

VECTOR

19



JOHN M. HIGGINS

VECTOR

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION

THE B.S.F.A.

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EDITORIAL

HELLO This is technically an Editorial because the Editor writes it. Actually, it's more like a sort of newsletter-within-VECTOR. There's quite a lot I want to say of more or less interest and/or importance. So here goes.

THE NEW COMMITTEE On the facing page you should find the formal particulars of your new Committee. Perhaps you'd be interested to know a bit about them.

Phil Rogers, our brand-new Chairman, has been a member from the Association's very early days. He is a familiar figure at the annual Convention, having attended (if memory serves) every one from 1957 onwards, and he has served on the Committee and/or helped with the arrangements for both of the last two. He is a tall and genial bachelor with a well-pruned moustache, and although he now lives in Scunthorpe is a native of Yorkshire.

In the normal course of events, Hobbie Gray, last year's Vice-Chairman, should have succeeded to the Chair this year. Unfortunately, personal commitments prevent her from undertaking the Chairmanship at present. She hopes, however, to be in a position to undertake it next year. To cover the hole in case she is still unable to chair the Association, Tony Walsh has been elected to serve as joint Vice-Chairman with her for the current year. Tony is also a familiar figure at the annual Convention, and served on the Committee for the 1961 Convention at Gloucester, and in the days when he lived at Goltanham he used to be prominent in the local S.F. Circle.

Marin Jakubowski, our new Secretary, is a Frenchman living in London whose work has appeared professionally in various French science fiction magazines. He is well known in London science fiction circles.

Jill Adgey, the Treasurer, and Michael Roushling, who publishes VECTOR, have both survived from the previous régime, I'm happy to say.

Which leaves me, your Editor. My name is Archie Mercer. If that sounds vaguely familiar to some of you older hands, it damn well should do - I was the Treasurer until two years ago. But that was in the past - I'm on the other side of the fence now. Instead of trying to stop my fellow-officers spending your money, from now on I'll be trying to stop Jill from hoarding it. Which ought to be much more fun.

While I'm about it, I may as well mention that the editorial policy of VECTOR will remain as I understand it has always been, namely to publish things that will interest the membership irrespective of the Editor's personal feelings in the matter.

THE 1963 CONVENTION The B.S.F.A.'s annual Convention for 1963, held over Easter at the Ball Hotel, Peterborough, was a resounding success both formally and socially. Credit for this belongs very largely to Ken Slater, who was mainly responsible for organising it. It was notable not only for the unusually large number of attendees, but also for the unusually large number of professionals present. (Of course the two are to some extent interdependent - the more professionals who are known to be attending, the more fans will flock to hear and meet them).

Among the professional writers of science fiction present were Brian Aldiss (our President, and a very good one too as any Committee member who has had dealings with him will testify), Harry Harrison (who annually migrates from Denmark for the occasion), Mack Reynolds (another American expatriate who commuted from Spain this time), E.C. Tubb, Michael Moorcock, John Brunner, Dan Morgan and Kenneth Bulmer. (This is by no means a complete list). Also present were publisher Tom Boardman, John Carnell (editor of the Nova Publications chain of magazines), and anthologists Geoff Doherty and Edmund Crispin. The latter (real name Bruce Montgomery) was the Guest of Honour. Unlike most Guests of Honour, he has been a member of the Association for several years - I was the Treasurer to whom he paid his first subscription in fact. All the more Honour to him. Kingsley Amis, noted as a perceptive critic of science fiction amongst his other literary roles, was also present for a short time.

The programme took place in a crowded upstairs hall of the hotel. There were two other Convention rooms. One of them (lockable) contained the professional displays and the artwork display, the other was a comfortable lounge which also contained displays in support of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund.

The proceedings opened on the Friday evening with a semi-formal introductory session conducted mainly by Brian Aldiss. On the Saturday morning, the Guest of Honour gave his featured talk and answered questions from the audience. He was followed by Harry Harrison, who made a strong and impassioned protest against the niggling censorship (publisher-inspired for the most part) which is still far too prevalent in science fiction these days and which confronts authors who try to express themselves honestly and legitimately, at every turn. Plenty of material the only aim of which is to appeal to the baser instincts is easily and cheaply available to readers (and those who only look at the pictures) of all ages - yet Harry Harrison was on one occasion prevented from having one of his characters say "Damn it" in *Knackboundalog* (or whatever the thing was called at the time).

On Saturday evening, Peter Hammerton of the Lincoln Astronomical Society gave a slideshow-talk on the planets, and the conditions that we may expect to find when we reach them. This was received particularly well by the younger attendees, and the question-and-answer session which followed went on so long that the item was never formally brought to a close at all, and if Peter's two assistants hadn't started packing up the equipment it might still be going on yet. The trio wasn't able to stay for very long afterwards, and are to be thanked for making the journey for the occasion.

The late evening of the Saturday was reserved for the fancy dress party. This was as usual the only strictly social event on the official programme - though the off-programme social side of the annual Convention is always equally as important as the formal side. There were a number of ingenious costumes illustrating the given theme ("After the End") and the hall was packed even with most of the chairs removed. Music was provided by Don Cowlen's band, a quintet of local musicians. They put up a brave showing despite the fact that few people wanted to dance - or indeed, had room to (which must be a considerable discouragement to a musician who's trying to play dance music). Somewhere around midnight, however, when the crowds had thinned out somewhat, in walked Dan Morgan (the science fiction author), unpacked his guitar, walked up to the far end of the hall, sat down beside the band and started to play. The difference was dramatic. Instead of playing pop music for dancing that nobody wanted to do, they were now playing for sheer enjoyment, and the result was an extremely enjoyable hour or so of mainstream jazz that I for one am most certainly glad I didn't miss - in a near-perfect atmosphere for that sort of thing.

(Incidentally, coming from a traddie like me this is praise indeed).

Sunday (the Sunday programme, rather) began with a general discussion on the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, chaired by Ethel Lindsey (who attended last year's World SF Convention in Chicago through the Fund). A number of suggestions were put forward from various sources and debated. By the very nature of this trans-atlantic institution no binding decisions could be arrived at, but it is clear that the Fund's future is very dear to the hearts of convention-goers.

The T.A.F.F. session was followed by the B.S.F.A.'s own Annual General Meeting. I don't intend to go into details at this point - to paraphrase Sir Christopher Wren's epitaph: if you would see its results, look around. Specifically, bits and pieces of the results are to be found scattered wholesale throughout this magazine.

On Sunday afternoon, after a talk by Geoff Doherty entitled "Old Lamps for New" (very illuminating), the massed professionals were empanelled in small squads and put to the question. There were so many professionals involved that I'm afraid I made no attempt to keep track of proceedings - so that's all the writeup I'm able to give this particular item I'm afraid. Eric Bentcliffe then gave a slide-show involving some of the personalities present besides some places of interest where he'd been at one time or another. And finally there was the film show. There were three films on the programme. First came Jean Cocteau's much-acclaimed "Orphée", then a short film (or an excerpt from a longer film, I'm not sure which) called "It Happened Here", which is notable in that several young London fans appeared in it as "extras". Finally there was the early sf classic "Metropolis", about which I will only say that there is no truth whatever in the rumour that I took one of the parts. Damn it (these words appear by courtesy of Harry Harrison) - I'm not the only person in the world with a full board.

Apart from an extra business session to deal with sundry loose ends from the A.G.M. earlier on, and the usual auctions and things, that was (I think) all the programme. Just one point I'd better make - if perchance I happen to have wrongly assigned any of the items as to its place in the

ordered scheme of things, my apologies. I am not noted for my chronology such occasions.

Naturally, not everything was one hundred per cent perfect. I have heard it suggested, for instance, that to have a full-length double-feature film show cuts too heavily into what should be social time. Then somebody mentioned having been given a cracked cup. (On the other hand, the hotel charges were specially reduced for the Convention, and there's a well-known way of dealing with cracked cups in any case). The only really bad feature of the Convention, I think, was the inevitable inability of at least some of those wanting to attend to do so. Prominent amongst this year's emergency absentees were ex-Librarian Peter Mabey and Treasurer Jill Adams, both of whom had to stay away for personal reasons. In Peter's case it was particularly unfortunate, because it turned out that he was voted to be the first recipient of the Doc Weir Award - an award he richly deserves for his services to the Library over at least four years besides other general service to the Association, to the Cheltenham S.P. Circle, and to fandom as a whole. Arrangements are being made to present him with the regalia in London (where he now lives). Jill's absence was occasioned by her small daughter Penelope, who came out in spots at just the wrong moment. I know some people claim they can't afford to visit Conventions (even though they're not all that expensive), but this is the first time I've ever heard of anybody having to miss one just because of one measly Penny.

FUTURE The annual B.S.F.A. Convention for 1964 is to be held at the
CONVENTION same place as 1963, to wit the Bull Hotel, Peterborough.
NOTES All those interested in registering should get in touch with
Gary Walsh. (Address on inside front cover). The preliminary registration fee (to be deducted from the total attendance money) is still five shillings. Enter 1964, that is. See you there?

A little further in the future, preparations are going ahead for the holding of the 1965 World Convention in London. The World Convention, of course, is the de facto convention of the year, and is usually held in the United States. It was previously held in London in 1957, and a special plane was chartered to bring over American fans and professional personalities. There is not, of course, any absolute certainty that London will get the '65 Worldcon. Nothing can be known for sure until the voting takes place next year. But there is much support for the project among American fans and/or convention-goers, and I should say that the chances are considerably more than fifty per cent in our favour.

See you there, too, then, I hope.

WHICH WAY A number of members have written in asking why the strip feature in the previous issue, "Witch War", was not credited as being based on the story by Richard Matheson. The answer, so I am informed, is that it certainly should have been but by an unfortunate oversight was not. Apologies are offered.

OBITUARY

The death is announced of BOB RICHARDSON, who died on the 1st of April this year.

Bob was for several years a leading member of the Cheltenham S.F. Circle. He has supported the B.S.F.A. from its very earliest days, and was the one responsible for organising the first Convention held under B.S.F.A. auspices, that in 1959, at Birmingham.

He leaves a widow and a young daughter, to whom all who knew him, and the B.S.F.A. as a whole, extend their wholehearted sympathies.

LONDON MEETINGS RESUMED

Members of the B.S.F.A. who live in and around London, or who visit London, will be glad to know that the Friday night meetings at Ella Parker's flat are now being resumed, and by the time this is published will have been running for some weeks already.

Ella's new address, at which the meetings are to be held, is now:

Flat 43
William Dunbar House
Albert Road
LONDON NW.6

The nearest station is still Queen's Park. Any Friday night, from now on, Ella (and the gang) will be pleased to see any member of the B.S.F.A. who can make it. Shyness is no excuse - and with Ella it's entirely unnecessary, anyway.

ANOTHER B.S.F.A. SERVICE TO MEMBERS

Amateur writers and artists in the B.S.F.A. (of whom there must be almost as many as there are non-professional members) should be interested in a new scheme that is in process of being organised. This is to form a so-called "Round Robin" chain (or more than one, depending on the response) whereby a typewritten "magazine" containing their offerings, and including hand-drawn (or even painted come to that) illustrations, is passed round amongst the participants for their comments.

Any member (whether full or associate) can participate. All that's required is a modicum of creative output in one's chosen medium, willingness to criticise other people's work and to have yours criticised by them, and the price of an occasional postage stamp or so.

Anybody interested (the more the better) should get in touch with Ray Kay, at 91 Craven Street, Birkenhead, Cheshire, who is running the scheme for the Association.

And oh yes - naturally, anything that turns up in the chains that is thought suitable for VECTOR will naturally be passed along to me or my successor. Which is why I have a personal interest (so long as I'm editing VECTOR) seeing a big response to the scheme.

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES It is announced in the 32nd issue of "Science Fiction Adventures" that there will not be a 33rd issue "at least for the time being". Poor sales are blamed. And so an excellent magazine passes into oblivion.

Personally, although I don't like seeing any sincerely-edited sf or fantasy magazine disappear, I am particularly sorry that Nova have chosen that particular title to kill. "Science Fiction Adventures" has a unique history. It started purely and simply as an American sf magazine. Then Nova brought out a British reprint - just as various other publishing houses were doing with other American magazines. Thus far, the pattern is entirely orthodox. But from there on, history was made. The American magazine folded, but the British magazine carried on - not merely living on uncultured corners of back-number American issues (as has happened on occasion) but publishing original stories that had never appeared in the American edition, until in time it became completely naturalised - a thing I have never known happen in any other case.

Of late, it has printed a number of particularly fine stories of novella or short-novella length that I'd hate to have missed. I hope John Carnell will be able to fit their like into his other two magazines somehow.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE Having taken over VECTOR's editorship, I have just been reading through the B.S.F.A. correspondence files for the past year, and although I'm fully aware that comparisons are (as the saying says) odious - or possibly invidious, if there's any difference - there are two things I simply can't help mentioning here. One is that Ella Parker's talent for writing exactly the right letter on every conceivable occasion leaves me literally gasping with admiration. The other is Ken Cheslin's fantastic energy. Fantastic, in fact, is very much an understatement. The amount of B.S.F.A. work alone he's got through (and I know he has plenty of other calls on his "spare time") staggers me just to look at it. If the B.S.F.A. had done nothing else but discover Ken, it would have amply justified its existence.

WHAT WILL IT END ? Right - that's all from me for now. But very likely you'll be seeing me popping up here and there in odd corners of the issue as I think - or hear - of other things that you might like to know. AM

PS. Today is the first weekiversary of my rash assumption of the Editorial chair, and I find to my horror that all the week I've been sending out letters on official headed notepaper without my address. Luckily it isn't as bad as it might be, because in many cases I enclosed return envelopes. But to those of you who may be wondering whether I know what I'm doing - obviously, I don't. You can content yourself with reflecting that people who never do that sort of thing are not very likely to accept this sort of job. I'm sorry - ashamed, in fact - anyway.

Faced by science fiction (old and new) as well as by what sometimes passes for science itself, it is not always easy to identify

THE GREAT THING

says

JAMES PARKHILL-RATHBONE

An "Amazing Stories Quarterly" of (I believe) 1933 was my introduction to science fiction at school. Dreamer that I was, and so to remain for years, I could not connect school physics, chemistry and natural science to anything remotely like the science in science fiction, and was quite happy to enjoy the latter without any aid from science reality. It was a long time before I grasped that they were related, and that was not to be whilst I was at school.

This is not as absurd, perhaps, as it sounds, for there was a make-shift appearance to school science apparatus of the thirties and it was difficult to relate this to the machines illustrating, for instance, Mathematica and Mathematica Plus in "Astounding Stories". The latter illustrations resembled nothing with which I was familiar, but they had a sleek, satisfactory look about them; they looked like machines which would work. On the other hand, school physics meant, at its peak, Archimedes buckets showing the displacement of water and a glorious mess; and natural science concerned plants in pots more than BEEs. In school science I had the sensation of being allowed to look through peep-holes at demonstrations of the self-evident; in science fiction I was already admitted into the wonder of the whole thing.

When I think about it now, subject to some reservations it seems to me that the generalisations of science fiction, even in those remote days, were more concerned with truth than was school science, for the fact is that the majority of us, even those specialising in a scientific subject, are too close to the trees to see anything resembling a wood. This by necessity since, unless we are of the calibre of a Modawar, when we see the wood at all, we fail to distinguish accurately the positions of individual trees.

We live on a mote of dust floating in a bubble of air and held in place by a matrix of gravitational forces. Careering round the sun in the company of the planets, the system itself moving through space, there is something strange about life and about human consciousness on the earth which it is not the business of science to describe. Both Jeans and Eddington were rightly criticised in their day for "metaphysical" over-reaching. But the science fiction writer has carte blanche to the whole cosmos, and my own enjoyment of his art has as much to do with what he hints at concerning the meaning of human life as with the plot of his tale.

This has not always been so, but I can mark the period of the change

with one story: it was Williamson's Legion of Time. I remember being absurdly concerned with the fact of time, and had a feeling as though a brick had fallen into place while I was reading the story. The experience had some relevance to the other changes I was going through, for when I re-read the story the other day the characters seemed pallid and over-romanticised -- it was not the story I had thought at all. Evidently much of my science fiction reading had to do with some kind of subjective approach to reality. Some types of science fiction seem to carry with them the unconscious attitudes of the writer, and it was possibly to this content that I responded.

My recollection of British science fiction of this period is that it had a repellently harsh view of human nature and a curious and unreasoning dislike for any form of machine. Knowledge was continually being unearthed on far planets or of past civilisations on the earth which was "forbidden" and usually buried or destroyed again. Scientists, bearing no resemblance to any of the multitude of research workers in any field, continually went mad or berserk and attempted to destroy the world. By contrast the U.S. equivalent jutted his bulky jaw and carried on unravelling the secrets of the universe in his own whimsical and unscientific way, but at least without fear. Both attitudes were characteristic of national approaches to scientific research, implicit in the U.S. contamination of the ionosphere with a high altitude test and our own cautious steps towards participation in a European space programme. There still is something characteristic in British science fiction, a kind of attitude of "humanity is more important than science" as though science were not the product of humanity.

My favourite magazine, "Astounding Stories", was always nearer to being technological than to science fiction, and because I was not a scientist but loved machinery I preferred it to the others. It was but a step, as the name of the magazine changed to "Analog", from engineering machinery to engineering civilisations. With some authors, such as Isaac Asimov who wrote the Foundation series, the change had already taken place. "Analog" is mainly concerned with sociological fiction nowadays.

Modern science fiction, in general, is much better than the science fiction of the thirties. The characters are more like real people, and the situations less contrived. I am not fundamentally concerned with how far, nowadays, the science in science fiction approaches "the real thing". At the same time it is good, even if most science fiction readers belong to the already converted, to be reminded that the sciences are not "cold", and science fiction does this. Whatever attitude the research worker must assiduously cultivate in the laboratory, and however objective he may aim to be, the pursuit of knowledge is a type of passion. Science is concerned with a kind of accuracy about the facts; the arts are concerned with a kind of accuracy about the emotions. For both the scientist and the layman, science fiction should be able to say something about both the mind and heart of man, and the possibilities of his intellectual and emotional imaginings.

James Parkhill-Rathbone

COMPETITIONS

THESE ARE NOT competitions. They are not-competitions. No prizes are being offered. They are just for fun - and interest.

NOT-COMPETITION I

This makes no claim to being original. Even though not couched precisely in these terms, something to the same general effect is liable to crop up almost anywhere every so often. This is the VECTOR version.

Imagine you are the chairman of the annual B.S.F.A. Convention - no particular year, any one will do. You have the task of selecting a suitable guest of honour for the occasion. You can choose anybody you like - provided the person you choose is a character of fiction.

Who would you choose - and why?

It has to be borne in mind, of course, that certain qualifications for the guest of honourship are essential. You must choose somebody you want to honour, for a start, and that you and the other attendees will be interested to meet. Your choice will be required to speak English, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, and should be capable of giving an interesting talk as a feature of the Convention programme. Also, it might be as well to pick somebody that you have no reason to suspect would not be willing to attend so long as he - or she or it - happened to be in the neighbourhood at the time.

You need not even choose a science fictional or fantasy character - though in practice no doubt most of you would.

Roll up and name your choice then - Lemuel Gulliver? Elspeth Marriner? Lord Graystoke? Fowler Foulkos? That character in the book by what's-his-name? The field is wide - there must be some fabulous guests-of-honour there somewhere.

NOT-COMPETITION II

While we're in the mood for Conventions, let's have a ball. Every year the annual Convention features a fancy-dress party, with dancing on the side. It has in recent years become traditional for the Convention committee to set a theme to which the costumes are expected to conform. This year, for example, the theme was "After the End" - though previous themes have been notably lacking in such inspired brevity on the whole.

You are requested to think up a suitable theme for such a party. It might be a good idea to concentrate on something that might be expected to lend itself particularly well to simple but effective costuming, in order that as many of the Convention-goers as possible be tempted to dress up for

the occasion. But there is no restriction apart from the obvious desirability of a recognisable sf or fantasy connection.

It may be as well at this point to mention that this not-competition has no official connection either with the 1964 Convention committee or with the tentative proto-committee for 1965. However, if these committees have not yet picked their themes for the costume parties, they will naturally be interested to see what turns up as a result of this.

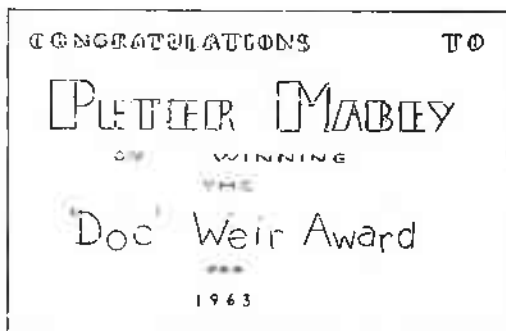
NOT-COMPETITION III

Think of a name for a space drive.

It can be a meaningful name, or an entirely arbitrary one. It should, however, contrive to convey an atmosphere of deep space. Many authors have their own names for the particular brand used in their stories. Some of these are more "natural" than others.

We want a better one still.

AM



DEPT OF THINGS THAT HAWKINS WAS NEVER MEANT TO KNOW

At the Convention, Brian Aldiss was introducing Kenneth Bulmer by asking him a couple of pertinent questions. One of them concerned what stories of his we'd be seeing in the near future. Pleading that he'd have to ask his editor, Ken called out to John Carroll at the back of the hall in a deliberately exaggerated Cockney voice: "What's happened to 'The Demons', cock?"

Brian Aldiss promptly volunteered to interpret this, in an equally deliberately exaggerated dryly-scholarstic sort of a voice: "What has happened to the demon's cock?"

A few years ago there was a film called Camel West, allegedly founded on fact, which concerned a project to harness dromedaries to covered wagons in the deserts of the south-western United States. (The dromedaries had to be specially imported of course). The germ of what could be an even more off-trail western is here introduced

WIND WAGON

by Ian Peters

Philip Jose Farmer has one of the most fertile, and surely the most fearless, imaginations in that most imaginative of all literary genres, the science-fiction/fantasy field. Admittedly he does not compare with the brilliant prose and deep - god, how deep! - insight into human (and inhuman) nature of Sturgeon but then how many do? His themes are mainly concerned with two of the most basic motivations of human life, sex and religion - one or the other or both - and since these are, by their very nature, controversial, his stories have often aroused a storm. Lacking, perhaps, the humanity of Pungburn, the poetic imagery of Brackett or the subtle realism of Heinlein's backgrounds, yet his characters are invested with the breath of life and the reader is left with much food for thought and discussion. Humorous, or "tongue-in-cheek" (as I call it) s/he can never have the impact of more serious works and that, I say, is all that keeps him from being among the top rank of science-fiction authors.

The Green Odyssey is not one of his major efforts but it is a really rollicking adventure, full of swashbuckling action and bawdy humour, played out against a richly-drawn alien-planetary background and culture, including a society of merchant traders complete with trading fleets far from any ocean. The denouement is really awe-inspiring in concept - that huge relic of a past civilisation, a planet-wide spaceport upon which all these interesting cultures and ecologies have evolved. A magnificent theme, only detracted from by the light-hearted treatment.

My reading in the history of the Old West, replete as it is with great (sic) stories of courage, humour and pathos, not to mention horror and degradation, has recently brought to my attention an interesting anecdote from the days of the Old Santa Fe Trail, that winding highway leading from Missouri almost a thousand miles across the Great Plain to the Spanish settlements at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. The Plains were a veritable ocean of grassy hillocks, sometimes deadly flat but more often rolling in long swells to the horizon, the wind-blown grass and the cloud shadows heightening that impression.

The white men who invaded them definitely looked on the Plains as a non-liquid sea. They named the jumping-off place in Missouri "Westport", called their covered wagons "prairie schooners", spoke habitually of making port and urged Congress to enact navigation laws for the "prairie ocean". There are legends among the Indians of a vehicle seen on the prairie, bigger than any wagon moving with oxen or horses to draw it, and with a white "flag" as large as a tepee on its deck. This is recounted in the files of "The Southwest Review". Shades of Xirardinur and Alan Green?

The interesting thing is that this legend is solidly based on fact. In 1853 a worthy by the name of Thomas attempted to finance in Westport a company to build a fleet of prairie clippers to carry cargo to Santa Fe. Driven by large sails to catch the steady wind of the Plains they would be economical, requiring no draught animals with their subsequent feeding and watering, and would sail by compass bearings. according to the enthusiastic innovator. When the local citizens scoffed, he actually built a wind driven wagon and "sailed" it to Council Grove and back, a round trip of three hundred miles in nine days. Convinced, the Overland Navigation Company was formed, and a mammoth wagon, on Conestoga lines, was built: twenty-five feet long, with a seven-foot beam, and mounted on twelve-foot diameter wheels. Unfortunately the trial run was a disaster. When the mainsail was hoisted, a strong wind caught it and the wagon dashed off. Faster and faster it went, to the alarm of the passengers. Thomas, deaf to all pleas, attempted to run her against the wind, but she suddenly went into reverse and, the steering-gear locked, went round and round in a mile-wide circle. One by one the passengers abandoned ship. Only a strong fence eventually brought the maiden voyage, and the Overland Navigation Company, to an end.

But Thomas, nicknamed "Windwagon", was undaunted. He embarked on his original little wagon and set his course for the high Plains, thereby sailing right out of the pages of history since his subsequent fate is unrecorded.

Did this fascinating glimpse of a bygone age give Farmer his inspiration for The Green Odyssey? I wouldn't be a wee bit surprised!

Ian Peters

REMINDER

The 1964 Convention is again at the Bull Hotel, Peterborough. For further information contact

Tony Walsh
167 Sydenham Road
BRIDGEWATER
Somerset

Preliminary registration fee 5/-.
Make a date for EASTER 1964

REMINDER

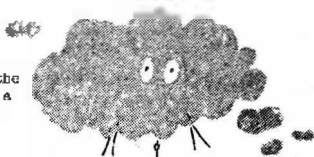
In London on a Friday evening? Ella Parker holds open house for B.S.F.A. members every Friday evening at

Flat 43
William Dumbur House
Albark Road
LONDON NW.6

Nearest station Queens Park. All members cordially invited

FANZINE REPRINT DEPARTMENT

No apologies are offered for running the following allegedly True Life Tale in a magazine ostensibly devoted to Higher Things....



AND THE SMOKE CAME DOWN THE CHIMNEY JUST THE SAME

by IRENE POTTER

(Reprinted by express permission from the Bumper Christmas Issue of BRENSCHLUSS for December 1954, cunningly disguised as a fake Christmas card)

"POOR SANTA CLAUS" said Daddy in a miserable tone, "now he'll got his coat all black." A few clouds of dirty smoke belched slowly from the fireplace and hung. "Pouff" they said and vanished. "Poor Santa Claus," said Mummy. I was silent.

After a while they discovered that if they kept the door open the smoke went up the chimney. After a while longer we were all very very cold. So they closed the door and the smoke came down the chimney again. "Poor Santa Claus" said Daddy. And after another while my mother opened the window. But this became cold too after a time and was no use. Daddy shook his head.

The builder said "Your chimney pot is cracked and you want another". And so he put on a new chimney pot and took away the old one. My mother went to the fireplace and the smoke was coming down the chimney. "Poor Santa Claus" I said. My father went out and came back with the builder. The builder looked up the chimney a long time. "Hmmm" he said and then he went away to think about it.

One day my father saw the builder digging and planting so he asked about the chimney and the builder said he was thinking about it wasn't he? My father kept asking about the chimney and one day the builder came with a queer tube. He fixed it to the new chimney pot and went away again. My mother went to see the fireplace and the smoke was coming down the chimney. My father was angry with the builder.

"Poor Santa Claus" said my brother, and bored two holes in the floor boards near to the fireplace. "Why are you doing that?" I asked. "It's suction" he said. Then we sat all that night and watched the smoke coming out of the chimney. Then my father was angry with my brother. So my brother blocked the holes up again, and went away and sulked about it.

My mother found a loose brick in the chimney, and my father told the builder about it. "Ahhh" said the builder wisely, "that's what made it smoke". So my father came home, and smoke was coming down the chimney. He went back and told the builder about it. The builder said "You want your chimney widening". And my father said "Fish" and walked away. He sent for the chimney sweep. The chimney sweep swept the chimney and then

he went away and left the soot in the garden. My mother said "The smoke is coming down the chimney" so they had a row.

A few days later two men arrived with the new fireplace, and pretty soon it was all nice and neat and fired in. A small cloud of smoke appeared and went pouff. I looked around and all the people said "Bow pretty". "Poor Santa Claus" I said. "But that doesn't matter any more" they said in surprised tones. "You're too old for that sort of thing now, you know".

Irene Potter

FREE SMALL-ADS	FREE SMALL-ADS	FREE SMALL-ADS	FREE SMALL-ADS	F
<p>WANTED: any editions of:- "Fantastic Adventures", "Amazing" & "Astounding" Also: "Unknown" (May 1940) in which de Camp & Pratt's <u>The Roaring Trumpet</u> appeared. PLEASE STATE YOUR PRICE</p> <p>Brian McCabe 2 Beaumont Road Manor Park SLOUGH Bucks</p>	<p>WANTED: book version of <u>The Twenty-Fifth Hour</u> (Herbert Best) Any reasonable price paid</p> <p>Archie Mercer 70 Worrall Rd Bristol 8.</p>	<p>WANTED.....URGENTLY to complete an asf indexing project. I want to BUY/Trade/or get information on the following copies of "Astounding Science Fiction": ALL issues of asf <u>before</u> January 1932, <u>except</u> for these three issues; <u>May 1930., Sept 1930., Dec 1930</u> If you wish to retain your copies rather than sell or trade, I would be greatly indebted to anyone who can supply me with the following information concerning any of the missing issues; Date of issue Volume and issue No. Titles and authors for all stories and articles in each issue</p> <p>OTHER FAN-EDITORS PLEASE COPY</p>	<p>WANTED by the Editor of VECTOR: <u>The entire contents</u> of the next issue! Particularly: <u>Articles</u> (serious, semi-serious, satirical etc) <u>Artwork</u> (of a nature suitable for transferring to stencil) <u>News items</u> of interest to the Membership <u>Letters of comment</u> on this issue If you're not sure whether any given item would be suitable for VECTOR, the Editor will be delighted to decide for you!</p>	<p>(This is, be it said, an entirely serious and constructive small-ad - Mother Hubbard at least had a cup- board to sell!)</p>
<p>Terry Jeeves 30 Thompson Road Ecclesall SHEFFIELD 11 Yorks (A free copy of the resultant index will naturally be sent to any helper)</p>	<p>PLEASE NOTE that Terry Jeeves is no longer in charge of Round Robin and Welcommittee projects. Queries on these and similar subjects should now go to the D.S.F.A.'s new Chair- man, Phil Rogers. (Address on inside front cover)</p>			

BOOK REVIEWS

(E T C)

Edmund Cooper: Tomorrow Came
(Panther Books 1961)

This is a collection of stories from an sf author who has received much less than his due from the devotees of the field. His two previous books have taken well-worn themes and added something new. Now we have a series of short stories which show the whole range of his talent, from good to

pretty bad. To start at the bottom there is The Mouse That Roared which is almost a direct steal from the plot of Wibberley's story. It is, to put it mildly, weak, both in plot and gimmick. Then there are a number of pedestrian stock stories. Welcome Home, for instance, is a first-men-on-Mars story with a twist ending that has been done to death by a good many authors before Cooper, and no doubt will be done to death again many times in the future. Quite a few of the stories are what I personally call 'deja-vu stories' because they serve only to remind me of far better treatments of the same theme. The worst of these is Judgement Day which reads like a synopsis of Earth Abides.

To offset the bad and mediocre stories in this volume there are several good stories, and two in particular which make the volume worth buying. The first of these is The Lizard of Woz which could almost be classified as a 'shaggy lizard story'. It is a tongue in cheek treatment of the superior-alien-surveys-earth theme, with an exceptionally good twist in the tail! But the best of the whole collection is the last in the book, The Doomsday Story. This concerns a British physicist who is requested by the Government to take over the leadership of a project to build the Doomsday weapon, the one that can destroy the entire world. His summation of the problem is, to my mind, a thing of beauty:

"Required: one Doomsday weapon capable of ironing out the whole human race. It was a tall order, but then I thought I had a rather tall solution. Oddly enough, several of my junior scientists were quite enthusiastic about the project. I dismissed the more original and enthusiastic members of my team. Such people seemed to me to be rather dangerous.

Besides, although I could countenance people working on the Doomsday project for financial reward and social distinction - as I myself was doing - the thought of somebody developing the weapon because it was the one thing they really wanted to do was somewhat abhorrent." !!!

This is a fair collection of stories.

JAC

John Lymington: The Gray Ones (Corgi Books 2/6d)
Eric Frank Russell: Wasp (Panther Books 2/6d)

The blackbird sings as I type this; the ivy rustles against the wall. But suppose the ivy were to be filled with a blind lust to reach out and strangle the gardener; suppose men themselves suddenly forgot what they were and reverted to savage beasts, so that birds, dogs and the few surviving normal men fled from them in terror?

This is a nightmare for many of us, or should be. We have inflicted such mutilations on Nature in our time that we fear reprisals may follow. If a plant sprouted leaves and flowers and...intelligence...what would its first action be? We scarcely need to ask. Somehow all the plunging strength of humanity would be overthrown by that tiny scrap of chlorophyll and fibrous tissue. We don't know how. That's the worst part of the nightmare. But if ordinary weeds can force their way through paving stones, we know that The Alien could not fail to find the crack in our armour. And it might use our own strength to bring us down. It might find a way to set us fighting among ourselves like savages.

The Gray Ones is not for everyone. If you demand scientific plausibility, for example, you may be disappointed. But if, as I hope you may, you prefer the rare stimulus of a carefully built-up suspense, you will enjoy it as much as I did. Enjoy, did I say? At times I felt that here was the nightmare face to face. It took all my Schadenfreude to read on without glancing over my shoulder.

Both the books here reviewed are good value for half a crown of anyone's money, but it is unlikely that many readers will enjoy both. Their appeal is to widely differing audiences. Those readers who prefer the crackling dialogue and casually-sketched backgrounds of Russell may find Lymington's carefully-tailored climaxes and relaxed use of conversation to be slightly irritating. Wasp was, I suppose, written for money. As Dr. Johnson said, only blockheads write for anything else. But it reads as if it were written for the sheer joy of it, as do all Russell's best stories. The cover of the Fortean Society magazine once carried a single sentence which the editor, the late Tiffany Thayer, must have thought summed up the Fortean outlook: "To prick a bloated one in the belly, I call good sport". (Nietzsche?) Perhaps it is no accident that Russell used to be the most famous of English Forteanes, for many of his most popular stories seem to echo those words.

A Terran saboteur is set down on an enemy planet with orders to sting wherever the flesh looks juiciest. Just as a single wasp, by selecting the right motorist at the right time, can engineer a carful of corpses, so James Morrow has to soften-up an entire planet before the invasion fleet can move in.

The story of how he does so is taut, fast-moving, and telegraphs no punches. In fact, vintage Russell.

Let no one be deterred by the old taunt that this is one of his TARTAN yarns ("Terrans-are-better-than-anyone"). For my money, such remarks are in the category that Arthur Clarke once defined as "the shrill whine of envious rivals".

And in any case, Terrans ARE better than anyone!

SLB

ALIEN (Tony Edwards: 10 Cheltenham Place, Chorlton on Medlock, Manchester 13, and others: 1/- each, postage extra: a duplicated fanzine)

The opinion that "Terrans are better than anyone" is evidently not shared by those responsible for producing ALIEN, the first issue of which has just reached the VECTOR editorial office with a request to review. It is sub-titled "The International Fanzine", the adjective (though not, perhaps, the definite article - after all, there are others) being justified by the existence of an American representative living in the Bronx under the name of Robert Bell. (Aliens, unlike Cockneys, are presumably born within the sound of Bob Bell.)

The layout, especially the cover, seems to be mainly inspired by the prozines, and is generally pretty effective (again, especially the cover). The artwork, some but not all of which almost certainly owes its inspiration to "Mad" magazine, is excellent, both in execution and conception - by no means the normal thing with fanzine first issues. The text is unfortunately somewhat messily typed - "sloppily" would be a better word I think - for instance, too many of the paragraphs are not indented, and there is room for considerable improvement in the spelling. However, at least it's all been legibly duplicated.

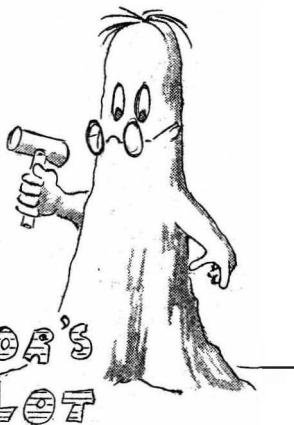
The longest of the contents is a short story by Jerry Morrell called A Mind of My Own. This is well-written if monster-movie-ish, and what if the reason why it happens appears to be as vague to author as to reader? A somewhat similar theme, handled at far greater length by a certain Name writer, is equally vague on the same matter - and is a recognised classic.

March of the Monsters, by Clive Fowkes (age 16 It Says Here) is an article on monster-movie-ism as a way of life redeemed by distinct signs of cheekbound tongue. Robert Bell's Monsters International Club comprises mainly a publicity-release for a picture called The Haven - Poe's bird presumably, though it doesn't actually seem to say.

Aub Marks has two short - very short - stories, both of the gimmick-variety. Guilt, the shorter of the two, has the more effective punchline - that of Shake the World is a trifle way-out. Shadow of Earth, by Tom Holt, is too confused for a short story, reading more like a synopsis of some such longer one.

One final point that might be taken note of: there are signs that the entire issue has been perpetrated since the Peterborough convention (at which several of the perpetrators were present). If that is indeed the case, I wish they all lived in Bristol - VECTOR could use their energy! AM

This is probably as good a place as any to mention that there is now in existence a printed checklist, annotated by our President himself, of the works of Brian Aldiss published up to the end of the year 1962. Compiled by B.S.F.A. member Margaret Manson, it runs to some 24 pages of classified (if not "top secret") information, and is well worth the price of 3/6d (plus postage) for which it can be obtained from Fantast (Medway) Ltd, 75 Norfolk Street, Wisbech, Cambs. It does not, of course, it being 1963 nowadays, cover the following article, which will have to be held over for some future supplement - of which may there be many.



THE AUTHOR'S LOT

BY

BRIAN ALDISS

YOU KNOW WHAT happened to Lot's wife? According to the Old Testament, she looked back and got turned into a pillar of salt. We like more science with our fantasy nowadays, but somehow the old story sticks. By giving this essay the title I have, I warn myself what may happen if I look back.

And then I look back.

I look back and try to see what made me a writer. To put it in an inaccurate nutshell: in my surroundings, it was a lack of something; in me it was a surplus of something. But lacks and surpluses are what have made man man. They're what continue to make man man. The man who is content with his surroundings is deficient in the vitamin of dreams. It means among other things that he will not want to read science fiction.

As a child, I was never any good at playing other people's games. My brother wanted me to play goodies and baddie with him; I just wanted to make jokes or be funny. Who ever heard of cops and robbers? When I got older, I liked the games at school well enough - rugby in particular I enjoyed when the pitch was ripe with good Devon mud and one could wallow about in the scrum as if evolving into some sort of super-beast. But what I lacked was the team spirit. I made a better touch judge than hooker. Swimming was okay; you only co-operated with yourself.

In fact, I might have co-operated better with myself if my childhood had

been violently sad. It was not, any more than it was radiantly happy. A lot of it was simply faintly dull: what Thomas Hardy called "neutral-tinted haps and such". Books I enjoyed, and making books. It's no good asking me what was the first thing I wrote, or when I first wrote science fiction; I don't recall; it seems as if I was always writing, though I was not what you'd call precocious. My earliest recollection of one of my own creations is a flash of memory like a faded photo in a friend's album; I can see myself as an eight-year-old looking at a two-page story I wrote at the age of six or seven, and realising I had written something. There was a picture to the story. It showed an immense building like a skyscraper lying on its side; the building had wings from which sprouted a large number of propellers. The building was flying to the moon.

Many children write and draw until the talent gets squeezed out of them by stupidities and restrictions - some of them unconsciously self-imposed; I ask myself why I kept on writing. The answer may be that I was a shy child. My father had a sarcastic way of picking up other people's remarks and turning them about until they looked ludicrous. This talent I admired, for it was genuinely funny, even when the laugh was against oneself. Nevertheless, it made one think before speaking, and often decide not to speak for fear of saying something foolish.

But if you write! Why, then you have the chance to look it over first and expunge at least some of the idiocies! If you think in this cautious way for a number of years, and act accordingly, then you find that you express yourself as if by instinct more cogently on paper than in speech. In conversation, you have to observe the tacit rules of team-work; on paper, you only co-operate with yourself

There are various reasons for writing. You can write to create art, or you can write - this is not always a conscious aim - to achieve a kind of therapy. I'd be hard put to define the difference precisely, but in so far as I believe it is especially noticeable that there is a high proportion of authors who are acting out their fantasy life on paper, even if they think they are creating (if you forgive this gross simplification). Several writers have admitted that mental disturbance gave them impetus to write. We have Walt Willis's word that Peter Phillips, once a very compelling writer, wrote under neurotic compulsion; when his neurosis was cured, he ceased to write sf. Van Vogt has said that he created his memorable body of sf work from "a position of extreme schizophrenic isolation"; he now writes no more sf.

One expects this sort of confession only from a writer whose period of disturbance is finished, or when he considers himself whole again. So we do not often get such illuminating statements. But I can think of several sf writers, some very prominent, whose work gives unmistakable indications of various kinds of deprivation and emotional upset; obviously it would be unjust to name names.

As it happens, sf is the ideal medium for externalising one's personal bogies and for cloaking one's secret fears in the form of aliens or slaver horrors. When a story has a slab of gross unbecked by any logical explanation, or obtunding inartistically from the structure of the story, then the watchful reader may know he is in the presence of a writer's irrational fear. I'm

sure my friend Geoff Doherty's pet Shanbleau is in this category.

When I began writing science fiction, about 1955, I was in a nervous and in some ways repressed situation, and I channelled many fears into my writing. One example was my early story Outside (reprinted in my Space, Time and Nathaniel, and in Crispin's Heat Sf Two): I was there putting into alien guise my own dread at the time of betrayal by other people and a fear of the dark. I did not realise I was doing this when I wrote the story; I realised it when I saw it in print. The therapy worked, however, for the fear of betrayal passed; nor have I been irrationally afraid of the dark since then.

Writing those early stories was a health cure for me. At about the time that Space, Time and Nathaniel was published, I ran out of phobias; they had all been expended on the stories that made Damon Knight say "Aldiss is most enjoyable when being most objectionable"; dragged out into the daylight, the shy little things withered and died like bluebells stolen from the woods. That would have been much more of an hiatus in my writing life if I had not by then learnt a little of writing itself, the eternal fascination of trying to perfect the individual sentence and - how rare the successes! - the individual story.

Of course, this therapeutic process only works on a superficial level. One has one's major obsessions. For an example: I have no patience with the belief in evil as a force external to man. In fact, I am cautious about allowing evil or bad into my beliefs and stories; I know that evil exists, but hold it to be rarer than most people think - thus such sins condemned by Christianity as lust or theft or gluttony may often prove to be, if examined, simple cases of deficiency, curable by understanding rather than punishment.

Whether or not these views are correct in an absolute sense, they are the ones I orient myself by. As a consequence, I can rarely raise enthusiasm for stories in which absolute good or absolute evil appears as an entity. This is why such works as Tolkien's Lord of the Rings or Moorcock's Elric stories leave me untouched; for me they are based on a fallacy. In the same way, you will find little evil in my stories, although I rarely write about virtuous people. Here my beliefs are a handicap; thinking as I do, I cannot draw villains.

Or if I draw villains, the villainy is only in the eye of the beholder; by the end of the story, when we understand things better, the villains are seen to be not so bad, and in fact motivated perhaps merely by ignorance or thoughtlessness, or even by the best of impulses.

The giants in Non-Stop, the Rosks in Equator, the morels in Hothouse, the mals in The Interorter, even Rose English in The Primal Urge, turn out to be less black than they seemed before we grew to know them a little better. Hate yields to enlightenment.

I claim this to be a reasonable and rational view for an sf writer. But it means that the final scenes of my stories are not likely to be the climaxes of mayhem that some readers enjoyed under an older dispensation; you're much more likely to find someone laughed out of court, or an armistice signed. And of course this isn't very dramatic.

Nevertheless, a writer is well advised not to violate his fundamental beliefs for the sake of fiction (any more than he should air his beliefs too blatantly). To anyone thinking of writing, whether for money, art, or therapy - all sound motives - I would say that fiction is not only the re-creation of life, or bits of life's experience re-assembled: it is itself a way of living; if your novel has any merit in it, you become a slightly different or deeper man by the time you have finished it. If you force yourself into a line of thought that does not ride with your personal philosophy just for the sake of the plot, there may be something wrong with your plotting. And you will never be really satisfied with the result.

SF writers appear not to put much of themselves or their experience into their stories. This is an illusion; it has some power merely because the discipline of sf requires us to look away from ourselves towards a greater thing (the universe, time, the unknown, whatever). The direction we look is still predetermined by what we are. A line AB may be of a certain specified length; the direction in which it points will depend on where A was in the first place.

Many of our writers, I suspect, write sf not only because, as I said earlier, it is an ideal therapeutic medium, but because they find in it camouflage for their own identities. Conversely, it is harder to write personally in sf. To compose a novel about people in London bed-sitters means we have to draw on more obviously personal material than if we are writing of the habits of the urg-devouring osks of Isk VI. But Hoinlein's osks, Brunner's osks, Panthorpe's osks, C.S. Lewis's osks, will all differ according to the personality of the author involved.

This is obvious enough. But what I would like to see is a number of self-analyses from a number of authors explaining the personal core behind their stories; that is tentatively what I have tried to do here. Or perhaps a reader of VECTOR will operate on the same level and confess what compels him to read science fiction. It must be a compulsion, or we'd all be reading something simple like Georgette Royer or Howard Spring or Mickey Spillane

Brian W. Aldiss

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

of world-shaking unimportance

B.S.F.A. NEWSLETTER No. 15, dated December 1962, is indeed the correct fifteenth of its kind.

B.S.F.A. NEWSLETTER No. 16, dated April 1963, also claims to be No. 15, but such claim is hereby disallowed. Who's the April fool, one wonders?

B.S.F.A. NEWSLETTER No. 17, dated June 1963, will make no claims to being anything but its own sweet and unequivocal self. It is expected to contain all the news that should have appeared in this VECTOR except that nobody told me until too late, besides several more book-reviews.

BEYOND THAT - who knows?

AM

THE MAIL RESPONSE

LETTER COLUMN

CHARLES E. SMITH (61 The Avenue, Ealing, London W.13):

I am finally writing the letter of comment I have been promising myself I would write for some time. I have been prodded into writing because I have found the last three copies of VECTOR rather dull and lacking in real meat. As you have said so often, unless we, the readers, voice any dissatisfactions we may feel, the editor can only assume we are generally satisfied with the general policy. On looking back at the last issue, I have tried to discover what I felt was lacking.

The book-reviews, as usual, were excellent. I particularly enjoy the comments of our esteemed president. However, there was only the one review, which seems rather short measure. Can we have more?

The main section of the magazine was of course devoted - an apt description, I feel - to the works of John Russell Fearn, as it had been for the two previous issues. This strikes me as rather too much of a good thing. All right - he was important in his day, and for the older fan it was probably a feast of nostalgia. Probably he did introduce many readers to science-fiction under the guise of Vargo Statten and Volsted Gridban - though it is also very probable that he dissuaded many other potential readers from reading any science-fiction at all with those dreadful titles and that style. I count myself very lucky that the first science-fiction I read was Heinlein's Puppet Masters and that, when I did meet Fearn in one of his many disguises, I was already an addict, because I could not get past the first page. Anyway, if the fact that a writer introduces readers to their first taste of fantasy or science-fiction is enough to justify devoting three issues of VECTOR to discussing his talents, how about an article on Noddy?

I ought to make it clear that I am not disputing Philip Harbottle's right to write articles about any writer he chooses, and it is after all relatively unimportant if the particular writer he chooses is regarded as completely without merit (this is perhaps a good reason to write about him, to convince us that he does warrant more of our attention than we grant him at present) but surely there should be articles about other subjects and writers alongside it for those readers who have no interest in Fearn (in this case: the same would hold good if the author were Sturgeon or Heinlein). It has meant that for the past three issues the major portion of VECTOR has held no interest for one reader at least.

If Ian Aldridge enjoys illustrating well-known stories, might I suggest that he takes a whole page and devotes it to a single illustration from a story he likes? This would give him more time to produce a picture which does justice to the original, as I feel his comic-strip technique does not.

The letter-section as usual provided the real meat of the issue. I was very pleased to see Brian Aldiss defending The Primal Urge which I

found hilariously funny and which had the same effect on me that the first reading of Lucky Jim produced. Brian Aldiss has produced the first really comic s-f novel ever. I tend to dislike comments as to how a work is the best one has ever read, seen, heard or whatever, feeling it is a rather juvenile attitude. However, on this occasion I think it is justified. It is the first novel written in the framework of speculative fiction to have a wholly comic aim and to succeed completely within these limits.

I was also rather taken with Don Smith's notion of a threatened libel action against him by Fearn. Could you persuade him to write something about this to counteract the impression of him left by Philip Harbottle's article? (Easily. AM)

As for suggestions, would it not be possible to bring back the magazine-review section? Even if the reviews are short, at least the contents are brought to the readers' attention. Same thing for fanzines. In some of the early VECTORS there was a section devoted to reviewing fanzines of interest to the general reader, and, more important, gave details of where those could be obtained and for how much. I don't mean a review section as is commonly found in the fanzines themselves, as these are too esoteric for the general reader and often require having the actual fanzine there for reference to discover what the reviewer is talking about. Could there not be also a larger section of the magazine devoted to wants and sales, possibly incorporating readers' queries about sources of s-f material, details of specific issues of magazines, anthologies, and information about specific authors and their work? These queries could be answered by any reader with the appropriate information, much in the way John O'London used to do. Also I should like to see readers contributing articles on their favourite authors or novels. There are surely enough of us (the readers) to run such a series. I hope so.

(Some very valid points there I think. VECTOR will print articles of interest concerning writers of interest - if such find their way through the Editor's letter-box. For instance, I would (much though I admire both writers) be delighted to receive a well-reasoned and non-libellous article written from the viewpoint that Heinlein or Sturgeon is not really as good as is usually agreed. This is of course not very likely to happen, because when someone makes a particular study of the works of some writer (as Philip Harbottle has done with the works of John Russell Fearn) it virtually pre-supposes a favourable rather than an unfavourable interest in the writer concerned. As for book reviews, the normal practice is only to review copies provided free by the publishers for that purpose, which of course explains why there are no reviews of professional magazines at present. Publishers of fanzines which they think should be of possible general interest are cordially invited to furnish VECTOR with review copies on the same basis. If more small-ads were received, more small-ads would be printed. I will be happy to print readers' queries too if they seem to call for such treatment rather than a direct answer. If anybody would like to set Noddy in a wider context than he is generally associated with, that too would make an article that would be considered for publication. This letter of comment was precisely the sort that I wish several dozen more of the readers would come up with - even though I cannot necessarily guarantee to quote from them at such length every time. AM)

BERT LEWIS (47 Queensway, Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston, Lancs):

I have enjoyed the series on John Russell Fearn immensely, in fact I am rather sorry that it has now finished. Philip Harbottle has really gone to town on his subject. I can speak quite a lot from personal experience of the Maestro, living as I do just a few miles from where he lived and having paid him a few personal visits. One of these was during the war years, which brings me to one little item about him that I do not remember reading about in the series, which is that he was a Cinema Projectionist in Blackpool during the war. I think this was part of his 'war time effort', as he was exempt from War Service on physical grounds.

It was in this way that I got to know about it. I had been invited to go over to his home one weekend to see a few films, as he had acquired a 'VOX' 9.5 sound projector just about that time, so we were able to see some which included the silent version of *Metropolis*. This had its humorous side, as John decided that a little 'musical background' would make it a bit more interesting, but the only records he had that were anything like what he wanted were some records of the music from *Chu Chin Chow*. I tried not to notice, but inwardly I had to smile at the attempt. We still enjoyed it just the same. We also had a good 'natter' about S.F. generally afterwards, which was always welcome when one meets so few 'fans' in person, particularly when it's someone like John.

There is just one other little item which I cannot quite line up with. In his 'biographical note' Philip says he was devoted to his mother. I suppose in a way this was correct, although I did not see it quite like that; the impression I always got was one of his being tied to her apron strings. This was borne out once when, talking about John still being single, she remarked that "John was not bothering to get married yet" and this when he was very much the 'eligible bachelor'. Of course he was kindness itself to his mother and I suppose on this account he was devoted to her.

One thing however will always remain with me, and that is his enthusiasm for anything science fictional. He has paid one of the greatest contributions to this form of literature. He remains one of the most prolific of writers in so far as it was always easy to read, and as such provided good reading entertainment, which to me is all that is required of S.F.

I think I endorse Christopher Priest's comments in that the book reviews are tending to be too long and that shorter reviews of more books, or even simply shorter reviews, would be more likely to excite interest in the books with regard to where potential buyers are concerned at least.

One other item which arouses my comment.... How the H... did *Stethoscopes for Sale* get into VECTOR? It would probably go down well in some non-fictional publication, but not in VECTOR .. please!!

(Wilson Tucker, the American author and old-time sf fan, is a movie projectionist. Any more I wonder? AMB)

BRIAN W. ALDISS (Oxford):

Let's hope other readers will differ strongly from Mr Harbottle in his estimate of the worth of Russell Fearn's writings. Could I add some-

thing to his assertion that "The failure of British authors - Ted Tubb excepted - to support his 'British SF Magazine' is something for which they should all be ashamed" ? Any writer, I would have thought, might have felt shy of having his work appear between the monster-haunted and blaster-toting covers of the "Vargo Statten Magazine" - and more than shy when patriotism was called on to aid commerce and the title was switched to "British SF Magazine".

But if you swallowed your apprehensions and submitted stories to the ~~mag~~, you soon found what a supercilious, even hostile, reception they received. Such was my experience early in 1954, when the mag had just started; I had just started myself then - both "New Worlds" and "Nebula" had accepted stories, but none had appeared in print. The editor wrote long letters, very pontifical in tone, asserting that because the fans had not taken readily to the mag they were "toffee-nosed", and claiming that "As an Editor, I could turn down everything that is submitted to me" - presumably because Vargo Statten could write the whole issue at a pinch.

Besides these letters, long readers' reports were sent with stories that the editor considered worth publishing if they were rewritten as he wanted them. I finally got into this privileged class, but the report was so illiterate and so absurd that I had to give up the whole idea. Behind the whole magazine was the idea that it was to appeal to teenagers, and that therefore everything had to be written down to them. This seems to me a barbarous distortion of the truth. If you hit crud early, chances are you may throw up and never go near the whole genre again or, even worse, that you may adjust to it and never want anything better. In our teens, we are at our most adaptable and adventurous; we shall never be more intelligent, though by accumulation of experience we may grow wiser and more subtle; and we need worthwhile reading to do that. Would not Fearn's writing and life suggest he had trouble in maturing? A study of him written with literary and psychological insight would be very interesting.

I was amused by your comment in VECTOR (this letter was of course written to Jin Groves, AM) that our min's work at right angles. It could be so - but watch it, because you realise what that must mean? One of us is slowly thinking his way into the fourth dimension

(Just one point - surely, in spite of the "Edited by Vargo Statten" tag, John Russell Fearn didn't actually edit the periodical in question? Whatever the failings of the magazine apart from the Fearn-written stories themselves may have been, I think this distinction should be kept clearly in mind. AM)

DENNIS TUCKER (87 Oakridge Road, High Wycombe, Bucks):

Many thanks for No. 18 of "British Medical Journal" // "Conic Cuts". (Strike out whichever is inapplicable).

No, but really --- ?

Knowing you (Jin Groves again of course. AM) for a pretty astute editor, I can't help wondering whether this issue wasn't designed with a view to shaking lazy slobes like me - who don't write when they're contented - out of their customary state of lethargy. If so, you have certainly succeeded in at least one case.....

As I see it, the British Science Fiction Association is a serious-

type body with serious objectives. Although it is run by fans it is not principally for fans and VECTOR is not a fan magazine. I don't know much about the current crop of fan-mags but I very much doubt that even any of them would devote one page, let alone five, to a comic strip. Apart from the question of what I look upon as the dignity of a serious body, artwork transferred to stencil is nearly always atrocious, and this is no exception. I am not saying that humour should be absolutely out - even quite learned journals have their cartoons - but these should be restricted to the odd quarter-page, not more than a couple per issue, should be the simplest of line-drawings (for the reason mentioned above) and - need I add? - should be at least slightly amusing.

Now to the other half of my grouse, 'Stethoscopes for Sale'. I found it very interesting, but just what has it got to do with science-fiction? ('Ah', you'll say, 'the final paragraph establishes a connection.') This does raise an interesting point, though: should the articles featured in the Journal necessarily have such a connection? I would say: yes, by definition, by the very nature of Journals. But if not there is no limit to what might be included; for instance, I indulge in 8mm cine-photography. Probably a number of other centers do likewise? Some might do aqualung diving. Probably a few collect stamps, or beer-dats, or women. Where will you draw the line?

In recent issues I have very much enjoyed Philip Harbottle's articles on John Russell Fearn - this is the sort of material I consider ideal for the Journal. Ken Slater is always newsy and entertaining. Book Reviews are fine and I like them the length they are: no review can obviate the need to read a book, always assuming one wants to, though I agree that the reviewer should not give away any of the authors' 'surprises' or 'twists'. The letter-column could certainly be longer, but again, that depends on the likes of me, doesn't it?

Shades of the Past! Michael Rosentblum doing the duplicating and Don R. Smith in the letter-column. It would seem there's life in the old guard yet..... I was very amused by Philip Harbottle's comments on Don's letter: yes, he's been 'a reader of s-f for a good many years'. For the benefit of Those Who Do Not Remember, or Don't Know - Or Possibly Weren't Even Born, I WILL REVEAL ALL! Donald R. Smith, sometime known as 'The Sage of Nuneaton', was erstwhile secretary of the British Fantasy Society (which preceded the Science Fantasy Society of Gt. Britain) (which preceded the British Science Fiction Association) (yes, It Has Happened Before!), and the author of numerous fanmag articles, humour and Words of Wisdom in days of yore. When I discovered fandom in 1940 he was already incredibly Revered and, indeed, it was rumoured that he supplied Wells with the plot for The Time Machine. (Hi, Don!)

By the way, is our Chairman the same Jeeves who supplies the delightful "Soggies" cartoon to "Amateur Cine World" each week?

(I seem to detect a spot of confusion in the above - the term "comic strip" as understood nowadays does not necessarily denote the presence of any humorous content, intentionally or otherwise. And Ian Aldridge's strips so far have been taken from stories that are particularly well adapted to the medium. / Re 'Stethoscopes for Sale', an article is surely justified if it contains matter that may give people ideas for sf stories? / Chairman no longer, but the same Jeeves, yes. AM)

D.M. WILSON (10 Roxburghe Place, Newtown, St. Boswells, Roxburghshire):

Personally I think the B.S.F.A. Library is the best part of the B.S.F.A. I have nothing but praise for the two librarians in Liverpool.

Vargo Statten (J.R. Fearn) was one of my introductions to S.F., although I soon progressed to other authors and magazines.

(Re the Librarians, a loud "Hear-hear!" AM)

DON SMITH (226 Higham Lane, Nuneaton, Warwickshire):

With a mild ha-ha at the cartoon and an acknowledgement of your inspiration in awarding an Oscar to Collanz for taking an adult interest in publishing worthwhile science fiction, I run full tilt into the concluding essay on JRF. Here I must pause, because a preliminary shufti at the readers' column has already told me that Mr Harbottle is raising a quizzical eyebrow at my claim to have been once threatened with a libel action by his late-lamented subject. Cross my heart, it's the honest truth. A peevish article of mine in NOVAS TERRAE, circa 1937 at a guess, was the cause, and anyone who has access to the files of that noble journal (as I have not) will find not only the article in question but my humble apology in the next issue. I used to have the letter itself - maybe I still have somewhere. It was brief and to the point. I was quite livid about it at the time, believing that what I said was only fair comment, but then, of course, I was suffering from the acute intolerance of youth. Now that middle age has mellowed me I am tolerant of almost everything - even of Mr Harbottle's baseless accusation of insincerity. I may treat many things somewhat light-heartedly, even with misplaced levity, but I never knowingly make a false statement. Why should I, when the truth is obvious enough?

And the truth is that only very rarely did Fearn, in any of his guises, give me even a flicker of pleasure in reading his stories. All too often he affected me like a creaking gate, setting my nerves on edge with his infelicities of style. And because I always felt - goodness knows why - that he had the ability to become a first class writer, it seemed to me that he was deliberately choosing the road of mass production of stories, small profits and quick returns, instead of the thornier path to a more craftsmanlike product. There is much too much poorly written, even trashy, science-fiction. When I first started reading it - in 1930 - it was held in such low esteem that it took no little courage to admit that you actually liked this rubbish. The aim and hope of fans at that time was to see it become a respectable branch of literature, published by respected publishers and reviewed by respected critics. And so I felt that any writer who did not do his damndest to raise the standard was a traitor to the cause.

Of course, authors have to live, and if JRF found that he could do best by mass-producing a large number of inferior stories he was justified, economically, in doing so. This does not mean that I have to simulate a liking for his stories which I do not have. I must confess that I never dipped into any of the works of Vargo Statten. I don't think I ever knew that it was another of Fearn's pseudonyms, but the name itself struck horror into my sensitive spirit.

So much for Fearn, and then's my real views for sure. Mr Harbottle has done a good scholarly job, and if I had half his enthusiasm and energy I'd do the same for one of my favourites - JWC for instance. Back to the magazine.

This is a valiant attempt in giving us what might be called an illustrated classic, but I'm a Flash Gordon man myself. The medical article was much more fascinating, especially as it introduced me to a development of which I was completely unaware. The idea of having a genetic immunity is quite heartening; less so the thought of having a genetic susceptibility. I suppose one can't win all along the line.

I'm not much worried about publishers changing titles of stories when reissuing them in different format. It is sharp practice, of course, but the sucker who expects to get an even break has to learn the hard way. I do remember being livid when a three part magazine serial was reissued in book form absolutely unaltered - except that the middle instalment was just left out en bloc. That little lesson cost me several weeks' pocket money.

(If the publisher's sole motive in making the change is to trap readers into buying the same story twice, then sharp practice indeed it is. There usually seem to be other considerations involved though, and you and I - I've been caught plenty of times myself - are just the unfortunate victims of a conflict of aims. AM)

DONALD MALCOLM (42 Carry Drive, Paisley, Renfrewshire):

As a new member of the B.S.F.A., I'd like to make a few comments on some of the items in VECTOR.

Brian Aldiss' column headed "SF Satire Hits the Mark" misses the question of the value of science fiction satire. I contend, Brian, that satire in sf is all but ineffective because it doesn't reach a large enough audience. Very few people who aren't regular readers see science fiction, even casually, so that the chance of their reading anything satirical is practically nil. And it's doubtful if the mass of the public would recognise satire, anyway.

My Guest Editorial in "New Worlds" 129 sums up my thoughts on this subject.

(But all satire is ineffective. If it had any effect, it would probably no longer be necessary. The introduction to the Penguin edition of Habelais mentioned that his satire was still vividly fresh today because the targets he tilted at were still very much with us. In that case, I thought, he really needn't have bothered. Satire can show us what a mess the world's in - I have yet to see satire help to get it out of it. May - could this be satire? AM)

L.R. JONES (36 Winscombe Crescent, Ealing, London W.5):

I should imagine that the average fan is reasonably literate, so I fail to see the reason for the idiot's supplement in the middle. I refer of course to the mangled précis of a short story that is given comic strip treatment in your centre pages. One of the less fortunate aspects of

this feature is the fact that the stories so treated are invariably ones we have read before. Don't get me wrong - I like Aldridge's imaginative illos, but I think his talent could be better employed.

I greatly enjoyed Robert Presslie's article 'Stethoscopes for Sale', and I would like to see more articles like this in VECTOR.

A feature I would like to see would be a series of fan portraits by ATOM, rather like those in the ATOM ANTHOLOGY only more elaborate. To me, at least, this would be of much greater interest than the present comic strip.

(ATOM had to begin somewhere when he was young, too. AM)

JIM DUCKER (38 The Moor Road, Sevenoaks, Kent):

I noticed that in a recent editorial comment on the letter column pages in VECTOR, you mention a shortage of reviewers. The letter (from Chris Priest) you were commenting on contained an interesting suggestion, e.g. that science fact books should be reviewed in VECTOR. An extremely good idea!

(Here once again we come up against the convention whereby VECTOR only reviews books that are submitted by the publishers thereof for that specific purpose. If it were noised abroad that VECTOR was interested in reviewing science fact books, I have horrible visions of being deluged with ten-volume treatises on any and every conceivable scientific subject. If somebody could suggest any easy way to get publishers to send us only such science fact books as we were capable of taking in our stride, both quantitatively and qualitatively, then I'd certainly be happy to run reviews of some. AM)

BRIAN McCABE (2 Beaumont Road, Manor Park, Slough, Bucks):

I enjoyed the article on John Russell Fearn immensely. Is it possible to also have one on such a noted author as Edgar Rice Burroughs? I am sure it would be a great success.

I like the idea of the comic strip in the middle pages of VECTOR, though there is much room for improvement.

The only criticism I have to make about VECTOR is the artwork, though I must admit I have a soft spot for Arthur Thomson's (ATOM) covers. If the drawings were done in a more serious vein (instead of in the usual whimsical fashion) it would improve VECTOR no end.

MI thought I was the only ERE fan in the Association. Now all we want is a third one, capable of writing interestingly about him. AM)

J. PARKHILL-RATHBONE comments amongst other matters that he is amused to find that "fan mag drawings remain fan mag drawings: twenty years have made no difference!" C. CLARKE of Swaffham, Norfolk, writes a long and interesting letter sparked off by VECTOR 17, which is not being quoted from as it arrived Too Late for V. 18. Somebody called Mercer also wrote, but I think you can do without any more of him than is necessary.

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