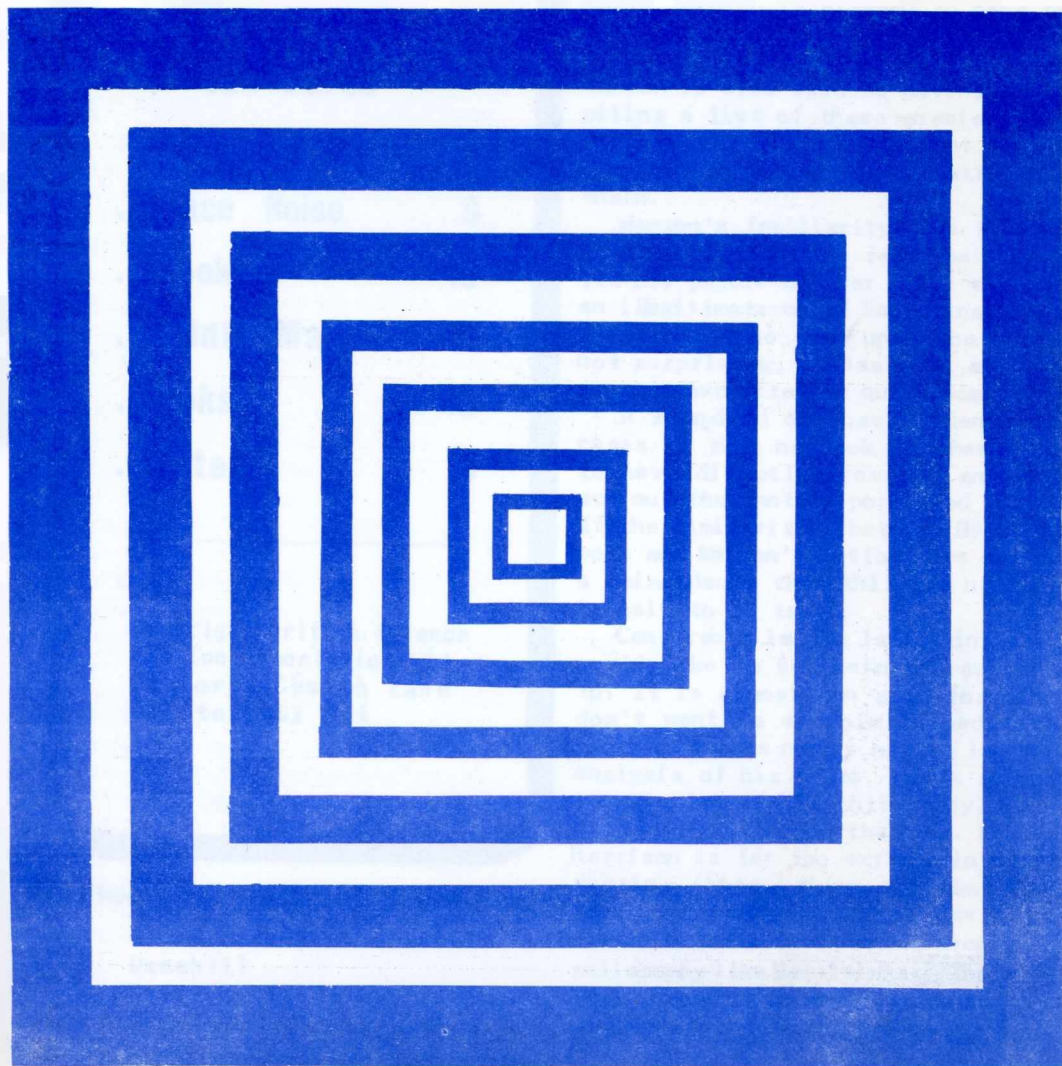


VECTOR

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number 55



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STRANGER INFLUENCE

"...being anti-Heinlein is fashionable. There are good reasons for being anti-Heinlein, but to be in fashion is not one of them."

Brian Aldiss *Speculation*

A recent report in *Time* suggests that one reason may be that he tends to corrupt and deprave. Charles Manson - accused with five others of murdering Sharon Tate and six other people - is said to have used Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* as a model for his bizarre activities.

The similarities between Heinlein's scenario and the reality of Manson's world is striking. Manson's 'family' resembles Michael Smith's 'nest'. Like Smith, Manson is alleged to have been abetted by female followers in his elimination of the enemies of his cult; Manson is also said to have been compiling a list of these enemies. Smith did not believe in death, but in 'dis-corporation' and a reincarnation-like-chain.

Manson's familiarity with this book is underlined by the fact that he called his parole officer Jubal and named an illegitimate child Valentine Michael Smith. That he came upon the book is not surprising, it has been an underground favourite for quite some time.

A standard defense in censorship cases is that no book has been shown to have directly provoked anyone to act out the fantasy portrayed therein. If the similarities between Heinlein's book and Manson's actions are not just a coincidence then this can no longer be said to be true.

Censorship is the last thing that I would like to see Heinlein subjected to. It is almost too good for him, I don't want to see him turned into a martyr. What is really needed is proper analysis of his ideas, and a reasoned repudiation of his philosophy, if you disagree with him that is. M. John Harrison is far too extreme in his invective (*Speculation* 24), but he is far from wrong when he sums up the likely outcome of steeping people in a philosophy like Heinlein's: 'The answer is Chicago.' It now looks as if it might also be Charles Manson.

NEWS

Disturbed Vision

Vision of Tomorrow has not come into this world completely free of printing difficulties. Somehow issues two and three appeared in the wrong order (I suspect that this was done to delight checklists). However, editor Phil Harbottle assures that all is going well. A new printer took over from the fourth issue, and preparation of the next six or so issues is well under way.

If you too have noticed a conspicuous absence of the magazines on the newsstands then you could try writing to them at 2 St Nicholas Buildings, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1. Alternatively you could ask your newsagent to get in touch with the distributors - the New English Library - who also distribute *Penthouse*.

More magazines are promised for the future from the Harbottle/Graham organisation. It would be unfair to comment on the earlier issues of *Vision*, which suffered at the hands of the printers, and perhaps a little from Phil's newness to editing.

Club Selections

The Science Fiction Book Club offers, as its programme for the first six months of this year:

The Girls From Planet 5 Richard Wilson
Past Master R.A. Lafferty

Venus Plus X Theodore Sturgeon

The Last Starship from Earth John Boyd

Echo Round His Bones Thomas M. Disch

Nova Samuel R. Delany

At 11s 6d each, including postage, the saving on this list is £4. The list is a reasonable, if a little conservative, selection of the science fiction currently being published. You also get a chance to select books from the other clubs in the Readers Union, 10-13 Bedford Street, London, WC 2.

Tension in Space

The question asked at the time of the Moon flights 'What happens if they get stuck up there?' is looked at in the new film 'Marooned.' In this the fate of the world rests on the ability to rescue three men from their orbiting space station.

Directed by John Sturges, the film is based on a novel by Martin Caidin with a screenplay written by May Simon. It stars Gregory Peck, David Janssen, Richard Crenna, and Gene Hackman. The special effects are good.

Convention Decrees

that we mention this year's convention, SciCon 70, which will be held at the Royal Hotel, Southampton Row, London WC 2 over Easter, March 27th to 30th. There's still time to register - send 10s to SciCon 70, 28 Bedfordbury, London WC 2 for all the information.

Bradbury Marches On

I Sing the Body Electric! is Ray Bradbury's first collection of short stories for five years. It is being published by Rupert Hart-Davis on the 23rd of March at 30s. We are told that 'The eighteen stories take us on a tour through time and space into a world of suspense and humour in which four dimensional babies and mechanical grandmothers jostle for interest with the IRA and Texas chicken farmers.'

World War III?

The film of 'The Bed Sitting Room', which was directed and co-produced by Richard Lester, with Oscar Lowenstein, has its British premiere on Wednesday 25th March, at the London Pavilion. Among the stars are Rita Tushingham, Dudley Moore, Harry Secombe, Arthur Lowe, Roy Kinnear, Spike Milligan, Ronald Fraser, Jimmy Edwards, Michael Borden, Peter Cook, Ralph Richardson, and Marty Feldman. The charity premiere is in aid of the British Film Institute and the English Stage Society Appeal Funds: tickets 21s to £10.10.0.

Editorial Changes

As from the next issue Vector will be edited by Bob Parkinson.

Linguistic Relativity in Middle High Martian

Willis McNelly

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At a recent cocktail party in Berkeley, a corporation lawyer bemoaned the generation gap. 'These kids of mine act as if I'm from another planet. I can't get across to them. I might as well be speaking Martian.'

His companion, an editor of an avant-garde journal, but cursed by the 'over-thirty' stigma, replied enthusiastically, 'You are absolutely right. I grok you. My daughter's a go-go dancer.'

Ten minutes later after some animated discussion about go-go dancing, someone thought to ask the editor what grok meant. Only one other person had heard the term before, but if the rapidity of dissemination at the cocktail party is an indicator of a larger acceptance, we will all be 'grokking' within a year or so.

The word was created by Robert A. Heinlein, dean of American science fiction writers, in his provocative novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (first published in 1961). It is the story, told in detail with sardonic humour, of Valentine Michael Smith, a Mars-born earth child. Raised by Martians after the death of his parents and all other members of the first Martian expedition, Smith is returned to Earth by crewmen of the second expedition twenty-five years later. Having been nurtured by the Martians, who are so non-earthly as to confound earthly analysis, Mike Smith is a Martian in an earth body. He thinks in Martian.

The rest of the novel is well-writ-

ten — perhaps 'slick' is the best adjective to describe Heinlein's style — as a variation of the noble savage theme, coupled with intriguing variations of the Whorf-Sapir theory of linguistic relativity. You can't really appreciate Mike Smith or the Martians until you learn to think in Martian, and you begin to think in Martian when you begin to grok. As one character put it, 'I grok it. Language itself shapes a man's basic ideas.' *Grok* is the only Martian word used in the novel,¹ but it is so basic to the Martian character, according to Heinlein, that an understanding of *grok* comes before an understanding of every other word in the Martian tongue.

As Heinlein handles the concept, the notion of grokking is crucial to the enlightened pantheism which is the religious construct of *Stranger in a Strange Land*. *Grok* means *drink* in basic Martian, and on a desert planet the sharing of water, or drinking together, becomes almost the highest, the only, religious sacrament. Those who share water become 'water brothers,' a unity so elevated that mistrust is impossible to one so internally baptized. *Grok* also means, in the words of one of the characters,

...even antithetical concepts. It means 'fear', it means 'love,' it means 'hate,' — for by the Martian 'map' you cannot hate anything unless you grok it, understand it so thoroughly that you merge with it and it merges with you — then

you can hate. . . . Grok means to understand so thoroughly that the observer becomes a part of the observed - to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in group experience.

If we benighted Terrans cannot grok completely until we learn to think in Martian, we can at least follow some of the extensions Heinlein gives the word. For example, Martians are sexless. They apparently reproduce by some sort of conjugate fission.

By a process of extension of meaning drawn from its earthly context, Heinlein adds a number of Terran modifications to the wildly alien Martian concept of *grok*. *Grok* seems first to mean *know, understand, appreciate, comprehend*. It resembles the hipster 'dig'. Gradually it comes to include *love, cherish, create*.² The Terrans in the novel do have sex, of course (they 'grok growing closer,' to use the terminology of the book). Thus the unsexual Martian *grok* becomes modified in the minds of the living Terrans: it broadens to include the fullest and most intimate communication humanly possible, the very essence of life itself, sexual intercourse. Thus transmuted, *grok* becomes a quasi-assonantal for its common Anglo-Saxon equivalent, and it revitalizes the archaic meaning of the Biblical *know* as well as emphasizes the ambiguity of the Terran word *intercourse*.

There are several further extrapolations of the term as Heinlein handles it. *Grok* also means *life*, as a logical extension of its meaning *drink*. In a most logical Martian way, all that groks is God. This concept leads Heinlein to build a quasi-pantheistic religious system with Mike Smith, man by ancestry but Martian by environment and thought processes, as its major prophet. The water ceremony is the sole sacrament: 'Share water, drink deep, never thirst.' In basic Martian this translates, approximately, into 'Grok, grok, grok.'

The salutation among water brothers is 'Thou art God,' with the central message of the novel being, as noted earlier, 'All that groks is God.' Alternately, God groks, in every sense of the word thus defined: God loves, drinks, creates, cherishes, infuses every being.

Heinlein carries this religious message of the novel even further by advancing the thoroughly Martian concept of ritual cannibalism. When a Martian groks death, he 'discorporates', and the surviving water brothers eat the remains, grokking him in fullness. The custom on Mars is formalized and deeply religious. The survivors would, by eating the discorporated one, thereby acquire some of his characteristics, attributes, or even eccentricities. One character expresses it this way, 'If I chopped you up and made a stew, you and the stew, whatever was in it, would grok - and when I ate you, we would grok together and nothing would be lost and it would not matter which of us did the eating.' Of course, Heinlein does not evaluate any qualitative or quantitative differences between the symbolic cannibalism of most Terran religious sects and the actual cannibalism of the Martians. He leaves those discussions to his readers.

One of Benjamin Whorf's great contributions in his studies of Hopi which led in turn to the thesis of linguistic relativity was his analysis of Hopi time perception. Heinlein has apparently read his Whorf well, because this concept of temporal discontinuity is another of the major theses of *Stranger in a Strange Land*. He puts it this way, 'With eternity to draw on there could be no reason for hurrying - "hurry" was not a concept in Martian. Speed, velocity, simultaneity, acceleration and other abstractions of the pattern of eternity were part of the Martian mathematics, but not of Martian emotion'.

Heinlein is quick to point out, as did Whorf in a similar connection, that '... the unceasing rush of human existence came not from mathematical necessities of time, but from the frantic urgency implicit in human sexual bipolarity.' Thus the Whorfian conclusion inevitable in the novel: the realities of time, space, and matter are almost totally dependent upon the verbal system one uses to speak of time, space, and matter. When we learn to think in another language, our entire perception of reality changes. What is more important, reality itself changes. Grok?

Accomplished literary craftsman that

he is, Heinlein skillfully utilises almost every technique to communicate his ideas. One specific device is Mike Smith's constant use of the participle or progressive verb form to indicate the eternal present of the Martian now. 'I am been saying so.' 'We are growing closer.' 'I am savoring and cherishing.' Further examples could be multiplied, but only one more need be cited. It is used so often in the novel that it becomes almost a ritualistic theme song: 'Waiting is.' Not 'Waiting is necessary,' or 'Waiting is important' or 'Waiting is inevitable.' Simply 'Waiting is.' The phrase, a curious juxtaposition of tense forms, implies that one will wait, until eternity if necessary, before grokking in fullness.

In one of the most moving parts of the novel, Mike comes to understand that merely speaking about love is meaningless. If all that groks is God, Mike must demonstrate this truth, not simply repeat it. He says in a striking parallelism with the Crucifixion, 'I'm ready to show them now - I grok the fullness. Waiting is ended.'

But this is not the place to note the number of Christian parallels in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, nor to evaluate if they are wholly successful. From a standpoint of linguistic relativity, however, similarities of Martian grokking and English thought find a union in Mike's last benediction as he is being stoned to death. Rocks have given him a 'crown of blood.' 'The Truth is simple but the Way of Man is hard. First learn to control your self. The rest follows. Blessed is he who knows himself and commands himself, for the world is his and love and happiness and peace walk with him wherever he goes. Thou art God. Know that and the Way is opened.'

Implicit in this Martian-Terran-Christian-Buddhist-Hindu benediction is the ultimate concept that 'Love,' however extrapolated from whatever widely divergent culture, will find an identity of expression. Many anthropological linguists will find this thesis highly debatable. In fact, the identity of expression seems to contradict the thrust of the novel: that a language 'map' will alter reality - any reality, including that of love.

The appeal of *Stranger in a Strange*

Land is not limited to its intriguing development of Martian thought, or even to its more than adequate descriptions of the 'growing closer' ceremony.³ The sugar-coated, over-simplistic romanticism of the story has become almost a cult in certain areas of the country. Psychedelic bookstores in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco have sold dozens of lapel buttons engraved, 'Are you a stranger in a strange land: Grok or share water.' Martian-Terran nests of water brothers are grokking wherever grokking needs to be grokked. There is no doubt that the sense of alienation or anomie which troubles the flower children has caused many of them to turn *Stranger*, as the cult calls it, with the same emotion that causes them to wear buttons reading 'Frodo Lives' or 'Go, Go, Gandalf!' Heinlein is almost Swiftian in his attack on some of the same American folkways that the hippies reject. His analysis of the hypocrisies of religion, politics, economics, and, explicitly, the Protestant ethic, seems to supplement the strictures which the flower children themselves maintain against our society. Whether grokking is an adequate substitute for involvement or commitment is conjectural, but a certain vociferous element in our society has seized upon it as a way of life. Fiction has become a reality.

Stranger in a Strange Land may not be a great novel. Perhaps science fiction has yet to produce one. Yet when a writer skillfully combines the varied themes of any work as well as Heinlein has done, science fiction has at least come of age.

Grok what I mean?

¹ Advance copies of Jubal Harshaw's *A Basic Martian Dictionary* (Marsport, Caxton Press, 2063) have not yet been received for review. - Ed.

² Cf the classic religious admonition: "You cannot love what you do not know."

³ Heinlein's humour should not remain unnoted. One of the major characters of the book is a journalist, Ben Caxton, who is a lippman, not a winchell. He is joined by a happy medium, Madame Allie Vesant, whose late husband was Professor Simon Magus.

A head bared

John Brunner

Crisis & Confusion

Having read those sections of this book which appeared in somewhat different form in *New Worlds* (although I missed the first excerpt of all in *Impulse*), I believed I knew what the primary theme would prove to be – in short, 'what the book was about.' Brian seemed to be dramatising, with perhaps less than perfect assurance (but that in view of the complexity of the material he was grappling with was inevitable and possibly even advantageous), the crisis of situational uncertainty, the temporal culture-shock, afflicting us in this age of paradox: this age which has built a pyramid whose base consists in starving millions and whose apex is beyond the moon, the actualisation of the ambitions of the builders of Babel. (Must we then suffer a second confusion of tongues? One fears so; one so often does not understand oneself these days.)

But this is not what the book is 'about', after all. That theme is certainly there; it is not however predominant. Instead, the pivot of the argument turns on the question of 'reality', if any, in the mystical sense. It is much influenced by Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, teachers who – I must be candid – strike me as being as shallow as, say, Hoerbiger and Blavatsky, and infinitely less relevant to contemporary western man than the Buddha, Patanjali and the Masters of Zen, although their occasionally spectacular simplicism is incontestably appealing to those who are elsewhere obtaining dusty, rather than shiny, answers.

As a leitmotiflich metaphor, the invocation of Ouspenskyan concepts does adapt very readily to the action of the book: to (employing an old-fashioned term) its plot. The latter may be summarised by saying that a Serb who has adopted the name Charteris after his favourite English author finds his way to Britain following a war fought with psychedelic drugs, which has 'dislocated' (apt word) society in most of the advanced countries. He loses so much of his own identity that he becomes a blank plate upon which a Messiah-personality appropriate to the times can be imprinted, a Messiah who will lead not precisely a crusade but a migration back across the smash-and-grab motorways of the continent preaching the new doctrine of acceptance of polyvalent realities. During the course of the journey he is involved with various women, with aides and rivals, with a super-movie producer and a German policeman cut off from Headquarters who admits to running his local force as a private army. (I'll make no attempt to summarise the climax, it would spoil your reading of one of the book's most effective passages.)

The presentation grows more fragmentary as the novel proceeds, developing out of the relatively plain narration of the opening towards a complex, highly associative, quasi-Joycean prose from the middle onward. Each section is followed by a group of poems which often refer specifically to characters in the story and mostly would not stand apart from it. This is therefore, to borrow a term I recently learned from Jim Blish and which seems to me very useful, a 'novel of appar-

atus', like *The Demolished Man*, *The Einstein Intersection* or my own *Stand on Zanzibar*: a somewhat loosely defined form that appears to have generated a good number of exceptionally successful works in the field.

Given this: given also the structurally reinforcing metaphors derived from Ouspensky alluded to above; given the fluid nature of the borderline between past and future in this age of paradox which constitutes one of this book's key premises and which impressed me greatly when I read excerpts in *New Worlds*; given, finally, Brian's accepted stature as an author...

Why does the total impact disappoint?

SF territory

There seem to me to be two contributory factors. The less significant inheres in that portion of the argument which is relevant to the action per se (for example, that which concerns Charteris's relationships with women). An element of external reference appears to obtrude occasionally, conveying the impression of special pleading. In other words, there is the feeling that the event being explained, justified or put in perspective is not the event in the book, but some other outside it: conceivably a personal experience, equally likely a situation noted from life and incompletely digested into the philosophy of the novel. (Other items 'noted from life' are admirably incorporated: the personal geographical observations are sharp and clever. Nor is the fact that occasional literals blunt the effect of the early verbal tropes particularly important. The happy invention 'quick-silver' on page 16 comes over well, and it builds from there.)

Far more important, though, is a matter which will require some initial parameters to be set before defining it. Perhaps I may take as my starting-point a comment on the front flap of the jacket:

"Brian Aldiss...has, in his latest book, gone far beyond the conventional territories of SF..."

Well - stylistically, maybe (though with what success is a question I'll take up later). Thematically, in one crucial sense, apparently no. This book is on the way to a wrong future, as non-relevant though not as infuriating

as those of *Analog*: a future shaped by the obsolete past and conditioned by information garnered at second hand which prior to its reception at the auctorial sensorium had been selectively pre-filtered. Not possessing the vitality due to the direct impact of contemporary events, the material was not strong enough to impede the growth of those aforementioned divagations excrecent from the progress of the work.

Or perhaps one should say not so much a 'wrong future' as one deriving from assumptions too shallowly rooted in the present to be convincingly viable. As well as being an age of fad and fashion, not merely in dress and favourite colours for cars, but in taste, in thinking, in preferred schools of philosophy... Yet these cycles in which fashion moves are not what they might appear, the stormy waves of the grand public chaos; on the contrary, they are symptomatic of a conformist urge towards a hypothetical 'self-expression' which will yet meet with mass approval from one's localised subculture.

From this illusion of chaos the contemporary western intellectual has had the effrontery to assert that society is going insane. But the anarchy of insanity is incredible: it is a paradox which a later species may achieve, but not mankind. Almost all non-intellectual creatures are sane, bar such anomalies as musth elephants driven mad by the pain of decaying tusks. It is a necessary condition of their survival.

No, the insane society cannot be anarchical. Its aberrance rather consists in the infinitesimally systematised delusions of paranoia - indeed, we have had demonstrations of this possibility in the simplistic teachings of Hoerbiger and of Houston Stewart Chamberlain and other experts in *Rassenwissenschaft* beloved by the Nazis.

Here, therefore, Brian is attempting a multiplication of incommensurables, the impossibility of which is implicitly recognised in the variety of forms employed to advance the argument. (In this respect Ballard's projections of disintegrating societies are superior, in that they centre on protagonists who have never been suff-

iciently rewarded by what is decaying to feel it is worth mounting a rescue operation)

The outcome is not a projection of a world in which the currency of sanity and reason is debased, but rather a reflection of the puzzlement felt by a reasonable man confronted by an obviously functioning society — broken-backed, but hobbling along — whose technique of achieving viability is not apparent and seemingly cannot be communicated to those who stand detached from it. One might as well ask the panhandler on the corner of St Mark's Place begging from passers-by nearly as broke as he is to support an evil habit what his motive is for survival. He has one, but it's not yours.

One sees a recognition of the process which is actually at work peering through the dense text of this book in certain exceptionally effective sections: for instance, in pages 127-8 where the razing of the old to make way for the new is treated in terms that suggest the succession of geological strata, but the Joycean layering technique applied to the language of the book does not — for me at least — sustain the vitality of these isolated insights.

And I would propose a possible explanation for this.

What made Joyce's prose so rewarding was his polymath's grasp of culture on uncountable simultaneous levels, unmatched even by the man who is probably the greatest living pattern-maker, Graves. If one is to attempt this layering, this multiple stratification, this condensation of scores of meanings into a shared mode of expression, then one must not above all be concerned with the transient present. Joyce deliberately set *Ulysses* on a past day in a past year, and *Finnegans Wake* takes place on every night and all... as one might say.

Moreover he was mining the riches of eleven languages that I can recall offhand to create his sense of universal contemporaneity. Here we have, one-plus-hits-of-some.

Now one must grant that our sense of the immanence of the past has diminished — we no longer look up to Caesar or King Arthur as childhood idols. Contradictorily, however, our coexis-

tence with the past is greater than ever before, and our direct daily experience of it would have been inconceivable even to our grandfathers. (What would Master Geoffrey have thought of the TV adaptation of the *Canterbury Tales*?)

For this reason, the application of Joycean linguistic compaction to the material of this book seems inappropriate. It was evolved by its originator to express precisely that direct experience of the past which the twentieth century for the first time offers us. Here, on the other hand, we have a society specifically portrayed as deprived of its past apart from the distorted shadows of personal memory and a few isolated — virtually symbolic strands of Ouspenskian teaching which might at a stretch be subsumed under the same category, since they are recalled by Charteris. (This compression into a mere present is repeatedly stressed throughout the novel, most notably in Angeline's reaction to the murder of her husband by Charteris who then becomes her lover instantly, the event belongs to the dead past.) The complex punning of Joyce's world is that of a world in which man is aware, without having time to verbalise the fact, that 'that reminds me of'... anything from the Epic of Gilgamesh to this morning's *Daily Mirror*.

And, inasmuch as it is Joycean, the language of this book is therefore not that of the given situation, but the language of the outside observer who cannot rid himself of the conviction that 'they're all mad bar thee and me' — thee: reader.

In passing, a probably unanswerable question. What language would be fitted to these premises? Perhaps the compulsive echolalic jargon of the schizophrenic? (The echolalic we have here is reasoned rather than reacted.) But the enormously efflorescent tree of verbiage that would entail would probably mean that a book this size might contain a single anti-conversation, bulked out by chapters explaining why speaker B had a wholly different reaction to the last remark from what speaker A intended. Accordingly it would almost certainly prove unpublishable even if (which is unlikely) it proved writable.

Granted that the above assertions are correct, then this book has been done an injustice by the blurb-writer. It is not a case of a writer going 'far beyond the conventional territories of SF.' Rather, it is a case of a writer who has explored the territories of SF coming home to the present-day world (which still enjoys our thousand-generation-deep appreciation of the past) and attempting to communicate certain intensely-felt responses to the image of the contemporary environment. It is the product of the past-rooted synthesist concerned to unify, correlate and interpret, not of someone who is content to accept and himself experience the actual fragmentation, overlaid simultaneity and inexhaustible paradoxicality of modern times. On the shelves, the Monmas and the Poppas precede Mozart; Burroughs William follows Burroughs Edgar Rice.

Not that this foundation on image should be taken as a condemnation. We do admittedly live - in our heads, whether barefoot or shod - by the guidance of images more than whatever a genuine 'reality' may consist in, and judged by that standard this is a book worth, possibly demanding, personal investigation. A slogan has often been shown more powerful than a reasoned line of argument, a koan more stimulating than a sermon, but this does not invalidate the task of the debater and the preacher, any more than Columbus's mistaken belief that he had reached the Indies nullified the consequences that flowed from his return with captive Indians and souvenirs. This is indeed the age of the paradox, and it is not inconceivable that the application of an inappropriate literary technique to a major theme should of itself shed fresh light on the contemporary enigma, if only by virtue of what it does not do.

This piece is also appearing as one of my regular "Noise Level" columns in Richard Geis's Science Fiction Review. The subscription overlap between SFk and Vector is believed to be minimal: I extend my apologies, however, to those who will see both journals. JKH5

SPACE NOISE

'... science fiction can never form a basis for action. Its only influence on the real world is to throw a mist of suspicion around the whole idea of technological progress, in which what is potentially a beneficent power for man to use at his choice becomes instead an obscurely threatening spectre. Prediction should direct our line of march; science fiction merely makes people drag their feet.'

*Lord Robens, Dudley Hooper mem,
orial lecture to the British
Computer Society, 1969*

'...a reality of moon landings, or organ transplants, of cybernetic development set on a course which will one day create a machine to surpass the human intelligence... this reality is rejected as unreal by minds which know it is happening, because we have run out of language. Dr John Clark, psychiatrist and cybernetician, put this point brilliantly when he said to me 'Only science fiction can describe the present.' He was right. This is the language we are using, and must use, every day.'

Stafford Beer, Computer Weekly

Speculation SF review
2/6 from 31 Pinewall
Avenue, Birmingham 30

SPOOKY

Fantasy or Fact—Spooky the Walnut Man

I am,
Spooky
the Walnut Man.
Who
are you?

— You
— Are
— As
— A
— Book

Do you
know?
I
know
Who?

— I
— Read
— You
— So
— Listen

I am,
non-existent
Are
you?
Non-existent.

— You
— Don't
— Exist
— I
— Do

.....and the Experiment

Feel this
This
power.
power
That destroys us
destroys us.
well and truly.
And truly
of Satan
it is
we are truly ignorant.
of Satan
Truly
This power
ignorant people
is the experiment.
control this power.
Is Atomic Power
is
necessary?
Atomic.

.....tells of fiction — not a fiction

Fiction
is
what
we
read.

Everywhere.
Know
one
can
escape.

It's
evil
grasp.
It
takes.

Over.
We
live
with
it.

And
tolerate.
While
it
devours.

Us.
Fact
no
longer
exists.

Now.
They
are
as
one.

.....and Another

Hello
—Hello, who are you?
Spooky the Walnut Man.
That's a funny name.
Is it. What's yours then?
—Another.

Steve Carrigan

Middle Man!

Distorted Vision

Everyone has been very gentlemanly about *Vision of Tomorrow*. Everyone seems to be waiting, hoping that the editor will learn as he goes along. He certainly has got a lot to learn; the first issue was an exercise in how to waste paper. By the second issue this problem had been solved, but it might have been better if things had gone the other way.

The writers aren't to blame, so I shall refrain from chastising them for their part in this affair. Instead I offer you a few quotes from the editorial.

'Man will not be content with the moon, our nearest neighbour in space. Inexorably, he will reach outward, to Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, and beyond to the stars themselves. The universe is infinite, and so is man's curiosity. It will drive him ever onward, and wherever he goes, you can be sure that the sf writer will have been there before him, moving as he is moving, but always that one step ahead of reality

This pitifully naive viewpoint is to be expected from a young awestruck schoolboy - even they are showing an increasingly realistic attitude toward such events. That the editor of an sf magazine can believe this is a blow. For years sf writers and editors have tried to destroy this. Their efforts would be in vain if *Vision of Tomorrow* turned out to be a roaring success. It is with a sigh of relief that I discount this possibility.

Strange Conventions

This year's convention is lurching into gear - the advertisements are appearing in the most unlikely places. I am informed, by usually reliable sources, that registrations are nowhere near last year's level.

The Heidelberg convention could account for some of this, although I couldn't tolerate more than a few minutes of hearty German fans myself. I believe that the character of the London con is more pertinent. I for one don't want to know about science fiction and scientology. There have been several sf stories pointing out the hazards of extremist religions. People should heed what they read.

New Fanzine!

We hear that there is soon to be a fanzine which will review the fanzines which review fanzines. There will, of course, be an editorial. As a special treat they will be presenting occasional checklists of checklists. More news next issue!

Sad Loss

It was with regret that I read of the death of James Colvin, in *New Worlds*. Colvin's work was particularly important to me as I was one of the few members of his fan club. There were very few of us - Colvin was a greatly misunderstood writer.

His death, as gruesome as it was, may lead to a greater realisation of his talent. It is said that he was killed by a falling filing cabinet. That the cabinet was full of unpublished manuscripts leads us to hope for a flood of material. These precious stories must not be allowed to die with their writer. It is the duty of his friends at *New Worlds* to share them with us.

Real Print?

The editor tells me that these pages are to see 'real print'. I think that this must be an exaggeration; but if it isn't, congratulations, and let's hope it lasts.

REVIEWS

MOORCOCK SEES INSANITY

The Black Corridor Michael Moorcock
Mayflower 5s

All the time that he has been pushing the cause of the 'new wave' Michael Moorcock has maintained 'that it is still possible to write a sound, literate, entertaining science fiction story which doesn't read (as most sf does) as if it had been written fifteen years ago.' Although they were written some time ago neither of Moorcock's two most recent novels have really fallen into this straightforward-sf category. Now, with *The Black Corridor* Moorcock has written such a story.

ALONG THE CORRIDOR

Looking into the not too distant future, we see a violently racist society. Here even Powell, with his funny Welsh-sounding name, would be hounded. Large mobs of 'Patriots' storm through the streets burning their unfortunate victims. With MPs urging the people on to search out the 'aliens' we see an all too credible future society.

On the microscopic scale overpopulation imposes intolerable stresses on the individual. Communal eating - the works' canteen - has gone. People are afraid of sitting down to eat together. Privacy and separation from other people, if only by paper-thin partitions, is to be preferred to any contact whatsoever.

Troubled by this environment Ryan gathers together a group of relatives

and friends and hijacks a UN spaceship that stands empty in the Siberian waste - another victim of rampant nationalism. With the crew so used to the isolation-seeking society of Earth it would obviously be dangerous for everyone to be daily subjected to the tensions of personal contact, so Ryan puts the rest of the crew into a form of 'hibernation'.

DRUG CURE

This leaves Ryan with the problem of staying sane for the four years of the journey to Munich 15040, the far-distant planet that they intend to colonize. To stay sane he has to resort to drugs prescribed by the ship's computer.

A straightforward sf novel with an interesting personal level. The reality/illusion interface that Ryan lives on is very well laid out, with just enough blurring. At times Moorcock seems to be wasting space for the sake of filling the book; there are better ways of building up paranoid tension than spelling out K.I.L.L. in page-size chunks of print. But only rarely does the wordplay seem irrelevant.

A very encouraging return to straightforward sf. If some of those who advocated the 'unadulterated' product and nothing else could do as well we would be in for some interesting reading. Just one complaint. The cover. I nominate this the worst cover of 1969 (from any source).

Michael Kemmura

Escape Into Space E.C. Tubb
Sidgwick & Jackson 24s

Increased radioactivity is slowly sterilising Earth. A millionaire buys government support for a star ship. The star ship takes off with a new untried drive just before a crusading politician can stop it. Travelling through 'M' space they reach another planet. The planet proves too hostile for the colony and they return to Earth, to find it deserted - the M-space drive has taken them back in time. So they land and start again.

Sounds familiar? That's the trouble with this book - there's not a single original idea, plot, or character in it. Normally it would have taken about two minutes to discover this, as it was I felt duty-bound to read on to the end. Plenty of violence, a few trendy swear words, and the captain gets the beautiful computer operator two chapters before the end.

harilev Patterson

The Andromeda Strain Michael Crichton
Cape 25s

I could easily leap on to the rank-closing bandwagon and condemn this as a badly written piece of fiction, and a step backward for science fiction. But I prefer to look at *The Andromeda Strain* in a different way. The freshness and excitement of this story dulled most of the annoyance that would normally be provoked by such a badly constructed novel.

A plague from space kills off all but two of the inhabitants of a small American town. A group of scientists is brought together to investigate the disease and find a cure. At first project 'Wildfire' with its vast and isolated underground laboratory seems to have all the time in the world. But in the end it turns into a life or death race against time.

Nothing in the novel is superfluous to the action. If you are told that a character is an epileptic then you can be sure that this will eventually turn out to be significant. The characters and their diseases are paraded before us as events decree that they should be; a thoroughly unsatisfactory and random method.

For all this, and the sloppy construction - often 'new' facts are introduced more than once - this book has something that is missing from much of today's straight sf. It is alive and exciting. Occasionally there is real insight. For example, I like the explanation given for setting up project Scoop - the name of the satellite that brought back the bugs, the real heroes of this story.

On the whole a good 'one-off' book. I cannot see that a second book in the same vein would be so widely accepted. *The Andromeda Strain* stayed in the US fiction top ten for months. This and the revenue from the film rights should give Michael Crichton time to learn how to write. If he takes the trouble then we might see some quite unique science fiction from him.

Michael Kenward

Reflections in a Mirage Leonard Daventry
Pale 21s

There are some novels that are so easy to read and so attention gripping that their relative lack of originality passes unnoticed. This is the case with *Reflections in a Mirage*. Essentially the book deals with a colonizing mission comprised of male and female criminals. Among them are two telepaths whose powers and greater awareness of all situations enable them to prevent the new colony from making fatal decisions.

A mutiny on the part of the criminals, however, precipitates the whole cargo on to a stark, desert world, seemingly lifeless yet hiding a very weird life form within and responsible for the mirages that plague the group of humans.

There is a sense of wonder in the way that Daventry has built up the atmosphere of the desert world, intriguing the reader as to what is and is not a mirage; and a very realistic development of the tensions and feelings between the major characters.

It is an impressive and entertaining approach, an ideal stimulant to the person who feels the atmosphere of magic in sf has gone.

Rob Holdstock

The Demon Breed James H. Schmitz
Macdonald 21s

From a watery world the Parahuans came in three sizes — the smaller the nastier. The small ones are also practically immortal.

In the past this alien race has tried to invade the *Hub* — space colonised by a human federation. The invaders retire with bloody noses, theorizing that their defeat must have been due to a hidden super race. These they called the *Tuvela*. (This was first published in 1968 in *Analog* under this title)

The Parahuans decide to have another shot and, for a dummy run, to expose the *Tuvela* to Nandy Cline, a selected aqueous plant. They meet two biochemists, Nile Etland (female) and Ticos Cay (male) who, utilising the *Tuvela* myth, subject the invaders to a frightful psychological warfare.

Schmitz writes damn good stories, remember *Witches of Karres*? The odd ecology of the invaded world is one reason for the success of this one, enabling Schmitz a wide scope in plot development. There is added spice in the form of intelligent mutant otters who play a significant role in the story. Even if you read it in *Analog* *The Demon Breed* is the kind of book you can read again

Roy Mortimore

The Square Root of Tomorrow Edmund
Cooper Hale 5s

British sf has never been the same as the American product, and Cooper's stories are good examples of the home product. They are quiet and somewhat foreboding. In 'Death Watch' two computers sit in their underground lairs and coldly direct man in his self destruction. In both 'Judgement Day' and 'Tomorrow's Gift' we see the survivors of holocausts.

Although some of the stories end on a hopeful note the tune is basically pessimistic. Cooper has little faith in man's ability to adapt to new situations. In 'Welcome Home' he is worried about the impact of 'the discovery that man is not a unique product of Earth.'

In 'A Question of Time' he is worried that man's discovery of a faster-than-light drive will lead to the sys-

tematic rape of the universe. 'Nineteen Ninety Four' portrays a society in which consumption is the great goal. Man must consume so that the producing machines are kept busy. 'The Brain Child' is a sad but humorous account of a scientist who thinks that his son is stupid because he cannot emulate his father's mathematical gymnastics. To get the lad interested in science he introduces him to his newly-developed wonder computer.

An interesting departure from the straight and narrow is 'The Jar of Latakia'. The drug-induced time travel is reminiscent of some of the earlier of Michael Moorcock's time stories.

Basically straight sf, of the English variety, these stories are dated. The sort of thing that I cannot take in large doses. But I so rarely read this type of story that this collection came as a pleasant change. A small dose of Edmund Cooper is better than the medicine churned out by many others.

Michael Kemward

The Janus Syndrome Douglas R. Mason
Robert Hale 18s

If this book were to be judged solely on the merits of the first two chapters I doubt if anyone would read beyond them. The writing is slow-paced and laboured; and flair for story telling seems non-existent. Once the hurdle of the first 30 pages has been jumped, however, the hero of the story (Dr Brant) and his companions, and their story, become much more interesting and involved.

Dr Brant, posing as a tourist, is sent to Lados by Earth security to discover the line of research into which his old friend Harry Thulden — recruited by the Ladosians — has channeled his talents. It develops that Thulden has invented a thought-reading machine which, if allowed to fall into the wrong hands, could throw the security of the entire Earth Alliance into jeopardy. Brant, programmed beforehand, reacts in a preordained way, and after a number of hairbreadth escapes from Ladosian security, succeeds in destroying the threat posed by this machine.

Bread-and-butter sf, but marvellous for those who like this type of story.

James Goddard



Harry Harrison's answer to *Starship Troopers*, *Bill the Galactic hero*, was a send up from start to finish. Less of a satire but still very funny is Dav Garnett's *Mirror in Space* (Berkley 60¢). His hero turns out to be allergic to the drugs that are used to keep the men docile and unquestioning.

The troops are shipped out to unspecified planets where they don their suits and set out to kill the 'creeps'. The creeps look just like humans but their suits have different emblems - copied from the Earth troops' last set of designs.

Sounds strange? There are a sequence of surprises paraded before us; but we are not subjected to the device of a manufactured ending. This follows on inevitably, and is decreed by the impotence of the average soldier in the face of the military machine.

MORE PERVERSION FROM SPIRAC

Also drugged up to the eyeballs are half the inhabitants of Sangre - a planet ruled by a sadistic brotherhood who, by the Natural Order, maintain a regime of torture, slavery, and cannibalism.

By concentrating on violence in *The Men in the Jungle* (Avon 25¢), Norman Spinrad will provoke less furore while being far more way out. People screw and deviate sexually far more than they eat and beat each other, but convention decrees that we accept violence far more than we accept sex in our films and books.

In fact the moral standards adopted in both this novel and *Big Jack Barron* have a closer link with the real world than have those of most sf novels. Bart Fraden, forced to beat a hasty retreat from his position as President of the Belt Free State, decides to foment revolution and take over Sangre by fair means or foul, but mostly foul.

Fraden is convinced that a people so tyrannized would welcome any pretext

to revolt. But this is against 'y'Natural Order'. Fraden has to work very hard - getting the Bootherhood hooked on Omnidrene, and letting his henchman drum up an unwilling guerrilla army - to create the blood bath that brings *The Men in the Jungle* to its horrid climax.

PEDDLING POT

Galactic Pot-healer, by Philip K. Dick, (Berkley 60¢) is not another story about the drug scene. It is about Joe, Fernwright, an unemployed mender of ceramic pots. He gets involved with the Glimmung and ends up joining a project to raise a cathedral from the watery depths of Plowman's Planet.

But the adventure is not the most important event in the life of the pot healer. Far more important to Joe Fernwright is his search for a meaningful life, away from the overcrowding and the war veteran's dole in Cleveland-no-longer-Ohio in the year 2046.

TENTACTILE POEMS

Science fiction poetry and space poetry are not the same thing. At least, the poems in *Holding Your Eight Hands* are very different from those in *Frontier of Going* (see Vector 53). Although three of the poems, and several poets, are duplicated the effect is different.

Holding Your Eight Hands, edited by Edward Lucie-Smith (Doubleday \$1.95), represents modern science fiction. In it are poems by Disch, Sladek, Aldiss, Brunner, Asa Benevise, D.M. Black, Robert Conquest, Mike Evans, John Heath-Stubbs, Adrian Henri, Ted Hughes, George MacBeth, Kenneth Patchen... and a host of other poets and sf writers (and hybrids even).

One poem that all sf writers and readers should thoroughly acquaint themselves with is C.S. Lewis's 'An Ex-postulation - Against too many writers of science fiction': a question to the sf writers who 'lure us on like this' using sf backdrops for 'The same old stuff we left behind.'

A really good collection of modern poetry with sf themes, both ancient and modern. To this collection Lucie-Smith has added an interesting and provocative introduction. This really is for everyone, from lovers of Lovecraft (he's there) to the Liverpool Scene.

The Ring Piers Anthony and Robert Margroff Macdonald 25s

Piers Anthony, who delighted us with *SOS the Rope* and *Chthon*, has joined forces with Robert Margroff to create *The Ring*, a not very memorable account of justice and social injustice in a society where crime is virtually unknown.

The ring itself is a tiny disc of metal, implanted in the index finger, which sends a powerful electrical jolt through the wearer's body whenever he thinks evil, speaks evil, does evil, or even hears evil and does not report it.

Sentenced to wear the ring, Jeff Font finds his task of proving that his father had been framed by his partner George McKissic and wrongly exiled from Earth very difficult indeed. As a ring wearer his social status is nil, his chance of survival in a society where the only good ring-wearer is a dead ring-wearer, are reduced and he can do nothing to protect himself!

Although a very readable story the plot is not strong enough. The crime-free society, with its related social topsi-turviness, is too predictable for the book to stand out.

Rob Holdstock

Quicksand John Brunner Sidgwick & Jackson 27s

An interesting idea, capable of being worked into an exciting and thoughtful work. Unfortunately John Brunner misfired and has produced a turgid and slow novel — enlivened by the occasional flash of wit and caustic comment. The plot concerns a mysterious and nubile girl, endowed with superb strength and reflexes, who appears, naked, in the vicinity of a mental hospital.

Paul Fidler, a psychiatrist at the hospital, treats the girl. Gradually, through devious ways, he elicits the truth about her. While the story lacks pace and vigour it does possess a certain melancholic charm and sadness; the pathos of the psychiatrist as the juggernaut of fate inevitably crushes him is very well done. There are several barbed references to the similarities between watchers and watched in the mental hospital environment. Some of Brunner's witty remarks come over

very well — I particularly liked the one about the unwanted pregnancy being a foetus accomplice.

Between the rare flashes of humour and biting social comment the story inexorably drags on. The sexual relationship is treated rather superficially, and much of the characterization is shallow and unrealistic. The bright patches — such as those deftly illustrating the internecine warfare raging under the medical profession's facade — are too few to save the book. It would have made a good longish story.

Mike Freeman

The Alien L.P. Davies Sphere 5s

This starts promisingly enough but, like some racehorses, it runs one-paced throughout.

The story — set in 2016 — concerns John Maxwell, who is taken to hospital with severe internal injuries after a fall from a monocoque. A number of exceptional facts are soon evident; his blood is certainly not human, his hair is strangely coloured, there are skin-grafts on his chest and head, and his heart is set on the right side of his body. He has no memory and his sense of smell and taste are...different!

There is no record of his existence prior to January 2015. Coupled with this are reports of an Unidentified Flying Object landing in a remote area of Northumberland in December 2014. Is he alien? Does he constitute a threat to the safety and security of the country — of the world?

Maxwell is eventually released from hospital, and placed under surveillance by Jerry Redfern, an Intelligence-Branch agent, and the enigmatic Carl Moseley.

The story, almost a conventional spy thriller, is flat and languid. While the main character is lifesize, the supporting cast barely rise above the level of mere names. And although the author has a wry humour (describing a 1966 car: 'They built 'em to last in those days.'): and the loose ends are tied firmly into figure-of-eight knots, one UFO does not make science fiction. Frankly this is a disappointing book.

Jack Marsh

At the beginning of *Cradle of the Sun* humanity is no longer a single species. It has developed many and varied sub-species during a long adaptive process initiated by its spreading to other worlds in the galaxy. On Earth itself human life has dwindled to a few scattered communities sharing a mainly hostile environment with the only surviving intelligent species — the rats.

It is, in fact, a philosopher rat who poses the sinister question to humanity which opens the novel. 'Why,' asks the rat 'are the twin races of humanity and the rats dying, failing to survive in a world where they have no ostensible evolutionary competitors?'

The rats and the Librarian — custodian of the great library which holds the sum of human knowledge and all its history — decide that the reason for the decline is a psychoparasite which lives on intelligences. It is traced to the crater of an extinct volcano on the inhospitable continent of Tierra Diablo.

A joint expedition is mounted to plant an atomic timebomb in the crater to blast it and its sinister tenant to extinction.

The expedition's leader is Kavan Lochlain, recognisable immediately as a human from the greatest and straightest period of human evolution. He feels fear, knows love and learns by reference to experience. In fact, Kavan is like you and me.

The other members of the party are less so. They include an amphibian woman and a 'tigerman' warrior and three of the new, large, talking rat species. With this motley crew Kavan sets out to surmount natural hazards and those flung in his path by the adversary in the *Cradle of the Sun*.

Since story telling began audiences have loved the intrepid hero who sets out on a journey through the dark and hazardous unknown to find a treasure, recover a lost comrade or do a monster to death. Brian Stableford's novel succeeds admirably on this level even if it fails gallantly on a more profound philosophical one — which it seems to have attempted.

The nightmare monsters and inventions which Kavan and his companions

must overcome leave nothing to be desired. For me they became a little bit tedious in the end, and I longed for a siren or two to attack the expedition with more subtlety. But this is a minor quibble.

As the tomorrow's Ulysses fights his way through to accomplish his mission, excitement follows excitement and the reading is compelling as the expedition is whittled down.

What Kavan finds when he finally sets foot in the *Cradle of the Sun* precedes a chilling climax to the book. Compulsory reading for the fans of the fantastic and those who can recognise a good monster when they see one.

Robert Wells

The Philosopher's Stone Colin Wilson
Arthur Barker

A psychedelic romp through time, and it really is psychedelic. 'Mind expansion' is the object of a simple experiment in brain surgery carried out on Norman Howard — a boringly proper and anti-septic ex child-prodigy. Along with expanded mind powers Howard gains an ability to see 'through' time.

Written as a journal in the first person, the book is, in Mr Wilson's own words 'a Lovecraft novel'. It is his second such novel; the first was *The Mind Parasites*. Not having read any Lovecraft I wouldn't know about this, but I can take Wilson's word for it that 'It is part of the game in a Lovecraft novel to stick as far as possible to actual sources, and never to invent a fact when you can dig one out of some obscure work of scholarship.' *The Philosopher's Stone* is certainly a mine of such obscure references. Maybe Wilson can 'modestly claim to have surpassed Lovecraft in this department.' But is it necessary? The exercise is of interest to the author only, the reader will be just as happy with manufactured credibilities as with learned outrages.

The novel certainly has an air of credibility, no matter how produced. Perhaps I accepted it because I believe that evolution will next take a cerebral step. Wilson's description of such a step in *The Philosopher's Stone* adds little to its superior predecessor.

Michael Kemward

The Squares of the City John Brunner
Penguin 6s

Town planners are a relatively new breed, traffic analysts are an even more recent addition to the ranks down at the town hall. Ten years ago they were probably even rarer than they are today; which explains why *Squares of the City* was then described as being a 'fantasy thriller.' Then it was prophetic, today it is horribly relevant. The power of the traffic planner is an unexploited power; give him a few years and he may become the revolutionary force that Boyd Hakluyt comes to see himself as.

Hakluyt is the central character of this splendid novel, he is also 'only a pawn in their game.' John Brunner has used a chess game from the past to plot this novel of the near future; but before putting this down to an author's whim, read on. Chess is more than just the national game of Aguazul - the South American country in which is set the city of Vados (named after the country's benevolent dictator). Hakluyt is to reschedule the traffic flow of Vados so that two peasant enclaves are removed. This, of course, doesn't go down too well with certain political factions.

At times the use of the chess game seemed to guide characters into uncharacteristic acts. However, the twist in the flyover's tail made me overlook this.

By the way, I wouldn't like you to come away from this highly-recommended book feeling that John Brunner is a brilliant chess player. This certainly can't be true. I know for certain that he has been beaten by one of the country's worst chess players.

Michael Kenward

A World of Difference Robert Conquest
Sphere 5s

Mr Conquest has a disquieting style, a mixture of suppressed humour and lengthy description which, while satisfying, seemed to drag on too long.

A World of Difference certainly is different, different that is from what you would expect of the cover. Reading it is like involuntarily mounting a switchback. The story is threaded

together with a pendulous cord which is constantly swinging forward and back, taking the plot with it.

It is based around a new type of drive, which comes into the story occasionally, along with the 'Watch-dogs' - a radical group with a plan to overthrow the government. This is tied up, in a most unexpected way, with a poetry-regurgitating and somewhat morbid computer, and a supposed plan to take over the minds of men and women.

For those who like political prophecies this is a very readable book; it develops the big-brother complex to its logical conclusion. To top all this, Martian artifacts, commonly considered to be works of art, turn up and weave themselves into the complicated plot. However, they do not complicate it any more; this would be practically impossible.

As a conclusion, and after many delays, the book gives its final message of the future - very poetically if I may say so, but then there is a general theme of poetic justice all through.

For those who like this particular plot sequence this is recommended. It is well written, if a little unrevealing to read.

Orib Moore

Flesh Philip Jose Farmer
Rapp & Whiting 26s

First I read *The Lovers*, and Farmer was immediately added to the list of 'writers-I-look-out-for.' *Strange Relations* came next and confirmed my liking for his work.

But then came *Flesh*!

If this boring account of Peter Stagg's enforced sexual ramps had been the first Farmer book I'd read, it might well have been the last. As it is, I know that he is capable of so much better and can only bemoan the fact that he saw fit to put his name to this hack job which is merely intended to titillate the sf clique and help pay the rent.

This Rapp & Whiting version is, it is claimed, completely rewritten. I can only shudder at the thought of what it must have been like before, and be amazed at the author's bravery in rewriting it.

Bryn Fortey

MAIL!

Dear Editor,

I was very interested to see your editorial in *Vector 54* entitled *Book Bind*, in which you castigate publishers for (a) lamentable packaging, (b) lack of publicity and (c) the long delays which precede publication of manuscripts. I hope you will be kind enough to give me space for a publisher's defence to some of these charges.

First, the long delays. Here I agree with you entirely. The trouble is that hardcover publishers insist on a gap of one or two years between hardcover and softcover publication. This means that a lot of our publications come out a long time after a considerable number of your readers will already have obtained the American paperback editions. The answer would be, of course, to publish SF as paperback originals, as is the practice in America. Unfortunately, a large number of authors insist on going into hardcover for reasons of prestige. If they were willing to sacrifice the prestige we would not only be able to keep up to date with our SF programme, but we would also be able to pass on the full royalty payments to the author, who now has to share it 50/50 with the hardcover publisher.

You are also right in pointing out how little publicity is given to SF books when they are published. From the publisher's point of view there are two problems. First, SF enjoys a very steady but never spectacular sale and I personally doubt whether extensive advertising would really enlarge the market. There are a handful of authors - John Wyndham, Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov among them - who appeal to a general readership as well as the hard core of SF fans, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule. It is simply not economically viable to spend large sums on advertising. We are trying to get round this problem in the future by having two SF months in 1970, when we shall publish five or six titles rather than

the usual one and promote them together as a package. Authors due for this treatment this year include Daniel F. Galouye, Philip Jose Farmer and Michael Moorcock.

I won't quarrel with you on the question of packaging because you don't say anything harsh about paperback publishers - but I would like to point out that Sidgwick & Jackson will be revamping their cover presentation next year and that Michael Joseph will be starting an SF list in conjunction with Sphere. It will carry the same four-colour jacket as the paperbacks.

Footnote: I was very interested to see your comments on the Golden Oldies and look forward to seeing the recommendations made by your readers. We are thinking of starting a subseries of SF classics but are currently wondering whether there is enough really first-class material out of print to warrant such treatment.

Yours faithfully
Anthony Cheetham
Editorial Director
Sphere Books

It would be nice if everyone was as concerned about the material they publish as is Mr Cheetham. Rarely do they have more than a merely commercial interest in their books.

I was recently talking to the sf editor of another paperback publishing house, himself an ardent believer in the genre. He finds things far less acceptable than does Tony Cheetham. He has to take more account of the decisions of the sales department than of the acclaim of the critics. Books are accepted or rejected on commercial say. If the salesmen don't like the look of a book, then it is hard luck.

Should the merchants take a liking to a book, then the hatdret men get to work. Very few books pass through this publishing house, at least, without their being whittled down to 'a commercially viable size.' And if the legal boys sense that there is the merest chance of legal action, that's it.

Sphere Books may be different, but the fact that just one publisher can treat books in this piddling manner is very disturbing. Gone are the days when publishers dealt in books. They now handle a 'commodity'.

BOOKS AGAIN

DOBSON...

continue to provide a very good selection of mainstream science fiction. *It's a Mad, Mad Galaxy* (18s) is a good collection of humorous long-short stories from Keith Laumer, who is a nice bloke. Keith was last seen sedately riding his new (don't believe what Chris Priest said in *Speculation*) British made motorcycle.

Another collection is *Step Outside Your Mind*, edited by Terry Carr (30s). This went, I think, under the name *New Worlds of Fantasy* in the States.

John Camell gives us yet another of his *New Writings in SF* series (this is number 16) which has stories by Chris Priest, James White, Michael G. Coney and other well-known names (21s).

There are novels from A. E. Van Vogt, *The World of Null-A* (30s); Poul Anderson, *Let the Spacemen Beware!* (18s); George Dick Lauder, *Our Man in Ganyমে* (30s). I particularly liked Philip E. High's *The Time Mercenaries* (18s) the tale of a long dead submarine crew whose wrecked submarine is salvaged, and renovated so that the crew can be revived to fight a war to save a human race that has bred violence out of its genetic structure.

Underground Jewel?

Piers Anthony is slowly being published over here. From Macdonald we now have *Chthon* (28s), a more than somewhat confused story of unrequited love and hard labour 'in the brutally hot, subterranean garnet caves of Chthon.' All through reading this book I felt that the author could have written a very good novel, but you don't do this by taking an over-long linear narrative, cutting and shuffling it so as to provide the reader with a 'spot the clues' game.

Submerged Stars

Ken Bulmer throws some strangely familiar names around in his latest book from Robert Hale, *Quench the Burning Stars* (21s). A gestalt war machine — a wonder of bioengineering — goes berserk and has to be stopped from starting up again the war that it was built to end. Good stuff with more than a hint of self-parody thrown in to enliven a story that could easily drown in its own vacuum.

SPHERE Science Fantasy

A new category devoted entirely to science fantasy has just been launched by Sphere. It will concentrate on the worlds of the imagination created by such notable writers as the author of their recently-issued trilogy, Philip Jose Farmer, and the sword-and-sorcery novels of Michael Moorcock.

Identified by the legend SPHERE SCIENCE FANTASY, colour coded covers, and distinctive cover designs, the new category is an important addition to any fantasy collection.

The first titles are a trilogy by Philip Jose Farmer, available for the first time in this country. *Maker of Universes*, *A Private Cosmos*, and *The Gates of Creation* make up the trilogy, but each novel is independent, the three books being linked by the overlying theme of man-gods and their thrilling machinations.

Created by Wolff-Jadawin, the god-like maker of universes, the Planet of Many Levels is a playground cosmos in which men battle with weird beasts while the Lords of Creation plot against one another.

Issues in Hand

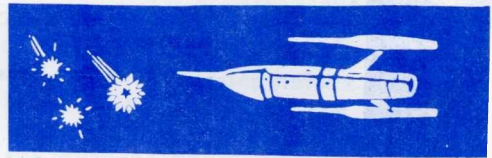
Asimov's first novel, a valuable addition to any sf collection, *Pebble in the Sky*, has just been published by Sphere. *The Fleshpots of Sansato* (New English Library, 5s) is a particularly amusing novel by William F. Temple. Harry Harrison's *Captive Universe* is being published by Faber (25s), as is *Outcrop* by Colin Cooper (28s). Meanwhile, namesake Edmund Cooper's *The Last Continent* has been published by Hodder (21s).

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