VECTOR 80

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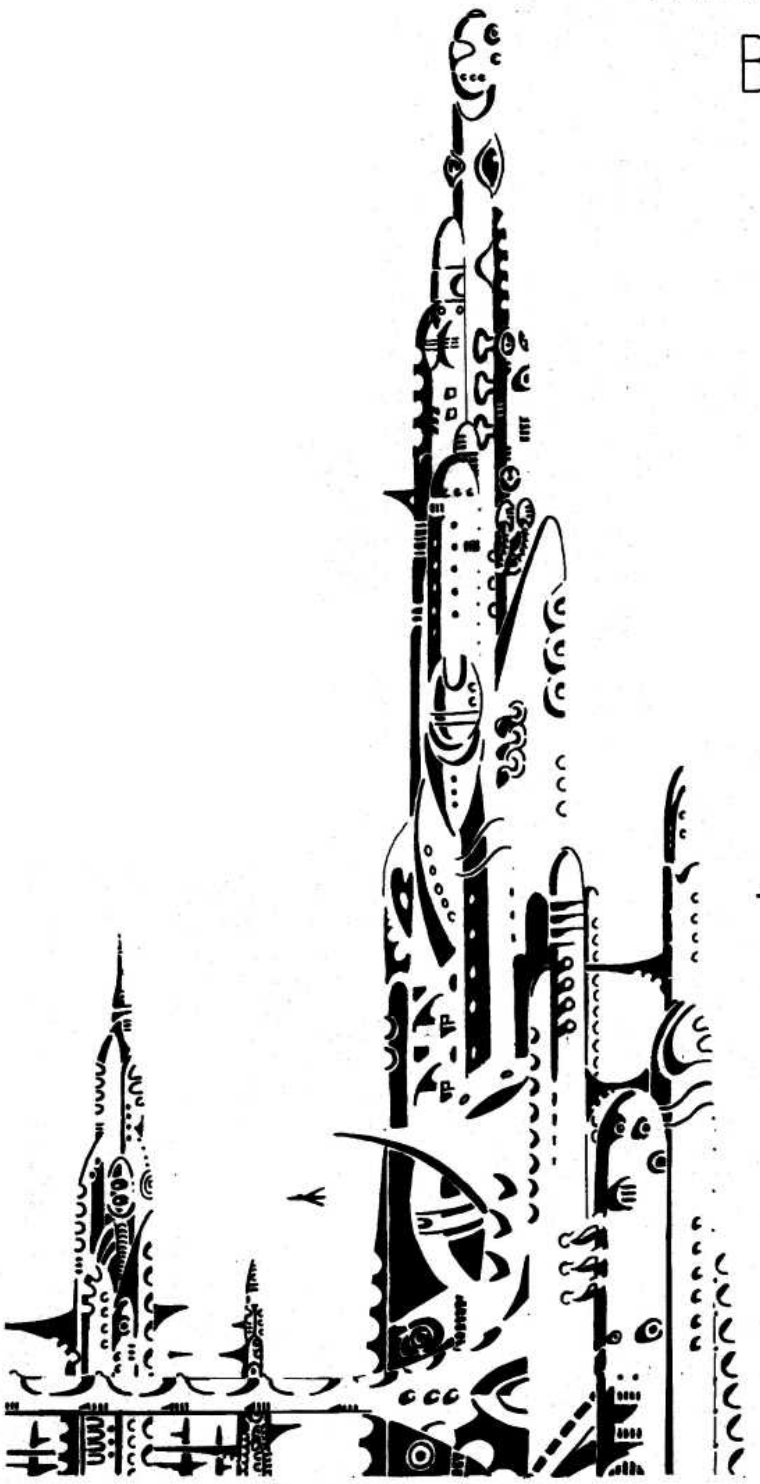

A.HIGGINS

VECTOR 79 MAR-APRIL 1977

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This issue is for Brian and Sarah, who are OK. RFT rule - OK? And sod the technicians.

VECTOR 80 is a product of the BSFA and Chris Fowler, both of whom are ruled by the IBM Selectric (OK?). The IBM is planning to run for Vice-Chairman next year; it would like your support. Chris Fowler would like to thank Dora, Jane, Colette (and all in Adv. Sec.), and Steve and Another Person Who Does Not Like Dedications.

Motto: (TJ take note!): "Dyslexia rule - KO?"

A Song In The Depth Of The Galaxies

by David Wingrove

(i) Toward the Distorted Mirror

Music and literature: both of them mirrors of their age. Thus it could once be comfortably said. Both served in the role of social commentary, as historical embellishment, poetical incarnation of the zeitgeist. A careful comparative study of these two forms over the last six hundred years would show clearly this complex relationship and illustrate how effectively they complemented each other in this role.

And why state the above if I were not now going to illustrate how this situation no longer exists.

Music, like literature and art, consists of many strata. I state the obvious, but sometimes that is necessary. Within this small (small?) genre of sf there is a diversity unparallelled elsewhere. But what impression does Joe Soak have of it? Doctor Who, Space 1999, Dan Dare, Monsters, Rockets and Robots! The better-informed may even have read some of the stuff - Wells, Orwell, Perry Rhodan! Thus with music. To many the shell is the egg, and they don't bother to look at what is underneath the shell. Pop, light orchestral, trad. jazz - that is the shell of contemporary music. And how does this relate to sf? Ahah, I return to my first statement, mirrors of the age, for in sf we have finally a literature that attempts to look beyond its age, to extrapolate and consider alternatives. It is a distorted mirror, if you like, not entirely escaping the limitations of this present, though seeking something else in the reflection, something innovative, some aspect of transition. However, until very recently it was most noticeable that there was no movement within music that parallelled this situation. I can propound several of my own theories as to why this should be so, but they can all be condensed into one simple factor: technology. Until the last ten years there had been very little radical change in musical instrumentation, and within the last decade, as in so many other fields, this has been rectified to the point that one man can take the place of an orchestra, (and play a damn sight louder, too!) one instrument can reproduce every conceivable sound, and a computer can write a "symphony". Words can be shaped stylistically by the human mind; music needs technology to achieve the parallel result. Hence the gap. Hence the absence for so long of an sf-oriented musical form.

And where do we find this form?

Certainly not in the BBC's Radio Workshop, nor (heaven help us!) on a re-issued copy of the Tornados' "Telstar". Grab the headphones and a teaspoon; we'll break the shell and see what's within.

(ii) A Satisfactory Medium

Jazz failed to provide a satisfactory medium for sf-orientated music primarily because it was a dionysian strand of the musical tree; music of the body, a spontaneous outpouring. More basically it failed because the bias was upon instrumentation, and its scant lyrical message was existential rather than apocalyptic. It was an off-shoot of jazz, however, a nephew several-times-removed , that finally captured the spirit of the genre; that incorporated the grandiose with the isolate, the gothic with the absurd, the technological with the fantastic. Contemporary rock music (and I do not mean all rock music, or even more than perhaps 5 - 10 % of rock) has adopted the ideas and imagery of sf as its currency and is slowly producing a whole body of music that must be considered alongside the literary, artistic and cinematic offerings when evaluating what sf is at present. Some of the names may be familiar, others completely alien to the average sf fan (and I hope none of you out there are average). One fact is certain, however; most of the musicians seriously producing these works earn far more than the better-known sf writers. Yet little is known or heard of them within sf circles.

If I utter a few names such as Yes, Pink Floyd, Hawkwind, the Grateful Dead and David Bowie - ah, then you've heard of some of them! But what of Peter Hammill and Amon Duul, Can and Magma, Khan and High Tide. The list is much longer. Rock music is impregnated with sf references to the core. Its semasiology is identical to that of sf (fantasy or fiction). What follows is only a brief summary of a few examples of a far wider range of musical offerings that originate from within sf and are much concerned with topics that are the constant diet of the sf writer.

(iii) The Aerosol-Grey Machine

If gothic literature has its counterpart, in music, it is in the work of Peter Hammill, individually or as part of the group, Van Der Graaf Generator. His powerful, insistent themes consistently overlap the concerns of the sf writer and throughout a sequence of masterful albums he has explored numerous aspects of the solitary human adrift in a hostile environment. Much of this consists of personal statements of a contemporary nature - songs of disillusioned love and religious condemnation - and so does not concern us for the purposes of this specialised resume.

The 1970 album The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other contained two songs that are immediately identifiable as sf:

> "Flame sucks between the balls of steel;
> nothing moves, the air itself congeals...
> Look at the flame if you want to,
> hear the sharp crack of the fission,
> smell the brief vapour of ozone,
> feel static motion!"

The words are from "What would Robert have said", and the reference is direct (to R. J. Van der Graaf of MIT), but it is the unusual use of instruments and Hammill's distorted vocal style (the distortion

physical and not technical) that complete this vision of a new era of omniscience. The growl and rumble of electric organ and drums beneath a screeching saxophone makes for disturbing listening. The atmosphere is threatening, hinting at overwhelming force, lulling and then lurching into open hostility. And such effects could not have been achieved without the considerable developments in instrumentation of the last decade.

More blatant is "After the Flood" which describes (musically and lyrically) the apocalyptic demise of Mankind as a nuclear war rages and the polar ice-caps melt (an ingenious effect upon organ). It is blunt. It is simple. But the simplicity marks this down as the ultimate holocaust song. There is even a touch of bathotic humour:

> "The final man is very small,
> plunging in for his final bathe..."

Again - and like all of Hammill/VDG's music, it is not easy listening. The central riff, with its atonal basis, has a discom fi ting effect, followed immediately by Einstein's unforgettable prophesy of "total annihilation". It is powerful stuff, capturing the grandeur and overwhelming superiority of nature and emphasising the frailty of Man.

On their third album H To He, Who Am The Only One, Hammill set out to write a specifically sf piece. The result was "Pioneers Over C", a chilling tale of how the first men to travel in excess of the speed of light cease to exist. I could quote the whole song, for it is a marvellous example of sf poetry. Here is a brief extract:

"I am the lost one, I am the one you fear, I am the lost one.
I am the one who went up into space, or stayed where I was,
Or didn't exist in the first place..."

The whole conception is perfect. The music emphasises the isolation, the emptiness, the fear and the confusion. Again there are the atonal riffs, a trademark of VDGG, and when the music stops there is Hammill's voice alone in the void, intimidating and shrill.

Another album, another song. On Pawn Hearts Hammill presented the track "Lemmings", an examination of the question "What course is there left but to die, in search of something we're really not too sure of?" The song is of a future that is already seeded in the present; where the young can see no point in continuing. This stark visualisation of the world as a machine "out of control" is soberingly like the futures visualised by writers such as Brunner. But is is a song with hope:

"Cowards are they who run today, the fight is beginning -
no war with knives, fight with our lives, lemmings can
teach nothing."

On his solo albums Hammill tends to produce a much richer, if less straightforward, tableau of songs. He creates scenarios that would make fine Hammer movies, and they read like a colaescence of Fritz Leiber and H. P. Lovecraft, the lyrics opulent and loaded with throwaway references. "(In the) Black Room" on the album Chameleon In The Shadow Of the Night is the first of these inner-space operas, pulsing and poignant, followed by the even more extreme "A Louse is not a Home" (with a blatant reference to Aldiss' Barefoot In The Head and the idea of omnivision) on the album The Silent Corner And the Empty Stage (which has two tracks which are also sf: "Modern" and "Red Shift"). The third of these powerful solo efforts is "Gog and Magog (In Bromine Chambers)" on the In Camera album, which attempts to relate God to Evil, Good to the Devil and Heaven to Hell. Here I am perhaps straying from direct sf references (i.e. there are no berserk robots, alternate worlds, space ships or little green men). But the wealth of material that Hammill assimilates into his visions necessitates more than a brief mention, and I judge them here much as one would evaluate a marginally sf story by an established sf writer; in terms of its relationship to the genre.

(iv) On A Sailing Ship To Nowhere

An important aspect of the preponderance of the music I am discussing here is its dependence upon the technological advances evidenced in instruments such as the electric bass, the clavierorgan, the moog, the tone generator, the copi-cat and various other instruments of distortion and amplification. What was not to be expected however, but which is nevertheless more than apparent, is the technical skill of the musicians making use of these new implements of sound. VDGG are excellent and well-disciplined musicians. So too are Yes, King Crimson, Magma and Pink Floyd. It must therefore be said immediately that without the oral punctuation supplied by these newly-developed intruments, the lyrics could seem rather trite, even banal.

And so I come to Yes, who are, in my opinion, the best of the musicians I shall discuss, though not perhaps the group most deeply interested and involved in sf. In their music this condition of the musical punctuating the lyrical is developed to a fine art:

"Yesterday, a morning came, a smile upon your face.
Caesar's palace, morning glory, see the human race.
On a sailing ship to nowhere, leaving anyplace.
If the summer change to winter, yours is no disgrace."

An excerpt from the post-holocaust song "Yours Is No Disgrace" on their Yes Album. Yes can be obscure lyrically and yet there is never any doubt of the emotional intent. The music lifts the words to a higher level of meaning. Through tracks like "Astral Traveller", "Yours Is No Disgrace", "Starship Trooper", "Close To The Edge" and "The Gates of Delirium" they have pursued a relentless course, undertaking to illustrate the movement by man towards a higher state, a state of grace. In their philosophy the individual may be frail but never unimportant, the species often in error but never, ultimately, less than sublime. Theirs is an optimistic view in direct contrast to VDGG's dystopian visions

Jon Anderson, their singer and lyricist, admits to the influence of the writer, T. Lobsang Rampa, and the abstruse wording of the last three albums is certainly evidence of this influence. Their pieces inhabit a fantasy realm of the spirit, a mystic wonderland linked tenuously by their imaginations. Their choice of Roger Dean as the illustrator of their albums is only part of this overall pattern (see SFM, vol 1, no 11 and vol 3, no 3 on Dean's work). Of all their songs/pieces, the most directly associated with sf is"Starship Trooper" on The Yes Album. It is a powerful piece of work with several references to Heinlein's book:

> "Sister Bugler, flying high above,
> Shining wings, onward to the sun..."

Its climax, "Wurm", with its gradual, repetitive build-up, convincingly evokes the image of a mile-long spaceship thundering through the void, majestic and Van Vogtian. The heavy bass notes, the forceful, descending organ chords and the slow, regular insistence of the drum produce a spine-tingling crescendo that eventually erupts. Sf's answer to Wagner!

Yes have become more subtle, if no less grandiose, since the time of "Starship Trooper", and their 80-minute work, Tales From Topographic Oceans can as easily be interpreted in sf terms as it can in terms of a spiritual search. It traces Mankind's development from near-lizard to a creature of pollution, cities and war, and then extrapolates towards the final man who acknowledges his "source" and admits to the harmony of life. "The Ritual", the fourth and final part of this work, culminates in the ritual incantation: "Nous sommes du Soleil..." (We are of the sun...) Perhaps Utopias are unpopular in current sf, subdued and submerged beneath the weight of innumerable dystopias, yet the musical presentation of these ideas by Yes makes it very hard to reject either their emotional or intellectual appeal. Personally I am

sceptical of Utopias (and wouldn't want one if you gave it to me...) but if they played music of a comparative standard all day and every day I think I could easily succumb.

And Yes are still improving, still exploring their fantastic realm. Relayer, their last album (at time of writing), and its major piece "The Gates Of Delirium", continues this investigation of the dominion of the spirit. As in all important sf they examine an aspect of the mundane world outside of its natural parameters and by stripping it of its secular trappings highlight its failings and its marvels:

> "Soon, Oh soon the light
> Ours to shape for all time, ours the right.
> The sun will lead us
> Our reason to be here..."

(v) The Fight's Between The Blue You Once Knew

There is a whole tangential off-shoot of sf-orientated rock at which I have only the time (and inclination - it's a deep diversion) to hint at in this summary, that is: purely instrumental music inspired by and dedicated to the genre. Much of German contemporary music is of this nature, and it is, in itself, a growing sub-culture. Alas that the originators of this highly imaginative hybrid are no longer with us, or, should I say, they are but their interest has waned... the vision has withered and died. Pink Floyd astonished the complacent musical world in 1967 with an album that combined fantasy, sf and children's songs in a magical way. The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn (incidentally a chapter-title from The Wind In The Willows) presented "Astronomy Domine", "Interstellar Overdrive", "Matilda Mother" and "Chapter 24". The music was pregnant with the imagery of sf, the hollow thunder of drums and the pulse of bass and organ. Then, in 1968, they produced an even better offering with A Saucerful Of Secrets, less magical but more mystical. Besides the title track there were three other tracks to entice the imagination: "Let There Be More Light", "Remember A Day", and "Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun". The words hinted and the music completed the image; the longer songs instrumental journeys between the planets. (Listen to the quiet passage in "Set The Controls..." on their live Ummagumma album.) A promising debut hinted at better things to come, and the promise was at first fulfilled. "The Narrow Way" on Ummagumma (with the live versions of their earlier works), "Cirrus Minor" on More and "Echoes" on Meddle - these were all developments of those early themes. But the impetus slowly drained away, leaving only the lifelessness of technically perfect albums such as Dark Side Of The Moon. There are no concessions to sf. The visions have clouded over, to be resurrected only at concerts when "the old stuff" is played. The early offerings were gems, and we have them to thank for theever-widening sub-culture of sf-related instrumentalists, typified by Tangerine Dream, Clearlight Symphony and a host of German rock bands. The first of these deserves a brief mention, being the only performers of this manner of music to have reached a wider, commercial audience.

(vi) Sunrise In The Third System

Tangerine Dream picked up the threads Pink Floyd appeared to have discarded with A Saucerful of Secrets and in 1970 and 1971 produced two crude but interesting albums, Electronic Meditation and Alpha Centauri. Like Stockhausen they "prepared" their music mathematically, writing their compositions as graphical representations, combining electronic and natural sounds to form a haunting texture. Alpha Centauri is heavily biased towards sf. The title track and the two smaller pieces, "Sunrise In The Third System" and "Fly And Collision of Comas Sola" all evoke the atmosphere of space and distance, of isolation and the vaccum. The climax of Alpha Centauri with its echoed voice (as if relayed from afar), majestic organ chords and wistful choir, is most impressive and is a good example of what this type of music can aspire to. Five more albums have appeared to date: Ziet (1972), Atem (1973), Phaedra (1974), Rubycon (1975) and Ricochet (1975). With Phaedra they reached a high standard in both performance and composition, blending electronic tones with near perfection. Tangerine Dream, and their many contemporaries and emulators, are producing music which can best be described as "soundtracks for the imagination". The lack of overt human influence and the repetitive nature of much of the music draws one into the music much more than could otherwise be achieved with words. It is beautiful, peaceful and complex; certainly not the pulsing, body-shaking stuff one expects from a "rock" album these days. Tangerine Dream are the best introduction to this side-alley, but there is a whole wealth of music there if you are willing to seek it out: Lava, Guru Guru, Cluster, Grobschnitt, Embryo, Thirsty Moon, Kollektiv and the previously-mentioned Clearlight Symphony, not forgetting Klaus Schulze who, since leaving Tangerine Dream have released five albums all tenuously linked with sf: Irrlicht, Cyborg, Blackdance, Picture Music and Timewind. No doubt I have left out many people and groups who deserve a mention here, but there is a lot of chaff amongst the wheat within this sub-genre.

(vii) A Short Stop At The Transylvanian Brain-Surgery...

And whilst still on the subject of German music, two groups have consistently touched upon sf themes over a number of albums: Amon Duul II and Can. The release of Phallus Dei by Amon Duul in 1969 caused no great stirs. It was different certainly, rhythmical and aggressive, but rather unpolished and uninspiring. It certainly did not prepare anyone for their next two offerings, two double albums, Yeti and Dance of the Lemmings. Most of the music was heavy rock, well played and imaginatively written. The lyrics however were replete with images like the best sf poetry. "Archangels Thunderbird" on Yeti is a good example of this:

> "Rent a destroyer and sail to Cape Up,
> There lives a lion, and they call him love.
> There is no other way to do it, but a hole in the sand.
> Shocked corridor, standing. People with their eyes in
> their hands."

It is a covert relationship that is strengthened by their choice of titles and the musical interpretation ("Halluzination Guillotine", "Flesh-coloured anti-aircraft Alarm", "Pale Gallery", "Cerberus"). Dance of the Lemmings added to this impression, even Melody Maker sat up and paid attention: "the first fully-integraged album of space rock" was their comment. In particular the track "Restless Skylight Transistor Child", with its assimilation of electronics and subtle movements from section to section, makes this a memorable album, combining the best aspects of Tangerine Dream's school of music and the imagination inherent in the more avant-garde sf poetry. Unfortunately, like Pink Floyd before them technical accomplishment began to outweigh the vitality of the vision. After Lemmings they became polished and mellowed. The sf-related tracks still appeared: "Deutsch Nepal", "Wolf City" and "Sleepwalker's Timeless Bridge" on Wolf City (1972),"Apocalytic Bore" on Vive La Trance (1973). But the spirit was dying and the captivating imagery with it. "Apocalyptic Bore" seems to express it all. When it is all perfect and there is nothing left to achieve, when life gives all and denies nothing, then purpose dies and with it every reason for carrying on. Amon Duul seemed to have reached that point with Vive La Trance and their next album Hi-Jack was so mediocre it could hardly be credited that it was the same band. Perhaps it is hard to sustain an intense level of imagery album after album, but Yes and VDGG manage. (And most sf writers also, though their problems are perhaps of a different order. It is difficult to conceive and produce a piece of music where the lyrical content is emphasised by the musical, particularly where the imagery is as external as it is in sf, i.e. not about love, work, and society-as-it-is.)

Can, like Amon Duul II, began by producing a very heavy, rhythmically-based music, but unlike Amon Duul

they have maintained that feel and left harmony as a secondary consideration. Their first album, Monster Movie, released in Britain in 1969, was the first revolutionary shot from a group who have never ceased to follow their own direction. They are innovators and not emulators and it is for this reason that they have managed to produce a body of music which is constantly surprising and which shows no sign yet of becoming jaded. Their flirtations with sf have been borderline for the most part although they have produced pieces that are definitive sf tracks: "Father Cannot Yell" on Monster Movie "Mushroom" on Tago Mago and practically the whole of both their Soon Over Babaluna and Future Days albums. It is cerebral music, tending towards modern jazz, always emphasised by the solid rhythmical foundation given to the music by Jaki Leibzeit on drums and Holger Czukay on bass. Irmin Schmidt, their organist, studied under Stockhausen and this training often surfaces in his bizarre use of the instrument. The sound is multi-layered, frequently brutal but often soft and gentle. It is difficult to listen to and much of it will be incomprehensible to the casual listener - but to the curious it will bring its own rewards. This is what sf is in musical terms, far more so than Bowie or the music of Dr. Who:

"When I saw the mushroom head. When I saw the mushroom head.
I was born and I was dead. I was born and I was dead."

(viii) Brief Mentions...

The vast majority of sf-orientated rock music has been produced in the last seven or eight years. I have already put forward my pet theory of why this should be so, but it also occurs to me that with the massive expansion of the recording industry in the self-same period the opportunities have been there for the more imaginative (or bizarre, if you like) musicians to put onto record a far wider range of peroccupations than ever before. Sf is a literature of change and innovation. Young people welcome change and innovation. The music industry is currently dominated by young people. Put those three factors together and you have another possible explanation for the marvellous phenomenon we are now witnessing. In its extreme cases (like Magma, Gong and Hawkwind, whom I shall come to in due course) it can attain cult status, but there are very few musicians it has not touched, even if only briefly. Roxy Music, a commercial band if ever there was one, have produced songs which are good sf besides being vivid descriptions of the more bizarre off-shoots of contemporary life. A good example is found in the lyrics of "In Every Dream Home A Heartache":

"I bought you mail order, my plain-wrapper baby.
Your skin is like vinyl. The perfect companion.
De-luxe and de-lightful. Inflatable doll,
My role is to serve you. Disposable darling,
Can't throw you away now ..."

Crosby, Stills Nash and Young were affected enough to write "Wooden Ships", a post-holocaust song of poetic beauty, and Neil Young deliverd a classic with 'After the GoldRush". Man dabbled with the genre, but without any real enthusiasm, and produced tracks like "The Future Hides Its Face" and "Back Into The Future", although their spin-off band, The Neutrons, are a better bet with their first album Black Hole Star. The late Jimi Hendrix made use of the field as part of his sexual imagery on tracks like "3rd Stone From the Sun", "Are You Experienced", "1983...(A Merman I Should Turn To Be)" and "Night Bird Flying". Electric Ladyland is his grand offering to this discussion, however, where Hendrix uses sf metaphor and his (then) highly innovative musical style in an entertaining and instructive admixture. In 1966 and 67, The Mothers of Invention under the guidance of Frank Zappa were writing lyrics that were more sf than the most outrageous offerings of the most extreme "new wavers". Their albums, Freak Out and We're Only In It For The Money used the sf-angle of extrapolating a situation to its extreme. Songs like "Who are the Brain Police" and "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" with their deliberately banal renderings succeeded without being didactic. They were fun. They were iconoclastic. They made their points. But again, the inspiration that made early tracks like "Let's Make The Water Turn Black" such a joy to listen to, waned rapidly and vanished completely after a very few years.

What the Mothers were doing in America was being achieved with greater refinement and subtlety in England where the Bonzos (The Bonzo Dog Doodah Band) under the manic influence of Neil Innes (now a camp member of Monty Python) used sf as the means of poking a humorous stick in the eye of the establishment. "I'm The Urban Spaceman" is the well-known example of this, but better instances can be found on the album The Doughnut In Granny's Greenhouse with its two immediately captivating tracks, "We Are Normal" and "Humanoid Boogie".

Less zany, but no less banal, is the album Journey To The Centre Of The Eye by Nektar (a British band living in Germany). This is science fiction of the fifties reincarnated with electronic embellishments, easily recognised from its trite words and Perry Rhodan theme. It leaves much to be desired and with the exception of the quieter moments it is just rock music played beneath a superficial garnish of science fiction. (I can't even term it sf, I'm afraid!) But fortunately there are albums like Wide Open N-Way by the Danish group Day of Phoenix. It is less accessible than Journey to the Centre of The Eye both musically and lyrically, but ultimately deeply satisfying. The three memorable tracks, "Mind Funeral", "Cellophane" and "Wide open N-Way" are intense and meaningful. The best literary comparison I can give is Malzberg. Day of Phoenix emphasise a duality of external/internal happenings. Occasionally it overstretches itself musically, but then the music is complex and they handle it well if imperfectly. It is highly textured and manages to be relaxed and yet forceful. I feel most people will not like this on first hearing, but it grows on you:

"Numberless faces of dumbfounded people
That carry the coffin the size of a matchbox.
Their red, bloodshot eyes can't believe what they see...
The ground heaves - embraces the casket...
You're witnessing your mind's funeral..."

Subtle, almost classical strains lead into boisterous, unsympathetic chordal sequences with excellent control. Music and words are one, unlike Nektar's work. I recommend this if you can find it.

Another surprising album is An Electric Storm by White Noise. The concept of White Noise came from a radiophonic workshop (no, not the BBC!) and the standard and use of electronics is excellent for its time (1969). The psychological thriller, "The Visitation" renders the more timid efforts of groups such as Black Widow laughable. It is not just electronic noise and there is some excellent music throughout the album. The aforementioned track plays like Walpurgis Night, with lyrics of an "exorcist" nature and chillingly distorted vocals:

"Young girl with roses in her eyes
Hugs close the dark and cries
The words she hears are weak
Her lover's not asleep he's dead."

This is a good example of what the BBC could have produced with a little imagination and a little less catering to the lowest common denominator. Well worth a few listenings.

Another painfully naive offering is Mythos by Mythos. The music is good but the lyrics to the large sf track "Encyclopedia Terrae" are poorly copied from Arthur C. Clarke (or one of his imitators - it sounds third hand and lacking inspiration). A slush-pile reject. They are best when they cut out the Perry Rhodomontade and let the music provide the message.

I have often heard it said that good sf only rates that

"good" appellation if it is also good writing. If the same criteria were to be applied to sf music as to literature, then there is possibly no excuse for mentioning Captain Beefheart And The Magic Band in this article except to dismiss them. But that I cannot do. The Magic Band are probably the least accessible musicians this side of John Cage (the composer of four-minute tracks consisting of silence). The best description of their work would be to call it "scripted anarchy". You have the impression that all five musicians were wearing headphones in the studio, and each playing a different song. That is the first impression. Listen closer and there is a manic order here. I explain all this to excuse my inclusion here of The Magic Band's Trout Mask Replica. Easy listening it is not; when it does become harmonic it is almost by accident and doesn't last long. But on a two-record set they manage to put down ten songs that in their own berserk manner are excellent sf: "The Dust Blows Forward And The Dust Blows Back", "Dachau Blues", "Bill's Corpse", "My Human Gets Me Blue", "Ant Man Bee", "The Blimp", "Steal Softly Thru Snow" and others. The lyrics verge on pure surrealism at times and at others (as on "Dachau Blues") achingly real. It sounds as if parts of the album were recorded on an old battered tape recorder and the apparent disorganisation emphasises the genuine nature of this effort, unlike the "posing" of Bowie. These are psychotic visions of a present extending without hope into the future; insanity as the only way it can be. My favourite is "The Blimp" with its fanatical commentary of a starship landing:

"Children stop your nurses, and let's surrender in fun...
The mother ship, the mother ship's the one...
....look up in the sky! There's a starship up ahead!"

They are the exception that proves the rule, but then they sound (and look!) as if they originated on another planet.

High Tide produced an album called Sea Shanties in 1969 which was interesting for what it promised in the future. There was nothing strictly sf on it but it was hardly surprising that with their second album, High Tide, they would make use of sf as their proper medium of expression. The two shorter songs, "Blankman Cries Again" and "The Joke" were both heavily indebted, particularly the latter which describes what happens when it becomes illegal to laugh except at the appointed time:

"To laugh before the given time, is his only crime..."

pleads the defence lawyer. The single-idea-short-story transferred to record, and one of the best instances. But they tend to be very heavy and over-complex, and after their demise in 1971 no one has stepped into the gap they left. One album is not, admittedly, overmuch, but it is worth noting that when High Tide toured with Hawkwind they were considered by far the better band. My opinion is that they got it right first time and no one was ready for it.

Which is as good an introduction to the Hawk Lords as any..

(ix) This Is Your Captain Speaking...Your Captain is Dead...

Ladbroke Grove has something of a reputation in the sf field as a stomping ground of young "artists" with bizarre ideas to share. In 1970 a group of wandering musicians found a focal point in a project called "Hawkwind", playing free concerts and supporting little-known bands. Theirs was a music of fixed, obsessional rhythms, overlaid by a decorative layer of electronic sound. It was unusual and innovative. A first album, Hawkwind made an impression and they became a cult-band, specialising in the music of "inner-space" and emphasising personal freedom as against institutionalised progress. With their second offering, In Search Of Space (released in 1971) they produced the first truly "thoroughbred" sf album. Their debut album had stated their intention to "levitate their minds, in a nice way, without acid, with ultimately a complete audio-visual thing". By In Search Of Space they had succeeded. In concert their hypnotic use of rhythm, stroboscopic lighting and dance achieved this effect. Seeing Hawkwind live is one of the few purely sf sensations I have experienced (many times, never on drugs - I object to them as an insult to my imagination - and always with great satisfaction).

"I am the centre of the universe
The wind of time is blowing through me
And it's all moving relative to me
It's all a figment of my mind
In a world that I've designed..."

"Master of The Universe", the song from which the above lyrics are taken, became the focal point of their "Space Ritual", the "audio-visual concept" they had set out to create. Musically they were criticised as being naive rock-and-rollers, clinging desperately to a gimmick. The "gimmick" was sf. With In Search Of Space came a literary offering (part of the packaging) called "The Hawkwind Log". It is a thought-provoking document, excellently (and humorously) illustrated, with much of the material presented live by Robert Calvert, their lyricist/vocalist. The log is replete with images of decay and re-birth, throughout toying with time and distance.

Police raids and academic criticism failed to prevent the logical progression of ideas, and the production of a "hit" single, "Silver Machine" (Top Of the Pops - I almost fell out of my chair!) and another "pure" sf album, Doremi Fasol Latido, silenced the knockers. There are four memorable tracks on the album, "Brainstorm", "Space Is Deep", "Lord Of Light" and "Time We Left This World Today". The sleeve notes are humorous pastiche of the New Worlds syndrome, an appropriate act of self-mockery, perhaps in realisation of the mythological creatures they had become in the eyes of their young followers. And the music was even better, possessing all the best qualities of intelligent escapism, and developing a theotechny comparable to the Jerry Cornelius mythos. Which is where Michael Moorcock comes onto the scene.

Space Ritual, the recorded incarnation of the audio-visual experience, drew on Moorcock's imaginative powers for assistance. He wrote two tracks on the double album, "The Black Corridor" and "Sonic Attack". The work is a well-balanced presentation of their material, drawing on past songs, pieces linked by commentary (by Moorcock and Calvert) delivered in a doom-laden monotone. The inverted nature of their vision, tempered as it is by good-time "vibes", can be witnessed best on a track like "Orgone Accumulator" on this album:

"I've got an orgone accumulator...
...it's no social integrator...
...it's a one man isolator...
...it's a back-brain stimulator...
...it's a cerebral vibrator...
...of orgones..."

And so on, beneath a jaunty beat and prodding drums, the electronic moth-flutterings of the audio generator and Dik Mik's assorted effects. Once again the sleeve notes and cover illustrations are fine additions to the music. This is the album that best serves as an introduction to Hawkwind. None of the songs is as pure as its studio-recorded counterpart, but each is charged with a driving and positive excitement throughout. "Born To Go", "Brainstorm" and "Master of the Universe" are all played with a venom and urgency previously lacking.

The next two albums, Hall Of The Mountain Grill and Warriors on the Edge of Time were once again original (within the limitations of Hawkwind's chosen musical style), the former evidencing a slight deviation in their musical direction. There were still tracks like "Psychedelic Warlords" with its insistent beat, but the influence of Simon House (formerly of High Tide) was marked, particularly on the shorter instrumental pieces like "Wind Of Change" and "Hall Of The Mountain Grill". Perhaps the general feeling of flux that runs throughout this album was a result of Hawkwind's

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DAVE GRIFFITHS 72.

Confronting Professor Greatrex

Michael G Coney talks to David Wingrove

DW: Your article in Vector 67/8 ("Period of Transition") was a delightful insight into the motivations of a writer on the borders of acceptance. Can you elucidate further and give a few details of when and how you started writing, and more important, why?

MC: I started writing around ten years ago directly as a result of a questionnaire in New Worlds. Mike Moorcock was asking all the questions a worried editor asks - the stories we liked best, favourite authors, and so on. I got carried away in my reply which overran the space provided, and finished up by saying that "I could do better myself". I couldn't, of course. I dearly loved New Worlds, but I'd got carried away by that orgiastic sense of literary impotence which is characteristic of the true amateur. But at least I started writing, and for a couple of years I gauged my success by the number of words the various editors saw fit to scrawl on the printed rejection slips. "Keep trying" I rated promising, but not so encouraging as "Good idea, but ... " And there was "Gvvp Ach Woop I hag, M.M." which though cryptic, showed that someone cared...This is when and how I started, but why? Don't laugh - but I really felt I wanted to contribute something to science fiction, because over the years I'd got so much out of it. Money was, and still is, a secondary consideration.

DW: Following on from that, can you give a brief outline of your life and work to date and how, if at all, it has influenced the path your writing has taken? (Here I'd appreciate some further comment particularly on the Antigua episode of your life which seems to have exerted a strong influence on you...)

MC: My work (I am a chartered accountant) has generally been geared to my main concern, which is living in pleasant surroundings. Most of my working life has been spent along the south-west coast where pay is low but job satisfaction high. I worked in holiday camps for a year or so, kept a pub for three years. Antigua came at a time when I found it too difficult to make my kind of living in England, and was intended as a stepping stone to Canada, because at that time I didn't have enough money to emigrate direct. If Antigua taught me anything, it was that emotion will have more effect on future events than reasoned arguments. As a hotel manager, on an island with powerful - and black - trade unions, I became involved in a lot of political issues. Three of us operated the hotel: a financier, a lawyer and me. The financier was thrown out of his chair when a bullet hit the woodwork and the lawyer and his wife were killed with a machete, and it takes a hell of a lot of chopping to kill someone with a machete. There were two political parties - who were also the Unions - but they each had the same political platform: Vote us in and we'll throw the whites off the island, and we'll all live happily ever after, black brothers. (My dead lawyer friend was black, by the way, but he was foolish enough to found a non-union political party.) I complained to the Premier often enough about his platform, and he would laugh and say: "It's only election talk. Nobody really believes it." But they shouted racial prejudice from the platforms, and they taught it in the schools - and then they wondered why the tourists said the natives were unfriendly, and didn't come back next year...

All this may have affected my fiction for a while, but such influences are short-lived; you write the hurt out of your system. Now, at a comparatively peaceful phase of my life, I find I write a little less, and what I write is more objective. I live in a particularly beautiful part of the world, and I do a lot of sailing, and the problems of Antigua are a long way behind me.

DW: How strongly are personal attitudes reflected in your fiction? Do you intentionally set out to create characters in opposition to your own views and are you able, if so, to treat them sympathetically?

MC: My personal attitudes appear everywhere in my writing; although their presentation may be pro or con, as the mood takes me. My first-person heroes are essentially me, and it's fun to have them occasionally lose out through some weakeness of character. In a way, I guess it's a sort of apology. I find no difficulty in presenting opposing viewpoints; it's essential, otherwise there would be no conflict. I think I give them a fair deal, although I enjoy destroying them.

DW: Who are your own influences, and what are those things outside sf/writing that interest you most?

MC: In one way or another I've been influenced by every book I've read, and every person I've ever known. As to conscious influences, I would cite P. G. Wodehouse, Hammond Innes, J. G. Ballard, Simenon, John D. MacDonald and I can't think of any others except possibly Wyndham. A mixed bag. Mostly alive and writing, and nothing that could be described as "classic". I can think of many twentieth century books which I've enjoyed, but very few before 1920 - except when I was a kid, and less critical. At school I was force-fed Silas Marner et al, which effectively destroyed any lingering taste for anything which might be described as Literature. Other interests? Sailing I've mentioned. Soccer, tennis, swimming, skin-diving, hiking - all outdoor stuff. Otherwise, eating,drinking, watching TV, fooling around with dangerous women.

DW: A writer must exert strong self-criticism as a matter of necessary discipline. Do you agree with this view, and then how much do you learn from mistakes between one piece of work and the next?

MC: I find it difficult to criticise my own writing and do very little rewriting except to correct obviously clumsy phrases and repetitious use of words. As a result, I probably pay more attention to other people's views than my own - which is a bad thing. Every critic has a different view. So what is a "mistake"? In retrospect, I think one of my books was too unpleasant in theme and character for general taste, and I've tried to write about nicer things since.

DW: You hint, in your letters to me, that you try to gauge "what the readers want". How do you go about this? Does this entail an analysis of reader feedback/sales figures, or is this something innate and purely subjective?

MC: Arising out of my previous answer, I've decided that the average sf reader wants a strong male protagonist and an upbeat ending, little sex and no religion. I've decided this by averaging out the criticisms of what I've written so far, and by an astonishing coincidence it fits almost exactly Roger Elwood's specifications for Laser Books. It is also diametrically opposed to my normal style of writing. Where does this leave me? I'm trying to figure some compromise without prostituting my art. Bob Silverberg had the same problem. Look what happened to him.

DW: Another thing that touched deeply, Mike, was your comment that "unless you really believe you can offer something better than anyone else, then it's difficult to justify writing at all". I heartily concur, but can you, once again, comment on the truth of this statement. I can see that a writer must be egotistical (by design, if not by nature) to survive, but does that necessarily entail the attitude "better than"? Surely it is far more desirable to be recognised for an "unique" manner (which isn't to neglect the quality of the work, I must hasten to add...)

MC: I stand by what I said. I honestly believe I am the finest writer on Earth. I read my novels on publication objectively, and I find myself nodding in agreement at the philosophy, laughing at the funny bits and - truthfully - crying when the guy loses the girl. I am mildly surprised that this great writer is me - but my name is on the title page to prove it. However, I am fully aware that ninety-nine percent of readers will not agree with me, and that they will be equally convinced that they are right. That's how it is. And as for being recognised as unique, well, that would be nice; but I'm competitive and for me there's only one beat. A lot of the time I'm competing with myself. I'm fighting my own stupidity, paucity of invention, lack of scientific knowledge, hangover, prejudices, frequent inability to construct the simplest sentence, and clumsy fingers - and getting a story down on paper by sheer guts and the will to win. Again and again. If you don't believe you're the best it's just not worth it.

DW: Can you elucidate upon your writing technique? You have told me that it is impatience that drives you as a writer and that, therefore, makes is impossible for you to consider re-writing. Can you ever see yourself changing your methods of writing?

MC: I've never read a book on writing so I'm not too sure what writing techniques there are. I only know that I write by gritting my teeth and getting down to it and struggling and looking forward to the time when it's all over and I can get a drink, like an old man having sex. I get a basic idea, and if it feels like novel-length I consider the possibilities and jot them down as sub-plots. Independently I think of some interesting characters and work on them, then I throw them into a story full-grown, and judge how they would react, knowing the kind of people they are. This may alter the original idea. So it goes on, and eventually I sit down and write the thing, planning each chapter in advance and aiming at 60,000 words, which usually means 75,000 words: I don't know any other way to write; it feels OK so I don't think I'll change.

DW: Are you an erratic writer? Do you have to force yourself to work at fiction, or does it all "come easy" when you sit down at the typer?

MC: I guess I've answered that. Unless I can set aside a couple of weeks just for writing, it's not easy. Hello Summer, Goodbye was easy, because I loved the story and I had three spare weeks and could get into my stride. The thing almost wrote itself. So did Brontomek.

DW: As part of your article in Vector 67/8 you said:

"So I cannot take the intellectual road, neither can I become a hack."

But what does this "greater realism" you emphasise entail if not approaching the core of human nature/existence, and isn't that, in itself, "the intellectual road"? Which doesn't necessarily entail "borrowing techniques from the mainstream", I agree, but each novel requires a unique (and suitable) manner of presentation, and a writer's "constant tone" could prove as damaging as it is (occasionally) beneficial. What I'm getting at is this: shouldn't a writer, as a "duty" to his reading public, experiment to assimilate a full spectrum of expressive modes? Zelazny does this by "writing into" his weaknesses. Do you find yourself doing this more and more these days or do old habits die hard? (I mention this point in detail because it was one of the aspects of Aldiss you said you admired greatly - that no two books of his were ever the same.)

MC: Human nature/human existence has no core, therefore it cannot be approached. It is simply an amorphous mass of behaviours, impressions and beliefs which is all around us, except at the north pole. Mysticism is crap. There are many facets of human existence which I would like to explore in time - but I can spell them out quite simply, and to explore them would still fit in with the type of book I write. I've never written about the many shades of madness, for example. My characters tend to be logical yet emotional - but never mad. For a guy who likes Ballard's writing, I find this strange; somebody pointed it out to me the other day. But madness is a fact, and I believe in facts, and will write about it. In a believable story, where believable people do believable things...Sure I admire Aldiss's variety - but he can do these things. In spite of my conceit I don't think I could have written any of Aldiss's books as well as he did;

the virtuosity of Barefoot in the Head frightens me. But Brian couldn't have written Hello Summer, Goodbye, even though he can give my ego a nasty knock.

DW: Right, now down to the nitty-gritty, skipping about as whim takes me. Are you an "Old-fashioned reactionary"? Is this how you wish to be thought of, Mike? (Letter 1-9-74, to TAC 11)

MC: No. It's simply that I examine a bandwagon very carefully - particularly its passengers - before I jump on.

DW: That letter contains a very good analysis of "convention" and its obvious demands on a writer. Isn't the excellence of a writer, therefore, to be judged by how skillfully he manipulates such "conventions" and how "new" (or unique?) he makes each inherited idea seem?

MC: Yes, this is one way of judging a writer. There are many others; and in the last analysis a writer is judged by how well he sells.

DW: Am I being presumptuous, then, to assume that you view sf not as a repository of escapist "wonder stories" but more as a forum - a place where basic problems of human existence can be discussed from several "unusual" (if not entirely original) perspectives?

MC: That's difficult - I view sf as being every type of literature except mainstream. This includes wonder stories as well as the forum concept. But what I write is a different matter. I try to write escapist stories, because those are what I like to read. At the same time I like to inject a good dollop of whatever issues are troubling or interesting me at the time. Then I like to use sf as an intellectual exercise - to experiment with the respective logics of various plot developments and to juggle with people and events to achieve suspense, mystery and an unexpected denouement. I like the sf detective story, too. The more serious issues can be built into all this, and thereby stand a better chance of being read.

DW: The "roots of familiarity" (your words): I've noticed how much you tend to model your fiction on your surroundings (something you readily admit to). Do you find yourself becoming more involved in them for their own sake than as a point of departure for a story, or are you escaping these "limitations"?

MC: Apart from the Peninsula stories which keep being written because I keep getting ideas which will only work with those particular characters, I am becoming less influenced by my surroundings. More often now, I find the locale of a story comes through some chance image while reading, watching TV, sailing or whatever. It is still important, though. If I can't believe the location, I can't write the story.

DW: Dick Geis's review of Friends Come In Boxes coined the delightful metaphor "scrambled plausibility". How far do such considerations come to mind when writing a new book? Do you actually undertake much research before writing or is such work done only as and when the problems arise? (And don't contain or confine the question just to FCIB, Mike, please, because you've expressed your views on that book in response to Geis - let it wander to other books.)

MC: Lack of attention to scientific detail was a fault in some of my early stories. Things have changed, however. Now I get quite a lot of enjoyment from the research and from the invention of gadgets, and from the careful construction of different ecologies. If I'd written Friends Come In Boxes recently, I'd have explained the Boxes more carefully, no matter how implausible they may be; I could have faked some explanation...I've caught up on a few of these omissions. In Brontomek I get the chance to explain how the amorphs from Mirror Image can increase their size at will, and I fill in a lot of sketchy background of Syzygy. Brontomek was full of gadgets - I really had fun there. I particularly liked the boat with millions of tiny holes in the hull, through which air was pumped to reduce the drag between the hull and the water. Ridiculous, of course - but plausible.

DW: Your letters to TAC/SFR, and, to some extent, to Vector, have earned you a reputation as a die-hard, sexist reactionary. I quote: "Personally, I'll stick with the majority". But when you say of Rurnelle "demonstrating that Jerry is about the most normal, average, boring writer in a field consisting mainly of interesting oddballs" and complain of quasi-liberals, against whom "I've fought for forty-three years". So where do you stand, Mike. (I think I know - in fact I'm damn sure of it.)

I've said to you, Mike: "I find real intolerance the hardest thing to swallow, and most minorities in crying 'intolerance!' (our modern equivalent of 'Wolf!') by their subsequent actions prove just as (if not more so) reactionary as those they oppose". Your article in SFR 16, "Whatever Happened to Fay Wray" hits out at this whole attitude of quasi-liberalism. But how far can you take either censorship/non-censorship? My belief is that there should be no censorship, merely the ever-present opportunity to ridicule extremes... humour and tolerance (I believe - I'm an optimist, as yet, in this matter) will triumph. How do you react to that blatantly personal view, Mike?

MC: It's possible to be sexist - which I am - without being reactionary. Sexism is difficult to define, like racism. I am a racist, too - but I am not a hypocrite; and it is the hypocrisy of both minorities and majorities which I can't take. I believe that there are fundamental differences between men and women - and between race and race - which are physical and mental, and which have evolved over a few million years through reasons of role and environment. I believe that these differences should be freely admitted and allowed for - compensated for, if you like - in our social structure, and not suppressed like guilty secrets. People were not created equal, neither did they evolve equally; that would be too incredible a coincidence. Neither will they ever achieve equal rights, because a person's right to share of the wealth around him will always be dependent on his ability to earn it - except under an impossibly perfect communist system. The ability and the wealth of people - and nations - differs enormously; and the gap between the developed and underdeveloped nations is widening. Am I supposed to shut my eyes to all this? One of the attractions of sf is that it allows us to take a clear view of humanity, from dozens of different viewpoints not available in the mainstream... I object to censorship where it defends sacred cows, ideologies, religions, politics, the State - anything which is fair game by my standards, including "minority" groups. I agree with censorship where it protects individuals from meaningless hurt - but only as individuals, and not as members of a group they have chosen to identify themselves with. I don't agree with personal attack. I would have been happy if Geis had censored my letter on "When It Changed", because my tone was too personal.

DW: "Ideology has taken the place of characterisation and literature is the poorer for it, because our fiction is being forced to assume that certain people don't exist". Yes, I agree, but isn't it just possible, Mike, (knowing how readily human beings fall into "assumed" patterns of behaviour - we kid ourselves, but we are still basically "instinctive" creatures) that these people behave as they do because that is their "mould", the manner in which they're expected to behave? Isn't it then right to break all such moulds, even if the means is far from subtle?

I too resent certain women (and men!) telling me (in letters that are little more than unadulterated tub-thumping exercises) that women "resent" the presence of men and don't enjoy having children/a family life (resenting the stereotyping that THEY - I cannot accept the argument that men alone have forced this upon them, although the economic reason I can accept - have been party to.)

But then I'm sorry, Mike, but I thought there was a need for a story like "When It Changed" as there are still too many men who treat women as possessions and not partners. But Joanna should then have written a story as counterpoint to that tale (i.e. from the opposite perspective) where the women are spiteful, frigid bitches and the men sensitive and gentle (and the latter types of people, of course, do exist, because I have, and still do, work amongst their like). I feel like crying when it is assumed that only homosexuals and women are sensitive. Christ, that's only a sexual predilection, not a basic character trait. Your comments, Mike, as I didn't frame that in the form of a definite question.

MC: We must realise that the average person likes his "mould". It is comforting, familiar, and a protective coloration against the dangers which surround him. So in various modes of behaviour, people will always fall into stereotypes - even in something so simple as wearing a dark suit and tie to catch the 8.30 to the city. In human and animal behaviour there is nothing wrong in conformity; it is an aid to survival. And since stereotypes exist, why not write about them? They serve as an excellent foil to point up the peculiarities of the far-out characters occupying the same pages. The liberated woman, thin, intense, humourless, bespectacled, shrill, is already herself a stereotype. I see people that way, don't you? My brain can't cope with a teeming few billion distinctive individuals.

DW: One last quickie...What exactly did Harlan Ellison say about your story for The Last Dangerous Visions, or don't you know yet?

MC: I spoke to Harlan the other day and he said TLDV would be published in late 1977. I know some of what he said, since he'll be using correspondence between Joanna, he and I. Do you realise all this was back in '73? I've just dug out one of his letters, and I'm sure he won't mind my quoting: "I find the piece repellent in virtually every particular ... I think fairness, full exposure, and open discussion will be sufficiently potent weapons to dissect the open wound of your sick statement". Neat, huh? And quite justified too. But I wish I'd had the vile invention in those days to write "In Search of Professor Greatrex", recently bought by George Hay for Penguin. It's quite the most abominable short story I've ever written and probably my best too - and I can't wait to send Harlan an autographed copy...But I mustn't be unfair. In the course of correspondence and talking I've found Harlan, Joanna (and Pournelle, who I did not say was boring) and most other writers, and I - we all see humanity in the same benevolent (if slightly cynical) way. Only our angles are a little different.

LETTERS

Andrew Tidmarsh: 90 Torridon Road, Catford, SE6

An open letter to readers of VECTOR.

1. Greetings! No doubt many of you will have read my review of Erwin Yeaworth's The Blob, a remarkable film (which appeared in V75). To all those who have, I offer my sincerest apologies. You may recall that in my review I suggested that The Blob should be regarded as a metaphorical film of the first order. The metaphor, I revealed, was that of the struggle between generations. How foolish and deceitful it was of me to make such a suggestion. I do not know what anyone's reaction to that piece was, but I doubt that it was dismissed casually (nor do I ask that it should have been). There is a lesson here. I am sure many reader will be familiar with the films Night of the Living Dead and Invasion of the Body Snatchers and perhaps are aware that these films have been praised because they are extraordinary films. They are extraordinary because they are claimed to be metaphorical films which, respectively, deal with racialism and (I think) the communist invasion of the USA. Who claims, though, that these films (and others I cannot name) were intended to do what they are claimed to do? And how can such claims be made? I will freely admit that I am attracted by the notion that sf is essentially a metaphorical literature; and perhaps understand why I should be attracted. Somehow, sf can be given a weight it does not possess. But it would seem that, with my review of The Blob, I have acted foolishly. My desire to claim for sf a (literary) status which cannot be justified has made me argue that even the crudest sf film has a metaphorical content, but its content is not what I say it is; rather, it concerns the movie-making industry. I will not attempt to make a deeper analysis than that. The Blob is a generally worthless film. Only after I had written the review did I realise what I had done. In private I have pretended that my purpose was satirical, but I was deceiving myself. I shall in future guard against a tendency to exaggerate.

2. Sf is not, in general, a metaphorical literature. It could be said that a basic sf "vocabulary" was established in the sf pulps, when sf was young; that later writers have found that they cannot add significantly to this basic vocabulary; and that moders sf is marked (not marred) by truly metaphorical works. The foregoing remarks are, all, partially inaccurate. Pulp magazines did more than create a vocabulary; they defined what sf was and how it should be written

(I do not mean literary technique but the approach to be adopted by writers). Later (post-WW II) writers did add significantly to sf's vocabulary (perhaps because sf, as a genre, broadened and new subjects were considered by established sf writers). More importantly, fresh subject matter required a fresh approach (or fresh approaches?). That fresh approach either allowed writers of sf to adopt techniques widespread, even obsolete, in the mainstream; or resulted in the birth of speculative fiction (sf?). I think it could be argued that two approaches to writing might now be identified among sf writers:

a) a desire to copy the approach found in the pulps;

b) a desire to imitate the narrative sophistication (as they would appear to sf's genre audience) which distinguished the sf of, e.g. George Orwell.

(I do not fully understand either of these approaches, though I know which I favour.) Sf is not, in general, a metaphorical literature; it is, in general, pulp fiction.

3. Barry Malzberg is a writer whom I have frequently claimed writes metaphorical fiction. This claim is based on an extensive reading of his fiction. Perhaps, also, it arises from my knowledge of Malzberg's background and an awareness that he is a failed litterateur. Malzberg openly claims (boasts?) that he has brought to sf a literary sophistication previously rare or unknown and suggests that his techniques (rather than his subject matter) are the reason why he is the "most hated writer of sf". What Malzberg may be experiencing is the reaction of "traditional"sf writers (such as Bob Shaw, whose review of Beyond Apollo in Foundation 7&8 was negative and generally dismissive). "Traditional" sf writers, I would suggest, adopt approach a) above; Malzberg adopts approach b). (This is, I will admit, a simplification but I think it is indicative of the situation.) Robert Silverberg might also be experiencing a similar reaction. And, in his case, it must be acknowledged that the subject matter of his later work should be familiar to readers of "traditional" sf; the adverse reaction that Silverberg's later work has provoked can quite clearly be seen to be a reaction to his approach. I admire the work of both Malzberg and Silverberg immensely and empathise with the attitude to sf they both adopt. Unfortunately I cannot describe how this attitude differs from that of "traditional" sf writers. Perhaps the two authors place a greater emphasis on narrative form rather than on narrative content? Perhaps. But I feel there is a quite intimate connection between form and content - by which I mean that the way, for example, Malzberg describes the Apollo space programme (in The Falling Astronauts) illuminates that programme with an entirely new light. His ironic prose, his use of the third-person auto-biography (to illustrate, from the point of view of the psychotic, a schizophrenic/paranoiac experience) allows him to say something new about the Apollo programme. (More tentatively:) It could be argued that Malzberg adopted a specific narrative technique before he decided to write (what was, ostensibly) sf. Was it not, therefore, an accident that his (science) fiction turned out as it did? Of course not! But, "modern" sf writers do place narrative technique before narrative content. "Traditional" sf writers placed narrative content before narrative technique (a fact which might derive from an absence of formal literary training). Barry Malzberg did have a formal literary training and did have literary aspirations (and is not a writer who despises mainstream fiction); it is unsurprising that his fiction is truly metaphorical. It is an accident that Malzberg should appear to be an sf writer, for his intentions are distinct from those of the "traditional" sf writer. Stated cynically, Malzberg (and I believe he would not deny this) has used sf for his own ends - to make an artistic statement through literature.

4. I hope the foregoing polemic will sweeten the final words of this letter. I have enjoyed writing those articles which have appeared in VECTOR over my name. I am pleased that my work should have been printed. And I am grateful for the comments made by several of you on my work. Oh! but, oh! I have been disappointed by the weakness of your responses. Few of you have reacted as I hoped you would: few have developed any of the ideas that I have put forward, few have suggested alternative view-points to my own. I have admitted (in a letter in VECTOR which I wish Chris Fowler had not published) that I have no fixed opinion of sf and that I am working toward a full understanding of it (of life, and of my purpose in the world). Sometimes I wonder what I am doing wrong, why I am making so little progress. I know that I cannot cope adequately with comments about myself, personally (especially praise), and am pleased in that respect that few of you know me. But I would appreciate objective comments directed against my ideas.

Brian Griffin: 17 Kitchener Street, Walney, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 3QB

VECTOR really does seem to get better every issue. I'm no layout expert, and no doubt there's room for improvement in that sector, but I wholeheartedly approve of the basic change of format. As to content, I was happy to read the Bob Shaw piece again, and it nicely offset the nitty-gritty tone of your Elwood interview, which was really interesting - in spite of all those statistics, which always make me feel dizzy. It was really about the whole issue of critical judgment, to what extent such a judgment can be generally valid as well as individually valid; and whether or not you agree with Elwood (I tend to sympathise with him though obviously he's in some danger of playing God), this is an issue that demands to be thought over. I think there MUST be such a thing as a generally-valid judgment; though I would need at least a couple of thousand words to defend that position.

((Sounds like a good idea for an article, Brian...? - Ed.))

I think that many readers of the new Fowler-style Infinity Box are getting hold of the wrong end of the stick. Obviously if you try to read a Fowler-type review section in one sitting you're going to end up with a headache. I think a good review section should act as an information-bank, operative for at least a couple of months ahead. The reviews should make nice reading, of course, but it's as information that they stand or fall. I think you've got the right idea, Chris.

I'd like to reply to Chris Priest's charge of rampant paranoia in my reviews, in respect of "Lit.Crit". There is, probably, a psychological reason for my attacks on Lit. Crit.: I spent four very confused years as an undergraduate, "reading English", and I'm still trying to live it down! And I would agree with Chris Priest (and Karl Popper) that criticism, pure and simple, is an essential human activity, and one to which sf should submit with gratitude. It's only when criticism takes on a vampire-like life of its own, thereby becoming Lit. Crit., that I begin to get the horrors. I'm not kidding when I say that people like Dr. Leavis really frighten me: they're sucking the life-blood out of literary experience, trying to achieve a pseudo-scientific critical consensus, getting between the individual reader and the text. Leavis is the extreme case, of course; but anything remotely resembling the Leavisite approach makes my blood run cold. As I said above, there can, there must, be such a thing as a generally-valid critical judgment; but it can't be arrived at the Leavis way. I think there should be a kind of constant literary gossip in the press - as there was at the turn of the last century, when the latest book from Wells, Shaw or Chesterton was news, on an equal footing with war and politics. This kind of gossip is still represented in the fan press, in a way - though it must be said at once that the fans tend to militate against this ideal by focussing their attention on sf at the expense of anything else in the literary line. I agree with Chris Priest that sf is, or should be, part of a broad literary spectrum, all of it subject to the aforesaid literary gossip. But once you step outside the fannish press, the literary world tends to consist of Lit. Crit. (as defined above) and TV book slots: the talk tends to get either desiccated or desultory. For this reason, I value the fannish press, and VECTOR, highly. I'm not saying there are no traces of Lit. Crit. in my reviews; but I like the company they keep.

In a way, I liked the front cover of V79; nicely disconcerting, not the kind of thing one likes to look at for too long. But put yourself in the shoes of Joe Public, Chris: what will he think of it? In his eyes, it will look like a floricultural journal gone wrong; he'll just blink, shrug, and turn away. You don't need an SF Monthly-type cover to sell, I suppose; but aren't you going a bit far in the opposite direction?

((Obviously, Brian, I disagree with you about the cover. It was precisely its original quality which motivated my putting it on there: VECTOR needs to stand out from the mass of the spaceships-and-Fabian-girls covers of other fanzines. I'd like to think there's a place in VECTOR - and in sf generally - for this kind of artwork. - Ed.))

Andy Sawyer: Children's Library, Birkenhead Public Library, Borough Road, Birkenhead.

You had me wondering what this new magazine was for a minute...Welcome to the new-look VECTOR. I hope the experiment succeeds.

It deserves to. Twice the size, glossy cover, adverts and all, VECTOR looks a lot more professional. The larger size allows the artwork to become really effective; more of Judy Watson, please! Yet again, Bob Shaw proved that for tortuous ingenuity there's no-one to touch him. I like the idea of his spaceship - the recycling of the beer put me off for a while, but then I reasoned that if you start off with Whitbread's no-one's going to notice when it comes back as re-cycled piss - though even the great adventure into the final frontier may not provoke sufficient attraction if the beer isn't the REAL THING.

I was glad to see the return of the letter-column, glad too that I wasn't the only one who had doubts over Ian Watson's article in V78; I find a lot of my own doubts about his central premise expressed in Christopher Priest's and David Wingrove's letters, so I won't repeat them. The Review Supplement is an interesting idea; I'm not sure whether it comes off. It trims the balance of VECTOR, but only by becoming another publication - and is there any criterion for inclusion of reviews in either VECTOR or the supplement? Perhaps an occasional publication to clear the backlog will work; I hope this is your idea of it.

((See comments in NEXUS/VRS 2 for my views on that, Andy. - Ed.))

The Elwood interview was well worth the wait. I found it interesting and at times infuriating. I've no reason to doubt his statements that he allows a greater deal of experiment and outspokenness than he is accused of, I just dislike his fundamentalist attitude that certain sexual practices are wrong. As he says, it's a minor matter, probably, in terms of actual stories, and other editors no doubt do the same; nevertheless I still feel that the restrictions which such an attitude imposes are an insult to readers. I shudder at the Laser formula - just like the Mills & Boon romances (which Harlequin market in the USA). I'm not necessarily against formula books as such - it is possible to write well and honestly within a restricted field, seeing how powerfully a limited situation can be developed. (This is how sf and detective fiction has grown - i.e. Moorcock's Elric novels and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe tales) But the Laser formula seems to me to be dishonest; to put it crudely, these books lie to their readers. I do not wish to be told that sex is wrong except with a member of the opposite gender after a certain ritual. I accept that most people seem to want reassurance in their prejudices - perhaps, I, too, do? But yes, Mr. Elwood, I have enjoyed a Barry Malzberg story.

I enjoyed VECTOR and think that this issue is a great improvement. By all means take advertising: for one thing we want to know what is available. ... I for one enjoy the regular VECTOR and hope that it can keep going ... But keep the letter-column, hey?

Andrew Muir: 11 Devon Gardens, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow.

I would not have thought that this was necessary, but apparently it must be said: and so, I think VECTOR should "pursue current policy" etc - you're doing a fine job, Chris, keep up the good work.

I liked the new layout etc. Advertising has a three-fold advantage: i) VECTOR benefits; ii) the advertisers benefit; iii) VECTOR's readers benefit.

I totally agree with Christopher Priest's remarks on inverse snobbery and paranoia; surely we do not want an "us/them" situation to be perpetuated. Just because sf readers are, rightly, incensed by people unfamiliar with the genre crudely lumping together all sf we should not commit the gross error of making similarly ill-informed remarks about mainstream fiction.

I like VECTOR reviews. David Wingrove, Chris Morgan, etc. have produced some excellent reviews; therefore I have no quibble about the quantity of reviews. However, if others feel that VECTOR is unbalanced, the VRS seems an eminently satisfactory solution.

I appreciate David Pringle's efforts to raise the standards of sf by bringing Bob Dylan into his review of Ballard's latest collection. (!) But surely J.G.B. is complex enough without making dubious generalisations about lord Dylan as well. A few points:

i) Was Dylan's best period his "revolutionary" one? (what was his revolutionary period?) John Wesley Harding/Blood On The Tracks and Before The Flood are surely Dylan's best or at least some of his best, and yet cannot be called his "revolutionary" period.

ii) Is Dylan "less angry" or is it not possible that David Pringle's outlooks have changed? And surely the emotion on"Hard Rain" is undeniable.

iii) Was Dylan ever truly angry? - a somewhat abstract and complex question. Please take Dylan and Ballard one at a time: both at once "strangled my mind".

Cyril Simsa: 18 Muswell Avenue, London N10 2EG

I think that you're doing fine. I think the fact that VECTOR is beginning to support itself through advertising and bookshop sales is commendable (since it reduces, after all, the expenditure of those precious BSFA funds). It seems ironic to me that Phil Stephensen-Payne is complaining about your wasting BSFA funds when in fact you are doing your best to supplement them with other revenue.

((See Phil's letter herein for further on this. But please remember, Cyril that it is Phil who, as Business Manager, is putting in the work to get that advertising. -Ed.))

Though I would be the last to deny that some recent issues of VECTOR have been overloaded with reviews, I think that:

a) Having reviews of most sf books published in the UK at hand, in the pages of VECTOR, is very useful.

b) Issue 79 was not nearly so overloaded with reviews as the previous three, and contained some very interesting articles. After all, any 'zine which provokes as vigorous a response as your lettercol indicates must have something that interested people in it.

c) The VECTOR REVIEWS SUPPLEMENT seems a good way to get rid of any back-log of reviews. This way, those people who do not want reviews need not have their 'zine clogged up with them.

Dave Langford: 22 Northumberland Avenue, Reading.

I brush aside the manifold merits of the vastly improved VECTOR 79 and quickly formulate a peeve -

OK, the artwork is highly successful. Carol Gregory and Judy Watson in particular (mmmm, those cartoons are morbidly fascinating). But Carol's picture on p 4 is diminished by the huge display adverts above and opposite. In a page of text it would have stood out; here it retreats. Surely you could have avoided this by careful shuffling?- I mean, this is a high-quality litho magazine; there's no excuse for such unfortunate juxtapositions or for the "continued on page 30". (We are told where to find the continuation of the editorial, but not that of Bob Shaw's piece. We may draw our own conclusions from this.)

((Nobody's perfect, Dave, and I made some mistakes in laying-out V79. I hope this issue shows some improvement. - Ed.))

Having long ago been involved in the production of Sfinx, I know that litho production has many advantages. By imperceptibly varying the spacing of paragraphs, you can cause both or all three of the columns to line up at the bottom of the page (as well as at the top). But you don't. You can cancel errors invisibly, and at the last minute, by re-typing whole lines and pasting them over the flawed originals; but VECTOR 79 is riddled with hand corrections. With no more sophisticated equipment than a ruler and blue pencil, you can ensure that all the margins are straight, but...

Were you that rushed, Chris?

((Yes, Dave, I was. I venture to suggest that in all your vast experience with Sfinx you've never had to attempt an SRA1 pate-up with only a 12" ruler to guide you. What I need, here, apart from an assistant - any offers, Dave? - is a proper drawing-board. But money there ain't and space there ain't. Until then, I'll just have to do my best with my little ruler. - Ed.))

I'm not entirely happy about offering criticism upon this low level, mind you. Mere niggling, you might say. Trouble is, I'm holding the first VECTOR which seems to be something more than just a serious fanzine; number 79 has made the jump into the Big League and must now be judged against such things as Algol! Flaws which could be passed over in the scruffier days have suddenly become important. That's an achievement.

((You're right, of course, Dave. But give me a chance - Andy Porter has been at it a lot longer than me, and he's got more money as well. - Ed.))

...It was a good thing that's Bob's piece is reprinted. It's a marvellous, er, discourse. Some day the circulation of Maya will be so high that reprinting items therefrom will be pointless, but until then, make the most of it! Odd thing about the piece: at Mancon I seem to remember Bob saying "Space Nineteen-and-ninepence - for some reason that's how I always think of that show ... " and so on. This seemed rather wittier than Space £19.99, as it later appeared in Maya and VECTOR. Baffling? Perhaps Bob was ad-libbing?

((He must have been. Both Bob Jackson and I followed Bob's typescript. - Ed.))

Hey - what's this? I know that VECTOR opinions are "not necessarily those of the BSFA", but the JEEVES FOR TAFF notice is Not Sporting, Sir! Vide Matrix, wherein Tom Jones carefully refrains from declaring support for either the Skycon or Channelcon bids for Easter '78. He is aware that, disclaimers or no, the editor of an official BSFA publication is speaking from a bloody large soapbox and should avoid passing opinions upon such topics in such a way, unless of course an official BSFA standpoint exists. Really, we should demand that in the interests of Equal Time you now print a similar urging of ROBERTS FOR TAFF and, for that matter, HOLD OVER FUNDS FOR TAFF and PRESFORD FOR TAFF. But have you, with serpentine cunning, arranged that VECTOR 80 and your abject retractions will not appear until after TAFF voting closes at Easter? Ha! I thought so.

The Channelcon plug is equally naughty (unless it was put in as an ad. by John and Eve, of course - in which case it should have been labelled as such), but I shan't be rude on this count: being heavily involved with Skycon, I couldn't turn on the righteous indignation with due impartiality.

((Both the JEEVES FOR TAFF and the Channelcon plugs were, as you suggest, adverts. If you want to take out an advert for Skycon...? - Ed.))

Thank you for the letter column and reduced mass of reviews. The supplements - both yours and Phil's - are good ideas, and I like the compromise a great deal: if one wants reviews, there they are as well, in large, easy-to-read print and at rock-bottom prices. On second thoughts, the print in most of your own supplement isn't that easy to read - you've typed up original sheets and made thermostencils, no? - with the minimal effort of cutting your own stencil on the typewriter the Supplement would be a very neat as well as useful booklet.

((You miss one point there, Dave, and it is an important one: to get so many reviews in such a small space in VRS, the original copy typed on the IBM is Xeroxed down to half the original size. Thus I couldn't cut stencils direct and get the same amount in. Simple economics. - Ed.))

Roy Gray: 72 Thornton Avenue, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 7XL.

... I have always been afraid to review books for the BSFA journals, because my own efforts seem so poor, and because the reviews I read in VECTOR are so involved and find so much meaning and philosophy in what seems to me a simple tale that I'm ashamed to show my ignorance.

However, when I find a review of Shadrach in the Furnace which misses what seems to be a basic flaw in the novel I don't feel quite so bad (Chris Morgan is in good company - Silverberg, Ben Bova and Andrew Tidmarsh in Arena SF also missed it).

Early in the novel Silverberg stresses Genghis Mao Khan's philosophy and in particular the motto "Redundancy is Our Means of Survival". Thus several research teams are working to extend his life, all on different paths to this goal, and during the liver operation described early in the novel three or four methods of preventing rejection of the transplant are detailed.

However, there is only one "Avatar" being prepared for the Khan's personality transfer. One or two alternatives are required to make the novel internally consistent.

I've a feeling that Dr. Shadrach Mordecai would also have a stand-in or alternative in the wings if the novel is faithful to the Khan's philosophy.

To me the best sf should be plausible and self-consistent or move along so fast that flaws remain unnoticed until you've finished. I noticed these rather quickly. Shadrach in the Furnace does not ring true. Minor points I agree, and easily resolved if the author or the editor had noticed them; so it's a pity they did not.

Colin Bateman: 3 Ballymacormick Avenue, Bangor, Co. Down, N. Ireland.

... My first impressions of the BSFA weren't very good. I read first through three or four booklets containing book review after book review, although the reviews were quite good, I couldn't help thinking that they were of little use to most people, as the majority of fans know already what they want. Perhaps a list of new sf books with only a few lines of comments would be better.

((How can you know whether you want a particular book unless you have some prior knowledge of it, either by knowing about its author, or, if the author be unknown, by having read a review? - Ed.))

VECTOR 79 was little better. I see little need for putting book reviews of any length in VECTOR, when they are over-abundantly available in the other accompanying booklets. I saw little or no point in including "cartoons" like The Last Fish". I don't believe anyone could have liked them.

((The reviews in VECTOR are proper reviews of a respectable length. Those in VRS supplement the ones in V. And what appears in Phil's Paperback Parlour are really only reports, based in many cases - as far as one can tell - on a mere skimming of the book or, even less reliably, on the publisher's publicity hand-outs. As to Judy Watson's work, you are in disagreement with the vast majority of our other correspondents, who enjoyed the cartoons immensely. - Ed.))

Dennis Tucker: 87 Oakridge Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 2PL

I prefer the new size to the old; it should certainly help over-the-counter sales, and the advertising will presumably help the finances, although, with a print run of only 700, it is surely charity rather than advertising?

((Hoho, Dennis, very droll. I never yet heard of a charitable publisher. -Ed.))

On the contents: I am not very interested in comics and am becoming weary of interminable (and ancient) interviews.

((The only "ancient" interview we have run was the Elwood one, and despite being old, it was not obsolete. There is a difference, you know. - Ed.))

I very seldom laugh out loud when reading, but, as usual, Bob Shaw made me do so: excellent. What a devious mind it must take to think up such a brilliant idea. The book reviews were, as always, too long for my liking. All I require from a book review is the full publishing details and price, a brief summary of the plot and an equally brief expression of the reviewer's opinion as to whether the book is worth buying. I do not require a lecture on the particular author's works, nor do I wish to know (figuratively speaking) his life history or what he had for breakfast. Some reviewers are, I fear, over-fond of the "sound of their own voices", or perhaps are encouraged to be so.

((We're all a little fond of the sound of our own voices, Dennis. Otherwise, why would we write letters to VECTOR? - Ed.))

low on to what must surely be the main talking-point of the issue - Phil Stepehensen-Payne's letter. I suppose it is only human that you should have been offended by it, although an editor should surely learn to develop a degree of immunity? I agree with much of what Phil says: in fact, you may recall that several months ago I made the same point about VECTOR not being your personal property. No-one -as Phil says - disputes the hard work and few of us could or would assume such a burden; we are all indebted to you and so it is even harder to speak like this; but does this mean we are not supposed to express adverse views, as members of a democratic organisation? One such view I must now express is to tell you how disgusted I was by your insulting, patronising and almost hysterical outburst in reply to David Raffe. It is certainly no part of your job as editor for the BSFA to so insul a fellow-member who expresses his views and, frankly, I think you should hang your head in shame and send an immediate written apology to him.

(("Listen, snot-nose - when do jumped-up littl turds like you get off criticising me?!" - tha Dennis, is a hysterical response. My response to David Raffe was pretty mild, and only gently sarcastic, considering the lowbrow views being expressed. And when I speak in the letter-column, as now, I speak with my own voice - as I do now. I don't dispute David - or your - right to express views. But I reserve my right to step on them when I disagree. - Ed.))

Please remember that we are not all science-fiction fans - bearing in mind that fan really means fanatic - to the same degree. Personally, when I devote a little of my time to reading sf, I am not particularly interested in having my mind stimulated or my thoughts provoked. I wish only to be entertained or amused in the lightest possible way and I derive such entertainment from many other kinds of books, apart from sf. In other words, sf is not the proverbial "be-all and end-all" of existence, but as far as I am concerned is simply a form of relaxation. Answering your question, I do indeed sometimes wonder whether we wouldn't all be a lot happier if our heads were filled with cold rice pudding, when one considers what the "clever" men, the scientists, thinker politicians and philosophers et al have done to the world so far ... but that's another story.)

((Whilst one recognises that many people only want light escapist entertainment from sf, one feels that the genre is capable of transcending its pulp origins and becoming a valid literary form. It can only do this if criticism is vigorous. VECTOR is an attempt in this direction. I certainly do not regard sf as the "be-all and end-all" of my existence - my interests in the arts, etc extend far beyond the confines of the genre. That is one of the things that helps me to edit V in the way I do.

As to cold rice pudding - do you really think that it is "clever" people who have got the world in the mess it is? Was Nixon really "clever"? Was Stalin? Was Ford? Was Heath? Yes, they had a certain low cunning, a certain sly way of gaining power, an ability to lie convincingly. But I would hazard that the world would be a far better place if the really clever people were in control. But then, I value people more highly than you: I think that all people are potentially clever in that way. It is the denial of any true democracy that robs them of the ability to fulfil that potential. - Ed.))

Robert Heath: 17 Lancaster Drive, Norton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

The BSFA mailing continue to be intriguing (in size as well as content) so it is hard to understand why anyone should want fewer or smaller VECTORs etc. But maybe not. Phil has a bell of a nerve to write a letter to VECTOR stating, in effect, that in his opinion, it would be in the best interests of the whole membership to cut down reviews as well as the size and number of VECTORs issued. For what reasons does he think people subscribe to the BSFA? Why don't they spend the £3/4 on books instead? I'm sure he knows why, so who's he to say that we should get less to read?

Also, it's common sense to assume that a shoddy thin and rare VECTOR may discourage some members from renewing their subs and might dissuade potential members from joining in the first place.

Phil has every right to state his views, but to insinuate that, for the good of the membership, his suggestions should be put into practice ... well, it annoys me. But that's my opinion. Everything I've said so far is just my opinion , even if if it is all a pompous tirade.

((Oh dear, I think this whole Phil/Chris debate over V is getting out of hand! It appeared to readers that the disagreement between us over publications policy was greater than it really is, from their reading of the last Letter Column. In fact, Phil and I agree about most aspects of this, although as you will see from Phil's letter in this column, we still have points of difference. But please note that Phil is now a member of the committee, helping with the running of the BSFA and its publications, and doing sterling work to increase our advertising revenue and thus reduce the strain on finances. - Ed.))

Anthony G. Richards: 48 Hillfield Avenue, London NW9 6NX.

It is over half an hour now since I finished reading Phil's letter. Such an interval between the experience and the actual setting down of words on my typewriter was necessary as what psychiatrists would call and emotional valve - otherwise this epistle would have consisted of a string of rich, and colourful, expletives.

Alas, it is the old, old story so often rehearsed in the bitchy world of sf fandom: dedicated and respected editor set upon by one-who-thinks-he-can-do-better . Even worse, Phil appears to be a patronising one-who...

((I'm afraid you misjudge Phil, Anthony. He had the best interests of the BSFA and its members at heart in writing, when he was disturbed by what he saw as a misallocation of funds, too much being spent on VECTOR. He was certainly not acting out of any sense of jealousy. He has proved this - if proof were needed - by working with us to improve the BSFA finances. Phil is a pretty dedicated guy, too. - Ed.))

Firstly, to deal with the reviews - most people will admit that there were too many reviews in V78, but reviews are highly important and once in a while this cannot be a bad thing. Moreover, if Phil considered some of the reviews that he submitted substandard why did he not improve them in the first place? I run a film crit. column myself, so know that this is not too difficult.

Secondly, Phil questions the desirability of regular issues of VECTOR. May I say - and this is purely a personal opinion - that I consider VECTOR to be the best 'zine that falls through my letter-box. It might be worth pointing out that the aim of the BSFA is to "promote the reading of sf" and as such VECTOR, with its serious approach to the genre, is vital to this cause. It provides that all-necessary balance to the more fannish approach of Matrix, thus making sure that the BSFA caters to all tastes, not simply the elitist (or so it seems to neos) approach of the Trufans. Or maybe Phil would prefer that the Association promoted only the fannish approach and excluded those "damned intellectuals". Just as there is room in the genre itself to encompass all readers from the ERB freaks to the New Wave revolutionaries, there is surely room in the BSFA to allow all modes of critical appreciation. This is a plea, perhaps, for peace and I know that there are plenty of members who would back me up on this.

To close, there may be faults in VECTOR but is all you are doing an admirable job.

Phil Stephensen-Payne: Lindon, 1 Lewell Avenue, Old Marston, Oxford, OX3 0EL.

... First impressions of V79. Which were very good indeed. The change of paper for the cover, the larger format and the marvellous cover combined to make a very impressive and eye-catching package indeed. There was no impulse to just chuck it on the pile of "to-be-read" fanzines, but rather a desire to delve further.

Sadly, such delving brought a very sad disillusionment. I suspect that many people will gripe at the tiny typeface, but I found it manageable and not too irritating. (Indeed rather a small, readable, well-proof-read - congratulations - than a larger, but error-ridden print like Dick Geis produces.) No doubt some will object to long pages without illustrations, but I can't say it bothered me - many other professional publications do the same. What did put me off was the illustrations.

On the inside front cover there was (presumably - the credits were a trifle unclear) a reasonable piece of fanart. Not up to the standard of the cover, but not too bad. The page 4 produced another superb illustration, by the cover artist Carol Gregory, which I was greatly taken by. So far so good.

Then on page 6 an inept cartoon strip. Not only ineptly drawn, but with a ridiculously trite "theme". Facing that another full-page piece of crud from Paul Dillon. He seems to have great difficulty in drawing human beings (or even Bob Shaw) and this is one of his poorer attempts. Then several art-free pages until page 26, and what do we find there. Another piece of crap from Paul Dillon (another full-page!) and another full-page cartoon-strip by Judy Watson that is even more trite and badly-drawn than the first one. So fearing the worst, I turn on. Nice piece of art on page 29 - oh, it's an advert. Superb inside back cover - whoops, another advert - and another inept piece of Judy Watson on page 30.

So what have we got. Two marvellous pieces from Carol Gregory, a reasonable full-page by Moy Griffiths and four-and-half pages of utter crap from Judy Watson and Paul Dillon. Surely I am not that out-of-touch with artistic taste? I'd be fascinated to hear what proportion of people see any quality as artists - if you'll excuse the euphemism - in either Paul Dillon or Judy Watson as here represented. No doubt people will object to irrelevancies - the title is Judy Watson's pieces or the non-sf of Dillon - which might obscure their feelings on the quality of the art as art.

((Obviously, I disagree with you about Judy's work, Phil - I think I made my views clear in the last Lead-In. It is true that the two pieces by Paul Dillon were not among his best - a fact that he recognises - but I don't think one can call them "crap". I think you'll see from this letter-column that most people disagree with you on the subject of Judy's work. - Ed.))

At this point I would have returned VECTOR to the shelves had I been browsing in a shop. But I wasn't. The magazine was "free" and I had time to kill so I pressed on and, behold, things improved exponentially!

Marvellous piece from Bob Shaw. I have never heard him in better form, and he has done some superb articles before. What better put-down of Space 1999 has there been? When else has there been such rapid-fire, razor-sharp lunacy? Not for far too long. No doubt there will be a few critics carping at the fact that it was a reprint, but no doubt most of VECTOR's readers will not have come across it before, which to my mind justifies any sort of re-printing.

Followed by a very interesting interview with Roger Elwood, which had two outstanding qualities - a good interviewer and a good interviewee, both of which seem rare these days. Far too often the interviewer knows nothing about either the interviewee or the subject under "discussion". The supremely bad example of this was a recent interview with Carl Sagan in Analog, where the interviewer's questions seemed limited to things like "if time dilates as you move faster, but doesn't seem to, is that why mammals live the same length of time as measured by heartbeats" or "relativity, what's that". At least you knew what you were talking about. (Take a bow, Fowler,you're getting some honest praise.)

In addition, I found Elwood himself fascinating, and on the whole, very impressive. He clearly has a lot of drive and energy, and the interview changed my views on him radically,

There was a drawback, as it seems there always must be - the age of the interview. With many authors - Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein - it wouldn't really matter if an interview was 15 months old, but Elwood moves too fast for that. He talked of the starting of the Laser series, and also its demise has been announced; plans for a series of Corgi books probably out in January 1977 - but there's no sign of them. I don't know what Elwood is doing these days, but it's not what he was doing at the time of the interview (i.e. original anthologies and Laser Books). Still, for all that, it was a most enjoyable piece, well edited to about the ideal length.

Whence to book reviews, as a quick pre-skim looked good. Seven sides (about 20-25% of the magazine, not too bad), with a preponderance of very recent books and a noticeable scattering of well-known and "loved" reviewers. So to details.

John Clute - well, what can one say? You either love or hate his style. Personally I love it, and reckoned his review of Nebula Award Stories 11 one of the best, for its length, I've seen for a while. I was not so fond of the Wan Plus review, but partly because I disagreed with him on the book's quality (amazing to find John Clute and Edmund Cooper raving about the same book) and wasn't convinced that The Sun Chemist deserved room in VECTOR. Still,it's a delight to read Mr. Clute at any time - keep him contributing.

Jim Goddard on The Martian Inca was curiously disappointing - he seemed to spend a long time doing a plot summary, and not much talking about the book. Having enjoyed Ian's previous two - though I would not award them the "universal acclaim" Jim talks of - I did not find myself inspired by the review to dash out and read this one, despite the superlatives. Perhaps a reduction in length would have helped. Conversely I found the length of Dave Pringle's Ballard review not in the least off-putting. A little slow to start, with his continual Dylan comparisons; he soon got off on a well-written and informative review, that did provoke my interest in the book. I wonder if he could do as well for any other author, though, as the next review - which I found a little simplistic - shows him to be somewhat of a Ballard expert - so much the better.

The most frustrating thing about doug barbour's reviews was what it omitted. On its own it was a good review of a book I had never heard of, giving a fairly good case for its quality. Yet I cannot believe that the Dhalgren in the book has no connection with Delany's book - such coincidences are too rare - and yet doug makes no mention of it. Shame, it left the feeling he had missed something when reading the book.

Stableford's review seemed fair enough. The trouble with a mediocre book is it can only produce a mediocre review, and Stableford certainly runs true to the general form here - which is not really his "fault".

Brian Griffin I found tedious. He rambled on and on about a book which, while seemingly good, was not outstanding enough to carry two-and-a-half columns. At half to one-third the length it could have been very good.

I'm undecided on James Corley's review of Future City. Half of me liked it, and the other half thought it was a waste of time. I suppose it has a sort of naive charm (in the way some very competent painters were called "naive" - this is not condescension, it's classification.) Perhaps half the length would have been the best answer.

Which leaves Dave Wingrove and Chris Morgan, and the problem of talking about one's friends' writing. Still here goes.

Off to a good start, for Dave, with a very enjoyable review of Le Guin's book. Perhaps a touch moreplot would not have been out of place, but a minor quibble only. I felt he had a bit of a tendency to drift on the Coney review, though. Every now and again he seemed to lose momentarily the thread of his argument. Another half-turn of the nut could have tightened the review considerably, into, indeed, a very good one. Quality fell a bit further in the third review, as Dave seemed to spend rather too long on stories he admitted were not worth much. It's always difficult to

review an anthology with as many stories as NW10 had, but I felt from Dave's summary (and on my own views of the book) that it was not really worth a two-column review. Still, no matter, Dave at his lowest is still high quality.

Chris also gets off to a good start with a competent review of the Aldiss/Harrison collection and a masterful one of Deus Irae - and who better than Chris to talk on Dick and Zelazny? I felt him to stumble a little at Shadrach in the Furnace though. We've talked briefly about the book before, as I found it somewhat shallow and boring for Silverberg, and I looked forward to Chris' review to see what I had missed. Sadly Chris seems content to give a plot summary and few scant lines of praise - I got no real idea from the review why the book had claims to be Silverberg's best. A pity, if anyone could find the hidden gems in Silverberg it should be Chris. The last two reviews were about right - short and to the point - ideal fillers to round off the section.

So on the whole, a very good collection of reviews. Of the seven pages presented, even I with perhaps the most "cutting" comments around, would not have wished for the excision of more than one page. Congratulations - I hope the quality reviews continue to arrive.

((Thanks for your very comprehensive comments, Phil. Both I and the reviewers like to have feedback on the reviews section. Just one point, in defence of Chris Morgan - he was rushed by me on the Shadrach review, to get it in in time for that issue, which explains why it was a rather shorter than Chris would have liked. - Ed.))

And last, but not least, the Letter Column. Welcome back old friend, it's good to see you again.

Although I began to doubt that as I read the first letter (from James Corley). A nice rambling fannish letter - just right for a nice rambling fannish fanzine, but VECTOR's better than that and doesn't need such ephemera.

Chris Priest was far better. A coherent, intelligent and well-pointed letter. As such, of course, it's utterly uncommentable-on (except, presumably, by Ian himself). Chris makes a lot of sense, and I agree with most of the sense he makes. I would hope that fiction in general, and science fiction in particular, was sometimes more than "a literary metaphor for the human condition", particularly Chris' own writing.

Dave Wingrove was also excellent in lucidity. The big problem with his comments on evolution is of course that evolution is as ill-defined a word as sf, and means many things to many people. For many people, one could cite in particular the recent wave of "sociobiologists" in the US, all of man's progress is evolution rather than training. I don't think we'll ever get the evolutionary jumps so beloved of our favourite authors and spawn a Higher Species, but I reckon man is pushing up all the time.

Cannot help but agree with Chris Morgan that "the style of your editorial has been rather over-used elsewhere" (OK, so imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but if REG hasn't taken out a sub he probably never will!) but am less inclined to "allow you to get away with it". As with James Corley's letter, it fits nicely into an amiable fannish fanzine, but not in a professional product like VECTOR. Similar comments could be made about David Raffe's letter (and yourreply) - but they don't really fit here.

Then on to the debates between Tom, you and I. The readership must be amused at the united front 50% of the Committee presents, but never mind. The point I think Tom was trying to suggest about reviews of good books was not that you, as editor, should say "We will publish reviews of X, Y, Z, in the next issue" and then commission the reviews, but that you should chuck out the books for review and then say "We will publish reviews of X, Y, Z because Fred thinks A was a load of crud and George's review of B is not really good enough and C has turned out not to be sf at all". Either you have adopted this policy this issue, a good idea, or you've been very lucky in which books got reviewed. I hope the former.

I am fascinated to hear that your policy for VECTOR was fully endorsed at the last AGM. However, as there was no motion related to VECTOR on the published Agenda, nor any published minutes saying that such an endorsement took place, it is hardly reasonable for you to expect people to know about it.

((The endorsement was in the form of the acceptance of my report as Publication and Distribution Officer, including my comments on V policy. - Ed.))

Why comment on the effort. I said incredible. I meant incredible.

The reviews of mine that you ran included ones of the first Steeleye book and the original Buck Rogers novel - you cannot reasonably call them "quite important books". Thank you for trying to encourage me to improve. "That must be the most patronising thing anyone has said about me for a long time."

((The reference to "important" was not about those books - although I do think that it was worth running them: they were original in the UK, and it is worth telling people that stuff is crud if that's what the reviewer thinks. And on the subject of the "encouragement" - you're right, that was rather below the belt. On the patronisation front, let's call it quits and forget it, OK? - Ed.))

There have been no triple issues per se, I admit. What I meant was the mailing which contained three issues of VECTOR - what matter that they're published in separate physical units. Yes, people want a strong critical section of reviews - not a 32-page one. You asked me to point out poor reviews - I pointed out poor reviews: or have you forgotten. I am at liberty to make comments upon the magazine without reading it, because my comments were not about the quality of the contents, as such, but rather about the general trend of VECTORs over the last year, and the overall policy - that I could comment on and did. Letters on specific VECTOR contents would never have gone to Tom, they'd be of no interest to him.

((I think you're on shaky ground in commenting in writing on the "bad reviews" in a journal without having read the latest issue, Phil, though I agree that you can still comment on general policy of preceding issues. - Ed.))

You predicted a lettercolumn "next issue" in Vectors 75 and 76/7, and they weren't. Why should I believe the promises in V78? OK, I know you said "definitely"", but then according to 76/7, issue 78 would "definitely ... have the interview with Roger Elwood", and it didn't. I have no objection to your making unfulfilled promises, but you can't expect people to take them as gospel.

((Phil - the letter-column kept not appearing because no-one sent me any letters! It was only because I wrote to people actually soliciting locs that I got any for V79. And the Elwood thing was just one hassle after another - basically editing the darn thing down from 3 hours of tape. - Ed.))

We fought a war once, because, among other things, we were imposing "taxation without representation". I felt the same thing about the BSFA's money and VECTOR. I have never tried to deny that you were, and still are, doing a good job, but it seemed that the members had little or no say in what their money went on. The one letter in Matrix raising the question (from Dave Lewis) was just calmly told it all got spent on Matrix and VECTOR. The most important thing in putting the magazine together is indeed yout time and I think everyone is grateful for it - but also vital is the BSFA's prestige and money. To put it bluntly, the BSFA managed to produce VECTOR without you (nothing like as good, I agree, but that's not the point) but you have not previously produced something of the quality of VECTOR without the BSFA. I think your help and assistance to the BSFA is invaluable, and I hope you will keep going for many years, but it is not all one-sided. And because it is not all one-sided, I felt that the decisions should not all be one-sided either.

((True - you've never seen anything from me as good as VECTOR prior to my involvement with the BSFA. But what you haven't seen, Phil is the magazines I produced before that time - because they weren't in the sf fanzine field. And, if I had not become editor of V, the chances are that I should have begun producing my own fanzine, of a similar type, even if it took longer to reach the quality of reproduction - due to the lack of capital - of V79. And my decisions about V were not the ones which ruled the day prior to your letter and involvement with the committee: I was always constrained by the other committee members, especially financially. -Ed.))

OK, so you don't like being called a nice guy. Perhaps you aren't a nice guy. But I'm damned if I'm going to write a letter to Tom Jones and start saying "Chris Fowler is a creep, but". Perhaps you'd prefer it, would you?

((Sorry, Phil, but it's just that all those statements that start "A is a nice guy, but.." just make my flesh crawl; they seem so false. Forget the "nice guy" bit - just come right out and say "I think Fowler is doing a bad job of editing". We tend to take it as given that I'm a nice guy! - Ed.))

OK so that's all history now. I can see why you were upset by some of the things I said, and other things I think you overreacted to immensely. No matter: V79 is better than V78, both in contents and financially. I hope that between us we can build it up to a higher position yet, where your dreams of a 100-page A4 issue can be met with my dreams of a VECTOR financed wholly by advertising and outside sales. We're on the right road at least.

Alexei and Cory Panshin: RR2, Box 261, Perkasie, Pa. 18944, USA

We were very impressed by (VECTOR 78). Recently we had an exchange with a young American professor who seemed to believe that the late arrival of academic sf critics superseded all previous sf criticism and all other forms of criticism. We replied that the task of understanding sf had barely begun. And that perceptive criticism of sf should be welcomed and listened to repectfully, whatever its quarter of origin. VECTOR is the proof of our words. There is no centre of sf criticism in the United States, academic or otherwise, comparable in its serious, focussed perceptiveness to this issue of VECTOR. We wish there were. You have something special in VECTOR. We hope you are able to keep it going.

We were very impressed by the generally high level of book reviews. This far overmatches the spotty reviewing in the American review journals, which seems to vary widely in quality, the result of trying to cover everything that is published.

This is only the second of Brian Stableford's historical pieces that we have seen. His discovery of Edgar Fawcett fills another hole in the sf family tree. It is work of a sort that American professors might well do, were they not involved in games of formal analysis and other introversions.

Cy Chauvin's piece on Lessing was the best we have seen by him. His continuing growth as a critic is fascinating to watch.

Of course, the centrepiece of the issue is Ian Watson's talk on sf. Particularly good was Watson's perception of sf as a tool of human evolution, a leading edge in the transformation of man, but likewise a tool, like a stone ax, that can be shaped in new and better ways and eventually be left behind. This is a view we share with Watson. This view is particularly valuable because it allows honour and value to the science fiction of the past without demanding that we must labour within the bounds of the science fiction of the past. Or within former conceptions of the nature of sf. For those who can see the implications, this view conserves the essential values of past sf while offering the prospect of a vastly richer conception of sf with great relevance to the problems and potentials of the present moment. How ownderful it was to discover Ian Watson voicing these ideas. It gives us all the more reason to look forward to reading his novels.

We Also Heard From:

John Brunner: "Congratulations on the massive mailing. Lord knows when I'll find time to read it...but congratulations anyway!"

Chris Morgan: " ... liked the new-style V and VRS, especially Judy Watson's marvellously sadistic cartoons. (Velly good!!)"

Carol ("Hurry! Rush! Panic! Dash!") Gregory: " ... for the lettering on the cover, could you be more consistent with type-face? I'm sure it would look better. A minor point though. ... thought V79 vast improvement content-wise on last ish."

Chris Evans: "The critical section of V is currently of an excellent standard. Personally, I prefer the pocket-size V, but that's just my own thing."

Ian Watson: "What a beautiful issue of VECTOR. We loved it. Hope you stay in A4!"

Michael Moorcock: (commenting on the small print) " ... it's not the sf that turns you blind, it's the reading about it."

...and lots of others - but typing any more will make me go blind and then people will say nasty things about what I get up to late at night in theprivacy of my room, so I shall cease and desist from typing...

the INFINITY box

MEDUSA'S CHILDREN by Bob Shaw; Gollancz; London; 1977; £4.20; 184 pp; ISBN 0-575-02249-3

Reviewed by John Clute

The thing about prolific authors, they will take their rest periods in public. After two remarkably good novels in a short span, Orbitsville and A Wreath Of Stars, Bob Shaw has come up too quickly with a new one, Medusa's Children, whose deadpan skittishness of pacing and structure feels weirdly hypnopompic, as though he were trying to wake himself up, just the way A. E. Van Vogt fails to, though there's nothing downright incoherent in the story, nor (it must be said, remembering Null-A) does the daydream ever darken into nightmare, either. What we have in Medusa's Children is a quick manly doze downwards to the last page, where the dream stops: there is no residue, no haunting.

The narrative is complicated enough. Two sequences dovetail halfway through the book, though to no generative avail, because the male protagonist immediately hops a spaceship (a very boring Ian Watson-like spaceship, verisimilitudinous but slummy, trammelled in heat-death) and conducts the rest of the story from that coign of vantage, though he does get back to Earth in the final pages to think - rather blankly - about the girl. The first sequence tells the story of aquatic human Myrah and her clan who live in a captive universe trope whose details gradually lead us to suspect that her submarine-world-ocean is some kind of generation starship, though it turns out not to be; the second tells the story of tough ex-soldier from the kingdom of South Newzealand Hal Tarrant who now farms algae (after having deserted the lamentable South Newzealand space programme) off Cawley Island, and whose aquatic farm is being raided by peculiar squid. Myrah's tight, sexually open clan is under threat from a new current in their mini-world pulling them downwards towards Ka, their god, actually (as we eventually learn) an enormously overgrown, mutated, sentient medusa (a repulsively agglutinative hydrozoan that tends to absorb fellow medusae into its corpus and thus to continue agglutinating, in Ka's case indefinitely) who wants to use Myrah and pals to go to Earth and work out some way of stopping the loss of water from the mini-world they all share; so Myrah and pals hold their breath and are swept (by matter transmitter, it turns out) to Earth, conveniently close to Cawley Island, where Hal Tarrant rescues them from the squid, which turn out to be emissaries of Ka, too, I think. Cawley Island is a close-knit sexually-repressed society, which we get a glimpse of for a few pages, enough to point the contrast (though not develop the contrast) between Myrah's and Hal's environment. With the help of a few friends, Hal works out the nature of Myrah's world, which involves a good deal of exposition. Long ago (we're now a hundred or so years past the high-point of the Petroleum Epist-em-, and rather decadent and balkanized) a man named Bergmann had a Hypothesis to the effect that some much earlier race or species had undertaken the task of controlling Earth's sea-level by constructing (I think) three mini- water-worlds in space whose function was to receive water from Earth (by a new kind of wave, electronic I believe) whenever the ice began to melt, and to reverse the process when necessary, hence Ka's removal to the mini-world, along with Myrah's ancestors. Now the ice is returning, water is leaving the mini-world (hence the current), and Ka is scared of being himself dismembered.

Hal notices that Myrah is a bit peculiar but soon kisses her, only to find himself taken over by a telepathic blob of Ka; soon he and his friends, also inhabited, and Myrah, are off in a boat to try and shut off the matter transmitter and hence save Ka. Fortunately for all concerned, however, Hal is almost drowned by a squid, his lungs eject the blob of Ka (I think), and he is picked up by the South Newzealand armed forces, who are also interested in the Bergmann Hypothesis and the chance that when they find one of the matter transmitters they'll discover the secret of dysteleonics (which is the name of the wave). As Myrah and crew have stolen an atomic bomb as part of their scheme, the South Newzealanders feel the need to eliminate them, but after Hal has persuaded them of the existence of Ka (and of some other things), they decide to send him in a spaceship to the planetoid to destroy Ka (and do some other things). Off he goes, the spaceship defuncts once they're at the planetoid, Hal and the South Newzealanders nevertheless go into the water, meet Myrah's uncomprehending Clan, blow up Ka, return, via the matter transmitter (which is very much like birth, or rebirth, or sex, or death) to Earth. Once Ka is dismembered, Myrah et al recover their personalities, so it's going to be a happy ending. The bomb is not detonated. Hal and Myrah will make it together. Hal will quit algae fishing. The kingdom of South Newzealand will get the secret of dysteleonics and (God knows) conquer North Newzealand.

So it's a very complicated tale, which is precisely the trouble with it. An experienced author like Bob Shaw - as he has just proven - has a wide range of sf tropes up the sleeve of his pyjamas, ready for hypnopompic display early in the morning; but displaying material in this fashion, without working it, is almost guaranteed to produce a novel like Medusah's Children, where sequent shifts of trope give off a simulation of complexity, like the farrago I've tried to resume above, but in reality fail to interact or to generate that synergy of telling and the told essential if the reader is going to remember what he's read. Of Medusah's Children I am beginning to remember only a drone.

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TRAVELLING TOWARDS EPSILON: AN ANTHOLOGY OF FRENCH SCIENCE FICTION edited by Maxim Jakubowski; New English Library; London; 1977; £4.95; 288 pp; ISBN 0-450-03068-7

Reviewed by John Clute

Here is the kind of book you open with the sort of gratitude you feel for the existence of dentists, because they are needed, but it doesn't turn out to be nearly as bad as that. Maxim Jakubowski has put together a surprisingly friendly anthology of French sf, with three or four stories of extremely high calibre, some feckless unassuming nonsense, and only one piece ("The Leap" by Tony Cartano) I couldn't actually get through. There are a few surface blemishes, which Jakubowski must take some blame for, but which certainly should have been caught by NEL's copy editor. It's probably the number one favourite error that translators from the French must teach themselves never to commit: translating conscience as "conscience" rather than "consciousness" in contexts that require the latter. I would argue that if you are hit on the head and black out it's likely to be consciousness you lose rather than conscience. And one rarely falls asleep in a thrice...

Several of the stories read very much as though they had been written by aficionados of Etruscan Lit. determined to reconstruct - to repenetrate, to reinhabit - the fundamentally opaque fabulae of an alien species; these tales, like "Where The Astronauts Meet" by Suzanne Malaval, or the editor's "Summer In The Death Zone", read as deeply estranged from the industrial sf whose language and concerns they feed on; others, in "psychologizing" hard sf, fatally reduce the tensions of generic tale-telling, reading consequently almost as explications of themselves, and that way lies Prufrockery.

The best stories were "Thomas" by Dominique Douay, "Delta" by Christine Renard and Claude-F. Cheinisse, and "Wings In The Night" by Nathalie Henneberg. Each takes a conventional generic idea (telepathic alien puppet master; Sturgeonesque love between species; Gothic bondieuserie) and intensifies it by applying a sort of heightened attention span to the material it deals with. Henneberg's is maybe the best of all. Into a mise en scene reminiscent of any Borowczyk film she engages a modern heroine in a horror tale whose complex explanation unfolds steadily and remorselessly to the close, the way James Tiptree's best stories take final shape only with their final sentences - and so it is with Henneberg.

The function of an anthology like this one is to widen and to sharpen expectations, not to fulfill them. Epsilon succeeds in that. I could feel my conscience raising.

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NEBULA MAKER by Olaf Stapledon; Bran's Head Books; London; 1977; £3.50; 120 pp; ISBN 0-905220-06-4

Reviewed by Mark Adlard

This is a book of extraordinary interest. It should be read not only by the growing number of people who regard Stapledon as the greatest of all writers in our field, but also by anyone who would like to discover what speculative writing could do when it was entirely disassociated from the genre audience and the magazines.

The text, a product of the 30s, was discovered about a year ago and is part of a first draft of Star Maker which Stapledon put aside. Just as the history of the various races of men (published as Last and First Men) was later condensed into part of a paragraph for Star Maker, so this history of the nebulae (not published) was later shortened to a retrospective episode in the same book. Or we can regard the "nebulae" as being dealt with in an opposite way to the "flames": Stapledon made only a passing reference to the "flames" in Star Maker, and then later treated them in extenso in their own book; he treated the nebulae at length first, and then (having put the ms aside) gave them only three or four pages before "the supreme moment of the cosmos".

Harvey Satty, in a concise and admirable introduction, describes the text as "unrevised and therefore unfinished". I should point out, however, that this is no fragment such as, for example, Fitzgerald's The Last Tycoon. At first I thought there was going to be a repetition of phrases that would have been excised: on p 12 we read that "it (the future cosmos) lay on the point of his (God's) finger as a mote upon a continent"; and again on p 14 that "Like a mote upon a continent it now lay upon the finger tip of God"; and on p 19 this grows into the sombre, Stapledonian grandeur of "a minute and gloomy pearl quiescent on God's finger". But with one or two trifling exceptions, which wouldn't be noticed in prose of ordinary quality, the text is fine and polished. It is without gaps or anomalies or unexplained happenings. Moreover, although the last chapter is entitled "Interlude", it forms a satisfactory conclusion, and the work can readily be enjoyed as a self-contained whole. Nebula Maker can stand without support as another and most welcome book by Stapledon.

Nebula Maker has some obvious similarities to Star Maker (1937) which it presumably antedates by only a short period. Both begin with a narrator who, after some "bitterness" with a loved one, leaves the house at night and climbs a neighbouring hill. He stands on the heather with the sea on one hand and his "mean little villa" on the other, and regards the stars.

Instead of being rapt into space and undertaking a cosmical Cook's Tour which will lead to a confrontation with the Star Maker, the narrator in Nebula Maker promptly sees the outline of God behind the stars. It is a figure that would have been more readily recognised by Max Müller than by the Church Fathers or C. S. Lewis: "now... his many-faceted eyes and pincer-mandibles, now ... the white-bearded Jehovah". In prose as muscular and powerful as the last panels on the Sistine ceiling, Stapledon describes the genesis of the universe and the nebulae appear.

The biological description of the nebulae is impressively resourceful in its portrayal of something alien to our own modes of cognition. Without language the nebulae develop a system of "symbolic images and incipient gestures"; without lens or retina they learn to perceive form by "slight differences in the direction of the light-rays which entered their tissue at different points"; and differences in electric charges in their neighbours convey emotional meanings.

But Stapledon, as always, is more interested in "mentality" than in biology. He points out that three factors make the nebulae completely alien to us: they do not procreate and die, and are therefore without experimental variety in their own species; they have no interest in economic activities (like the "flames") and are therefore without its stimulus to practical intelligence; and most of them reach maturity without becoming aware of other minds, i.e. each other. Each of these disabilities (as we

would regard them) has its compensating virtue. The narrator discovers that each solitary nebula is striving after an ideal of self-expression through the performance of a kind of dance.

Over aeons of time some of the nebulae become aware of each other and form groups. The individual nebulae struggle to maintain the symmetry of their own dances against the distorting influence of the group, but here and there communities arise in which the dance of the entire group enriches the individuals in it. We are on familiar ground. The potentiality of the group, as a device for enhancing instead of restricting individual personality, had previously been embodied in the metaphor of the "group-mind" of the Last Men. Personal love develops between the nebulae in some cases and Stapledon, as so often, finds the appropriate, alien imagery: "Sometimes, indeed, this passion was so intense that the lover dared not approach at all near to the beloved for fear of marring his beauty by his own extraneous gravitational sway".

Conflict develops in the new societies and martial rituals evolve. The nebulae learn how to unlock sub-atomic energy in matter, and a new culture develops on the basis of mechanisation. Stapledon almost invariably regarded mechanisation (the "mechanic's mentality" as he repeatedly called it in Waking World) as inimical to truly civilised ways of living. (This contempt for mere paraxis is one of the things that makes Stapledon so different from pulp sf with its reverence for gadgetry or what its proponents call "ideas". Less happily this same contempt has been a distinguishing feature of the English intellectual and social elite for a long time, and has a great deal to do with the weakness of British management and our national decline. But this is no place to talk about that sort of thing.) Practically all matter is in the living tissue of the nebulae, and their new mechanical civilisation can progress only at the expense of individual lives: an extended metaphor which unfairly but neatly drives home the point.

The Cosmical Wars arrive and killing becomes general. Stapledon makes use of a curious technique that he had used in Last and First Men and that he will use repeatedly in Star Maker. "There is no need to tell in detail how the victims ..." he says (p 78); "It would be tedious and unnecessarily harrowing to describe in detail ... " (p 80); "It would be tedious to follow the course of the war ... " (p 119). It would be a little while before Eric Frank Russell came to see Stapledon with an armful of American magazines, from which Stapledon could discover that the very things he dismissed as tedious or unworthy of description were packing the contemporary pulps (Amazing and Astounding) from cover to cover.

From this point Nebula Maker, like some of the episodes in Star Maker, slides towards satire or implied commentary on our own world. The "hard-pressed general" who slaughters nebulae for ammunition might have savoured the nebular equivalent of a first-growth claret behind the line of the So-me with Haig and Foch; and the "Pan-Cosmical League" wouldn't have known what to do about the Sudetenland, any more than the League of Nations did.

The nebulae produce two remarkable individuals. The first is Bright Heart, with his doctrine of "glad beholding and dancing". He clearly represents the Tolstoyan Jesus, i.e. the philosopher who delivered the Sermon on the Mount, not the phenomenon that was theologised by Paul and imperialised by Constantine. He is succeeded by Fire Hold, a more composite figure, but one wouldn't be surprised to find the rarified equivalent of Das Capital tucked away in one of his gaseous pockets. Bright Heart, like all Stapledon's supermen, is killed; and Fire Bolt's rebellion ends in suppression of the newly free and even worse wars.

The more enlightened nebulae can see that the goal of life "must ever be to awaken the spirit so far as possible in percipience, intelligence, and appreciation". The vocabulary is different, but these are the three gateways to the "life of the spirit", the conclusion of all Stapledon's thinking and the ultimate finding in all his speculative fiction. But the advocates of "mechanical power" seize the government, new wars start, more hideous weapons are developed, the nebulae drift apart in their expanding universe and succumb to a disease which over aeons of time breaks them up into galactic clusters.

The narrator, having watched this history, is appalled by the futility of it all. He loathes the God who has thwarted the spiritual potentialities of these huge creatures. It is a God without compassion; or at any rate without a compassion which can be understood by minute creatures such as ourselves. It is a God who destroys what he creates. Like everything else in the universe, this God is evolving; and he will evolve into the Star Maker whose austere presence dominates the greatest of all Stapledon's great books.

The Nebula Maker hasn't the scope or depth of Last and First Men or Star Maker; nor has it the variety of interest of Odd John or Sirius. I would, however, place it on the same level as The Flames, to which it is similar in more ways than one; that is to say, I would place it far above anything we are likely to see for a long time. If I read anything nearly as good in the rest of the year, I shall count myself doubly blessed.

I must conclude by saying that the book is nicely produced by this new publisher. We should be grateful to them, and also to Harvey Satty who has earned himself a permanent niche in Stapledon studies even if he never moves another finger.

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BRUNO LIPSHITZ AND THE DISCIPLES OF DOGMA by John Robert King; Gollancz; London; 1976; £3.50; 159 pp; ISBN 0-575-02171-3

Reviewed by Mark Adlard

Somewhere around the 23rd century a space station, of the usual doughnut kind, is circling earth. The aliens arrive and they, too, are one of the familiar kinds - Alsatian dogs with such names as Greyback, Redtooth, Smalldog and Yellowtooth, who wear shorts and are capable of learning and speaking fluent English in three days flat. I remember a creature similar to that on the cover of Analog, which someone pressed upon me to show how intellectual the magazines had become.

But don't go away. This is a humorous novel. And one of the interesting laws of sf is that you can use the old cliches, which were absurd even when they were fresh, and not be under any compulsion to explain the impossible, providing your intention is to be witty or satiric.

And so we discover that the aliens are part of an Evangelist Fleet, currently lying fourth in the Northern Branch Conversion League, and they are anxious to win a few extra points and consequent promotion. Some insight into their religious system is gained when, after entering the Station, they take down their shorts and excrete en masse. One catches a slight whiff of Aldiss's "utods" in The Dark Light Years. It appears that when Dogma defecated He created the planets, and when He urinated the never-ending flow of eternity began. It's as near as anybody ever came to explaining eternity so far as I'm concerned. A prized devotional object is a plastic statuette of the excreting Dogma with the Holy Turd glittering at His anus. The Declaration of Faith begins with "I, that am but a mite in Thy turd ... " which nicely encapsulates a certain attitude of mind.
The writer's mood is one of light cynicism and deflation. Lois is "fairly frugal, and sometimes gave of her affection with no ulterior motive whatsoever, other than the pursuit of pleasure and maybe a sandwich or two". Mikis' eyes are "deep pools etcetera, and besides being the all-round Renaissance athlete, scholar, singer, poet, he also cooked a pretty fair beanpaste mousaka". The wry, bantering dialogue helps the story along.

This is a pleasantly sharp, astringent read from - I think - a new writer.

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THE TIME OF THE HAWKLORDS by Michael Moorcock and Michael Butterworth; Star Books; London; 1976; 254 pp; 70p; ISBN 0-352-39894-9

Reviewed by Chris Evans

I experienced one of those Waves of Annoyance so graphically described by Bob Shaw in Foundation 10. Never mind, I told myself, Moorcock and Butterworth are not responsible for the trendy jargon of the blurbwriter, proceed to page one. Unfortunately, from that point on things went rapidly from bad to worse.

This is a juvenile novel, though not billed as such. The list of credits at theend cites Moorcock as producer/director and Butterworth as writer. This did not really surprise me, for although the book has some of the hallmarks of a typical Moorcock novel (the background of a ruined Earth, the fascination with legend, quaint character names), the writing lacks the subtlety and wry humour which Moorcock usually injects into his work. In fact, the tone of this novel is particularly banal and so devoid of style that I suspect that Moorcock's involvement was minimal.

If you're fourteen or fifteen years old, into heavy rock and with a dislike of "straights", then this is the book for you. If you see yourself as one of the oppressed minority of free-thinkers, held down by the petty restrictions of the system, then this is what you've been waiting for. In The Time Of The Hawklords the hip really do inherit the Earth and the centre of their empire is, natch, Notting Hill Gate. I must admit that as an ageing twenty-five year old who still looks back on the days of the Beatles with fond recollection, this isn't really my cup of coke, but then maybe I'm just a square.

So what's it all about? Catastrophe has overtaken the Earth, civilisation is in ruins, and only five thousand people survive in the whole of Britain. These survivors are periodically afflicted with a strange kind of nausea which turns their bowels to belly, gives them queasy stomachs, aching limbs, and, worst of all, nightmare visions of hideous creatures which emerge from the depths of the Earth to wreak havoc amongst the remnants of mankind. Exactly like some of my hangovers, in fact. Amongst these survivors are the intrepid members of Hawkwind, who, for those of you not musically minded, are a rock group. Hawkwind have discovered that when they play live music, the malaise which is affecting them and their followers is mysteriously neutralised. As you can imagine, the survivors flock to their concerts in order to dig the music and obtain relief.

"Next came Lord Rudolph the Black, most recent champion sworn to the ranks of the Company of the Hawk. About his lips there played an eternal, mysterious smile as he adjusted the strap of his great bass called Boneshiverer, which all men feared and all women loved."

Lucky lad. Not everyone is appeased by the music, though. Hawkwind's captive audience comprises the youth of the nation, known as the Children of the Sun, but for some of the older survivors, the music actually brings on the symptoms which it dispels in the children. They vow revenge:

"He shuddered uncontrollably as visions of the detestable, long-haired yobbos in Green Park returned to him. They were the offensive. They were the Enemy. They were what was turning his men into a bunch of ineffectual, spineless pansies ... "

Meanwhile, the musical emanations are reaching all over the world, attracting the interest of other survivors who embark on pilgrimages to London. Hawkwind are transformed into the avatars of the Hawklords who, it is prophesied, will free the Earth from the scourge of the Dark Forces. They enlist the aid of Moorlock the Acid Sorcerer, a bearded eccentric who lives in Ladbroke Grove. Together they discover that their music is counteracting the effects of a Death Ray located at the earth's core aeons ago by a race of aliens. And so on.

There are broad hints throughout this book that it's an elaborate parody, but it's so badly done that any reader with an iota of intelligence is likely to be irritated rather than amused. What worries me is that some younger readers might take it seriously, swallowing the Us versus Them propaganda wholesale. This is a thoroughly shoddy book, written without grace or conviction. The characterisation is primitive and the prose stilted and laborious. I see that Michael Butterworth is also responsible for the new series of paperbacks based on Space:1999. I seem to recall that in the heyday of New Worlds he was known as an experimental writer who scorned "linear narrative". Alas, the swinging sixties have given way to the sober seventies and we live in less adventurous times. No doubt The Time Of The Hawklords was written as a money-spinner, and no doubt Moorcock's name on the cover will ensure that it sells well. You might be interested to know that this book is the first in an exciting new trilogy to include The Queens of Deliria and Ledge of Darkness". It figures. After all, if you take the trouble to concoct a revolution, you might just as well capitalise on it.

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THIS FORTRESS WORLD by James Gunn; Sphere; London; 1977; 192 pp; 65p; ISBN 0-7221-4145-9

Reviewed by Chris Evans

James Gunn is one of those writers whose work seems to hover on the edge of a reader's awareness, like the perennial supporting character whose face we've often seen in a number of films but whose name we can't remember. Over the years, Gunn has produced a body of work which has been well-crafted, but uninspired, and as a consequence has never entered the front rank of writers. "The Listeners" is my favourite Gunn story, a typically low-keyed, thoughtful tale about the attempt to make contact with extra-terrestrial civilisations. This story embodies a typical Gunn theme - the struggle for ordinary, basically decent people strongly committed to some cause or course of action to make headway against the conventions and restrictions of the society in which they live. Gunn's fortes are a lucid style and the ability to make his characters interact in a way which seems real. These are hardly flamboyant qualities compared to the pyrotechnics of a Delany of an Ellison, but perfectly suited to the reflective tone of this particular story. This Fortress World, originally published in 1955, is the first of Gunn's novels that I've read, and on this occasion his shortcomings as a writer outweigh his abilities - the book is competent but uninspired.

The story opens in a cathedral on the planet Brascusi where William Dane, an acolyte who is growing increasingly disillusioned with his religion, witnesses the brutal maiming of a girl by a group of mercenaries on the steps outside. Before leaving the cathedral to confront her pursuers, however, the girl drops,

an object into the collection box. Dane retrieves it and finds that it is a crystal pebble. The mercenaries close in, and Dane is forced to flee. Various factions are seeking the pebble, discovered amongst the ruins of an ancient civilisation some years before. Dane is shot at, beaten, tortured, betrayed and despite all he manages to survive, and eventually the secret of the pebble is revealed to him. I suspect that the book was originally commissioned as a serial for a magazine, for mini-crises crop up with grim regularity. The plot is rather patchy in places and there's an air of expediency about the way in which Gunn finally brings together all the various elements which he has introduced into the story. The interplanetary intrigues and machinations do not really ring true, almost as if the author wished that he had created a more modest stage on which his characters could perform, and the ending, wherein it is revealed that the crystal may herald the dawn of a new era for mankind, is quite hackneyed. Somehow I get the feeling that all the elements in this book could have been combined into a stronger novel in the hands of someone more imaginative and with a superior grasp of plot. A case of the wrong man for the job.

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TOMORROW, INC: SF STORIES ABOUT BIG BUSINESS edited by Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander; Robson Books; London; 1977; 256 pp; £3.75; ISBN 0-903895-97-8

Reviewed by Chris Evans

I must admit that I approached this book with some trepidation, for the idea of an anthology devoted to sf stories about big business did not really appeal to me. It isn't that I'm not aware of the way in which large corporations dominate much of our lives (I work for one myself), it's just that it didn't seem a particularly exciting premise on which to base a collection. But I was wrong, for this is an entertaining book with only one or two dud items and a few real firecrackers.

The roster is impressive: Asimov, Ballard, Clarke, Dick, Sheckley, Silverberg, to name but two. The fourteen stories which make up the volume have all been culled from the fifties and sixties, with the exception of "Owe Me" by John T. Phillifent which was originally published in 1974. Old-time readers may be familiar with most of the entries, but I had only encountered two before: Mack Reynolds's "Criminal In Utopia" and Ballard's "The Subliminal Man". Greenberg and Olander - both academics who make it clear that their bias is towards the more traditional type of sf - contribute an interesting introduction in which they point out that "If there is evil in the human condition, the literature of Marxism looks for its source in the nature of the social structure; the literature of science fiction seeks it in the nature of human beings". True of most sf, I suppose, but a proposition that should not go entirely unchallenged: on the previous page the editors mention Player Piano and it seems to me that the whole of Vonnegut's work is testimony to the belief that there are no real villains, it's just a lousy world.

But to business. Norman Spinrad opens the book with "Age of Invention", a short, jocular, piece about the origins of the business instinct in the Stone Age. A pert enough starter, but a little too flippant for my tastes. This is followed by "Brave New Word" by J. Francis McComas, who, I was interested to hear, was one of the founding fathers of F&SF. "Brave New Word" is also set in the prehistoric era, a thoughtful and sensitive exploration of the development of trading between two different tribes. Frederik Pohl weighs in next with "The Tunnel Under the World", the first of four stories on aspects of advertising in the future. This is one of those tales which begins mundanely enough and then gradually the reader becomes aware that something is wrong. Pohl unfurls the mystery with consummate skill, reserving the biggest surprise of all until the end. Next is "Captive Audience" by Ann Warren Griffith, a soberly horrific tale which presents us with a world in which products actually advertise themselves. Talking cigarette packets, singing cereal boxes - just imagine it. Ear-plugs, by the way, are illegal. John Jakes's "The Sellers Of The Dream" takes the idea of planned obsolescence and extends it so that there are trends in body structure and personality which the public must mimic. This is a meaty idea but Jakes only nibbles at the carcase, preferring to concentrate his attention on the hero's efforts to get the girl. A pity. Then comes Ballard, exploring one of his favourite landscapes, the motorway. No actual crashes in this one, but there are the familiar "junkyards filled with cars and trucks, washing machines and refrigerators". A study of the effects of subliminal advertising, Ballard's style, as always, is peerless. Isaac Asimov's contribution, "Dreaming Is A Private Thing", envisages a future in which the premise of the title is patently untrue - a select band of people who are capable of dreaming with a special intensity are recruited by companies who develop their talents and broadcast their visions for the benefit of others. A kind of one-man Hollywood with emotions thrown in. The Good Doctor's prose is as plonkingly leaden as ever, but it didn't bother me on this occasion. That brings us to the half-way point.

Silverberg's "Company Store" is a story from his "insane robot" period, a piece of effortless commercialism without a real thought in its head. It's all about a robot salesman who tries to sell the necessities of life to a colonist stranded on a planet by the unscrupulous company for whom he works. The editors claim the story is "creative social criticism"; I would imagine that Silverberg wrote it before breakfast. The strongest story in the book is Ralph Williams's "Business As Usual, During Alterations", which takes a hard look at the problems which would face our society if someone (in this case, aliens) came up with a machine which could duplicate any object (including itself). I tried to imagine the possibilities inherent in this idea as I went along, only to find that Williams eventually anticipated every one of them before coming to the conclusion that capitalism would not simply survive but flourish. He handles the story with amazing dexterity and I can only register my admiration. Quite a feat. "Criminal In Utopia" is about an all-pervading credit card society and the efforts of an individual to beat the system. Mack Reynolds explores all the angles, and, like Pohl, throws in a little something extra at the end. Highly entertaining. If I ever get my hands on Rockefeller's Barclaycard... John Phillifent's "Owe Me" is a study of the interaction between the talented individual and the organisation. It's quite short, with an effective hook, but somehow not particularly memorable. Another short piece by Arthur C. Clarke follows - "Patent Pending", one of the "White Hart" tales. I found this story ponderous and jocose, and hardly worth the writing for the plot it carries. It's about the recording of emotions, like sounds on a record. Clarke's attempts at humour are extremely laboured. John Wyndham (as John Beynon) appears briefly as a supporting character. Philip K. Dick follows with "Captive Market", and engrossing tale which explores the idea of supply-and-demand in a way that only Dick could. He presents us with a future Earth, ruined by an atomic war in which a group of survivors are struggling to equip a rocket that will carry them off to Venus. Essential supplies are brought to them once a week by an old lady in a pickup truck. The woman is actually from the past, possessing the ability to travel forwards in time to obtain an extensive profit for much-needed goods. Towards the end, Dick throws in the idea of a multiplicity of possible futures which enables the canny old woman to ensure herself of a continued market. Finally, the book ends with Robert Sheckley's "Something For Nothing", an acidic parable in which the protagonist acquires a machine which will grant his every wish. As you would expect, Sheckley's hero is a bum, and a loser who literally ends up in Purgatory for his misdeeds.

So there you have it. An interesting collection, full of solid ideas. One of the things which worries me about the modern trend in sf is that in the efforts to improve its literary quality, writers may sacrifice the speculative element of their fiction, and Tomorrow Inc. is a timely reminder that sf is first and foremost a literature of ideas. It's possible, desirable eve, to write stories in which the characters are real and the writing stylish but, above all, the situation must be fascinating. That's what sf is all about.

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CONTINUUM 2 edited by Roger Elwood; Star Books; London; 1977; 60p; 191 pp; ISBN 0-352-39655

CONTINUUM 3 edited by Roger Elwood; Star Books; London; 1977; 70p; 182 pp; ISBN 0-352-39656

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

These are poor anthologies by any standards. The gimmick, in case you don't already know, is that Elwood has commissioned eight progressive series each of four stories to fill the four Continuum volumes. Each story is meant to be complete in itself and also to link up with the other three in that series to "form a continuous narrative". In trying to fulfil both of these requirements most authors have failed to avoid repetition. For this reason the stories in volumes 2 and 3 are generally poorer than in Continuum 1.

The only authors who have remained faithful to Elwood's scheme while managing to produce readable stories are Anne McCaffrey and Poul Anderson. The McCaffrey tales of Killashandra, crystal singer, are enjoyable (but the story in volume 3 should be read before the one in volume 2). Anderson's stories follow on from his novel Orbit Unlimited. The high-gravity, high-density planet which acts as background is scientifically accurate and well described, but the characters tend to be wooden, acting out corny plots and adding fuel to the American obsession for Wide Open Spaces.

The two instances where authors have departed from the idea of a continuous series have also provided readable stories. Edgar Pangborn presents two further tales from his after-the-bomb USA, one an Amerind legend and the other a revamping of the Salem witches episode. Both are good without quite equalling the excellence of "The Children's Crusade" in Continuum 1. Chad Oliver has created Caravans Unlimited, an interstellar trading company, in order to write further competent but uninspired stories of alien anthropology.

Of the rest, Gene Wolfe is the most disappointing. After a brilliant beginning in volume 1, his theme of people voluntarily entering the spirit world has lost direction. Thomas K. Scortia tells a boring half-tale over and over again in "The Armageddon Tapes", while repetition is only one of the faults of Philip Jose Farmer's abysmal contribution. The eighth series - concerning robots on a far future Earth when man is considered a myth - has undistinguished offerings from various authors.

Save your money.

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TEN THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS FROM HOME by James Tiptree Jr.; Pan; London; 1977; 60 p; 255 pp; ISBN 0-330-24895-2

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

The latest issue of Charles and Dena Brown's Locus reveals that James Tiptree Jr. (long known to have been hiding behind a pseudonym) is a 61-year-old woman named Alice Sheldon. To anybody who knows the Tiptree stories this is a staggering, almost unbelievable, piece of news which is bound to redden a few faces. For example, Robert Silverberg, in his introduction to a second Tiptree collection (Warm Worlds and Otherwise; Ballantine; 1975) says: "It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing". It's not that the stories are too good to have been written a woman. Perish the thought. It's just surprising that a 61-year-old woman should choose to write mainly about men (only one of the fifteen stories in the collection under review has a female lead character), and that she should make such effective use of ingredients like sex, space technology, physical violence, sport, drugs and rock music.

Although Ten Thousand Light Years From Home is the first James Tiptree collection, including his (to save confusion I'll stick to the male name and male pronoun, OK?) earliest published work, from 1968, the Tiptree hallmark of extreme complexity going hand-in-hand with extreme subtlety is present in every story. Indeed, Tiptree is not always easy to understand. He delights in confusing the reader; he doesn't explain things, but prefers to scatter hints not quite at random throughout, along with throwaway satire and allusion to contemporary American life which might just be clues. If the reader works it all out he's going to be so pleased with himself that he'll rave about the story; if he can't make sense of it he's likely to avoid other Tiptree offerings. It's a difficult tight-rope for an author to walk.

Despite the fact that most of the stories deal with aliens and/or spaceships, they are highly original. They have characters one can laugh and cry with, make important points about human motivation, always seem to be part of a larger whole. "And I Awoke And Found Me Here On The Cold Hill's Side" is the best here: an unsettling tale about the human desire always to screw something different, such as aliens. Then there's "Painwise", delicately told but exceedingly nasty, about a man who can't feel pain ("He pushed his thumb and forefinger between his lids and twisted until the eyeball hung wetly on his cheek.")'and the group of beautiful but ghoulish aliens who use him.

But not all fifteen are so horrific. "The Man Doors Said Hello To" is a Laffertyesque romp. "Forever To A Hudson Bay Blanket" is a tragic love story. "Beam Us Home" is an intensely satirical wish-fulfilment fantasy especially for Trekkies.

Yes, there's something for everyone in this marvellously varied collection. Except for women over sixty, of course, who I'm sure would find it all terribly shocking.

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ICE AND IRON by Wilson Tucker; Arrow; London; 1977; 60p; 181 pp; ISBN 0-09-913910-3

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

This novel is the strangest and most inconclusive piece of double-plotting I've ever come across. The chapters headed "Ice" are set in northern Canada about 250 years in the future, when troops and scientists (monitoring the advancing glacier which has made Canada uninhabitable) find a number of recently dead bodies and items of debris which suggest a prehistoric origin. The chapters headed "Iron" solve the problem: approximately 13,000

years in the future, when the glacier has retreated from southernmost Canada, groups of stone-age level hunters are skirmishing with a technologically advanced army of women which is moving north on an expedition of rediscovery; the women possess weapons which they believe disintegrate their enemies but which really knock them back through time.

And that is as far as the plot goes. The reader can work out these facts within a few chapters, but the "Ice" scientists take the whole book to arrive at the same conclusion, dragging in as evidence Charles Fort's records of items falling from the sky over various parts of Canada.

Yet it isn't a bad novel. Some intelligent characterisation, slick writing and painstaking research of past glacial epochs make it a good read. By the way, this is the "incomplete" version of the book. The "complete" version is only available as a Ballantine paperback; it contains two extra chapters but not a conclusion.

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CASE AND THE DREAMER by Theodore Sturgeon; Pan; London; 1976; 60p; 155 pp; ISBN 0-330-24884-7

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is a collection of three novellas: "Case And The Dreamer", "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?" and "When You Care, When You Love". A book by Sturgeon is always worth reading - he is unrivalled in sf for his modelling of certain human predicaments, and his writing combines sympathy with vividness. He has a tendency to the polemical, but even when he loses control of his material (as he occasionally does) he remains compelling reading.

Sturgeon is the indefatigable champion of the lonely, whether their isolation is a consequence of wealth, poverty, perversity, fear, strangeness, ugliness or neurosis. The instrument which he offers as a cure in almost every case is love. (It has been said that all Sturgeon's stories are about love, but this is too generalised a statement in more than one way - his main concern is not love per se but the healing power of love and the power of love as a stimulus in extreme situations.)

The lead characters in two of these stories are isolated not merely by personal circumstances but also by time and death - here are extremes indeed - and yet the potential remains for resolution. The plots will stretch credulity to the limit, but the reader's involvement with the characters is likely to survive the pressure. Loneliness - even ultimate loneliness - is something that almost everyone can imagine and identify with. The remaining story - the middle one - deals directly with human prejudice, and with the alienation of an entire world. It is necessarily less convincing.

There are flaws in all the stories. "Case And The Dreamer" is unbalanced, and "When You Care, When You Love" is so asymmetrical that fully three-quarters of it seems to be missing. In point of fact, I think that it is - this was originally intended to be the opening section of a novel, whose brief ending was tacked on to give it the mere illusion of completeness. "Case", too, might have been a novel if it had grown enough to be fully mature. Sturgeon suffers from a fault very common among sf writers - the power of his ideas will not sustain his efforts to the bitter end. He writes masterful beginnings, but tends to underdevelop his middles and rarely sets up his endings properly.

"If All Men Were Brothers..." has a different fault, and that is passionate excess. On the one hand, he overestimates the power of the taboo he is attacking - it is by no means as unthinkable as he pretends - and on the other he makes compensating claims for its virtues which are hopelessly exaggerated. It is true that the incest taboo is a social ordinance rather than a biological one, but it is hardly credible that it lies at the root of all social ills, and that its abandonment would guarantee Utopia. This is a bad story, while the others are good in spite of their flaws, but even a bad Sturgeon story commands attention and evokes a response.

Not to be missed.

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EVIL EARTHS edited by Brian W. Aldiss; Orbit; London; 1976; 90p; 322 pp; ISBN 0-8600-7889-2

Reviewed by David Wingrove

First of all I must make quite clear that this book contains little in the way of progressive ideas. For the main part adventure and a "sense of wonder" are evoked for their own sake. As Brian Aldiss clearly states, this is "a job of archaeology among the strata of ancient sf magazines ... " (as were the preceding volumes in this series, Space Odysseys and Space Operas). It is meant to be fun, an entertainment, and though many feet have sacrosanctly sullied those strata (often mistaking clay pots for golden amulets...) Mr. Aldiss manages to resurrect at least five beauties and presents them here with a minimum of fuss and egocentricity (unlike Mr. Asimov...).

"The Last Word" - Chad Oliver and Charles Beaumont: there is a beautifully light tone to this writing that is just right for this comic hotchpotch of impossibilities. We are led at breakneck pace through a good many of sf's major themes; irrelevant and excellent amusement, marvellously immoral and the style deliberately banal:

"It was good to be thrown on one's own resources and all that, but there were limits ... "

And a sex-starved female android thrown in for good measure...

"Film of Death" - J. Scott Campbell: delivered in the form of an address to a convention of scientists (a rather inappropriate means of presenting this story), a scientist tells how two discoveries that individually could have terminated life on Earth, by combining serve to unite the World. Asimov is so much better at serving up this rather unwholesome mixture and I think even he would shrink away from so optimistic an outcome...

"The Wound" - Howard Fast: written in the sixties, it is nevertheless dated; almost a cliche. A tale about oil-drilling and its extremities.

"The Golden Man" - Philip K. Dick: a story from Dick is always welcome, and this is good even by his high standards. In the post-holocaust World the DCA hunts down mutant strains, protecting homo sapiens from homo peculiar... and then, the Golden Man. Is he homo superior? Only Dick knows and can lead us through the pathways to the answer. In fact the golden man is our antithesis in his mental processes. His present extends into the future, ours into the past; he can no more tell what has happened than we can tell what is to happen. Obviously, a man with no past can develop no memory - he can only have instinct. But he has the element of choice over a variable series of futures and the instinct to choose the correct survival path. Intelligent or not? Man or not? Dick never gives the answer until we are on out knees and begging.

"Guest Expert" - Allen K. Lang: short, sharp and... well, cliched again. An ingenious (?) solution to the overpopulation problem (which incidentally poses a more interesting question: are there morons on Mars? Lang does not develop!)

"The Valley" - Richard Stockham: the only "truth" in this story is the fictional president's statement: "The people simply must not know the whole truth ... " (and this in 1954...). Otherwise this is a fairly feeble vision, replete with anachronisms: the ships go out and find Earth is Man's only home in the entire Universe (and, thinking on it, isn't that a rather remarkable feat - to chart the Universe in 2000 years with only a few thousand ships?).

"Down Among The Dead Men" - William Tenn: a gem. This reiterates the question posed by Silverberg in Tower of Glass: when Man creates intelligence (in this case resurrected humans) what duty does he owe it? Very well written and well worth re-printing.

"Among The Hairy Earthmen" - E. A. Lafferty: Lafferty's stories taken individually seem glib, scant in development and far too frivolous. This is a pre-Chariots-of-the-Gods explanation for our hectic post-Romanic history. Of course, well written...and not bad really.

"Later Than You Think" - Frits Leiber: Earth's demise is seen from an alien viewpoint when they discover a sealed "time-vault". This was too much like Arthur C. Clarke's glib Walt-Disney Joke ("History Lesson").

"The Time Trap" - Henry Kuttner: this was genuinely awful: 111 pages of twenties-style pulp adventure. The hero, Mason, has the sensitivity of a scorpion and a predilection for saving naked young queens from several fates-worse-than-death (by the end I was praying he'd fail!). Like a rotten fruit it's over-sickly cramming of far too numerous hackneyed story-lines into one abominable package cloyed and festered in my throat. For example: everything nasty always misses by a few feet...the hero always goes down "fighting desperately" and emerges unscathed... he knows Sumerian, South Amerind and Chinese, is an archaeologist with a sound knowledge of science (and thews like Conan!)...need I go on? Kuttner says it all for me: "Mason felt a queer sense of unreality as he closed the port of the time ship ... " (p 266) He wasn't the only one!

The language in Kuttner's story is stilted and clumsy, and the only sign of cerebral activity comes in the form of undigested parrotting of high-school physics and chemistry texts. If that were not enough, it is blighted by subdued (and often overt) sadism, juvenile eroticism, xenophobia, plagiarism and a deluded "sense of duty". My own deluded "sense of duty" almost faded and failed me...

"The Men Return" - Jack Vance: I sighed with relief. Here was genuine opulence; a nicely structured story with an original line of thought. Earth swims into a pocket of 'non-causality" and logic (and the laws of nature) dissolves. The Relicts and the Organisms (the sane and the mad) inhabit the discordant ruins of Earth, the latter's illogicality perfectly adapted to the "insane" environment The descriptions of natural elements behaving beyond all rationality are excellent, forming a credible but surreal landscape. In Vance's tale the change comes and the Men return.

"Heresies of the Huge God" - Brian W. Aldiss: (also in The Moment of Eclipse) it is frightening how many original ideas the mind of Brian Aldiss has spawned. This is a masterful story written with subtle humour. An eight-legged creature (four-and-a-half thousand miles in length) settles on the Earth. Aldiss provides all the data regarding geological change and charts the sociological furore as a new religion is born. The insect's shuffling becomes a source of major geological catastrophe. Read on...

"If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth" - Arthur C. Clarke a sobering tale of the last colony of Mankind on the Moon and the pilgrimage of a ten-year-old boy to see the phosphorescent Earth. Cli perhaps, but rather poetic in its manner.

"Night" - John W. Campbell: from the same period as Kuttner's tale (late 30s) and yet so much better. A man experiments with an "anti-gravity" device and finds himself at the end of Time. The compressed universe idea is very good (only millions of miles between the impotent stars) but the images of decay are rather mechanistic, concentrating on the nuts-and-bolts rather than people. These quibbles must be made even though this an entertaining eschatological tract. The machines ("curious" rather than intelligent Campbell's thinking at that stage didn't extent that far) are the sole inhabitants of the apocalyptic universe. Nice, but marred slightly by another dose of text-book science thrown in.

Ninety pence is a lot to pay for a book marred by 110 pages of unadulterated crap...but there are excellent contributions from Aldiss Vance, Oliver and Beaumont, Dick and Tenn. And whilst it is not for the advocate of sf as a serious social instrument, I would nevertheless recommend it as good light reading... and the truth is that even as light reading it is so much better than the majority of "best-selling" "literature". As an example of "Golden-Age archaeology" it is far better than average.

FRIGHTENERS 1 edited by Mary Danby; Fontana Glasgow; 1976; 159 pp; 45p; ISBN 0-00-61434(

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

This is a varied, substantial collection of "new stories of horror and the unknown", a collection to be relished slowly rather than read quickly in the train. There are four really good stories that provide strong meat for the imagination and support the editor's suggestion that "(perhaps) among these stories of today lie tomorrow's classics". There a five good, substantial supporting stories; plus a few short pieces of varying quality.

Taking the four main stories in order of occurrence: "Old Hether's Picture" by Joyce Marsh, is a classical ghost story in the tradition of M. R. James's "The Mezzotint"; and it stands up well in comparison to that masterpiece. In A. E. Ellis's "If Thy Right Hand Offend Thee" a necromantic cousin of Kingsley Amis's Dr. Thomas Underhill (see The Green Man) rises from the grave, skull-naked except for his shroud, and haunts the cloistral precincts of a public school in search of --- what? The action takes place in the 1920s, so that the narrator can naturally assume the M. R. James style and recreate the authentic hothouse atmosphere of an English public school. The spiritual overtones of the story are very rich; the climax is unexpected, and deeply satisfying.

"Dorothy Dean" by Dorothy K. Haynes, probes total conviction into the mind of a deeply-disturbed child, perfectly combining horror and compassion, and posing the question: su Imagination is Reality? There's nothing da about this one: it could (one feels) be happening right now, right in the middle of the 1970s. No fantasy (in the usual sense) here in fact, it's all too real for comfort. Psychologically real, that is.

The other major story is "The Old Men" by Julia Birley. This combines a realistic portrayal of the claustrophobic, hierarchic life of a large hospital - the Old Men are the surgeon-kings, the small elite at the centre of the corridors of power - with the depiction of hellish forces gradually assume concrete form, beginning with relatively hapless poltergeist activity. Not a sentence wasted here, and we're left with a definite impression of having broken down the barrier between Appearance and Reality.

The five supporting stories are still good, less tightly-packed as it were - which is just as well. Bernard Taylor's "Cera" is a very fishy tale with a definite touch of the Lovecrafts, though it exists independently of

the Cthulhu Mythos, and poses a very distinctive moral concerning the nature of love (in the widest sense). It attains a certain grandeur in the end. Terry Gisbourne's "The Quiet Man" is also highly distinctive - it could be described as a Hammer Films version of Coronation Street! That in itself makes it good unhealthy fun; but it also provides a novel approach to the psychology of murder, which lingers in the mind. Frances Stephens's "A Walk Along The Beach" presents us with a very convincing Evil Child, and some very nasty mutated jellyfish: good atmospheric stuff. R. Chetwynd Hayes's "The Catomado" on the other hand, performs the near-impossible feat of combining horror and broad farce: it made me laugh, and it made me feel shuddery. Vincent Price and Peter Lorre have done this kind of thing, I know; but not as successfully, I think.

The last story in the collection - "The Horror Under Penmire" by Adrian Cole - is simply Lovecraft done in English: for legend-haunted Arkham read mystic Penmire, for Cthulhu read Dagon. Once you've realised this, the story is wholly predictable; but Adrian Cole writes well, and can create the appropriate atmosphere. And in his treatment of the two central figures he nicely suggests the terrible frailty of the conscious mind when faced with the ancient cauldron of the Unconscious.

As for the remaining short pieces: our old friend Sydney J. Bounds presents "The Mask" (a mere bloodstained trifle) and "Hotbouse" (a really novel version on the old plant-eats-man theme). Martin Ricketts provides two competent but insubstantial quickies. Bernard Taylor's "My Very Good Friend" is also rather insubstantial, especially when compared with his "Cera" (see above), though it is likewise preoccupied with out psychical affinities with the insect, or piscine, worlds. Kay Leith's "For The Love Of Pamela" is a rather undistinguished variation on the theme of the Spirit-Possessed House. And last, but not least, Pamela Vincent gives us two quirky and distinctive pieces: "Lost Soul" (horrific psychological study of an amateur theologian in a laundromat) and "Homicidal Maniac!" (simple-seeming, but really subtle and shuddery).

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FRIGHTENERS 2 edited by Mary Danby; Fontana; Glasgow; 1976; 45p; 157 pp; ISBN 0-00-614170-6

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

Frighteners 2 is a nice, varied collection, though I don't think it reaches the same heights as its predecessor. Otherwise, the mixture is as before: five good, substantial tales, surrounded by slighter material of varying quality.

Rob Holdstock's "Magic Man" and Bryn Fortey's "The Substitute" are curiously related in theme: in both cases, the imaginative faculty of the main protagonist - in itself the most mysterious faculty of all - is observed to break free of the the frail shackles of reason, with ensuing madness and chaos. In Rob Holdstock's tale the time and place are prehistoric (the Magic Man being the tribal image-maker who paints the luck of the daily hunt on the walls of his cave, keeping well within the bounds of certain strict taboos until - but let Rob tell you what happens: he does it well); while in Bryn Fortey's tale the venue might be described as post-historic suburbia, the central figure being a Walter Witty/Billy LIar type, a humble cost clerk whose fantasy-life gets totally out of hand, comically at first, but ending in the blackest of black comedy. In both tales, the result is a kind of Hell. (Bryn Fortey, while sticking to a very simple narrative style, achieves a total effect that is as bemusing as an Aldiss enigma, without any of the associated difficulties.)

For sheer style, though, Catherine Gleason's "Friends" takes first prize. First it presents us with a group of permissive friends who share the flat of one of their number for the purpose of sexual adventures; the flat owner in question being himself a sexual neutral, but nice and sociable with it. All this is well presented. Then Catherine Gleason adds the supernatural, the fantastic and the horrific; for the sexual neutral becomes the unwitting host of a bisexual devil --- . Strangely enough, this comes across with an uncomfortable logic, and the result is pretty compulsive reading. Thoroughly nasty, of course, but justifiably so, I think.

"Cross Talk", by Roger F. Dunkley, is not as smoothly-presented; but, like "Friends", it unobtrusively loosens the stays of space/time and reveals something of what lies beneath. (That image isn't inappropriate: if "Friends" is about permissiveness, "Cross Talk" is about sexual repression, among other things.) The main elements are two old maids living alone, one of them psychic; a burned witch, buried for centuries beneath the old elm at the bottom of their garden; and crossed telephone wires tangled in the roots of the elm. There's plenty of mystification, a good finale, and sufficient clarification.

"Guest Room", by Tim Vicary, is good in a very different way. I won't give away the plot; suffice it to say that, ideally, this one should be read with some of J. B. Priestley's favourite theories about Time and the After-life borne in mind. It is wholly convincing - very mysterious, but not mystifying.

The rest of the collection varies a lot. "Fully Integrated", by Dorothy K. Haynes, is a nice horrific anecdote with a touch of Robert Aickman's very chilling story, "The Hospice"; though the Haynes story, besides being much more rosy-hued, has a point and a climax of its own. Sydney J. Bounds contributes two of his short pieces: "A Complete Collection" which is a good joke about a professional writer of fantasy, and has serious undertones; and "An Eye For Beauty", which employs Greek mythology, concerns a sculptor and his agent, and is really very slight and predictable. "The Thirteenth Kestrel" is a straightforward, efficient tale about a jinxed plane. Roger Dunkley's "The Method And Madness Of George Strode", and Roy Harrison's "The Cockroaches" both have a definite feel of deja vu (lifelong failure tries repeatedly to murder wife; scholarly foreigner calls up the Egyptian Scarabaeus Curse). "Claws", by Frances Stephens, is nasty without much justification; "Brain Drain", by Margot Arnold, I just couldn't take seriously, perhaps because I've never suffered from a terror of libraries. Kay Leith, in "Avalon Heights", presents a nice line in understated horror: in this tale, the horror in question is invincible because no-one can see it for what it is. I like that. And Bernard Taylor, in "Pat-a-Cake, Pat-a-Cake", continues his vivisection of human love in order to reveal nasty hidden things: in this case a baby (the narrator) subjects his foster-parents loving care to an ice-cold evaluation, and reveals himself as a total egoist - and more. An ambitious short, this: not perfect by any means, but worth a read.

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AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION Volume 50 Number 1; edited by Ted White; Ultimate Publishing Co. Inc; New York; June 1976; 130 pp; 40p; IDC 08025

Reviewed by Chris Evans

Doing my obligatory browse through the latest editions of the magazines (I rarely buy, these days, unless the contents page looks promising) I am surprisedby this, the fiftieth anniversary issue of the first American sf magazine. Amazing has seen better days, but for this special occasion editor White has assembled Asimov, del Rey, Ellison, Leiber and others within its modest, typo-speckled pages. At 40p it's cheaper than most paperbacks and only marginally more expensive than a good birthday card. Fifty years! Happy birthday, science fiction, and many happy returns.

The legacy of the pulps and their descendants is, of course, a great bone of contention within sf. While it is true that the magazines have bequeathed the genre a host of colourful and exciting writers, it must also be admitted that their voracious appetite for material encouraged formula writing and a disregard for the higher standards of literacy. Personally, I think that sf would be far poorer had they not existed but I can't help wondering what the field might have produced if the writers of the day had carried on in the tradition of Verne and Wells. Nobel Prizewinners? Full length reviews in the TLS? Hmmm. Maybe sf is still flourishing because it's been ignored by the literati.

These days, alas, the regular magazines are in a poor state of health, bled dry by the proliferation of original anthologies and the more lucrative markets of the glossy, non-specialised mags such as Playboy. The UK has no regular sf magazine at present (discounting the nascent SF Digest) and in the US only Analog and F&SF appear to have respectable circulation figures. I'm surprised that Amazing and its sister magazine Fantastic have lasted so long since it's evident that they're operated on limited budgets, surviving, no doubt, more on nostalgia than on economic realities. Indeed, if we read between the lines of this anniversary issue, we detect an air of meribundity beneath the celebratory veneer.

Forget the stories. Asimov delivers a cute, predictable vignette featuring Hugo Gernsback as one of the characters; del Rey combines an interesting idea with an inadequate treatment to produce an eminently forgettable story; Robert F. Young is very disappointing with the inevitable Bicentennial tale; Fritz Leiber entertains with his erudition but is unable to hide the slightness of his concept; editor White is merely monotonous with his offering, and even Harlan Ellison is in minor key. Lil and Kris Neville contribute a gentle, introspective tale of old age in the future, finely written, and Jack Dann shows promise with his short novel Starhiker (Short novel? I counted about 38 pages.). But we have to turn to the features to gain a real insight into the current pre-occupations of the writers and editors within the field. It makes fascinating reading.

The most revealing item in the magazine is the potted history of the field, written by, of all people, Barry Malzberg (who also contributes one of the most excruciatingly bad poems I have ever read; a joke, surely). Malzberg, the iconoclast, is a writer who has aroused more conflicting passions in readers than possibly anyone. He contributes a typically idiosyncratic piece, more, as editor White describes it, a juxtaposition of images than a panoramic look at the past. Malzberg makes the very important point that the idea of sf functioning as a predictive tool is essentially a myth. Science fiction has always kept well ahead of technological achievement: the improbable fascinates us, the possible is of minor interest, the practicable of no interest at all (witness the dearth of recent stories on or about the Moon now that man has landed there). Sf writers, in general, are not concerned with anticipating the fruits of technology but with creating a world in which the reader can lose himself, where the pressures of the real world are diminished (more of that later). What many people have failed to recognise in Malzberg is his basic affection for sf, masked somewhat by his loathing of sentiment. At the end of the essay, Malzberg announces that he is retiring from the field, an announcement that will doubtless be greeted by roars of approval from amny quarters. But sf will be the poorer without him.

For our second glimpse at the dark underbelly of sf we turn to Alfred Bester, a more respected figure in the field, here interviewed by Darrel Schweitzer. Bester has always written a traditional mode of sf, so it is surprising to find the following observation at the start of the interview:

" ... most sf writers don't know enough about people to write real people with real problems, and you can't move a reader unless you write about real people with real problems ... This is why sf calls itself to people who are mostly science oriented rather than drama oriented. If there were more drama, more reality of human nature in sf, it would be drawing an even wider audience than it does now. As it is, it mostly draws people who are just curious about science."

Bester is, of course, absolutely correct. The bulk of sf is adolescent in tone and incapable of creating characters whose sufferings and successes involve the reader. Pick any ten sf books off the shelf at random. The chances are that most of them will be stock adventure stories containing stereotyped characters (the villians, rather than wearing black hats, will be malevolent aliens or insane robots) within a framework that is ostensibly outre (a spaceship, a strange planet) but is, in reality, all too familiar. Many sf conventions have now become so ossified that any writer attempting to use them in a novel manner invites the suspicion and scorn of his audience. One of the major reasons for the general antipathy towards Malzberg is the fact that he uses the standard props of sf to mirror his characters' internal conflicts rather than as tradition demands to provide a colourful backdrop to their adventures. How dare he!

I sometimes think that sf readers are a different breed from readers of general literature, as Bester suggests. Perhaps they approach a novel as if it was a crossword puzzle or some intricate kind of textbook. Most sf fans are primarily interested in ideas per se and have only a passing concern with the impact of these ideas on people - hence the popularity of Larry Niven, for example. Niven is a more imaginative writer than most, despite his literary shortcomings, but he is not the kind of writer who is likely to appeal to the wide general readership outside science fiction because the "reality of human nature" of which Bester speaks cannot be found in his work. This is not likely to trouble the sf reader who is seeking, not a deeper understanding of human behaviour, but an escape from it.

If Niven has the virtue of some originality, the type of sf exemplified by Perry Rhodan, Laser Books and the bulk of the DAW and Ace range is the product of a decadent genre and has as much bearing on the future as formula Westerns do on nineteenth century American history. When Wells was pioneering science fiction at the turn of the century he was writing a popular novel which served to stimulate his readers' imaginations, to be at once entertaining and thought-provoking. Most science fiction nowadays cannot claim to be either truly imaginative or to have pretensions to social responsibility, in the sense of predicting the future and hence warning people of invidious trends or in supplying them with a perspective on the present day. At best it is simply wish-fulfillment. The problem is not that this type of sf should not exist (there will always be adolescent fiction, in whatever field) but that writers of obvious talent such as Le Guin, Silverberg and Disch (to name but three) who have constantly been striving to retain that freshness of vision unique to sf, are equated in the mind of the general reading public with writers of space opera. (Silverberg has recently retired, Disch seems to have abandoned sf and there is,

at present, no new novel forthcoming from Le Guin. These are ominous signs.) Newsweek did a cover story on sf several months ago and I shuddered to see a photograph of Le Guin sharing space with a Trekkie complete with pointy ears and raised eyebrows. A major reason, sadly, for this blanket view of sf is the existence of the magazines which have simultaneously allowed the development of major sf talents alongside the banalities of Elmer T. Hack. The magazines deserve our thanks for providing a market for the talented minority but perhaps the time has come for them to bow gracefully aside and for the division between true specualtive fiction and the starry fables of Captain Kennedy and his ilk to be more firmly drawn so that those who care about the future of sf will see it proper and gain the wider appeal of which it is so eminently worthy.

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THE TELZEY TOY by James H. Schmitz; Sidgwick and Jackson; London; 1976; 175 pp; ISBN 0-283-98308-6

THE LION GAME by James H. Schmitz; Sidgwick and Jackson; London; 1976; 157 pp; ISBN 0-283-98312-4

Reviewed by Chris Evans

What does a reader look for in a work of fiction, specifically science fiction? An impossible question to answer, of course, since the sf readership is as wide and as varied as the subject matter which caters to its tastes. Reviewers must, of necessity, approach a book with a keener and more critical eye than someone reading for pure enjoyment, and they will interpret the book according to their own set of values as to what constitutes "good" literature. I make these rather obvious points to indicate another, even more obvious fact: all reviews must be treated with suspicion because the reviewer's values will not necessarily (will rarely, in fact) coincide with the interests and expectations of the reader.

Before I discuss these two books I'd like to make my own position clear on what criteria I use to judge a work of science-fiction. Aside from the essential attributes of literary ability and imagination, I prefer sf which is unorthodox. By unorthodox I mean the kind of fiction which is different either in tone or subject matter or emphasis from most other books of its kind. I like books which speak with an individual voice, which offer fresh perspectives on the stuff of science fiction at the expense, perhaps, of cosiness. The Telzey Toy and The Lion Game are very cosy indeed. There's plenty of murder and mayhem in the pages of these books, but the overall impression is one of blandness. Schmitz writes well enough and he's quite inventive; but good writing and a fecund imagination are not enough, even in science fiction. What makes a book special is the author's personal vision of the world which is, in the best fiction, imbibed in his characters so that the reader frowns, pauses, smiles, shakes his head during the course of the reading. Without this vision the reader is merely a passive observer of events and the book does not really demand his attention. It took me over a week to read The Telzey Toy and The Lion Game, not because they were poorly written or because, on the surface, the activities of Schmitz's characters weren't interesting (on the surface, they were); I struggled because the books seemed to me to be wholly without passion or vitality.

The Telzey Toy is a collection of shorts; The Lion Game a novel. Both feature the same central character, Telzey Amberdon. Telzey is a cute, un-neurotic girl of fifteen or sixteen (depending on the story) who has psi powers. These powers are never described in any codified manner but they include the ability to read other beings' minds, to erect mind blocks and screens, to even take over, temporarily, another person's body. Comparisons with Dying Inside would be invidious; suffice it to say that Telzey's abilities cause her no acute emotional problems of any intrinsic nature. She gets into dangerous situations simply because she functions so well and is constantly enlisted by the Psychology Service (the mind reader's FBI) who send her on hazardous missions, to apprehend a weirdo or to uncover some interplanetary intrigue. Telzey manages quite splendidly.

What does the author makeof all these goings-on? Well, Schmitz is content to sit back and tell his story, to keep the moralising to a minimum and the tone upbeat. The reader is never in any doubt that Telzey will eventually triumph over her adversaries and while this may be reassuring, it does tend to take the edge off what might otherwise be a gripping narrative. In fact, after reading the first couple of stories in The Telzey Toy, I found that I couldn't care less. There are several really nasty characters, aliens galore of diverse physiognomy who all seem able to speak interling and brandish knives and guns with menace. But Telzey is always one step ahead and so, after a while, is the reader.

You will, perhaps, have noticed my uneasiness towards these books in the cautions and qualifications which I gave at the beginning of th review. This is because I am aware that Schmitz has an audience who enjoy his work and would find my criticisms (should they care to read them) superfluous. Telzey's adventures, they might argue, were written as sheer entertainment and it's wrong to attack them on artistic merits. To which I can only nod my head and retreat in confusion, for in my local library Schmitz is stacked next to Silverberg and it's all called science fiction.

THE CELLULOID DREAM

Steve Divey

Andrew Tidmarsh

CARRIE (X) Directed by Brian De Palma; with Sissy Spacek, Piper Laurie; Distributed by United Artists; Colour; USA; 1976; 97 mins.

Reviewed by Steve Divey

With sympathetic observation ending in bloody chaos, Brian De Palma's latest film follows the traumatic emergence into womanhood of a repressed high-school girl, Carrie White. Blessed with a one-parent upbringing by her fanatically religious mother, Carrie's innocence, naivete and ignorance are almost enough to push one beyond sympathy into contempt. Bowed by her mother's strength, dominance and precarious sanity, Carrie is the odd girl out at school: plain, dressed in grey cardigan and white socks while her beautiful contemporaries disport themselves in tight shorts and T-shirts. She is the butt of their jokes and, shamefully, those of some of her teachers as well.

Her trauma begins with the physical onset of puberty, as she experiences her first period in the communal school shower after gym. Having been kept totally ignorant of her bodily functions by her mother, Carrie is quite understandably terrified out of her wits by the flow of blood from her body. Her friends respond by ridiculing her and turn into a sea of hostile faces, pelting her naked, cowering body with tampons until she is rescued by the gym mistress. It is at this point that she discovers the first inklings of her amazing power to move objects by the power of thought.

The two strands of plot that emerge from this beginning weave together superbly. Carrie's friends are punished for their behaviour by the gym mistress with extra gruelling gym. One of them decides to get her own back on Carrie with a particularly unpleasant stunt at the end of term dance. Carrie, meanwhile, starts to react against her mother's repressive discipline, begins to be interested in life outside their sombre house cluttered with religious bric-a-brac, and in particular responds tentatively and nervously to the attentions of a good looking boy in her class. Carrie's only asset is her telekinesis which at first she barely understands or controls. When her mother becomes aware of this supernormal power, she is convinced that Carrie is in league with the Devil; when Carrie announces her intention of going to a dance with a boy, she remembers her own disastrously short-lived sexual career, and these extra strains on her mental instability prove too much for her.

The climax of the film is of course the school dance. Everything goes for those involved, and the final thirty minutes of the film is a finely orchestrated crescendo of horror and bloodshed resembling a ride on an accelerating roller-coaster. The last moments of the film contain one of those incidents that sets cinema apart from all other artforms; a perfectly manipulated shock effect that caused the whole audience, male and female, to jump and scream with horror. This power of film over its audience, apart from being one of the reasons why cinema is the only art form of today that we allow to be officially censored for us, is as impressive as the most horrific film. The memory of a couple of hundred people screaming in unison will take a long time to fade.

The gothic horror situation prevalent as a background throughout much of Carrie fortunately didn't tempt De Palma onto the bandwagon of satanic possession, etc., which others are finding so profitable. Relatively straightforward paranormal events such as telekinesis don't strain the credulity quite so far. A large part of the film deals with the observation and character study of the half dozen or so protagonists. In fact the neatness with which De Palma cuts backwards and forwards, while the plot unfolds, between the young conspirators, humorously observed in a manner reminiscent of George Lucas's American Graffiti (1974), and the creepy home of Carrie, replete with its dark shadows, flashing lightning, rattling shutters and maniacal mother, is a joy to behold. The mood switches from ominous foreboding of a grizzly climax to lighter vein as a youth participating in theplot is bribed with fellatio in his car. The chaos of the dance itself as Carrie in fear and anger lashes out at her tormenters is presentedin split-screen, through coloured filters, and is as exhilarating as it is horrible to watch.

This is Brian De Palma's twelfth feature film but only the third to surface in this country. The other two, Phantom of the Paradise (1974) (reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh in Vector 76/7) and Obsession (1976), though marred by fairly serious faults showed enormous imagination and promise. Carrie is a vast improvement on both. The best thing about Obsession was the creation of powerful moods and strong visual atmosphere by the use of imaginative sets and clever photography. Carrie also uses that talent to enormous effect. Obsession was severely hampered by the appalling woodenness of the male principals. This kind of Hitchcockian thriller failed without believable acting more than a less subjective approach. In Carrie it is the ability of Sissie Spacek to be totally convincing as a late developing adolescent that provides the film with its main strength. A highly talented actress in her late twenties, Sissy Spacek was first noticed internationally in her role as a young girl in Terrence Mallick's Badlands (1974). Her performance in Carrie brought her close to this year's Oscar for Best Actress. Piper Laurie is very good as the mother, with only one slight lapse towards the melodramatic. She presents a deranged character that despite her behaviour one can still feel sympathy for. The other actors all provide strong performances, the greater depth and scope available to the girls being a prerequisite of the plot. On the evidence available, Brian De Palma seems a far better director of actresses than actors. He seems more in tune with the needs of their roles. He shares this characteristic with such exalted directors as Kenji Mizoguchi and George Cukor.

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The Most Exciting Original Motion Picture Event Of All Time:-

KING KONG produced by Dino de Laurentiis; directed by John Guillermin; USA; 1976

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh

The title of this piece is misleading.

The film Dino de Laurentiis has produced bears a direct and obvious relationship to the 1933 film, King Kong. This relationship is so direct that the impact of the new film would be greatly diminished had not the original film existed. However, I will not attempt a point by point comparison of the film of 1976 and the film of 1933, though I do think that de Laurentiis must be criticised for exploiting the fame of the 1933 film - a film that, with justification, is acknowledged as a classic.

The opening shots of the de Laurentiis film portray a voyage of discovery in Indonesia conducted by an oil company, PETROX. The company is engaged in a competition with, for example, EXXON and Shell, so fierce that it can permit a junior executive to claim that vast deposits of oil lie beneath an island which is not even known to exist. (This island of course conceals Kong.) It can be conceded that Indonesia is a major oil-producing area; in this respect, the film establishes an air of credibility. Further (more strained) attempts to establish credibility are made by

the aforesaid junior executive and his scientifically-oriented side-kick. Much "scientific" exposition at this point. Fortunately, Mr. Jeff Bridges makes an entrance.

Mr. Bridges it might be recalled is one of the stars of the movie industry who has established a rapport with the "youth" audience. (Jack Nicholson and, to a lesser extent, Peter Fonda, are other examples.) Bridges' role in King Kong is, therefore, pre-determined: he is the sop to the ecological consciousness of the 'in-crowd". (My use of archaisms is, you will note, deliberate. The concerns of the film are out-dated, even though those concerns are not genuine. Ecology is no longer fashionable.) Bridges is an anthropologist who has become aware that a fabulous ape has been reported to exist on the island on which the gaze of PETROX has fallen. (obviously, he has seen the film.) To the island, then, Bridges must go. His appearance among the PETROX crowd (the "out-crowd") is designed to incite a ...yawn? (I will explain. One of the underlying themes of the film is that of the conflict between the aims of an oil company and environmental protection and preservation. The film crudely indicates that the aspirations of the oil company are bad and that environmental protection is good. The use of so simplistic a conflict inevitably reduces the film's stature. It is easy, many cliches exist, to establish good and bad characters; it is less easy to make the characters convincing. The film does the former: would you believe, the bad guy has dark hair and a moustache, the good guy has fair hair and a full beard. Jesus Christ! The film does not do, and maybe does not aim to do, the latter. The foregoing comments are designed for those who wish to consider that cinema is, potentially, an art form but who can recognise that the product of recent years rises from the investment of money not from the investment of the talent of an artist. The film is an investment in the same way the Centre Point was an investment. And, it may be impressive from the street but inside it is empty; too much money is involved, artists could not pay the rent.)

May we reach the island, now? No. First we must rescue sweet (blonde!) Dwan from the grip of the terrifying ocean. She has been cast adrift from a yacht, her companions and the prospect of fame. But, because she is dumb (i.e. of limited intelligence) (and because she is blonde) she has been saved. Dwan, I must report, is a nauseating person, so content to wallow in self-indulgent innocence that she does not understand that she is being used. (Ah! You wicked man, de Laurentiis; how could you so exploit a child? How could you establish that she is pure in both thought and deed, and clean of limb, so that the audience might empathise with her, and then emphasise her physical beauty (OK, her breasts) so that the (same) audience might acknowledge that she is a sex-symbol?) (Ah, my boy, you fail to recognise the demands of the modern movie-going audience. It might appreciate that even the crudest film can be said to have an underlying theme, but it must be told explicitly what that theme is. Things must be made simple, explanations must be thorough. I believe that my film will be a success because I do not under-estimate the intelligence of my audience. They expect me to make things easy for them. Don't you understand that people do not flock to the cinema to be educated or intellectually stimulated but to be entertained. My films are, above all else, entertainments. It is, therefore, unnecessary for me to employ talented artists, whose preoccupations could only weaken the impact of my production.) Jessica Lange copes adequately with the undemanding role of Dwan.

Now we may land on the island. (The story should be familiar form here on, so I will keep my description brief.) The island is inhabited. The (negroid) natives live behind a gigantic barricade. As the invaders arrive the natives are perforaing a ritualistic ceremony of marriage. The invaders disturb this ceremony. The natives are attracted by the appearance of Dwan, but Mr. Bridges will not allow Dwan to be sold to them. It is noted by the invaders that the natives are chanting "Kong!" Subsequently, Dwan is captured by the natives, the marriage ceremony is repeated and Dwan is given away to Kong. Kong is a giant gorilla, perhaps forty feet tall, but is gentle with Dwan and gradually falls under her influence. Dwan, in turn, falls...

Hold it! We know this, we know the rest. What is the point of repeating it all?

I thought you would never ask. Unfortunately, I don't have a convincing answer to give you. I would suggest, however, that you look closely at the original film and decide for yourself whether that film was intrinsically funny. I think you will agree that it was not, and nor was it intended to be, funny. Rather, it was a film which established the legend of King Kong and yet which was not structurally atypical of the films of the thirties. Inexplicably, it was considered to be unique and has retained its interest to the present day.

Now, a film company re-makes King Kong, perhaps because it has no faith in originality, and produces a humorous, an intentionally humorous film. King Kong (1976) is riddled with dialogue which self-consciously refers back to the original film, is loaded with images which exaggerate images from the original film and simplifies (and thereby renders ludicrous) the themes - most obviously, Beauty and the Beast - of the original film. King Kong (1976) could not have existed had not the original film existed. But the new film can only damage one's opinion of the original film. I would not wish anyone to think that King Kong (1976) is an honest, a true, a whole-hearted re-creation of King Kong (1933). It is not, and I do not believe that it ever was intended to be.

Yet, de Laurentiis is too able a producer to produce a bad film. He may have based an ostensibly original film on a very famous idea, he may also have copied many scenes from another film, but he has produced a film which in its own right is strong, in places thrilling, and which tells a coherent, gripping story. Its faults lie in its incessant acknowledgements of its origin.

One might criticise de Laurentiis but one must not condemn him for what he has done, not because his plagiarism has made (someone) a lot of money. One must acknowledge, however, that he has not made the most thrilling, nor the most original motion picture of all time.

(15-1-77)

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FORBIDDEN PLANET directed by Fred McLeod Wilcox; USA; 1956

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh

Access is forbidden to the planet Altair Iv for the reason that the male inhabitant of the planet considers habitation, by others than himslef and his daughter, dangerous. In truth, Dr. Morbius is subconsciously jealous that his kingdom of twenty years standing is to be invaded and his powerful position subverted. This is the key to the film: Morbius subconsciously desires to protect Altair IV, and the stupendous Krel machine thereon, for the - as he sees it - primitive and barbaric human race. Ironically, the primitive subconscious of Morbius destroys not only his ambitions but also the very things he wishes to protect - the wisdom of the Krels and the sanctity of his daughter's (literal and metaphorical) virginity.

The film is located early in the twenty-second century AD. The hyper-drive - which permits hyper light speeds - has just been developed and an intensive exploration of the galaxy is underway. (An interesting aside is that the film proposes that the human race lands on the moon in 2090, yet that the development of the interstellar space-drives proceeds apace thereafter. A strange mixture of pessimism and optimism for a film made as recently as 1956; and perhaps indicative of non-afnal origin?) Twenty years previously, a rocket from Earth has landed on Altair IV; now a United Planets (which planets, I wonder?) cruiser is returning to check up on the status of the original colonists. In the intervening years it unfolds that all the colonists, bar Dr. Morbius and his wife, have perished in a most unusual fashion - torn almost limb from limb by a mysterious force. Indeed, all the original colonists have perished within one year of landfall and, so it would seem (and certainly this would reinforce the structure of the film), at about the time they had voted to return to Earth.

However, while alive, the colonists have discovered a vast, incomprehensible machine - a cube twenty miles on each side! The colonists have investigated this machine but are not able to understand what it is or what it does. Only Dr. Morbius is in a position to understand. His preliminary inquiries, direct mental communication with the machine, place him in a more advantageous position. Yet, as it turns out, it is this mental contact, and the strengthening of the Doctor's subconscious mind, that leads to the destruction of the colonists.

Following the, at that time inexplicable, deaths of their companions, the Morbiuses produce a child, Alataira. Unfortunately, the Doctor's wife - herself a doctor - dies in child-birth. But, through his contact with the miraculous machine, Morbius is able to provide all that his daughter needs to lead a normal life, and a great deal that she does not need to lead an abnormal life. (e.g. The companionship of no one but her father; oddly, in view of the overt Freudianism of the film, little is made of the Electra complex the girl might have been expected to acquire living alone with her father.) While his daugher matures, Morbius ceaselessly examines the vast machine: he discovers that it is the ultimate product of the Krel civilisation which had endured for one million years yet which had perished in one day two thousand centuries (a clumsy phrase, indicative of an unfamiliarity with numbers or of a desire to impress) before the arrival of mankind. Morbius, mistakenly, believes that the Krels were sufficiently advanced to have been on the threshold of harnessing the power of their thoughts and of being able to give them physical substances; his focus is too narrow for him to grasp the true picture.

After nineteen years, the United Planets' cruiser approaches and desires to land on Altair IV. Morbius is reluctant to let his solitude be disturbed and he rationalises that descent would be catastrophic. However, Commander Adams prevails and the cruiser descends into the maelstrom. Morbius simultaneously disclaims responsibility for any unfortunate consequences of the landfall. (As yet, he does not understand that, because of his intimacy with the Krel machine, only he can harm the invaders. And, it is significant that he must regard the spacemen as invaders.) However, Morbius acts courteously as soon as the spacemen have landed: he sends out his man-servant to escort Commander and senior crew-members to his residence. (At this point we are introduced to the robot, Robbie. Little need be said of this mechanism, other than that it is wholly irrelevant to the mainstream of the story. It is worth noting that, so vast was the cost of Robbie that another film, The Invisible Boy, 1958, was made using it in order to justify the expense. This is an amazing indication of mistaken priorities, for the strength of Forbidden Planet derives more from its philosophical content than from its hardware.)

Morbius entertains the Commander and companions, careful not to mention the existence of Altaira. Morbius also - as much for the benefit of the film's audience as for his personal audience - outlines the noteworthy events and his discoveries since his arrival on Altair. At the tail of his tale, Altaira makes an appearance, much to the surprise (and nauseating delight) of the spacemen. However, one must not dismiss the clumsy way in which Altaira is introduced, by the worldly wise (and stupendously naive) spacemen, to the delights of kissing (on camera) and, no doubt, sexual intercourse (off camera). (I think one must mention this subject, whether or not the film explicitly does. It is the jealousy of the father - Dr. Morbius - for the Commander which motivates the film. And, this jealousy, as Freud suggested, is grounded in the sexual connect between Morbius and Altaira. On the surface, Forbidden Planet pretends to deprecate Freud; but, really, it is a physical manifestation of this man's theories. (I feel this "dates" the film but in no way can be said to damage its high quality.))

The story unfolds quickly from this point. One is aware, in hindsight, of significant incidents. The Commander is dismayed by Morbius' reluctance to return to Earth; it is, therefore, necessary for the Commander to contact Earth and to seek fresh instructions. That same night, an invisible entity - the first manifestation of the Doctor's naked id - destroys the spacemen's communicative device (nee radio). An electronic fence is erected around the United Planets Cruiser; and is attacked by a vicious, yet invisible, creature. The attack is repulsed; simultaneously, Morbius is seen to awake from a disturbing dream. Already the Commander has an inkling of the truth. Subsequently, he holds Altaira in his arms and protects her from the attack of a wild tiger (a creature, of course, native to the planet Earth); earlier, the same tiger had allowed Altaira to stroke it as though it were a tame kitten. Finally, the Doctor shows the Commander around the Krel machine and demonstrates one of its simplest components: a device which creates solid, visible representations of any image held clearly within the brain. (Morbius visualises, and the machine embodies, his thought of, Altaira.)

So, the film explains itself (and the denouement - which may or may not provide a happy ending - is comprehensible). The vast Krel machine was that civilisation's ultimate triumph, was a machine which enabled the Krel to transmute their noblest thoughts into noble objects. Yet, the same machine also transmuted the Krels' basest thoughts - concealed in the subconscious id - into base monsters. The contact of Morbius with the Krel machine enables Morbius to embody his thoughts - both conscious and subconscious. Monsters from the id - over which the Krel had no control - had destroyed the Krel (in a single day, remember!); a monster from the id - over which Morbius has no control - is threatening to destroy the Commander and his crew.

OK; the film is based on an anthropomorphic fallacy; but ignore it. Krel and human minds are unlikely to be isomorphous. Ignore it. The film is splendidly ironical and not at all insulting to the intelligence (not withstanding the repetition of the phrase "two thousand centuries"). It assumes a basic awareness, though not an acceptance, of Freudianism. And, best of all, Forbidden Planet boasts an intriguing electronic score - provided by Louis and Bebe Barron - which predates Tangerine Dream by fifteen years!

(19-2-77)

A SONG IN THE DEPTH OF THE GALAXIES

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30)

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

H to He Who Am The Only One	Van der Graaf Generator
The Yes Album	Yes
Unmagumma (2)	Pink Floyd
Phaedra	Tangerine Dream
In Search of Space	Hawkwind
Foxtrot	Genesis
In The Court Of The Crimson King	King Crimson
Blows Against The Empire	Paul Kantner and the Jefferson Starship
Radio Gnome Invisible Part 1	Gong
Mekanik Destruktiw Kommandoh	Magma

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM IAN WATSON

Can I ask readers of VECTOR if they would like to put any questions to Stanislaw Lem about his own work? As Features Editor of Foundation I recently wrote to Mr. Lem asking whether he would write a piece for our "Profession of Science Fiction" series, and he replied that he didn't want to write a formal piece, but that he would be happy to answer any specific, detailed questions about his own writings, if I compiled a Questionnaire, which I am not doing. Lem will answer the questionnaire in Polish, but Dolores Jakubowski has kindly agreed to translate. So if you have any specific questions you'd like to ask, would you send them to me (fairly soon)? I'll run a credit line in Foundation thanking and naming anyone whose questions are used.

Write NOW to Ian Watson, 37 St. John Street, OXFORD OX1 2LH.

PUBLISHERS' REVIEW EDITORS PLEASE NOTE...

THE LISTING OF BOOKS ALSO RECEIVED AND "TO BE REVIEWED" APPEARS IN ISSUE NO. 2 OF NEXUS: THE VECTOR REVIEWS SUPPLEMENT WHICH ACCOMPANIES THIS ISSUE OF VECTOR.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN VECTOR 81....

Brian Griffin's article "Culture, Anarchy and SF" - a major analysis of Brian Aldiss' Frankenstein Unbound.

Cy Chauvin's "British SF - An American View".

Brian Stableford's "Icaromenippus, Or The Future Of Science Fiction" - an important piece of criticism from SF's most knowledgeable historian.

Contributions from: John Clute, M. John Harrison and all the regulars.

Artwork by: Carol Gregory, Eaianne Cooke, Paul Ryan, Zoe, and many others.

M. JOHN HARRISON SPECIAL ISSUE:

Interview with M. John Harrison;

Discussion with Michael Moorcock on Harrions's fiction and contributions to New Worlds;

John Clute on Harrison's critical writing;

David Wingrove's 12,000 word article "The Mutable M. John";

David Pringle's "A Son Of New Worlds";

Photographs and specially commissioned artwork;

Possible contributions by other leading writers and critics.

The M. John Harrison special issue is slated for publication in July.

LATE ADDITIONS TO THE INFINITY BOX:

GASLIGHT TALES OF TERROR edited by R. Chetwynd-Hayes; Fontana; Glasgow; 1976; 191 pp; ISBN 0-00-614149-8

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

"A science fiction story" says Edmund Crispin in his introduction to Best SF (1953) "is one which presupposes a technology, or an effect of technology, or a disturbance in the natural order, such as humanity, up to the time of writing, has not in actual fact experienced". So how does a collection of very traditional ghost stories, such as Gaslight Tales of Terror, qualify for "The Infinity Box"? Well, I quite enjoyed my review copy, so the least I can do is find an excuse for reviewing it. Here goes: all ghost stories are elaborations of the same idea, which Tikien expressed in a TV interview when he said that "There is no such thing as death from natural causes". (I think he was quoting Simone de Beauvior.) In other words, death, far from being a natural phenomenon, is the great disturbance of the natural order, and its implications are cosmic. Paradoxically, it is the oldest disturbance of nature; yet, because men live continually by the unspoken assumption that there is no death, it is always a new disturbance, challenging all our old perspecitives. All individual cases of death are unprecedented for those involved, and have vast implications. So Gaslight Tales of Terror can quite rightly be reviewed here.

Most of these stories are quietly efficient and enjoyable, and there are a few collector's items. "A Tale of a Gaslit Ghost", by an anonymous author, is culled from The New Christmas Annual of 1867 (and quietly sinister and unpredictable it is, too); while "The Phantom of the Lake", by Edmund Mitchell, M.A., a quietly haunting anecdote of Jungian synchronicity, comes from a bound edition of Argosy, 1886. J. S. LeFanu's "Authentic Narrative of a Haunted House" reads, convincingly, like a documentary account, though the author may be having us on; while R. Thurston Hopkins, in "The Glass Staircase" (I like the staircase: it pulsates with a ghastly green light) purports to be exhuming a century-old manuscript. Fitz-James O'Brien, the author of "What Is It?", was certainly killed in the American Civil War; and his story - one of the few scraps of fiction he left behind - features a very convincing Invisible Man from another dimension, and is the nearest thing to sf in the collection as sf is usually conceived. "Mrs. Raeburn's Waxwork" by Lady Eleanor Smith, another exhumation job, has curiosity value, but is little more than competent in itself.

Of the stories by living authors, Rosemary Timperley's "The Maid, the Madman and the Knife" has something of the power of C. L. Grant's "A Crowd of Shadows" in the June issue of F&SF; R. Chetwynd-Hayes's "Keep the Gaslight Burning" (set in the Bronte country) is good on atmosphere; Harold Lawlor's "The Silver Highway" is memorable, and involves more Jungian synchronicity (it was made into a TV play); Roger Wallinoo's "The Last Victim" is an efficient piece of pseudo-Edwardian nonsense; James Jauncey's "The Veritable Verasco" is also efficient and atmospheric (it's set in a Victorian music hall), although it has what must be one of the oldest plots in the business; and "The Pauper's Feast", by Sydney J. Bounds, is a quick potboiler. But the best of all these stories by living writers is "Up, Like a Good Girl" by Dorothy K. Haynes, which is set in a really dismal nineteenth-century all-female orphanage. This has real psychological subtlety, eats deep into the mind, and is exquisitely morbid. It stands up very well to the best that is provided by the old ghost-story writers, here represented by M. R. James's mind-boggling "Number 13".

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THE SEEDBEARERS by Peter Valentine Timlett; Corgi; London; 1976; 282 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-552-10260-1

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

This should be read as Rider Haggard with all the inhibitions removed. That is, all the sex is explicity, not to mention all the rape and mutilation; and when battle is joined blood, brains, guts and just about everything else is spilt in profuse detail. This may be commercial, but Mr. Timlett is not cynical: all the gory details serve a purpose, which is to portray, in broad and crudely effective terms, a great civilization in process of losing its soul - the physical plane losing contact with the spiritual.

Mr. Timlett is, in fact, an Atlantis freak, and his story is based on the ancient myth. The original vast continent has sunk thousands of years previously; all that remains of it is two islands off the "Gulf of Mehicoan" bearing the survivors of the ancient races - the Akkadians (vaguely Greek), the Mnoahals (negroid), and the master race, the Toltecs. They are ruled nominally by an outer ring of priests in the Sun Temple; they are ruled ultimately by the "Illuminati of the Withdrawn Temple", an inner ring of priests. One main aspect of Peter Timlett's novel is the swiftly-widening chasm between the Inner and Outer modes of the One Life, resulting in empty ritual and the isolation of the Illuminati from the life of the people. The other main aspect is the revolt of the soldiery under its evil and ambitious commander, Vardek, against the Sun Temple - the revolt of the Heart (the "spirited element" of Plato's Republic) against the Head. Caught between these two main aspects is the love story of Helios, a priest of the Sun Temple who has not lost inner contact with the Illuminati, and Netziachos, a priestess. Their problem is to resolve the conflict between their bodily desires and the will of the Illuminati, the "inner plane beings" among whom they are destined to be numbered.

The will of the inner planes is not an easy one; for the Illuminati have forseen disaster, and are preparing to send forth the Seedbearers - the flower of the doomed civilisation, specially selected to survive its death and further the evolution of Man within the inner planes, according to the ultimate Will of the Logos. There are veiled references to "the Son behind the Sun", which adds a dimension to Helios's name: perhaps Peter Timlett will explore it further in succeeding volumes, for The Seedbearers is designed as the first of a trilogy.

Characterisation is almost non-existent. But this is consistent with the Grand Manichaean Scheme of the novel, in which the individual is non-existent and the outer world is only valued as a mirror wherein the Inner Plane Reality can be revealed. The spiritual machinery is crude but certainly effective, especially in the sexy bits where we're asked to switch quickly from the bodily to the spiritual level and back again. There are prescient mirrors conjurings of elementals and "abhumans" (pretty well done, too), everything being supervised on the inner plane by the Illuminati, rather in the manner of the Second Foundation Minds. Given this scheme of things, it's quite logical that the characters, as such, should be almost non-existent; for Peter Timlett is portraying a world in which the Individual (in whom the dualism of spiritual/unspiritual, Inner/Outer, mental/physical, etc., ceases to apply) has not yet been born.

On the whole, Peter Timlett writes well enough to sustain his narrative, especially in the last quarter, which is all Tolkienesque battles, set amid increasing physical and psychical chaos. And there's a good holocaust at the end. Only occasionally does his language become over-elaborate - at which point he tends to trip over his "whences" or produce a barbarity like "equally as" - or, conversely, descend too far into bathos. For the most part his language is smooth and functional, and if his priests and priestesses are straight from an old-fashioned Hollywood epic, this is something not even Rider Haggard could avoid.

The Seedbearers is a good story, efficiently told.

THE NON-EXISTENT LEAD IN

Some of you out there may be wondering why there is no "Lead In" this issue. There are really two reasons, the first concerned with space and the second concerned with flak.

Due to the length of Dave Wingrove's article, it was impossible to place the Quasar Books advert anywhere else except on page 3, which has meant that the space where "Lead In" would normally appear is used up. And the central section of VECTOR, with the interview, reviews and letters, is almost entirely typed and pasted-up - not to mention being printed as I write this - so there's no room for an editorial in there.

Also, the editor has been getting a great deal of flak from certain Illuminati amongst fandom. One person went so far as to accuse the editor of having "all the presence of a dead toad". Those of you who read Matrix will find this comment, amongst other criticisms of the BSFA in general, in a letter from Joseph Nicholas, a young man who has now left the BSFA, presumably in disgust.

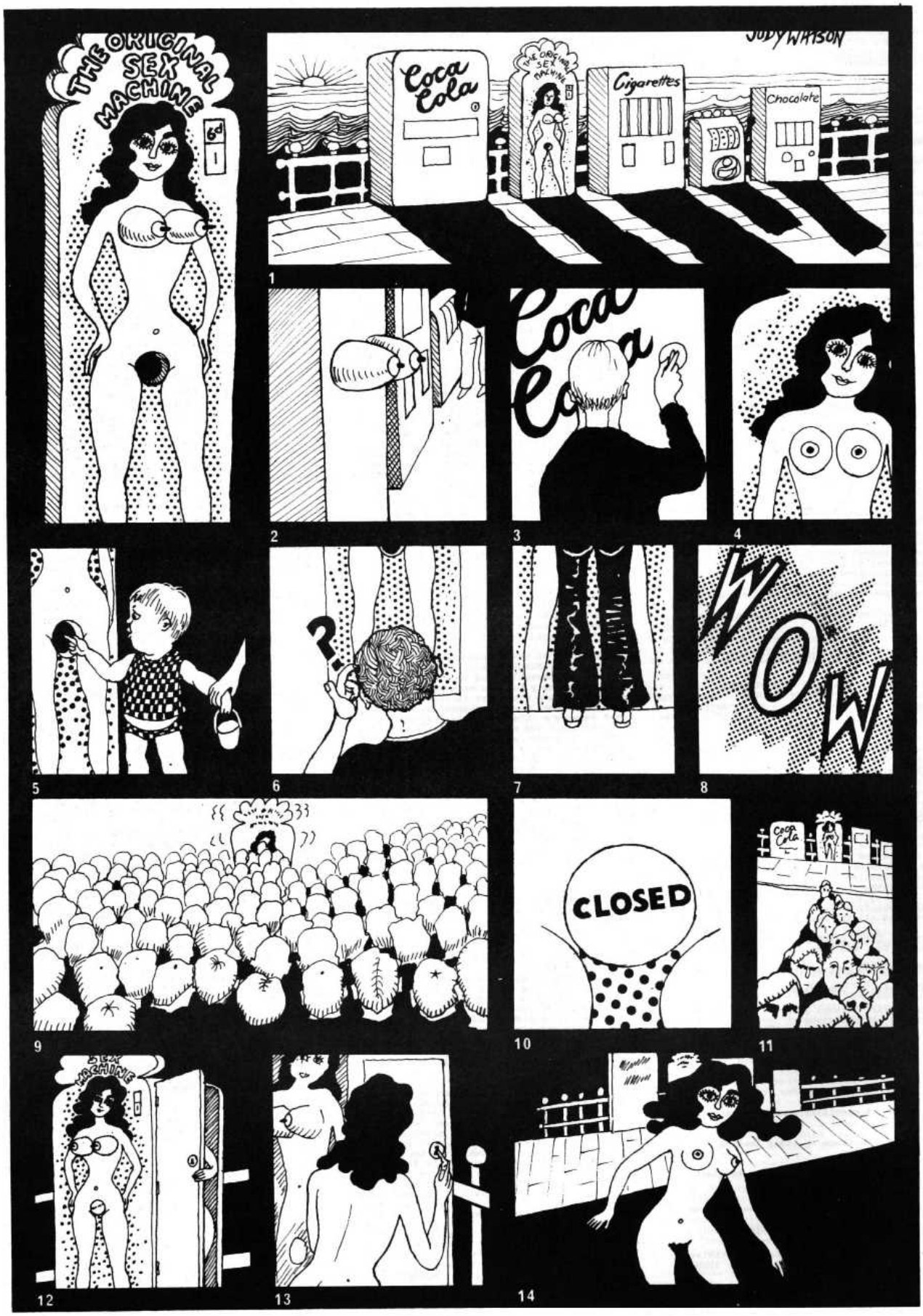
Well, this particular dead toad is pretty tired, and there seems little point in fabricating an editorial if the only response is going to be that jumped-up little turds like Nicholas are going to be rude.

Anyway, those people whose views I respect - such people as John Clute, Alexei and Cory Panshin and Ian Watson, seem to like VECTOR the way it is, without any pontificating editorials.

So there it is.

Or rather, isn't.

Chris Fowler, 6/4/1977


THE ORIGINAL SEX MACHINE
JUDY WATSON
Coca Cola
Cigarettes
Chocolate
WOW
CLOSED
SEX MACHINE

new found affluence. A working class band, suddenly acclaimed, they tried desperately to retain their anti-establishment identity as a "people's band".

Warriors was something new; stability after the uncertainty of their previous work. Making use of Michael Moorcock's series of novels, The Eternal Champion, as a central theme, they produced what was perhaps the thematic apotheosis of their work. But the signs of staleness were also there. Their most recently released album, Hawkroads, is a collection of eight of their most jaunty and memorable songs. Somehow I never expected a "best of" album from Hawkwind, but there it is, a fine album if it were their only one, but sadly adrift from the mythos.

Michael Moorcock himself, active on the Warriors album and inpired by his contacts with the musical medium thereby, produced his album New Worlds Fair, supported by a band entitled The Deep Fix. The band is, unsurprisingly, a hybrid of High Tide and Hawkwind. It is fairly pleasing as a rock album, but (for me anyway) disappointing in that Moorcock doesn't make the best use of the possibilities there. These are just songs, linked in the vaguest manner, with no attempt at a strong theme. Perhaps next time...

(x) We Want You Big Brother...

David Bowie occupies the other extremity to that filled by Hawkwind. Elitist, extroverted and abnormal is a fair description of the stage (life?) effect he attempt to convey. He is often thrust forward as one of the foremost exemplars of sf-rock, and yet this is quite misleading. Bowie has produced some classic pieces, but very often these are incidental, almost accidental even, to his original intention, which is to highlight his uniqueness, his own personal strangeness. Sf is a perfect module for such antics, far more so than the alternative of existential meanderings (like Nico and Velvet Underground), and he abuses the genre to obtain his own imagery. His music is not so dissimilar to that of any other rock group playing love songs, protest songs and anti-war songs. He makes scant use of electronics and generally leaves a heavy burden on the lyrics which must carry the entire imagery alone. Bowie's reputation is largely substantiated by the overwhelming media coverage he can command. "Starman", "The Man Who Sold The World", "Life On Mars?" and "Space Oddity" are all widely known, as are his albums Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars and Diamond Dogs. But his preoccupations are not what they superficially appear (especially not to a well-read sf fan). A good example of this is Ziggy Stardust which deals with the situation that Earth has only five more years left. An intriguing theme - which Bowie doesn't even touch! No. He is intent on telling us the story of the pop star who makes it by cashing in on the disaster. As good an analogy of Bowie's own situation could not be drawn. "Starman" is one of the incidental tracks that this album throws off, but it doesn't redeem it in my eyes. Better is Diamond Dogs with the best thing Bowie did in this line as an opener, "Future Legend". A Delany-esque image, it tells of the death of the city and of corpses on the streets, red-eyed mutants, rats as big as cats. But he is then content to drift onto a recent-nostalgia trip, homosexual inferences abounding in the lyrics. The second side seems, superficially, quite attractive with tracks titled "We Are The Dead", "Big Brother" and "1984". Again the music is too far from the lyrics to convey a realistic image. Only when, as in "We Are The Dead", it lilts into the paranoic, does it achieve its effect. "Big Brother" is by far the best track of these three, with its menacing thread of anti-Orwellian tendencies:

"We'll build a glass asylum
With just a hint of men
We'll build a better whirlpool..."

and

"Someone to follow...
We want you Big Brother."

And with these lyrics we have penetrated to the core of Bowie's philosophy. He sees the mass of humanity as Orwellian plebs to be manipulated by the talented few who will entertain them and give them an example to follow. Only recently he has been quoted as saying he would welcome a fascist Prime Minister The man being himself). Which is all a far cry from tracks like "The Supermen" which tells of the boredom of the eternal beings and their joy when one of their kind dies. If it were all of that standard I would hail the man, but as it is I wince at his abuse of the genre.

And I am not alone. The Strawbs, a group whose own songs have bordered upon fantasy (particularly with the album From The Witchwood) recognised the "posed" nature of Bowie's work and produced an excellent parody with "Ciggy Barlust And The Whales From Venus", a delightful piece of music with humorous and cutting lyrics.

(xi) Roughage and Rocketry...

Still in a humorous mood, Donovan offered a rare comment upon space exploration in 1973 when he released the single "The Intergalactic Laxative". Dwelling upon the most basic elements of life in a rocket he comes up with some unforgettable lyrics:

"The intergalactic laxative will get you from here to there
For cosmic constipation, there's none that can compare.
If shitting is your problem when you're out there in the stars
The intergalactic laxative will get you from here to Mars."

Contemporary music draws from the total output of all media for its inspiration and this is nowhere more apparent than in the narrow confines of sf-orientated music. Like its literary counterpart it seeks to redefine by extrapolation, abrogation and, if necessary, by revolution. It is no wonder then that whilst it is a relatively small sub-genre it embraces an extraordinary range of social commentary. In search of fresh territory, uncliched imagery and provocative concepts the more talented and imaginative musicians are moving to a medium of expression that is akin to that of the sf writer - and music is the medium of the masses, able to convey with a phrase and a handful of notes what a writer would labour chapters to produce. Part of its diversity and popular appeal I have already tried to illustrate. I would add the following examples.

I stated at the very beginning of this article that I felt jazz music failed to provide the correct atmosphere for the development of an sf music. Sun Ra is a perfect example of this. In various incarnations he has been producing "solar" and "galactic" sounds for many years, music inspired and structured by and in the manner of natural sounds. The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra II, released in 1966, is typical of Sun Ra. Despite some very interesting percussion effects the use of traditional instruments fails to lift this album. Instrumental chaos, unrelieved by coherent lyrics, it sounds dated and is.

Stockhausen and his many imitators in the rock field have well surpassed this traditional strain of experimentation. Sun Ra's inclusion in this piece is tenuous; his images are unconvincing. A delightful album that is successful is Burt Alcantara's Zygoat. This is beautiful, multi-layered music of the Tubular Bells variety, performed completely on ARP and RSE synthesisers. Instrumental, the titles to the pieces conjure grand images that are not spoilt by ineffectual music. From the opening "Leaves Of Sand" through "Movement To The Earth", "Zy-clone" and "The Ladder Of Zengma" it progresses through a wide range of moods and tones. Again its complexity is rewarding, although to the well-versed classical admirer its structure will be familiar. I notice (though I have yet to hear) that there is a second album out from this studio (Electrophon), Wavemaker, with a piece entitled "Where Are We Captain?". It is easiest to separate this type of instrumental music from the Tangerine Dream school by texture rather than intent. Zygoat comes from a shortlived family that began with

Walter Carlos (famous in his own right here for his electronic interpretations of the classics which illustrated A Clockwork Orange) and are noted for their cramped configurations and intense delivery. Tangerine Dream derived from Pink Floyd with their relaxed inferences of space and the vaccum. Midway between the two and a fusion of jazz and rock influences is the work of Terry Riley.

A Rainbow In Curved Air is an utopian vision without reservations. The music is subtle, repetitious (and perhaps to the untrained ear monotonous) and the overall effect cumulative rather than immediate. Linking with Jon Cale (of Velvet Underground fame) he also produced Church of Anthrax, a similar attempt to inscribe a vision in purely musical terms. There have been no end of imitators, but none as effective as these two templates of how it should be done.

It seems, however, that for every one good example there are two bad ones. I pause only to mention Atlantis and UFO as typical of the latter, promising to the casual browser of record shops and yet totally wasteful. Occasionally however the unintentional succeeds, such as Lambertland by Tasavallan Presidentti. An ambiguous song, it lays itself open to interpretation at several levels, The setting is nowhere on a known Earth. The time could be 1,000 years past, today or well into the future:

" Same rash breaking out fresh...itchy and sore
Sky locked sun she's glaring in a clench up and tight
Field hand dropping the hoe, left it out there
Lost it somewhere, getting out of Lambertland fast..."

There is no attempt to explain and the enigma gives the piece an additional dimension that even the excellent musicianship of this Finnish group could not provide.

Grateful Dead are another group that possess a reputation in excess of their production of sf music. Dark Star is a masterpiece of its kind, but one swallow... Their preoccupation with country and western music is the complete antithesis of every other group or artist in this piece. Sf and pleasant country-rock are somewhat incongruous. Their supposed link with sf appears more a publicity thing than an actual desire to use sf imagery. (A good example is the Mars Hotel LP which has no other reference to sf at all...) A scattering of names here. I said at the start that I could cover only a small part of the actual production available for comment upon. With these I plead my partial or total ignorance and the need to work for a living as an excuse for not giving more detailed comments, although I'll provide what I can. Seventh Wave (a later development of Second Hand who produced an interesting album with Death May Be Your Santa Claus) have so far released two sf albums with Things to Come and Psi-Fi. Heavily keyboard dominated this is a brainchild of Ken Elliot and he seems to use the genre references very well indeed. Song titles include "Metropolis", "1999½" and "Star Palace of the Sombre Warrior". Tonto's Expanding Head Band were a phenomenon of a few years back before Tangerine Dream swept the market. Their album Zero Time is entertaining stuff particularly on tracks like "Cybernaut" and "Jetsex". Ramases are busy producing concept albums such as Glass Top Coffin. Again, I think this is the brainchild of a single man. Passport are a new German group whose album Infinity Machine shows promise. Weather Report are better known for their sweeping jazz-rock pieces than for any connection with sf, and yet they have shown several times how successfully this fusion of the two influences works; as on the album I Sing The Body Electric and Lord Of The Rings, which was a certain target for criticism, has continued in the fantasy vein with Magician's Hat. And finally in this brief section, I must admit to my greatest omission, The Moody Blues. The feeling of movement and spiritual seeking that is characteristic of a Moody Blues record has never enticed me before now to look any deeper than the surface icing. A few hours intensive treatment rectified this as far as their To Our Children's Children's Children album. It is much more than pleasant background music, and the theme of this album, that of unending wonder at life, is powerfully conveyed by the lyrics. The same can be said of A Question of Balance In Search Of the Lost Chord and On The Threshold of A Dream. All the concepts used are familiar to the arm chair philosophers of the sf field; the search for higher meaning beyond space and time:

"I never thought I'd get to be a million
I never thought I'd get to be the thing that
all these other children see.
God and me."

(xii) Cat's Foot Iron Claw. Neuro Surgeons Scream For More...

An adjunct of rock music that has required more than the usual degree of popular acclamation and support is (if I might be excused the phrase) "pomp rock", a grandiose and highly polished musical form derived from and tending towards classical music. Genesis, Queen, King Crimson, ELP and Yes are the notable examples and they have all, to some degree, drawn upon sf (fantasy and fiction) as an inspirational source. I have discussed Yes already and much of what I said then could equally apply to early Genesis. In a relatively short but varied career they have managed to produce a whole spectrum of related songs, ranging from the semi-humorous and socially-prophetic "Get 'em Out By Friday" to the serious, part myth, part surrealist journey by Rael on their Lamb Lies Down On Broadway album.

It began with an album entitled Trespass, containing tracks like "Stagnation" and "The Knife", definite fantasies, blending stark pessimism with nebulous optimism, lulling melodies with stomping aggression. The Musical Box which followed is the definitive album of its kind, a beautiful tapestry of fantasies, casual observations and black humour. The title track tells the story of Henry Hamilton-Smyth minor (8), who has his head removed by the croquet mallet of his young friend Cynthia. Two weeks later she discovers the musical box in his room and lifts the lid. Henry returns in child's form, but as the music plays ("Old King Cole") he ages rapidly and though he still has a child's untrained mind he suffers a lifetime's desires. He tries to fulfill his "romantic desire" with Cynthia but Nanny (entering on cue) hurls the musical box at him, destroying both. This is a typical if good example of Genesis' work. And on the same album is the incredible "The Return Of The Giant Hogweed":

"Botanical creature stirs, seeking revenge
Royal beast did not forget
Soon they escaped, spreading their seed,
Preparing for an onslaught, threatening the
human race."

Wyndham with a sense of humour!

Their third album, Foxtrot, was a classic. It opened with "Watcher Of The Skies", a song in the Stapledon philosophy telling of a being to whom the Universe is known. ("He whom life can no longer surprise.") On the same side is "Get 'em Out By Friday" with its Wellsian humour:

"This is an announcement from Genetic Control:
It is my sad duty to inform you of a four foot
restriction on humanoid height."

The second side is dominated by the 25 minute mammoth, "Supper's Ready", a manic romp through a dozen mythologies culminating in a deeply moving and poetic climax. (Irreverently titled, as ever, "As Sure As Eggs Is Eggs (Aching Men's Feet)".) It mixes the banal with the apocalyptic, the mythological with the contemporary and farce with passion. It is a fine microcosm of the band's work and would be a perfect introduction to anyone unfamiliar with the schizophrenic nature of Genesis.

When the double album, The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway appeared, the critics were disappointed and perplexed. Possibly the latter prompted the former because it

is a complex work. The varied, repetitive themes criss-cross throughout the four sides of this modern picaresque which tells of the psychotic Rael and his search (through numerous fantasies) for his identity. The coalescence of natural and unnatural settings, contemporary references and arcane mythology results in a powerful work replete with startling musical images. If anything, Genesis are even more delicate in their lighter moments, organ guitars and drums stretching out in an ethereal and rippling membrane of sound that demonstrates Rael's awe or bewilderment, and as magnificent as ever when pounding out the major themes which illustrate Rael's psychological state. There are some of Genesis' best pieces on this album, amongst them three stunning sf songs: "The Grand Parade Of Lifeless Packaging", "The Supernatural Anaesthetist" and "The Lamia".

The Lamb was something totally new for Genesis, following as it did their Selling England By The Pound album with its lyrical attack on commercialism and advertising. It was also the last project undertaken by Peter Gabriel, their lyricist/vocalist. The band's latest album, A Trick Of The Tail, is a softer, less complex work, akin to Trespass with its gentle, haunting music and understated lyrics. A temporary diversion - possibly a new direction - but Genesis still have a lot to offer. "The Squonk", a delightful track from this album is a fantasy of a new kind, an indication of new heights to come.

In The Court Of The Crimson King launched the frightening King Crimson onto an unsuspecting public. A faultless debut, it commenced with "21st Century Schizoid Man", a nasty vision of the era to come. The music was tight, original, nightmarish and yet appealing. Electric guitar and electric saxophones screeched and screamed above a hectic rhythm:

"Death seed blind man's greed
Poet's starving children bleed
Nothing he's got he really needs
Twenty-first century schizoid man."

That single track would be enough to make the album memorable, but the contrasting peace of "Moonchild" and the grandeur of "The Court Of The Crimson King" make this a masterpiece. (King Crimson's first and best album.)

Their second album, In The Wake Of Poseidon, followed the same pattern, almost to the letter. "Pictures of a City" and the title track show the violent and grandiose sides of Crimson while "The Devil's Triangle", an adaptation of Holst's "Mars", provides both peaceful and threatening moments. Peter Sinfield, a poet, is the lyricist and his words are well balanced and compatible throughout. The use of the mellotron with its complete range of synthesised woodwind instruments makes the music distinctive and achingly majestic. Lyrics and music are complementary:

"Their children kneel in Jesus till
They learn the price of nails;
Whilst all around our Mother Earth
Waits balanced on the scales."

King Crimon's third album was the last of a trilogy in the same format, the last Crimson album heavily indebted to fantasy. Lizard is its title and also the name of the major piece that takes up side two of the album. Jon Anderson of Yes sings vocal on the first part of this and whilst Crimson are quite distinctive there are comparisons with Yes to be made. King Crimson are possibly the other side of the coin, their intention intellectual rather than spiritual. But their ability to push all the emotional buttons is never in doubt, as witnessed on "Dawn Song", part of the Lizard suite:

"Burnt with dream and taut with fear
Dawn's misty shawl upon them.
Three hills apart great armies stir
Spit oath and curse as day breaks.
Forming lines of horse and steel
By even yards march forward."

Personnel changes and the insistent search by the group's founder and leader, Robert Fripp, for the perfect Crimson sound has meant a complete rejection of light fantasy for a more menacing contemporary message. Theirs is still one of the most interesting musical lines to follow, though menacing landscapes of modern nightmare, on albums like Red and Starless and Bible Black. They have relinquished the grandiose for a heavier jazz feel, although their music still gives the impression of a well-coiled steel spring unwinding. Van Der Graaf, when they launch into a threatening riff are the nearest comparison to modern Crimson. (Unsurprising in view of Fripp's connections there, in particular with H To He, Who Am album.)

The youngest of the groups in this section and the most commercial are Queen. Recognised as a "pop" group through their successful sallies into the singles charts, their albums are startlingly fresh and original.

It is their second album, Queen II, on which this is most evident. The album is split into Side White and Side Black in an Alice-like arrangement that lyrically dances between fantasy and faerie; the eighteenth century of the romantic poets transmitted in an electronic medium. The result is wistful and majestic, and nearly always beautiful, a series of unconnected songs all in the same tone. Side Black, with "Ogre Battle", "The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke" and "March Of the Black Queen", though not over-impressive as sf pieces, are nevertheless evidence of the heavy reliance contemporary music has upon fantasy. "The Prophet's Song" on their most recent album is a further step in this direction, with its warning to the people of the Earth. The use of such imagery is rife. As Donald Wollheim argues in his recent book The Universe Makers, we are living in an sf world and the youth of today accept the currency of sf imagery.

The depth to which this is true can be shown by reference to the most academic of the aforementioned "pomp rock" groups, Emerson, Lake and Palmer. Their renditions of classical pieces and attempts to create modern electronic classics have gained them an international reputation, and yet it is their use of futuristic sounds, stage props and (occasionally) lyrics that has won them such a strong and voracious following. The bizarre Tarkus suite (with its story of a creature part-armadillo, part-tank) and the complex and majestic "Karn Evil 9" both seem to be music far ahead of its time, written as such and performed as if by an aesthetic computer. The sound is as far removed from that of ten years ago as the laser is from the flint axe, electronically phased drums under a web of looped moogs, repetitious organ chords and hollow, distorted bass. And its importance lies not so much with the origins of the musical compositions but in the implications of the sounds; for the electronic matrix within which the music is produced is yet another product of the sf World that has spawned from the pulps of the thirties and forties.

Strange as it may seem, the newly discovered power and articulation that modern instrumentation has brought has engendered a rash of music firmly steeped in fantasy. I have touched on Queen and King Crimson as practitioners of this incongruous hybrid, being blatant examples, but rock is full of them. The cult of Tolkienism and the resurrection of sword and sorcery have brought in their swathe groups like Led Zeppelin ("Ramble On", "The Battle Of Forever" and "No Quarter"), Wishbone Ash ("Phoenix", "The Pilgrim", "The King Will Come" and "Warriors"), Black Sabbath ("The Wizard", "Hand Of Doom") and many others. It all seems quite natural to the youth of today who have grown up in the climate of electronic music, but it is more than evident that the trinity of love songs, patriotic/protest songs and comic ditties has been added to by a fourth category, that of the fantastic (or sf?). It is only a recent thing. There was nothing comparable before this last decade. To me it is like a blossoming out of sf into yet another dimension. The visions that were once pulp and then celluloid are now wax as well. As yet (and despite all that has gone before) it is still virgin territory, to a great degree unexplored, uncharted. Perhaps as more of the younger writers mature and find themselves

at ease within the genre they will look to this new medium as a means of expression. Moorcock has dabbled; possibly others will shortly follow. Within musical circles (as in the film world) the current use is as much an abuse of the imagery; untutored lyricists producing hackneyed metaphors. There are of course - and I have tried to show some - exceptions to this. In many cases the effort has not been sustained and we have been left solely with a few rare gems and a feeling of frustrating unfulfilment. But there have been a few who have succeeded in what they set out to do...

(xiii) Have You Seen The Stars Tonite...

I believe sf to be a revolutionary force, a shaping factor in our daily lives the match of any other. Where it intersects with contemporary life in the form of social commentary there it is at its best, its most natural state. It is no small wonder then that one of the best if not the best sf albums has resulted from the area of intersection. Blows Against The Empire by Paul Kantner and Jefferson Starship was nominated for a Hugo in 1971 for "Best Dramatic Presentation", a quite justified accolade even if no award was finally given in that category. The second side of the record is a 23-minute future revolutionary tract telling of the hi-jacking of a government-built starship by 7,000 crazies (dropouts?) and their journey to the stars. It is surely the most peaceful and wonderful vision of opting-out there has ever been. Jefferson Starship in their days as Jefferson Airplane sang of alternate societies, of fighting the system before the future of 1984 became total reality. They sang of water brothers (Heinlein) of flying saucers and mystical ways opened by drugs and obscure religious rites, but never dared summon the total vision of Blows Against The Empire. It is a challenging work that damns the part of Mankind that needs to conform. They can see no solution on Earth with its police-state thinking and overpopulation. It is a common theme in their music (appearing in the two tracks "A Child Is Coming" and "Let's Get Together" on the same album) but in this suite it comes to full fruition. A few quotes from it will give an idea of the emotive quality of the work:

"Surprise
Civilised Man
You were keeper to me
Now your animal is free..."

and:

"What you gonna do when you feel your lady rollin'
How you gonna feel when you see your lady strollin'
On the deck of a starship
With her head hooked into Andromeda..."

and finally:

"Mankind gone from the cage
All the years gone from your age..."

The suite itself can be seen in two parts, the first three sections in the arch-revolutionary and practical vein of the old Airplane, a harsher, didactic message that metamorphoses into the gentler, dreamier Starship of "Have You Seen The Stars Tonite" with its beautiful optimistic feel reminiscent of the old sense of wonder. "Starship" is a perfect climax, a statement of ascendence.

Starship have not repeated the experiment. It could only be done once, and it was done well. Earlier pieces such as "Have You Seen The Saucers" and "Crown Of Creation" are also worthy of note, a similar mixture of the familiar and the strange. Musically Starship tend to be gentler on album than they are live. Live they sound much like Amon Duul and many of the German bands, and the influence is admitted by Duul at least if not by others. By such means does sf show itself to wider and wider audiences.

(xiv) The Octave Doctors and the Crystal Machine...

In 1972 came the appearance of a group who, like High Tide, showed exceptional promise and despite producing one of the finest (sf) albums of that year disbanded, leaving only that single, memorable wax impression. Khan were the group and their album was titled Space Shanty. Although it opens shakily on the opening track even that improves and the awkward departure is the sole blemish. The music (a blend of classical and jazz themes played in a rock mode) is excellent, the musicians craftsmen. What makes this something special however are the uncliched lyrics, ever relevant, thoughtful and capable of conveying the appropriate image. My own favourite is "Stargazers" (showing the influence of Egg and of what was to come with Hatfield and the North):

"Can your words cope with infinity,
You must communicate it perfectly...
...King and Queen,
An extra gene..."

A song overbrimming with optimism.

But all was not lost. Dave Stewart, the organist went on to join Hatfield (who produced the semi-humorous Gigantic Crabs In Earth-takeover Bid and who promise more in this vein, if only tangentially) and Steve Hillage, lead guitarist was promoted to Submarine Captain of the Planet Gong. And That's another story...

Gong could be said to have developed as an aberration of the weird imagination of David Allen, formulator of the mythology of Gong and one-time lead guitarist. Disregarding the two albums Magick Brother, Mystick Sister and Banana Moon (although these are quite interesting in their own right) the origins of Gong can be traced back to 1971 and the album Camembert Electrique. Recorded during full moon phases (supposedly all Gong's work is) this album trips comfortably between delightful music and absurd lyrical silliness. It was the first of three works that delve (almost incomprehenibly) into the complex mythology of the Planet Gong, a mixture of zen, ufo-fantasy and sexual allusion.

In terms of this article, Gong are important because they have developed this semi-humorous, semi-philosophical ideology as a long-term project; not content to play music about the subject they have let the subject become the music. The result is a maniacal electronic tapestry involving pot-head pixies, flying teapots, meretricious witches and angels' eggs. After the serious (even morose) offerings of Hawkwind it is hardly surprising that Gong are not taken seriously outside of their fanatical clique of afficionados. But the blend of serious music and amusing fantasy is absorbing, and when Gong launch into instrumental flight there are few bands who can touch them. The atmospheric nature of these interludes (heightened very often by mystical chants) cannot fail to impress. The message may not (depending upon your interpretation) be particularly attractive, but it is a definite alternative.

The scant ravings of Camembert Electrique had progressed to complicated insanity by the time of Radio Gnome Invisible, Part 1: Flying Teapot (1973: read the sleeve notes for a fuller understanding of the Gong pantheon). Commencing with the almost ritual invocation of the Planet Gong it traces the story of the landing of the pot-head pixies on Earth and their communications with the band. Angel's Egg (Radio Gnome 2) completes this trilogy. It is the most blatantly sexual of the three (almost to the point of obscenity). The album records the adventures of Zero the Hero as he becomes enlightened and journeys to the Planet Gong. Chaucerian earthiness and zen-mysticism can be a heady mixture, but Gong carry it off well. You, their next album, was adrift from the central direction of the preceeding albums but set quite definitely in the same imaginary universe. "The Isle Of Everywhere" and "You can Never Blow Yr Trip Forever" illustrate Gong at their instrumental best, a hybrid of Hawkwind and Tangerine Dream, pulsing and yet ethereal. Steve Hillage was by then with the band and his influence was most noticeable. His own solo album, Fish Rising, is a throw-off of Gong in conception with its

ideology of Lafta Yoga (the yoga of total humour). But back to Gong. Sf embraces a wide spectrum of peculiarities, from the more obscure modern writers (who profess only to write exercises which transcribe reality from a novel viewpoint) to the full-blown fantasists (sword-and-sorcery, ETBs and FTLs). Likewise with its musical relation. Gong could be dismissed off-hand as bizarre humourists, lacking in grandeur, or as perverse iconoclasts. But sf music, like its literary counterpart, should have room for the disrespectful alternatives it spawns. Gong are highly unusual, highly imaginative; at their best they are excellent wielders of the image (as on "Glad Stoned Buried Fielding Flash And Fresh Fest Footprints In My Memory" on the Glastonbury Fayre album). Futhermore they are one of only two bands who have bothered to formulate their alternative as a project spanning more than a single album. The other is Magma.

(xv) Hortz Wlasik Kobaia...

A glance at the covers (if you are lucky enough to find all of them in any single store) will indicate something to the attentive; the six-spiked hemisphere, threatening, the devil's sign? Invert your conception of the badge and there is the single shaft, like a rocket ship, its flames threatening to engulf the fragile needle. Magma is a conception so intricate that it would need an article this size again to even scrape the surface. Born in the mind of Christian Vander, the saga now spans five albums and looks likely to continue for some time longer. And what is Magma besides being a French rock band of solid core and constantly shifting peripheral membership? Magma is the performance on Earth of the THEUSZ HAMTAAHK, that already prophesied by Nebehr Gudahtt; the judgment of Humanity for "all its cruelty, its dishonesty, its uselessness, its vulgarity and its lack of humility". A tall order indeed. It would need a new order of musicians to bring such a grand project to fruition. Magma is the vehicle by which that is achieved.

In concert there is a ritualistic feel from the start, an atmosphere of ceremonial cleansing. The powerful drumming of Vander pushes the massive wheels around and the juggernaut builds up speed. Showmen in the negative sense, Magma are electronic priests, telling us what has already happened. And who could deny the credibility of the vision. I'll tell you the story.

Mankind exceeds even John Brunner's worst predictions and man falls into utter degradation. But before the total collapse a few men object and build their own starship. They escape Earth Space Control and eventually discovers the planet Kobaia where they establish an utopia in perfect harmony with nature, a lengthy but successful venture, incorporating technology and nature in mutually beneficial ways. Then, in the best tradition of sf they forget (or neglect to remember) their origins and are only reminded when years pass and an Earth spacecraft gets into trouble over Kobaia. The Kobaians learn of the sad fate of Earth, a series of massive cyclical disasters, and a few of them decide to go back and convert them in the truest missionary sense. This much is covered by the first of Magma's albums, recorded in 1970, a double album of searing power and disturbing musical imagery. Then,as told on Magma's second album, 1001 Degrees Centigrade, they arrive on Earth to seemingly friendly greetings but their zeal to create a better mankind is seen as a threat and they are imprisoned and their ship impounded. A message is sent to Kobaia however and a showdown results in the Earth authorities backing down against Kobaia's stronger military power. But the seed has been shown on Earth that will later come to full blossom when the Kobaians (who have left Earth in disgust) return many years later.

Mekanik Destrktiw Kommandoh is the third album and undoubtedly the most powerful thematically and musically. It tells of the prophet Nebehr Gudahtt who sees the only means of purifying the race as the path of self-sacrifice. This of course is not what people want to hear. They like simpler solutions like tax cuts and new hospitals. They revolt en masse against him, declaring that he is a ruthless tyrant, but the Universal Spirit, acting in its own inexplicable manner, leads them to a state of grace, turning their march of hate into a march of spiritual realisation as they enter eternity.

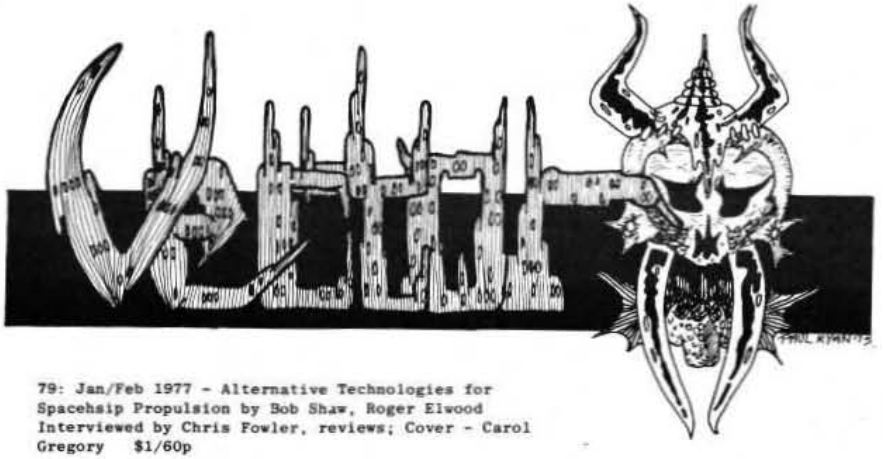
The solution sounds too glib, too mystical a solution, but in the context of what has gone before and what follows (the albums Kohntarkosz and Tristan et Iseult and the live album) it has a very potent credibility. The vision is macroscopic, as was Olaf Stapledon's in Star Maker and First And Last Men. It succeeds because of the mommania of Magma and their obsessive tapestry of sound.

Having commented upon the story that runs throughout THEUSZ HAMTAAHK I must comment on the actual music itself, for there is no one to compare to Magma musically. Their sound is derived from diverse and unconnected sources. From the very beginning it has been highly complex, utilising irregular time signatures that emphasise the stop-start nature of the narrative. Vander comes from the jazz school of influences and before Magma was a respected jazz session man, though he uses the rock idiom as if to the manner born. To speak of their sound in comparison to the Mahavishnu Orchestra or Chick Corea is not overestimating the content, and says little for the skilful use of dynamics Magma make.

The use of a standard electronic/brass line-up (i.e. without moogs, synthesisers, etc.) would seem very confining in the light of what I have previously said, but Magma overcome this with their use of dynamic rhythms and semi-operatic, repetitious and highly-stylised vocals. And the vocals are a crucial difference for they are all totally in Kobaian, a complex bastardisation of several European tongues into a single teutonic-sounding language that is easier on the ears than Esperanto. These harsh vocal sounds emitted in staccato fashion above a driving electronic pulse can conjure unpleasant comparisons (Nazi rallies, the rumblings of war machinery past government building...) But as every passage is illustrative of the plot the accusation that could be levelled at Bowie cannot be raised here. The message is that Mankind is ugly, but also that he can be saved.

The first album (the double) is a very open-ended work, the most relaxed of them all, describing as it does the Kobaians' attempts to harmonise with their new world; their sucesses and their failures. Only occasionally does it develop into the densely-structured pattern of the later albums. There is no single dominant style as is marked on the later movements and yet there is a steadily growing atmosphere throughout the four sides. The ten "songs" into which the album is divided are each tiny dramas with several moods illustrated and created within a short space of time (as with the basically gentle "Nau Ektila" which describes nature's acceptance of Humanity on Kobaia". This vivid use of a musical chiaroscuro allows the full expression of very subtle mood changes and builds upon our suspension of reality.

1001 Degrees Centigrade is a much more traditional album than any of the others with its strong brassy musical feel, but it utilises all the techniques first shown on Magma in a much ordered manner. It is a highly instrumental work which mixes highly pleasant themes with their opposites in short and sharp order. The result is a very good album with strong jazz tendencies. The long track on side 1, "Riah Sahiltaahk", hints at what is to follow with stabbing, ever-changing rhythms that build up and die in rapid succession. Mekanik Destuktiw Kommandoh is Magma at its best. There are few as impressive opening pieces as "Hortz Fur Dehn Stekehn West". Drums, bass and electric piano play out a three note sequence in powerful, machine-like manner whilst masculine voices half-sing, half-chant in Kobaian. The atmosphere deepens as brass chords thunder in over the top, joined by a choir of voices singing a repetitive line that grows and grows to a climax. It is the people of Earth marching in their hatred against Nebehr Gudahtt, and as the music progresses and the urgency does not diminish by one iota it must be realised that Vander has successfully



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76/77: Aug/Sept 1976 - Robert Silverberg Interviewed by Chris Fowler; Opening Minds by Brian Stableford; book and film reviews; cover by Brian Lewis $4/£2.40

75: July 1976 - Harlan Ellison Interviewed by Chris Fowler; book reviews, including David Wingrove's in-depth analysis of Again, Dangerous Visions; cover by Paul Ryan $4/£2.40

73/74: March 1976 - J. G. Ballard Interviewed by David Pringle and James Goddard; book reviews; cover by Paul Dillon $2/£1.20

72: February 1976 - Dan Morgan's GoH Speech from Novacon; Robert Silverberg Interviewed by Malcolm Edwards; book reviews; cover by Brian Lewis $1/60p

71: December 1975 - The Stone Ax and the Musk Oxen by Ursula Le Guin; Towards and Alien Linguistics by Ian Watson; book and film reviews; cover by Dave Griffiths $1/60p

70: Autumn 1975 - Time Travellers Among Us by Bob Shaw; Violence in SF by Edmund Cooper; SF's Urban Vision by Chris Hamnett; book, film and fanzine reviews $1/60p

69: Summer 1975 - The Science in SF by James Blish; Early One Oxford Morning by Brian Aldiss; The Value of Bad SF by Bob Shaw; Science or Fiction by Tony Sudbery; book and film reviews; cover by AMES $1/60p

67/68: Spring 1974 - Three Views of Tolkien by Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and Peter Nicholls; Letter From Amerika by Philip K. Dick; Period of Transition by Mike Coney ; After the Renaissance by Brian Aldiss; Down-at-Heel Galaxy by Brian Aldiss; book and film reviews $2/£1.20

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 Poul Anderson; book and fanzine reviews $1/60p

61: Sept/Oct 1972 - The Arts in SF by James Blish; An Interview with Peter Tate by Mark Adlard; book and fanzine reviews $1/60p

Also: Issues 60 & 59 - a few left at $1/60p

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crossed rock with opera for the first time ever. The interplay of male and female voices, the repetitions of single lines (often up to eight or twelve times) and the infusion of standard Magma time sequences needs at least three or four listenings to appreciate the full depth. I have yet to read of a more futuristic music in any sf story:

"Wi wi ess ess wi wi uss uss wi wi ess ess wi sun wi sun (x12)
Wi wi ess ess wi we uss uss wi wi ess ess wiwidondai (twice)"

Over the repetitious chords rise and fall, guitars and drums improvise, and all the while there is Christian Vander pushing the rhythm section along at a breathtaking pace.

Mekanik lives up to its name in its mechanical approach. But it is hardly sterile; emotion oozes from start to finish, unsullied by any overbrashness of delivery.

Whilst Kohntarkosz is lesser album than its predecessor Mekanik, it is nevertheless an admirable achievement. The music shows a maturity and a new confidence but lacks rather the complexity and vitality of Mekanik. There are no marvellous operatic choruses and the scene of the action is back on Kobaia, hence the more relaxed, jazzier atmosphere. The musicianship is first class; in this respect Magma are the inferiors of no one. The two sections of the title track, which takes up all but ten minutes of the album, evidence a new approach; still vigorous and intense but far less dense in texture, it is a further demonstration of Magma's willingness to experiment with tonal sounds, especially with vocal textures. Of the two short tracks on this 1974 album only "Ork Alarm" truly deserves mention with its horrific vision of an invading force...perhaps the next Magma album will deal with this. (The people of Ork are marching on the people of Zeuhl Wortz, the former being made of matter which "to the machines is what the machines are to man".) The live album was, like Hawkwind's "best of" album, unexpected, but even if it falls outside the steady development it is a fascinating documentary of Magma's diversity and musical ability. Tristan et Iseult was the soundtrack for a film (I have yet to ascertain if the film was in any way connected with the THEUSZ HAMTAAHK; if so it could be a treat) under Vander's sole name although the music is certainly from the THEUSZ.

You should leave the best until last I've always been told. Magma are the best we have to offer at this time; they are unique. Magma have continued on an unswerving course for six years, forging their own musical direction (and it occurs to me that most of the "advanced" rock groups are a year or so behind what Magma were producing in 1970...) and making their obsession seem credible. Perhaps they are too clever to attain popular recognition; like sf they will remain obscure because most people want the mundane, the simplistic, the unimaginative. I began this piece with the intention of indicating what there is in the way of sf music and must end with an attempt to justify my choices here, to define my interpretation of sf music. I have tried to tie in literary references where they occurred and where they were not too obsucre, but a literary definition will not do because this is the newest of the genre's children and as such is still riddled with cliche and muddled fifties thinking (like the movies until very recently!). Sf music calls upon the vocabulary of the genre and uses that vocabulary for the same purpose (i.e. "Fly Me To The Moon" is not an sf song!). Sf music uses the electronic tools of our advanced technology to create futuristic sound landscapes, projected musical atmospheres (and not catchy pop tunes...) Sf music proposes alternative states - suspended realities. if you like - to the everyday mundane world. T does much more, of course. No one has defined sf properly and I think no one will. I'll not try to go beyond a brief outline fo what I see it to be in musical terms. It might be argued that some of the philosophical bands, Yes, Moody Blues and Beefheart had little right to be represented here. You could dismiss a reasonable percentage of modern sf writers for the self-same reasons. Sf has escaped the bodage of the machine world; we live and work in the machine world. Sf has to look elsewhere these days for that sense of wonder, and so too does music. I feel the best of sf music is yet to come as techniques improve and a second generation of musicians arrives on the scene. I personally would like to see this proliferation of distorted mirrors; an expansion of the grandiose musical images we have only recently been granted.

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