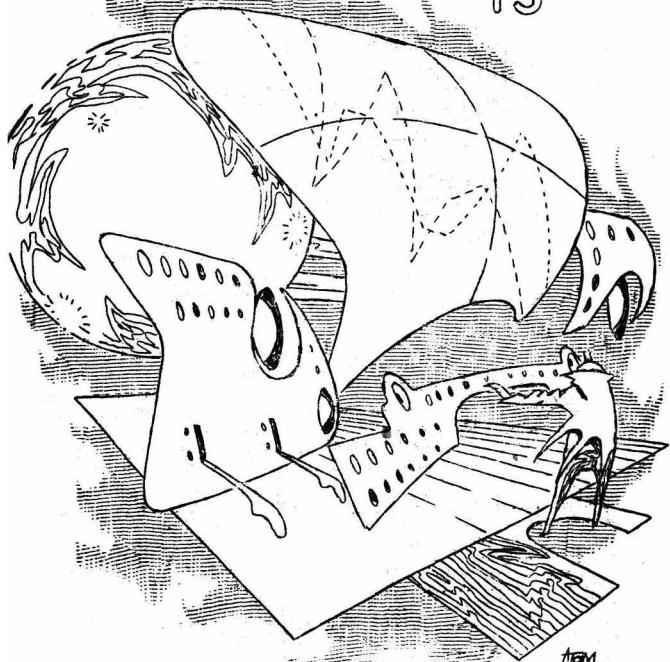


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VECTOR 15

CREDITS

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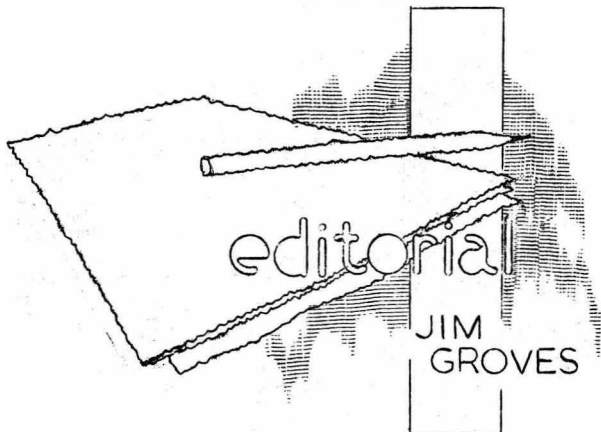
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All headings by Atom, except that on
page 4.

Letters of comment, contributions etc. to Publications Officer, c/o
(Basement) 130 London Road, Cheltenham, Glos.

I'd like to take this opportunity of publically acknowledging how much I
am indebted to Arthur Thomson (ATOM) for his help in improving the appearance
of VECTOR in the past two years. ed.



This being my last editorial I'm going to ramble on about anything that comes to mind - mainly because I can't think of any definite subject to write about. Science fiction is one subject I won't cover, having hastily averted my horrified gaze from the last few ANALOGs - I don't mind Campbell's editorials, they are often thought provoking even when misguided, but I object when they are served up two or three issues later, five times the length, with cardboard characters, as genuine sf - ugh! Sturgeon may have been right when he stated that 90% of everything, including sf, is crud, but why doesn't someone publish that 10%? But to continue.

The future of VECTOR seems bright. Despite the fact that I don't as yet know who the next editor is I do know that some good material is coming up. I have in the files at the moment the first episode of an article on John Russell Fearn, alias Vargo Statten and many others. And now I know that you are probably thinking and it just isn't so! Fearn may have been responsible for the Vargo Statten stories but he also wrote a lot of good stuff pre-war. And why do so many people sneer when they mention the Vargo Statten stories, I put my sf teeth on them and so I guess did a lot of you. They weren't brilliant stories but they were a lot better than some of the recent stuff, and they performed very well the task of stepping stones to the better sf. I can remember the time when I passed over those ragged American pulps for the nice clean Vargo Statten stories! Anyway read this article(s) and learn the real story.

And while I'm on the subject of material for VECTOR several of you have said you'd like some more of it and more frequently too. Why don't you have a bash at writing it too? Or if you cannot do that how about writing letters of comment?

continued on page 5

SECRETARY'S REPORT

I expect that quite a lot of you will be reading this at the Easter Convention in Harrogate. Unfortunately, I can't be with you this year and so I will have to wait another year before meeting new members for the first time, and all you others again, but I'll definitely see you all in London next Easter.

At the Convention I should be giving you a report on what has been happening in, and to, the BSFA during the last year, but as this is obviously impossible I will do this here in my final report.

I feel that this year has been quite notable for the fact that for the first time since its inception the BSFA is showing signs of gaining a settled membership. Already, (two weeks before the Convention) the renewed membership is over the hundred mark. In past years many members have waited until the Con to renew, which meant that up until then we had comparatively few paid-up members, so if the general rule is followed this time should see a higher percentage of renewals than ever before. This is very gratifying as a large turnover in the membership is extremely frustrating for the Committee, especially as no reasons are apparent for the exodus. I would like to feel that perhaps now we are reaching a public who feel that the BSFA can give a service otherwise unobtainable.

A few weeks back the informal Friday night meetings in the home of Ella Parker got going again, after a three months break while Ella went on a sort of good-will visit to the United States. These meetings restarted from where they left off with a regular group of seven or eight meeting each week, and others dropping in now and again. If there are any of you in the London area who feel that you might like to try it some night just come along to Ella's where we will guarantee you an interesting evening. To a great extent these meetings epitomise one of the biggest successes of the Association, that of making people aware of others in their area who share the common interest of sf. One outcome of this has been the forming of the Speculative Fiction Group at the University of Oxford where Chris Miller managed to convince some others that reading sf wasn't something to be done under the bedclothes, late at night. I also know of numerous other members who have started up correspondence with each other since joining the Association. To my mind this is one of the most important aspects of the BSFA as all too often a new member wants to be able to talk about science fiction to somebody who doesn't think he is a bit wrong in the head. While I am on the subject I would like to remind you that if there are any of you who would like to write to other members then get in touch with your editor who will publish your name in VECTOR, asking for people to write to you.

Apart from the two points I have mentioned there is very little else to report...no great innovations or achievements, unless you count to enrolment of our first Canadian member. The library is still doing well, and as you will all have seen from the recent library list has reached quite a considerable size. Other than this there has been no change in the general running of the Association,

but, as I said at the beginning, there are definite signs that the BSFA is gaining in strength and the next few years could see it becoming an important factor in the science fiction field.

Well, as I said at the start, this is my final report as at the Convention the BSFA holds it's AGM, and there my term of office finishes. The year has been a very full one for me, and I found the Secretaryship both interesting and enjoyable, although there have been times when I could have sworn that half the population of the British Isles had written asking for details of the Association. However I feel that the time was well spent in writing to these prospective members as many of them became something more than prospective, and in a couple of instances I struck up correspondence which I hope to continue. Yes, I quite enjoyed my spell as Secretary, but although you have heard the last of me in this column, I expect that every now and then I'll pop up with the odd article, so until then that's all from

Joe Patrizio.

EDITORIAL continued from page 3

And to continue my pursuit of trifles let's run over again the services that the Association provides. VECTOR and the newsletter are, of course, known to you all. After them comes the Library under the command of Peter Mabey (see contents page for address). Run in harness with this service is the magazine chain. For the sum of 6d per issue you can receive any of the American magazines regularly. All you have to do is pay the postage to pass it onto the next member in the chain, when you've finished reading it. Peter Mabey is also running that service. It is, unfortunately, restricted to UK members only. And this is as good a point as any to point out just how much Peter does for the Association, a vote of thanks is in order I think.

The other major service that is open to all members is not officially sponsored, but is the work of just one member, Miss Ella Parker. Every Friday evening at her home in London (151 Canterbury Road, West Kilburn) Ella holds open house for all BSFA members who can attend. Talk, and tea, flows thick and fast and everyone has a damn good time. Apart from the regulars we have members visiting from all over. Perhaps we shall see you there someday?

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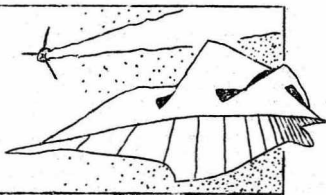
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if
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CHARLES
SMITH

"Science fiction is dying", say many critics and fans. "Look how many writers are leaving the field"... "The Old Sense of Wonder (definitely in capitals) has disappeared"... "Oh, for the Golden Age to return!" These are some of the phrases one is liable to encounter in conversation with fans or in the letter columns of the magazines.

Is the situation really as depressing as this? At first glance it certainly seems so. One look at the death rate of late lamented (and not so lamented) magazines of the past seven years apparently confirms the diagnosis. The "Startling", "Thrilling Wonder" stable has ceased production. "Venture", "Infinity", "Other Worlds", "Original" and "Future" SF, "Satellite", "Fantastic Universe", all have ceased publication. In fact, at the moment only six magazines are seeing print in the States and only three original magazines are appearing in this country.

It can be argued, however, that the small number of published magazines is a good thing. The field, even including fantasy, cannot perhaps support a greater number, especially with the quite considerable number of original paperbacks being published. It is even doubtful whether there are enough authors of sufficient stature and, more important, sufficient readers, to support more magazines. This situation is not so terrible, providing the remaining magazines maintain a high standard, as they should. After all, it should be easier to find the stories the editors want and there should be no question of filling out with rubbish because the good stories are spread out over too many magazines.

Here, however, the problems begin. The standard of "Amazing" and "Fantastic" has improved enormously, and "New Worlds" maintains a fairly high standard, especially in the serials it has published recently. Nonetheless, it is in the contents of the big three, Galaxy, ASF and F&SF, that one would expect the really top class science-fiction to appear. As far as ASF and Galaxy are concerned, however, this has definitely not been the case.

In fact, the two magazines have become stereotyped and often lack interest and excitement.

In spite of the general situation of the magazines, in spite of all the complaints that science fiction is in the doldrums, in spite of the fact that there is a dearth of new concepts, I suggest that the field is undergoing a profound and important change, that the period is in fact a healthy one. Science-fiction is going through a period of stasis because it is concerned with improving its general situation, its power of writing and its delineation of character before continuing its progress.

During the past few years this improvement in the standard of writing technique in the field has become clearly apparent. In spite of the accusation of a lack of new ideas, truly fine science fiction has been produced, Miller's "A Canticle for Leibowitz" and Herbert's "Dragon in the Sea" to give but two examples. These two works depend not on fast-moving, bewildering plots in the grand Van Vogtian manner but on real rounded characters. The characters in these two novels, and in many other works written recently, are alive and no longer stereotyped and two dimensional. Even C.O. Smith manages to breathe some life into the characters of "The Fourth R". The main character is no longer merely a symbol or, as in Van Vogt's novels, a featureless creature, possessing certain superhuman attributes, who, once stripped of these characteristics, could be substituted for any other of his heroes without necessitating any revision of the plot mechanics.

I defy anyone who reveres the "Golden Age" to produce from that period a real flesh and blood character and more important anything resembling a real relationship between two characters. Clarke, for example, is breathtaking when he describes his almost poetic visions of space-flight, undersea farming and alien environments, but why must he sink to the worst women's magazine noveletteish style when he tries to portray the romantic relationship between his hero and heroine? Why does Heinlein insist on repeating his father-son relationship theme, when it can only become sentimentalized (bathos, not pathos) in his hands? Why does the self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity of the two lead characters in "Gulf" conjure up visions of the worst Hollywood 'tear-jerker', heavenly choir and all? Why in "Beyond this Horizon" does the heroine insist on calling the hero, Hamilton Felix, by the nickname 'Filthy', an attempt at humour so crude and inept as to make me writhe every time I read it?

The same sort of criticism can be leveled at other great names of the 'Golden Age', Van Vogt and Asimov for example. Their ideas are often brilliantly conceived and planned but their characters are dead. Possibly they are unemotional writers or perhaps their emotions are directed towards their ideas and unfortunately the characters and the writing suffer as a consequence.

At last, however, changes have occurred and an improvement has taken place. And not simply because new writers have come into the field. This improvement has affected many of the authors who were guilty of the faults mentioned above. When I first read stories by Algis Budrys in Astounding I was unimpressed. Here was an author, I thought, who would have no effect on the field. I made no attempt to read all his stories and only saw them if they came in one of the magazines I received regularly. What a jolt I received when I read 'Rogue Moon' in P&SF! Here was an exciting, emotional and truly creative writer who only needed the opportunity to produce a near masterpiece. It is only bettered by a real masterpiece, Walter Miller's 'A Canticle for Leibowitz'. And who would have thought when reading Miller's previous stories in Astounding that he had the potential to produce as near perfect a novel as this?

This improvement in technique is perhaps most readily apparent if one compares Judith Merril's "Year's Best" anthologies with those of Bleiler and Diky. The change is quite startling. Perhaps the imaginative concepts are not so staggering but does it matter if stories like Daniel F. Keyes' "Flowers for Algernon", Leiber's "Space Time for Springers" and J.C. Ballard's "Froma Belladonna" are to be produced? Side by side with this new improvement in writing technique we are at last beginning to see experimentation in technique. The old, flat, straight forward and naturalistic style of writing needs to be injected with new blood by constant use of new techniques, new styles, to keep it exciting and alive. This experimentation is now taking place. One of the best examples of a writer who refuses to adhere to one set style is Theodore Sturgeon. Back in the early fifties, Sturgeon was startling his readers by writing, in "More than Human", in a strange almost impressionistic style, somewhat lacking in form but wonderfully evocative and brilliantly expressive. In his recent novel, "Venus Plus X", he manages to develop the main plot while injecting between each chapter a short vignette describing the normal world, extrapolated only slightly into the future, which contrasts with, and helps to explain, the strange world of Ledon.

Again, Judith Merril in "The Tomorrow People" sets out her characters' thoughts alongside the dialogue and, although the technique is a little confusing at first, it becomes more and more effective as the reader accustoms himself to it.

Finally we are seeing a widening of frontiers and a lessening of old taboos. Subjects once considered unsuitable for science fiction are beginning to be treated therein. Sex is now regarded as a fit subject for speculation and Philip Jose Farmer is able to write stories about the alien physiology of reproduction as in "Open to My Sister" (L&SF May 1960), and Sturgeon is able to write stories like "The World Well Lost" (Universe June 1953) with it's homosexual theme, without the concepts themselves causing any raised eyebrows. BE's chasing nubile and scantily clad girls have disappeared and have been replaced by a far more healthy and speculative attitude to sex.

Religion also has become a fit subject for speculation. No longer is it treated as non-existent or as a future source of tyranny, more impregnable because it is based on scientific laws. Now stories like the Farmer "Father John Cypody" series, Eish's "A Case of Conscience", Boucher's "Quest for St. Aquin" and Miller's "A Centicle for Leibowitz" appear quite naturally in the magazines.

If we now return to Astounding/Analog and Galaxy, perhaps we can throw some light on their difficulties. Their problems are not due simply to a diminution of interest in the field itself but rather to the inflexible policy of the editors. They have been left behind by the new developments in science fiction and still look for the type of story which they used to publish and which caused their prominence in the field. However, the better authors obviously refuse to be typed and are continually developing. Thus their stories usually do not suit the policies of these two magazines. They are writing instead for markets which have a more flexible policy, where the style and theme are left more to the author. This applies in the magazine field solely to Fantasy and Science Fiction, which magazine always showed this attitude under the capable and discriminating leadership of Anthony Boucher and shows it still, though to a lesser degree, under Robert Mills. Campbell and Gold, on the other hand, are forced to make do with second rate authors who are willing to write the kind of stories these editors want.

The credit for the new developments can be apportioned to a number of individuals within the field. The emotionally charged technique of writing can be laid at the door of Bradbury who was the first in the magazine field to combine science fiction themes with poetic prose, the first to give real attention to style as well as ideas. Experimentation in writing techniques is largely the responsibility of Sturgeon. Even Wyndham, though his themes are largely derivative, can take some credit for achieving popular success with novels in which the stress is laid on the characters rather than scientific fireworks. The widening of horizons is largely the result of Farmer's "The Lovers" and of Merwin's courage in publishing it in Startling Stories. Fantasy and Science Fiction under Boucher's editorship takes a great deal of credit for maintaining a flexible policy and for showing that science fiction could compete creditably with any form of writing in the mainstream of literature. Finally, credit should be given to the new type of criticism within the field itself, criticism unmarred by any in-group feeling, or loyalty. Once anything which came under the heading of science fiction was considered worth reading by the critics and the work had to be pretty bad to be panned. Now criticism is based on solid literary principles. This new criticism is naturally having its effect. Writers have taken heed of the remarks of such able critics as Damon Knight and have tried to improve their works as a consequence.

Let me make it quite clear that I am not suggesting that science fiction is perfect at its present stage of development, nor that works produced during the 'Golden Age' are without merit. Both periods are essential stages in the development of science fiction. To continue the comparison with jazz started by Kingsley Amis, there is a direct correlation between this attitude and the attitude of the Traditionalists who say that the only real jazz is the music of New Orleans. And both are on the same level as the remarks of the older generation talking about the 'Good Old Days'. This is nostalgia, not an unbiased judgment of what was, and is, being produced in the science fiction field.

Once the new developments within the field have been absorbed science fiction can continue its progress towards the development of a truly mature fiction of ideas. The staggering concepts of the Golden Age can return, but this time they will be coupled with sound writing and three-dimensional characters and a truly exciting form because there will be no overemphasis either on the science or the fiction.

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BOOK REVIEWS



EARTH ABIDES by George R. Stewart.
Corgi Books, 3/6d.

Perhaps the remarkable fact about EARTH ABIDES is not that it is so well written but that it is so well loved. Ever since it's first appearance in 1949 (about the same time as Orwell's 1984), it has been a favourite among sf readers, and among the general public, as is shown by the fact that Corgi have now reprinted their edition of six years back, with a new cover.

The novel won it's popularity the hard way, for it contains no sadism, no scenes of mass violence, no remarkable sexual exploits. The ravaging disease which decimates man until he is as rare as a Pere David's deer is not used as an excuse for sensationalism; indeed, it is so lightly passed over that the reader's sensibility is scarcely allowed to stumble over one corpse.

The atmosphere, in a word, is less harrowing than elegaic; Mr. Stewart is appealing rather than appalling.

An outline of the story is quickly given: Isherwood is one of the few survivors of the unspecified plague. He lives in the suburbs of San Francisco, and we watch him over fifty years grow in stature while the metropolis declines about him. At the finish, he is the legendary Ish, more revered than listened to by the small tribe he has gathered about him. To outline the spell the book exercises is more difficult; a reviewer is reduced to placing his hand on his heart and saying that while reading, the fiction became reality, and the real world dim, that nothing seemed to matter but getting back into the pages of the book; truth seemed to lie there and only there.

A rereading of this remarkable novel suggests cooler judgments. One sees of course that it would make a wonderful film (and equally, alas, a bad one). I think that the decline of the second generation, of Ish's and Em's children, into a sort of bow and arrow culture, seems a good deal less than inevitable. One has only to remember the energy with which William Masen, hero of Wyndham's 'Day of the Triffids', tackled his much greater problems, to realise how negligible are Ish's attempts to retain a modified version of civilization; he is no more than a gentleman looter, rather priggishly aware of how much he prefers books to drinks. Ish has very little force of character, and the others too are wayward rather than positive; it is easy to imagine that in the hands of another writer, shall we say Isaac Asimov, David Duncan or Tom Godwin, we might have had a splendid essay in reconstruction instead of a splendid essay in decline.

This remark is offered more as a reflection than a lament, but it points

our way towards the fact that EARTH ABIDES is in a special category of sf. It belongs with 'The Day of the Triffids', 'Alas Babylon', 'City' and possibly 'Death of Grass', in that the author is in revolt against the effects of the industrial revolution and in full cry for a simpler life. This attitude makes a book of partly by courtesy; it can just as well be on the same theme and not be sf, as is Richard Jefferies' 'After London', a delightful story that is an Earth Abides set in the region that once was the Thames valley.

This predominantly anti-urban disposition is apparent all through EARTH ABIDES. Little harm comes to any of the characters in the book, but when three children die one autumn, they die of eating ant-poison. The comment "Even when dead, civilization seemed to lay traps" is curious when we consider that although civilization may be dead, these people are living, after all, on the rich pickings of the carcass. Elsewhere, the great disaster is described as "A magnificent wiping off of the slate". And when the one really nasty character in the book comes along - Charlie, who suffers from venereal disease - it is significant that he arrives clad in "a business suit" as a symbol of all that Mr Stewart holds evil.

It is because he feels this way that Mr Stewart has shaped the novel as he has, in the same way that all novels are not just an accidental product of plotting but also the fruit of more deep-centred causes in the author's personality. The bias produces, inevitably, merits and demerits. I would say a demerit was the too easy way everyone heads for laissez-faire and savagery. But the merits far outweigh the demerits; all the great moments in the novel, the memorable scenes, are ones in which people are only peripherally involved and in which the accelerating decay of civilization becomes manifest. This is Mr. Stewart's central theme, and when he hits it, he hits it unerringly. His symbols of decay are many, and often put to poetic use: the Golden Gate bridge, for instance, and the little coupe parked on it - the name of the owner comes back to Ish as he is dying, though he has it wrongly.

The most dramatic moment comes with the most dramatic single slice of decay, the failure of the electricity:

"When he awoke, he noticed that the lights had faded more. The filaments in the electric lamps were only an orange-red now. He could look at them without hurting his eyes. Now although he had not turned off any of the lamps, the room was in half darkness...."

A deep shiver shook him, but he stilled his panic. After all, he thought, the Power-and-Light had held up for an amazingly long time, all its automatic processes functioning though man had gone... These might well be the last electric lights to be left burning in the world, and when they faded, the lights would be out for a long time.

No longer sleepy, he sat there, feeling that he should not go to sleep, wishing at least that the end would come quickly and with dignity and would not be dragged out too long. Again, he felt the light fading, and he thought 'This is the end!' But still it lingered, the filaments now only a cherry-red."

For many touches of this sort, EARTH ABIDES should be read. It's relaxed style grows more and more hypnotic. Although it is a long book, it is never long enough. This dumpy paperback edition runs to 316 pages, bound in the usual unsatisfactory way of paperbacks, so that even an uncloseable book like this proves, on first reading, almost unopenable.

Several people have told me that A FOR ANYTHING is a dull book; I have told them that it is an interesting one; but both sides remain unconverted.

It is the curse of liberalism that one appreciates that the other side has a tenable viewpoint even while arguing against it. There is the undeniable fact that the novel seems not to make any particular point, seems indeed even to make contradictory points; it is, for instance, saying that the established order is ripe for overthrow, or that despite it's faults the established order has it's merits; it is saying that nothing is more degrading than slavery, or that some people are fit only to be slaves? With Van Vogt, such questions do not arise - one is concentrating on remaining seated, as it were; with Damon Knight, his intelligence forces us to ask the awkward questions.

It has to be admitted too, that the story contains several long episodes which appear to play no vital part in developing the theme. At the start of chapter four we meet Dick Jones, who is going to leave his father's large estate of Buckhill to go to Eagles. Before he arrives there in chapter seven we have a long episode in which he offends his cousin, is forced to duel with him, and kills him. For all that this affects the unfolding of the story, it might have been condensed to one page.

Then there are the first three chapters before we meet Dick. These concern people whom we never see again. With many writers, this might have been a distinct advantage; Knight draws sympathetic and interesting people whose disappearance we regret.

A FOR ANYTHING (which in America was entitled 'The People Makers') has its weaknesses, but to call it dull because of these is like calling a dalmatian unhealthy because of its spots.

The gimmick with which the story begins is a Gismo. We are told what a gismo looks like and what it does. It is a foot and a half high and shaped like a cross; the cross is wired, the wiring forming loops at the end of each cross-arm, with curious metal and glass blocks suspended from the loops. You put something - anything - through one loop, and as it emerges, an identical twin emerges from the other loop: it is a duplicator. When gismos are distributed by mail throughout the States, people start duplicating dollar bills. The inventor hopes these gadgets will bring true liberty. Instead they bring true chaos. To the inventor they bring slavery.

Knight, like any sensible man, quickly tires of these playthings. He makes no attempt to introduce any pseudo-scientific justification of the gismo, and with a decent haste he turns to show us the new order ushered in by them, an order where money is extinct and both master and man are in bondage to slavery.

In doing this, Knight has been extremely successful. When Dick moves to Eagles, the real story begins. Eagles is a sort of horrifying finishing college, a mixture of West Point, gothic castle and Versailles. The work at Eagles is done by slaves (or slobs) duped by the gismo, as one of them, Frankie, explains: "This morning, they was two hund'ed forty-three of me exactly. You know last month they was onlt two hund'ed twelve, the mos', but this month we doing so much work to build up the Long Corridor where it fell down, they need us bad. We the bes' servan' in Eagles ... Nox' nearest is Hank the carrier, and I think they only a hund'ed, a hund'ed ten of him."

Dick makes an enemy of one Keel almost as soon as he arrives, fights a duel

with him and knocks him into a fast-moving channel of water from which he saves him from drowning. Later, Keel challenges Dick to a curious sort of a duel, a climb over the frosty roofs of Eagles. He falls to his death, and Dick only narrowly escapes destruction; this is a hair-stirring episode. Later, Dick joins a hunt in the territory nearby for a tribe of primitives suspected of illegally possessing and worshipping a gismo; when they find it, it is merely a christian cross. On this hunt, Dick eliminates Lindley, obeying orders from a secret society which he has joined. The society is dedicated to removing the injustice of slavery. But things go awry; when the revolt breaks out, the butchery is appalling. In the end - by my reading - Dick falls back into the old power-centred way of thinking to which he was bred, and grossly betrays the revolutionaries. There are no doubt other interpretations, but in any case there is about the ending a note of ambiguity pleasing because it follows from what has gone before.

This is a critic's book. It lacks the instinctive story-spinning ability that one senses in several of the older sf writers such as Murray Leinster or Jack Williamson. At the same time, every scene is fully realized and the characters do most of the author's work; it is instructive to compare any of Knight's scenes with the scene (to use a convenient example) in 'Earth Abidee' where Charlie appears. There, we are not allowed to gather for ourselves that Charlie is bad; Stewart keeps telling us he is, and the whole effect, if read separately and critically - beyond the spell of the book - is very forced, mainly because the Charlie episode is too deeply embedded in comment, in a lazy way of which Knight would probably be ashamed.

The chief delight of Knight's work, as noticeable here as in his recent collection of short stories, 'Far Out', is that he is one of the few craftsmen who takes pleasure in writing for the sake of writing rather than for the sake of working out his story. Although I am not suggesting that this is an unparalleled virtue, it does mean that we get a richness of texture and detail; the smells, the clothes, the food, the sights, all the incidents that go to create a world, rise before us as we read of the great estate of Buckhill, or of Eagles. Taking an example almost at random, savour this paragraph, which describes Dick's entry into the kitchen at Buckhill, where a feast is being prepared.

"Inside, it was hotter still; a cook's inferno of sweat-dripping scarlet noses, splattered aprons, curses, banging plates, and scullions underfoot. The breathless air was thick with the smells of duck, goose, pheasant, capon, squab; of venison, beef pie, whole sucking pig, breast of lamb; of steamed oysters, clams, giant prawns, lobsters, soft-shelled crab; of cod, albacore, flounder, mackerel, swordfish, salmon; of compotes and savories, sweet-and-sours, cheeses, puddings; of bread, rolls, biscuits, lady fingers, pies, cakes, little and big. Greasy kitchen boys with stuffed eyes were hurrying everywhere; oven doors were banging, dishes clattering, men at the edge of their sanity were shouting from raw throats. A steel tray went ringing across the floor with a tinkle of broken crockery behind it; there was a shriek from the smallest kitchen boy and a torrent of abuse from the cooks. Dick seized the moment to slip behind around a long table loaded with floral centrepieces (all scallion of hot grease), to the counter where the cut cheeses stood, surrounded by tiny ganteel wedges. Dick cut himself a more substantial chunk, grasped a pitcher of milk with the other hand, and escaped."

The wit and accuracy of the kitchen boys with "stuffed eyes" (how else

could they look with all that heat and food?) is pleasing, particularly coming as it does after the intentionally overpowering list of dishes. Nor is the detail overdone; Dick arrives in the kitchen at the beginning of the paragraph and leaves it at the end, conveying this sense of movement to the writing, making it not merely a setpiece which could be left out. Also, by the glimpse of activity we are prepared for the important feast next day.

A dull book? No. But an unusual one. Our glimpses of the future are so often confined to barely furnished and bleakly described council halls, corridors, computer rooms, taverns or spaceship cabins, that inevitably it is disconcerting to find ourselves in the kitchens, lavatories and boudoirs of *Demon Knight's* rick imaginings.

Brian W. Aldiss.

ROGUE MOON by Algis Budrys. Gold Medal Books 2/6d.

This book seems to have created quite a stir in sf literary circles. Gordon Dickson greets it as a new classic of sf and of the 'revealed' novel. Alfred Bester thinks that it comes very close to realizing his ideal of science fiction. He speaks of 'vivid Characters' and 'overpowering conflicts'. James Elish states unequivocally that it is a masterpiece, and he is very free with terms like '...more than impressive: not only a bequest but a monument', and 'fully realized work of art'. And there are many others in at least partial agreement with the above.

By chance I read all of these comments before reading the book itself. I was in a pleasant frame of mind and prepared to enjoy myself. I was greatly shocked to find upon closing the book, that I was rather unhappy and in complete disagreement with the authorities quoted. I feel that I owe to them, to Budrys and to myself, the need to find out just why this difference of opinion.

I have had a growing sensation for a long time that Budrys is not basically an sf writer, and ROGUE MOON goes a long way towards proving this. The most enthusiastic of Budrys' acclamers keep insisting that he is due to move into the mainstream soon, and goodbye and good luck. This comment occurs again and again and I'm sure this is because Budrys has no real interest in sf for itself. For him it is a marvelous vehicle to carry his thoughts about people, life and death. Particularly death. He likes to play with words and language, and has found in sf a medium to exercise his interests. Let us look at the evidence.

Mechanically this is the story of a strange alien creation on the moon, a 'machine' or 'thing' whose secrets must be uncovered by the U.S. government. The only reason ever given for this massive, expensive and deadly effort is to get the information before the Russians do. (A valid enough reason for the politicians and the military, but I would have like even a few words as to what is motivating the scientists.) The thing kills anyone who goes into it, and this problem is solved by a matter transmitter that sends duplicates of men from earth to explore the thing. The man on earth maintains a mental connection with his duplicate and feels 'himself' die. This generates the sub-theme of the story: finding and using a man who can feel himself die over and over again without cracking up. The sub-theme is developed by this man's relationship with the scientist in charge of the project, and the hate-love relationship to his girl. This area is where Budrys' real interest lies, and he get so carried away with it that he never finishes the science fiction story that we bought the book to read.

The intention of every one in this book, as well as the book itself, is said to be the problem of the moon-thing. What is it? We must know? After what must be the highest pedestrian mortality rate in the known universe, two men do manage to penetrate the thing and come out alive. Hoo-ray! End of story.

What is the thing? What does it do? What have we discovered? Absolutely nothing except that it looks different to different people - something we knew in the first few pages. This is cheating, a special kind of cheating we are all familiar with. This is Lovecraft's thing 'too hideous for human eyes to behold' and Merritt's colour 'never before seen'. This is fantasy and emotion and impact - but it is not science. Budrys has promised but not delivered. Perhaps because he was not capable of delivering, or more likely because he didn't really care. This was not the story he was interested in writing. He sees his people and the moon-thing as symbols, to be manipulated in an artificial manner to gain a preconceived end. This gives the critic who is interested in this sort of book (James Blish for instance) a field day of supposing, connecting, interpreting and the like. The immature love relationships don't trouble Blish, and the fact that he thinks the characters are all raving mad doesn't bother him in the slightest. There are plenty of fireworks, roman candles and literary catherine wheels in this story, but when I shield my eyes against the glare and look to see who is holding them up I find there aren't any people there at all - just those two-dimensional cardboard images you find in front of theatres.

Be advised. If you enjoyed Kafka's THE CASTLE and think that Joyce's ULYSSES is the classic of our time, you will gain a great deal of pleasure from ROGUE MOON. If, however, you feel that a story has certain obligations to fulfill: such as solving a problem - not pretending to solve it. Or of building up a great character conflict between two men - then not resolving it. If you wish to find this attitude to a novel, you will not find it in ROGUE MOON and will put it down with a very unpleasant sensation in your mouth.

This is a pity. Because Budrys has a writing talent that he has gone to great trouble to polish. but he has bitten off too big a lump to chew well, and some parts of this book are thoroughly undigested. He would be better advised to try the mainstream novel people keep talking about. He should do it well.

I can add only one closing word of advice that may ring on deaf ears, though I hope not. Love and death are fine topics - but we must not make them a preoccupation. There are other themes, and it might be an interesting experiment if he should try a story on one of these themes - any one as long as it avoided death. A change of pace is sorely needed, and even Shakespeare didn't mind including a comedy scene or two in his gloomiest tragedies. A little lightness would have worked wonders with ROGUE MOON. Budrys is a very serious fellow with one eye always on the grave no matter what he is writing. He should try writing a few jokes. This is not as incredible as it sounds: L. Sprague deCamp, one of the most serious men alive, has enjoyed a reputation as a humorist. Constant study, the recording of all jokes he hears (as well as a figure that shows the laugh-reaction of the audience) has worked wonders with his stories.

How about it A.J.? The next time your two gloomy gravediggers bend to their morbid task, how about the handle of the shovel cracking on the first stroke and the broken end catching corpse-carrier number two right in the arse?

This would really break them up in the rural areas - and we draw our readers from all over.

Harry Harrison.

STRANGERS IN THE UNIVERSE by Clifford Simak. Panther Books. 2/6d.

Kingsley Amis has called Simak 'science fiction's religious writer', at which thought Simak himself has hooted with joy and slapped his knees. But I am tempted to agree with Amis. Sir Julian Huxley wrote RELIGION WITHOUT REVELATION as if he had Simak in mind. Groping for another word that might describe Simak I can find only humane or humanistic or compassionate. Though I think I'll settle for religious - with the Huxley meaning, that is.

Here are seven stories, old friends to the dedicated reader, but no lighter for being familiar. And the typically Simakian air of compassionate understanding is through them all. Even the villains in MIRAGE aren't as bad as they like to think. Not that his men can't be strong enough when need be. The hero of SKIRMISH leaves no doubt of that. There is an understanding of life here - human and alien - that other writers might well study. The stories themselves are uniformly good without a clinker in the lot. This in itself is well worth the half-crown.

If Simak has a weakness, it is in his practical science. I hate to mention something so trivial to the man who has spanned galaxies; but a little rereading of basic physics would be rewarding. You can't break a sealed tube and have the vacuum "puff out". Nor can gyroscopes provide gravity - unless you are riding the rim of one. I'm not an absolute purist, but I do feel that lapses from known science can ruin the sense of reality a writer is trying to create.

But don't let my minor complaint put you off. This book is good.

Harry Harrison.

THE MALE RESPONSE by Brian Aldiss. Beacon Books.

If you like that variety of modern humour which is not so funny when you think about it, then get hold of this book as soon as you can. The publishers blurge describes it as a story which is "destined to become the top ADULT science fiction novel of the year..." This is very misleading as it has only a marginal connexion with sf. When we read a little later that it describes "how a young Englishman copes with the pagan passions and primitive perversions of today's torrid continent (Africa)..." we know that ADULT means sexy. Well, it's certainly sexy, but not in quite the way this rubbish suggests. The dreamed (I imagine) cover by an 'artist' suffering from frustrated adolescent sexual phantasies, has no relevance whatsoever to the book, and is so revolting in itself, that it is a great pity Mr. Aldiss is unable to sue Beacon Books for defamation of character!

The story relates the adventures of an anti-hero, Scames Noyes, who is sent, together with a number of technicians to Goya, Africa's first completely independent state, to install and start up an immensely complicated computer - Unilateral's Apostle Mark II. This is the sf bit. Excitement runs high from the beginning when the aircraft carrying the ill-fated group crashes in the African jungle. Scames, along with a technician, Templeton, and Jimbo, the President of

* Editorial note - this is a typo on the part of the reviewer but it seemed so apt that I've left it in!

Goya's son, are rescued with the Apostle Mk.II intact. At the plot level the story is then concerned with their attempts to assemble the computer in the most improbable conditions, and the machinations of various factions within the republic either to make capital out of it, or to prevent its construction at all. The opponent-in-chief is one Danyami, the head witchdoctor, who very much resents the new magic! There is a very fine farcical climax when Danyami demands that the Apostle Mk.II shall decide the fate of the miserable Soames. It would be unfair to reveal too many of the details of the story as there are some extremely amusing surprises, as well as some that are pretty sinister. However, Soames is carried along on the wings of chance, so to speak, until his fortunes reach quite a high peak.

Much satirical humour is produced at the expense of the rival factions in Ceyanese politics - Portugese, Indian, Chinese, native; in fact, the capital, Umbalathorp, is rife with every kind of vice, corruption and double-dealing you can think of. Each interested party feels that there is one sure way into Soames' favour, i.e. to produce some desirably beddable virgin for him, usually a favourite daughter - this goes for the ex-patriot clergyman as well as the head of the palace laundry! The general atmosphere of rather seedy corruption, muddle and practical incompetence linked with a certain naive optimism amongst the natives, is not unlike SCOOOP, but, whereas Waugh is almost entirely concerned with farcical satire, Aldiss is much more concerned with character, or at least human nature. True enough, emergent African nationalism receives its fair share of often hilarious ridicule, but we are never allowed to forget that there is a sinister dark power in this primitive world by which Soames is gradually seduced - if that is the right word.

It might be more accurate to say that he is made aware of elements in his nature which he did not know existed, for Soames is a poor sort of fish, and here lies the tragedy of the story. Soames is the failure of a system, or a society. He is a middle-class, intellectual, self-conscious Englishman, a Manchester Guardian man, who likes his civilised comforts. He is not really fitted for any kind of constructive life, either at home or in Africa. At the same time he is not really sure who he is, or where his responsibilities and loyalties lie. His past life and upbringing have been a sham. He is painfully insensitive to the feelings of the people he meets - this is well illustrated by his ham-fisted treatment of Grace Picket. He is not a completely lost soul, but most of his self-realisation comes too late. He feels the strange attraction of the dark side of Africa: "Not only time and colour changed as one yielded up to the arms of the equator, but life itself, and one's attitude to life." Something worthwhile is there in this alien continent for the Westerner to find, unfortunately Soames is not equipped to deal with it when he does find it.

Such serious themes lie behind this comic novel about Africa. Although it is not sf, it is worth noting that there are passages of description that are inspired by an sf attitude, and this is also true of the orientation of the story and the author's analysis of his characters. This, however, would provide material for an article rather than a book review. THE MALE RESPONSE, is, shall we say, a book in the mainstream of satiric fiction which will be of special interest to the sf devotee - and not merely because it has been written by Brian Aldiss.

G.D. Doberty.

FALLEN STAR by James Blish. Four Square Books.

We expect a book written by James Blish to offer something out of the

ordinary in the way of sf: FALLEN STAR is certainly not a disappointment. A great deal of the story is concerned with the efforts of the Second Western Polar Expedition to get itself organised and under way. It is led by an eccentric explorer, Geoffrey Bramwell-Farnsworth and his luscious, publicity-conscious wife, Jayne. The expedition has been sponsored by the IGY, somewhat reluctantly, since it is not at all clear whether or not Farnsworth's fundamental interests are in science or advertising!

As far as the IGY is concerned, the party is bound for the North Pole to carry out research into oceanography, the Earth's magnetism, to monitor the first earth-satellite etc., but Farnsworth has a personal obsession. He is not in the least interested in the IGY programme, but is quite sure that he is going to find meteoric evidence for his pet theory that the asteroid belt is the residual debris from a disintegrated protoplanet. After a number of arduous and very well-written adventures, he has his evidence all right, but with horrid consequences. To reveal them would spoil the ending. However, this novel does not fade away into an anti-climax, but maintains its interest to the very last page.

The whole story is realistic and convincing. Most of it, by far, describes the misfortunes of an ill-fated polar expedition - one feels that all of it could be true. The characters, particularly Julian Cole, the narrator, and indeed most of the main protagonists, are very well realised (a pleasant change to be able to say that!) and the background to the press, the Pole, and the world of high pressure publicity is absolutely convincing. Incidentally, Blish displays an immense fund of scientific information which is brought in easily and not thrust down one's throat. The effect is to gradually build up the impression that we are reading a documentary account of a perfectly sane scientific expedition which has made some quite human errors of judgment and suffering rather more than its fair share of bad luck. The personal attractions and antipathies of the characters are set off against this background, and the whole thing is written in a style which seems just right for a narrator who is a professional science correspondent - a contributor to the Scientific American!

Of course, we are made aware by hints, the tenor of conversation and so on that something is wrong. This starts early, but is not overdone; a technique favoured by some writers of good ghost stories. We are wooed into accepting the truth of the narrative whilst the suspense is slowly mounting to an intolerable degree. When the final climax does at last arrive it is very powerful and horribly plausible.

This is a first-rate sf novel containing excellent characterisation and construction, in fact one of the best I have read for a long time. I only wish there were more like it.

G.D. Doherty.

All the books reviewed here, and indeed any sf book you might want, can be obtained through Fantast (Medway) Ltd., 75 Norfolk St., Wisbech, Cambs.



ABACCHUS

by

mal ashworth

I sometimes wonder what I would do in case of fire.

When I really stop to think about it, of course, I realise that the location of the fire would have quite an effect on my reaction. So, for that matter, would the date. Take Nero's fire for instance - the one that destroyed the major part of Rome, raged for several days and had vast droves of people fleeing underground to escape not only the fire but Nero's murderous soldiers who were roaming the streets as well. It must have been a dilly of a fire, and I didn't get to hear about that one until long after it was all over. To be perfectly honest, I don't know just what I would have done about it if I had heard of it earlier, but it isn't nice to feel left out of these things even if you're not going to do anything about them. The more I think about it the more hurt and offended I am at being left out of it; I suppose you can't really expect a psychopathic old Roman emperor to be anything other than selfish about his lyre-accompanied holocausts, but it cuts me to the quick all the same. You just wait, Nero; one day I will have a goddam fire of my own, and you won't be invited - it'll be a bigger one than yours as well, and I shall have the whole Boston Symphony Orchestra to play an accompaniment to it. So there.

There is one fire I would rather have been at than the fire of Rome though, but I would have been very likely to get into a whole heap of trouble at it, and it is perhaps just as well that I never knew about it until much, much later. The fire I mean is the mighty holocaust there must have been when that crazy old fake Chinese emperor anticipated Ray Bradbury by several centuries and had all the books burned so as to destroy all the evidence that he wasn't the real emperor. I know what I would have done at that fire all right; I would have been running around like crazy throwing buckets of water all over the place, trying to carry off piles of books and generally behaving like some demented soul in Hades - a description that would have been near enough to the truth to make no difference. After that, I daresay, I should have tried to gain an audience with the old fake emperor to try and prove to him the error of his

ways by cutting out his intestines and strangling him with them. I can even surmise what would have happened after that, but I prefer not to if you don't mind. Yes, it is perhaps as well that I wasn't able to be present at that particular fire.

I didn't get invited to the Great Fire of London either. (I don't want you to get the idea that I am a pyromaniac or anything like that; I am not. I freely admit that I like a good fire as much as the next man, but probably no more. Why, I can even walk past the most delightful fires without so much as faltering in my stride if I happen to be on my way to something better, such as a meal or a bookshop. This isn't just the sort of optimistic boast that you often hear from incurable addicts either. I know it is true, because I have walked past delightful fires, fires quite without mar or blemish, with perfect nonchalance: or at least, I have tried to, and the fact that I didn't walk straight past them: but had to make detours of up to half a mile or so to get past them was due to no fault in my character but merely to a staunch determination on the part of the presiding police officers not to let me walk straight past. When I started this article I had a definite idea in mind other than just licking my lips over all these juicy fires, and no doubt if you will bear with me long enough we shall meet up with the original point I was going to bring up, somewhere along the way and you will then recognise all these passing conflagrations as mere straws in the wind.)

But about this Great Fire of London; so I was saying, I didn't get invited to that either. Mulling this thing over thoroughly now for the first time in my life, I am beginning to think that perhaps some person or organisation is deliberately endeavouring to keep me away from all these major fires. You may regard this as just idle fancy, but look at the evidence. I didn't get to hear about Merc's fire until it was all over; all right - to miss one big fire could be sheer bad luck. I didn't hear about the Chinese conflagration until years afterwards; all right - a combination of bad luck and coincidence. But I didn't hear about either the Great Fire of London or the Great Fire of Chicago until they were all over and tidied up either! To miss two, or perhaps even three, big fires, could perhaps be put down to sheer coincidence - but to miss all the big fires? I ask you; could that possibly be mere coincidence? No, I hardly think so. There is Something Behind It All. And whoever, or whatever, they are, they are no small fry; there is somebody with influence in the plot. To my way of thinking it must have cost them a tremendous amount of money to keep me away from all the major fires over a period of at least a couple of thousand years, but I have to admit they spent their money well. Whoever has been paid to do the job has certainly done it with commendable efficiency (and I say this although I regard him as my enemy), for the fact is indisputable that he has kept me away from all the major fires. Really, though, they have been more devious than necessity demanded, what I mean is, if they had simply come along to me and offered me all that money that they have spent in a round-about way to keep me from these fires, I would gladly have stayed away from the fires of my own free will. I would have felt better about it too.

It would all be easier to understand too if I knew why they are so anxious to keep me away from the really big turn-ups. I reckon for them to go to all that trouble and expense to make sure that I am never on the spot when one of these big fires breaks out, there must be some pretty cogent reason for it. It may be that I have some sort of hidden Wild Talent in connection with fires that even I don't know about. Perhaps if I should ever be on the spot when a really major holocaust breaks out, some hitherto dormant section of my brain

will come into operation and douse the whole thing instantaneously by purely mental means. It may be; I wouldn't know, but if it is so, do you realize what that means? It means that They want these fires to happen! Not only do They want them to happen, They take the most fantastic pains that nothing shall interfere with the incessant raging of the fire. Probably what They are paying to keep me away from the scene of these fires is a mere flea-bite compared to what They are getting for making sure that the fires take place. By Ghod, there are hidden depths in this thing! This means that They are either making some direct profit out of the burning down of large cities and so on, or else Someone Else is paying Them to do it! The mind boggles.

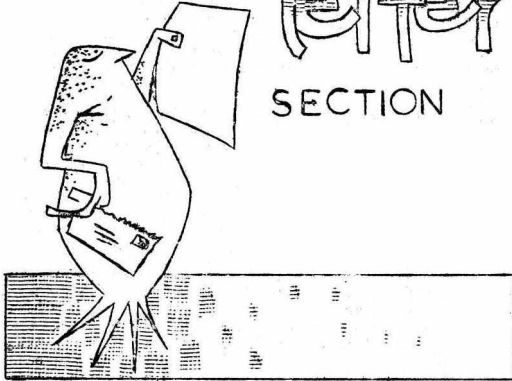
In this case They are mere sub-contractors, and no more the Master Minds behind the thing than is the man They pay to keep me away from the fires! What a simpiton I was to ever think that They were the Big Boys; I can see now that They are mere minor employees and the whole scheme is run from much Higher Up. Keeping me away from these fires, of course, is just one of the unimportant details taken care of by the Sub-Contractors. Probably the real Bosses don't know that I am being kept away; they may not even know that I exist. Probably if they did know they would approve of my being kept away, because after all there must be some reason for it, so I wouldn't be any better off if it was brought to their notice, but all the same it might be worth trying. Suppose I started a really Big fire of my own - London again, (there would be some poetic justice in that) or New York, or Moscow - without Them knowing about it. I would look away while it got nicely going - just about half the city gone, say - and then turn and look out over the mighty holocaust. My Hidden Talent would be sure to come into operation then and die the whole thing out in three seconds flat, much to the amazement of the despairing and panic-stricken fire brigades. Then I would just wait around and see what happened. They would be flabbergasted of course; not having arranged the fire Themselves They would be unable to understand how it had ever come about, and, even more mysterious, why it had suddenly been extinguished. The Bosses would want to know that too; a thing as big as that would be bound to come to their notice. They would ask awkward questions of the Sub-Contractors. They (the Bosses) with their wider experience of the whole business, would realize immediately what must have happened. They would instruct the Sub-Contractors to find me and bring me to them. Then I would be able to tell them just what I thought of the whole business and make my own terms for staying away from future conflagrations. The more I think about it the more I like the idea.

There is just one drawback, of course. To have carried on Their business all this time without interference They must have plenty of influence in the right places. I suppose there is just a chance that They might tumble to what had happened, find me straightaway and have me arrested and removed from the scene of the fire just as though I was a pyromaniac or something. My Hidden Talent wouldn't have time to come into operation then, the whole city would burn down, They would concoct some lying story to tell the Bosses and probably even get a bonus for slipping in a gratuitous fire, the Bosses would never get to know about me, and I would probably be put away to serve a twenty year jail sentence, which would only aid Them by keeping me away from any other big fires during that time. I suddenly realize the enormous risks involved in starting a Big Fire of my own; hell, I don't know what to do!

I started out to say that I sometimes wonder what I would do in case of a fire at home - which of my science-fiction books and magazines I would try to save, and so on, but somehow it doesn't seem to matter any more.

letter

SECTION



Howard Leigh, 177 Iffley Road, Oxford.

People always look back on the past and say "Ah, the Good Old Days". Somehow things always look better when they are gone than when they are actually with us. Take for instance the advent of modern art. Did anyone, apart from a few with foresight, approve of modern art? No. They said it couldn't be good, or, well, not as good as art used to be. And exactly the same with other things. So, I believe, it is with us. I personally do not consider that we are reaching the heights it reached, in say the war and post-war periods. Nevertheless it is still GOOD. It is simply that it is changing its direction. Particularly evident, I feel, is the trend towards better style in writing.

The problem of those people who join for one year, and then let their subscription lapse, must surely be looked at from a different angle from the one you choose. Before you can begin to wonder why they have left, you must know why they joined in the first place. This is, of course, difficult. I feel that a lot must join because we have a momentary appeal to them, as a result of reading some of our material from their local library, and perhaps an occasional prose. They therefore join the BSFA mainly because of the library service, and finding that their initial enthusiasm dies away, do not bother to renew their membership. I know of one person who has done this. Not, of course, that this is sufficient evidence on which to base a general inference, but I feel that this is a fairly accurate reason. Quite honestly, I don't feel that this transitory section of the membership is any cause for alarm. The BSFA appears to have a sound nucleus of members, who are permanently fascinated by the future of the organisation.

Bob Parkinson's article on Hal Clement was most interesting. Could I

put in a plea for more of the same? A similar discussion of Van Vogt I'll instance. However, I cannot bring myself to say that I like Hal Clement. The first of his stories I read was "Mission of Gravity" which I would class as the best novel Hal has ever written. Unfortunately the rest of his work left me cold. Firstly I feel that they are too much of a muchness; his style of writing bores me to tears; his characters don't live; the stories don't move at more than a snail's pace. Only in "Mission of Gravity" were these faults at a minimum. I do not deny that the inventiveness (from the scientific viewpoint) of his stories is something remarkable. Unfortunately this does not make a story acceptable for me.

I too must support Jean Graman in her defence of Richard Matheson's "Born of Man and Woman". Personally I like Richard Matheson's stories, nearly as much as Brian's. I do not think he reaches Brian's standard by any means, for his plots are so often rather weak, and often poorly developed. Nevertheless, he holds me entranced in almost the same way as Sturgeon does. Not that I am comparing Matheson with Sturgeon, it's just that their stories have the same effect. In the long run tho', Matheson's stories fade away quietly from my memory, whereas those of Sturgeon and of several others of the top of authors linger on.

Re Fred Hunter's letter. I must endorse everything he says on Geoff Doherty's article. But Geoff is right when he claims that Wells, and to a lesser extent Verne, as being the true progenitors of sf. Fred's comment on of gimmicks viz., non-existence does not imply impossibility, reminds me of the attitude of many scientists to unusual ideas. Anything that does not fit into the currently accepted ideas of science is for many scientists, farcical. For some of the postulates of sf though, definite evidence can be produced against them. One in particular, comes to mind - that of contraterrene matter. Although particles of the same size and mass of protons and electrons, but of opposite charge, have been detected, they are of such fantastically small stability relative to normal atomic particles, that the whole concept of stable ct matter, despite its apparent feasibility, is probably false. Notice I don't say impossible: I am in no position to be dogmatic. However, I can also produce an excellent argument (or rather my tutor in Theoretical Chemistry can) against the existence of ct matter. Likewise time travel and ftl travel.

(* I don't like modern art either! Or, that being a sweeping statement, I don't like the bulk of what passes for art these days. Ditto for modern cf. Take for instance the February Analog (JS edition), I recognise only two names in it, Campbell's and that of the lead story writer, Raymond F. Jones. The rest are unknowns, and having read their stories I hope they stay that way. Even the Jones story is rather poor, it has a plot based on a recent Campbell editorial, a la Dean drive, and a couple of stories Jones wrote in the early fifties. And those earlier stories got the point over better and were entertaining as well. The best part of Analog now is the editorial, and even that palls when it turns up two or three issues later, expanded, with characters, dull reading in the extreme. I didn't start reading of for its slick writing but for its ideas, it's a pity the authors don't use any anymore.

Most people who join the BSFL are expecting something, when they don't get it they don't renew. We provide certain facilities. It's obvious that these aren't what they expected. What gripes me is that instead of telling us what they expected so that we can consider providing it they just leave, as mute as they came. I think there is plenty to get alarmed about. The potential membership is low enough as it is. Consider - of the general public few read

sf. Of these few only some are enamoured enough to pay out any amount of money to buy and collect the stuff, and fewer still will pay out for what is, in effect, an association item, the BSFA. And we only manage to retain about half of them because they don't find whatever it is that they expect to find in it. That's cause enough for some soul searching.

Articles like that on Mal Clement will be published in VECTOR only if they are submitted to VECTOR! I can't print what hasn't been written.

Talk about damning with faint praise. Matheson's weak plots were what Brain was complaining about.

Of course ct matter is unstable in the presence of normal matter, and vice versa, but that doesn't have any bearing on it's chance of existence away from normal matter. Your Chemistry tutor had better watch his step - making dogmatic statements about someone else's speciality is frowned upon in scientific circles. And I seem to recall an excellent argument 'proving' the impossibility of heavier-than-air flight coming from an eminent astronomer around the turn of the century. *)*

Bob Parkinson, 52 Mead Rd., Cheltenham.

After having finished the most obvious reading for me (and sulphur is spelt with a U, page 8), I came to page 11 and the more readable style of Kingsley Amis.

Boom! That was Bob Parkinson resuming nuclear testing, and the particular target for this one is Amis' comment "...the fallacy which says that the human mind and human society may someday be the objects of real scientific study. This is inconceivable...." Maybe so, but it also happens to be accomplished fact. One has only to read Vance Packard's "The Hidden Persuaders" to realise that our notions and the reasons for them are the object of one of the more detailed scientific investigations of our time. Motivational Research is already sub-titled 'Human Engineering', and the psychologists around this University (Nottingham) are already complaining about the amount of scientific work that comes into their course. Admittedly there is not yet a solid background of mathematical theory in this region, but that too is probably only a matter of time. Certainly the lack of anything better than statistical method does not exclude it from science, any more than similar considerations exclude biology.

Now I don't say that there will ever be a science of 'Sociodynamics' which will be able to predict the behaviour of every person in a human society. For a start there is probably an effect analogous to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, and in any case, no science is comprehensive. Sociology is almost certainly as infinite a field as, for instance, physics (though even here I have a sneaking suspicion that someone is about to/has proved that physics is a finite, albeit large field). However, it is always a stupid action to make dogmatic statements about what science may not investigate. Chances are, that someone is already working on it, someone who has never heard of, and who has no respect for, your personal opinions. I guess it must come hard to outsiders who are used to having a more or less stable floor under their feet, but you can guess it comes a lot rougher to those within the field.

So Amis considers this a threat to his freedom does he? So does Vance Packard, and so do I for that matter. But you can't get out of it merely by wishing it wasn't there. This is a thing that you have to live with, even if the facts are very uncomfortable companions. The work of the Motivational

Research people, for instance, suggests that our free will is considerably more limited than we would like, and that most people never bother to use it really. When did you last exercise yours, and can you ever be certain you know what it really is? With these considerations, why should we be interested in freedom when we don't really know how to operate it?

(Lightening can kill, as can sitting in the electric chair, but at this moment I'm typing under an electric light and the radio is on providing a soft musical background. The laws and forces of the universe are neutral, its use to which they are put we should worry about. The study of the human mind will, in my opinion, open the way to quite a number of possibilities for our future - to a rigid opinion-control dictatorship, to educational techniques which will promote individuality without anti-social tendencies, etc. With knowledge comes control, with control comes choice, and the choice is ours. The risks of learning are high, but that's life.*)*

G.W. Maiver, St. Margaret's House, Sutton Valence, Maidstone, Kent.

I'd like to say rightaway how much I agree with what Joe Patrizio had to say in VECTOR 14 about introspection being around too much in sf. But after thumbing through my mags and thinking a bit, I've come to the conclusion that what the real matter with sf at the moment is not that there's too much of anything; it's that there are things missing which should be there. I've got some ideas on what these missing factors may be. They're not at all original, but they do have the virtue of being simple.

I'd say the following things were lacking in modern (British) sf :-

- a) Sex
- b) Humour
- and c) Horror.

I maintain that these things are fundamental to any really good story. I've often read things such as "people who want dirt buy dirt, and people who want sf buy sf" - implying that anything remotely sexual in an adult way has no place in sf. And when I read something like that, I want to jump on the typewriter of the idiot who wrote it. What's wrong with sex anyway? I don't know about other people, but I for one would like to read sexy sf stories.

And then next, humour. I like to laugh. Most people do. But you can't do it very often, reading British sf. If Eric Frank Russell manages to work up suspense and yet gets you laughing, how come nobody else can do it? And then thirdly, horror - or more specifically, B.E.M.s. I want to read stories about aliens and Beasts and Things which menace the Earth: I may be in a minority of one here, but I like B.E.M.s. And I do not want to read any more morbid, immensely profound, psychological works which get nowhere and do nothing except get on my wick. They're dry, all dry as hell, and dead into the bargain. You pick them up and the dust falls off them all over the place.

So once again I say: lets have Sex, Lets have Humour, and lets have Horror - and lets have plenty of them!

(Bravo! I'm glad to find someone else who reads sf for it's entertainment value rather than for social criticism or profound thought. Sf, the technological fairy story, not the sugar coated pill, for me too *)*

Don R. Smith, 228 Higham Lane, Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

I note with some nostalgic twinges the trouble you are having in finding volunteers for the various official posts. I cannot offer any serious help in this problem, not even to tell you what I require from the BSPA. The only thing I require is the library service, and the comprehensive catalogue which delighted my eyes with VI4 has shown me quite clearly that there is more of this than I shall ever have time to make use of. (I am still, in spite of valiant efforts, two issues behind with ASP.)

I thought it was the onset of senile decay which was responsible for my forgetting the sf stories I read almost before I've finished them, but I see from the Secretary's Report that others suffer too. Maybe there is something the matter with the stories themselves. Certainly I find myself in no hurry to read Analog these days - not the fiction side of it anyway. I do read the factual articles at once, and also the editorials - though usually disagreeing strongly with the latter. The stories - I don't know what's lacking; they're well enough written, the characters are plausible, the plots adequate and even often reflecting contemporary problems (if that is a virtue). Maybe they're too damn smooth, too bourgeois. Perhaps science-fiction is getting too respectable, so that it is getting smothered in literary conventions and becoming one with the great mass of competent professional fiction churned out by writers well-trained in the literary disciplines for the greater profit and glory of the publishing magnates. But the old-age effect is still a tenable theory. Perhaps sf should only be read by the young, whose imaginations are still vivid enough to feel the thrill of wandering in the lands of fantasy. But if that is the case, why can't I stop reading and re-reading "The Lord of the Rings"?

Hal Clement is one modern science fiction writer who I can enjoy, possibly because I dote on technical detail. That may be another grumble about modern science fiction, too many authors seem to think of psychology and its relations as being the only form of science worth considering as anything more than background - apart, in Analog, from something called psionics, formerly referred to as the Fairy Godmother. I think it's another result of the literary boys stepping in to show the technical clodpoles how to write stories properly, as approved by the writing schools. It would be interesting some time to compile a list of really memorable stories written by authors who were scientists first and writers second, and compare it with the list for equally memorable science fiction written by professional authors.

The book reviews continue to be my favourite part of VECTOR. Apart from the Penguin anthology, which I already have, I am attracted by The Green Suns, repelled by the length of Atlas Shrugged, indifferent to the Soviet anthology, repelled by The Giant Stumbles. All very useful.

(* Maybe senile decay is the answer, but in the stories rather than the readers. *)*

Roy Kay, 91 Craven Street, Birkenhead, Cheshire.

Was very interested in Bob Parkinson's article on Hal Clement. This is the sort of thing I would like to see more of in VECTOR.

What Willis, of course, very nearly ran away with all honours, entertainment-wise. But when the fanzine reprints get to be better than anything else, you start to wonder....

The letter too I enjoyed....all five of them. I can't find anyone to argue with. Why can't more people start an argument in a letter?

The book reviews. I always read and enjoy the reviews in VECTOR. Let's have more from Harry Harrison. By the way, does Harry remember Lynton's TV play 'The Night of the Big Beat'? He also published it as a novel quite recently. It's all about what happens to the people of a small rural village when a fantastic beat wave hits them. Everyone is sweating all over the place, especially the girls. Then, all of a sudden, a flying saucer lands on the village green. So all the villagers barricade themselves in the local. There they are, some with their backs to the door, trying to keep out whatever is pushing from the other side. In spite of all their efforts a huge terrifying papier-mache claw forces itself round the side of the door. End of part two. I think everything ends happily ever after, but I forget how. I don't particularly want to remember. The novel was reviewed in NEW WORLDS as 'probably the most exciting novel published recently...'

Ah well.

But the most important items in the OO were, to my mind, the two questions raised in the Secretary's Report, namely, a) what is happening to science fiction? and b) what is happening, or is going to happen if we're not careful, to the BSFA?

First this sf. We are chiefly interested in British sf.

It is in a mess isn't it? Beside me as I write this I've a pile of recent copies of NEW WORLDS, starting with the fabled 100' dth ish. Sf here would be doing ok if every NEW WORLDS was like that one. Night really good shorts from the big names, a guest editorial from EFR. Why there's even illustrations! But, oh dear, take a look at the other issues in the pile. Here and there, a story you like, a story with an ending you didn't expect, a story with a pleasing flavour....but never any excellent stories, never one you read and say to yourself, "Ah, that's why I read sf. That was something special!" And all the rest of it is crud. Worse than that, boring, uninteresting, half-baked crud. Why, the crud isn't even presented attractively!

Some of their covers are laughable. Some may be better executed, but rarely is one original. Then you open the mag, and only an avowed sf addict would do that after seeing some of the covers, and what greets your gaze? Every issue good old dependable Carnell gives us exactly the same typographical layout, it hasn't changed since the mag's inception. Nowadays we never get even a line illo inside, or if we do we have to squint to make it out, it's so tiny. I would risk a high bet on the fact that NEW WORLDS must be the dullest looking prozine anywhere.

Alright, now and again there is an outstanding cover, like Quinn's on 110, once in a while there might be an extra enjoyable story....though I can't remember any at the moment. But what happens meanwhile? What about all the hundreds of potential sf readers lost because they pick up a copy of NEW WORLDS and are subsequently bored to tears?

Yet still, every month, I go to the newsagents and buy the thing. I don't know why, perhaps in the vain hope that something exciting will be in it, perhaps just because, as one of the rapidly diminishing ranks of sf readers, I have to at least try to keep the flag flying. Even if, these days, it is only flying at half mast.

Thank goodness we have 'Dark Universe', the recent novel from Daniel F.

Galouye, to remind us that great sf is still being written. If that doesn't get the best novel title I'll eat the next three VECTORS. End of Commercial Break.

I have sat here complaining about all this but I haven't bothered to make any constructive suggestions. So many people seem to be doing this already, people much more qualified than I, real genuine authors. They all express really noble sentiments when they write those guest editorials don't they? Can someone please explain why, after all those beautiful high flown ideas, they then turn around and write the same old twaddle?

This is the problem as I see it, the solution lies with the writers. However, I do believe part of the cause of all this is the fact that the authors may be trying too hard to find the new angles on all the old ideas. What is needed to lift sf out of these doldrums are some new trail blazers.

Now the BSFA. I like and am privileged to be a member. The fault certainly doesn't lie with the way the association is organised, or the basic quality of the service it gives.

The reason why so many members do not renew after one year lies, in my opinion, in the quantity of these services.

I would like to see monthly VECTORS, well, bi-monthly at least. If however it must remain quarterly I'd like to see many more pages in it. I would like some regular series of articles. Say, profiles of leading authors, articles on general sf, something about famous past stories or authors, perhaps discussions on various sf gimmicks and assumptions. And why not bring back the magazine reviews, concentrating on British editions. Try to get more publicity, so that the Association will pull some weight in the world of science fiction. All this and monthly newsletters too. Now I know full well that all this is impossible as of this moment. But these, or something like these, should be our aims for the future.

First of all, let's bring back monthly newsletters. Then add a couple more pages on the next VECTOR.

This letter has ended up pages longer than I intended. Sorry, but I'm glad to get all that off my chest. I'd be very glad to hear your views on all this, especially about that dream BSFA of mine. Must it remain a dream? You have all been in office so you know all the snags.

("Right of the Big Beat"* was memorable only for one thing, it suggested one good reason for the behaviour of all those BEEMs who land here - they're not really intelligent, just the alien equivalent of our mice and monkeys.

Monthly newsletters are not economical, it costs about 30/- to post an issue of it whether it has one or twelve pages, and there's rarely enough material on hand to justify even two pages of newsletter. As for more VECTORS, well, we need more material, need I say more? *)*

Archie Mercer, 434/4 Newark Road, North Rykeham, Lincoln.

Kingsley Amis' article is disappointingly short - his points, if they're worth making, could surely do with a bit of expansion. The book reviews are well worth keeping up with. Re *"Atlas Shrugged"*, I thought that to a great extent Miss Rand made her points by having her protagonists tilting at a world that had no existence outside her imagination. Given conditions precisely as she delineates, 'tis possible things would pan out the way she says. But

conditions never are precisely as she delineates, either 'good' or 'bad'.

Walt's reprint was an amusing piece I don't remember reading before - I like the title too.

Which hasn't said much, but it was an enjoyable issue nonetheless.

(The trouble with Lynn Rand is that she's got a good point but to put it over she's exaggerated it to a black and white situation and reduced it's plausibility.)

John Curtis, Long Wittenham Manor, Fr, Abingdon, Berks.

I sat down and thought about this business of members not being satisfied with the BSPA and not bothering to renew membership. I think the trouble is that they join and then wait around for something to happen, they're not quite sure what but they expect some great exciting change to come over their lives without ever doing anything themselves to bring about this change.

The point is we, the members, are the BSPA and if you want to get something more than library lists and your quarterly copy of VECTOR out of it then you must put something in.

Greatly enjoyed that very readable article by Bob Parkinson on the subject of Hal Clement, one of my favourite authors. More of the same please.

Tony Walsh, 256/E Berkeley Camp, Berkeley, Glos.

I still think the front cover should be free of artwork and have only the word "VECTOR" plus the issue number. Understand that I like Atom's illustrations but think a more sober presentation would be more in keeping.

In your editorial could you note applause for PeterKabej's work on the library list.

Referring to a statement by Kingsley Amis "the fallacy which says that the human mind and human society may some day be the subject of real scientific study, this is inconceivable, but if it were not it would be hell."

"Hell", yes. "Fallacy", no! What is so sacrosanct about the human ego that makes it automatically inviolable? "If you cut me do I not bleed?" and "If you stimulate me do I not drink a pint of milk a day?"

Both of these can be reduced to cause and effect. The second, admittedly, is more complex than the first, but it is the thin edge of the wedge.

To Kingsley, myself and all of fandom it would be hell, but I know a lot of people who wouldn't even realise it was in existence. Happily the literature which confronts us with this intolerable situation also provides a way out of it. We can always go and live on a frontier planet. (There, you see I told you it was escapist literature!)

Finally, no more BEM illos, please.

Jill Adams, 54 Cobden Avenue, Bittern Park, Southampton.

Both your report and Joe's sound a little, tired I think is the nearest word. Can't place my finger on just what it is about them.

The Planet Maker was good. I don't know quite why but all the articles in VECTOR about authors make me want to read more of their work. They are always

well written and interesting and this one is up to the usual high standard.

Maybe it's me, but Amis doesn't seem to say anything. Though it would seem that he enjoyed himself.

Joe's point about sf being in none too healthy a state - I've only been reading it for a short time but people have been saying that for as long as I can remember.

WEALSCHARDFROM

Robert Worrall, who would like coloured covers on VECTOR and both more pages and more issues per year. Ian Aldridge, of Scotland, who can't see why there's all this fuss about the definition of sf, and who also sent some artwork along. Angus Watt, of Luton, and Ken Cheslin, of Stourbridge, round off the list. And that, apart from a nice thank you note from the Keeper of the Printed Books, is that.