Tuxley said that an army of monkeys strumming on typewriters would be bound one day, by chance, to write a Shakespeare sonnet? Remember how Eddington has said - and others too - that the water in a kettle on the fire might by some improbable chance freeze instead of boil?

"Well, these two hypotheses started me off. I had to have something more interesting than a kettle of water, so I hurried along to the day when atom-smashing and metal-transformation will be a mere routine affair. Out of this I produced, with I hope some of the unexpectedness of a good magician, a most delectable blonde.

"I fancied this ought to make for interest, and I realised too that I had a fine chance for a humorous development - for a blonde in a coldly scientific physical laboratory is by no means usual.

"But I had to stick to my original plot outline, so the humour was put on one side for the development of the age-old theory on how life came to Earth, why Mars has become more arid than a dehydrated egg, why Venus has no moon, ...

"Naturally it is purely a speculation - and show me the science fiction yarn which is not - but it was a decided joy to write, and to figure out, albeit with a headache or two, how much chance can rule our lives and to a great extent predestine our future."

We see from this that Pearn wrote it for pleasure, using again several themes which he had originated some years earlier, as and when they suited his plot requirements. Chief among these was his idea of transferring air and water en masse from one planet to another. Pearn used this device often, beginning with his "Red Heritage" in ASTOUNDING for January 1938.

Unfortunately, such was the original impact of "Red Heritage" that many fans of 1946 still remembered the story very well, and castigated Pearn for using it again. I think this is unreasonable: there is no sense in tossing aside a good theme after only one development.

"The Multillionth Chance" is important in that it typifies Pearn's work, containing as it does so many of his ideas and plots. One of its themes, that on

the 'laws' of chance, has received a heavy "going-over" by subsequent authors.

1946 was a very important year in Britain for science fiction. It saw the birth of several sf magazines in this country. Fearn was well represented. In the first two issues of NEW WORLDS, he had five stories. One of them "Lunar Concession" was actually written as long before as 1940, at which time John Carnell was originally planning the magazine. The war put a stop to it, so Fearn sold his story to SCIENCE FICTION, where it appeared under the Thornton Ayre by-line in Sept. 1941. It was illustrated on the cover by Frank R. Paul. In 1946 Carnell was hurried into using it again. This was perhaps a mistake, because it had been written around an old idea - that of the hidden side of the moon being an inverted bowl, complete with air and life of sorts. Even by 1946 this romantic idea had fallen into disrepute. It is interesting to note that Ray Gallun, who popularised the theme in his ASTOUNDING story "Fires of Genesis" in 1937, was the first to debunk the idea over ten years later in his "operation Fumice".

Two of the other stories, "Vicious Circle" (Cross) and "Sweet Mystery of Life" were reprinted in STARTLING and THRILLING WONDER, the first one that same year, and the latter early in 1947, with some minor changes. The Cross story was again a nemesis angle wherein Dick Mills is shuttled back and forward through time, following a circular time-line. He swings through Past, Present, and Future, ultimately to disappear into Eternity, leaving Earth behind for ever. The other story was an exceptionally well-written fantasy, which was an sf variation of his earlier weird-horror story, "The Wailing Hybrid" (THRILLING MYSTERY Dec. 1936). It told of a botanist who 'grows' a Venusian plant-woman, and the story ended on an ironical note with a moron destroying the secret of space travel.

"White Mouse" by Thornton Ayre in the first issue, told of the marriage between a former space pilot to a Venusian girl. They return to Earth to live, and are happy enough at first. Eventually, however, the marriage becomes shadowed with a sense of doom. The girl, Lucia, is slowly dying - unable to adjust to the lighter air pressure and lack of oxygen. After her first summer on Earth, she is further stricken by the (to her) relatively unmasked solar rays. Inevitably, Lucia, the first alien to come to Earth, the cosmic White Mouse, is claimed by death - but not before she has expressed her love for her husband. Then -

"She was silent, & wistful smile was fixed on her small mouth. Her eyes were wide open, unblinking. Stupidly I followed their direction towards the open window, where the curtains stirred restlessly.

Over the sunset was a star, a glowing planet, brilliant and alone."

This fine little story, more than any other, utterly refutes the accusation, repeatedly levelled in ignorance, that Fearn was nothing but a gadgeteer.

"Solar Assignment" - an action-packed interplanetary short - attributed to 'Mark Denholm' in the first issue, is not generally known to be Fearn's. The pseudonym was used only once again, as the by-line for "Setters of Eternity". This appeared as a feature novelette in the first issue of the British WORLDS OF THE UNIVERSE, circa 1950. The latter is especially interesting in that it was one of the few stories in which Fearn dealt extensively with the Hyper-Space concept. He gave free rein to his imagination, embodying some of the concepts of his Astounding era.

In a similar vein, with definite fantasy connotations, was Fearn's "Pre-Natal" in yet another short-lived British magazine, OUTLANDS, which appeared towards the winter of 1946.

Late in 1946, Walter Gillings launched FANTASY, for which Fearn wrote the lead story "Last Conflict". Gillings, well-known for his brilliant fanzine "Science Fantasy Review", had also launched the pioneer British sf magazine TALES OF WONDER before the war. Like its predecessor, FANTASY proved extremely popular, but was forced out of print by paper shortage after only three issues.

Gillings, who was a close friend of Fearn's, believed in introducing sf to the British public in gradual stages, favouring the older type stories initially, and then intending to build up to contents comparable with the best in the modern trend. He received some rather stupid criticism by the minority of British fans who were long familiar with the American scene, as did Fearn for his "Last Conflict" which was written to order. They were impatient for a magazine comparable to the American ASTOUNDING.

The paper restriction obliged Fearn to move back across the Atlantic in 1947. May THRILLING WONDER carried "The Arbiter", in which seven disembodied brains are planted in a machine designed to guide the destiny of Man - the Arbiter. But Nature is not to be cheated. The machine ends by stagnating and eventually destroying the human race.

After several more stories, Fearn decided to leave the Standard magazines, his last story being "after The Atom" in the May 1948 STARTLING. It was a worthy note on which to bow out. In this, his first real mutant story, he adapted the Cross technique to a story embodying his own ironical overtones.

The world is ravaged by an atomic war, resultant in oxygen and hydrogen combining during the radiation onslaught and forming water, burying all the continents and turning the earth into something pretty close to a hydrosphere. Two men, Dr. Oswald Salsback, and the narrator, Robert Conway, are caught up in an explosion and blasted in and out of hyper-space, to arrive 5,000 years in the future. They encounter a race of aquatic beings - mutated humans - and after a struggle are captured.

Earlier, Salsback had theorised, then proven, that a certain group of genes is responsible for Man's stavistic and war-like tendencies, and that a combination of radiations could eliminate it. The twist is that the atomic war had accomplished this: the New People are peaceful, without the power-lust. Summoned to their court, the two are condemned as throwbacks:

"There was nothing we could do to alter the decision. It was cold, ruthless, yet understandable justice. But, writing these last words with Salsback beside me, as we await the carrying out of the death sentence, I cannot help but see something remotely funny about it.

We who tried to make a perfect race, and theorised on how recessive units should be eliminated, are ourselves condemned by the perfect race because we are recessive units.

Ironical? I think so."

In 1948 Fearn took stock. Either he could continue to sell to the American magazines, for limited financial reward in the midst of increasing competition from rising new authors, or he could concentrate on material for the home market, which was expanding again. As a professional author Fearn had little choice. Britain offered much greater - and easier financial reward. He was in a

unique position. Already he was the most prolific writer of sf in the country - a fact which had earlier caused his fellow British exponents to dub him "The Blackpool Wonder."

Pocket book publishers beat a trail to his door for material, and the enterprising Scion Ltd essayed a master-stroke by placing Pearn under contract, following the success of his "Operation Venus". In 1950 'Vargo Statten' was born.

Today Pearn is irrevocably linked with the Statten stories. Very few people are really aware that he did anything else. It is time that they be made aware of the fact that Pearn wrote sf for 27 years, of which period Statten only occupied five. To one aware, as I am, of the whole picture, it is depressing to note how Pearn's reputation has suffered as a consequence of those two and a half million words - and unjustly so, at that.

Kenneth Slater is one of the most well-known figures in British fandom to have expressed his views on Pearn - and they are most disparaging. In the early fifties Slater contributed an article on the British scene to the lamented American JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION, in which he practically laid the blame for the upsurge of rubbishy material at Pearn's door, whilst openly admitting that he had read only a limited amount of his material. Up to a point, I can appreciate his views, I can well imagine him exclaiming in despair: "Ye Gods, here come the Underground Martians! Not Atlantis and cosmic rays again! But, outside of his own preferences, are his views really applicable to a fair assessment? I don't think so.

To most readers, the pre-war concepts were brand new. In this way, both here and on the continent - where dozens of translations appeared up to the end of 1957 - the Scion pocketbooks served to introduce the pleasures of sf to a whole new generation. They sold over five and a half million copies all told, and have done far greater service to the genre than the hundreds of crummy fanzines which have been produced. In passing, I should like to correct a few misconceptions about the works. Contrary to fanish belief, very few of them were virtual reprints of earlier material, and a similar small percentage were rewritten from previous premises. The great majority of the books were fresh material. Furthermore, the standard of writing was quite high: read "The Time Trap" for proof.

Recently, I have been surprised to learn that Pearn was still prolific in his final years, writing as he did numerous non-sf novels under half a dozen different names. Besides which he published three short novels (sf) a year in the Canadian TORONTO STAR - "Manton's World" (1958) and "Climate Incorporated" (1959) being quite outstanding. His last novel, "Ghost World" - a Golden Amazon adventure - was published posthumously in December 1960.

Walter Gillings once said of Pearn that he never forgot he was writing science fiction, that he tried with sincere determination to interpret his most bewildering ideas in scientific terms, that some found it difficult always to appreciate his similes may have been their fault as much as his: few possessed his illimitable imagination. Ken Slater tells me that he finds Pearn "full of meaningless 'scientific gobbledegook'...Almost unreadable." As Pearn himself stated, "One man's meat..." remains the best criterion.

Some years ago I used to suspect that there was a conspiracy against Pearn, at author/publisher level, in this country. Having since dismissed this as fantasy, I am now not so sure. Tasmanian bibliophile Donald H. Tuck recently wrote to me about a visit he'd had from old-acquaintance A. Bertram Chandler.

Learning of Fearn's decease from Tuck, he was amazed that this was not mentioned in the magazines. Chandler added, significantly, that the main reason Fearn was "frowned" on was the fact that before the war he was making far more out of U.S. sales than so-called better British writers. Certainly the situation needs clarifying.

Finally, I present an extract from a letter from Edward Wood, who has been internationally known in the sf fan field for many years.

"The modern science fiction reader does John Russell Fearn an injustice. He compares him to Heinlein, Asimov, Kuttner and Arthur C. Clarke and wants of a pioneer what even the most skilled of modern writers cannot be; the first and also the best. I'm beginning to think that all science fiction written before 1950 will be relegated to oblivion by current so-called critics and readers. It is truly a shame as there are treasures in the old magazines. Not perhaps as many as the rabid fans of the 50's might think but certainly more than say Boucher or Conklin would admit..."

The old guard fan-reader is vanishing and it is truly a pity because the new fans are in too many cases completely ignorant of science fiction's past."

In conclusion, I should like to thank all those who have helped, and are helping, in my search for Fearn material - John Burne, Arthur Sellings, Ian Peters, and others. Thanks also to Don Tuck and Ed Wood, and especially to Ken Slater who has helped me extensively on every aspect.

I only hope that between us, we may enable others to enjoy Fearn's stories as much as I have myself; they deserve that small heritage at least.

.....
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

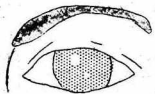
John Russell Fearn was born on June 5th, 1908, near Manchester. The son of a cotton salesman, he tried a variety of jobs before settling down to full-time writing. Writing had always been his ambition, and he began at a very early age. It was with the publication of his novel "The Intelligence Gigantic", written when he was 21, that he began to realize those ambitions.

Most of his life was spent in Lancashire, although he did move south for a short time before the war. He was devoted to his mother, and did not marry until quite late in life. He remained in Blackpool with his wife up to the end of his life, but travelled extensively all over the country in later years.

Reticent and unassuming by nature, he could yet number among his best friends such notables as Professor A. M. Low, G. Ken Chapman, and Walter Gillings. He was always well disposed towards fandom, although he appeared but rarely - a notable exception being at the 1954 Convention in Manchester. Fandom as a whole were unappreciative, and the failure of British authors - R. G. Tubb excepted - to support his BRITISH SF MAGAZINE, is something for which they should all be ashamed.

.....
AND a last word or two from Philip Harbottle on this subject appears at the lower part of Page 23. It would seem to your 'publisher' that the sort of appreciation any particular SF reader has for the ultra-prolific J.R. Fearn depends to some extent on the time he started searching for science fiction. For the immediate post-war generation in Britain, Fearn was indispensable. All honour to him !!

WITCH WAR

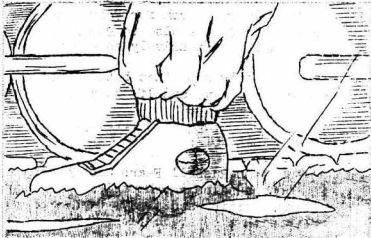


JAN ALDRIDGE

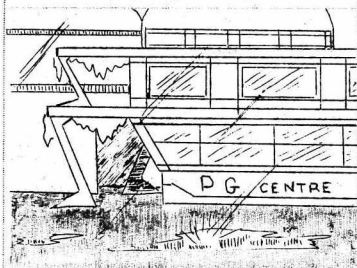
Weary, exhausted men trudging ...



through the rain-swept night ...



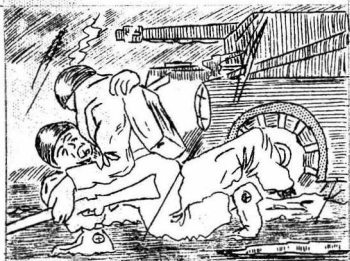
towards an imposing building ...



inside which seven pretty girls sat ...



Outside, men slipped in the mud ...



cars and trucks stuck ...



Inside, the troops are sighted ...



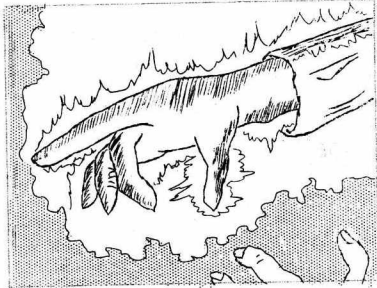
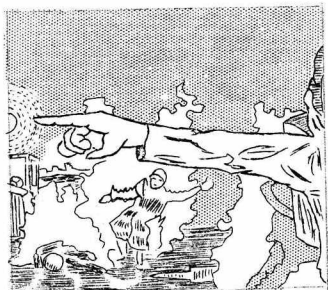
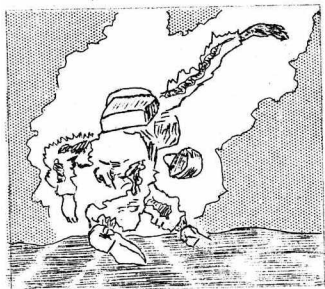
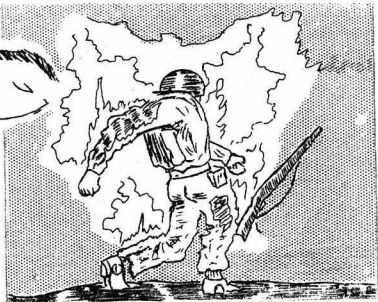
The girls were informed ...



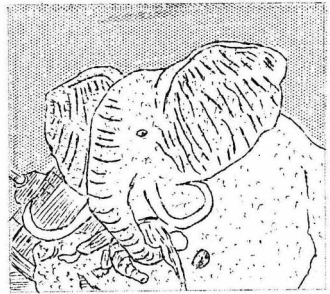
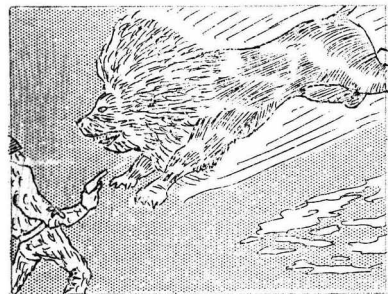
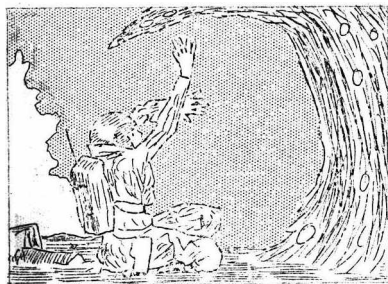
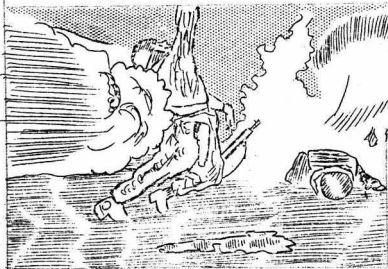
Seating themselves, they begin ...

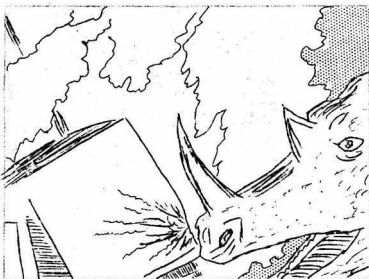


feverishly IMAGINING ...

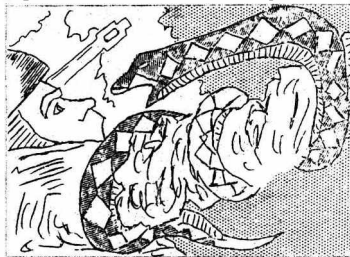


hanks broke, men fired at each other,
while the girls imagined ... imagined ...

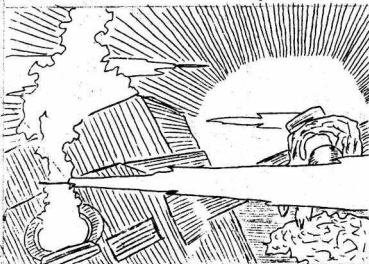




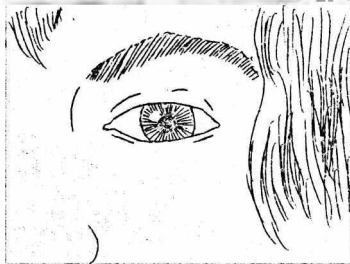
Snakes rained down from the sky ...



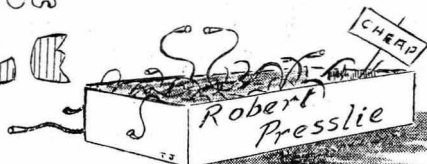
Silence reigned, as the morning mists rolled over the defeated army ...



and the girls relaxed and went to breakfast ... victorious, as always ...



STETHOSCOPES FOR SALE



You don't feel so good. You've had a headache for a week. Most of the time your spine is as cold as a ski-run. But at odd moments you get the sensation somebody has plugged your tail end into the power socket and has made an immersion heater out of you; if it wasn't that you were past such things you would swear that you were having an all-over blush. Somewhere about six-to-eight inches north-west of your navel you have a dull pain. Well, maybe it isn't exactly a pain - except when you are describing it to whomever will listen - but it still worries you now and again and you wonder if the old pump is going to finish up in a pickling jar in the autopsy room with the world's top ten cardiac specialists scratching their heads in awe. Apart from the headache, the shivers, the flushes and the vague pain, you feel fine. As the old Hebrew saying goes, it's a good job you've still got your health.

So you give it a week. Apart from the martyred look on your face the world does not know how sick you are. Neither do you. And that isn't so good because it is the uncertainties of life that bring on the grey hairs. If you could pin it down with the usual self-diagnosis and convince yourself you had a cold coming on or an airlock in your pylorus then all you would have to do would be to gaze at the television ads until they came up with the tablet that contains not one but four ingredients and worked faster than anything or until the choo-choo train went by with its promise to bring express relief.

But you are special. The symptoms persist. None of your home remedies seem designed with your particular case in mind. It looks pretty certain there is going to be a gathering of your friends - and you are going to be a very dull host. You admit defeat. Not quite certain whether to expect a swift easing of your mind or a veiled insinuation not to start reading any serials, you put on a clean set of underwear and make for your local surgery.

By the time the bell rings to signify it is your turn to bare your chest and your soul you know that if you didn't have something before you came in you most certainly have by now.

The drill is familiar. The doctor taps your torso. He listens to the assorted machinery behind your ribs. He asks you to intone a cabalistic number. He feels your pulse, takes your temperature, looks so long at your turned-down eyelids you begin to think he has found a second set of eyeballs there. Then he tells you to get dressed. Offhandedly he mentions that you have nothing more

serious than gastric influenza. You will live a little longer yet,

But next time you get one of those vague pains your reception might be different. Something is making a place for itself in everyday practical medicine. That something is genetics - the jam on many a science fiction writer's bread.

Genetics has been with us some time. Your physician has a working knowledge of genetics but he also knows that until now most of the work with genes has been done in hospitals or research establishments. Genes to him are the things that control heredity and the nearest he has got to making use of them is asking a patient whether his family has any previous history of epilepsy or tuberculosis or whatever disease he suspects your symptoms tally with.

However, on the quiet, the science of genetics has got so big it now qualifies for subdivisions. Medico-genetics is one. The youngest is pharmacogenetics. This, if you have studied your Greek diligently, is a mating of drugs and genes.

Let's get the significance of these two new sciences down in black-and-white.

(1) Because some people possess a certain set of genes they are more prone to some particular diseases than non-possessors.

(2) Because some people possess a certain set of genes some drugs have a greater (or lesser) action on these people than they do on other people.

On the way to establishing item (1) there are shoals and shoals of red herring. Starting at the front end of the alphabet we find Addison's disease and the fact that it favours men to women as victims in the ratio of two-to-one. Is the causation genetic? Sorry, it's that old monster again, Sex. Addison's disease is due to the malfunction of the suprarenals and the suprarenals are glands which secrete hormones and you know what they are. If you don't you are too young to be reading this anyway.

In this same shoal we find similar red herring. The list is long. You can take your pick. Sticking with the A's there is appendicitis which is even more sex conscious. Eighty percent of appendicitis cases are male; and even when it does happen to a woman it is nearly always at the time of a menstrual period. Moving on to the third letter of the alphabet we come up against Chlorosis. Sex is still involved but the odds are reversed. Chlorosis is a blood disease practically confined to females between the age of 14 and 24. Chlorosis is kin to anaemia which, because of the female make-up, is similarly predatory on that sex.

Whether you like it or not, we are going to leave the subject of sex. In the passing, did you notice the second qualification for candidacy as a Chlorosis sufferer? Did you notice the age factor? Age is another separator of the sick from the healthy. It is almost essential to be on the wrong side of 40 before you can have an aneurism. Between 50 and 60 Erysipelas is on the sidelines waiting for you. Just after 50 a white ring (arcus senilis) appears round the cornea of your eye. But once again, the blame for these frailties of the human body cannot be laid at the doorstep of the genes. They are simply diseases which favour the weakness of senility. There are just as many which are exclusively diseases of the very young.

Why should a felt-hat maker's teeth fall out? Do makers of felt-hats have special genes peculiar to their trade? It sounds too bizarre to be true, and it

isn't true. Men who make felt-hats use mercury in their work and loosening of the teeth is a symptom of mercury poisoning. Which gives us another class of red herring. The trade disease, Pneumoconiosis (literal translation: dust in the lungs) attacks miners, stone-cutters, cotton workers - anyone, as you might guess who inhales a lot of dust at work. The Chinese who make most of the world's camphor and menthol go blind due to the action of these chemicals in their vapourised state. People who work with tars and oils get more skin cancer than other people. Clergymen get throats, divers get the bends, tennis players get elbows, writers get cramp. One unusual disease which crops up in this group of occupational diseases is albuminuria. You don't have to pursue a special trade to get albuminuria. But you do have to be active. One of the more unpleasant aspects of training men for a war is that after prolonged route marches you are going to get a fair percentage of them in hospital with excessive albumen in their urine. The same thing can happen to a runner after a race, a forward after a football match, a mountaineer after a stiff climb,

We started off to chase clues of genes being responsible for disease afflicting selected victims. So far we have found false clues of sex, age and occupation. But don't give up. We are getting closer all the time. The next false clue brings us closer still. Here the common factor is locale. Why is beri-beri confined more or less to the hot climates? Is the climate responsible? What then of Newfoundland and Labrador where it is anything but hot. The people in Newfoundland and the natives of the Fiji Islands both dehusk their grain before consumption, thereby depriving themselves of vitamin B₁. This deficiency is responsible for beri-beri. Likewise you find goitre concentrated in districts as far apart as Himalaya, Derbyshire and Michigan because goitre is an enlargement of the thyroid gland which malfunctions when the diet is deficient in iodine. Among parasitic diseases, the attacks of a particular tapeworm are most prevalent in Australia and Iceland. All right, you say, what the hell have two such widely separated places got in common? The answer is this: the adult stage of the tapeworm in question is found in dogs and the two countries where men and dogs come most in contact are Australia and Iceland. There are other reasons (nutritional) why two other tapeworms infest the Japanese bowel exclusively and why the whipworm can almost claim French nationality.

Now we can come to the object of our chase. We have disposed of the major false leads. There are others, of course. Like the facetious, but perfectly true, suggestion that there is even a disease of class distinction. Gout affects the rich only, since the poor cannot afford to procure the over-indulgence which is the precursor for gout.

However, back to the chase. We were following a line of diseases which were peculiar to one locale. So what do we do about Chorea, usually known as St. Vitus's Dance? Back in the Middle Ages there were outbursts of combined physical and mental excitement which culminated in a dancing mania. The sufferers used to visit the chapels of St. Vitus, in the hope that the saint could cure them. And this happened in one place - in Germany. There is no germ or parasite involved. It is a nervous disorder. So it ought to be fair and reasonable to conclude that some Germans are possessed of genes that make them prone to Chorea. Unfortunately we have overlooked a mis-statement. The particular incident in the Middle Ages involving the chapels of St. Vitus happened in one place. But - and it is a big but - Chorea still happens. And all over the world. It just so transpires that the story of St. Vitus is such a good story that it tends to make us forget that the nervous complaint happened and still happens everywhere.

But before you conclude that you have been offered yet another false lead, a few more facts are necessary. Chorea, or St. Vitus Dance is hereditary. Not in a straight-line descent in the sense that a Chorea victim is the child of another victim. But a family history of nervous disorders, particularly if allied with a history of rheumatism, does give a member of that family shorter odds on falling prey to Chorea.

We can move on to slightly firmer ground when we consider diabetes. Only slightly. Because there is still some argument whether the causes are due to habits of life and diet or to genetics. But nobody can deny this fact: that the Jewish race and the Hindus have a higher percentage of diabetics than other races.

Are you a bleeder? Nothing personal or derogatory intended. But if you should be haemophilic the chances are that you are (a) male and (b) Jewish. Haemophilia - a defect in the blood which often causes uncontrollable bleeding - is very much a hereditary disease. Which means the genes are to blame. It is a peculiar type of hereditary complaint. Only the males of an affected family are bleeders and they cannot transmit the disease to their children. The females, on the other hand, are not bleeders but they do pass the disease on. In other words, if you are a bleeder your children won't be; but your sisters children will almost certainly be bleeders. And, as already mentioned, haemophilia is especially common among the Jewish people.

Leprosy is less common than it used to be, thanks to the white man's medicine. That statement is true but misleading. Before the advent of the white man in darkest Africa leprosy was rife. Came the white man and his medicine and the disease is somewhat checked. But if it was only the medicine why did the white man not contract the disease as easily as the black man? Possession of a cure is no passport to immunity. The conclusion is to be drawn - and correctly - that people with dark skins have certain genes which make them more susceptible to leprosy than people with light skins.

Now we are really on sure ground. We have found a true example of what we set out to look for: genetic causation of disease. Trachoma, a chronic form of conjunctivitis, is another. It is so prevalent in Egypt that it is sometimes known as Egyptian ophthalmia. But other races possess the same Trachoma-prone gene. The Jews and the Poles, for example. (Digressing, doesn't it seem that the seven plagues are still pursuing the unfortunate Jews?). Getting back to Poland, we find a scalp disease which is so oddly localized that its Latin name is Plica Polonica. And going from nominated countries to no country in particular there remains the unsettled question about cholera. Everybody has noticed that doctors and nurses working with the everyday sick seldom get infected by their patients. It is said that they have gradually acquired immunity to the commoner diseases by continued contact and by having subcritical bouts of the various diseases. This fact can be granted for measles, diphtheria and what-have-you. But no one can acquire an immunity to a disease they have never met. So why then is it that among missionary nurses out East for the first time, working with cholera victims, why is it that some get infected and some don't? This question has perplexed medical men for some time. Some people just do not get cholera. The conclusion is that they have a genetic immunity. Not, you will note, any mention of heredity - which couldn't apply in the case of the missionary nurses, or very rarely. This time the genes are out on their own. This is what we were looking for. Let's give it a sentence to itself.

Some fortunate individuals have certain genes which make it impossible for them to be infected by cholera.

If this is true, does it then follow that other people have genes which make them more susceptible or less susceptible to the action of drugs? The latest facts suggest that this is so.

Fact No.1....In the treatment of T.B. there is a drug called Isoniazid. It is metabolised in the body by a process known as acetylation. In Great Britain the drug is metabolised rapidly by 50% of the population, slowly by the other fifty percent. And it has been shown that the rate is controlled by a single pair of genes. The rapid gene is dominant to the slow. Patients having slow genes (as regards isoniazid only, of course) derive more benefit from the drug than 'rapid' patients. Which figures. The drug has more time to act before it is destroyed in the body. Unfortunately, the drug can also have toxic effects and the slow-gene types are more affected. In one check-group, 20% of the slows developed polyneuritis against only 3% of the rapids. The 50/50 split of the slows and rapids applies only to Great Britain. In Japan and among the Eskimo the ratio is 90% rapids to 10% slows.

Fact No. 2....Certain drugs, such as atropine and hydroxyamphetamine, cause the pupil to dilate when instilled into the eye. But... blue-eyed Europeans are more sensitive to the drugs than those with brown eyes and the dark brown iris of the negro hardly dilates at all.

So there, with two facts only, we have sufficient proof that a man's genes can dictate his reaction to drugs.

Up to this point we have been considering only what was known to be true. But try playing your favourite game of placing those facts in a future situation. What will it be like when you next visit the doctor? Is the Stethoscope outdated? Will the most important part of diagnosis consist of knowing your age, sex, race, skin colour, eye colour, gene classification? And will your prescription be written accordingly? Good health to you!

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ADDENDUM TO THIRD AND FINAL ARTICLE ON J. R. FEARN.

Not many people know that "Vargo Statten" was featured in the U.S.A. on at least one occasion. "The Avenging Martian" was slightly abridged as "Survivor of Mars" to become the supporting novel in TWO COMPLETE SCIENCE-ADVENTURE BOOKS, Spring 1953 issue. It was billed on a vigorous Felly Press cover as "A Startling British SF Novel".

Nor was Fearn entirely absent from the reprint scene, set by FANTASY STORY QUARTERLY in Spring 1950 - as some authorities will tell you he was. The first issue reprinted "Death at the Observatory" (CAPTAIN FUTURE Summer 1940) - a neat detective story, which suffered somewhat by its brevity.

Finally, the September 1952 AMAZING carried a new story by Fearn, "Flight of the Vampires", which rated a cover headline. Whilst strictly old-time in its concepts and plotting, it was cleverly handled in a light, tongue-in-cheek fashion, with a semi-humorous denouement. This was written with half-an-eye cocked on the imminent expiration of his contract with Scion Ltd. All of which shows that he was fully capable of re-entering the American market if occasion demanded it. As it turned out, Scion drew up an excellent new contract, which Fearn accepted.

P. Harbottle.

f i n i s

Letter Column

In the last Newsletter there was a stop press item about the First Festival of Science Fiction Films. In my official capacity as editor of VECTOR, and in my unofficial capacity of a fan, I joined the Eyerview Film Group and went along to have a look-see. The first film was "The Day the Earth Stood Still" starring Michael Rennie as the spaceman with the take-me-to-your-leader approach. The second feature was episode 1 of "King of the Rocket Men" a serial from way back. For the record it appears that if there is sufficient interest in this programme it will be extended. For those of you who live in the London area who are interested the address of the Membership Secretary is 154 Bayswater Road, London, W.2. Membership will cost you 21/- with an additional payment of 2/6d for each performance. The cinema is the Estonian Theatre, 18 Chapstow Villas, W.11. The nearest station is Notting Hill Gate. The shows start at 7 pm. For those of you who live too far out of town, or who cannot attend most of these films but who wish to see one or two there is provision for guests at a cost of 3/6d per performance. Since bookings must be made in advance would any of you wishing to take advantage of this offer please get in touch with me a little before the performance in question. The present programme is as follows: 6/2/ Forbidden Planet, 20/2/ Things to Come, 6/3/ Surprise item, 20/3/ Colossus of New York and The Space Children, 3/4/ Erakatis, 17/4/ Metropolis, and 1/5/ Then!

KLATU BERADA NIKTO

And now a word from our President,
Brian Aldies.

David Sparrow asks why my book THE PRIMAL URGE was retitled MINOR OPERATION, and why similar rechristenings happen. Ye ED is even harsher, and speaks of the change as "a major crime". This particular criminal would like to explain why the crime is hardly jail-worthy or even, from the author's point of view, a crime at all.

Title changes occur for various reasons. David instances Arthur Clarke's AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, which later appeared as THE CITY AND THE STARS. This change was to indicate that the story had been altered and expanded. This obviously is a functional change, and should help reader as well as writer. An author is fully entitled to improve on his own work - why not, when frequently other writers will do so for him! An analogous example here is James Blish's BEANSTALK, which recently made a second bow as TITAN'S DAUGHTER.

This sort of change occurs when the author has had second thoughts about his story. There is another kind of change which is similar, though this happens more often with short stories. It occurs when an author simply has a better idea for a title. An instance of this: several years ago, I wrote a short story called HOW TO BE A SOLDIER. Even then, it did not really appeal to me, but its oddity

struck me. Nobody would buy the story. I let it rest. After some time, I took it up again, liked it, polished up a few crudities of phrase, and called it SOLDIERS RUNNING. Under that title it appeared in New Worlds. This week, I've been revising it and just slightly recasting it to appear in my next American collection. Now at last I think I have found the ideal title for it: HEARTS AND ENGINES.

But HEARTS AND ENGINES is a title that holds a wealth of implication for me. In a way, it summarises for me the sort of sf I am trying to write. So I may use the title again some day in the English market. If I do, it will be from a sense of the fitness of things, and not to rob Ye poor old Ed or David Sparrow.

The third type of title change is the one that takes place outside the writer's control. Here again, I can best illustrate from my own experience, though most authors have a similar tale to tell. I wrote a tale (you'd hardly dignify it with the name of novel) that I thought of as THE INTERPRETER; but that sounded a bit staid and unappetising for a New Worlds serial, so I called it X FOR EXPLOITATION, and under that flag it appeared. But the American publisher must have thought X FOR EXPLOITATION was staid. He called it BOW DOWN TO NUL! I know nothing of this title change until the book arrived in print. (Incidentally, when the thing was published as a paperback over here, I got the chance to have my own way, and it did then appear as THE INTERPRETER!)

Many titles are changed by American publishers. They insisted on calling HOTHOUSE the languorous LONG AFTERNOON OF EARTH (no doubt the French will call it L'Après-midi d'une Terre!) In fact, I don't think the American publishers have ever not changed a title of mine - this although the Signet people are the most cooperative and helpful of people. I'm sure the reason is not that they are villains seeking to entrap innocent editors and David Sparrows, but that they are obsessed with their study of the market, and think that they will always be able to drum up a more marketable title than the author; naturally, authors will never concede this.

In the case of PRIMAL URGE, I did strongly dislike this title, though I suppose the contents of the book invited it. When it was serialised in New Worlds, I had the chance to alter it to something more innocuous, MINOR OPERATION. And there is a difference between the two versions: Minor Op is about 58,000 words, Urge about 75,000. Incidentally, I was amazed to see this little comedy reviewed very solemnly in VECTOR without a word being said to the effect that it was meant to be funny.

Perhaps this exposition may help to ensure that in future not a Sparrow falls for a title-switch. If it doesn't - remember how you earn the author's gratitude by buying two copies of his work!

Finally, one should say that publishers are not always as innocent as I believe my own have been. The switching about of old Van Vogt titles is, I'm sure, a confusion intended to confuse. One remedy is to stand and read 'em at the bookstall!

** (Hrum, I think I did lay the major part of the burden of the 'crime' on the editors and publishers. The reasons you give for an author changing a title are reasonable enough, though it is going to be confusing to read in a future 'Brian Aldiss Bibliography' of two stories called HEART AND ENGINES. The third type of title change is the one I most deplore. BOW DOWN TO NUL is a ghastly title, X FOR EXPLOITATION isn't much better. It's a great pity it didn't

appear in New Worlds as THE INTERPRETER. I think that authors are the best people to select titles. (This, of course is the cue for someone to produce incontrovertible evidence that, for instance, John Wyndham wrote a story he called INVASION OF THE SPACE CRIPPLES but was bullied by the publisher to call it THE KRAKAN WAKES!)

I must admit that I did take PRIMAL URGE seriously in my review. I am rapidly coming to the opinion that your mind and mine run at right angles Brian. Or maybe I take sf too seriously.)**

Ted Ball, 196 Wessax Buildings, Wedmore St., London, N.19.

"Forgotten Master" is doing a fine job in describing the work which made Fearn one of the most popular pre-war sf authors. The stigma which is now attached to his name comes from the Vargo Statten and Volsted Gridban names which were used on dozens of novels published in Britain in the early '50s. It was these novels that attracted me to sf.

I see from the letter column that "Forgotten Master" has been quite well received among the membership, so how about articles dealing with the work of other British authors.

The best part of VECTOR 17 in my opinion was your review of "The Lani People". The problems of defining a member of the human race, and of sapience, have hardly been touched by modern psychology. Although the main point in "Lani People" was how to define a human I think that whatever definition is adopted it is the treatment of intelligent non-humans which is important. Are they to be treated as animal, as in Bone's book? That is the way Hitler treated the Jews, and very few people would defend it.

The definition of sapience given in Piper's "Little Fuzzy" is not satisfactory because it gives only a sufficient condition for sapience. A good definition must be both necessary and sufficient, and in my opinion 'talk-and-build-a-fire' is not necessary. Vardis Fisher in his novel "Darkness and Deep", described as showing 'the first glimmerings of intelligence in a forest primate' deals with a group of men, or sub-men, on the borderline between animal and man. They have no speech or fire, and in the first part of the novel have no idea of tools. The way the book is written makes them appear to be both human and intelligent.

In practice the use of speech is the most basic sign of intelligence which we will be able to use for some time, but we should bear in mind that intelligence may appear without speech. Piper's 'chicken and egg' problem, about which came first, sapience or speech is easily resolved if we do not assume that speech is a necessary condition for sapience. The problem only arises because Piper has taken a sufficient condition as his definition, and then assumed it was necessary.

Phillip Harbottle, 27 Cheshire Gardens, Wallsend-on-Tyne, Northumberland.

I hate to grouch on a fine issue but in the last paragraph of my article on Foarn, those lines which run "...he (JRF) was only able to put out two stories in 1942 - as opposed to ten the previous year -" represent a misprint. It should have read "1943". Trifling, perhaps, but I have tried to get my facts about the stories correct, even if my interpretations as to their merit are debatable to some.

Which brings me to Don Smith's letter. I was very interested at his mention of a threatened libel action against him by Foarn, and only wish he had told us more of this. However, I'm afraid that I cannot take this seriously. In fact

I cannot take Mr Smith seriously at all in view of the fact that he confesses to never having read a British SF Magazine for ten years. In the face of his obviously being a reader of sf for a good many years, his attitude is nothing short of monumental bigotry - if it is true. Actually, I am inclined to regard his entire letter as a fabrication - and I do not feel that the contrived humour which pervades it is an adequate excuse for insincerity. Let us hear your real views, Don.

The letter column, incidentally, is far too short. As a step towards obviating this, may I suggest that those fans who are 'down' on JRF - and that includes you, Don, (or does it?) - write in to VECTOR, and state the case for the prosecution. I would be glad to act as defence, augmented perhaps by those gallant souls who support my contention that JRF was a pretty fair author. And don't spare the vitriol. A lively 'issue' is what makes a good letter column - as those who remember 'The Ether Vibrates' in those grand old Standard mags will well recall.

And if you couldn't give a damn about Fearn - well then, contribute a stream of other material and crowd him out. Either way the strained editorial position will be relieved, obviously a good thing.

In conclusion, I'll retract my criticism of Mr Smith's letter in so far as it embraces the book reviews, and join in applauding them.

Christopher Priest, "Cornerways", Willow Close, Dodinghurst, Brentwood, Essex.

Since I have only recently joined the BPSA I have let a couple of VECTORS pass by before considering commenting on them. Of course VECTOR as it stands is almost beyond reproach, perhaps the only justifiable quibble being the rarity of it. However, since I neither edit, publish, cut stencils nor pay for VECTOR then this quibble is minimised. Even so, three months is a long time between each one.

You ask for comments on VECTOR and suggestions for improving it. Well, I think a small leaf can be taken from the book of the publishers of the prozines. Such things as guest editorials by such people as say, President Aldiss or Kingsley Amis, shorter reviews of more SF publications, and reviews of science fact books, all of which are used by the big mags., could be utilized on a smaller scale by VECTOR. I am particularly in favour of shorter book reviews. In V. 17 we were offered 4 long reviews which just about obviated the need to read the books. I am strongly of the opinion that a reviewer should give a very short precis of the story (giving away no surprises of the author) and his general opinion as to readability and general standard of the book. In this way many more books could be reviewed.

*(Welcome Chris. Guest editorials - that might be a good idea. Reviews however are a different cup of tea. First off books are hard to get, review copies I mean. Publishers are a wary bunch. Reviewers are something of a problem too. At present we have three. Two of them, Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison, are professional writers, which means that they live by their writing and hence can't be expected to spend too much time on reviews for VECTOR. The third, myself, happens to be in a swings-and-roundabouts position, being both reviewer and editor. Review length depends entirely on the reviewer and what he feels is appropriate.



S.P. SATIRE FINDS ITS MARK

The great novelists of last century were great mainly because they rebelled against the world in which they found themselves. Some of them seem to have rebelled instinctively, as Emily Bronte did, while others such as Charles Dickens were moved to do so through what we would now call sociological analysis. Thomas Hardy, Henry James, George Elliot, Butler, Conrad - in different ways, they all show in their writings a criticism of their society.

The same is possibly true in this century, though the position is now more difficult because our society is a fragmented and constantly changing one, and one man's rebellion is another's peace treaty. Between the old and the new state of affairs is a transitional period marked by novelists such as John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett who began their writing in a critical spirit and eventually succumbed to the forces they had opposed.

The present fragmented state of affairs may be such that it is not possible to write a "great" novel as it existed in its prime period last century. Nevertheless, there is one form of literary protest which flourishes as never before. This is the satire.

Satire takes many forms, from the good-hearted grin of "The Good Soldier Schweik" to the giggle of disgust of "Ape and Essence"; and under its most eminent practitioners it becomes somewhere near to greatness, as "Brave New World", "1984", and "Animal Farm" demonstrate.

These last three examples, you will note, are science fiction, or something like science fiction. Science fiction, as more than one of our eminent contemporaries has pointed out, is a good vehicle for satire.

Myself, I've never been too sure about that. For one thing, satire does not mix too well with other ingredients, for the satirist's view of life must be narrow, like a surgeon's knife. He must not be deflected from his object, as comedians and tragedians sometimes may. This is the fault that spoils a novel for which one can otherwise have only admiration, "The Space Merchants". The satire is keen and relevant; the adventure episodes are out of key, and break the mood that Pohl and Kornbluth so carefully built up.

Adventure and wonder do not go well with satire. Satire is intended to leave us with mixed feelings, with disgust or distaste, whereas one's basic reaction to wonder and adventure can be sufficiently simple as to be expressed in the monosyllable: "Coo!"

Much early sf was a long-drawn out coo. Many of the writers were simply reacting in excitement, the excitement of fear or admiration, to the wonders of technology about them. (I say "simply" without wishing to decry their attitude, for late in the twenties or early in the thirties it was a far more prevalent attitude than now.) One or two of the others occasionally attempted lampoons, but revealed thereby such a poor understanding of human beings that the effect is dismal.

Since Hiroshima, we're a bit leery of the blessings of science, and the far-sightedness of scientists. The climate for satire has improved. An anthology of sf satire would contain some good stuff. Pohl's "The Midas Plague", that most ingenious paradox of an idea, would be in, with something of Shockey's, and a William Tenn - "Liberation of Earth" would be my choice - and some Kris Neville and Alan Nelson, though those are two writers who appear infrequently nowadays. A mordant bit by Will Worthington should be included, and one of Jim Ballard's frightening stabs at city life. And more, but not a great many.

Among novels, there are healthy helpings of satire in Kurt Vonnegut's two sf novels, "Sirens of Titan" (which becomes joyfully entangled in fantasy), and "Player Piano"; in "Canticle for Leibowitz"; in most of Frederick Pohl's novels; and in this critic's "The Primal Urge" (which often lapsed into one of satire's half-brothers, farce). Not a very long list.

Now here comes a new satire, Mark Clifton's "When They Come From Space";* and I have taken my time in getting round to the book itself because it is worth making the point that here is a novel doing one of the things that sf's supporters claim sf often does and does well: to wit, satirising our present. In fact few sf novels written by regular sf writers do do this, or do it consistently. "When They Come From Space" does it consistently and does it well.

In outline, the book is simple. The central character, Ralph Kennedy, is summoned to Washington to become Staff Psychologist of the Department of Extraterrestrial Life Research. Washington is in a ferment, for a Black Fleet hovers at intervals over its sky - just as it has hovered over other large cities of the U.S. and the world.

The Black Fleets cause a general panic. They seem invincible. They are the incarnation of evil and might. Earth is finished! Then the star-sapphire globes appear. In a terrific fight above the spell-bound capital, they sustain heavy losses before vanquishing the Black Fleet. These saviours of the world eventually land, amid great excitement. Five Starmen appear. They are the

* Dennis Dobson, 15s.

epitome of all the "Gee, it was nothing - just luck, I guess" type of heroes that real life and Hollywood have spawned.

Kennedy suspects the Starmen are phoney. But the aliens go about the world, laying wonderful roads everywhere, bringing rainfall to desert areas, warming up Alaska, and so on, in a splurge of super-science. Things are complicated by a monstrous press magnate, Strickland, with his manipulation of what goes on in Congress. He weighs in with his newspapers, supporting the adulation which is the chief public reaction to all these miraculous feats.

Without giving away too much of the tale, I will say that Kennedy finds that both the Black Fleet and the Starmen are projections of a superior Being intent merely on observing Earthly behaviour, when it has seen enough, it withdraws.

Chaos comes again. The new highways, the new fertile areas, crumble to what they were before. Strickland, true to form, tries to make capital out of this development and to pin responsibility for the breakdowns on Kennedy. He fails. The Starmen make a final appearance, to say farewell, and the novel ends with earth's millions carrying on as before, and in particular with the scientists returning eagerly to their little schemes, and the heads of departments to their tasks of spending the money Washington has voted them.

Readers who read for the plot, who read glancingly and care little for style or for what the writer intends, will probably get a simple pleasure from this jolly and interesting tale. They can mistake it for a hackneyed story of adventure, with smart terrestrial hero outwitting manaces from space.

In fact, "When They Come from Space" is something more rare. I believe that Mark Clifton has fully achieved what he set out to do. This is a remarkable achievement in any field. In sf, at least at novel length, it is almost unheard of.

Mark Clifton has been on the scene for some while. The first story of his I met was "What Have I Done?" in the December 1952 ERM Astounding, a story that bears certain interesting affinities with this present novel. Mr Clifton's sympathies do not lie with human folly. Since then his most noteworthy productions have been "They'd Rather Be Right", a serial he wrote with Mark Riley which appeared later in book form as "The Forever Machine"; a novel, "Eight Keys to Eden", some of the elements of which are interestingly transposed into another key in the present book; and the series of short stories whose titles carved their way through a crumple of Pope's: "That Thin Partitions", "Sense from Thought Divide", and so on.

These latter stories had as hero the same Ralph Kennedy who appears in "When They Came From Space". In mood, the novel is unlike the stories which preceded it. Some play is made in its first chapters with the fact that Kennedy only gets the post with the Department of Extraterrestrial Life Research because he is confused in Space Navy Records with a Doctor Ralph Kennedy. Is this just a transparent authorial device to smuggle in an old hero into a new context to ensure reader participation?

The answer is a decided no. Like the mistake in identities that sends the innocuous William Boot off to Africa in Evelyn Waugh's "Scoop", the confusion in Kennedy's is there for a purpose. When Ralph Kennedy protests that a mistake has been made, he is told, "The Space Navy does not make mistakes. It cannot

make mistakes. Therefore you are Dr. Kennedy, the correct Dr. Kennedy," and the stage is set for a satire on bureaucratic idiocy.

Many of the stigmata of satire appear. People have funny names (there is a Dr. Kr-Ah who produces a time chart of masterly imbecility, and the aliens are called Bex, Dex, Jex, Kex and Lex); only the hero is immune from the general short-sightedness, self-interest and self-righteousness about him; and he, of course, is generally disregarded, "without so much as a good-conduct medal", as he puts it; and we end with the people in the book absolutely indifferent to the lesson that we may (but be sure won't, Mr. Clifton seems to say) learn from it. Just what this lesson is, we will come to later.

As the narrative proceeds, a number of thrusts enter a number of targets. Many of these are against bureaucracy, which finds embodiment in the head of Kennedy's department, Dr. Kibbie, who secures vast appropriations for Kennedy to use.

"Dr. Kibbie then stepped forward and laid his gift on the desk.

"Another two billion," he crowed happily. 'A special committee with special war emergency powers...'

"'Good God,' I said. 'I haven't finished spending the last two billion, yet.'"

Political power is also satirised; the President smiles "his fatuous vote-getting smile". The powers of press and publicity come in for special derision, and are embodied in Strickland. Strickland is, of course, a caricature, but caricatures are the flesh and blood of satire.

Strickland has a man called Miller who has special reason to hate him. Miller is the butt of all Strickland's resentments. Anyone who does not recognise the novel as satire will find it hard to account for Miller's function in the book; in a satire, he works well. For the truth about Miller, who at first rouses our sympathies, is that he deserves much of Strickland's contempt (this is the sort of point sf rarely makes). When he finally works himself up to shoot Strickland, the attempt is a dismal flop. Strickland dies of a heart attack, partly because he is grossly overweight. Not that his death matters: "There'll always be Stricklands," Kennedy says.

Other aunt sallies include the police (though "they could go back to their normal occupation of attempting to entice ordinary people into committing crimes so that they could entrap them more conveniently" is playing the satirical rogue too hard, particularly as we meet no ordinary people); the F.B.I. (an ineffectual agent N462 feebly pursues and blackmails Kennedy); religion (Christianity owes its being to an illegal appearance of criminal Vegans on Earth); American hospitality; and women ("Let the women dress the way savages dress everywhere - bedeck themselves in old dead parts of birds and animals, smear their faces with coloured clay, mash flowers over themselves to conceal their natural stench. The same way they always dress.")

Much of this might, in a less well-built book, be accounted mere coarse-grained humour. But Mr. Clifton tightens the screw page by page, and the end shows great consistency and brilliance, where the mockery reaches new heights. I would like to point to the sciencefictional side of these proceedings.

Mr. Clifton operates on more than one level. Like Rabelais, that great satirist, he is not content to mock only his characters; he must reach out and

tweak the readers nose too. "When They Come From Space" - the very title implies it - is both sf and a parody of sf. Not only is the space battle in Chapter Eight a beautiful space battle; it is not a space battle at all but an illusion. Kennedy sees its beginnings over the TV. He thinks it hokum; then he thinks it a beautiful piece of hokum; then he is convinced; he rushes to the balcony and watches the real thing outside - only to discover later that it was hokum all the time.

Similarly, when the Starmen first land and appear before a great and excited multitude, their first words are a cliché culled from a thousand pulps: "Take me to your leader".

The stunt sallies seem to be many. Only when we reach the end do we realise that they are but minor attracts to be blown away as incidentals. Mr. Clifton's real target is the cosmic pretentiousness of the human race. "How long is the human race going on believing it is something so damned special that the universe and everything in it has to be arranged to suit man's convenience?" The Starmen themselves prove to be mere instruments with which to observe man's behaviour the better. They are neither for us nor against us; simply indifferent. Just for a moment, we were spread out on a slide and observed. Then the eye took away its microscope and moved on, leaving mankind unregenerate.

Of course there are faults to be found in Mr. Clifton's Novel. Like many of his harsh and noble predecessors, he sometimes falls into mere derision - as when, evoking the shade of Thersites in "Troilus and Cressida", he speaks of women viewing the supermen and describes "the faint rustle of stretching brassieres as the ladies began to lift their mammary appendages into more prominent view." Many of his targets are as wide as the proverbial barn door, and as well peppered. It remains a most successful book, well-planned and consistent in its viewpoint. It is the satire that some of us have hoped for, that mocks something which can only be mocked through science fiction.

.... Brian W. Aldiss

NOT WITHOUT SORCERY by Theodore Sturgeon. Ballantine Books.
distributed in the UK by Thorpe & Porter Ltd., @ 2/6d.

This is a reprint of the 1949 collection "Without Sorcery" with certain of the stories missing. The missing stories are "The Ultimate Egoist", "Shuttle Bop", "Memorial", "Maturity" and "Microcosmic God". Left, among others is the ultimate horror story "It" and that delightful fantasy "Cargo". The book is worth getting for these two alone. However it does seem strange that stories like "Shuttle Bop" and "Microcosmic God" were omitted in favour of the two quite negligible "Ether Breather" stories. The ways of editors are very hard to fathom indeed.

..... JAG.

The new paperback - THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING (Fontana 6/-) is the compendium volume of T. H. White's irreverent reconstruction of Arthurian legendry. It will probably be known nowadays as the "book" of the musical "Camelot", still to reach this country from the US, planned as a successor to "My Fair Lady"; but fandom will recall its first appearance as "The Sword in the Stone" and "The Ill-made Knight"; which can probably be found in your local library. Top level fantasy which will be a rich treat for anyone who has not met these works before. Also new in paperback are two most unusual, devious and peculiar allegorical fantasies by Victorian writer George MacDonald; "Theaetastes" and "Lilith". You might like to try these as a new experience from today's fantasy-styles. JMR.

Sam Albin

