

VECTOR 71

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Vector's ISSN is 0505-0448
BSFAN's ISSN is 0307-3335

VECTOR 71. December 1975: Journal of the British SF Association: Vol 2 no 3

Cover by Dave Griffiths : Back-cover art by Paul Ryan : Interior art by
Paul Drilon (\$, 13,24,37,38) and Paul Ryan (23,30)

Contents:

Lead-In.....	3
The Stone As and The Nush Oxen/ Ureula Le Guin.....	5
Towards an Alien Linguistics/ Ian Watson.....	14
The Infinity Box: Book Reviews/ Brian Griffin Chris Morgan Charles Fortington Andrew Tidmarsh.....	24
The Celluloid Dream: Film Reviews/ Christopher Fowler Andrew Tidmarsh.....	31
Latters.....	38

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Copy date for Vector 71: Friday, January
16th 1976

Collating/stapling/folding/enveloping
on Vector 70 by loyal members of the
Reading SF Club, too numerous to mention.

Thanks to:

As ever, Florence Russell, without
whose ILM Selectric Vector would be
as nothing...

Keith Freeman and Marlin Hatfield ..

... and Dora (especially in the bad
three weeks), Howard+Vette, Steven+
Sandra, Sally, Margaret and Barbara,
who, in various ways, provided "a
place to come to and rest"...

Welcome back, Judy

And a Happy Christmas to all our
readers, as they say

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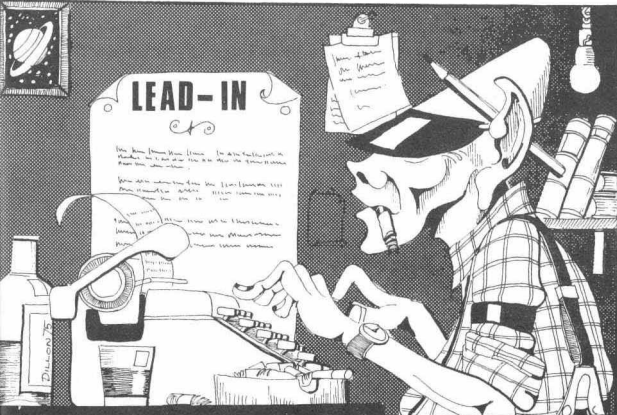
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the incredibly low price of 50p. It
is regularly available in the UK only
to members of the BSFA (membership
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Vector subscriptions outside the UK
are five issues for \$5.00 (or \$1.50
per copy air-mail) in the USA or
Australia. Equivalent rates elsewhere.
Please send sterling cheques or money
orders, payable to "Vector", or, failing
that, cash, in US dollars

Back issue availability listed on back
page.

Print run this issue: 800

Printed by: Sanderson Design and Print
Limited, 18 Portman Road, Reading



As I have explained elsewhere, this issue is appearing a couple of weeks later and about three articles shorter than I should have liked. Vector editing and production is something of a one-man job - of necessity - although the magazine would never actually get out to its readership without the help of the Reading SF Club, and Keith Freeman's computerised mailing system. When that one person gets ill, the result is a delay. I hope, however, that you will feel that this issue of the magazine is a worthwhile one. The delay, and the necessity therefore to shorten it to produce it for the printers' deadline, has had one advantage. It has meant that for the first time since starting to do the job I have a file of material for the next issue, even before the current one has gone out. Thus you can expect to see, in Vector 72, a long interview I conducted with Roger Elwood, the controversial American editor, earlier in November; Den Morgan's guest-of-honour speech from the last Novacon; a postal interview by Malcolm Edwards with Robert Silverberg. Also definitely fixed for that issue is a cover by Brian Lewis; art by Paul Ryan and Paul Dillon. There will be the usual reviews, and we hope to have a Novacon Report and an analysis of Roger Elwood's new paperback line, Laser Books, to tie in with the interview with him.

Since V72 is to some extent already well supplied with material, I am able to turn my attention in the next few weeks to a couple of longer term projects. In the form of special issues. One of these is the promised - but not delivered due to pressures of other Vector work - James Blish issue. I feel very guilty about not having done this yet, but crave your indulgence, especially craving that of Judy Blish. The second of these projects is an issue on women in SF. For this I already have a cover, again by Brian Lewis. Other long-term projects include a change in the appearance of the magazine, possibly to tie in with a wrap-around cover being prepared by Paul Dillon. Which is probably as good a moment as any to introduce our two interior artists this issue. (It's assuming that Dave Griffiths is already known to readers, for his excellent recent cover work for Faber, perhaps.) Paul Ryan first came to my attention through his magazine Orion Express (see last issue's fanzine column) and I later met him at the Novacon. He was very keen to have material

published, and thus we are glad to have some of this in V71. Any other editors or publishers interested in his work should contact him at: 28 Morrill Avenue, Bolton Leeds LS13 7EP. Similarly, I met Paul Dillon at Novacon. He has produced some very fine pieces for this issue, and would be very happy to answer queries about his work personally, or to have artwork published elsewhere. His address is 28 West Crescent Darlington Co Durham. Of Brian Lewis, more in the next issue.

This issue, though thinner than previous ones, has two very solid articles in it. The first of these, Ursula Le Guin's guest-of-honour speech from the Ausiecon earlier this year, is something we are very fortunate to get. Mrs. Le Guin has allowed the speech to be generally available for publication, a piece of news which I found out from Locus. Managing to contact her - with the aid of Peter Nicholls - and also having cleared with Bruce Gillaspie in Australia the publication of the speech in Vector, I think we may well have achieved the first publication anywhere in the world of the speech. Thanks to all concerned with that.

The second main article, that by Ian Watson, was something I had been wanting to get into Vector for some time, since I heard the progenitor of this talk at Tynescon, in 1974. Finally getting to talk to Ian at Novacon, I managed to get permission to use "Towards an Alien Linguistics". It is a piece which requires careful reading, and re-reading, but it will repay many times over the intellectual effort expended in drawing from it all its insights. A very thought-provoking and stimulating talk.

The book reviews section is again shorter - we have only in the last week managed to get out our press release to publishers, so are only now beginning to get review copies of books. If the flow of these continues, we should in a few issues have a review column which is up-to-date and, if not all-embracing, at least embracing most of the new of being published in this country. A number of people have promised reviews once books start coming in, including some well-known names.

The film review column is again well served by Andrew Tidmarsh, whom I hope can be persuaded to take some time off from his fiction writing to send us some reviews in the future. How well my own review serves must be something for you to judge - I'm a little loathe to the writer to be objective!

Since becoming unemployed in mid-November, and despite illness, I have managed to begin the lengthy process of catching up on my own reading. Thus I hope to be able, as Malcolm Edwards did, to review a few books in each issue in future. Other than that, my personal energies are likely to still be absorbed by editing, rather than writing, for Vector.

Needless to say, I am always on the look-out for material, be it in the form of an article, a review, or a piece of artwork. If you can write/review/drew, then why not send us something for Vector. Anything sent will receive a serious and sympathetic appraisal. I'm particularly keen to get some small pieces of artwork, to use for breaking up the solid masses of type on the interior pages. Even if you can't contribute in this way - at least keep those letters of comment coming. This feedback from members is vital to our survival. I shall be keeping the letter-column as long as possible, although in the current issue I had to stop it after 4 pages, due to the necessity of meeting a deadline on typing. Apologies to those whose letters have had to be held over into the Newsletter. So - communicate with us, keep on reading - and, please, renew your membership as soon as possible. We need every one of you to survive

The Stone Ax and the Musk Oxen

Ursula Le Guin

I have a question, a serious question to ask you. What on earth are we all doing here?

Well, I think we have come here to celebrate. This is a celebration, this is what the word means - the coming together of many people, from all kinds of weird places, away from their customary life and ways; often at some trouble and expense; maybe not knowing very precisely why they come, but moved to come, to meet together, in one place, to celebrate.

And a celebration needs no celebration, no excuses or rationalisation. A celebration is its own reason for being, as you find out once you get there. The heart has its reasons which reason doesn't know, and a celebration such as this has its own reasons, its own strange laws and lifespan; it is a real thing, an event, an entity, and we here, long after, in our separate ways and places, will look back on it and recall it as a whole. And if there were bad moments in it, if some of us got drunk, and some of us got angry, and some of us had to make speeches and others of us got horribly bored by the speeches - still I think the chances are that we'll look back on it with some contentment. Because the essential element of a celebration is praise; and praise rises out of joy. When you come right down to it, we've all come here to enjoy ourselves.

We aren't going to accomplish anything, you know, or establish anything, or sell anything. We're not here in order to make a new law, or declare a war, or fix the price per barrel of crude oil. No, and thank God we're not. There are enough people involved in that sort of rubbish. We are here, I think, simply to meet each other, in hopes, and some confidence, that we'll like each other. We're here to enjoy ourselves, which means we are practicing the most essentially human of all undertakings, the search for joy. Not the pursuit of pleasure - any hamster can do that - but the search for joy. And may I wish to you all here that you find it.

But what is it that brings us, this particular us, these particular peculiar individuals from unearthly places like Casherra and Oregon, together here all standing on our heads in Melbourne? What is it that we're here to celebrate? "Joy" is a bit vague, after all; we have to specify, and narrow it down, and put our finger on it. I put out my finger, here, tonight, and what is it that I touch?

This is the text of Ursula Le Guin's guest-of-honour speech at Ausalicon, August 1975. Published by permission of Mrs Le Guin; and simultaneously being published in Australian SF Review.

Science fiction, of course. That's what brought us here. It does seem a rather bizarre motive, but it's certainly no odder than the motive that brings together International Conventions of Manufacturers of Plumbers' Supplies, or Summit Conferences of Heads of State discussing how to achieve parity in over-hill. Science fiction is the motive and the subject of our celebration. That's the one point where all our different minds and souls touch, though on every other subject in the world they may be utterly different, lightyears apart. Each of us here has a button somewhere in his soul, like a bellybutton, but a soul button, and it's labelled sf. Many people do not have a soulbutton, they only have bellybuttons; but each of us does. And if you put your finger out and touch that button, the whole spiritual console lights up and goes **Zzzt Blink All Systems Go, All Systems Go.**

I am your guest of honour, and deeply honoured to be so. As such, I think I am to speak not only to you, but for you: to be the Oracle, the Leader of the Celebration, the Priestess of the Cult. When the last orgy is over, I understand I am to be led forth and thrown into the nearest volcano, to propitiate the Fertility Gods of Melbourne. But never mind that. So long as I'm here, my job is to speak for you. To celebrate what we are celebrating. To speak in praise of science fiction.

Well, that's something I don't mind doing a bit. I like science fiction. And I have reason to be grateful to it. For the past dozen years or so, sf has added money to the family pocket, and confusion to the family income-tax returns, and books to the family bookshelf, and a whole sort of Parallel Universe dimension to the family life. -- Where's Ma going this month? -- Australia. -- You mean I have to wash the dishes for a week? -- No, we get to come along. -- Can I have a pet Koala? I promise I'll feed it myself! --

Do you people realise, by the way, that to my three children science fiction is not a low form of literature involving small green men and written by small contemptible hacks, but an absolutely ordinary, respectable, square profession - the kind of thing your own mother does? We, you and I, most of us, those over 25 anyhow, read sf when young, and hid our copy of Galaxy inside a copy of Intermediate Algebra, in order to appear respectably occupied. We asked children's librarians for it and they said O we do not allow children to read escapist literature. We asked adults' librarians for it and they said O we do not carry children's books on this side of the building. We had to put the books face down because of the cover, which showed a purple squid carrying off a fainting maiden in a large bronze bra. We had the difficulty and the pleasure of doing something which, if not actually illicit, was sneaky; eccentric; addictive; and splendidly disreputable.

Now you know, our kids - not just my kids, but all our kids, and everybody here that's too young to have any business having any kids yet - the rising generation, shall I say, is almost entirely missing this experience? The poor things have nothing disreputable left but sex and marijuana, and sex is getting respectable all too fast. They're getting taught sf in schools. Some of them for all I know may be hiding their copy of Intermediate Algebra inside a copy of Agassi, Dangerous Visions, and solving marvellous irrelevant equations in secret while Teacher thinks they're reading Meaningful Literature. I gather this co-optation of sf into the curriculum is less usual in the Commonwealth than in America; but I was in England earlier this year, and got stuck on a tale spot with five beautiful Cockney kids from a Marylebone school, who had read more of than I had, and done a whole school session reading and writing it. So it's coming, fame. In the States, it's come; and from St. Pancras Station to the farthest sheep-station, it's coming. Science fiction is being taught, by teachers and professors, in schools and colleges. Science fiction is being seriously discussed, by futurologists with computers and by literary critics with PhDs. Science fiction is being written by people who don't know Warp Five from a Dyson Sphera, and being read by people who don't read science

fiction. I am here to proclaim unto the assembled faithful that the walls are down. The walls are down, we're free at last. And you know what? It's a big cold world outside there.

I can't really blame those of my generation and older who don't want to see the walls come a-tumbling down, and who cling to their ghetto status as if it were a precious thing, making a religion of it, which the touch of the uninitiated will profane. They were forced into that attitude by the attitude of respectable society, intellectual and literary, towards their particular interest; and it was perfectly natural for them, like any persecuted group, to make a virtue of their necessity. I can't blame them, but neither can I agree with them. To cling to the posture of evasion and defence, once persecution and contempt has ceased, is to be not a rebel, but a cripple. And what I want is to see it continue to rebel. I want to see it evade, not those who despise it, but those who want it to be just what it was 30 years ago. I want to see it step over the old, fallen walls, and head right into the next wall, and start to break it down too.

One of those walls is the labelling of books by publishers as sf - labelling, packaging, and distributing. At the moment this is pretty much a necessity of the publishing trade. It is sensible, and I don't expect an immediate rejection of the practice. Public librarians, school librarians, and booksellers want to be able to display it so that those who want it can find it. It's convenient for us addicts, and profitable to the booksellers and publishers. But the practice does considerable wrong to the innocent non-addict, who is prevented from picking up an sf book by chance; he has to go to shelf 63, between the Gothics and the Soft Core Porn, and look for it. And of course the sf label perpetuates a dichotomy that no longer exists, between sf and Mainstream. There is a spectrum now, not a chasm. The sf label is a remnant of the ghetto wall, and I'll be very glad to see it go for the day when I can go into any library and find The Man in the High Castle not shelved next to Sarg the Barbarian by Elmer T. Heck, but by author's name. Philip K. Dick, right next to Charles Dickens - where it belongs.

And another day. The day when the Times Lit Supp. or the New York Times Book Review, or the East Grange-Sheep Rancher's Weekly, review a major new sf novel along with the other novels, not in a little column set apart and headed Sci Fi or Spec Fic or what have you. In which columns, by the existence of which columns, it is implied that however highly praised the work reviewed may be, it's not to be placed in the same category, of course, as the other novels reviewed throughout the paper - the real ones.

There's lots of walls yet, you see, to be reduced to rubble.

But all this is a bit external. The worst walls are never the ones you find in your way. The worst walls are the ones you put there - you build yourself. Those are the high ones, the thick ones, the ones with no doors in.

See, here we stand, science fiction, a noble figure among the ruined walls, chains dropping from our giant limbs, facing the future with eagle eyes, and all that. But actually, who are we? And exactly what future are we facing with our eagle eyes? Now that we're free, where are we going?

From here on I have to speak as a writer. I've been trying to speak for the community of sf writers-and-fans, and enjoying it, but I can't keep it up. I'm faking. I'm not a fan. As you know, many of writers are, or were; they started as fans; it was a phenomenon of the ghetto, which is now called the Golden Age of Science Fiction. Well, I came along just late enough to miss the Golden Ghetto, in ignorance that it even existed. I read sf as a kid, but knew nothing about fandom. I wrote sf first, and discovered that it was as second, when the publishers told me so, and then finally, third, I discovered the existence of fandom. That was in Oakland, in 1964, the first big Worldcon, I guess. I heard there was this science fiction meeting going on

and I'd published three or four sf stories and was crazy about Phil Dick and Cordwainer Smith, and so I went down to Oakland to see what was going on. And there were about 5000 people who all knew each other and absolutely everything about sf since 1928. And the only one I met was Barbara Silverberg, who was so incredibly beautiful that I instantly went home and put my head in a paper bag for a week. That was the last Worldcon I attended. Until now. You see, I am an outsider, an alien, for all you know I come from a whole different galaxy and am planning the overthrow of the entire Australian Ballot System. But all the same, I do write sf. And that's why you asked me how. And so I think it would make sense if I went on and spoke as what I am, a writer. A writer of sf. A woman writer of sf.

Do you know that I am a very rare creature? My species was at first believed to be mythological, like the triffle and the unicorn. Members of it survived only by protective coloration and mimetic adaptation - they used male pen-names. Slowly, timorously, they began to come out of hiding. Looking around warily for predators. I myself was forced into hiding just once, by an editor of Playboy, who reduced me to a simple, unthreatening, slightly enigmatic shape - a U. Not Ursula, but U. I have flat a little bent, a little U-shaped, ever since. But we kept creeping out; it took a while, and there were setbacks, but gradually my species took courage and appeared in full mating plumage. Anne, Kate, Joanne, Vonda, Suzi, and the rest. But when I say "the rest", please don't get alarmed, don't feel threatened, or anything. There are very few of us. Maybe one out of 20 sf writers is a woman. That statistic is supplied by my agent, Virginia Kidd, a very beautiful member of my species; the ratio is a guess, but an educated one. Do you find it a rather startling ratio? I do. I am extremely puzzled, even embarrassed, at my own rarity. Are they going to have to lock us up in pens, like the Whooping Cranes and Duckbilled Platypuses and other species threatened with extinction, and watch eagerly to see if I lay an egg?

Why are women so scarce in sf - in the literature, among the fans, and most of all among the writers? A good many historical reasons come to mind - American sf as action pulp fiction during the 30s, Campbellian sf written for adolescent engineers, etc. - but all of them are circular. Why was Golden Ghetto of a males-only club? Is there really something in the nature of the literature that doesn't appeal generally to women?

Not that I can see. Analog and its school did certainly follow one minor element within sf to the extreme, to a point where only those who enjoy either wars or wiring diagrams - preferably both at once - can enjoy it much. Most women in our culture are brought up to be rather indifferent towards military heroics and wiring diagrams, so that they're likely to be bored or irritated. Also, adolescent boys in almost all cultures tend to be afraid of women, and to form clubs that cut them out, exclude them. And similarly a good deal of sword and sorcery leaves most women cold, because it consists so largely of male heroics and male fantasies of sexual prowess, often intensely sadistic. But those two minor provinces set aside for Boy Scouts only, all the rest is left - all the broad, beautiful countryside of grown-up sf, where anything can happen, and usually does. Why have more women not moved in and made themselves at home?

I don't know. My trouble is, I was born here, I didn't move in, so I can't figure out what the problem is. Year by year, I see more members of my species, young ones mostly, coming and building temporary nests, or boldly trying out their wings above the mountains. But still not enough. 20 or 30 males to one female is not a good ratio for species preservation. Among domestic fowls, in fact, it goes quite the other way, half a dozen hens to one rooster; but never mind that. I just want to ask the men here to consider idly, in some spare moment, whether by any chance they have been building any walls to keep the women out, or to keep them "in their place", and what they

may have lost by doing so. And to ask the women here to consider, idly or not idly at all, why are there so few of us? We can't blame it on prejudice, because of publishing is in general a quite un-sex-biased field. Have women veiled themselves out, through laziness of mind, fear of being seen using the intellect in public, fear of science and technology, fear of letting their imaginations loose - and above all, perhaps, fear of competing with men? That, as we all know, is an unladylike thing to do.

But no art is ladylike. Nor is any art gentlemanly. Nor is it masculine or feminine. The reading or a book and the writing of a book is not an act dependant in any way upon one's gender. (In fact very few human acts are, other than procreation, gestation and lactation.) When you undertake to make a work of art - a novel or a clay pot - you're not competing with anybody except yourself and God. Can I do it better this time? Once you have realized that that is the only question, once you have faced the empty page or the lump of clay in that solitude, without anyone to blame for failure but yourself, and know that fear and that challenge, you aren't going to care very much about being ladylike, or about your so-called competition, male or female. The practice of an art is, in its absolute discipline, the experience of absolute freedom. And that, above all, is why I'd like to see more of my sisters trying out their wings above the mountains. Because freedom is not always an easy thing for women to find.

Well, all right, so we've established one fact about who and what science fiction is. It's very largely male, but seems to be tending always a little more towards androgyny - at least I hope so. And what else is it?

As one Theodore Sturgeon once remarked, it's 95% trash - like everything else.

I'm in an heretical mood. I dare to question Sturgeon's Law. Is 95% of everything trash? Really? Is 95% of a forest trash? Is 85% of the ocean trash? It soon will be if we go on polluting it, but it wasn't to start with. Is 95% of humanity trash? Any dictator would agree, but I don't agree with him. Is 95% of literature trash?

Well - yes. It probably is. Of the books now published in the world in a year, 95% probably aren't even trash, they're just noise.

But I revert to my speaking as a writer, not as a reader, and inquire, how many books, while they are being written, are conceived of by their author as trash?

It's really an interesting question. I have no idea of the answer. It's not 0% - far from it. There are many authors who deliberately write junk for money, and I have met others who, though less cynical, spoke of their own works as "potboilers" or as "mere entertainment" - a little defensively to be sure, because the ego is always involved in the work, but also honestly, realistically, in the full knowledge that they had not done, and had not tried to do, the best work they could do. And in art, from the artist's point of view, there are only two alternatives: the best you can do - or trash. It's a binary system. On/Off. Yes/No. Not from the reader's point of view; of course from there there are infinite gradations between the best and the worst, all degrees of genius, talent, and achievement between Shakespeare and the hack, and within each work, even Shakespeare's. But from the writer's point of view, while writing, there are just two ways to go: to push towards the limit of your capacity, or to sit back and spit garbage. And the really unfair thing is that the intent, however good, guarantees nothing. You can try your heart out, work like a slave, and write drivel. But the opposite intent does carry its own guarantee. No artist ever set out to do less than his best and did something good by accident. You head for Perfection and you may very well get trash. But you head towards

track and by gum, you always get it. The Quest for Perfection fails at least 95% of the time, but the Search for Garbage never fails.

I find this reputation of the trashiness of most of top easy - both defensive and destructive. Defensive: "Don't hit me folks, I'm down already." That's the old, ingratiating, self-protective, ghetto postures. And destructive: because it is cynical, it sets limits and builds walls. It says to the art writer, of all people, Why shoot for the moon? The chances are 10 to 1 that you won't get there. Only a tiny elite gets there, and we all know that elite people are snobs anyhow. Keep your feet on the ground, kid; work for money, not dreams; wrote it like the ad-lur says he wants it; don't waste time raving and polishing; sell it quick and grind out the next one. What the hell, it's a living, ain't it? And so what if it's not art, at least it's entertainment.

The "entertainment" bit really burns me. It hides a big lie behind an obvious truth. Of course and of story is entertainment. All art is entertainment. That's so clear it's fatuous to repeat it. If Handel's Messiah were boring, not entertaining, would thousands of people go listen to it year after year? If the Sistine Chapel were dull, would tourists troop there endlessly to get cricks in their necks? If Odysseus Rex weren't a smashing good show, would it be in the repertory after 2500 years? If The First Circle weren't a gripping, powerful, highly entertaining story, would the Soviet government be so terrified of Alexander Solzhenitsyn? No! If he was a dull hack, they'd love him. He'd be writing just what they want, writing to the editor's specifications, weak tea, perfectly safe. He'd probably be a People's Artist by now.

Of course, some art is immediately attractive, and some is difficult, demanding intense response and involvement from its audience. The art of one's own time tends to be formidable, in a time of change like ours, because we have to learn how and where to take hold of it, what response is being asked of us, before we can get involved. It's truly new, and therefore truly a bit frightening. I'm easily frightened myself; I was even afraid of the Beatles, at first. People are easily frightened, but also brave and stubborn. They want that entertainment that only art can give them, that peculiar, solid satisfaction, and so they do keep listening to the weirdest electronic music, and staring at big ugly paintings of blobs, and reading queer difficult books about people on another world 20,000 years from now, and they say, I don't really like it, it's unsettling, it's painful, it's crazy. . . but you know I kind of liked that one bit where something went cooooo-bwang! - it really got to me, you know?

That's all art wants to do. It wants to get to you. To break down the walls between us, for a moment. To bring us together in a celebration, a ceremony, an entertainment - a mutual affirmation of understanding, or of suffering, or of joy.

Therefore I totally oppose the notion that you can put Art over here on a pedestal, and Entertainment down here in a clown suit. Art and Entertainment are the same thing, in that the more deeply and genuinely entertaining a work is, the better art it is. To imply that art is something heavy and solemn and dull, and Entertainment is modest but jolly and popular, is neo-Victorian idiocy at its worst. Every artist is deeply serious and passionate about his work, and every artist also wears a clown suit and capers on public for pennies. The fellows who put on the clown suit and the painted grin, but who don't care about performing well, are neither entertainers nor artists; they're fakes. They know it, and we know it, and though they may indeed be briefly and immensely popular, because they never frighten anyone, or move anyone, or make anyone really laugh or cry, but just reassure people by lying to them - all the same, that popularity is meaningless. The same dies, the work's forgotten, and what's left? A hollow place. A sense of waste. A realization

that where something real might have been done - a good handsome clay pot, or a really entertaining story - the chance was lost. We lost it. We accepted the fake, the plastic throwaway, when we could have held out for the real thing.

I'm not one of those antique-lovers, but do you know how moving it can be to use, or just to handle, some object - a piece of pottery, or a tool, or a chair - that has been used by several generations of people, all stranger, all dead now? I keep a stone ax on my desk at home - not for self-defence, but for pleasure. My father used to keep it on his desk. It makes a good paperweight. It's New Stone Age, but I don't know how old, anything from a few centuries to 12000 years. It's partly polished and partly left rough, though finely shaped. It is well made. You think of the human hands patiently polishing that granite. There's a sense of solidity, and of community, in the touch, the feel, of that ax, to me. There's nothing sentimental about it, quite the opposite; it is a real experience, a rare intimation, of time, our most inward dimension, which is so difficult to experience consciously, but without which we are utterly disoriented and astray in the seemingly so familiar external dimensions of space. Well, that's what I mean about the real work of art. Like a stone ax, it's there. It stays there. It's solid, and it involves the inward dimension. It may be wonderfully beautiful, or quite commonplace and humble, but it's made to be used, and to last.

Hard work is not made to be used, but to be sold; and not made to last, but to wear out at once and be replaced. And that's the difference, I believe, between art-and-entertainment on the one hand, and trash on the other.

Ted Sturgeon, when he made his Law up, was simply responding to contemptuous and ignorant critics of sf, who scarcely deserved so clever an answer. But his Law has since been used as a defence and an excuse and a cop-out, and I suggest that we in sf stop quoting it for a bit, at least if we're using it in a resigned and cynical fashion. I'd like us not to be resigned, but rebellious; not cynical, but critical, intransigent, and idealistic. I'd like us to say, 95% of sf is trash - Yecchhi! Let's get rid of the stuff! Let's open the windows and get rid of this garbage! Here we have science fiction, the most flexible, adaptable, broad-range, imaginative, crazy form prose fiction has ever attained - and we're going to let it be used for making toy plastic raygun that break when you play with them, and pre-packaged pre-cooked pre-digested indigestible flavourless TV dinners, and big inflated rubber balloons containing nothing but hot air? The hell we are, I say.

You know what our attitude of science fiction needs to do? We need to use his eagle eyes to look at himself. A long, thoughtful look. A critical look. We don't have to be defensive any more. We aren't children, or untouchables, or cripples, any more. Like it or lump it, we are now adult active members of society. And as such we have a challenge to meet. Noblesse oblige. We've got to stop skulking around playing by ourselves, like the kid everybody picks on. When a sf book is reviewed, in a magazine or a literary review, it should be compared with the rest of current literature like any other book, and placed among the rest on its own individual merits. When a sf book is criticized, in print or in a class, it should be criticized as hard as any other book, as demanding, with the same expectations of literacy, solidity, complexity, craftsmanship. When a sf book is read, it should be read as a novel or a short story - that is, a work in the traditions also employed by Dickens and Chekhov - not as an artifact from the Pulp Factory. The reader should expect to be entertained, but he should also expect to find himself on unfamiliar ground; if he finds experimentation, innovation, irreverence, complexity, and passion, he should rejoice in them, and not run away whimpering. But it wasn't like this in 1937! And finally, when a sf book is written, the writer really should be aware that he or she is in an extraordinary, enviable position: an inheritor of the least rigid, freest, youngest of all

literary traditions; and therefore should do the job just as well, as seriously and entertainingly, as intelligently and passionately, as ever it can be done. That's the least we can ask of our writers - and the most. You can't demand of an artist that he produces masterpieces. You can ask that he try.

It seems to me that if I am standing, these days, in a doorway. The door is open. Wide open. Are we going to just stand here, waiting for the applause of the multitudes? It won't come; we haven't earned it, yet. Are we going to cringe back into the old safe ghetto room and pretend there isn't any big bad multitude out there? If so, our good writers will leave us in despair, and there will not be another generation of them. Or are we going to walk on through the doorway and join the rest of the city? I hope so. I know we can, and I hope we do, because we have a great deal to offer - to art, which needs new forms like ours, and to critics who are sick of chewing over the same old works, and above all to the readers of books, who want and deserve better novels than they mostly get. But it will take not only courage for us to join the community of literature, but strength, self respect, the will not to settle for the second-rate. It will take genuine self-criticism. And it will include genuine praise.

If you think, secretly or openly, that you're second-rate, that you're 95% trash, then however much you praise yourself it won't mean much - to you, or to others. That's like adolescent boasting, which so often reveals a terrible sense of worthlessness and weakness.

It is pretty well grown up now. We've been through our illiterate stage, and our latent or non-sexual stage, and the stage when you can't think of anything but sex, and the fear of them, and we really do seem to be on the verge of maturity now. When I say I'd like us to be self-critical, I don't mean pedantic or destructively perfectionist; I mean I'd like to see more of readers judging soundly, dismissing the failures quietly, in order to praise the successes joyfully - and to go on from them, to build upon them. That is maturity, isn't it? - a just assessment of your capacities, and the will to fulfill them. We have plenty to praise, you know. I do think of during the past ten years has produced some books and stories that will last, that will be meaningful and beautiful many years from now.

It seems to me that we can grow and change, and welcome growth and change, without losing our solidarity. The solidarity of the of community is a really extraordinary thing. It makes the lives of fans much richer and a great deal more complicated, and for the writers, it can be an incredible boon - the support, the response an of writer gets from his readers, is unique. Most novelists get nothing like that; they are quite isolated. Their response comes mainly from the paid reviewers of the review services and journals; if they are best sellers, they're totally isolated from genuine response by the enormous mechanism of salesmanship and publicity. That fandom, the of community, gives the of writer, or at least this is my own personal experience, is the best modern equivalent of the old smallscale community, city-state or the like, within which most of the finest artforms developed and flourished: a community of intensely interested people, a ready audience, ready to discuss and defend and attack and argue with each other and the artist, to the irritation and entertainment and benefit of all.

When I say the ghetto walls are down and it behooves us to step over them and be free, I don't mean that the community of us is breaking up, or should break up. I hope it doesn't; I think it won't; I don't see why it should. The essential lunacy that unites us all will continue to unite us. The one thing that's changed is that we're no longer forced together in a mutually defensive posture - like a circle of weakmen on the Arctic snow, attacked by wolves - by the contempt and arrogance of literary reactionaries.

If we meet now and in the future, we writers and readers of sf, to give each other prizes and see each other's faces and renew old feuds and discuss new books and hold our celebration, it will be in entire freedom - because we choose to do so - because, to put it simply, we like each other.

--Ursula Le Guin



Towards an Alien Linguistics

Ian Watson

I have called my talk, "Towards an Alien Linguistics". But do we wish to hear about aliens who are very similar to us, and relatively easy to understand? Hardly! Yet on the other hand, do we want to hear about amazing and strange aliens, who are almost incomprehensible? Here, one runs the risk of being simply bizarre; of concocting monsters of languages and societies, for the sake of monstrosity. In either case, we do not necessarily arrive at a general theory - at an alien linguistics, but only at a literature of imaginary languages. So I want to speak about the general idea of alien languages, rather than about particular invented examples. I want to outline a few ideas for a theory of language, embracing alien languages and inspired by thinking about them - what their nature might be; how we might possibly understand them.

And immediately a problem arises. For apparently this has nothing to do with Linguistics

The American linguist Bloomfield said that "the only useful generalisations about language are inductive generalisations". In other words, we should base our theories upon data from actual languages. We should discover, not invent. Otherwise, we might succeed in being amusing or provocative, but from a strictly linguistic viewpoint we should be talking nonsense.

Yet I feel that this is to restrict oneself unhelpfully - in rather the same way as Wittgenstein restricted philosophy, when he refused to take account of any solutions that the sciences might propose to problems of the nature of language and knowledge. In effect, Wittgenstein fenced off a certain area, and said, "This is Philosophy; the rest isn't. The rest isn't part of the Philosophical Game. Psychology and Biology cannot provide philosophical answers". I would not wish to impose a similar restriction on Linguistics. I prefer the definition that Linguistics is not so much just about human languages, as about the place of human language in the universe. This retains a pragmatic, human base - while leaving the wider questions open.

The Alien is unknown. Alien Languages, obviously, are unknown. But how much do we know about human language, for that matter? The fact that we use it all the time does not mean that we know all about it. We only know about human languages in their present state. We have no real knowledge where our languages came from, or how. Nor do we have the least idea where they are going to, or why. So even human languages, in the distant past and the far future, are quite alien to us.

It is hard to imagine that evolution on this planet is going to stop with present-day Man - unless we destroy the planet, that is. Language, too, is plainly an evolutionary phenomenon. It has been very different in the past. It has only grown to its present state through a series of radical changes in form. The growth of arith system of transformation rules - those rules which relate the prolific structures of surface speech to a more limited

number of abstract deep structures - must be one example. Without transformations, grammar would have to be extremely complex in order to express the amount of information that we normally handle today. Transformations enable us to manipulate a rich variety of concepts economically. But Speech did not spring from our foreheads - like Athena, goddess of wisdom, from the head of Zeus - fully armed with transformations. The linguist McNeill, writing about "The Creation of Language", points out that primitive speech must therefore have taken many years to learn. Yet nowadays we possess what Chomsky has described as an innate plan for acquiring language: an inborn scheme which ensures that we will master speech in a remarkably short time. This is part of our genetic code, now. But it could not have been so in quite the same way for primitive man - or the stages in early life when he was receptive to language, when he was primed to learn, would have passed away before he had time to learn enough. So language-change and genetic-change must go hand in hand. It is hard to imagine that genetic change will cease. It is equally hard to imagine that language will cease to evolve and undergo radical changes. Its form, and even the genetic plan for acquiring it, must alter.

Assuming, then, that evolution carries on into the far future, building on the base of present-day Man, then we even contain the Alien within ourselves. In a very real sense: Future Man, with a language as different from ours in quality and concept, as ours today is from the speech of those first primitive men inhabiting the borderland between Nature and Culture. But we do not think very much about the dynamics of language over an evolutionary time-span - and to what state of word they may be leading. So I think it is valuable to talk in terms of an Alien Linguistics, for it forces us, not only to think about Aliens, but to think about this Future Man, whom we do not yet know either. Science fiction, with its population of aliens from other star-systems, and also its aliens in human guise - its mutants, telepaths, etc - establishes a vocabulary of metaphorical beings, ranging from the downright crude to the relatively sophisticated, for questioning the known universe and the unknown future.

Now, by the way, that in questioning the grammar of primitive man, I made some perfectly acceptable linguistic statements. But the fact is, we do not know whether they are true. We have no proof that primitive speech was this - or that. Simple and telegraphic - or ponderous and complicated. All languages today show approximately the same degree of complexity and sophistication. There are no primitive languages today. Languages spoken by so-called "primitive peoples" in South America or New Guinea are, in reality, just as sophisticated as European languages - or as Chinese, or Arabic, or Eskimo. Historical records go back too short a time to show any drift towards more primitive structures. I was merely being deductive in talking about primitive speech. But it is obviously useful and desirable to know the origins of what we are talking about. Not is it meaningless to speculate about those origins. So we should not pay too much attention to Bloomfield's rule.

Alien Linguistics, then, is an idea about the relationship between language and the universe. But is it a universal idea? Are there any universal ideas? Must we conclude, after Leo's Solmaris, that we cannot actually understand the alien should we encounter it; that wherever we may go we will only experience human experience? Is the alien, by definition, unknowable; and is it therefore a waste of breath even to mention the idea of Alien Linguistics?

Let us explore this problem of universal ideas a little further, and ask ourselves what the relationship is between Language and Reality - and whether Language does represent Reality in any meaningful sense.

The American Benjamin Whorf, in contrasting European languages with American Indian languages, came to the conclusion that different languages condition radically different world-views; different realities. Whorf's studies of Hopi, Nootka, Shawnee, and the American Indian view of the universe read at times like models for an alien linguistics; and indeed a good example of Whorf-based aliens occurs in Delany's Babel-17 with its description of the culture of Ciribia, entirely based on heat and temperature changes. Delany's moral is that "compatibility factors for communication are incredibly low". This is Whorf writ large on the galaxy.

However, since Whorf's time, Chomsky has shown that there is in all human beings an innate plan for acquiring any human language - and therefore that all human languages must be formally related on some deep structural level. Also, Charles Osgood, applying his technique for measuring meaning (known as the "Semantic Differential") to speakers of languages as remote from each other as English, Navajo and Japanese, has demonstrated the existence of what he calls a "common market in meaning", based on the biological systems of emotional and purposive behaviour which all humans share.

Whether aliens will necessarily develop systems sufficiently similar for us to comprehend them, is a point to which I will return later. Meanwhile, so far as Man is concerned, the Whorf argument has to be abandoned.

Apart from this linguistic objection to the existence of universals in language, there is an important philosophical or logical objection to the idea that the underlying structure of languages and human thought may be related to the underlying structure of the universe. This objection has been voiced by several philosophers since Wittgenstein, but in essence the objection springs from various remarks Wittgenstein made in his Tractatus. In Wittgenstein's view, there is a fundamental logical reason why we cannot disinter Reality archeologically from behind the language that represents it. Wittgenstein wrote: "The picture cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth" (2.172); "No proposition can make a statement about itself, because a propositional sign cannot be contained in itself" (3.332); "That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent. That which expresses itself in language, we cannot express by language" (4.121). Thus, if the structure of reality is indeed mirrored in language, this in fact prevents language from articulating the structure of reality. In which case, to quote the logician Quine, "we do better simply to say the sentence and to speak not about language but about the world". One can either speak about language, or about the world; but not about both at once, using language. The purpose of language is language; there is no underlying significance. Thus it would be pointless to hunt for some universal significance which underlies, and links, the set of possible alien languages. It would be inarticulate, opaque; ungraspable.

Systems, whether it be the mathematical system or the linguistic system, apparently cannot be properly self-descriptive; cannot know themselves, authenticate themselves. They can only mediate behaviour. Wittgenstein tells us this as regards language. The Austrian logician Kurt Gödel told us this forcibly in 1931 for mathematics when he published a remarkable proof that the truth of arithmetic cannot be proved within arithmetic. The ethologist Gregory Bateson, applying concepts from cybernetics to the problem of the nature of consciousness and the unconscious, tells us that "if, as we must believe, the total mind is an integrated network...and if the content of consciousness is only a sampling of different parts and localities of this network; then, inevitably, the conscious view of the network as a whole is a monstrous denial of the integration of that whole". We are conscious only at the expense of being largely unconscious. Consciousness is a boundary cutting through the complete circuits of total mind. Above,

visible for inspection, are the arcs of circuits. Of these we are "conscious". Below, invisible, is the rest of the Mind, closed off from our inspection. Consciousness thus only exists by virtue of Unconsciousness; the total system cannot be conscious. Perhaps we might even make a comparison between the Conscious and Unconscious Mind on the one hand, and Chomsky's Surface Structures of Speech and Deep Structures, on the other hand. Deep Structures underlie all our surface manifestations of language. But introspection will never recover them. We cannot consciously think by means of them. And even the level of Deep Structures is some way removed from the level of Thought itself. Between the world and our expression of it are thus a series of interfaces, apparently impenetrable to consciousness. Our language is an activity; not a proof of anything.

Thus we would seem to be cut off from consciousness of Reality by virtue of the language which alone enables us to organize our thoughts and think about Reality. This may seem paradoxical. But really it is not so surprising. For Culture could only emerge from Nature by an act of cutting off - by alienation. This was the only way that consciousness and speech could dawn - in the act of negation. As Octavio Paz puts it in his book on Levi-Strucos: "It was the first 'No' which set man against nature".

The origin of language in negation is discussed by Gregory Bateson, too. A simple affirmation statement about the world can only come about after the evolution of a simple negative, derived from animal displays of threat. The simple negative makes a degree of separateness of Thing from Name possible. Piaget points out that negation is possible because of the mechanisms of neural inhibition - for example, the withdrawing of one's hand after one has stretched it only a certain distance towards an object. Also, we must build mental maps of the world we are born into, by means of contrast, comparison and the separation of elements; so that the syntax of negation is already latent, too, in the place we are born with for acquiring internal conceptual maps of the environment. It is not, be it noted, a world of "raw" data that we are born into. We have a search programme for establishing patterns in our environment already given genetically - evolved through the pressures and constraints of our environment. As do lizards. As do birds. The environment dictates the permissible plans of itself that we can learn.

Another feature which may enforce the separation of Name from Thing, and the growth of language, is the fact that we humans receive most of our sensory information in one mode, Sight, but articulate it in another mode, Sound. The biologist C.B. Waddington speculates that species which both process and articulate information in the same sensory mode might fail to achieve this separation; their world of conventionalized symbolic forms would for them have an absolute character of Moral Authenticity about it. Specie-authority would sanction the order of the world, to an great an extent as it sanctioned social order. The world would have to be as it is. Since the dolphins and toothed whales are both highly intelligent and communicate about the world in the same mode as they perceive it, Sound, this may be one of the reasons why investigators like John Lilly have had such difficulty in proving that these creatures have a genuine language. Conceivably it may turn out that language is a blind alley if it does not operate in a different mode from the basic sensory input - because it cannot grow sufficiently abstract; cannot detach itself from the world far enough to be able to reflect on it. Alternatively, dolphins and caecilians may well have an authentic language - flexible, open-ended and sophisticated; and our difficulties in even knowing whether they have or not, after years of research (with all due respect to Robert Merle's imaginative novel The Day of the Dolphin!) would be a fairly poor prognosis for any encounter with aliens. A third possibility is that dolphins are in a state of immense preparedness for true language -

and remain stuck in that stage, locked in an ethical union of Name and Object, unable to abstract, deprived of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign (in Saussure's jargon) which makes abstraction possible. And perhaps this is a vital characteristic of any true language: the moment away from Representation to Arbitrariness, which is at the same time the separation off of Culture from Nature.

It should also be remembered that dolphins and whales did not evolve wholly in the sea, but returned to the sea, perhaps 135 million years ago, after a life on land where sight obviously played a much more important role than it does for whales today.

At any rate, whatever the answer to the dolphin and whale dilemma we can at least say confidently that alien languages may divide up into name-sensory languages and different-sensory languages. And furthermore, that we may well find it much harder to come to grips with the name-sensory languages. Alternatively, alien languages do not divide up in this way, and proper languages are obliged to be different-sensory.

Octavio Paz remarks that while Language signifies the distance between Man and Things, at the same time it signifies the will to erase this distance. Elsewhere he says that Nature is not a substance nor a thing, but a message. Nature is a message which Nature both sends and receives; and Man is a moment in this message. These two remarks strike me as particularly interesting for language. By this view, is no longer merely something that happens to exist in the world, and whose purpose is no more than this. Language, on the contrary, is something which has emerged from nature in order to return to the point of origin and illuminate nature. As Paz says, "Nature is structure, and structure sends forth meanings; therefore, it is not possible to silence the question about meaning". Well, what is it possible to say scientifically about this idea that language is a functional part of the dynamic of nature? That it is a means whereby nature progressively illuminates and articulates itself.

Without deifying Nature, let us ask what it is in Nature that impels it to send a message to itself?

Here we come back to the problem of self-descriptive systems, which we have touched on in connection with arithmetic, and consciousness. We surely meet this problem too, when we consider the universe as a total system. It exists - but what sustains it? Why should it be as it is? What authenticates it? Is it possible to explain why and how a universe exists, within the limitations of this same universe? Can the universe legislate for itself, authenticate itself, describe itself - without our being forced to step outside it?

We are now compelled, as physicists are now being compelled - without mysticism or superstition - to introduce the fact of consciousness as a scientific necessity into our description of the universe.

A decade ago, the physicist R.H. Dicke pointed out that the right order of ideas might be: Here is the Universe, an what must Man be? but rather: Here is Man, so what must the Universe be? He based his reversal of the traditional way of looking at things on the argument that a Universe is quite literally meaningless in the absence of any awareness of that Universe. But awareness requires life - which requires the presence of elements heavier than hydrogen. These can only be produced by thermonuclear cookery inside stars over a time-span of several billion years. This length of time is only available in a universe the size of ours. Why, therefore, is the Universe so large as it is? Only thus, can there be life in it! So Dicke (and Carter) arrive at the idea of a "biological selection of physical constraints". There

appears to be a numerical relationship between the estimated total number of particles in the universe, the radius of the universe at its maximum point of expansion, the size of an elementary particle, the ratio between electrical and gravitational forces, and several other so-called "big numbers". This relationship indicates a universe where total size, particle size, number of particles, strength of gravity etc., are all linked to one another structurally - such that a per cent difference either way in one of the constants would produce an uninhabitable cosmos. Why are these values as they are, in the first place? How are they chosen? They cannot be influenced or determined by any previous cycle of the universe - if we accept, as seems probable, that our universe will ultimately collapse into a Black Hole and undergo probabilistic scattering so that no laws or constants are preserved. Rather, according to John Wheeler's remarkable suggestion, we must admit that in some strange way the universe is brought into being by the participation of those who participate in it.

Already, Quantum Physics compels us to accept the concept of the Participant as a fundamental physical principle rather than just a difficulty in the way of making very small measurements. Perhaps, suggests Wheeler, this is only the tiny tip of a great iceberg. I quote. "Does the universe also derive its meaning from 'participation'? Are we destined to return to the great concept of Leibnitz, of 'pre-established harmony', before we can make the next great advance?" The Universe is not legislated from outside. It is not a statistical average of other possible universes. It is unique - cut off radically by the physics of gravitational collapse from any other possible universes. Therefore, to be what it is, it must bring itself into being. It must legislate for itself; it must describe itself. To quote John Wheeler again, "Are we, in the words of Thomas Mann, 'actually bringing about what seems to be happening?' Are we destined to return to the deep conception of Parmenides, precursor of Socrates and Plato, that 'what is...is identical with the thought that recognises it'?"

Perhaps we are. In which case, this cosmological idea is of vital importance to our concept of our own, and any alien, languages - since language is one of the prime means by which Nature transmits a message to itself. And what must this message be about? It can only be about the definition of Nature: which, being defined, is enabled to exist. So, will the various intelligences throughout the universe necessarily be compatible on some deep level? Will they all necessarily have the same general project for consciousness? Will the structures of their languages relate to one another, in some universal, general grammar, because it is the selfsame Nature that all are part of a message from, and to? Alternatively, can all the languages of the universe be regarded as representing different stages in the transmission of Nature's self-defining message? Could there be a dynamic within languages, over an evolutionary time-span, whereby language, having divided off from Nature, returns to its point of origin to illuminate it? Can we expect a progressive revelation of the nature of language within language - a growing reflexivity that mirrors the reflexivity of the cosmos as a whole? This may be a necessary evolutionary tendency within languages; so that we might expect the languages of more advanced intelligences to be progressively less "subconscious" and "opaque".

Well, this may be the case. However, talk of "necessity" in the context of evolution tends to make people nervous. But here is an even grosser example of Necessity. How can the initial value data of our cosmos, which later will make life possible, conceivably be determined by something which only arises billions of years later - namely life? For this is what we suggest, by invoking a "participatory" universe. Now, I think this problem disappears if we reconsider Time itself. Perhaps we are mistaken to think of the Universe

as developing from some time in the past - where it all "started" - towards some time in the future, where it all "stops". For one thing, we might be quite unable to locate a specific start or end-point - using Time as the measure. In his book Black Holes: the End of the Universe, John Taylor of London University suggests that time may be proportional to activity; thus time will distend enormously as we trace backwards to the first seconds of the universe - the time of the Big Bang, when the majority of activity occurred. Likewise, towards the end. Time will approach infinite duration at either end, from the viewpoint of an observer in our universe. Time will become meaningless, immeasurable. Indeed, time may be only meaningful within the processes of a Universe, but cannot say anything about the universe as a whole. For the total universe, there may be no passage of time at all. The Universe may best be regarded as a totality that is simultaneously, and permanently, present to itself. There can be no overall "arrow of time". Thus the future and the past may indeed determine one another, reciprocally; and the Universe can be self-determined by its contents - even if these contents only manifest themselves at a specific local time in its history from their own point of view.

So we are approaching a "goal-directed" view of the Universe. Some kind of "goal-directed" view of evolution is implied, also. Now, this is an idea that Jacques Monod for one, in Le Hasard et la Nécessité, finds offensive and unscientific. According to Monod, we must guard against the feeling that everything real in the world is also necessary, rooted in the very beginning of things; that Man is necessary, that life is necessary - even though life, being goal-oriented by definition, appears to carry its own inbuilt necessity "Destiny is written as and while, not before, it happens," writes Monod. The universe as a whole was not pregnant with life. Life exists by chance. Necessity may reinforce the initial lucky chance - but there was nothing necessary about that chance. A totally blind process can, by definition, lead to vision - purely by accident.

But, even ignoring the idea that such terms as "before" and "after" may be irrelevant for a simultaneously-existing, omnipresent universe, let us consider the genetic process itself. It takes 20 minutes to produce a single bacterial cell: from DNA to live organisms. During this twenty minutes, about 4 million nucleotides have to be "read" and translated into proteins and so forth, with close to zero error. This is remarkable enough. But even more remarkable is the problem of how this gigantic sequence was ever arrived at. The DNA molecule that carries the code for the simplest bacterium represents one of few choices out of more than 10 in the power 1 million alternatives ($10^{1,000,000}$). Only the tiniest fraction of these could have been tested at random by nature during the total time-span of the universe to date. So there has to be some hierarchical principle of organisation at work: some dynamic of pressure and constraints on the basic physical and chemical level that leads, rather rapidly, towards living matter.

How do collections of matter produce their own internal descriptions? How does living matter describe itself, in order to perpetuate itself? Are genetic instructions simply ordinary molecules? No, they are more. They are ordinary molecules endowed with symbolic properties. It is not the structure of molecules as such, but the internal self-interpretation of their structure as symbols that is the basis of life. But what endows them with this symbolic property? What determines that they shall function as Language?

The answer, in the words of American biologist Howard Pattee, is that this is "a consequence of a coherent set of constraints with which they interact". Recent developments in theoretical biology - in particular the work of René Thom, who has applied concepts from topology (the branch of mathematics which concerns itself with the connectedness of shapes) - makes it possible to begin to explain how the interactions of the universe can dictate symbolic properties

to matter; and in so doing, bring it to life. The publication of Thom's *Stabilité Structurelle et Morphogénèse: Essai d'une théorie générale des modèles* was reviewed in England as the only book comparable in respect to Newton's *Principia*. And indeed, Thom's theory of the necessary forms which are characteristic of our universe, and which will manifest themselves inexorably in any morphological process whatever (whether this is biological - or geological) is a daring and radical concept, that links up with the cosmological and linguistic questions we have been asking.

For Thom, language is an internal representation of space in the mind: a symbolization of the environment and of "les catastrophes phénoménologiques" occurring occurring within this space. I quote: "Il me semble difficile de dire qu'avant la pensée conceptuelle il n'existe, et il existe encore chez l'homme, de l'extérieur, une pensée spatiale qui réalise le contrôle de tous nos déplacements dans l'espace; or un tel contrôle implique nécessairement une représentation cérébrale, consciente ou non, de l'espace extérieur de la Mécanique. En fait, reprenons-le une fois encore, la vie ne se conçoit guère sans une représentation interne de l'espace ambiant, la compétition pour l'espace étant l'une des interactions biologiques les plus primitives... Quelle est la fonction primitive du langage? La fonction primordiale du langage est de transcrire sous forme communicable par nos organes les catastrophes phénoménologiques du monde extérieur..." (Following on from this Thom elegantly analyses the geometry underlying various language structures, which in his view are open to the same kind of analysis as morphological events in biology, or elsewhere; for there are only a certain number of such possible events, as a universal topological principle. (These ideas of a restricted number of mathematical "mother structure" is, incidentally, one that the group of structuralist mathematicians who publish under the pseudonym of Nicolas Bourbaki is also pursuing vigorously.)

Thus Man reflects Reality. Language reflects the basic shapes of Nature - and these are even susceptible to mathematical analysis. Thom even goes so far as to say: "La vieille image de l'Homme microcosme reflet du macrocosme garde toute sa valeur: qui connaît l'Homme connaît l'univers". (2) Elsewhere he writes: "I believe that in biology there exist formal structures, in fact geometric entities, which prescribe the only forms which a dynamic system of auto-reproduction can present in a given environment". And the same is true he maintains, even of the table of the elements: Sodium and Potassium exist, because a formal structure already existed, corresponding to them.

So we seem to be moving in the direction of being able to talk of a topological grammar of the universe - which reflects itself in the grammar of actual languages. Here we say that these same universal constants, pressures and necessary forms must reflect themselves in any language anywhere in the universe?

Well, Thom is very careful to say that his "formal structures" or "geometric entities" only prescribe particular forms in a particular environment

(1) "As I see it, it seems difficult to deny that, before conceptual thought, there once existed, and still does exist in Man, a special thought which controls all our movements in space. Such control necessarily implies that the brain makes a conscious or unconscious picture of the space outside each-animal movement. In fact, to repeat this again, we can scarcely conceive of life without an internal picture of surrounding space, as the context for space is one of the most primitive of biological interactions. What is the primitive function of language? This is to transcribe the phenomenological events of the external world into a communicable form to be transmitted by our organs."

(2) "The old image of Man as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm retains its value: he who knows Man will know the universe."

Now different, then, might be the forms - both morphological and linguistic - that might be prescribed for alien beings? Perhaps they might be so different that there would be no compatibility between us and them.

What is meant, however, by a "particular environment"? Does that mean a particular planet - a Jupiter as opposed to the Earth, a Mercury as opposed to Jupiter? Hardly! The particular environment we are concerned with is surely the particular universe we happen to be in, the universe whose mother structures prescribe the existence of Sodium or Potassium. We have every right to assume these elements exist in the same form as we know them, in the furthest galaxies.

Now, to return to the point I raised earlier. I mentioned that all human beings possess a common marker in meaning based on the biological systems of emotional and purposive behaviour they all share. I asked whether aliens would display emotional and purposive behaviour sufficiently similar to provide some community of meaning between us and them. Well, if language involves "une représentation cérébrale, consciente ou non, de l'espace extérieur de la Mécanique" - and if the pressures and constraints of the environment prescribe certain proper forms not only for biology, but also for intellectual structures, there may be a reasonable chance of compatibility on the deep level. The possibility, perhaps, of an Esperanto of the necessary forms involved in physical and intellectual development. These would determine the deep structure of knowledge of the Being. Deriving from this, in response to the particular environment, would be what Robin Fox and Lionel Tiger call the "biogrammar": the hereditary biologically-based patterns of behaviour, including the plan for the acquisition of actual languages. Then, on the surface, would be the languages themselves, in whatever form they presented themselves: by sound, by gesture, by patterns of lights.

You may object that it is a hopeless task to presume we could unpick these various layers. You may also object that, once having unpicked them, we might find that even on the deepest level there was sheer incongruity. Particle physicists are nowadays coming to the reluctant conclusion that while there is a regular underlying mathematical structure to Nature, Nature does not however properly obey its own laws. In the words of Steven Weinberg of Harvard, "Increasingly, it is believed that the asymmetries of nature are in fact exact, but they are asymmetries of the underlying field equations, and are not obeyed by the solutions to these equations". We live in a universe which only approximately corresponds to the formal structures and regulations that permit it to exist. The same may be true of the set of alien languages. They are related, yes - via the biogrammar, to an underlying set of necessary forms. But only approximately so. There will always remain a fundamental uncertainty and ambiguity - corresponding to the uncertainty with which the universe obeys its own laws! This may turn out to be the case. But that is no reason for not pursuing the idea of an alien linguistics.

To sum up, we must be prepared to entertain the idea of a self-creating, self-examining cosmos, in which life is somehow involved in the very processes which bring it into being in the first place; and that the nature of life's involvement is, in the broadest sense, a linguistic one: its double role of message and observer or messenger. Since language evolves we must also entertain the idea that structural evolution of language is to some extent determined by the demands of this participatory role; and furthermore that language may tend evolutionarily to yield up more of its nature, so that it will one day be possible to represent in language that which is mirrored in language. Or, that this is already possible, elsewhere - in languages which

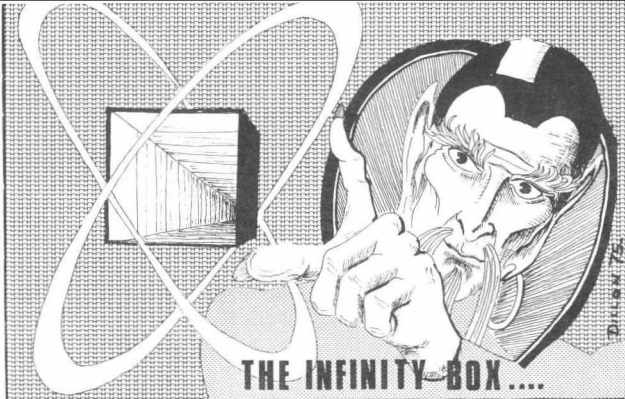
we would therefore have great difficulty in comprehending. But, then again, such "ideal languages", which articulate Reality, might be quite impossible - is the same paradoxical way as the universe has to break its own rules, in order to exist. The ideal pattern only generates approximate realities. And this approximate feature is inherent in the nature of things. The idea of a universe pulling itself up by its own bootstraps, in the way I have outlined, is somewhat absurd. As Pinget puts it in his book *Le Structuralisme*, "The subject cannot be the a priori underpinning of a finished posterior structure; rather, it is a centre of activity. And whether we substitute "society" or "meaning" or "life" or even "cosmos" for "subject", the argument remains the same". The cosmos cannot generate itself. And yet, strangely, it must do.

And English mathematician, G. Spencer Brown, has written a book called *Laws of Form*, in which he develops a logic to describe this situation: a logic for "operations taking their own results as base". His logic demands, to make this possible, a universe which is so constituted as to examine itself - which divides up into Observer and Observed. So, once again, we are faced with a participatory universe: and it is only a participatory universe that can generate itself. Nevertheless, as Spencer Brown says, we are faced in such a universe with the situation of a dog chasing its own tail. "In respect of its own information, the universe must expand to escape the tautocapex through which we, who are it, are trying to capture it, which is us".

Whatever the outcome of these speculations, it seems indisputable that we are witnessing nowadays a necessary convergence of what used to be regarded as the most diverse areas of knowledge: Physics, Cosmology, Biology, Mathematics, Logic, Linguistics. Each is needed now to throw light on the fundamental problems of the others. And this convergence - which demands some highly speculative "leaps into the Beyond" - is also something which the Science Fiction imagination can and should explore. The problems of this world burn and now are urgent - the social, economic, ecological problems; and science fiction should deal with these. At the same time, I think it must find a way of dealing with these epistemological problems. For science fiction is a literature of the Beyond, as well as a literature of the impact of change on Man. It deals with the Beyond in a historical sense: the Future, that is rapidly becoming the Present. It must also deal with the Beyond of knowledge - without losing touch with a sense of the social base of Man, whose knowledge this is. For, just as we are here making our world and our society, so in another sense we are engaged in the making of the universe through that which is at the root of our social being: our language.

-- Ian Watson





GALAXIES by Barry N. Malzberg (Pyramid: 1975; \$1.25; 128pp)

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh

Let me make it clear, from the start, that I love Barry Malzberg's work. But, his most recent novel leads me to doubt that he will ever write another decent story. Why? I do not dislike this book, though it took me about a fortnight to finish it. Malzberg writes well, he cares, he is good. Yet there is beneath the surface of *Galaxies* a hint of death. Malzberg is leaving, say already (for what do I know of his personal life?) have left.

The hero of this novel, if I may so stigmatise an astrobiological feature, is a neutron star, located at the heart of a black galaxy. By some unfortunate oversight (such that conventional detectors of electro-magnetic radiation do not register gravitational phenomena) a spaceship, *Skipstone*, has plunged into this galaxy, and has apparently been trapped. But *Skipstone's* beautiful pilot, Lena Thomas, knows that escape is possible: she can gear the ship up to tachyonic drive and leap, through some mysterious level of space, to safety. Of course, the application of the faster-than-light drive might destroy the universe.

Lena Thomas does not make her decision quickly. She is constrained from action by the fact that her vehicle carries, in its hold, the frozen bodies of five hundred and fifteen dead men. The dead men are rich men, searching for revival; and the *Skipstone* was built so that they might benefit from being exposed to the unknown radiations of deep space. However, after consultation with several cyborgs, provided by the omniscient Bureau, Lena does press the relevant switch. Malzberg does not specify what happens. He is frightened.

My appreciation of this novel was marred by the realisation that it is an allegory. I will not explain the allegory, other than to say that the black galaxy is a representation of sf (the field of endeavour). / Is this right? Does not the Skipatone represent sf and the black galaxy represent the field of literary endeavour, not which sf has accidentally fallen? No. I think not. The dead men are quite happy to stay where they are; only Lane wishes to transcend oblivion. / True, Malzberg does satirize the type of sf which would have found favour with John W. Campbell, and admits that the is not writing novel, only notes towards a novel. But, mingled with these intentions, is the intention to say farewell, and to explain why he feels that sf is no longer a field in which original work is possible.

Sf, as a genre, is almost fifty years old. Many capable writers have used the genre to express their artistic visions. Other writers have used sf, especially during the era of the pulps, as a source of outrageous adventures. Sf is now gaining respect, becoming a branch of literature. Yet, through the years, no one has been able to say what it really is and the assertion "if you have to ask you'll never know what it is" supposedly justifies the lack of a definition. But how can we love sf if we don't know what it is? The answer is that we do know, and we have known since we, as children, discovered Julius Verne (as I did) or Edgar Rice Burroughs (as I didn't). The fault of much modern-day science fiction is that it is still moulded by childish perceptions, still the product of a childish "sense of wonder". Malzberg, and several other fine writers (Tom Dinch is a personal favourite), realised this and have tried to change the direction in which sf is moving, tried to halt the slide toward oblivion. Outraged voices have complained that what Malzberg writes is not sf and does not deserve to be placed alongside the work of Andre Norton, John Norman, or Lin Carter. Malzberg has, consequently, been pressurised; the demands of the commercial market have forced him to reconsider his decision to be a science fiction writer. Is he right? Is he wrong?

He is right. The future health of science fiction lies with writers who do not believe that the universe was created by a science fiction writer (a point which Malzberg makes on pages 34 and 35 of Galaxias - the implosion of the neutron star created the universe, and will eventually destroy it). We should not be too sad that Malzberg is retiring, though we may wish to cry for a few minutes. Other writers are emerging who will, I am certain, be able to do what Malzberg tried and failed to do.

Farewell, Barry N. Fare well

(26/10/78)

STATIONARY ORBIT by Peter Marwy (Hobson; £2.50; 184pp. ISBN 0 234 77121 0)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

As a general rule I am against reviewing bad sf, on the principle that had publicity is still publicity, but very occasionally a book appears which is so bad that it deserves to be made an example of, in the hope (vain, probably) that such rubbish will be neither written nor published in the future. Such a book is Stationary Orbit; so awful in every way that I am unable to find a word to say in its defence.

It is set in the present day at an unspecified English university where an interstellar communications project is being set up. The sole participants are an irascible old professor and an extraordinarily naive graduate student. (This is told as if the idea is completely original, with never a mention of Project Ozma or any similar programme.) Of course, results come very quickly

despite a minimum of equipment. Communication is established with an alien mathematical genius which appears to be in a "stationary" (synchronous) orbit around the Earth. It is soon taught English and its incredible mind (which it claims to use directly for receiving and broadcasting, without the need for any radio components) is put to work solving various mathematical problems. The latter escalate until the Chancellor of the Exchequer, no less, comes to ask the alien to balance his budget.

I assume that most readers over the age of nine will give up in disgust by this stage, but Mr. Kacey's plot grinds on inexorably to its truly unbelievable conclusion that the "alien" is in fact a dolphin in a pool, close to the university. How about that for an original twist? I shall draw a veil over the graduate student's lengthy, painfully embarrassing and astonishingly unsuccessful encounters with the opposite sex, which occupy about a third of the book.

None these brief points. The novel is aimed at adult readers. At no time is it believable. The "characters" are an insult to the cardboard from which they have been so ineptly harked. The entire book is an insult to the intelligence of readers of any age.

It is evident from the text that Mr. Kacey has never previously written any of, or read any. It is equally evident that he knows nothing about present-day students, or universities, or interstellar communications projects, or government, or dolphins, or the writing of fiction. So do yourself a favour and avoid this book like the plague.

DEEP SPACE by Eric Frank Russell (Dobson; £2.75; 249pp; ISBN 0 234 77037 6)
 LIKE NOTHING ON EARTH by Eric Frank Russell (Dobson; £2.75; 155pp, ISBN 0 234 77189 5)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Back in the mid-1960s, when I had been reading sf for ten years and thought that I knew all there was to know about it, I used to grade sf authors in league table fashion. Since then my tastes have changed and new writers have eclipsed the old until only one of my favourites from that time remains so: Eric Frank Russell. This is the more remarkable when one considers that Russell's output over the last ten years has been almost nil. Is his work really as readable today (one might ask) as it was fifteen or twenty years ago? My answer is a conditional "Yes".

These two collections (of nine and six stories respectively) are old. Deep Space is a facsimile of a 1956 Eyre and Spottiswoode volume, with some of its content fifteen years older than that; Like Nothing On Earth is newly-assembled from stories which appeared in Antarcting in the 1960s.

Given that Russell has a predilection for "alien and spaceship" themes, where technology is often a vital ingredient, it is not surprising that some of his extrapolations and predictions have the bicycle clips still firmly attached while others have already been proven wrong. Specifically, he oversimplifies routines like spacecraft manoeuvres, and he makes little use of computers, TV or robotic devices, thereby laying himself open to the charge of failing to keep up with the technology which was contemporary at his time of writing. These technological "errors" occur in many of Russell's stories, but rarely do they spoil a story - perhaps because his main points concern human beings (or anthropomorphised aliens), whose behaviour patterns change far more slowly than do the horizons of technology. In a similar fashion, the red sands of Mars (in "Homo Sapi" - Deep Space) and the jade jungles of

Venus (in "The Titled Tiger" - Deep Space), each complete with appropriately-bued sentient humanoida, have been relegated by science to the status of fairy tales, but this does not make those stories any less absorbing - for me, anyway.

A more important objection of some of the stories in these two volumes is no fault of Russell's: over a quarter of a century certain of the themes and last-page twists have become hackneyed. It is a sort of compliment to an author to have his ideas used by other writers, but the process tends to devalue the original, dragging Russell's innovations down to the level of clichés. I am not trying to suggest that Russell was always original and never borrowed plots. Indeed, the Adam and Eve theme - surely old before Russell used it - occurs twice in Deep Space. This might still have been an acceptable theme in 1950, but twenty-five years on it is enough to make me cringe: a pity, because both these stories ("First Person Singular" and "Second Genesis") are beautifully told. Terran space scouts landing on new-found worlds are another theme cliché which occurs several times in the two books, and despite the clever ways in which Russell has twisted his plots about them there is bound to be some consumer resistance on the part of the reader to yet another space scout vessel thundering down through the first paragraph to stage a hundred yard circle of blue vegetation on yet another Earth-type alien planet.

Honestly though, my intention is not to knock Eric Frank Russell. I cannot think of any other of writer whose short stories shine so brightly, gem-like, up to thirty-five years after their first appearance. One of his secrets is the simple, casual writing style, (no Tiptree-type intricacies or poetic word-crafting à la Delany here), an easy to read but no difficult to write consistently. Another is his studied use of psychology, together with a sympathetic concern for the problems of his characters, nowhere better expressed than in "A Little Oil" (Deep Space) which tells of the circus clown who is sent along (incognito) to provide light relief on a long space voyage. Russell does poke fun at his creations, but always with a twinkle in his eye. And it is not always the stupid alien who hears the truth (as in novels like Wasp and Next of Kin); in "Into Your Tent I'll Creep" (Like Nothing on Earth) and "Home Saps" (Deep Space) it is the human who is shown to be stupid when compared to dogs and camels (respectively).

Of these two collections, Deep Space is marginally better (apart from those Adam and Eve stories) and is also a hundred pages longer than Like Nothing On Earth for the same price. Both are well worth reading, though, and each has a clever jacket design by Richard Weaver.

THE TIME BENDER by Keith Laumer (Dobson; £2.75; 160 pp; ISBN 0 234 77241 7)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Wish-fulfilment fantasies are often a pain in the neck. I suppose the heroes enjoy themselves - once they've recovered from the scratches and bruises they always seem to sustain during the first nine-tenths of the story and are able to wallow in the happy ending. But as for the reader...ah, this is where the neuralgia comes in.

As I sit typing this I could wish that the pile of reviews was already typed and on its way to Chris Fowler, or (more to the point) I could wish for a couple of naked andubile females to appear on the carpet of my study, but I don't bother to wish because I know neither is going to come true. So when, in the first chapter of a new Keith Laumer novel, the young hero messages

to wash himself out of the present day into an existence populated mainly by anachronisms, I sigh and protect my neck from the draughts which blow through the holes in the book's logic. And when, by the end of chapter IV, it becomes obvious that the hero is not going to be allowed to wish for anything really sensible (like euthanasia, suggests my more sarcastic alter ego), that he will have to battle through to the last page before he gets the girl and that the level of the humour is not going to rise above knock-about farce, I know that the remaining eight chapters are going to be hell.

Do you really want to hear any more about Lafayette O'Leary's incredible adventures in the Kingdom of Artesia? All right, then: Artesia is basically a mediæval city-state with electronic accoutrements, where the people speak with Brooklyn accents. The palace contains one middle-aged king, one beautiful princess, one insanely jealous courtier, one beautiful chambermaid, one palace magician (To Whom There Is More Than Meets The Eye) and a never-ending supply of rough guards - all the usual characters.

Towards the end Keith Laumer tries to impose some sort of logical framework on this fairy-tale chaos by talking about probability faults and extra-continental phenomena, but the book remains a wish-fulfilment fantasy from beginning to end.

OTHER TIMES vol 1 no 1 (60p; published by, and available from, P.P. Layouts Box A, 240 Camden High Street, London NW1)

Reviewed by Charles Partington

Other times no 1, or if you will, New Worlds circa 1967. A difficult magazine to review for it fills me with interest and despair. Interest because I'm in rapport with the editor's views and aspirations (if not with all the contents of this first issue), despair because it seems that the only magazines that sell sufficient quantities to keep them commercially viable are fuck books and NEL's Science Fiction Monthly.

It would be nice to say here that the days of the literary speculative magazine are over, thus implying that there had been a period when a magazine like New Worlds sold enough copies to keep its editor/publisher from the constant spectre of emotional and fiscal bankruptcy. It never happened. Moorcock's brilliant New Worlds staggered uncertainly from one issue to the next, only his sense of personal commitment keeping it afloat. But enough people know the history of New Worlds, Oz and Friends for it to be unnecessary to outline them here. Yet given that knowledge, it's surprising to see echoes of all three in Other Times.

Contributors? Mal Deas, John Sladek, Barry Malzberg, Eric Mottram and Blaire Cendrara. Sladek's "Apocifer Look" was, for me, the best piece of fiction in the issue. His stories never seem to be fillers, his peculiar violence always entrance. Not so for Barry Malzberg, Gustav Haeford and Rikki Bucornat, their contributions to this first issue were slight, well written but lacking something, perhaps Sladek's style and internal power. Unless one is fortunate enough to obtain material like Ballard's "The Aircraft Disaster" in Bananas no 1, it's extremely difficult for an editor to do more than indicate the direction he wants the magazine to move towards in the first issue. He can after all only publish what he considers to be the best of the material he receives. One dilemma is that he may not be satisfied with any of it, but if he rejects everything - no magazine. A fact that should be obvious, but in I suspect often forgotten. How many times have you thought "Shit, why did he run that?" Possibly the answer was out of desperation.

I'd like to single out the lavish portfolio "Last Drawings of Mal Dean" as being of particular interest, and perhaps the only thing of real content in the issue. I'm not convinced that the drawings Mal Dean left us will survive. Perhaps his output was too small for him to have made a significant impact. But had he continued to produce there can be little doubt that he would have achieved great acclaim. Other Times as I is worth the price if only for the Mal Dean portfolio.

I'm not going to make the mistake of urging you to go out and buy a copy. Those of you who are going to buy a copy will do so regardless of anything I say. I just hope there's enough of you to justify a second issue....

WHEN ELEPHANTS LAST IN THE DOORSTAD BLOOMED by Ray Bradbury (Mari-Davis, MacGibbon; 1975; \$2.75; 143 pp; ISBN 0 266 10828 2)

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

The elephants come from the Persian carpets used in the annual carpet-beating ceremony in the Bradbury/Spaulding backyard in Waukegan/Green Town, Illinois, circa 1928. In the poem (one of nearly 50 published in this collection, 21 of them hitherto unpublished, representing Bradbury's output from 1984 to the present day) Bradbury makes the carpet-beating ceremony represent the life of the human imagination, beating elephantine fantasies out of the prosaic world, and wonders whether this human imagination is not itself a thing of the past.

Still on such days do heartbeats throng the town
Where alderwitch and tads
Where toms and great-grand-crones gone feverish with sweat
Goad fine out of the warp and weave,
The tapestry of treeded hearthware woolen flush,
Beat time into the breeze and watch the billion footfalls
Sift clouds inot the greening insufferable beauty of young trees?
Do old and young still tread a common ground?

Leaving that question aside, When Elephants Last presents a succession of these transforming fantasies, covering everything from Bradbury's present-day front-lawn to "far Centauri". Some of them are apparently trivial, some grandiose; but what immediately sets them apart from the fantasies of any other living writer is their sheer human zest and warmth. (And it's no use complaining about the notorious Bradburian sentimentality: like Dickens, Bradbury must have swallowed whole, or not at all.) My own favourite, perhaps, is "Mrs Harriet Madden Atwood, Who Played the Piano for Thomas A. Edison for the World's First Phonograph Record, is dead at 105". In which Bradbury takes Mrs Atwood and plays with her at some length, performing ever-more-fanciful variations on her theme, until this worthy lady has become a universal symbol of immortality, and Thomas Edison part of a vast, suprapersonal creative process in which we are all caught up.

She played for Edison!
Old Thomas asked her talent to begin.
So she began and in the beginning knew no end.

I wouldn't like to say how all this would strike someone coming to Bradbury for the first time. Some poor devil of a mainstream poet, reviewing When Elephants Last for The Listener, spoke of trite sentiments, unbearable rhythmic monotony, and so forth. This is understandable, especially in a mainstream poet reviewing this science fiction versifier who will undoubtedly command a large audience, whose formal limitations are obvious, sometimes painfully so. The truth of the matter is, that Bradbury is the world's greatest living

amateur poet. His verse is fuelled almost entirely by an enthusiasm for fanciful inventions; for the rest, most of the format connoting is provided by an all-pervasive iambic metre, more or less deceptible - the metre that first seems to have made a public appearance in the radio play Leviathan '99 - which at best bestows a kind of Elizabethan grandeur on the proceedings (as in "Old Ahab's Friend, and Friend to Noah. Speaks his Piece"), and which at worst has obviously been arrived at by chopping off all the definite and indefinite articles in the sentence.

It's also undeniable that much of the resonance of Bradbury's poetry comes from Bradbury's own past work; but I don't think this is his fault. The human imagination cries out for the kind of light verse which can unexpectedly provide rich poetic insight - the kind of thing Chesterton or Kipling did so well. But this kind of poetry relies on very simple, shared human experience - it is, if you like, exoteric as opposed to esoteric poetry - and simple shared experience is something we seem to lack these days. So the esoteric poet who wants to have his work published must first create the shared resonances of his poetry. Thus, Tolkien's light verse exists in relation to Tolkien's whole "sub-creation", which provides a common ground between the poet and his audience.

Likewise, the common ground we share with Bradbury the Poet is to be found in the totality of Bradbury's past work. For instance, the light/dark, South/North, warm/cold polarities explored in "The Thing that Goes by Night, the Self that Lures in the Sun" --

Then I have need of sun and my warmed Southern self
My right hand called from noon
To wrestle with the dark,
To troop the spidered clutch,
Let loose my soul to brighter goops of climes --

All this takes us right back to the title story of The Golden Apples of the Sun ("South", said the captain), in addition to recapitulating the whole of Bradbury's past work, and most of the other poems work in similar ways, sometimes illuminating our past literary experience. Of course, the volume is not merely retrospective: the poems interact with each other, bringing out dominant themes and new insights. The theme of Memory itself comes out very clearly, for example, one thinks of the horns' words to Anson in C.S. Lewis's Out of the Silent Planet. "A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered. You are speaking, horns, as if the pleasure were one thing and the memory another. It is all one thing. You say you have poets in your world. Do they not teach you this?" (P 85, Pan edition, 1960) Bradbury does, certainly. But the essential thing is this: we know where we are, this poet's world is not a private domain; and the result is good experiential poetry.

In short, anyone who is already sold on Bradbury will not be disappointed; while those who aren't will readily point out the imperfections - one or two of the apparently trivial poems really are trivial, there are clumsy bits that seem to have been transcribed straight out of a notebook, and there is one disaster, "Christ, Old Student in a New School", in which Christian theology refuses to submit to Bradbury's fanciful treatments.

My own position is clear: when I call Bradbury "the world's greatest amateur poet" I mean just that. Amateurish he often is. And, most definitely, great.



The Celluloid Dream

Andrew Tidmarsh

Christopher Fowler

PLANET OF THE APES directed by Franklin J. Schaffner; 1968; USA

The attraction of this film is that it features a crowd of men (and a few women) dressed up as apes and acting as though they were humans: talking, thinking, pretending to be rational beings. I am puzzled that a film (indeed a series of films) could be based on a premise that an ape society would be modelled, quite closely, on human society (I am deliberately vague: Planet of the Apes is not a political film, is not an attack on either capitalist or communist attitudes). The film relies on the supposed similarity of apes and humans.

A space vehicle has been launched from Earth in 1873 with the intention of proving or disproving a theory which suggests that the rate of progress of a body through time is affected by the velocity at which that body travels through space. The only way that this theory can be verified is for the astronauts (or tampanauts) to return to an Earth which has moved into their future (and incidentally forgotten that they even existed). This happens in the film, but not because the implications of testing the theory have been sorted to a logical conclusion. The story allows the astronauts to know that time on Earth is progressing at a faster rate than time in their own space vehicle, simply (and wrongly) by placing two clocks in the space vehicle: one which measures ship's time, and one which measures Earth time. This is an idiosyncrasy. The clock which measures Earth time could only be calibrated if the aforementioned theory were taken to be fact and the exact relationship between the velocity through space of a body and its velocity through time were known.

The vehicle crashes into the sea of an unknown planet, and the crew, which has slept for most of the journey, is roused by the shock. The astronauts learn that they have moved approximately two thousand years into the future - yet are only eighteen months older than when they left Earth. The three men in the crew discover that their single women companion (this film is noticeably homophobic) has perished, and thus suppose that they are the last living members of the human race. This is a very touching moment. Fortunately the mental health of the men is not affected by their perceptions, and they are able to struggle from their vehicle with several packages of useful equipment and food sufficient for three days.

The planet is lifeless, apparently sterile; its landscapes are harsh, reminiscent of the canyons of Earth carved out by the millennia long passages of rivers. The men walk, and talk hopefully about themselves. They discuss the reasons for their decision to volunteer for a flight into the future, into oblivion, but aren't quite able to explain why they chose to leave Earth. They begin to believe that they have chosen to die. Then they find a tiny plant, then a tree, a grove of trees, a waterfall, a pool of clear, cold water. The men awa and laugh, and enjoy the living things which will save them from death (and the human race from extinction).

But the apes are not alone. Other human-like beings exist on the unknown planet. These humans are stupid, mute, pre-technological, peaceful. When a shrill scream sounds across a forested valley, the mute humans are justifiably terrified. A band of mounted and armed gorillas appears, and the film's inventiveness collapses. An interesting situation is abandoned because of the need to introduce civilized, embarrassingly human, apes. How would the astronauts have coped with creatures to which they were related but to which they were subtly different? The film just could not face such a difficult theme (and presumably, neither could the novel, Monkey Planet by Pierre Boulle, upon which the film is based).

Gorillas, chimpanzees, and orangutans are the elements around which ape society has been built. The gorillas are stupid and brutal; the chimpanzees are docile and inquisitive; the orangutans are calm and authoritative. But the structure of the ape society is not lucidly articulate, and seems merely to be a faint pastiche of human society. Of course, the neat, and simplistic, reversal of the roles of ape and human is used as a source of titillation; it is the film's *raison d'être*. But to my mind it is the film's most unattractive facet. The idea that a human being is inferior to some, as yet unseen, creature could surely have been treated in a more intelligent fashion. / Of course, the film was not intended to be an extrapolation of a possibility, merely an exploitation of an impossibility. I certainly do not believe that apes could ever be more human than humans. / The proliferation of the Ape films suggests that we do not wish to know that we are not perfect, though supporters of the sub-genre (for want of a better term) might argue that the appreciation of the films is an indication that we are able to laugh at ourselves and at our pretensions of grandeur. I disagree. If we laugh at a film that tries (as Planet of the Apes obviously does) to ridicule human beings and to say that they are stupid and are destroying their world and ought to care more about other creatures and less about themselves, we are ignoring the truth of these assertions, or, at best, accepting that they are of minor consequence. Planet of the Apes would have been more effective if it had been less blunt and if it had seriously attempted to show that an ape society might exist which owed little or nothing to present-day human societies. But the Ape films have been and are being successful; it does not matter that I should object to them.

We could learn many things from the Great Apes. Earth is their world as well as ours. Yet we ignore them, or force upon them the dubious privilege of acting as though they were humans. We are wrongly convincing ourselves that human beings are in every respect better than apes. Our behaviors are ludicrous. And our long-established belief that apes are ridiculous, and should be laughed at when they act as we act, leads us to think that Planet of the Apes does not criticize our shortcomings. The intentions of the film were and are laudable; sadly, we / or I because of my upbringing) are unable to treat it seriously.

The film's final image is a crushing, poignant dismissal of those who assert that New York is the embodiment of the American Dream and will go on for ever. If only the rest of the film had been so good!

-- A. T. 1/11/1975

BUG JACE PARMITER · A Review of BUG, directed by Jeanant Svarc; 1975; USA

I stick with science fiction because I believe that it is something that can push us towards the future, and help us to lose our fear of change. But I have been disappointed. It has achieved nothing; even the genre's recent respectability is not an indication of a step forward. "Literature" is a trivial game which academics play - and which I go along with because I am

an "educated" and "sophisticated" person. Yet it offers a glimpse of something that I wish to see: the promotion of intelligence as a virtue and not a vice. All other endeavours are determined to avoid or negate concepts which drag thoughts from minds, aside from the security (and the boredom) of the past.

I moved into London at the end of July 1975, after a period in isolation and happiness. I recognised immediately that London was a place I could be entertained in in a variety of ways. So, breaking a long period of abstinence, I came to see a film. I chose well: Solaris is remarkable - intelligent, provocative, inexplicable. I don't pretend to understand what Lem or Tarkovsky were saying or trying to say. But nothing is held back, ideas are not diluted or ignored for the sake of assuring an audience. Since that first delight I've seen perhaps thirty films; about half were what I might call fantasies: The Exorcist, Earthquake, Westworld, Tommy. My opinions have been sliding downward. Maybe this was inevitable; after all, do many people enjoy London? Do many people have the resilience and the determination to face and overcome a continuous series of challenges? No. I have been made to realise that most people are happy (or, at least, not unhappy) with what they have and avoid innovation, progress, unfamiliarity. These are not startling revelations. But they are revelations which hurt me, which cut right through the layer of fat I had insulated myself with and tear at my brain. I don't want to live as my father lived, or as my older brothers and sisters NOW insist on living. Yet, is any other course open to me? Yes. I can visit the film Bug and forget I am even alive.

I can believe that work is not a REAL part of my life, and can be forgotten as soon as I step into a cinema and listen to the electronic modulations which introduce a film about fire-raising bugs that have a penchant for human mutilation and human flesh. For a few hours I can be TRULY happy. And, in my office the next day, I will remember how mutated cockroaches crawled across a young girl's face. And I will remember how I was REALLY frightened when flying red insects crashed through a window. And I will wipe me from teeth again on my stomach. Maybe, scraping at the cold custard during lunch, I will wonder if my life is better than Jack Parmiter's? Most of all, I will be fighting to ignore my work, and my responsibilities as a civil servant, and the weak, impassioned cries of my stupid, old-fashioned boss.

This is the best fate that Bug can expect. Yet, this is the fate that Bug was intended to find. The film is a product of the entertainment industry; it is a simplified and (scientifically) howlerised version of a fine book (The Hephæstus Plague by Thomas Pugo); and it is a poor example of a science fiction film.

Teach! I think I'll move onto music.

The above, of course, is an unfair criticism. I haven't considered Bug as a film, merely as an identifiable source of irritation. Why? Why am I slamming a film that does not try to be consequential, significant or relevant? Why don't I enjoy a well-told, occasionally exciting story? Why haven't I noticed the capably staged special effects? Because these are details that I have come to expect from any and every modest, competent film. I had hoped that a science fiction film (which Bug without doubt is) would be somewhat different, somewhat EXTRA-ordinary. I was being rather naive, wasn't I?

I'll stick with science fiction because it keeps alive my hope that people think, and like to think. But the makers of films such as Bug still have a great deal to learn. Some sapience is SAPIENT! Let us not forget that.

A.T. 22/11/1975

STEREO directed by David Cronenberg; 1969; Canada

AM! At last - a film to warm the very cockles of my heart, if I had a heart. But I am an android and not affected by emotions, or by high blood pressure, or by alcohol. Of course, if I really were an android (and I am assuming for the sake of this review that I am a human being) I would not be interested in telepathy; consequently, I would not be interested in Stereo.

How can a human being - a vessel wracked most painfully by love and hate, joy and dismay - view and understand a film which operates on a continuous high level of intellect? An android would have no problems. An android would focus on the ideas that the film contains and would draw together a logical, consistent, and comprehensive account of the theories of Doctor Stringfellow. Such an account would, if applied carefully to the images presented by the film, explain how the six telepaths were interacting. But, how could an android cope with the hypothesis that the strength of telepathic communication between two telepaths depends on the depth and extent of love that the telepaths feel for each other? An android would brush aside the film's central thesis. A human being has no such problems.

Telepathy is a subject that must be considered by a human being. And, in my opinion rightly (though I never previously made the connection), Stereo associates telepathic communication with the display of emotion. Human beings are emotional AND intellectual creatures; Stereo is a film that recognizes this fact. Such recognition can only be a good thing.

The story is, basically, as follows: Stringfellow, a psychiatrist, is interested in telepathy. He develops a theory which, because of his academic prominence, is chosen to be tested. A number of psychiatric patients volunteer to have their brains surgically altered so that they will be able to communicate telepathically. The subjects' telepathic potential can only be developed if the subjects are placed together in isolation from "normal" people. This occurs. The initial reactions to telepathic communication vary: two subjects commit suicide. Stringfellow's theories are reconsidered; and modified. The remaining subjects are again placed in isolation and, because the subjects have been trained and are familiar with Stringfellow's theories, they are able to merge into a telepathic commune. The film presents Stringfellow's theories, suggests how the theories can be tested, and shows the telepaths moving together.

I, honestly, did not understand what was happening. I grasped most of Stringfellow's theories: 1) that telepathic communication depended on the depth of love felt between individuals; 2) that the strength of communication was inversely related to the square of the distance between telepaths (the inverse square law - suggesting that telepathy is electromagnetic, and a physically detectable phenomenon); 3) that a dominant-subordinate relationship between two individuals must be established before a telepathic commune can develop; 4) that as an individual's telepathic power increases (exponentially) the conventional senses (sight, audition, etc) are either discarded, except on a most basic level (e.g. for eating), or taken over by the telepathic facility. I'm not certain that I agree with these ideas, but they are certainly thought-provoking. And I appreciate films that make me think. (Why aren't more such films made? Can't the ordinary "ama-in-the-street" think? Who says that he/she can't think? Is the film industry composed solely of idiots?)

Stereo's presentation is most deceptive. The telepaths do not speak; there is no musical soundtrack; explanations are delivered at intervals by a series of different (and unattributed) voices. I thought that what was being said referred directly to what was being shown; I was wrong. The film records events which happen chronologically after the events mentioned by the voices.

But, because I was relating what was said to what was shown and realising a discrepancy, I was thinking about what I was seeing. I realise, now, that I was not merely repeating mentally what I was told but actually producing original thoughts!

Stereo is a film which I must praise. It is the best science fiction film that I have seen since 2001: A Space Odyssey. But, unlike Kubrick's film, Cronenberg's film will not find a wide audience - because it was made in black and white, by an independent company, on a small budget. Get to see it if you can (I saw it at the ICA); and if you can't get to see it, feel sorry for yourself. This is where all films ought to be going. Why aren't they?

A.T. 29/11/1975

((Reading SF Club is showing both Stereo and another David Cronenberg film, Crimes of the Future, on March 8th, 1976; 8.00 pm; Palmer Building, Room 1.09, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading. Ring the editor for further details. For anyone wishing to show these films for a club, they are available from the distributors, The Other Cinema, in Newport Street, London.))

THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR (AA) directed and written by Robert Clouse; 1975; USA; Warner Bros; on general release on the ABC circuit

The Ultimate Warrior appeared at the local ABC cinema as a second feature to Permission to Kill, a spy thriller whose sole redeeming merit is Dirk Bogarde's masterful presence, without any publicity, and without having previously impinged on my consciousness. I went to see the film expecting little more than a mundane ad adventure, but with vague hopes of something better stirred by the presence of Max von Sydow in the cast. In the event, I was not disappointed.

The film opens with a series of shots of deserted and ruined urban scenes: empty freeways, skeletal tenements, silent skyscrapers. As elsewhere in the film, imaginative use is made of contemporary city scenes - presumably shot early on a Sunday morning - to conjure up a vision of a post-apocalyptic future, somewhat as Godard used contemporary Paris to suggest his future city in Alphaville. Words on screen inform us that this is New York, 2012. Immediately, our initial perception that some disaster has befallen civilization is reinforced by scenes of men scavenging for food - catching pigeons - who are attacked, robbed of their plunder and killed by a gang wielding cross-bows. As the gang walk through the deserted streets of New York, we draw back to Max von Sydow, on a rooftop, watching them. Around him is a roof-garden. It soon becomes apparent that von Sydow - the Baron - is the leader of a small commune surviving in a barricaded-off brownstone street by virtue of scavenged canned food, a well, and the genius of Cal, a horticulturist, who tends the roof-garden. The Baron, for reasons which later become apparent, wants to recruit a fighter, Tol Brynbar, who has been offering himself for hire by standing, statuequally naked to the waist, atop a pedestal in the street nearby. A venture is made by the Baron and a group of his men through the dangerous streets, an offer is made, but no response comes from Carson, the fighter. Perhaps the best shot of the film shows the Baron approaching the fighter, standing legs apart on his plinth. The camera tracks down from Carson's shaved head, down his magnificently muscled back, past his knife-belt, and ends peering between Carson's legs at the Baron. The contrast is immediately apparent between the strength of the fighter and the relative feebleness of the Baron.

Returning to their commune, the Baron's group is attacked by the street people, and are saved only by the timely intervention of the knife-wielding

Carson. He has decided to join them. The attraction? The Baron's supply of cigars. A nice touch this - something we accept as a natural part of life becomes worth a man's life. In conversation, it emerges that Carson is on his way to his family's island off the coast of S. Carolina, safe from the marauding gangs now leaving the dead cities. The Baron recruits Carson to help in his scheme to get Cal to safety and open space. For Cal is of unique and enormous value. He has developed hybrid strains of vegetables which will grow, even after the plagues which have killed other crops and destroyed civilization. He has a small supply of seeds, and these and he must be taken to safety. Carson agrees to help, but before the plan can be put into operation, tragedy intervenes. The commune is attacked by a raiding party from the group led by Carrot - a suitably unpleasant, vicious and wild-eyed villain - and Cal killed defending his crops. But the seeds survive, and the Baron arranges for Carson to take them and his (the Baron's) pregnant daughter (Ah - you thought this all sounded a bit easy, didn't you?) to the island, escaping the commune and New York by way of a basement leading to the underground railway system. The escape of Carson and Melinda is accomplished, but not before the other members of the commune - now doomed to collapse - have noticed their surreptitious exit. They turn on the Baron, believing he has betrayed them to save his daughter, beating him to death as he sits among his beloved clocks - a beating in which even his most loyal lieutenant joins. Then we see for a second time how close the "civilized" members of the commune are to the barbarity of the street people beyond their barricades. The first time this is seen is when a member of the commune is accused (wrongly) of stealing food, and is thrown out to the street people - and to certain death. The act of commune weakness, beating at his victim, beating and clawing at him, are little better than animals. Truly, the veneer of civilization is a thin one.

The last third of the film is an exciting and tension-filled chase through the underground, with Carrot and his gang in pursuit of Carson and Melinda. Carson fights off the pursuers, but Melinda, in the true style of weak females in sexist adventure stories, chooses to enter labour at the crucial stage of the chase. Carson delivers her son in a train carriage - a man of many talents, this - and with hardly a pause goes out to fight the last of Carrot's gang. Disposing of most of them with his knife in scenes where Brynner reveals his superb physical abilities, he is faced with Carrot, armed with a pace. With the pace entangled with Carson's wrist, and Carrot dangling by the linking wire over a pit, Carson is forced to a fashion reminiscent of the worst excesses of Conan, to cut off his own wrist. He crawls to a blazing torch and cauterizes the wound. Seemingly immune to shock, he is up and walking around - as is Melinda, who, obviously is not as weak as we thought and has recovered from her child-birth - off on the journey south. A final stop-frame shows the couple on a beach, an island bulking up in the background.

From this plot synopsis, it can be seen that The Ultimate Warrior is fundamentally a standard post-apocalyptic story. In fact, the average of reader will be able to predict the plot from the first few minutes. Yet for all this, it is involving, at times gripping, and is raised above the mundane by its occasional insights into the way human beings become animals so easily. Its use of contemporary locations (excepting the standard Hollywood back-lot street set, tricked out with wrecked cars and so on) emphasises the fragility of civilization based on technology. Director Robert Clouse has made the film with an economy of style which is both pleasing and entirely apt for his subject. He paces the chase sequences especially well. Vul Brynner plays himself, the samurai as ever, but he is excellent in the fight sequences. Joanne Mien as Melinda manages sparks of true emotion, as when Cal is killed, and generally is rather better than the script might have allowed a less talented actress to be. Max von Sydow portrays the ageing Baron, trying to preserve civilization amongst barbarism, with the sensitivity and quiet

strength which we might have expected. But what is the man who played in such masterpieces as Seventh Seal, A Passion and Bour of the Wolf doing in a film like this? (Indeed, what was he doing in a trashy horror flick like The Exorcist?) Oh well, I suppose even great actors have to pay the rent.

The Ultimate Warrior advances at in the cinema not one centimetre. But it is entertaining, and with Permission to Kill makes a double bill well worth the cost of a cinema ticket. It will do until something better comes along.

C.J.F 18/12/1975

AN EVENING FOR JAMES BLISH

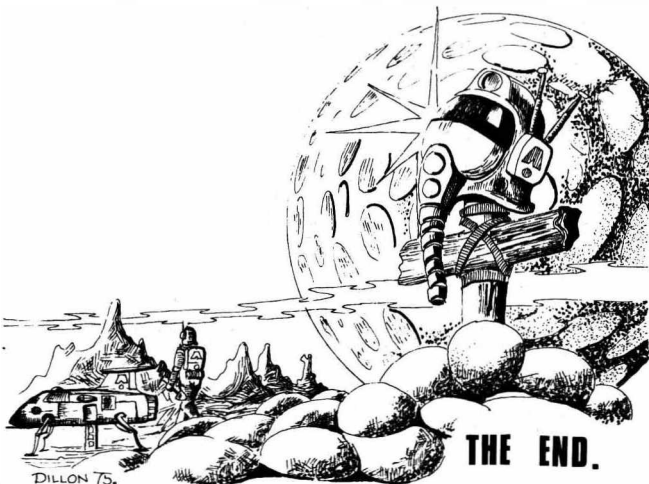
In Memoriam

February 19th 1976

James Blish, author of A Case of Conscience, Black Easter and Doctor Mirabilis, and a distinguished contributor to the development of science fiction in this country, died on 30th July 1975.

Well-known for his explorations of man and morality in contexts of past and future history, James Blish's world included poetry, music, ironic fantasy, James Joyce - and Star Trek

At 8.00 in the cinema of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (The Mall, London) friends and colleagues will present their images and reflections upon James Blish, the work and the man. The evening is open to the public at an charge, tickets may be booked from January 2nd 1976 from the ICA Box Office (01-930-6393).





{(This letter column is short because: a) we didn't get so many letters, and b) because if this issue is not typed up within the next few hours, it won't get to the printers in time to reach you for Christmas. Other letters, as usual, in the Newsletter - Ed)}

Andy Sawyer, 14A, Fifth Avenue, London E12

Vector itself seemed nicely balanced; I like to see a lot of reviews (after all, this is surely part of your raison d'être - informing people what is available) but some nice solid critical articles add weight to what should be a fairly serious journal. Reviews themselves, even long ones, tend to be just someone's personal opinion, expressed more or less well, rather than serious criticism. This is as it should be, but reviews without criticism leads to incoherence. I enjoyed some of your reviewers' pieces, hated others, and was impressed by Peter Hyde's fortitude in not yielding to the obvious temptation when reviewing Servants of the Wankh (a title which in no way can be suppressed)

Speaking of playing with ... words: Bob Shaw was, well, Bob Shaw - an excellent light lead-in to the two more serious articles by Edmund Cooper and Chris Hammett. The latter produced something very worthwhile. I got the impression from your editorial that you seemed to be worried about the acceptance of his article - in my opinion it provides a serious, thought-provoking core to Vector. Obviously, we can get too "academic" but to neglect the serious side of sf is to reduce us all to a bunch of frivolous wankers, (or Wankbros) and we might as well pack up, go home and wait for the Apocalypse. We have to get the balance right - and I think you've done it with Vector 70 - may we have more such articles

One specific criticism - obviously Mr Hammett couldn't - or wasn't, really - bring in every single instance of his thesis; however, I'd think A Clockwork Orange (both versions - Burgess's book and Kubrick's film) provides a classic example of "social futurism" with respect to "the position of man in the city of the future" (V70, p 17). The far future - that of Trentor or even City - can be speculated about; the near future - that of Alec and his droogies - has to be lived through, and the relevance of A Clockwork Orange to the here-and-now is shown quite simply by the distasteful fact that some would-be Alces found that the film related so well to their own particular environments that imitation of the scene where the doander is beaten up became the obvious

thing to do. That, if you like, is a "future city - on the streets" and that realistically brutal vision - the antithesis in many ways of City and untouched in Foundation although, admittedly, present by implication in much of Ballard - surely deserves a mention?

Having said that, I'll leave with congratulations to all involved in Vector 70 for a job well done. May I make one final comment on Sonya Porter's letter, which I've just noticed - maybe Moonbase I snuck because it was Peyton place in space, and didn't really get into people. Gadgets? Yes, of course, I like gadgets but I'd rather watch Tomorrow's World than the current "science fiction" abortion, Space 1999 - at least there you get the gadgets unadulterated with any pathetic attempts at drama. Space 1999 shows the essential poverty of the purely "gadget" approach to sf - brilliant technical effects, no characterization whatsoever, wooden acting and a script which explains the how and why with the most ridiculous pseudo-scientific double-talk - even I could see through it! Like Sonya, I love gadgets - but I think there has to be more - a good script, an original situation, some humour or even some genuine philosophical/social/political questions raised (e.g. 2001) which had most of the qualities I've described of 1999 but ends up a genuinely superb... epic is the only word - what a difference two years makes!!) Otherwise the thing fails. In London, Space 1999 clashes with Doctor Who - after several episodes of the former I decided there was only one choice - at least there's some humour and the occasional valid bit of concept going down with the Doctor.

Ken Bulmer, 18 Orchard Way, Horamondea, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 8LA

...I write to express my appreciation for Vector 70. I trust you are planning a super-bumper issue for no. 100? (Oh no, have a heart, Ken, that's a five years' editorship you're asking of me... what's going to be my state by then?!)) There is much good in this issue and I see that you have cleverly placed Sonya Porter's letter on the backcover so that her very sensible advice about the use shall be seen. Her last couple of sentences make one realise there are people out there who operate on the same wavelength as us idiots. I've read through the letters and I see general agreement that you are doing a good job, which is correct; also I am seeing large quantities of gratuitous advice. You cannot follow it all, clearly, for a great deal is contradictory. So, at the risk of telling you how to cook eggs, I'll just say that you must soldier on with Vector in your own style doing what you think is right. So far you seem to have hit the bullseye and are to be congratulated. If you put in the stuff you like and feel will be useful and interesting etc to the readership then you shouldn't go far wrong. Is the reviewer James Corley real? Or is this someone we all might know and love? (Yes, he's real - or at least, if a spirit or steller he's got a very good "automatic writer"!)) Edmund Cooper's piece moves you to comment, bottom of p.3. I'd suggest you could get an argument that if violence is used in an immoral way the piece would not be art. It does seem as though Cooper is saying that it's all right if the guys in the white hats shoot the guys in the black hats, but not the other way round. One most interesting notion I've been thinking about recently which is seldom brought up in this kind of discussion is that we tend to look at violence - of Cooper here - in terms of the late 20th century. We must do this, of course, because that's where we live. But I've been doing some historical work recently and it does appear that violence was accepted in ways we today would regard as unbelievable. If the lord of the manor rode up and cut off a serf's head the serf knew that was the right thing to do and the lord was correct, even if the serf had no idea in what way he had sinned. And after all the talk about Modish violence of the orange and rollball end 1984 and such-like types, true violence is still found in everyday life and in everyday situations of which we are all aware and look at and condone. Won't the folk of a thousand years' hence look back and say how on earth did those poor devils of the 20th C. put up with it all?

Helen Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Glasgow G72 9NA

Vector 69 was there to greet us when we came back from our Orkney holiday at the end of August. I was delighted to see it and after reading it was inspired by your editorial and enthusiasm. Typical of me, I was going to do some praising so I put it off but if I were complaining I'd have done it immediately. I thoroughly enjoyed Vector - please, please continue to print it. I am not a member of the BSFA (my husband is) but after your standing up for it I intend to join.

I have a soft spot for the BSFA, through it we went to our first con at Chester. I got my first glimpse of people who were just names - Brunner, Shaw, Dulmer, Pohl, Niven and best of all Harry Harrison. Before I bore you with my thoughts on Vector, my background - too Irish, selective of reader (anything husband Sandy selects and buys I read). Parts of Vector I enjoyed - Ellis and Shaw articles. Book reviews I read with mixed feelings. Unless I've already read a book I don't usually bother with them - I like reading books without knowing the plots but Rob Holdstock's review of Yesterday's Children caught my eye and I MUST read it as soon as I can - no book could be that bad, could it?

I do hope Vector 70 is printed if not already on its way. Please keep up your previous infectious good humour and enthusiasm.

Dave Langford, Boundary Hall, Tadley, Basingstoke Hants RG26 6ND

For many weeks I have been brooding on the possibility of sending you a letter about Vector and the BSFA Newsletter, a letter in which praise and/or hatred of those twin should be so closely intermingled that even your keen dissecting blade could not extract more than one word or two in answer for reproduction in either. Thus the hot potato would fall back to amazement at the (apparently) heavily censored Langford letters, which would read something like "existential, relevant... deeply involving, shitty ... in one place and "written... read... criticised... expurgated... imploded..." in another. Backing away from the thought of writing with all the adjectives applicable to Vector and all the verbs to the BSFA - or vice versa - I find myself constrained to write, in haste, dehomogenised and readily separable prose.

So Vector. Passing over to 69 for the simple reason that you've defused my protesting analysis thereof by sending me no 70 - we come to 70. Again, as always, as ever, can nothing be done to dim the doc's brilliance? - Bob Shaw steals the show. Though, as it happens, this was the first of his talks that I'd heard before seeing in print (my hearing aid conked out at Tymocor) and Time-Travelers, as a result, was three times as funny through its dragging back of the night and sound of Bob in action: beautifully deadpan, beautifully timed. Why doesn't someone issue tapes of these things commercially? (Actually, I believe George May has some plans along these lines, but my knowledge is foggy.)

One of the things most deplored in reviewing is the plot summary; and Edmund Cooper's piece looks at first like a series of summaries held together by very thin threads of argument. However, the thing comes off because of the telling, which has a gusto reminiscent of Asie in Man Hags. Probably better as a talk than as an article, though. Chris Hannett's following piece takes a bit too long over the same sort of exposition - the looks at the stories are interesting but again... Summary!

Vector is looking like Foundation, with all the titbit stuff. Rob Shaw, plus some reasonably intelligent reviews, plus one or three interesting letters: these save it from the dreaded creeping academe. The fantasy reviews are definitely too short. I believe people like to read fairly long reviews.

of fantasies they've read themselves - okay (rip off the mask), I do anyway - thus to concentrate on the more prominent zines, or the most intelligent and interesting, or best of all the ones the reviewer wants most to talk about - that's what's needed. We can buy Peter Roberts' Little Gem Guide if we want to know about addresses and titles to the exclusion of all else.

As a lot of people will be telling you, Muck-Witz the Windgod in Flying Sorcerers is Sam Moskowitz; Filfomar the Rivergod is Phil Farmer; the Woin'bar/Mil'wan business has to do (my source here is TAC) with Star Trek and TV Ratings. I would much like to know who Sp'oce the god of slime may be. But I digress.

The Newsletter reads like a letter, without the vast efforts of cultivated style which ooze from Vector. Not much for comment, really: apart from the Reports and Serious Bits, which show the anticipated state of chaos in every ramification of your far-flung organism (organisation?). ((oh, come on, Dave, they show so much thing. They show that the committee members are clearing up the chaotic state left by the previous incompetents. We are in fact well organised - Ed)) It would be nice to see you actively seeking news as recommended - bomb in hand, you slink into the Tan - Horror! was that an active search for news instead of (as I innocently thought) a boozey and incoherent conversation, at 3 am on Saturday, Moricon last? ((Please Dave, keep quiet about that, Malcolm will be very angry if he finds I've been talking to Christine again, nope, I mean, actively gathering news of the Edwards household - Ed)) Already I may be quoted to my disadvantage. But my revenge will be terrible! I shall go forth and seek news actively myself. News-divining-rad attemble, I totter off into the night. What is this? A pub? Let us seek news therein for the next four hours..

Pete Frenford, 10 Dalkeith Road, Reddish, Stockport

Many thanks for Vector 70. I enjoyed the Edmund Cooper article, Violence in SF, although I thought he covered the topic a little thinly. It should have been a two-part article at least.

I was very surprised that he did not mention Norman Spinrad, and even more so that author's Men in the Jungle. A more horrific picture of cannibalistic society could not be painted in print..the final scenes in the book where wholesale carnage is carried out in the Sports (I) Arena, well, one could only blanch a little at it.

And the ugly little scene of the High Priest's initiation ceremony, where the person who wishes to join must eat the arm of a freshly roasted infant. Do we say that we must censor a novel of this nature, or do we just shrug our shoulders and pass it by. To be honest, I would not like my kids to get their hands on it .. not for a few years anyway.

From the rail of Cooper's article are we to understand that he condones pornography and carnography if it is well written? If one starts to slap censorship on books, the badly written and well written must surely come under the same hammer. The fear of the wide boys coming into the sf field to sell their wares is disturbing, in the fact that it will undermine the years of careful building that sf has had to go through, to fulfill its acceptance in the literary world. The whole concept of using sf for a vehicle of this type of writing can be shattered at the publishers' door. For the public can only choose to read what it is given. It could be argued that the moral standards in books can be allowed to go down, because the average intelligence of readership is rising. Which seems to be therefore able to differentiate more easily between bad and good writing. So it would seem that the fear is not that the sf field will be used for porn, etc. But that this type of writing will be well below the standard that we now accept. The thought of bad writing and bad porn and bad sf makes me shudder.

Chris Morgan, 81, Knightsdale Road, Westham, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 0HU

...I should launch into a long, scintillating LOC which praises V70 to the heavens, comments provocatively on some of its articles, provides excellent suggestions for your author collaboration competition and even says something meaningful about the BSPA. BUT, I'm so weary after typing out 1500 words of reviews that I don't feel like composing a long LOC.

V70 is a good issue. I'm not over-impressed by either Edmund Cooper's or Chris Hannett's treatments of their subjects, but both articles were worth printing, if only for the controversial response. Bob Shaw's contribution is (it almost goes without saying) a joy to read. You know, when the genius inherent in my fiction is finally recognised and a con committee invited me to be guest of honour, a lot of people are going to be awfully disappointed with my speech, because it won't be half as good as the speeches that Bob Shaw and Jim White seem to turn out so regularly whether they are gods or not. The review section is quite nicely balanced. Your editorial is not too preachy, and the layout is very nice. (I liked the bit on p 39 which says "Chris Morgan will be making a come-back". You make me sound like an ageing actor who has just managed to conquer his drinking problem.)

I feel I must make a few comments on Chris Hannett's article. These are, I'm afraid, not linked by a single coherent framework of theory (for reasons of lack of time and energy) but are presented as a series of numbered points with page references to the article where appropriate.

- 1) (p17) Hannett seems not to have read much of the 1970s, or even of the late 1960s, which invalidates most of his introduction.
- 2) (p17) Social futurism hardly seems to me to be an adequate synonym for science fiction, which is more the literature of speculation than of the future and more concerned with gadgets than with society.
- 3) (p18) The quotation from Emrys Jones is sadly true, because most of writers, even when portraying far futures, tend either to retain present-day norms or, even worse, to perpetuate the golden myth of a never-never USA where all husbands have 9-5 office jobs, all wives are solely housewives (looking after the two children), all families live happily in small apartments, and there are no problems of economic recession, women's lib, ethnic minorities or urban terrorism. It takes a real visionary to tear a hole in this framework by for example putting grazing sheep on the apartment block roof. But gradually as authors are beginning to portray new frameworks which are both different and convincing, e.g. The World Inside by Robert Silverberg.
- 4) (p18) There are stories which show a reversal of current trends, of which one of the best known must be Brian Aldiss's Graybeard, in which, due to a zero birthrate, Oxford reverts to being almost a mediaeval city.
- 5) (p18) By concentrating on stories which focus on the city, Hannett misses many very good throwaway ideas concerning future cities. (No examples are necessary; the list is very long.)
- 6) (p24) The problem of plenty has been dealt with by Fred Pohl in at least two short stories: "The Man Who Ate the World" and (I think) "The Miss Plague".
- 7) Hannett seems to have ignored the differing roles of the city, as portrayed in many novels. I offer a selection: the city as battlefield (Brunner's Stand on Zanzibar, etc, though Heintz in 1975 is worse), the city as bero (Silverberg's The World Inside), the city as frightener (Charles D. Pluney's The Unholy City), the city as lung-destroyer (Brunner's The Sheep Look Up, etc.), the city as enigma (Delany's Dhalgren, Farmer's Inside Outside).
- 8) Three most important topics, inseparable from science fiction's urban vision.

have been either ignored or else touched on too briefly: transport, race and the family. Transport in cities has been the theme of at least one novel (Brunner's The Squares of the City) and a number of good (though deliberately exaggerated) short stories. The problem of race is usually side-stepped by writers who, if they refer to it at all, assume melting-pot effects to continue to the point where the entire human race has light brown skin; but what if the ethnic village effect is the one to persist, so that London still has independent, endogamous communities of West Indians, Sikhs, Cypriots, Pakistanis, Poles, etc in a hundred years time? The family of the future is nearly always seen as the nuclear family (two parents and their children only), but why should there not be a swing back to the extended or joint family (grandparents/married siblings, too), due to the breakdown in social services, as in Disch's underrated 3347

8) Finally I must mention the original anthology Future City edited by Roger Smeed, for which stories were commissioned on that theme.

10) I want to make it clear that I'm not knocking Chris Hannett for the sake of knocking him; his subject would easily fill a large book, so the fact that he fails to do it justice in sixteen pages is not surprising.

There you are, Chris. That came out a lot longer than I had expected and was written without much reference to my collection of sf.

Andrew Tidmarsh, 53 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PG

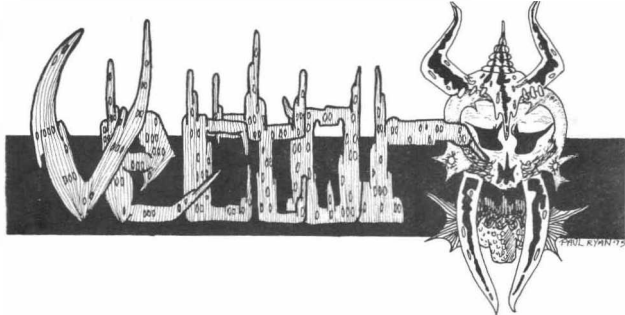
((These fragments from letters from Andrew, one of our most prolific as well as most recent contributors, provide an insight into his thinking on sf - Id))

(26/10) ...You can probably see that I am trying to formulate a coherent view of what I think of ought to be and what writers ought to be aiming for. More work is still necessary in this area. I feel that sf can grow from within and still only be damaged by intrusions from "outsiders" who write novels that conform to what they consider is the science-fictional stereotype

(22/11) ...I hope you don't think that I am losing sight of the basic intention of Vector (ie to draw people to and into sf). My views are relevant to the continued well-being of a field/genre that I love, because I am trying to say how people should expect sf to be, and therefore how I think it should develop. I am against "escapeism" (though I might concede that, if things in the world are bad, people need to be able to escape in order to be able to survive) because it is a negative attitude, a negative form of behaviour. How will our world (the world in which I grew up) pull through the crises it is now submerged in if our people are content to ignore REALITY? And, how will the world be changed by people who are only marginally aware that such a thing even exists? That is why I don't want sf to become, or to continue to be, escapist fiction. I am reassured by the few attempts that are being made to drag sf away from fantasy.

(29/11) ...I think you've got four articles from me that you haven't yet published. Do you think, when and if you do publish them, that you could indicate when they were written? I'd like readers to realise how my thoughts have progressed from article to article. I bring this subject up because I intend to have a rest for a few months from non-fiction so as to devote more time to what I originally came into writing to do: to write short stories. I am only intending to rest from non-fiction temporarily; I will be back. Don't think that fandom or science fiction has lost a devotee; I will merely be abouting with another voice.

((People - Don't let Andrew gaffate! Send him - or me - a letter today to tell him he must carry on with at least a bit of non-fiction writing. You must keep your hand in, Andrew. Besides, what am I going to do with all those gaps in the film review column? - Id))



WHISPERS FROM THE PAST....BACK NUMBERS OF VECTOR

70: Autumn 1975 - Time Travellers Among Us by Bob Shaw, Violence in SF by Edmund Conner, SF's Urban Vision by Chris Hammett, plus book, film and fanzine reviews

69: Summer 1975 - The Science in SF by James Blisch, Early one Oxford Morning by Brian Aldiss, The Value of Bad SF by Bob Shaw, Science or Fiction by Tony Sudbery, film and book reviews

67/68: (the last Malcolm Edwards issue) Three Views of Tolkien by Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and Peter Nicholls, Letter from America by Philip K. Dick, Period of Transition by Michael G. Conner, After the Renaissance by Brian Aldiss, Machines and Inventions by Brian M. Stableford, Down-at-Real Galaxy by Brian Aldiss, book and film reviews - Spring 1976

68: July/August 1973 - The Robot in SF by Brian Stableford, D.G. Compton: An Interview, D.G. Compton and New Standards of Excellence by Mark Adlard, book, film and fanzine reviews

65: May/June 1973 - Gene Wolfe: An Interview, Lost People by Pamela Sargent, The Man Who Could Work Miracles by Brian Aldiss, Ad Astra by Bob Shaw, Author's Choice by Roger Zelazny, book and fanzine reviews

64: March/April 1973 - The Android and the Human by Philip K. Dick, The Extraordinary Behaviour of Ordinary Materials by Bob Shaw, Author's Choice by Paul Anderson, book and fanzine reviews

61: September/October 1972 - The Arts in SF by James Blisch, an Interview with Peter Tate by Mark Adlard, book and fanzine reviews

60: June 1972 - Through a Glass Darkly by John Brunner, SF and the Cinema by Philip Strick, The Frenzied Living Thing by Bruce Gillespie, Edward John Carnall 1914-1972 by Harry Harrison, Dan Morgan, Ted Tubb and Brian Aldiss, convention report by Peter Roberts, book and fanzine reviews

59: Spring 1972 - An Introduction to Stanislaw Lem by Franz Rottensteiner, A Good Niding by Stanislaw Lem, A Cruel Miracle by Malcolm Edwards, Why I Took a Writing Course... and Didn't Become a Writer by Dick Howard, SF Criticism 10 Theory and Practice by Pamela Hulmer, book reviews

Each of these issues is available from the editor at the price of 50p (£1). Please make cheques payable to Vector. Hurry, hurry - many are in short supply!