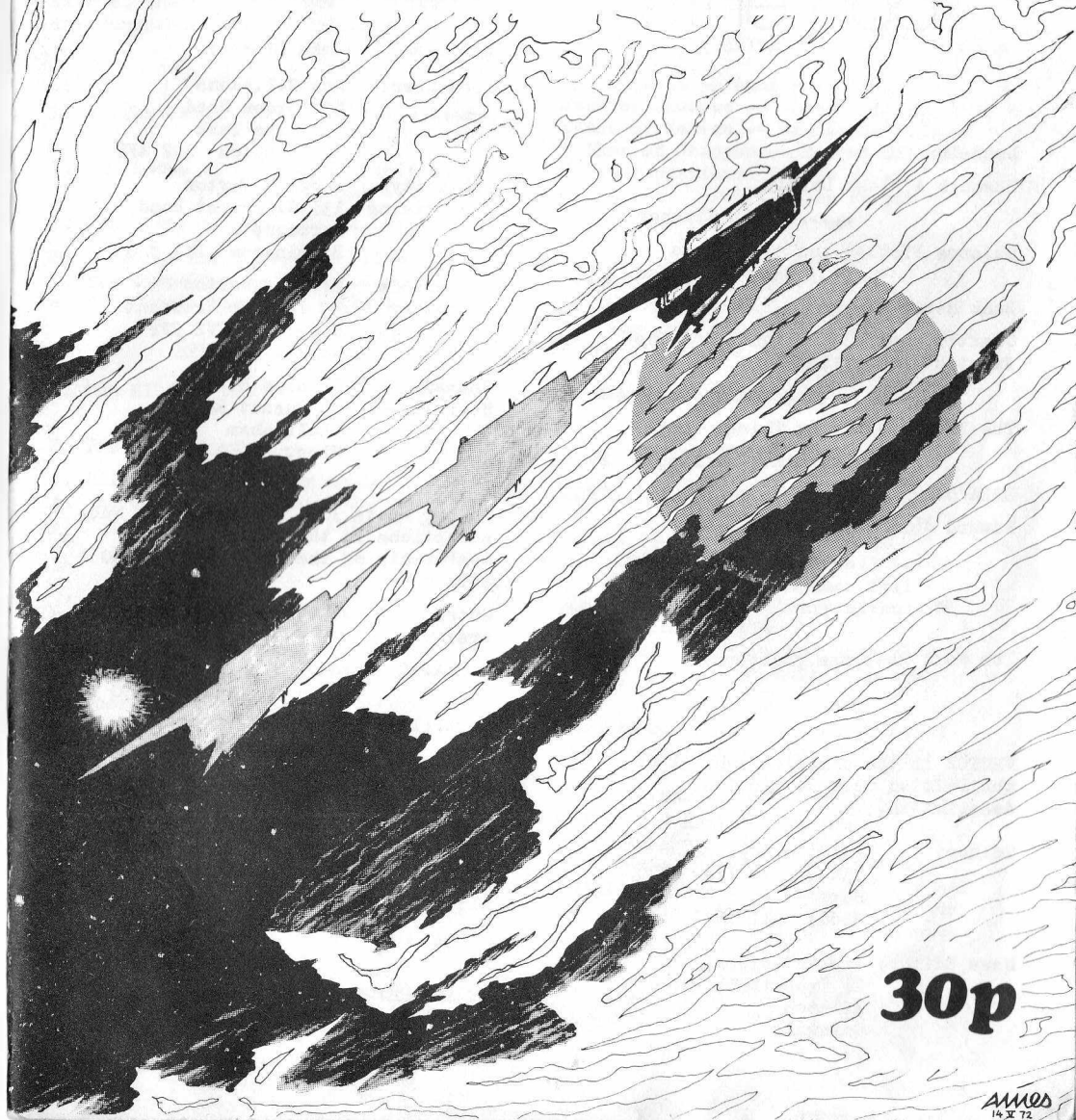


# **vector**

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# VECTOR 60

Journal of the BSFA; June 1972

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# LEAD-IN

## AWARD FIRM

You may have seen them listed elsewhere by now, but on the assumption that many of you will not have, here are the results of the 1971 Nebula Awards, and the final nominees for the Hugos. First the Nebulae:

### Novel

1. A TIME OF CHANGES -- Robert Silverberg
2. The Lathe Of Heaven -- Ursula K. Le Guin
3. The Devil is Dead -- R.A. Lafferty
4. Margaret and I -- Kate Wilhelm
5. The Byworlder -- Poul Anderson
6. Half Past Human -- T.J. Bass

### Novella

1. THE MISSING MAN -- Katherine McLean
2. The Infinity Box -- Kate Wilhelm
3. Being There -- Jerzy Kosinski
4. The God House -- Keith Roberts
5. The Plastic Abyss -- Kate Wilhelm

### Novelette

1. QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS -- Poul Anderson
2. Mount Charity -- Edgar Pangborn
3. Poor Man, Beggar Man -- Joanna Russ
4. Special Kind of Morning -- Gardner Dozois
4. The Encounter -- Kate Wilhelm

### Short Story

1. GOOD NEWS FROM THE VATICAN -- Robert Silverberg
2. The Last Ghost -- Stephen Goldin
3. Horse of Air -- Gardner Dozois
4. Scattered God -- George Zebrowski

Of the novels, only The Lathe of Heaven has so far appeared in this country (Gollencz); all the others are available in imported US paperback editions with the exception of Margaret and I, which I've never heard of. Many of the shorter pieces will of course appear in the annual anthology, which will be edited by Lloyd Biggle. Kosinski's Being There is also available, published by The Bodley Head.

The Hugo list is somewhat different, as follows:

### Novel

- Dragonquest -- Anne McCaffrey  
Jack of Shadows -- Roger Zelazny  
Lathe of Heaven -- Ursula Le Guin  
A Time of Changes -- Robert Silverberg  
To Your Scattered Bodies Go -- Philip Jose Farmer

### Novella

- Dread Empire -- John Brunner  
Fourth Profession -- Larry Niven  
Meeting with Medusa -- Arthur Clarke  
Queen of Air and Darkness -- Poul Anderson  
Special Kind of Morning -- Gardner Dozois

### Short Story

- All the Last Wars at Once -- Geo. Alec Effinger  
Autumn Land -- Clifford Simak  
Bear with a Knot in his Tail -- Stephen Tall  
Inconstant Moon -- Larry Niven  
Sky -- R.A. Lafferty  
Vaster than Empires and More Slow -- Ursula K. Le Guin

Once more many, if not most, of the nominees in the short fiction categories of both awards come from the original anthologies -- Orbit, Quark, New Dimensions, Universe, Protostars -- rather than from the magazines. Robert Silverberg's The World Inside also made the final Hugo ballot for best novel, but was withdrawn by the author. It's nice to see Silverberg winning a Nebula for A Time of Changes, though it isn't one of his best novels, after

having been runner-up in that category in 1967, 1968 and 1970, and 4th in 1969. SF's answer to Leeds United!

It's probably not too late if you want to have your say in the disposition of the Hugos to join the LACon. UK supporting membership used to cost £2.00 — I assume it still does — for which you get all the progress reports, plus the programme book, plus the final report which they swear they're going to produce this year (the same oath has been sworn in the past by other Worldcon committees without ever coming to anything; still, let's be optimistic and say that it would be a good thing to have if it comes off), plus a vote for the Hugo. If you're interested, you can get details from the convention's trusty U.K. agent Peter Roberts (87 West Town Lane, Bristol BS4 5DZ).

An event which sounds well worth attending is Speculation III, the third annual one-day conference on sf, which takes place at the University of Birmingham on Saturday 24th June, starting at 10 a.m. and ending at 6 p.m. You should find a flyer advertising the conference somewhere in with this issue. If you can't attend, well, some of the proceedings may appear in a future Vector. But that isn't settled yet. Admission price is 70p; full-time students and pensioners 35p. I was intending to try and get in half-price as one of the former (after all, I will be at college full time next year); looking in the mirror lately, though, perhaps I'd stand more chance of passing myself off as one of the latter.

Some success at the Cannes Film Festival for sf films, I notice. The Jury Prize went to the American film of Slaughterhouse Five, directed by George Roy Hill (of Butch Cassidy

fame). No doubt we'll be seeing the film in London in due course. It may be a lot longer before we get the Russian film of Solaris, directed by Tarkovsky from the novel by Stanislaw Lem (who, you may remember, was mentioned in passing in Vector 52). The film doesn't seem to have gone down too well with some of the English critics, who found it slow, not to say boring. Others were much more impressed, and from the reviews it would appear that the film follows the book reasonably faithfully, not least in demanding an effort from the reader/viewer. I look forward very much to seeing it, but dread the possibility that someone will seize upon it as the Russian 2001 and promote it as such, complete with the usual awful dubbed American dialogue.

If you have a club or society to keep amused, or even if you just like to show films to yourself in the privacy of your own home, a series of films about sf is now available from Visual Programme Systems Ltd (send enquiries to 21 Great Titchfield St., London W1P 7AD). There are 5 films in the series, all in 16mm and colour, running between 20 and 30 minutes. Poul Anderson discusses plot; Forry Ackerman talks about films; Asimov on the history of sf; Harlan Ellison conducting a seminar on new directions in sf; a John W. Campbell working lunch, with Harry Harrison and Gordon Dickson. All of these can be borrowed, at about £5 a throw.

Of course, Vector always needs material of all kinds — articles, reviews, that sort of thing — but one thing I'm particularly short of at present is artwork. Dave Rowe and Andrew Stephenson have kindly provided some for this issue, at rather short notice, but more is needed. So if you do any of that kind of thing, please do send some in. Two restrictions: it must be black-on-white (or v.v.) and it must be done to a full-page size of A4 (the magazine being photographically reduced from that size).

John Brunner

## Through a Glass Darkly

Science fiction, it seems to me, is like a mirror — a distorting mirror, admittedly, yet one which like all mirrors reflects what is set before it: our hopes and fears, our aspirations and our doubts.

Although, ostensibly, it deals with the future, when I am writing I am always conscious of the fact that I am thinking in the present and by the time my reader sees what I have written it will belong to his past. Already, in the twenty years or so I've been writing SF, I have seen many, many of my imaginary futures overtaken by events, so that they belong neither to the future nor to the past, but to a limbo of unrealisable possibilities.

Yet the commonest raw material for SF is speculation about what's to come, and here I am confining myself to that aspect of it.

Has it ever occurred to you how very recent is the idea that the future will be significantly different from the present? It's as new as the Industrial Revolution; in other words it's only two centuries old. According to I.F. Clarke in Voices Propheying War, in 1763 there appeared in England a book entitled The Reign of George VI, 1900-1925. (You may note that we did in fact have a King George VI in this century.) That king is portrayed leading his troops into

battle on horseback and inspiring them to rout the enemy before the gates of Vienna. His navy consists of sailing ships, built of wood. The anonymous author seemingly could not conceive of any major change in the type of warfare he was accustomed to.

Yet it's highly likely that he may have lived long enough to hear about Montgolfier's hot-air balloon and even of Charles's hydrogen balloon, which opened up the third dimension to mankind.

There followed the perfection of the steam-engine, the development of railways, the invention of the electric telegraph... All of a sudden, new devices were appearing so thick and fast that it was no longer tenable to picture the future as essentially an unaltered extension of the present.

It was not that technology, prior to the industrial revolution, did not exist. Consider the extreme sophistication attained by the windmill just before the steam-engine took over. Not only did it face the wind automatically, regardless of what direction it was blowing from; in its ultimate form it could — also automatically — feather its sails to prevent them being damaged by a gale, employing a feedback system as modern as any you can find today even though its cogs, shafts and gears were

*Guest of Honour Speech at the 1972 Swedish Sf Con*

forged by the local blacksmith or carved out of timber!

No, the point was rather that innovation, up to that time, had produced its effects slowly, as it were by diffusion and not by imposition, and often the impact of an invention was not recognised as stemming from that actual cause. The horse-collar is frequently cited as an example. By putting the load on the animal's forequarters instead of its neck, that enabled heavier loads to be drawn. The stirrup is a similar case; not only did it improve the rider's control and make his posture more secure, but it also permitted archers to rise in the saddle and shoot on the move. One must likewise bear in mind the windmill, as I mentioned, and the watermill, and wire-drawing -- and here's one of my favourite stories, by the way. It seems that in the fifteenth century the craftsmen of Augsburg were desperately attempting to draw iron into wire. They knew it had been done elsewhere, but every time they tried it the iron proved so brittle that it snapped. One day, a particularly exasperated experimenter grew so sick of failure that he gathered up his stock of iron rod, carried it along the passage and ceremoniously dumped it in the privy. Thinking better of his rash impulse the next day, he retrieved the rods and had another go. To his amazement, this time they drew into good-quality wire.

Which is why, for a long while afterwards, you could see the wire-drawers of Augsburg going to work with a yoke across their shoulders and a pail at each end. One contained their lunch. The other contained -- ah -- its exact opposite.

What had happened, of course, was that carbon had penetrated and tempered the surface of the rods, reducing the risk of brittle fracture and improving the mechanical qualities of the metal. At that time, however, it did not apparently occur to anyone to try and discover a basic underlying principle to account for this change in the iron. The habit of looking deliberately for new techniques was not systematised.

That is not to say there was no taste for novelty. On the contrary. It's my opinion, I should remark in

passing, that in studying the history of science fiction one can draw more pertinent and valid conclusions by examining the continuity of the audience than by looking for a direct line of literary descent, with one author influencing a successor or several successors. Until the establishment on a universal basis of an awareness that the future is going to be different, there was no possibility of SF arising as a recognisable and distinct category of literature. Therefore those people who enjoy SF today are the counterparts of those who in late medieval times avidly read such fantastic travellers' tales as those attributed to Sir John Mandeville....or indeed who listened to the bard and skald singing about Beowulf!

But a liking for novelty, marvels, new sensations, is not by any means the same as an interest in invention and innovation. It was not until a sufficient number of people had been sufficiently affected within the span of a single lifetime by the impact of new inventions that SF could come into existence in a form we can identify as a precursor of what is being written today. When the climate of public opinion was ripe, it emerged.

Such pre-industrial works as Kepler's Somnium, or Bishop Godwin's and Cyrano de Bergerac's accounts of voyages to the moon, although employing a few devices which foreshadowed SF, reflected a tradition harking back to the days of alchemy rather than forward to what we would now regard as science.

Once this watershed had been crossed, however, it is possible to argue that for each successive generation there has been a view of the future which carries more than mere plausibility. You will appreciate that I am throughout talking in terms of our highly literate and highly technological western culture; I have no intention here of getting embroiled in oriental views of the relationship between past and future or man and the universe.

Mere plausibility is something that even a mediocre writer can achieve within the confines of a story, or even a novel. Beyond this lies what you might call conviction. One might illustrate it this way: people not accustomed to the wide-ranging and free-wheeling dog-

ree of speculation we are used to in SF might say, "Yes, the future is going to be different -- but it's most likely to be of the general form such-and-such, and any writer who projects something completely out of line is going to have a lot of explaining to do before he can convince me!"

Thus, at the stage where it becomes possible to isolate SF for the first time in its modern guise, at the stage where it became reasonable for a writer to specialise in it (Jules Verne being of course the obvious example), the projection common to the great majority of literate and intellectual persons was the one reflected by the majority of SF: a euphoric view conditioned by the success of the European industrial powers in exploring unknown territory, carving empires and nations out of them, and immensely increasing their material wealth. Let me give an instance from Verne, one of hundreds. In The Clipper of the Clouds Robur is flying over Dahomey when his lookout spots a tribe torturing captives in preparation for a cannibal feast. Using the flying-machine and the power of European guns, he drives the natives away and frees the captives.

The attitude underlying this episode is precisely that of the White Man's Burden philosophy, the argument that the European is obliged to civilise the non-white races, by force if need be. I

know of no more apt and eloquent expression of this belief, which survived well into the present century and in a few backward areas such as Alabama and Cape Town still does survive, than what Winwood Reade said in The Martyrdom of Man, the book which inspired H.G.Wells to write his Outline of History. Here's a passage from it:

"The negroes are imitative in an extraordinary degree, and imitation is the first principle of progress...it will, I believe, be found that when they enjoy the same inducements to work as other men, when they can hope to distinguish themselves in the parliament, the pulpit, or in social life, they will become as we are, the slaves of an idea, and will work day and night to obtain something which they desire but do not positively need."

In passing, you will doubtless note the implied agreement with the so-called "Murtan ethic", which held that work was holy and rest -- if not exactly sinful -- at least something to be worked for.

Now I have elsewhere summed up this picture of the future as seen from the 19th century as "the naive Victorian belief in man's ability to conquer the universe by the power of steam." Perhaps I should add gunpowder, for Winwood Reade, on the very next page after the extract I quoted above, foresaw European-



ised negroes opening up the centre of Africa "with Bible and musket"!

However that may be, we do have here the first very widespread, the first conviction-carrying idea of what the future was most likely going to be. It was the one which sank roots so deep into our collective unconscious that traces of it still linger; one could apply it very aptly to the world's most famous and highest-paid SF writer today, Arthur Clarke, with the crucial qualification that in such books as Childhood's End Arthur has envisaged radically contrasting alternatives, including the possibility (in that novel) that our concern for the individual and his rights may be a blind alley in our evolution to another stage of intelligence. Perhaps Larry Niven would be a more precise instance of someone who has inherited the same principles.

When somebody proposed a future which was absolutely at variance with this general conception, like William Morris in News from Nowhere with its plea for a voluntary return to a craftsman-and-peasant culture, the audience was limited and the response minimal. It was the engineer's future which was most acceptable....and the entrepreneur's. That of course did not prevent such alternative views being voiced. Nor did it prevent the authors from being more correct than their contemporaries. A few of them had exceptional insight. One of the most remarkable was Rudyard Kipling, who in With the Night Mail and Easy as ABC foresaw an end to democracy — because of its unfortunate tendency to lapse into mob-rule, with its concomitant riots and lynchings — and the rise of a managerial form of government based on the power to control trade and communications, not to mention the need to reverse the population explosion! Quote:

"The Planet has taken all precautions against Crowds for the past hundred years. What is our total population today? Six hundred million, we hope; five hundred, we think; but if next year's census shows more than four hundred and fifty, I myself will eat all the extra little babies. We have cut the birth-rate out — right out! For a long time we have said to Almighty God, 'Thank You, Sir, but we do not much like Your game of of life, so we will not play.'"

And a line or two later: "I am rich

-- you are rich -- we are all rich and happy because we are so few and we live so long."

Considering that that was written in 1912, I find it most impressive.

The tradition of Morris's News from Nowhere continued; it reached perhaps its most eloquent expression in Graves's novel Seven Days in New Crete (otherwise Watch The North Wind Rise), but by and large the popular image of the future remained that of most SF writers, whether specialists or not. Expansion equalled progress, and progress was all.

The tarnish, however, had appeared early on this romantic steam-driven future. Kipling, in the story referred to above, revealed a fundamental optimism. Wells, in whose long shadow we SF writers still for the most part have to work, was inclined by his different background and upbringing towards pessimism, securely founded on the insights of Marx, Darwin, Rayleigh and other clear-sighted critics of the industrialised world. Not only in The Time Machine but also in The Shape of Things to Come and many other works he emphasised the cost at which progress was being bought, the price in humanity and humanness. He also stressed the ways in which so-called progress could backfire, through misuse of our new discoveries, and although like many propagandists he exaggerated his case in books like The War in the Air, he was absolutely right in principle. This was borne in on the comfortable — indeed smug — school of naive progressivists by the appalling slaughter of the First World War. For four years the proud heirs of that glorious Age of Steam applied the achievements of science to the destruction of their fellow humans, breaking all records for battle-casualties. The previous greatest mass-murderers, such as Attila, Genghis Khan and Chaka Zulu, probably did not kill as many people in their entire lives as the British, French and German generals were happy to wipe out in a single week.

It was hardly to be expected that this traumatic experience could be followed by a complete switch to a pessimistic view of the future. It is true that Wells's attitude, the cynical one, became the respectable one among intellectuals, and such authorities as



Professor J.B.S.Haldane, when they made projections of man's future, spoke in terms of millions of years before any significant social difference would be perceived. (He also referred to two partly-successful moon landings having been achieved by the year 8,000,000.... though in neither case did the crew manage to return to Earth.)

Let me quote from Haldane's The Last Judgment, written in the 1930's (I'm afraid my copy of the collection it appears in provides no date):

"For the human race on Earth was never greatly influenced by an envisaged future. After physiology was discovered primitive men long continued to eat and drink substances which they knew would shorten and spoil their lives. Mineral fuels were also oxidised without much forethought. The less pigmented of the primitive races exhausted the fuel supply under the continents on which they lived with such speed that for some centuries the planet was dominated by the yellow variety resident in eastern Asia....The unpigmented men appear to have foreseen this event, but did little or nothing to prevent it, even when it was clearly only a few generations ahead. Yet they had before them the history of an island in the North Atlantic, on which Newton and Darwin are said to have lived, and whose inhabitants were the first to extract mineral fuel and the first to exhaust it, after which they disappeared from the stage of history, although at one time they had controlled large portions of the earth's land surface."

For a contemporary Briton that has an uncomfortably correct ring to it...

But we human beings are incapable of living with the belief that our best efforts are doomed to failure, that our children's lot will inevitably be worse than our own. Besides, the mass of the public -- and in that mass I include the readership of the SF magazines which appeared late in the 1920's as a specialist category -- are not chiefly exposed to the views of people like Wells, Haldane, or Aldous Huxley, whose cynical projection of an antiseptic future world where God has been replaced by Ford remains as alarmingly valid as it ever was.

No, on the contrary, what shapes the mass opinion of the public is the continual hammer-hammer-hammer of advertising, and of propaganda in all its forms. Even during the Depression years, a belief persisted in the power of applied technology to make the world a paradise. Given that the slump was being cured by such projects as the Tennessee Valley Authority, bringing electricity to the remotest villages and farms; given that Ford's Model T and Model A had endowed even the poorest of the poor with unprecedented mobility -- and, incidentally, revolutionised American sexual habits and later those of other countries because in a car a courting couple could get away from the sharp eye of their parents -- given all this, plus a wistful envy of other and hypothetically happier times and places, it was not surprising that the SF magazines persisted in the obsolescent attitude towards the future which had been inherited from the last century.

However, it's notable that an increasing degree of interest in social consequences becomes discernible at this time. We begin to move away from the stock figures of the twenties, the handsome rich hero who builds a starship in his private laboratory and provides three cabins, one for himself, one for his fiancée and one for the elderly scientist who goes along as chaperone.

With the advent of World War II, and ultimately of the atomic bomb, we reach a stage where disillusionment begins to coexist with optimism. I have said elsewhere that the chief attribute of the science fiction hero is that he knows what he's doing -- an enviable talent -- but, faced with the possibility that we might destroy ourselves, the irritating question arose unavoidably: "How the hell did we get into this mess?"

During the First World War, unless you were unlucky enough to live in Flanders or Western Russia or some other actual field of combat, the war came to you second-hand; the few Zeppelin and Gotha raids on Britain were terrifying, but they caused no actual disruption -- that was occasioned at a distance, by submarine blockade or your brother's receipt of a conscription notice. The Second World War abolished frontiers over much of Europe; no one who covered listening

to a V-1 or the nightly drone of Lancaster bombers could fail to be aware that the finest achievements of modern science were being perverted to monstrous ends.

That knowledge persists today, of course; switching on the TV news is enough to inform us of the way in which still more modern advances have been similarly misapplied. But in the last generation we have learned something which is yet more disturbing. Even when we are doing something innocuous, or actively beneficial, such as inventing penicillin or DDT, we now realise we are screwing ourselves up. We are more and more often discovering that the cure is worse than the disease. Reduce the infant-mortality rate; inevitably you increase the scale — and the likelihood — of famine. Cleanse the orchards of insect-pests; unexpectedly you find birds' nests full of broken eggs because their shells crushed under the mother's weight. Make the weekly washing less of a chore; next time you go to the river, intending to spend the time you've saved fishing, there are no fish to be caught. And so on.

We are, in consequence, on the verge of a complete reversal of our former popular picture of the future. Unless something is done to prevent it, very quickly, the image of tomorrow which carries the greatest power to convince is going to be that of world-wide starvation, disease and probably senseless warfare. One can see this view spreading. One can tell by the way the younger SF writers are concentrating on stories of disaster and collapse; as I said at the start of this article, SF functions as a distorting mirror of the present. Norman Spinrad has written all his most powerful stories on themes of disaster and destruction: "The Big Flash" and "The Lost Continent" are probably his finest work. James Tiptree Jr. (who I predict will collect a Nebula very soon, and probably a Hugo too) similarly produces his most impressive work in a downbeat mood; his recent F&SF story is an example, "And I Awoke and Found Me on the Cold Hillside". Samuel Delany's best novel, The Einstein Intersection, is laid in a post-disaster world. What was only natural against the background of WWII's

devastation seems incongruous a quarter of a century after that war's end, yet the fact stands: it is here that the most conviction-laden SF is emerging.

It is true that the old future-vision continues to inspire many writers; I've earlier mentioned Larry Niven, and there are several older authors who have simply continued to express views which they held in their younger days and don't feel inclined to change. Poul Anderson is one of them; Gordon Dickson is another; Robert A. Heinlein must also be included in this class, I feel, despite his unconvincing bows to "permissiveness" and "withitness" in I Will Fear No Evil. (That's a curious novel, because despite the lawlessness and violence, not to mention the pollution of the larger world, its action is played out in an enclosed area protected by the power of money. One thinks of Marie Antoinette and her court playing and shepherds and shepherdesses while the real peasants were listening to the call of revolution.)

But it's becoming more and more essential for a writer of SF who wants to project an optimistic future to show, or at least hint, how we got there from here. In other words, it's no longer permissible to take for granted a bright future of interplanetary and interstellar travel, where dirt and disease are unknown and racial prejudice is a forgotten aberration; on the contrary, the dirt, disease, prejudice and so forth must be taken for granted, and the alternative depicted as stemming from some special cause which interfered with the foreseeable course of events.

Alternatively one may revert to Haldane's view, and decide that it may indeed take millions of years for us to evolve into fit company for each other...

In the distorting mirror of SF, we have seen many facets of our successive presents reflected. At each stage we have seen a loss of confidence. It is as though the future, of which we had such high hopes, has let us down when it actually arrived. Each stage of this loss of confidence can be matched with a pattern of present-time events. The First World War; the Second; the Depression; all the other little wars — so-called — from Algeria to Viet-Nam;

and, on our own doorsteps, the terrifying rise in drug-addiction in the States and elsewhere, not to mention the brutal religious war in Blister and the racial conflicts in the US and in Southern Africa... It is only too typical that the first practical application of a rocket-design intended to launch men into space was to deliver a ton of high explosive at a time on a great city.

Along with all these great disappointments, there are the smaller and more nagging ones. Consider the city of Stockholm: it used to be the custom of liberals to point to the enlightened policies of Sweden, its publicly-financed housing, its excellent educational and medical systems, and so forth, as a viable and admirable alternative to the communist ideal....it being taken for granted that unbridled capitalism was going to rape the planet sooner or later and leave us starving in the midst of luxury.

Yet it's notorious that there is an emptiness in the lives of many young people there, which leads them to waste their time driving around aimlessly, picking up girls for casual sex, drinking too much and experimenting with drugs even more dangerous than alcohol. It is perhaps not the least sobering (reference intentional) discovery of our time that there are a great many people whose chief ambition is to renounce the power of reason that's supposed to mark us out from the brute creation, and with the help of L.A. or other artificial aids to switch off their consciousness for good.



That's a far cry from the old ideal of the SF hero, isn't it? In place of the man who knows what he's doing, we find more and more the man who doesn't

care what he's doing. Or even whether he's doing anything at all.

In the distorting mirror which SF holds up to us in the present, what we see — you must never forget this — is actually here. It may not be here in the same proportion, but precisely because the writers are working in the present and their readers are reacting in the present what strikes hardest, what is most likely to touch a nerve, is what influences the changing view of the future that carries more than plausibility, that carries conviction.

By that standard of measurement, a film such as 2001 did not gain its massive audience because it portrayed an inspiring view of a probable future.



Its appeal was founded on nostalgia and rooted in escapism. Just as, during the Depression years, people crowded to cinemas to see lush Hollywood musicals; just as today people in Hong Kong go day after day to see an endless succession of violent and fantastic historical movies: so the customers for 2001 came, and keep coming, in search of the last expression of the future-view which has been dominant from the very beginning of SF. No matter that man has had "a little help from my friends"; he's going to the stars one way or another! Who cares that the odd computer here and there may go crazy? We're used to that — did you hear what happened last week at my bank?

It may seem somewhat paradoxical to claim that a film supposedly about the future can draw audiences because it's nostalgic. But the paradox resolves here: that now-outdated view of the future which I've repeatedly alluded to itself belongs to the past. Consciously, the majority of people who bother to

think about the future at all, including specialist SF writers, are compelled to admit that the trends detectable in the present which will give rise to our future offer little encouragement for optimism. Time after time, the most hopeful-seeming developments have foundered in the midst of war, and now — this cannot be emphasised too often — those which have escaped being misapplied to killing are entraining subtler but no less fearful consequences.

It's small wonder that people vaguely aware of this state of affairs look back with regret to that simplistic idealised future which never actually happened

Does it follow from this that SF writers must resign themselves to becoming the modern counterpart of fabulists, and spin mere technological fairy-tales without foundation in reality? Does it follow that they must pack up and go home? I don't think so. While it is true that SF has regularly and routinely reflected the present in a distorting mirror, let us not forget that those distortions are under the control of the writer. He is free to choose whether he makes a straightforward projection of foreseeable tendencies, or whether he hypothesizes some new-as-yet imaginary influence that may alter those tendencies, or even abort them. SF has been around for quite a long time now. Not only does it now reflect the present, as it has always done; it has to some extent at least conditioned it. It's notorious that the director of NASA dedicated a photograph of an Apollo team to Arthur Clarke, saying he had given the team the necessary intellectual drive to get to the moon. Now that not only scientists and technicians, but ordinary people, can see and occasionally comprehend the impact of science on our lives, SF is regarded with a respect it formerly did not enjoy among academics, intellectuals and influential persons generally. It would be nice to think that it will remain worthy of that respect; that its themes will be substantial, that its scope will grow wider, that the fresh approaches and the resources of imagery which it has developed will be more and more frequently applied in general fiction, drama and the other arts.

For talking about the future as seen from a given moment in time tells us things about the present which we might not otherwise be able to appreciate.

There are signs that this has begun to happen. To cite just one relevant example, the opera *Aniara* is clearly SF. More and more young writers have come into the field — more and more young artists have made their appearance in the galleries — more and more creative personalities have been emerging who acknowledge openly that SF had a determining influence on their thinking in childhood. One must have reservations about some of the consequences; endless reruns of the Flash Gordon movie serials do not exactly open up new vistas for us! But on balance the effect must surely be healthy. After all, at least part of the reason why we are in such a mess today can be found in the fact that the people who led the way here imagined the future was going to take care of itself, that any amount of rubbish could be left behind for their children to clear away, that any quantity of resources could be squandered, any number of trees cut down, mines exhausted, rivers fouled, and the future would still be bright and glorious! At any rate we're learning better.

And people who throughout their lives have been encouraged — thanks to sf — to worry about tomorrow, are that much more likely to question destructive obsolete principles, such as the sacredness of hard work, the obligation to make a lot of money, the equation of greed with progress, the identification of material comfort with psychological happiness. We are going to have to throw away a lot of our old misconceptions, and as I've said our conviction-carrying view of the future is currently being turned topsy-turvy. But although I'm rationally a pessimist, I'm congenitally an optimist. We can find a way out. Even if it means postponing the realisation of our stock SF dreams to the third millennium, that's a minor hardship compared with drowning in our own waste products.

The distorting mirror is at present reflecting the sores and scabs on our body politic. That may, eventually, help us to pluck up our courage and call the doctor.

# Science Fiction and the Cinema

A COLUMN BY

## Philip Strick

Philip Strick is a man of many parts: film critic for Monthly Film Bulletin; columnist in Films and Filming; chairman of this year's Speculation Conference; lecturer for the University of London Department of Extra-Mural Studies with a course of lectures entitled 'Worlds of Science Fiction' commencing this September. I've probably omitted a few things, but can now add one: columnist for Vector. The column's title doesn't mean that Philip will always be talking about sf films, not by any means; this first installment stems in part from a discussion at Chester on the merits of Fahrenheit 451, which seemed to provide an appropriate starting point....

It was a pleasure to see Fahrenheit 451 again at Chester, even though any film you care about looks impotent on 16mm in a smoke-filled Convention hall where the acoustics are bad and everyone's fidgeting to get away to the bar, and there are interruptions for the reel-changes. The print had scratches all over it, of course, and was printed with chunks of picture missing on either side; altogether it was rather like trying to read a book through a gas-mask with the lights out — almost as bad, in fact, as watching films on television. But plenty of people stuck with it, and they were all disposed to discuss it afterwards, so it served its purpose. I hope we can all see it again under perfect conditions one day, but meanwhile all praise to Harry Nadler and his lot for laying it on.

All Truffaut's films are about loneliness, in my view, and Fahrenheit is one of his bleakest. Like his delinquent (in Les quatre cents coups), his musician (in Shoot the Pianist), his femme fatale (in Jules et Jim and many more), and his married man (in La Peau Douce), Truffaut's fireman is on a hunt for a real self, a hunt of which he only gradually becomes aware, through his encounters with other people making similar journeys. On the one hand is his wife Linda, immersing herself in the television 'family' which even addresses her by name. On the other is Clarisse, the appealing girl from next door who parallels his wife's narcissism by wondering why society won't accept her. Logically enough they are both played by Julie Christie, looking gorgeous as the wife but very awkward as the neighbour, a piece of casting which at one stroke reveals and emphasises one of the most important patterns of the Bradbury original. Sadly, the balance is missed by the film's deletion of Faber, the old man who is Montag's ally in the second half of the book, and who is Bradbury's 'outsider' equivalent to the fire chief. The paternalistic aspects of the chief, an omniscient bantam who consigns Kein Kampf to the flames with honeyed reassurances but is also nervously dependent on the loyalty of his staff, are however well brought out by the film — and they're in keeping with one of Bradbury's persistent themes, the adored but elusive father. Truffaut uses a tiny scene

near the end of the film to acknowledge this, with an old man dying as his son haltingly recites the words his father has taught him.

The following of instructions from a higher authority: Montag is simply exchanging one authority for another when he takes to reading books instead of burning them, which is no doubt why Truffaut gives him the air of a monkish pedant rather than that of an enthusiastic convert (and how is it, they all asked at Chester, that he knows how to read anyway? And why is it, I ask, that we don't see his first momentous gesture of revolt by preserving the first book from burning?). But if there is an ultimate irony in that Montag 'becomes' someone else — and it could only be Poe! — at least he is better off, Truffaut suggests, than are his previous co-zombies, who have no identity at all save that stamped upon them by the ultra-Platonic city-state. It's a chilly message, particularly in its snowbound final scenes where the muted landscape colours are appropriately more easy on the eye than the superbly strident shades of earlier sequences. My assumption has always been that its intention was pessimistic, but when I checked this with Truffaut himself, meeting him for the first time just a couple of weeks ago, he maintained that he is always the optimist; the snow just happened to fall at the right moment, and he regards the ending as one of beauty and contentment. Well, I stick to my critical guns. As the bookmen tramp with purposeful aimlessness along the lakeside, muttering to themselves like madmen, it seems to me that they may well have all the diversity of books in a very public library but there seems little chance of their ever being read. Bradbury's ending blew the city sky-high on the horizon, but Truffaut leaves the stainless mausoleum intact, and with it remains, in my view, the inference that the bookmen may never cease to be socially redundant. Their self-sacrifice would seem to have only fractionally more purpose — in that it is at least a matter of personal choice — than that of their city cousins.

Even so, Fahrenheit has too much exhilaration, polish and humour ever

to become as depressing as its theme. Nicolas Roeg, since become a film director in his own right, gives splendour to the photography, while Bernard Herrmann's music has a rich and pounding excitement that almost makes you want to take up book-burning for the bell of it. Herrmann, of course, has done the music for many of Hitchcock's films, which is a reminder of Truffaut's admiration for the great man; seeing



Fahrenheit once more, I noticed that it had more of Hitchcock in it, however, than the soundtrack. Montag's nightmare, for example, has something of the mood of Vertigo — and there are indeed (as John Ramsey Campbell pointed out at the Convention) some subtle resemblances to that film in the story. Whether or not you go in for influence-spotting, most of Fahrenheit is compulsive watching in its own right — particularly the punctuating shot of the mini fire-engine, scooting through the countryside like a child's dream come true, or the book-burning scenes, in which the flames pore

fascinatedly over the pages in hypnotic close-up. A timely reference to La Religieuse (Rivette's film was being martyred in France at the time Truffaut was making Fahrenheit at Pinewood), an obligatory "Cahiers du Cinema" (tribute to Truffaut's days as a critic), but otherwise Truffaut wisely lets the books speak for themselves. And they are marvellously eloquent.

Turning to more recent screen exploits, I was sad to see what they'd done to Richard Matheson, even if few would rate I Am Legend as greater in importance than Fahrenheit. It's a brutal novel, like all of Matheson's work, but to my mind his best (yes, despite Incredible Shrinking Man), and it's the only thing on vampirism that doesn't leave me stone cold bored. I've always thought it could make a really tremendous movie, and so have plenty of scriptwriters; the first attempt at it was The Last Man on Earth, made in Italy in 1964 with Vincent Price, with a good beginning and not much else. With The Omega Man, Boris Sagal directs and Charlton Heston makes quite a decent stab at being Richard Neville, only to be deprived, right at the start, of the essentially Mathesonian paranoia which would have had him pursuing his victims with garlic and sharpened stakes. Instead, he grasps a matter-of-fact machine-gun, and his opponents are little more than albino psychotics in modish dark glasses, sprinting impishly about like Chaucerian friars.

Forgivable as it may be to simplify the technology-versus-humanity debate in this fashion, The Omega Man reveals its true colours depressingly quickly with Heston's screening of his favourite movie (Woodstock, no less) in which the garbled hopes of the peace-lovers are evidently intended to encapsulate both the innocence and the naivete of the common man. The scriptwriters, John and Joyce Corrington, also wrote Von Richthofen and Brown (the Gorman movie released as The Red Baron),

and would seem on this evidence much drawn to the theme of a foredoomed hero who insists on outliving his usefulness. But the potential ironies in the film have either been so overemphasised as to become banal, or have been subverted by the introduction of blatantly 'loaded' factors like the child who wonders if Heston is God (not yet, dear, not yet), and the irresistible heroine, coolly played by Rosalind Cash, who provides Heston for no very good reason other than that it hasn't been done before and might just ensure a bigger audience, with his first black bedfellow.

The film is often as garish in its appearance as in its script, with lurid sets, unhelpfully stark lighting, and a great deal of uncertainty in the editing (notably in the scenes of the escape on the motorcycle, rather obviously ridden by a stuntman, and of Heston's sluggish demolition of an intruder who has climbed his outside wall while he's been fiddling in the basement). Yet it would be unfair not to say that the film has somehow managed to retain at least an echo of the compulsion of Matheson's original, even while upturning its ending so that the survival of Heston's blood-brothers is promised. The customary garbage of disaster is as fascinating as ever: the empty city, the untended houses, the corpse-filled hospital beds, the eerie menace of torch-bearers in the streets at night -- sometimes, if nowhere near often enough, The Omega Man has an authentic chill to offer. Sad that it could all have been so much better, but then that's what Matheson's novel was all about in the first place...

--- Philip Strick

Cover and cartoon strip are by Andrew Stephenson; all other artwork is by Dave Rowe

Downward to the Earth

by Robert Silverberg  
Signet, 75c

Son of Man

by Robert Silverberg  
Ballantine, \$1.25

Reviewed by Terry Crooks

On second reading — following some months after the first — I found myself enjoying Downward to the Earth, Robert Silverberg's good colonial novel, even more, if anything, than I had the first time round. Well, no: to call it a colonial novel, while partly accurate, is misleading. It's the story of an ex-administrator who returns to the colony he formerly governed, where the native creatures proved to be intelligent, and were therefore given back their autonomy. But more than anything, it is a religious book. It is the story of a pilgrimage: the journey Edmund Gundersen undertakes to expiate his feelings of guilt; to find spiritual fulfillment; and, ultimately, to be reborn.

The concern is one shared by other Silverberg novels. The paperback blurb for Nightwings, for example, describes it as a novel of 'redemption and renewal': this might apply equally well to Downward to the Earth. There are closer correspondences with Silverberg's more recent novel A Time of Changes: both books attempt to depict in prose a transcendent experience, a kind of religious ecstasy; and both adopt much the same approach. It made the later novel seem to me a darker alternate to Downward to the Earth; but in both cases I felt the attempt was successful.

This is in every way a worthwhile book. Simply as an exotic adventure it is excellent: the world of Belzagor is superbly drawn: the journey is dotted with many moments of real beauty and horror: the serious points about colonialism, its attitudes and its aftermath, are well made, without being over-insistent — one effective touch is the way in which Silverberg contrasts Gundersen's journey with the nilkoror — the native beings —

book reviews



with the guided tour on which the party of tourists with whom he arrived are conducted. Even the rather Ava Gardner-esque figure of Seena, waiting not-quite-alone in her house at the head of the huge Shangri-La falls comes off in context. It is a book well worth attention on each of its three main levels, and to my mind it is Silverberg's best to date, despite being less ambitious in technique than much of his other recent work.

One such book is Son of Man, a book which seems to have received practically no attention in the fan press, possibly because nobody dared to commit themselves. This may be partly because Ballantine's packaging and advertising maintains that the book isn't sf; it is, very definitely, but not sf of a kind to easily fit within established genre limitations. In fact, one of its notable achievements is in its return to first principles. It approaches its idea without any apparent reference to what has been done within the genre with the same kind of concept, to the various traditions which nowadays restrict our imaginings while claiming to discipline them.

It is also a book which practically defies the critic to interpret it without making a fool of himself, and in all honesty I didn't actually enjoy it nearly as much as some of Silverberg's other books. Very basically, it's about a man who awakens in the distant future, when men have become much like gods — or some of them have, since man has split into a number of separate species. The symbolic note is struck at the outset: when first asked what was his name, he thinks for a while and replies, "I was Clay". With one of the types of man, the Skimmers, Clay performs the Five Rites necessary to keep the world in balance. The idea seems closely analogous with the cosmological ideas of some North American Indian tribes (my guess that this may be the specific influence is Silverberg's use of material from the same source in his short story "Sundance"): the idea that the world is like a machine which slowly runs down and must, from time to time, be 'wound up' by

ceremonial means; and the concurrent idea that that the energy which powers the world is the same as sexual energy, so that the rites are generally of a sexual nature.

This is one aspect of the book; the other main strut is transcendence again. The various sorts of humanity each represent, rather obviously, Aspects of Man. Clay becomes each, in turn, in an attempt to embrace and understand each and therefore be able to become something more.

By the nature of this book, as described above, it contains a great deal of sex. I must confess that I find Silverberg's writing about sex rather ugly: too harshly lighted, like pornographic photos. But at the same time one should recognise that he does at least write about it in an individual style; an achievement in itself in a world where the merest mention of a hardening nipple seems sufficient to reduce most writers, whatever their abilities, to an identical state of quivering mediocrity.

I've shied away from assessing this book very much; it's too open for that, I feel. I think it's a novel you should try to read, but I don't guarantee your enjoyment. I'm still not really sure how much I enjoyed it.

#### Mutant 59 — The Plastic Eater

by Kit Pedler and Gerry Davis  
Souvenir Press; 21.80

Reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

The creators of "Doomwatch" here turn their talents to the literary field. The characters are different from those of the TV series, but the situation itself could be taken straight from it — and indeed, if I remember correctly that I heard about the first ever episode, which I didn't see, it is. Two scientific discoveries precipitate the disaster at the core of this novel. The first, occurring some time before the events of the book, is the development of a

bacteria which will attack certain plastics. The scientist who discovers it dies without ever revealing his secret, but spores of the bacteria remain. Things start to happen when the dormant bacteria come into contact with a new form of plastic developed by a commercial scientific group, the Kramer Consultancy. This plastic provides just the food the bacteria needs and it eats, and grows, and mutates, and spreads, becoming able to digest a wider and wider range of plastics — and soon, all over London, plastic is dripping uselessly from a thousand insulations. As short circuits occur everywhere planes crash, submarines sink, the London Underground grinds to a halt.

A nice set-up for a disaster novel, but unfortunately the central events aren't the only disastrous thing about Mutant 59. It is regrettably clear that neither of the authors knows much about writing a novel, let alone about rewriting one. The book stretches for 295 pages, perhaps 50% over its optimum length. Tension is lost over pages and pages of clumsy action and dialogue. The physical aspects of disaster — generally the most fascinating part of such a book — seem lacking, except for material relating to the London Underground, with which the authors seem peculiarly obsessed. The characters are so artificial that one cannot help but wonder why the bacteria didn't get to them as well. Lectures are scattered through the text, most unconvincingly dramatised. To give just one example of the general ham-handedness of the book: towards the end, while research on the antidote is in full swing, the authors introduce one Professor Kendall, who is supervising the experiments. They discuss the situation to him, but they don't get very far: as soon as they mention polymer chains and photosensitive links the Professor interrupts, saying, "Sorry, I'm a bit lost". Pause for explanation. Then, when the discussion later turns to polypeptides, the Professor is again at sea: "Polypeptides, sorry I don't really see...". More explanation, and the ignorant Professor and the ignorant reader are equally enlight-

ened.

The prose is distressingly wooden and frequently ungrammatical. In fact, the only spark of life comes when the authors are describing some of the disasters caused by the bacteria, which they do with a rather unpleasant relish:

"The severed nose section, turning over and over like a giant bullet, bounced once at the end of the road and, in one final gigantic ricochet, spiralled into a tightly packed mass of housing, pulverising walls and ceilings.

"The remaining fuselage began to shatter, turning end over end like a ragged metal stick flung through the air.

"The lives of the forty-eight passengers and crew ceased almost simultaneously as collapsing bulkheads and jagged panelling slashed their bodies into a terrible carrion which rained down on the street below..."

In the end, of course, our hero finds the answer (they poison it, but it takes them 250-odd pages to think of it) and the bacteria is defeated, while he gets the girl and the chairmanship of the company.

A dull, amateurish novel; yet one which seems destined for a popularity which eludes practically all decent sf, having been sold to book clubs, films etc for huge sums. It's rather depressing to me, but I expect the authors can cry all the way to the bank over that.

### Science Against Man

edited by Anthony Cheetham  
Macdonald, £1.75; Avon, 75p

Reviewed by John Bowles

First, a word from the editor:

"Ten years ago, a collection such as this would have been a collection of technological nightmares — crazy robots, poisoned wastelands, megalom-

maniac computers, fiendish subliminal advertising techniques, mega-death dealing microbes and warheads..... Today these nightmares are no longer the preserve of the science fiction writer. They are part of our daily lives."

Now what do you suppose he meant by that? I mean, I don't know about you, but my daily life (admittedly mundane) is rarely disrupted by so much as a single crazy robot or megalomaniac computer; and while I bow to no one in my mastery of fiendish subliminal advertising techniques (such as the nearly-invisible interlineations in this review reading "John Bowles is a great critic") I must confess that I haven't seen a mega-death dealing microbe since last Thursday. Anyway....

Perhaps the authors were equally baffled by the conditions set, for despite Mr Cheetham's assurances there are several stories which feature computers, one of which could be described as megalomaniac and another of which is crazy. Furthermore, the best story in the collection is a poisoned-wasteland story pure and simple. The question which the best of the stories seek to answer is one posed by Mr Cheetham later in his introduction: "How will (man) meet the challenge of his new environment?"

The computer stories are generally unimpressive., perhaps because, of all Mr Cheetham's 'technological nightmares', computers have truly become part of our daily lives — so much so that it's no longer possible to accept the traditional Luddite approach, or to regard them as other than complex, efficient, and totally inanimate lumps of machinery. So Paul Ableman's "Man's Estate" (only peripherally in this group, admittedly) is clever but empty, while John Brunner's "The Invisible Idiot" is merely dull. Bob Shaw's contribution is good-humoured and entertaining, but unmemorable. Michael Moorcock's "Sea Wolves" is (you guessed) a Jerry Cornelius story, one of the best of that ubiquitous gentleman's shorter adventures to my mind, but that's about all I dare say.

Bafflingly, there are also two stories which are little more than fictionalized palaeontological/evol-

utionary lectures. Piers Anthony and Harry Harrison are the culprits, and while the former is quite instructive and the latter (dealing with more familiar material) is very vivid, neither story seems particularly relevant to this anthology, or particularly good as a story.

Four stories, however, are relevant. James Blish's "Statistician's Day" is an effective short about the necessity for maintaining a balance between the various sections of a stable society. Since you can't control the number of people that are born of a given kind... It's not a likely solution, but the story does explore what would be a real problem. (But Jim: where did you get the idea that middle-class Britons refer to the bathroom as the wardrobe?) "The Hunter at His Ease", by Brian Aldiss is a telling extrapolation of the technological imperialism of the industrialized countries, channelling their aggressive tendencies against their less-fortunate neighbours, having no outlet for them at home...while at the same time this provides the stimulus for industrial development, which is the only solution to the population problems faced by the under-developed countries. It's a complex problem, and makes for a worthwhile piece of fiction.

Robert Silverberg's "In The Beginning" is one of his Urban stories; others have appeared in Galaxy, and some of them at least form the background of his novel The World Inside. The premise is that by the mid-24th century the Earth will be able to accommodate a population of 75 billion. Seven-eighths of cultivable land is turned over to food production; the remainder is given over to the urban constellations which house the vast population. A typical constellation, Chipitts, consists of fifty urban monads, colossal apartment blocks, 1000 storeys high; self-contained worlds housing 800,000 people each — people who would no more step outside their monad than you or I would visit another planet. The stories, as a series, offer a solution to the population problem so effective that breeding is once more encouraged, but at what cost? In such closely crowded living conditions violence

must be eliminated. Since repression breeds violence there must be no repression; since tensions lead to violence there must be no tension. The result is Silverberg's 'post-orivacy' culture, and a horrifying, powerful vision it is. This said, this particular story is not one of the best, having a tendency to excessive patness, particularly in one of the best ordered 'dream sequences' I've ever encountered, in which one of the characters conveniently dreams all about the background of the story. It's undeniably relevant, but should be assessed in the context of the rest of the series.

The best story in the book, though, much the best story, which is also the author's best story to my knowledge, is "The Lost Continent" by Norman Spinrad. This poisoned-wasteland epic gives us an unforgettable picture of America a couple of centuries hence: entire seaboards blanketed in smog banks; deserted cities; sub-human survivors in the New York subways; the surface inhabitants, lucky to live to 50 even if they change their breathing filters every day, such is the virulence of the atmosphere. Spinrad knows the power of his material, and mostly just lets it speak for itself, which it does eloquently in a series of carefully described landscapes. The story is simply that of a prosperous tourist party from flourishing Africa, come to marvel at the ruins of the greatest civilization the world has known — a journey counterpointed by the ritual playing-out of the old racial conflicts. It's an old cliché to say that it's worth getting a book for one story alone, but I think it's true here (it does in any case account for about a quarter of the book's length). Not that the rest are worthless; they'll keep you entertained, and three of them are pretty worthwhile in themselves anyway. But it's Spinrad's book.

In the next Vector, we will feature reviews of, among others, The Tombs of Atuan by Ursula Le Guin, Fugue for a Darkening Island by Christopher Priest,

Stonehenge by Harry Harrison and Leon Stover.

Books received (may be reviewed in future issues)

From Gollancz: Report on Planet Three, Arthur Clarke (£2.20); Kuldesak, Richard Cowper (£1.80); Holding Wonder, Zenna Henderson (£2.00); Patterns of Chaos, Colin Kapp (£1.90); The Tombs of Atuan, Ursula Le Guin (£1.25); Can You Feel Anything When I Do This?, Robert Sheckley (£1.80)

From Faber: The Day After Judgment, James Blish (£1.60); Fugue for a Darkening Island, Christopher Priest (£1.75); Nine Princes in Amber, Roger Zelazny (£1.75)

From Sidgwick & Jackson: Timescoop, John Brunner (£1.50); What's Become of Screwloose, Ron Goulart (£1.75); Nightwings, Robert Silverberg (£1.60); Out of Their Minds, Clifford Simak (£1.60).

From Peter Davies: Stonehenge, Leon Stover and Harry Harrison (£2.10)

From Pan/Ballantine: R is for Rocket and S is for Space, Ray Bradbury (25p each); 100 Years of SF, Damon Knight (2 vols, 30p each); A Voyage to Arc-turus, David Lindsay (40p); Water of the Wondrous Isles, William Morris (40p); The Palace of Eternity, Bob Shaw (30p); The People Trap, Robert Sheckley (30p).

From Tandem: The Time Mercenaries, Philip E. High (25p); Confessions of Westchester County, Barry Malzberg (Olympia Press, 60p); Priest-Kings of Gor, John Norman (30p)

From Arrow: The Jagged Orbit, John Brunner (50p)

# Chester Song at Twilight

from Our Man at  
the Convention

## Peter Roberts

A walking tribute to the destructive power of Guinness, Peter Roberts is well-known as Britain's fannish fan par excellence. He's just completed a four-year course at Keele in — I think it was — American Studies, and is all set to join the dole queue. Which should allow plenty of time over to write Vector's second new regular feature, a column of fanzine reviews. First, however, a report on the Chester convention, at which Bram Stokes thought he was me. Which of us do you think should feel insulted, Peter?

Last year at the Worcester Eastercon everyone told me how good a time they'd had on the Thursday evening before the official start of the convention, so I arrived happily and expectantly on Thursday afternoon, found no one in the Blossoms, and walked the mile and a half to my overspill hotel, the notorious Peacock. This bustling place was a giant Twenties pub and was closed until the landlord arrived at 6 p.m. "We generally go to bed at eleven o'clock," said his wife. "But I daresay you'll be back before then?"

Looks like a really good con, I thought.

However, things became somewhat brighter with the arrival of Greg Pickersgill, famed Fouler editor, an ex-Australian comic fan John Brosnan. We kept the poor landlady up till half past one waiting for Roy Kettle who, as it happened, was still sleeping peacefully in London. She had her own back the next morning, though, and charged John £4 for the double-room...

We made our way over to the Blossoms, where Greg and I found we'd been double-booked. Great. Last straw, and all that. Anyway, much of Friday was spent in long and tedious arguments and a great deal of trudging around; the moon-son came to Chester, the Peacock opened an hour late, and the police waited watching us, whilst we waited watching hamsters in a rat-race. If Greg and I looked sour and more than usually dishevelled on Friday, you now know why. The con committee later cleared things up and we parted fairly amicably, but the first two days of the con turned out to be a dismal and unlively introduction to Chester.

Enough of my general woes, however. I shall now turn briefly to science fiction, the sub-literary genre to which, I'm told, the convention was dedicated. Professional writers in attendance were: Larry Niven, the Guest-of-Honour, from America; Brian Aldiss, fine British author; Harry Harrison, Anglo-American author and fan, currently plugging Stonehenge, an historical novel of sorts; Fred Pohl, well-

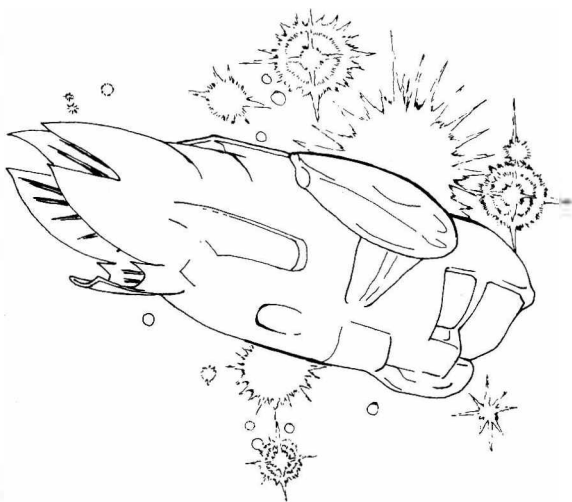
known American writer, now editing Ace Books' sf line; John Brunner; Bob Shaw and James White, Irish fans and authors; Ted Tubb and Ken Bulmer, famed auctioneers and writers; Anne McCaffrey and James Elish, ex-Americans now in residence in Britain; and many more whom I should doubtless have mentioned. The programme was not an appealing one to a trufan, and I'm afraid I was not tempted by the various films and talks on science fiction. Such a gross neglect of fannish topics may well result in a backlash of sorts at future cons, I fear, to the obvious detriment of sf addicts and casual visitors. It should be possible to produce a balanced programme — last year's Eastercon, for example, had a fine range of items; even a couple of serious things worth listening to, instead of "Sf in the Past, at Present, in the Future" (delete as applicable) and sundry other well-worn themes. Nevertheless one remarkable event occurred, I'm told: Brian Aldiss did a little Pohl-vaulting and a genuine argument was heard during a panel discussion!

The Blossoms Hotel itself was far too small for the con, but had the most good-natured and extravagantly helpful staff I've ever encountered. The cocktail bar stayed open from 9 a.m. to 6 a.m. (hence, incidentally, the lack of room-parties) and was the setting for late-night singing, the (fool)hardier fans being supplemented by early breakfast-eaters. Have you ever heard Pete "Speculation" Weston singing "Danny Boy"...? Could make it a regular programme item.

The Buttery Bar downstairs was the watering-place of Chester's gay population, despite the presence of the Oddfellows pub nearby. Apart from one or two minor incidents, the regulars kept to themselves, although provoked by some idiot who persisted in carrying a whip around.

I did actually enter the con-hall for the auctions. A mass of fanzines were to be sold, part of the BSFA collection which had been rotting away unseen for many years (despite the gallant efforts of Charlie Winstone); these were unsorted, and Rog Peyton and I spent a frantic half-hour just before the auction trying to sift out some of the hideously rare items that had been mixed in

with the general crud and chaff. It was a mark of the unfannish nature of the con that no one seemed to know anything about fanzines and none were in fact auctioned at the major sale. An unscheduled auction, however, grudgingly allowed a few of the things to be sold and, lo and behold, they fetched higher prices than the rare books and artwork put together. A set of Hyphens went for



£27, I believe... Visiting Texan fan, Joanne Burger, bought a large number of items against my bidding, and there was a loud, chauvinistic cheer when I finally managed to secure some pre-war stuff. Mind you, I could hardly have afforded all that I'd set my eyes on — my fannish exuberance almost had me walking home as it was. Good job my bus fare was only six bob.

Despite some setbacks, I finally found myself enjoying the con as usual; plenty of people were around, including the newly-degafiated Tony and Simone Walsh, German fans Gerd Hallenberger, Tom Schluck, Waldemar Kummig, Mario Bosnyak, and others, Rat and Gannet fandom en masse, and many more, all of whom will be rightfully annoyed that I failed to mention them. All I can do is write a longer conrep in Egg and cease to exhaust the patience of the massed

readers of the BSFA who are probably bemused at the moment and are now wondering if they dare risk being seen at a con. Well, why not, eh? After all, did you do something better over Easter?

--- Peter Roberts

And now.....the  
first installment of  
the column nobody  
expects ----

## The Fannish Inquisition

Having written fanzine reviews for some time, I'm well aware that the audience for these columns is somewhat small: a select coterie of you, me, and the fanzine editor in fact. Fanzines come in various shapes and sizes and range widely in content, the two norms being the serious or serious magazine which comments on science fiction and the fannish fanzine which deals with science fiction fandom. In this column I hope to cover a wide selection of material, both serious and fannish, and to include at least one fanzine from the British Isles, not an easy task since almost every fanzine published here is irregular and issues appear infrequently. Most of the material comes from the United States, needless to say; but there is also a strong band of Australian and Canadian publishers, plus those in Europe (mostly German), and an isolated few elsewhere. I'll limit reviews to those fanzines which are at least partially in English.

That proviso may seem obscure, but it applies to the first fanzine I intend looking at, namely Antares News 1 which is half in Turkish, half in English. The arrival of this newszine surprised me, I must admit; I'd heard that Turkey had discovered both science fiction and fandom, but I hadn't realised they'd become sufficiently organized to produce anything. This first issue, written in very fair English by the way, serves as an introduction to Turkish fandom and is invaluable for anyone wishing to contact foreign fans. A list, for example, notes thirteen Turkish fans looking for correspondents (although only five require British ones) and a brief letter column shows the results of the editor's first contact with Continental fandom and thus provides more names and addresses for potential letter writers. Antares News is published by the SF Fan Club and an information sheet is provided for foreign members who will receive AN and their journal, Antares, as part of the subscription. The contents of this issue are largely concerned with film news and notes ("Tarzan'in Oglu" sounds rather fine), sf publishing -- aside from comics -- being rather sparse in Turkey. There are also some short fanzine reviews and some intriguing letters in Turkish which stimulate my notable tendencies to linguamania (a futile attempt to learn several hundred languages at once).

The above might best be classified as a newszine, so I'd better turn to something more specifically serious as I promised earlier and look at a new British publication, Macrocosm, edited by Rob Holdstock. This is almost entirely devoted to amateur fiction, though I use the adjective with some hesitation, since nearly all the contributors have sold stories professionally. I wouldn't normally read something like this, but in the interests of unbiased reviewing I did and my dedication was not without reward, for the collection proved better than I had expected.

Unlike the majority of fiction fanzines, Macrocosm contains nothing that is so bad that it's pitiful or laughable. Andrew Stephenson and Alistair Noyle both write pastiches which are predictable and somewhat clumsy sty-

listically, whilst Jack Marsh attempts an American setting which is too blatant (and also inconsistent) and which therefore spoils and interesting short story. Rob Holdstock himself contributes an indulgent piece: no sin in itself if his indulgence hadn't taken the form of mimicking a second-rate author's love of words in an opulent and whimsical mess (and a startlingly inappropriate ending didn't help either). This still leaves a fine, straightforward Roy Kettle story, written without pretension and relying on a fluid narrative style to highlight the content, and a piece by Matthew Hatch, suspiciously full of Tuckerisms, but again successful with its linguistic ease and straight dependence on content. Two out of six isn't too bad an average and as I said initially none of the fiction is excrable or too wretched to print. An sf panel discussion from the 1971 Eastercon is an additional, though rather non-descript, item and Macrocosm 2 also has a letter column and a brilliant editorial which I must confess I enjoyed more than anything else. The presentation is excellent, an extreme rarity for a British fanzine, and the abundant artwork is generally fair. There are few fanzines dealing with serious attempts at amateur sf and most of the others I've seen are a lot worse than Macrocosm.

To close this first column I think I'll choose a fannish fanzine, in my opinion the most consistently successful and entertaining species of fanzine yet produced. This one is Terry Hughes' Nota 4, an American production which looks something like a New York fanzine, but actually comes from Missouri. As with most fannish zines, the editorial and the letter column are two strong points; the first is rambling and well-written, interlineations being used to advantage. Terry seems to have a tendency to over-write, a common pitfall I fear, though mostly it's channelled off into exclamation marks and capitals and the reader can thus become acclimatized without much trouble. The other half of Nota has a fannish three-subject column by Creath Thorne which is entirely readable, if not outstanding, and an 'Open Letter to Alvin Toffler' (author of Future Shock) by Ray Nelson which seems a little out of place. Jim

Turner has some more idiot recipes and advice for drinkers and the Luttrells review fanzines in what strikes me as a rather miserable and prejudiced way. Terry's layout and printing are adequate, though with less cartooning than would be ideal. Nota 4, therefore, is an enjoyable fanzine, and one that seems typical of the fannish genre; the reliance on the editorial and letter column means that it enjoys a stability of content that article-oriented fanzines often lack, though it's still building up, of course, after only four issues.

Next time I intend to look at another three or four fanzines chosen at random, but with an eye to mixing countries and types. I am, however, open to suggestions for this column, though not to requests or demands that I review a specific fanzine. The information given below is rather mercenary; most faneds will trade fanzines and send free copies to letter-writers and contributors (fannish faneds prefer this and tend to discourage subscribers).

Antares News 1 (18pp): Sezar Erkin Ergin, Bakarliklar, PO Box 56, Ankara (G-10), Turkey. Duplicated/10 Int'l Reply Coupons for one year.

Macrocosm 2 (48pp): Rob Holdstock, 15 Highbury Grange, London N5. Duplicated/15p per copy.

Nota 4 (27pp): Terry Hughes, 407 College Ave, Columbia, Missouri 65201, USA. Dup./25c per copy.

— Peter Roberts

Continued from page 39

pages, and features an amazing 55 page editorial-cum-letter-column, with long letters from, among others, John Brunner, Damon Knight, Stanislaw Lem, Ursula Le Guin, David Gerrold, Franz Rottensteiner, Wilson Tucker, and yours truly, plus the first of three articles by Bruce on the novels of Brian Aldiss, and articles by Prof. Darko Suvin and others. SFC comes very cheap, considering the size of some issues (averages 50pp: No.19 was another monster, over 130pp), at £1.50 for 9 surface mail, £4 for 9 air mail.



# **The Frenzied Living Thing: Kobo Abe's Future**

Scene: the Institute for Computer Technique, in Japan.

Dramatis personae: Tanomogi, Wada, and Katsuko, workers in the Institute, Tomoyasu, of the Programming Committee, Professor Yamamoto of Yamamoto Laboratories; and Professor Katsumi, head of the Institute of Computer Technique, who tells the story. This is his laboratory.

The other people in the laboratory are many of Katsumi's old friends and confreres. Perhaps they are also his enemies. Tanomogi has assisted Professor Katsumi in developing the Institute's *raison d'être*, the predicting machine. As soon as Katsumi steps inside the door, Tanomogi takes command of the situation. "We've been expecting you," he says. Katsumi does not bridle at this impertinence; Tanomogi already knows more about this mysterious situation than Katsumi does. Why shouldn't Katsumi expect some more impertinence?

The group has entirely taken command of the Institute. Wada, Katsumi's quiet, efficient assistant, tells him that they have gathered to screen his application for a visiting permit to Yamamoto's experimental farms on the continental sea floor. "The formal designation of this gathering," says Tanomogi, "might be called the Administrative Committee of the Society for the Exploitation of the Sea Floor -- Regular Meeting of the ICT branch." This is the first time that Katsumi hears of the existence of the branch.

"Who gave you permission to use this place?" I murmured softly.

At once the speaker of the forecasting machine began to talk: "I did."

"Your second self, Professor," said Tomoyasu, looking up apologetically at the loudspeaker.

The meeting develops into a trial. The loudspeaker of the forecasting machine "says" in Katsumi's voice, "There is danger that the Professor, with malice aforethought, will commit the heinous crime of infanticide." Certainly, Katsumi already believes that he should kill his "son" as soon as possible, but he does not realize that anybody could guess why he wants to visit Yamamoto's farms.

## **Bruce R. Gillespie**

The proceedings catch Katsumi more and more off his guard. Enough mucking around; the committee has made its decision: "You're going to have to die." Tanomogi adds comfortably, "We intend to exert all our efforts to save you, sir. What we're hoping for is that now you know the conclusion, you yourself will find premises which might change the conclusion."

What sort of game are they playing? If this secret organisation wants to destroy Katsumi, why don't the members shoot him on the spot? Why doesn't Tanomogi say, "We will kill you." Why does he say instead, "You're going to have to die." The latter statement is a prediction about the future, not a threat. The only person who can change that future is Katsumi himself.

As the members of the Committee point out to Katsumi, he knows nothing of his own future, and, acting upon government orders, he carefully avoids making predictions about political events. "Let me remind you that I'm a mere technician, not a philosopher," he tells the assembled company. At this point the Committee most firmly disagrees with him. "You manifestly didn't even try to consider the possibility that the future might be at odds with the present," says Wada. "You see, sir, you were a lot more interested in the machine than concerned about the future." And because Katsumi has invented a machine that can predict the future accurately and minutely, and because he sees none of the consequences of his invention, the machine predicts that its maker cannot take part in the future.

\* \* \* \* \*

Haven't I just given away the answers to a number of the book's mysteries? True, Kobo Abe constructs Inter Ice Age 4 so that superficially it resembles any number of other mystery books. At the beginning of the book, Professor Katsumi's forecasting machine has just begun to operate. The government tells Katsumi that he must not make any political predictions. They might rock the boat. (Moscow's machine predicts a completely Communist world by the year 2000!) Tanomogi suggest to Katsumi that they should predict the destiny of some individual instead. They should pick

some person at random in the street, collect as much information as possible about the individual, and "exercise" their new toy with the information. Tanomogi and Katsumi find a seemingly average man in a cafe and follow him back to a block of apartment buildings. Tanomogi follows the man up to his room and finds him murdered. Katsumi becomes frightened that a casual bystander might have seen the two of them following the stranger; shortly afterwards a mysterious voice calls Katsumi on the telephone and tells him: "You'd better not go too far with us. The police already suspect the two fellows that were shadowing that dead Romeo." Katsumi's wife, three months pregnant, is drugged and taken from a hospital and given an abortion. The man they shadowed was murdered in the flat of a prostitute who, among her many activities, "bought" three-week-old foetuses from expectant mothers. For awhile it seems as if Kobo Abe has invented more mysterious killers, strange machines, and secret organisations than any Ian Fleming.

Stanislaw Lem has described the mysterious story as a "mechanistic, deterministic" type of literature. I take this to mean that a mystery novel unrolls towards a prediscovered conclusion. A mystery story's *raison d'être* is its conclusion; once you have discovered whodunit or howdunit, you need not show any further interest in the story. The mysterious gadgets of its plot may lead the reader of Inter Ice Age 4 to finish the book in a hurry -- and then read it a second time to find out what it's really all about. The problem of "knowing the ending in order to know the beginning" is so acute that I cannot even talk about the book without revealing some of the answers to its superficial mysteries, for only after the reader knows these answers can he assess the questions that Abe raises during the book's first few chapters. The author writes such lean, concise prose that he can make the meaning of any sentence harmonise with the meaning of any other sentence elsewhere in the book. When I read the book again, I found that Kobo Abe does not particularly want to baffle the reader, but he particularly wants to baffle Katsumi. The reader must out-guess Katsumi in order to judge both him and the situation, but he needs to read the book twice in order to form his

judgment.

\* \* \* \* \*

Katsumi receives the last infuriating phone call from the mysterious stranger who seems to keep permanent watch on him. The voice can anticipate Katsumi's every move. Often Katsumi is on the point of guessing the identity of the mysterious stranger, but he can never quite find the answer. During the last call, the stranger teases Katsumi with an eerie Alice-in-Wonderland-type conversation:

"But surely, Professor, you've noticed how exactly my voice resembles your own. Maybe it's some accidental likeness to that of a total stranger, you're thinking, Professor. No, it's all right. Your not trying to learn, your not bending every effort to find out who I really am, and my being obliged to telephone you like this now are after all two sides of the same coin, so to speak."

I realised that I must take care. That my adversary could command at will words worthy of a gangster and the expressions of a government official meant that he was not an ordinary individual.

Again, Katsumi faces the same allegation that several committee members make during different parts of the novel -- that Katsumi has missed a vital part of some overriding message about the future, because he deliberately chooses blindness. Katsumi is worried sick about the situation in which he finds himself, yet the voice dares to berate "your not trying to learn, your not bending every effort to find out who I am."

Katsumi tries to bargain with the stranger. He cannot see that the voice is trying to teach him, not menace him. The stranger's cloak-and-dagger tactics bring down his defences and at last he surrenders to the attack:

"This is the crucial point," said the voice. "I can see everything."

"And so?"

"Eh. You don't get it, do you." The threatening voice gave a deep

sigh. "Even though I've said this much, you still don't have any idea? This isn't me. It's you yourself. I am you!"

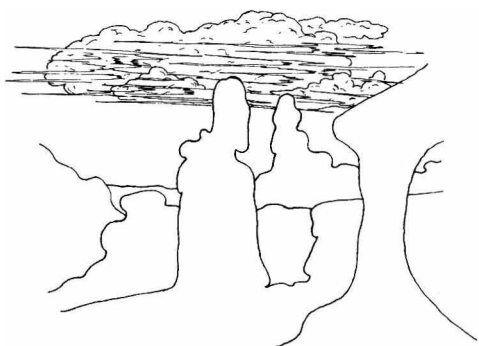
This revelation illuminates the meaning of all the novel's previous chapters, and dominates the long last scene in the ICT control centre. In chapters 29 and 30 Kobo Abe seeks to illuminate this central mystery of the novel. The forecasting machine, speaking with Katsumi's voice, and programmed to precisely predict his every movement, conducts a "conversation" with his original self. "I'm merely a prerecorded tape," says the voice. "Of course I wouldn't have anything so fine as perception." The machine speaks on:

..."But I possess reliability and certainty that go beyond perception. I know what's going on in your thoughts long before you think them. No matter how you may try to behave independently, you can't take a single step outside the prearranged program in me... My volition is your volition. But you still haven't realised it. I am only doing as you probably would if you knew your own future."

Kobo Abe makes real a concept that most novelists merely fool with, for Katsumi learns about himself from "himself", or, if we want to use such terms (and Abe doesn't) his ego learns from his superego.

But why does the predicting machine know Katsumi's motives while Katsumi has so little self-knowledge? The voice says, "All Tanogomi's actions up till now have been at my request. And my commands are nothing more than your commands." This idea includes several assumptions, or clues, which Abe does not describe at the beginning of the novel. When he built the machine, Katsumi must have built it so that its capabilities reflected his own personality, or perhaps his possible personality. Also the author assumes that a programmer can codify enough information about the human mind or behaviour patterns so that the machine could predict to the split second the actions of any particular person. Western philosophers, at least, would say that "mind" and "machine" are entities of such different kinds that no machine could ever duplicate human behaviour in so precise a way.

But, you might say, Abe has already explained that the machine is not sentient, that it does not think for itself. In that case, I am not satisfied that the predicting machine would not simply ape Katsumi's behaviour rather than counter it. Kobo Abe has dropped a few specks of magic into his machine, I think. However, if Abe cheats at this point, he doesn't cheat when he delineates the main philosophical conflict of his novel. The voice from the telephone continues to taunt Katsumi. "You're your own enemy, there's no way out of it. We've all exerted as much effort as we can for you." When Katsumi reaches his last destination, Wada admonishes him further, "You were a lot more interested in the machine than concerned about the future. You're able to envisage the future only as a continuation of day-in, day-out life."



The Society has learned that a global disaster will take place within a few years. As a result, the sea will rise, and will cover most of Earth's land, including Japan. The Society, financed by unnamed Japanese industrialists, seeks to create a completely new form of underwater civilisation (the aquans) before the disaster strikes. At the same time, they seek to justify their expenditure in the most satisfactory possible way: members of the Society join Katsumi's staff, Tanogomi feeds all the relevant information into the predicting machine, and the machine gives them a precise picture of the world's future.

When Katsumi accuses the Society of social amorality on a grand scale, the members agree, and they let the "certain future" justify their actions. As Katsumi realises during one brief moment of illumination, the predicting machine makes the future into "some frenzied living thing that possessed a will independent of the present". In Inter Ice Age 4 the Future becomes an independent entity. The concept of free will loses its reality. Hitler used the same argument as the Society's; but neither Hitler nor any other despot has ever had certain knowledge that the future would vindicate his actions.

The final chapters of Kobo Abe's novel provide very sombre reading. I leave them to your perusal. However, even during the last pages, the writer still cracks ironic jokes at the expense of Katsumi, but although the Society is factually right, the author doesn't sympathise with their position either. Time after time, Katsumi shows his moral stupidity. Even at the last moment, when he "knows everything", he makes a futile attempt to escape the room. Several times he admits that he would much rather hide somewhere and immerse himself in the trivia of computer programming, although he has found out the whole strange future of man.

The grim joke of Inter Ice Age 4 is that Katsumi never does realise the power of his "pet" predicting machine. In making the future certain, he denies himself choice in the present moment.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the reader discovers the meaning of the book's ending, he may return to the book's beginning and marvel at the way in which Abe infuses every passage with the desperate spirit of the whole. Even during the novel's first passage, Abe shows how moral ignorance combines with intellectual passivity in Katsumi's nature. "Don't throw things around like that," he snaps at his assistants. (His "assistants" already know the predicting machine's full potential, have begun to program it, and have effectively taken over control of the centre.) Katsumi opens a page of his scrapbook. The popular scientist of a newspaper writes, "We stand now at a new turning point in the history of

civilisation." "As far as I was concerned," Katsumi mumbles to himself, "the critic hadn't seen the future at all but merely witnessed an inconsequential newsreel." Katsumi praises (and dismisses) Tanomogi as a "somewhat ill-mannered but very efficient assistant."

Given that Abe scorns Katsumi at times, he still makes this novel into a moving account of a man's battle with the inevitable. "What if the determinists were ontologically as well as metaphysically correct?" Kobo Abe seems to say. "In that case we couldn't submerge ourselves in illusions of free choice. But we couldn't surrender our wills to the people who represented the future. We would need to meet our intolerable futures in the best possible way."

However, the future will not contain an omnipotent Society for the Exploitation of the Sea Floor which will prepare for man's fate. The predicting machine doesn't exist, and Kobo Abe's particular invention probably never will. Abe shows that we have no one to protect us against the future, that "frenzied living thing", except our own wisdom. The world mainly contains Dr Katsumis, who, when faced by the future, will say, "The question had nothing to do with natural phenomena or social phenomena." Or, as the world dies or changes beyond recognition, will we finally ask Katsumi's last question, "Could man be made to assume responsibility just by existing?"

— Bruce R. Gillespie

## news department

edited by archie mercer

News concerning the Association and its members, members' small ads, and the like should be sent in the first instance to the News Editor. This department is in effect the old Bulletin in a new shape.

**NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS** says the saying. The lack of news on this occasion, however, is, if not exactly "bad", certainly no more than mediocre, being entirely due to the fact that the final Bulletin was sent away weeks ago for duplicating and distribution and as I write is definitely overdue. So the back news has been covered, and until the members see it they won't bother to make any more! Hence this feeble collection. Better next time, I sincerely hope.

**CORRESPONDENTS WANTED** Peter C. Hill: 22 South Spring, Sidcup, Kent. "Other" interests: Astronomy, mythology, chemistry. Preferred location of correspondents: USA and generally.

John W. Ellison (16): 93 Gorsedale Rd., Wallasey, Ches, L44 4AL. Surrealism, sociology, music.

**MEMBERS WANTED** By the Tolkien Society, Britain's own answer to Kordor. Two regular publications, The Mallorn (a serious, but not too serious, magazine) and Anduril (more of a newsletter). Social meetings for those who are within range. Subscription is £1.00, covering four issues of The Mallorn plus any Andurils that appear among them. Treasurer is Archie Mercer, whose address appears on the contents page of this Vector. Cheques and postal orders should be payable to THE TOLKIEN SOCIETY.

### NEW AND REJOINED MEMBERS

- 907 Ellison, John W.: 93 Gorsedale Rd., Wallasey, Ches, L44 4AL
- 1053 Gielgud, Christopher H.: 8 Rutland Park Mansions, Walm Lane, London, NW2 4RB
- 1246 Hill, Peter C.: 22 South Spring, Sidcup, Kent
- 1247 Lawrence, Gerald G.: 58 Oakley Drive, London, SE9 2EJ
- 961 Wilde, Peter J.: 98 Church 3TP Road, Sheldon, Birmingham, B26/

# Edward John Carnell

## 1912~1972

### Harry Harrison

(The following article first appeared, in a slightly different form, in "Science Fantasy" No.68, as "E.J.Carnell — A Quick Look". It is reprinted here by permission of the author, who has added a new postscript.)

If the Things from outer space landed in Regent's Park tomorrow, there is no doubt that the authorities would turn first to Edward John Carnell for advice on how to handle the situation.

I firmly believe this to be true: he has not been called the Old Monopolist for nothing. For years now he has been carrying on the most complicated career imaginable, a polydactyl mastermind who has a finger in every science-fictional pie. It is a lucky thing for us all that he has been the benevolent despot, managing to be impartial while at the same time acting as literary agent, art agent, magazine editor, book editor, anthologist, book club selector, pub-

lisher's representative....my powers of expression fail me, as does my memory. The result of this has been that whenever someone such as a publisher, movie producer or television director has made a request for science-fictional information or aid anywhere in the British Isles, the request has sooner or later been dropped onto the O.E.'s desk.

It is important to remember — if you doubt the benevolent part — that "Ted" Carnell started life as an sf fan and has remained true to that dedicated calling ever since. He likes sf and this affection has always been his prime motivation; he has had monopoly thrust upon him. In the primitive days of 1946 when "New Worlds" was first founded — and again in 1952 when it was re-founded — there were no other British sf magazines nor editors nor agents who handled this specialized material: Ted had to take them on one by one for himself. Only dedication could have motivated him to assume all this responsibility, while at the same time editing "New Worlds" and "Science Fantasy", through all the black years of audience indifference into the present sunlight of acceptance. It cheers me to see that other editors are now at work on

these journals: I was afraid that the O.M. would explode from overwork. He still has entirely too much to do, but apparently that is the only way that he can operate.

For one thing, he appear to have gained some sort of global control of sf. For a long time he has had northern Europe within his empire, channeling British and American sf to the markets there, and now he has appropriated Spain, Portugal and Japan, and is introducing them to the glories of science fiction. All of this is a very good thing — remember the benevolency — and the only ones with cause to grumble are shoestring foreign publishers, since he insists always on a fair price for the authors he handles. But agenting is not all, he still keeps his hand in the creative pool as editor of "New Writings in SF".

The man who carries these many portfolios is a dedicated Londoner, born in Plumstead in 1912 he still has his home there. He sports a natty moustache and a fine ruddy complexion that only years of exposure to the rigours of the English climate — both indoors and out — can produce. I have many times tucked my legs under the family table and consumed the immense and satisfying teas his wife Irene uncomplainingly produces for all the flotsam of science fiction that wash up on the Carnell doorstep. After tea, and with a little prodding, the O.M. will show some of the films he has made of historical science-fictional gatherings and one can sip a drink and wallow in nostalgia. The fire crackles in the grate and forgotten faces are recalled with enthusiasm and amusement. I think, perhaps, this is the secret of Ted Carnell's success and his ability to play fair to all in his many roles. He enjoys science fiction and, since he has made it his life's work, he feels content with every passing day.

His is an enviable position

\* \* \* \* \*

When I wrote the preceding a few years ago for "Science Fantasy" I meant exactly what I said. I still do. Ted was all these things and more; a man of most obvious honesty and honor in a field not noted at times for either of those attributes. What I can add now is that Ted

was always the best of friends, someone whom I shall miss very much. He befriended me in 1957, when I came to London for the first Worldcon there and stayed on to make my freelance fortune on Britain's hospitable shores. That was a cold winter, you will remember, and we ran out of sixpences for the fire in our bedsitter on Camden Town Road while food — not to mention drink — was in very short supply. Ted, friend of a few months, was far more concerned for my and my family's welfare than the miserable New York agent I had at that time. Not only did he have us over for the already mentioned teas, but he commissioned stories from me, cash on the barrel-head or in advance, and found ways to reprint some of my stories from little-seen US magazines. He had to do none of these things; he just wanted to. This was the beginning of a friendship and a business relationship that lasted down through the years.

Ted, I am going to miss you, we are all going to miss you.

The world is a diminished place since you have gone.

--- Harry Harrison

## Dan Morgan

I first met Ted Carnell at a convention held in the Royal Hotel, Woburn Place back in 1951. He was, as I recall it, Chairman and Master of Ceremonies on that occasion, and memories of my first SF Con will always be associated with his wit, charm and enthusiasm. The most vivid of those memories are his welcoming smile and handshake when I nervously introduced myself as the neo-writer whose first SF story he had recently bought for publication in New Worlds.

The way he greeted me was typical of the Ted I was to know for the next twenty years — a man completely without false pride, who despite his outstanding personality was capable of the self-effacement which is one of the most necessary qualities of a great editor. And he was

that, make no mistake about it; the unquestionably dominant force of British SF in the fifties, who acted as guide, friend and father confessor to most of the writers of my generation. The list of those whose first stories he published must be a tremendous one; the amount of encouragement and advice above and beyond the call of duty which he handed out was enormous.

Writing is an odd sort of introverted affair with its own special agonies. Quite frequently when a writer asks for criticism what he really wants is the kind of praise that will ease his self-doubts and make him believe he really is the genius he would like to be. Ted understood the dangers of this kind of self-delusion. His praise was given only when he considered that it was truly merited, and never as a sop to pride. It was thus a rare and treasured thing. He was honest about a writer's work, even if he knew that sometimes such honesty would hurt — because he knew that in the long run his frankness would be for the good of all concerned. For all the ivory tower legends, writing is not a job for those whose egos bruise easily, and in his wisdom he knew this.

I remember one occasion in particular when I disagreed violently with his assessment of a story of mine which he had rejected. I wrote him a long diatribe attacking his editorial policy, and he replied with typical mildness and humour, saying that maybe I was right, and could he print my broadside in the letter column of New Worlds? The story was afterwards published in another of the British zines, but in retrospect I understand that he was right in saying that it was not suitable for his magazine. The keystone of his policy at that time, and indeed right through his editorship of the "New Writings" series, was that he would not publish anything that he considered might corrupt the young people he looked upon as his average readers, or offend their parents. With him this was a matter of principle, a principle adhered to in later years in the face of attacks a great deal more vicious than my own.

Ted went on publishing my stories in New Worlds until he left the role of editor for the new one of agent, when I was privileged to become one of his first clients. The relationship between

a writer and his agent is a delicate one. Very few writers are able to regard their own work with a sufficiently impersonal eye to appreciate that if a piece doesn't sell they have only themselves to blame. It's far easier on the ego to assume that the man whose job it is to sell the stuff isn't working hard enough. That kind of face-saving excuse could never apply when your agent was Ted Carnell. A book completed, I would send it to Ted and wait gnawing my nails down to the elbows until I heard his assessment of its quality and saleability. In my experience, over the dozen or so novels he handled for me, he was never wrong. I respected his judgement, and he continued to represent me until he died, even though latterly he was battling against a crippling and painful illness.

Just how ill he was I only realised for the first time in September 1971, when Georgie and I stayed with him and Irene for a night on our way back from Spain. Even then it seemed impossible that his everlastingly cheerful spirit could ever yield, and as recently as the beginning of this year my phone would ring every week or so and we would chat about what was new and plan for the future. Now alas, that future is no more for Ted. But his is assured of the only immortality any human being can expect — he will live on in the memories of his many, many friends.

Vaya con Dios, muy buen amigo.

— Dan Morgan

## Ted Tubb

Edward John Carnell is dead and if the achievement of a man can be measured by the hole he leaves behind then Ted's achievement was great indeed. His record speaks for itself, but not all things are a matter of record. There are other things, personal moments and, for me, they stretch almost forty years into the past. I remember him in the years before the war, the early years



when the Science Fiction Association consisted of a few devotees of a frown-ed-on literary medium, and Ted was there, tall, suave, kind and, above all, knowledgeable. He knew the science fiction world probably better than any man in the British Isles and became such an integral part of it that he was regarded as being the prime source of information. And he was always with us, at Conventions, in the White Horse and later the Globe, at meetings, in his office, at his home, always there and always ready to help, to advise, to guide.

So what do you do when such a man goes? What else is there to do but to remember?

The early days when we were young together and science fiction was opening into a bright new way of life in which we wrote and sold and magazines flourished and there was a sense of shared interest and companionship. The gatherings and enthusiasms and always Ted, the man who knew, who could answer any question, who was always good-humoured, always good company. Ted who was the mainspring behind the Festival of Britain Convention which set the pace and began the series of Conventions as we know them today. Ted the impeccable MC, the toastmaster, the chairman who knew everyone and could introduce them all.

And other things, more personal and perhaps, because of that, the more individually important. He was the editor who accepted my first published story and who later, as my agent, sold my novels all over the world. A kindly agent who was reluctant to pass on bad news but who was always quick to give a needed boost to ease depression. Who would take a delight in giving me good news and who was always cheerful, always patient.

And there was the visiting, the sharing of wine, the talking of the past, of old friends and mutual acquaintances, the observing of a changing scene. The reminiscences of a span of years encompassing generations. And now he has gone. A friend, a business associate, but even more than that. A man who was a star in my personal sky.

As I said at the beginning — the hole he has left is very great.

## Brian Aldiss

Arundel Street is one of those little London streets that trail steeply down to the Embankment. Derwent House is on the right as you go down. It's dignified but slightly seedy, smelling of last week's disinfectant.

Nova Publications lived in the basement of this mansion. As you hurried down the street, you could look through the area railings and see Ted Carnell down there, working with his jacket off, shirt always clean and uncreased, sleeves always down. You could also see piles of unsold Nova magazines, "New Worlds" and "Science Fantasy". There were girlie calendars on the wall, for Ted, that most respectable and retiring man, liked to think of himself as 'a bit of a lad'. So he was, in his way.

When I first went into that basement, as a slender and callow youth, my inner feelings were that this hardly seemed the lair for the sort of poetical-emotional sentimental-intellectual fiction I wished to write. I was not entirely at ease — in those days I often wasn't. But Ted was his own man, and he and I got on very well together.

He was never anything but kind. He never had any facade against the world; and as far as I could observe he was always exactly the same person to everyone he met (a trait of which, given my own character, I stand in some awe). On the rare occasions when I could afford to visit London, Ted would take me out to lunch in truly awful genteel cafes, often subterranean, where it would be "hello, Ted, dear!", and "Hello, Rose!" between him and the waitress. He seemed to like my stories — though I wished he could be more precise in stating what it was he liked about them: beyond saying that their style was 'nice and fresh' — but at least he said that several times — he had no other critical comment. All the same, he knew what he liked, and had a quiet and unshakable determination to publish it.

My first sf story was published in "Science Fantasy", and my second; after which, I was promoted to "New Worlds". Announcing the story in the previous issue, Ted remarked that "it promised to be the gem of the issue", a comment I cherished dearly, as one should the first word of praise in print. (The story was "Outside", appearing in issue 31 in 1955; that I still recall without having to look it up.)

The remarkable tale of how the Nova magazines were born has been told elsewhere. Or it would be a remarkable tale to those who cannot understand the strange devotion that sf arouses in the manly hearts of those who read the stuff. The battle went on for years, the issues appeared irregularly, and often had awful rubbish in them (as well as some nice John Christophers and John Wyndhams). When Ted and I first corresponded, he was just getting out of his difficulties, and proudly announced a monthly schedule in 1954. To that schedule he stuck tenaciously. "New Worlds" never failed to come out on time -- or to pay its writers reliably, however little the pay was (it was two guineas per thou then, and so it remained for many a long year, whereas the unreliable but enthusiastic Peter Hamilton, publishing "Nebula" up in Glasgow, paid five guineas per thou).

Ted Carnell was not a literary man, but he had a sort of permanence about him which caused literature to get born. By that I mean that he was not a shifty character, and that his inclination was for regular habits. Since writers are shifty characters, and generally irregular, Ted was a good and stable man to have around.

The contrast between his quiet way of editorialising and the brash drum-beating that went on in American sf magazines at that time ("Jim Harmon -- a pulsating new volcano-load of erupting talent!") was marked. I preferred Ted's way intellectually, but emotionally I believed that it would do a lot of good -- to us if not to him! -- if he had stood up and said, "Look at my new authors, Aldiss and Ballard, two pulsating new volcano-loads of erupting talent!"

Here are some of the things he did do in his quiet way. He began his literary agency, almost forced into it by press-

ure from authors, who in those days had no way of selling their stories, or no other publishers to sell them to, or no other literary agents who knew what the hell sf was! To give you some idea -- I was lucky in that my first book was ordinary fiction, and Faber approached me rather than vice versa; also the book was a success, just, so that Faber were glad to publish "Non-Stop", and would have done so whether I had had an agent or not; but it took Ted over a year, maybe over two, to sell to paperback... to Digit, the lowest form of life. They paid £75. Yet only three years later, I was editing the Penguin Science Fiction Series, where we actually managed to extract sums of up to £500 for authors, including Harry Harrison -- for his masterly "Make Room, Make Room!" and Ballard and Budrys. So rapidly did things change.

With other fans like Les Flood and Ken Chapman, Ted launched the International Fantasy Award, which was born before the Hugos. The Award went to "Earth Abides" and, a little later, to Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings"; pretty eminent choices. I'm still pleased to think that "Earth Abides" was singled out.

The Science Fiction Book Club called on Ted's services at an early stage. Somehow or other, he smuggled all my early books into it. He also helped in the organisation of the World Convention in London in 1957 -- its near-disastrous first venture away from the States, inspired by that fine Anglo-philic expatriate, Dave Kyle. It was okay for Dave -- he managed to make the occasion a honeymoon as well, but Ted Carnell almost had a breakdown with all the stress and strain behind the scenes.

Sciencefictioneers -- to use an old term -- are prone to grandiose dreams, inspired by reading too much van Vogt and Asimov, no doubt. Ted could have built himself an empire, enmeshing all the British writers in his agenting and publishing net, and building up outer bastions with the excellent overseas systems he gradually acquired. He could have moved from Plumstead and conducted the whole business from the South of France. But he stayed where he was, never nourishing any territorial ambitions, beyond working in order that sf

should not vanish from the face of the Earth!

When Maclean's closed down the Nova magazines and they were bought by Roberts and Vintner at the last moment, Ted appointed Bonfiglioli and Mike Moorcock as his successors and started his "New Writings in SF", where he quietly did in paperback form exactly what he had been doing in magazine form. Whereas Nova magazines had begun, in their last months of Ted's reign, to show lower and lower returns, "NWSF" do better and better with each number. Ted's modest

recipe was a success at last.

In a nutshell, Ted's success story was this: that, through a lifetime of devotion to sf, he made it a success story for a number of other people as well. He prepared the ground, he provided a stable environment in which we writers could do our stuff. He was entirely honest, entirely without envy, entirely nice; I like to believe that some of his virtues have rubbed off onto British fandom, and onto us.

— Brian W. Aldiss

## NEWS (cont. from p.29)

- 1110 Bertin, Eddy C.: Residentie Murillo, Dr. van Boorstaelstraat, 80-B.9002, Ledeberg, Belgium

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

- 1070 Horrell, Mike: now 1 Piccadilly Square, Caerphilly, Glam, CF8 1PE, S.Wales  
1082 Horsman, P.E.: now dpl. Sld. Horsman, P.E., Stet Cie TRIS, NAPO 5700, Utrecht-Veldpost, Holland  
1239 Edwards, Malcolm: add HAI 1RF

### STATISTICS

#### STATISTICS

Members with inland addresses (including BEFO)	223
Members with overseas addresses	22
Total	245

## Foundation .....

Everyone seems to have been expecting the SF Foundation's magazine Foundation for an awful long time now, so it came as a bit of a surprise to actually see it, although there had been a number of rumours to the effect that it had appeared but the Foundation

people hadn't been able to get copies from the publisher. All completely untrue, no doubt; but here it is, and a handsome production too, though scarcely cheap at 50p. The main content, surprisingly for a journal whose statement of intent specifically says how scholarly it is, consists of reprints from various fanzines, plus pseudonymous stories by George Kay. There's a slightly different version of the Pamela Bulmer article from Vector 59, with Pamela thinly disguised as Kathryn Buckley. Then there's a Larry Niven article from the last Speculation and a rather mediocre John Boardman piece from Science Fiction Review. Stir in an interesting piece of John Brunner's autobiography, which says little one hasn't read before but does have the virtue of saying it all in one piece, and yet another long review of Solaris, and a couple of other pieces and you have an odd hybrid, half academic journal and half fanzine. Charles Barren and co clearly take this project very seriously, and good luck to them, but I can't help thinking that only in an sf scholarly publication could you come across words like 'afficionados' and 'antecedents'.

(Foundation 1, from The Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Barking Precinct, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS.)

## Dan Morgan Almeria

Dear Malcolm,

Even at the risk of creating a precedent I feel myself impelled to write a L.O.C. about the last issue of Vector.

Pam Bulmer is beautiful, and I love her very dearly. Ken Harker is not beautiful, but I happen to have met him a number of times at the Writers' Summer School and found him to be a pleasant and undoubtedly sincere person who takes his SF writing seriously.

I have never read any of Ken Harker's books (he has written several), but then — with a few notable exceptions — I am not an aficionado of British SF. This may be unpatriotic of me, but my tastes were formed early, in the days when there was no British SF to speak of, and I have found no convincing reason to change them, pseudo-Wells and camp Edwardian jollity notwithstanding. The Flowers of February may indeed be as bad as Pam makes it sound — although it should be borne in mind that quotations out of context and plot summaries interspersed with hostile comment are hardly the best way of forming an

## The Mail Response

### LETTERS FROM READERS



opinion on a work of fiction.

A great deal of labour and dedication is required in the writing of even a bad novel -- much more work than is involved in demolishing one in a critical essay. I question very seriously Pam's ideas about the purposes of criticism, in particular her suggestion that criticism is of some help to the writer. In the case of Ken Harker I can only hope that he isn't a member of the BSFA and that he doesn't ever read Vector 59. Should he do so he may very well be so badly discouraged that he will find himself unable to summon the self-confidence needed to write at all for some time afterwards. Pam might reply that this would be a good thing, but I'm afraid I don't see it that way.

Criticism is a sterile occupation. Might I suggest that Pam would be better employed in the production of her own novel -- which would no doubt provide a yardstick of excellence against which we would be able to measure all future work in the field.

++ Do I detect a note of sarcasm? Obviously you find criticism of your work no help to you, but I don't believe every writer would share that opinion (see, to quote a relevant example, Samuel Delany's letter in Speculation concerning Pamela Bulmer's review of Nova). However, even if criticism is no positive help, surely accurate criticism should not harm a writer? I can't comment in the specific instance of The Flowers of February, not having read the book -- perhaps Pam would like to reply to your points in a future Vector. But I would suggest that if a writer is that badly upset by accurate criticism, then what you term self-confidence is actually self-delusion, which is no good to anyone. ++

## Bruce Gillespie Melbourne

Dear Malcolm,

Vector 59, a magazine which looks nearly as bad as SF Commentary, reads nearly as well. Good stuff. Franz's article makes an interesting complement to his Stanislaw Lem: A Profile, in Luna Monthly 31. However both articles raise certain real problems which I'm not sure Franz has considered completely:

(i) Franz has made a consistent effort since 1969 (or even earlier; I remember his review of The Invin-  
cible in Australian SF Review 19, April 1969; the review was written some time before that issue appeared) to promote the works and reputation of Stanislaw Lem. His motives seem fairly obvious to me: having become completely disillusioned with the thud-and-blunder sf that he loved in his childhood and teens, Franz looked around for an author who fulfilled the potential that he saw in the field. He found this author in Stanislaw Lem, whose works were mainly unknown in the West. After writing to Lem, at some time or another Franz offered to become Lem's agent, and in the last few years Franz has turned that potentially vestigial job into what seems like a whirlwind of activity. What's more, it looks as if Lem might even achieve some or all of the success that he has achieved in Eastern Europe.

(ii) When one considers Lem's views about present Western sf (views as set out in magazines like SF Commentary and WSFA Journal, in the English-speaking world; and in all the literary journals in Europe) and Lem's approach to sf writing, as revealed in Solaris and in Franz's articles, it appears that Lem hasn't a hope in Hades of winning any readers from among present sf readers. Fan reactions to Solaris tend to bear this out.

(++ Not all reactions though, Bruce, and not all fans. ++) Therefore why does Franz bother to promote Lem's work in present Western sf circles?

Well, I haven't a clue. Doubtless Franz was greatly encouraged by the kind of discussion of sf that he found in Australian Science Fiction Review, later in John Foyster's Exploding Madonna, and (I hope) later still in SF Commentary. However -- and this is what I really meant to say -- the response to Lem's work and criticism from readers of SFC, although tumultuous, should not give Franz any illusion that Lem is going to win acceptance among readers of genre sf. I like publishing Lem's stuff, but I get the idea that Franz should never have worried about the fanzines, or the sf magazines, or the sf publishers. He should have trumpeted about Lem in The Listener, Times Literary Supplement, in the "little magazines", in The New York Review of Books; in real magazines which are worried about real literary problems. If the sf world ever takes kindly to Lem, I'll count it as one more triumph for Franz Rottensteiner; if it doesn't, I don't think Franz should be very surprised or disappointed. On the other hand, if the literary world of New York ignores Lem, then I would have to blame Franz for not plugging Lem in the right places.

(iii) I should remind Franz again that so far he has precious little of Lem to promote: one novel, five short stories (does the one in Vector count as a sixth?) and the fanzine articles, about six or seven of which have appeared in SFC, two or three more in WSFA Journal, another one in a recent Moebius Trip, and an interview with Lem in the most recent Scythron. I think Franz could have restrained himself from whetting our appetites for Lem's novels until more of them were translated, printed, and actually in our hot little hands. I want to go out and buy The Invincible, and Memoirs Found in a Bathtub, and The Cyberiad, and all those other marvellously evocative names. Now I know from correspondence with Franz just why he cannot open this treasure casket in a short time, but most of the readers of our magazines don't know that. I hope that they haven't all forgotten Lem by the time these books appear. Knowing something about Franz, I don't think that's

likely to happen.

(++ I look forward with very slightly mixed feelings to the forthcoming Lem explosion. I can't help wondering sometimes: what if they're no good? Judging by Solaris, there should be nothing to worry about; but there must always be a considerable uncertainty about twice-translated novels. I know somebody who has read the translation of The Invincible, and he said it was dreadful. The work is being done, I understand, by Wendayne Ackerman, whose chief claim to fame is as the translator of Perry Rhodan. I may be doing the lady a great injustice, but I'm filled with foreboding. ++)

Everything else in Vector is very interesting. Pamela Bulmer's SF Criticism in Theory and Practice is of course well worth printing, but I can't help feeling that she's missed the point of criticism, for all the very sensible and helpful remarks she makes about it. I don't think that she says anywhere in the article that most of the problems of criticism in the sf field exist because most sf is lousy by any standards (and especially by the standards that sf readers raise when they talk in abstract terms about the field) and that most fans and sf readers prefer one of the varieties of the lousy sf to any of the few brands of the good stuff. Therefore, in John Foyster's archetypal example, the sf critic often does have to explain to his fanzine readers (or prozine readers; it makes little difference) just why Van Vogt is not a better writer than Tolstoy.

Roger Waddington  
Malton

Dear Malcolm,

I was actually pleased to see (Vector's) reappearance in duplicated form...it probably means more work for some group of fen, but I saw the dupered Vector as having

more warmth in it, something to show that it had been prepared with loving toil and sweat by interested parties, rather than just another job for the lithopress that the printed Vector seemed. But I'm waiting to see the next Vector with interest and hope that it can settle down to some standard format; I think that's half the battle!

++ Well, yes, if only (from my point of view) because a bi-monthly magazine needs some oomph on which it can rely. This issue is an experiment for me, being printed rather than duplicated, and the way it turns out may determine what format Vector will adopt in future. My fond belief that typing copy for pasting-up would be less onerous than typing stencils has already been shattered — this issue has taken much longer to complete than I expected. ++

The other half being content, of course; which was why I found the Dick Howett piece especially welcome, not so much for its writing, but for the fact that he could find a home in Vector at all. The latter issues seem to have been determined to make it a learned sercon journal ... Now, I'd say most of the people who join the BSFA do it more to find out about sf rather than any contacts they may make in the fandom they finally reach, but couldn't their load be lightened? ... There's maybe a place for fanishness as well. Which is why you needn't apologise for the Dick Howett piece, but proclaim it as a much needed step forward in the concept of Vector!

++ I wasn't apologising for Dick's piece — it was, after all, my own favourite in the last issue — but wondering about how it did fit in with the way people saw Vector. I only received very few letters, but the reactions were strongly favourable, which has encouraged me in a policy which I'd already decided on, namely to widen the range of material in Vector. Recent issues of Vector never seem to have been very interesting, however worthy, and this must surely be a major reason why

the BSFA, while attracting a steady flow of new members, seems to have an equally steady outflow. I don't claim to be able to alter the situation single-handed, but if I can make Vector into a magazine people look forward to reading, instead of just looking through because it arrives every now and then, it must be a step in the right direction. ++

So much for evangelism. This is a very short letter column, largely because of the dearth of letters received. My thanks to the three people whose letters are printed, and to David Lewis, Terry Jeeves, John Piggott, Audrey Walton, and Andrew Stephenson, all of whom commented at greater or lesser length. However, I think it should be obvious that eight letters from a membership of more than 200 (seven, rather, as Bruce Gillespie isn't a member) is not a great number. I'll content myself with pointing out that a magazine like this depends heavily on feedback from its readers, and if it doesn't get it, then it is not particularly likely to improve.

Room for a mention of two items which you can obtain from me. The first is Locust, a bi-weekly newszine edited by Charlie and Dona Brown, late of New York but currently, as far as I know, of no fixed abode, being in transit to the West Coast. Locust won the 1971 Hugo for best fanzine, and must be favourite again this year. It contains comprehensive coverage of all of news, announcements of forthcoming books, conventions, book and fanzine reviews, market reports for writers and anything else relevant. Comes airmail and is sent first-class, so it's current when you get it. £1.50 for 10; £3.50 for 26.

The second item is SF Commentary, also on the final ballot for the Hugo this year, and the only contender from outside North America. Its editor is Bruce Gillespie, Vector's Australian agent, whose article on Kobo Abe appears in this issue. Latest SFC to hand, number 26, runs to 118 (yes, 118) large

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