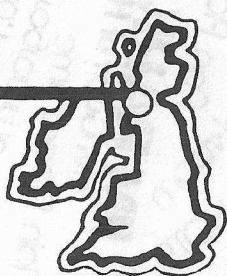


FAIRCON '82



PROGRAMME BOOK

CREDITS
The Bookroom
Room 104
FAN GUEST OF HONOUR
JIM BARKER
FAN
MAIN:
Video: Audio and Computing
Programme
HIL ROLLASON
and Neil Craig
MARTIN HOARE
FAN:
ALBACON 80
What Went Right
OPERATIONS
The Business Meeting
PROGRAMME
Bob Shaw
WHAT WENT WRONG
ACCOUNTS
EVENTS:
AND WHY
Chairman's Report: Audio
STEVE MILLER
Film ORN SCOFFIN
WHAT NEXT?

SAFETY
Bob Shaw
HOTEL UARSON
Video
HOTEL Dave Ellis
Bob Jewett

THE ALBACON REPORT

FILM
Jimmy Robertson
Film Programme
Bruce Souille
I was a Captive in a Scottish East

Everything you wanted to know about running an Eastercon, but were afraid to ask!

Articles about all aspects of Albacon, the 31st Annual British Science - Fiction Convention. What went right, what went wrong, and why. Comments by the Committee on the running of the Convention, and what they'd do differently next time. PLUS a series of articles explaining how to organise such essentials as a Bookroom, Film Programme, etc.

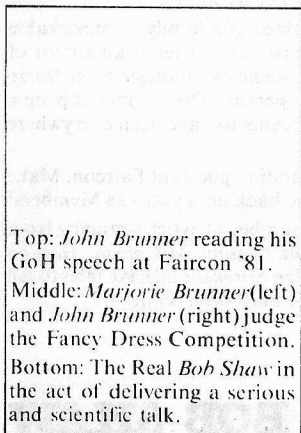
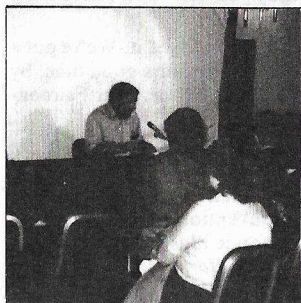
Copies are available now from Bob Shaw, c/o 200 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6LN. The Albacon Report costs 50p; if you buy by post, then please include an A5 SAE.

BIG BOB'S BIG BOX

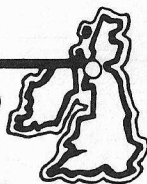
8	Video, Audio and Com.	ST. DAVE
9	Alternative Programme	BOB JEWETT
10	Film Programme	BOB JEWETT
11	I was a Captive in a Scottish East	BRUCE SOUILLE
12	Film Room	JIM BARKER
13	Safety	JIMMY ROBERTSON
14	The Business Meeting	ORN SCOFFIN
15	Accounts	BOB SHAW
16	Eastercon '79 Accounts: Varcon	HAL ROLLASON
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19	Appendix 1	BOB JEWETT
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THE ALBACON REPORT



FAIRCON '82



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FAIRCON '82



23-26 JULY 1982

HELLO (AGAIN)

Welcome to Faircon! Now, put this magazine away, and don't dare look at it until Faircon is over. Get out there and enjoy yourself - don't sit reading pithy prothe!

Good. Well, now that Faircon is over, I hope you enjoyed it. We've put a lot of thought into the weekend, and hope that you've had a good time. By now you should know both our Guests well; just to refresh your Faircon-damaged brain I'll recap.

Guest of Honour at Faircon '82 is *Harry Harrison*. He comes from the USA, and is renowned both sides of the Atlantic as a writer and fan. Harry's fan history stretches back more years than he'd care to admit - ask him when he first attended a World SF Convention and step back in wonder; ask him, too, about his career as a comic illustrator, and about why *Reptilicus* was the worst film ever made. *Harry* is a top-ranking professional, a fan from way back, and a nice guy. *Harry Harrison's* wife *Joan*, will be at Faircon too; get to know her as well!

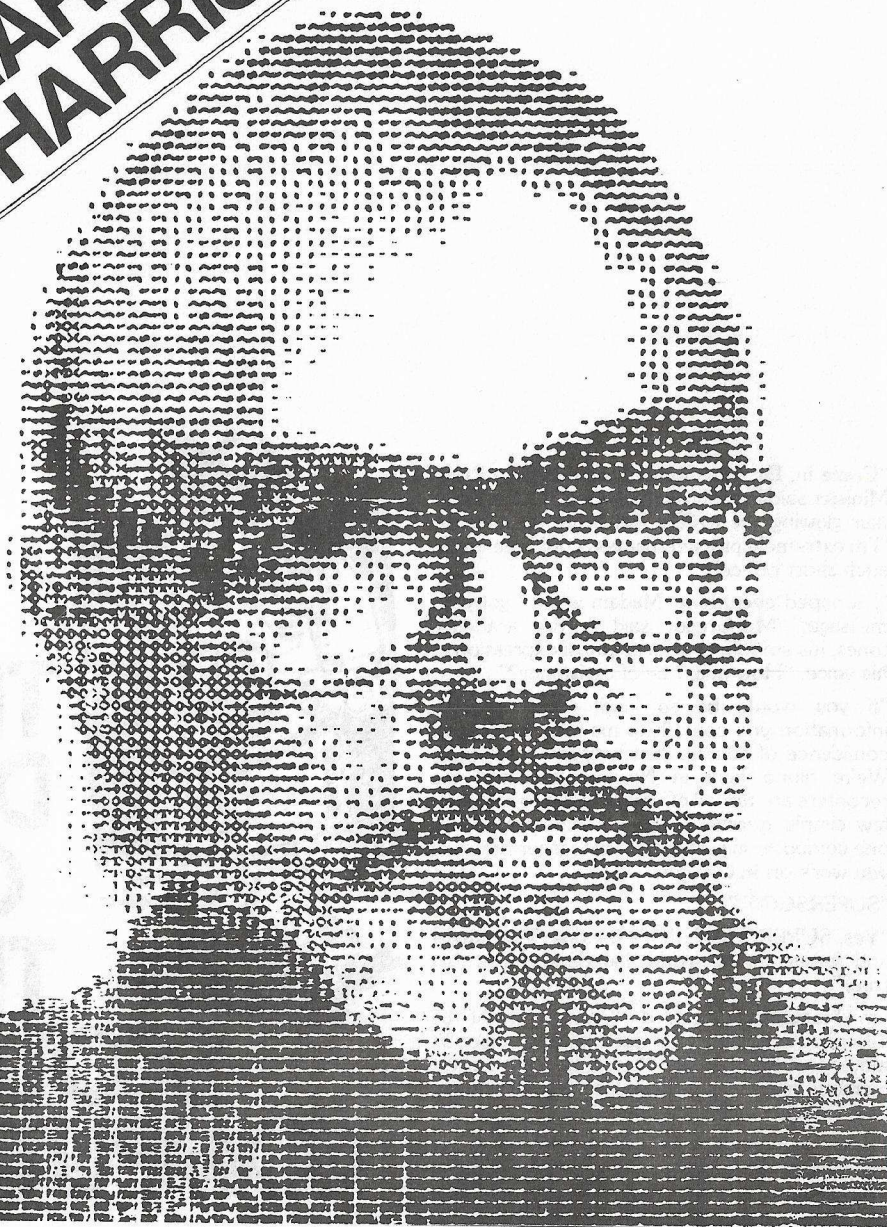
Special Guest is *Naomi Mitchison*. She comes of a family of remarkable individuals, and is as well known as a mainstream writer as an author of SF. She's been around the world writing scene even longer than *Harry Harrison*, and is in all ways a most unusual person. The number of people who know her is quite unbelievable - she seems to have been everywhere and done everything.

We're very pleased to have two such outstanding guests at Faircon. Make them welcome, and convince them to come back next year - as Members!

Inside the Programme Book you'll find a number of articles ranging from the serious to the funny. *Harry Harrison*, *Naomi Mitchison*, *Gordon Johnson*, *Nick Lowe*, *John Brunner*, and *Ian Sorensen* all have tales to tell or songs to sing; read, and enjoy. But not until *after* Faircon!

BOB SHAW

HARRY HARRISON



a short story

"Come in, Dr. MacGregor, come in!" the Prime Minister said heartily, teeth shining, her varnished hair glowing the watery light from the window. "I'm extremely pleased that you could see me on such short notice".

"I dropped everything, Madam when I got your message," MacGregor said in dry academic tones, his smooth face as empty of expression as his voice. "How may I be of assistance?"

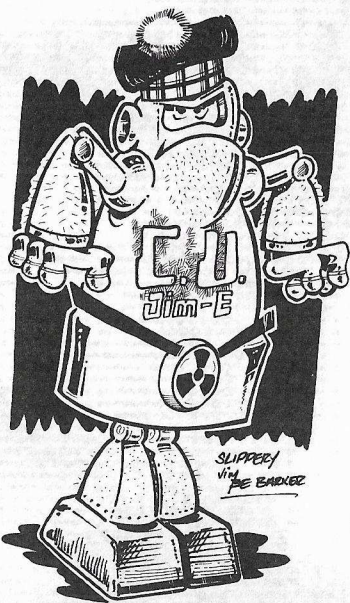
"If you would be so kind, there is some information you could help me with. In strictest confidence of course. Just between old friends. We're alone here in Number Ten and the recorders are turned off. I would like to ask you a few simple questions about computers. About one computer in particular. That rather large one you work on in Glasgow....."

"SUPERSCOT."

"Yes, SUPERSCOT, that's the one. The biggest and fastest in the world, I understand. Is that true?"

Dr. MacGregor nodded. "Aye, it might be described in that manner. But it would be a wee bit more accurate to say that it has the largest memory banks and the fastest retrieval time, coupled with VLSIC circuitry."

"Yes, of course. You took the words right out of my mouth. So let us say, just for the point of discussion, that if any computer is going to take



THE DAY OF THE SCOTCH COMPUTER

by Harry Harrison



over the world, why SUPERSCOT is the one that could do it. Correct?"

"Incorrect."

The Prime Minister blinked rapidly. "Would you care to explain that?"

"Of course. At the present state of computer technology it is physically impossible for a computer on its own to 'take over the world' as you put it. Computers do not think - yet. They must be programmed. That is, they must have software written for them."

"Software?"

"Yes, Madam. To explain briefly, hardware is what is left when you turn a computer's power off. All the physical equipment, the VDU's, memory banks, buttons, switches, all of it. Just a collection of electronic parts. Then, when you turn the power back on, you put in programs that make the hardware function. This is the 'software'."

"That seems reasonably clear. Do correct me if I'm wrong. Your computer, SUPERSCOT, has the hardware to take over the world, but not the software. And it can't write its own software."

"Absolutely correct, Prime Minister."

"Then we are in agreement. Would you also agree that if someone wrote a program to take over the world, why then he could run it on that computer and take over the world?"

"No. It would take too long, be too cumbersome. After the program was written it would have to be debugged, that is checked many different ways to make sure it would work. It might take a lifetime to do that."

"You're not being frank with me, Dr. MacGregor" The Prime Minister's voice was now cold, decisive. "You've been watched. You are writing that program. Admit it."

"Yes, I started to write that program....."

"I knew it! Guard!"

The door burst open and a General rushed in with a drawn Webley revolver in his hand. Dr. MacGregor was unruffled.

"I started to write that programme," he admitted. "Then I realized that if I were smart enough to write a program and debug it, why it would be a lot easier to simply take over the world myself. There would be no need to get involved with the computer at all."

"Execute him!" the Prime Minister shouted hoarsely. "Before it is too late."

The General stepped forward, raised the revolver carefully, aimed and squeezed the trigger. A single shot rang out.

The Prime Minister slumped forward, dead.



Naomi Mitchison

"I am basically a story-teller; I like things to have a beginning, a middle and an end, all properly tied up. what interests me is how people react to new situations, as many of us have had to do over the last half century. Doing this entails the imaginative gymnastic of getting into other people's bodies and minds in these situations. Science fiction means one kind of new situation and should show its effect on genuinely real men and women. The same goes for historical fiction (or writing about people of other cultures). Here it is essential to get social and historical facts of probabilities as minutely correct as possible. I have tried to do this in many books, not only on the ancient Mediterranean world, but on Africa or the West Highlands, and perhaps to lead the reader to thinking about these facts, about what they have done to us (or we to them) and the situations in which we may yet be involved."

As a main-stream writer I find myself looking rather slant-wise on Science Fiction, having only written two S.F. novels out of some seventy others. What are all these S.F. guys (and dolls) actually onto? I have had a number of friends in the S.F. world, including H.G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon, the earliest of the serious writers. You notice that I have not counted, for instance, Jules Verne; but it seems to me that he doesn't really count, because he was not thinking in moral terms. And here, I believe, we must stop and consider. Wells and Stapledon certainly saw themselves as teachers and warners. They told a good story of course, but that is a skill rather than a matter of morality. In the twenties and thirties they were deeply aware of the dangers of new scientific advances and new technology, much of it called into existence by World War One, and also of the dangers - at that time - of over confidence, at least in the minds and life styles of the growing middle class, to which they both belonged.

That over-confidence took a knock from World War Two, which in a way they had foreshadowed. Prophets of course are not much heeded in any culture, and some of the nastiest things they had thought of did not happen - not then. Confidence of a slightly different kind came back with the end of the war. We were alive after all. Then there came the great changes: the welfare state, above

**HAVE
WE A
DUTY ?**

NAOMI MITCHISON

all the health service, and the great, sweeping liberations of the old colonial territories. But then things slowed down. So what are the warners and prophets up to now?

Let me put my own point of view on how S.F. fits into all this. We are in a bad patch. I think you will all agree. Maybe I am writing before the badness has totally developed but I see it coming. Am I right in thinking that an element of prophecy or warning, a firm suggestion that a change of outlook is necessary - or rather writing in such a way that the change of outlook happens to the reader - and even that our usual pattern of morality does not work in certain situations, is something which ought to come into really acceptable S.F.? Of course that is not the same as what pays or what publishers think they want. But look at the difference (I'm taking another art form on purpose!) between films like Star Wars which is simply Goodies (Us) and Baddies (Them), not at all a prophetic or shape-changing moral attitude, and on the other hand The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy which has these wonderful moments of pure battiness which takes us out of our normal moral stance and give us the twist which starts something else: a re-adjustment, a sharpening up, a tumble out of ourselves.

It is the same with S.F. One thinks of many of the older writers, Asimov, Aldiss, Hoyle, Clarke, who

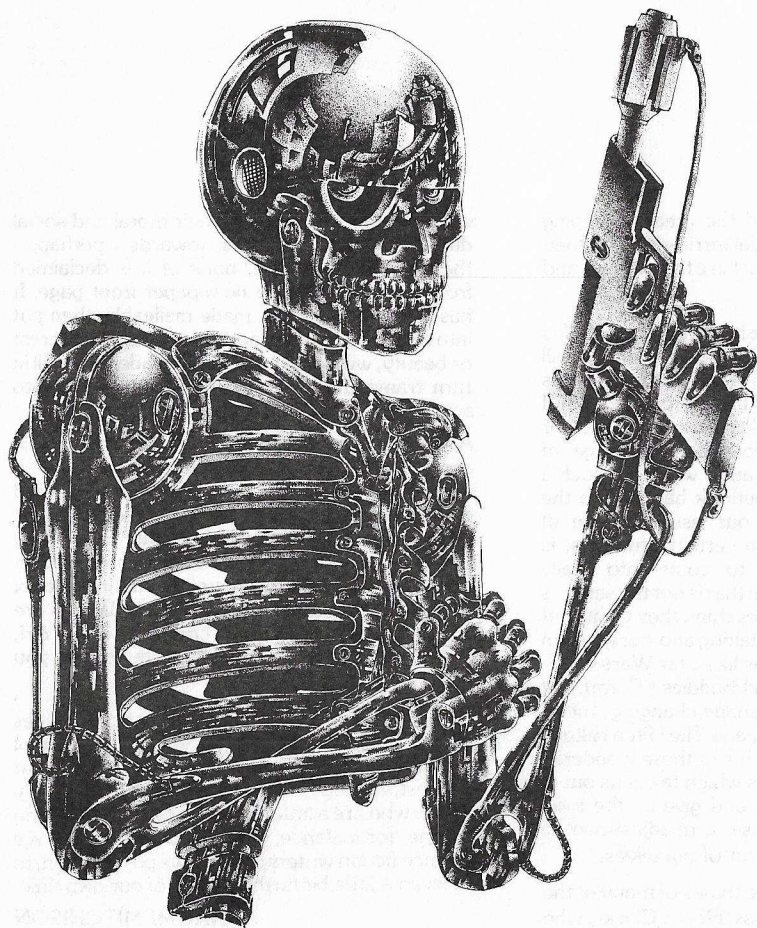
were all very conscious of their moral and social duty towards the readers: towards - perhaps - themselves. Of course, none of it is declaimed from a pulpit not yet a newspaper front page. It has to be thought out, made malleable, then put into a shape which because of its intrinsic interest or beauty, will be taken in by the reader who will in turn transmute it into ideas. Perhaps even into action.

A magical process? But isn't it what writing is about, isn't it the process that all ideas and all visualisations, all intricacies of plot and characterisation must go through before they get to the final stage? So what is magic? Something one doesn't understand because the words for it don't exist. And the more you try to find and fix the words, the more they slip away. Words are not agile enough. What it comes to is the old, stupid phrase used by teachers, by lovers: you know what I mean.

So here I leave you with one caution: moralities change with humanity. The idea of God or of Good changes with man's history and all that, at his best, he hopes to be. There are a few in every epoch who are a little ahead of their time, as John Donne, for instance, was ahead of his time. We science fiction writers ought, if we possibly can, to be even a little bit further ahead of our own time.

NAOMI MITCHISON

HARRY HARRISON



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Only US and UK magazines are covered, and no attempt has been made to go beyond English language publications. The aim, as usual, is to help the reader locate any of Harry's work which might otherwise be missed.

The layout should be clear. Under the book publication heading, the title is given, within brackets the surname of the editor, if an anthology; the letters (s.a.) same author indicates a collection of Harrison stories, as distinct from an anthology edited by him.

As Harry used pseudonyms at times, it is shown under the publication details where the pseudonym was used. Why the pseudonyms? Don't ask me - ask him!

Any further information which might add to this bibliography would be welcomed by the compiler. Even Harry couldn't be sure we've got everything!

HARRY HARRISON: Short stories and novels

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Ad astra	Vertex, Aug., 1974	Best SF stories of the year: fourth annual coll. (Del Rey) Best SF stories of the year: 1974 (Del Rey) (Title change) Visitors book (anon) The Penguin SF omnibus (Aldiss)
All wheels, gears and cogs		
An alien agony (a.k.a. "The streets of Ashkelon")	More Penguin SF (Aldiss)	
American dead		The year 2000 (s.a.)
Arm of the law	Fantastic Universe, Aug., 1958 Science Fantasy, Oct., 1958	War with the robots (s.a.)
An Artist's life	Rocket Stories, Sep., 1953 (as: Felix Boyd, pseud.)	
At last, the true story of Frankenstein	Science Fantasy, Sep., 1965	The best of Harry Harrison
Bill the galactic hero (see also: "The Starsloggers")	New Worlds, Aug.-Oct., 1965	Gollancz, 1965 Doubleday (US), 1965 Penguin, 1969; Avon (US), 1975 Equinox (US), 1975
Brave newer world		Four futures (Silverberg) The best of Harry Harrison
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A dip in the swimming-pool reactor see above		
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E = MC ² or bust part 3 of Bill the Galactic Hero see above		
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The final battle		Prime number
Final encounter	Galaxy, Apr., 1964	Two Tales and 8 tomorrows The eighth Galaxy Reader (Pohl) Galactic Empires (Aldiss)
The finest hunter in the world		Prime number
From fanaticism, or for reward	ASF, March 1969	One step from Earth The best of Harry Harrison
The ghoul squad	ASF, June 1969	Four for the future (Harrison) Prime number
The gods themselves throw incense	Impulse, March 1966	Four for the future (Harrison)
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(a.k.a. The time machined saga)
- They're playing our son
The time-machined saga
(a.k.a. The technicolor time machine)
Toy shop
- Trainee for Mars
(a.k.a. Simulated trainer)
A transatlantic tunnel, hurrah!
(a.k.a. Tunnel through the deeps)
- Tunnel through the deeps
(a.k.a. A transatlantic tunnel,
hurrah!)
- Unto my manifold dooms
(a.k.a. The many dooms)
The velvet glove
- The voice of C.W.A.C.C.
Waiting place
- War with the robots
(short story)
We ate the whole thing
- Wheelworld (trilogy 2)
- The wicked flee
- Wife to the lord
- World in the balance
The world Otalmi made
- You men of violence
WITH GORDON R. DICKSON:
Lifeboat (a.k.a. Lifeship)
- Lifeship (a.k.a. Lifeboat)
- Web of the Norns
(short version of Web of the Worlds)
Web of the Worlds
WITH LEON E. STOVER:
Stonchenge
- Fantastic Universe, December 1964
ASF, March-May 1967
- ASF, April 1962
- Fantastic Universe, June 1958
New Worlds, September 1958
ASF, April-June 1972
- Fantastic Universe November 1956
The Saint, 1961
- Impulse, December 1966
Galaxy, June 1968
- Science Fiction Adventures
July 1962
- F & SF, June 1970
- Fantastic Universe, June 1957
Science Fiction Adventures
June 1958 (US) October 1958 (UK)
Galaxy, April 1967
- ASF, February-April 1975
- Science Fantasy, April 1958
- Fantasy Fiction, November 1953
- Doubleday (US) 1967
Berkley (US) 1968
Faber 1968
N.E.L. 1970
Futura (Orbit Books) 1976
Pinnacle, (US) 1981
- Prime number
The 8th annual of the year's best
SF (Merril)
- Second orbit (Doherty)
- Faber 1972
N.E.L. 1976
Tor (US) 1981
Putnam (US) 1972
Berkley, (US) 1974
- Two tales and 8 tomorrows
Into the future (Yglesias)
- War with the robots
Fantastic Universe omnibus (Santesson)
Crime prevention in the 30th century
Souls in metal (Ashley)
- One step from Earth
The best of Harry Harrison
War with the robots
- The best of Harry Harrison
UK editions only
Granada (Panther Books) 1981
Bantam (US) 1981
New Dimensions 1 (Silverberg)
Best Science Fiction Stories of the Year
(Del Rey)
The Best Science Fiction Stores (anon)
The best of Harry Harrison
UK editions only
One step from Earth
The best science fiction stories (anon)
- Great SF Adventures (Shaw)
- Prime number
- Futura (Orbit Books) 1977
Dobson 1978
Harper (US) 1976
- Scribner (US) 1972
Sphere 1974
Davies 1972

HARRY HARRISON - STORY COLLECTIONS

The Best of Harry Harrison

The best of Harry Harrison

The men from P.I.G. & R.O.B.O.T. (Juvenile)

One step from Earth

Prime number

Two tales and 8 tomorrows

War with the robots

Pocket Books (US) 1976

Sidgwick & Jackson,
1976 (on book but did not appear
until 1977)

Futura (Orbit Books) 1976
1975

SFBC (US) 1974

Faber 1974

Puffin Books 1978

Atheneum (US) 1978

Macmillan (US) 1970

Macmillan (US) (pubk) 1971

Collier (US) 1971

Faber 1972

Arrow 1975

Berkley (US) 1970

Sphere 1975

Gollancz 1965

Bantam (US) 1968

Sphere 1976

Pyramid (US) 1962

Dobson 1967

Panther 1976

The Streets of Ashkelon;
Captain Horatio Harpplayer, R.N.;
Rescue Operation; At last, the true story
of Frankenstein; I always do what Teddy
says; Portrait of the artist; Not me, not
Amos Cabot; Mute Milton; A criminal act;
Waiting place; If; I have my vigil;
From fanaticism, or for reward;
By the falls, The ever-branching tree;
Brave newer world; Roommates;
The mothballed spaceship;
An honest day's work;
Space rats of the C.C.C. (20)

Contents as above, *except*
deleted: Not me, not Amos Cabot!
added: The wicked flee; We ate the whole
thing(21)
Deathworld 3 (3)

The man from P.I.G.

The man from R.O.B.O.T. (2)

One step from Earth; Pressure; No war;
or battle's sound; Wife to the lord;
Waiting place; The life preservers;
From fanaticism, or for reward;
Heavy duty; A tale of the ending (9)

Mute Milton; The greatest car in the
world; The final battle; The powers of
observation; The ghoul squad; Toy shop;
You men of violence; The finest hunter
in the world; Down to earth;
Commando raid; Not me, not Amos Cabot!
The secret of Stonehenge;
Incident in the IND; IF; Contact man;
The pad; A civil service servant;
A criminal act; Famous first words (19)

The streets of Ashkelon;
Portrait of the artist;
Rescue operation; Captain Bedlam;
Final encounter; Unto my manifold dooms;
The pliable animal; Captain Horatio
Harpplayer R.N.; According to his
abilities; I always do what Teddy says (10)

Simulated trainer; The velvet glove;
Arm of the law; The robot who wanted
to know; I see you;
The repairman; Survival planet;
War with the robots (8)

HARRY HARRISON: ANTHOLOGIES (Single editor)

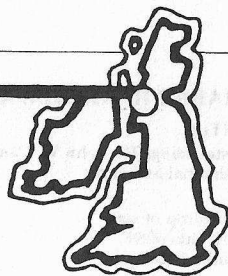
TITLE	PUBLISHER	NO. OF STORIES
Astounding: The John W. Campbell memorial anthology	Random House (US) 1973 SFBC (US) 1974 Ballantine (US) 1974	Thirteen
Backdrop of stars (UK title of: SF: Author's Choice)	Dobson 1968 N.E.L. 1975	Thirteen
Blast off: Science fiction for boys	Faber 1969	Twelve
Four for the future: an anthology on the themes of sacrifice and redemption	Macmillan (US) 1969 Macdonald 1969 Quartet, 1974	Eight
The John W. Campbell memorial anthology (UK title for "Astounding....")	Sidgwick & Jackson 1974 Sphere 1975	Thirteen
The light fantastic: science fiction classics from the mainstream	Scribner (US) 1971	Thirteen
Nova One	Delacorte (US) 1970 SFBC (US) 1970 Dell (US) 1971	Fifteen
Nova 1	Sphere 1975 Hale 1976	Twelve
Nova 2	Walker (US) 1972 SFBC (US) 1972 Dell (US) 1974 Sphere 1975 Hale 1976	Fourteen
Nova 3	Walker (US) 1973 Sphere 1975 Hale 1977	Thirteen
Nova 4	Walker (US) 1974 Manor (US) 1975 Sphere 1976 Hale 1977	Twelve plus one article
The outdated man (Title change from "Nova 3")	Dell (US) 1975	Thirteen
S.F. Authors' choice	Berkley (US) 1968	Thirteen
SF: Author's choice	Berkley (US) 1970	Twelve
SF: Author's choice	Putnam (US) 1971 Berkley (US) 1973	Thirteen
SF: Author's choice	Putnam (US) 1974 SFBC (US) 1974 Berkley (US) 1974	Fifteen
Worlds of wonder: 16 tales of science fiction (Juvenile)	Doubleday (US) 1969	Sixteen
The year 2000	Doubleday (US) 1970 SFBC (US) 1970 Faber 1971 Berkley (US) 1972	Thirteen

HARRY HARRISON - NON-FICTION BOOKS

Great balls of fire: A history of sex in SF illustration	Pierrot 1977
Mechanismo (machinery as portrayed in SF)	Pierrot 1978
Spacecraft in fact and fiction (with Malcolm Edwards)	Orbis 1979

GORDON JOHNSTON

FAIRCON '82



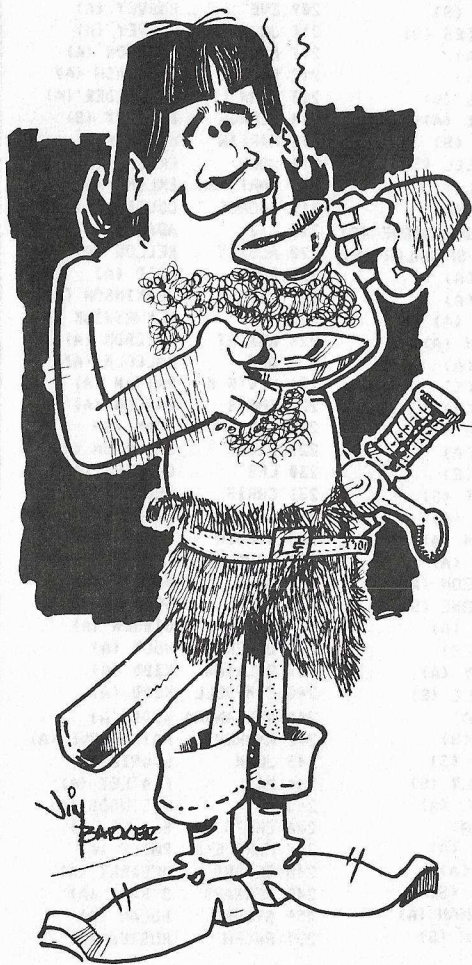
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86 J	ARMSTRONG (S)	142 DAVID R	SMITH (A)	198 PAULA	LUNDIE (S)
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89 DEREK	CUNNINGHAM (S)	145 DAVID	CARLILE (A)	201 MICHAEL	MURDOCH (A)
90 ALEX G	TAYLOR (S)	146 DEREK	CAMERON (A)	202 DOUGLAS C	MASON (A)
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93 GEORGE	BARRIE (A)	149 MICHAEL	JOHNSTONE (S)	205 MARK TONER'S	FRIEND (S)
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97 EWEN	MAINS (A)	153 JAMES	MCORRY (S)	209 EVE	HARVEY (A)
98 JIM	DARROCH (S)	154 BILLY	HUMPHRIES (S)	210 JOHN	HARVEY (A)
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113 PAUL R	NORTHWAY (A)	169 MICHAEL	SMITH (A)	225 DON	MALCOLM (A)
114 ANDREW	IRVINE (A)	170 RAY	SMITH (S)	226 KEVIN K	RATTAN (A)
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116 L R	GRAY (S)	172 STUART	MURDOCH (A)	228 LAURENCE	DEAN (S)
117 R	DYER (A)	173 CLARE	CONY (A)	229 DAVID	HASHPTON (A)
118 PAT	SUEENEY (A)	174 JANET	LOHAS (S)	230 LES	CHESTER (A)
119 N	RANSAY (A)	175 HELEN	STEWART (S)	231 CHRIS	SELLER (A)
120 STAN	ELING (A)	176 DAVID	IRVINE (A)	232 MARK ER	PAICE (A)
121 HELEN	ELING (A)	177 CRAIG	TULLOCH (A)	233 STEVEN	LAWSOON (A)
122 ELENOR	EVANS (S)	178 IAIN	FRENCH (A)	234 DOUGLAS	CAMPBELL (A)
123 GRAHAM	HEAD (A)	179 ANDY	ROBERTSON (A)	235 A	NOFFAT (S)
124 ALAN	JEFFREY (S)	180 JACOB S	JOHNSTONE (S)	236 CLARE A	GOLDMAN (A)
125 NAVEED	KHAN (S)	181 MARY	KEENEY (A)	237 IRIS	GIBSON (A)
126 KATHY	WESTHEAD (S)	182 ARTHUR	SMITH (S)	238 DEREK	HOLT (A)
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128 DAVID	CLARK (A)	184 STUART	CAMPBELL (S)	240 CAMPBELL	KIDD (A)
129 PAUL	PAULINI (A)	185 JIM	MANN (A)	241 ALEXANDRA	KIDD (A)
130 PAT	MACLENNAN (S)	186 PETER	COHEN (S)	242 ANDREW	FAIRGRIEVE (A)
131 BILL	MORRIS (S)	187 STEPHEN	DAVIES (S)	243 JOHN	LAURIE (A)
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138 RICHARD	HOLT (A)	194 HOWARD	SINGERMAN (A)	250 STEVEN	DOLAN (A)
139 PETER	HOLT (A)	195 HOWARD	SWAFFER (S)	251 RALPH	HUSTON (A)

*WHEN YOU'VE BEEN OUT ALL DAY,
SLAUGHTERING WIZARDS, BUTCHERING
BARBARIANS, RAVAGING THE ODD
SLAVE GIRL OR THREE... THERE'S
NOTHING LIKE COMING HOME TO
THE RICH, ROASTED, FLAVOUR-
LOCKED TASTE OF...*



This is going to be a serious critical discussion. Despite repeated plunges into the ludicrous, it has a serious premise and serious conclusions, and it's only the stages between that are completely preposterous. Among the burning questions I propose to resolve are what makes people addicted to sf, why they go off it in their twenties or thereabouts, why British sf is so much better than American sf, why science fiction is such a revolutionary development in the genesis of culture; and, quite incidentally, what is the *real* secret of the Lensman's powers, and what is the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.

How is this possible? The answer lies with a humble everyday commodity freely available over the counter, without prescription, at your local hypermarket. Its nature will become apparent shortly; for tactical reasons, I'd prefer to leave the main theme of this article, and my enigmatic title, unexplained for a page or two, and allow awareness to dawn gently and gradually. Sufficient for now to boast the discovery of the ultimate key to sf criticism, the formula that at last will enable you to distinguish shitty sf without having to read it! (Readers unable to contain their excitement may turn at once to section II.). The general shape of my argument is that of the classic mind-expanding sf plot, a pattern observed in a great many epics including *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and in fact any story in which you start with a snotty little shepherd-boy minding his flocks on a scrubby island in a bog on some god-forsaken planet in a particularly insignificant backwater of the Lesser Magellanic Cloud, who by the end of the book is Emperor of a Billion Universes. I'd like to lead you on a voyage of discovery that starts with a tiny,

The black wine of Thentis

NICK LOWE

apparently trivial and insignificant detail, and then little by little explores its ramifications out to infinity in all directions, until we arrive together at a total understanding of the universe and its contents.

I'd like to start by examining an intriguing trend in sf publishing and criticism that I don't believe has received much comment. One of the great traditions of sf publishing is the anthology, which served as the original medium through which science fiction made the transition from pulp magazines to hardcover books, and thereby from trivial sub-literature to respectable reading matter. The sf anthology is a marvellous institution, and I think goes some way towards explaining how young people get hooked into the genre in the first place. The really classic sf stories are so widely anthologised that they never go out of print; so that no matter when you start reading sf you can be sure of reading most of the cream of the genre's short fiction within your first year. It's surely because of this that sf fans tend to read fewer and fewer anthologies as they get older - it's not necessarily that the novels are more satisfying, but that as time goes by you encounter fewer and fewer really wizzo stories you've never seen before.

But all this only really applies to one particular kind of sf anthology, the **Ten Extremely Good SF Stories** type of collection. The trouble with this sort of anthology is precisely that I've just described: after a while your average sf reader will stop buying this sort of collection because he's read all the stories. The number of extremely good sf stories, after all, while large is assuredly finite. What you really want, from the publisher's point of view, is a strategy that will generate anthologies without limiting the selection to that narrow pool of first-

rate stories, and then you have a kind of anthology that the readers will continue to buy. There are two ways you can do this. Either you can fill your anthologies with new stories, which could be newly commissioned writing or could be a year's-best selection; or you can try and find a way to sell those existing stories that are not first-rate.

Well, both of these trends got going in the very early days of sf book publishing, but only escalated beyond all proportion in the 1970's. The great pioneer of the sf anthology was the unforgettably-named Groff Conklin, who edited most of the best collections from the mid-forties to the mid-sixties, and the Conklin anthologies are still a superb introduction to the sf of the period. But it's interesting to observe the change in his style of anthologising over the course of his career. All the early collections have titles like **The Best of Science Fiction**, **A Treasury of Science Fiction**, **The Big Book of Science Fiction**, and so forth. But when you get on to the anthologies published in the fifties, you witness the emergence of a new ruse in sf publishing, as Conklin lights upon a way of selling collections of stories that aren't necessarily the best, or at least have a different sort of publishing hook from that of mere excellence. Some titles from this period: **Invaders of the Earth**, **Science Fiction Thinking Machines**, **Great Science Fiction about Doctors**, and the marvellously cackhanded **Science Fiction Adventures in Mutation**.

Notice the change? These were the first of that extraordinary, because almost entirely pointless, breed of book, the science fiction theme anthology. I can't imagine anyone being so interested in stories about mutants as to want to buy whole books full of the wretched things; and I

think you have to account for the enormous proliferation of theme anthologies in the seventies, under editors like Elwood, Silverberg, Olander and Greenberg, as a simple publishing gimmick to give the collections some coherence and individuality. There may, of course, be odd cases where a particular reader has a particular interest in one particular sf theme for personal or professional reasons, but that's a pretty slender justification for a mass-market paperback. You can't sell a book like **Great SF about Doctors** if the only people who are going to buy it are sf-reading doctors. Look through your shelves, and count how many of your theme anthologies you bought out of an interest in the theme, rather than because you looked through the contents and found enough interesting-looking stories to warrant buying the lot.

Obviously this is a problem, and in the USA in the early seventies an ingenious new justification for theme anthologies began to emerge: that science fiction stories could be used as teaching aids, that the speculative ideas offered in sf could be genuinely educational. The first theme anthology to advance this daring proposal was Stover and Harrison's **Apeman, Spaceman** of 1968, but the editors who gave it most prolific exploitation were the academic team of Joseph Olander and Harry Greenberg, sometimes with specialised collaborators. Their early collections had titles like **Sociology**, or **Anthropology**, or **Introductory Psychology**, or **American Government**, or whatever, through **Science Fiction**, though the subjects got progressively less academic and more blatantly commercial as the enterprise grew more profitable. And during the same period you find sf criticism taking an interest in Themes of Relevance and what sf had to say about them, beginning with books like Brian Ash's **Faces of the Future** and culminating in the ambitious theme entries in the SF Encyclopedia.

The trouble is, I feel, that the usefulness of sf criticism by theme is seriously misconceived. I don't dispute that reading science fiction can be instructive and enlightening, but I'd like to suggest that the power and originality of the speculation is pretty well irrelevant to this function. You see, my own feeling is that sf isn't really all that good at speculation on themes that concern the real, scientific world, not in the sense that you'll learn something about sociology by reading the complete works of Mack Reynolds. It's surely significant that theme anthologies on the soft sciences far outnumber those that claim to teach physics, say, or biochemistry. Unless you count collections about black holes and gas giants, I

can't think of any, despite the fact that current scientific speculation in these fields is far more extravagant and exciting than in political science or anthropology. And I can only suggest that the reason is that science fiction can't really compete with professional scientists in a field that values wide-ranging, imaginative speculation within the discipline.

What sf has to contribute, to my mind, is not **having** the ideas so much as **dramatising** them in scenario form, and getting you to develop an appreciation of current ideas in (say) sociology by involving you emotionally with characters on whom those ideas have an immediate and shocking impact. As an intellectual exploration of the theme of a hermaphrodite society, **The Left Hand of Darkness** is hopelessly outclassed by Theodore Sturgeon's earlier and consistently underrated **Venus Plus X**. But who would dare to suggest that Le Guin's is anything but the definitive treatment of the theme? The reason, surely, is that where Sturgeon argues, Le Guin evokes. Sturgeon's novel is explicit, articulate, polemical, seeking to persuade by thought rather than feeling; Le Guin wins the reader over to her ideas by making the world and the characters seductive, and the reader's involvement principally is an emotional one. For all that sf's vaunted as a literature of ideas, I don't find, in my own reading, that the quality of the ideas, the speculation, is nearly as important as getting the reader to **feel** things.

This is why I feel theme criticism is so misconceived, and theme anthologies so desperately boring. The interest I find in looking through the theme entries in the SF Encyclopedia is for the ideas that haven't been tried, the very limitations imposed on speculation by the nature of the sf medium. It's possible to paint a pretty convincing picture of anything up to, say, fifty years in the future by extrapolation from what is currently known; anything beyond that, and there seems an extraordinary dearth of really imaginative and convincing ideas on what the world, or the galaxy, is actually going to look like. What the sf theme-chasers seem to have overlooked is that following a theme through tells you much more about the genre than about the subject. In the social sciences, in particular, sf extrapolation is pitifully weak, with all these prepoterous galactic empires and neo-feudal societies dotting the universe simply because writers can't seem to imagine a social setup radically alien to anything in human history. Looking through, for example, the SF Encyclopedia entry on "Anthropology" won't tell

you bugger all about anthropology, at least not as it is studied in today's universities; what it will tell you, most instructively, is about the way sf writers think, the kind of ideas they've favoured over the decades, and also the kind of imaginative leap that seems beyond them.

Right. We are now ready to get silly. It follows from the above argument that the chief value of looking at particular themes in sf is to understand the genre rather than the theme. There is consequently no pressing reason why we should restrict our studies to themes of social or scientific importance, or to those which constitute the overt subject of stories. In fact, there's a lot more to be gleaned about how sf works from looking at the themes the authors don't give much thought to, and which make frequent but purely incidental appearances in science fiction.

What I should like to do now is to take a look at one of the sf's most popular and, I feel, most significant themes; one which, despite its ubiquity, has received no critical attention at all until now. Regard it, if you like, as first notes towards the forerunner of a new wave of theme anthologies, the first to be truly relevant to the understanding of sf today.

II

Consider the following passage (slightly condensed) from John Norman's *Assassin of Gor*. *Assassin* was the fifth Gor novel, and the first of the really bad ones. It seems incredible now that the Gor series could ever have been quite good, but when I was at school I really lapped them up, and I can distinctly remember the moment in volume five when the great nosedive into awfulness began. Here it is:

Elizabeth lifted her head, sniffing. I did so, too, scarcely believing my nose. She looked at me, and I looked at her. A girl slave in a white tunic and white collar, barefoot, came to the table, and knelt before it.

"What is that I smell?," I asked.

"Black wine," said she, "from the mountains of Thentis."

"Bring two bowls," I said.

In short order two bowls, steam curling out of them, were brought and placed on the table.

I sat there staring down at them, and Elizabeth did, too. Then I picked up one of the thick, heavy clay bowls. Since no one was looking, we knocked the bowls together gently, and put them to our lips.

It was extremely strong, and bitter, but it was hot, and, unmistakably, it was coffee.

A profound moment. On a savage world two hundred million miles from Earth, where men are men and women are big-breasted voluntary doormat substitutes, Mr. Norman has managed to get his hero a cup of coffee.

Nothing flows so strong in a writer's veins as coffee. It is his elixir; it is the life-blood of his muse. The contribution made to the evolution of sf as a major force in 20th-century literature by such as Gernsback or Campbell surely pales into insignificance beside the contribution made by Nestlé Ltd. If there wasn't any coffee, there probably wouldn't be any sf. Let's face it; if your life revolves around sitting at a typewriter from 9 to 5 hacking out wordage at n cents a line, what is going to be the theme that is ever at the forefront of your mind? The effect of corporate growth on the individual consumer in the year 2020? philosophical and ethical implications of recombinant-DNA research? the psychology and politics of artificial intelligence? Not a bit of it. It's **"Christ, I could use a cup of coffee...."**

I don't say all sf authors depend for their inspiration wholly or partly on chemical stimulation; obviously not. Even those that do have other recourses than caffeine; I've heard Edmund Cooper explain how when his creativity is burning white-hot he can get through a gin-and-tonic every fifteen minutes. But coffee is the drug that's most socially sanctioned and acceptable, particularly in America, and that's why I've chosen to explore it as one of sf's great unstated obsessions.

You see, disillusioning as all this may be to someone with a romantic notion of sf authors as godlike disembodied intelligences creating Art out of pure Form, it's only actually embarrassing when it starts to creep into the text. Picture, if you will, well-known sword-and-sorcery series writer Joe Normal blearily hunched over his word processor wondering what the bloody hell to have happen next. He reaches gloomily for his coffee-cup, lifts it partway to his lips; stops shorts; stares at it, with a new fire of inspiration in his gaze! Greedily he drains the cup and dashes it back on the saucer, then begins to type as though possessed. Two hundred words flow from his pregnant brain; then, sweating, he pauses, reads it back. Marvellous. His hero is now stoked up with strong black coffee, and can keep going for pages more...**Ah**. We need to explain what that cup of coffee was doing there in the first place. Not to worry; bluff like mad, and hope the reader doesn't notice....

We now return to Mr. John Norman, who naturally bears no resemblance to the character just described, at the point where we left him a moment back:

"Actually," I said to Elizabeth, "this is very rare. Thentis does not trade the beans for black wine. I have heard of a cup of black wine in Ar, some years ago, selling for a silver eighty-piece. Even in Thentis black wine is used commonly only in High Caste homes."

"Perhaps it is from Earth?" she asked. (Spot the feed line.)

"Originally, doubtless, beans were brought from Earth," I said, "much as certain other seeds, and silk worms and such."

I should explain that last, rather mystifying reference. Mr. Norman earlier on in the series rashly indulged his own fetishistic imagination by dressing all his women up in diaphanous silks; the waitress in the above passage wears white silk, indicating she is a virgin, as appropriate to the solemnity of her role in the scene. But having once saturated his alien world with silks, he found himself having to explain how they came to be there.

I think what's so essentially ludicrous about this and many other coffee scenes in science fiction (lots more below) is its marvellous plummet into bathos and incongruity. What is the real likelihood, after all, of there being coffee on other worlds, or thousands of years in the future? You could make out a plausible enough case for alcohol, because it's already got several thousand years' pedigree behind it and shows no sign of going away; and alcoholic beverages depend upon one simple chemical constituent which occurs freely in nature and is easy to distil. But coffee has only been known in the west for about 250 years; it's a whole plant, not a single chemical, and the plant is notoriously difficult to grow, requiring very special climatic conditions, and even worse to try and transplant over long distances like a few hundred miles, let alone a billion light-years. Moreover, the main institutions through which you'll find coffee served up in tales of distant worlds and times are the coffee break and the coffee bar, which aren't exactly what you could call universal constants of human civilisation. On the contrary; they're particular excrescences of America in the twentieth century, and to extrapolate coffee bars and coffee breaks into the future and the universe at large is to make the implicit statement that mankind has, in

western capitalism in its present form, reached the ultimate stage in the development of civilisation. Oddly enough, there is a substantial and widely-read body of sf writing which takes that assumption more or less for granted. I'll have more to say about that shortly.

The main trouble is, as I suggested earlier, that it's extremely difficult to serve up a speculative scenario further away than about fifty years in Earth's future that will convince a reader of any real sophistication that that's what it might really be like. And when you go so far as to posit that, by the time your story's set, mankind has developed an interplanetary or interstellar civilisation, the idea that they'll all be still sitting around cafe tables sipping Lyons Brazilian Blend is daft enough to make your brain pop out of your head and fly around the room bumping into things and dribbling.

Let's examine a very specific case that actually names the strain of coffee. I think this is the only example I've got here of coffee madness in an author who could reasonably be called good; it's from Theodore Sturgeon's famous **Dangerous Visions** story "If All Men were Brothers, Would you Let One Marry your Sister?". The hero is intrigued by a number of individually small but cumulatively suggestive clues that seem to indicate a cover-up of cosmic proportions:

I guess I could have forgotten that too but for the coffee beans. Blue Mountain Coffee, it was called; the label claimed it descended in an unbroken line from Old Earth, on an island called Jamaica....I liked it better than any coffee I ever tasted but when I went back for more they were sold out. I got the manager to look in the records and traced it back through the Teratu wholesaler to the broker and then to the importer - I mean I really liked that coffee!

Well, the coffee in question, as you no doubt remember, comes from shunned Vexvelt, the utopian planet whose paradisaical blessings all emanate from the fact that there is no incest taboo. It's not the least flaw in the story's reasoning that Sturgeon nowhere explains how sucking and fucking your nearest and dearest will enable you to grow Blue Mountain Coffee, but that's not really the point I'm interested in here. I'd just like to spend a few lines looking at the implications of this passage for the image of the future Sturgeon is presenting. First of all, Blue Mountain Coffee is not a single

strain or a single quality-grade of coffee - there's no equivalent in the world coffee market to an **appellation controllee**. Strictly speaking, the name only applies to a general area in Jamaica (the Blue Mountains), which has its great coffees and its occasional bums like everywhere else. The legendary Blue Mountain coffee, the one that really is better than anything else in the universe, comes from one smallish plantation in that Blue Mountain district. It's called the Wallensford Estate, it produces a mere eighty tons of coffee a year, and almost all of its shipment goes to Japan. I very much doubt whether Mr. Sturgeon has ever tasted it, and I certainly haven't. What you buy in your local coffee shop under the name Blue Mountain could be almost anything. If it says "pure Blue Mountain", it is shipped through Langford Brothers of London, and costs about twice what other coffees go for, it's a rather good if overpriced blend of coffees from a number of small family plantations in the Jamaican Blue Mountains. Otherwise, you'll be lucky if it has any Blue Mountain coffee in it at all; it's most probably a rather ordinary coffee grown elsewhere on the island, and quite likely (especially if it's called "Blue Mountain Blend" or somesuch) eked out with some foreign muck from god knows where. In North America "Blue Mountain" usually means a blend of Jamaican and West Indian coffees, no more. So first of all Sturgeon is asking us to believe that the name Blue Mountain will mean something by the time man is reaching out to the stars.

Okay. Now consider how you get the stuff to Vexvelt. You can't generally grow coffee plants from beans (as John Norman seemed to suggest) unless they're very fresh (like straight off the tree) and you plant an awful lot of them to make sure. On the other hand, the trees themselves aren't very hardy in anything but perfectly tropical conditions, and you'd have to be pretty jammy to get a plant or a cutting to survive a long space voyage. When you finally get to Vexvelt, you'll need to find soil, altitude, and climate exactly equivalent to those of the Blue Mountains, or else however noble your strain of tree it won't taste like Jamaican. Finally, a vitally important factor in what makes any particular coffee taste its distinctive taste is the way it's harvested. For something as high-grade as Jamaican Blue Mountain this is a very labour-intensive process, and could hardly be managed without a large workforce of uncomplaining human beings. Perhaps Sturgeon would have us credit that people wouldn't mind working on coffee plantations so much if they could look forward to knocking off their sister when they get home.

I hope this begins to illustrate my point about the difficulty of extrapolation beyond the near future. Every little detail of food, drink, clothing, manners, society and culture, as well as simply of technology, is an implicit statement of the way you think human history's going to go. The further forward you look, the more such details you have to think about if you're going to get readers to acquiesce in your fantasy. From this point of view, giving your hero a thermos of steaming coffee says considerably more about the universe than, say, giving him a warp drive.

Let's look at another example. Remember the scene in *The Mote in God's Eye* where the humans are treating the aliens to a coffee-tasting party and mysterious things start happening to the percolator? Now, I admit that if the characteristic Pournelle military ethos, so excruciatingly clean-cut and all-American, can represent as it does in this novel the apogee of civilisation, then almost anything can seem credible, and be overlooked. But just think a minute about these percolators. You know how a coffee percolator works: boiling water is forced by steam pressure up a tube in the middle of the assembly, and then it soaks back down through a basket of coffee grounds, and the cycle is repeated under thermostat control. But, in spite of the continuing popularity of the perk, particularly with elder relatives at weddings, it's one of the worst ways to treat your coffee you could find. Percolated coffee has been boiled and reboiled dozens of times over; and unlike tea, coffee owes most of the subtlety of its flavour to some extremely volatile oils that vapourise on boiling. That's why, unlike tea, you shouldn't make coffee with boiling water, and why percolated coffee comes out as a kind of stewed yuk ranging from the indeterminate to the undrinkable. Now, I ask you, is it really conceivable that a galactic civilisation so advanced as to include an entire planet of Scots would have evolved no superior coffee-brewing hardware with which to showcase the coffees of Old Earth to an alien species than the percolator? I honestly don't believe you could even tell apart the various gourmet coffees listed in the test (including the ubiquitous Blue Mountain) in percolated form.

These people just don't **think**. I can imagine Niven and Pournelle sitting round thrashing out the plot, and wondering what to do for this scene, and then their eyes meet over the percolator.....I think, in fact, that Niven and Pournelle between them must be responsible for the highest rate of caffeine intake per galactic caput than any other sf writers. A couple of weeks before I first wrote this, as a controlled experiment, I took down from a friend's

bookshelf Jerry Pournelle's **Future History**, a book about which I knew nothing previously and which I had never so much as opened. Noting the grandiose title, which in effect declares that this is the way Pournelle sees the human race developing, I asked an assistant to start timing, opened the book, and started to leaf through. I found the first reference to coffee within thirty seconds. There's a lot of it drunk in Niven, too; it's freely available in the Known Space tableau of the future, for example.

I don't believe it's any accident that high coffee consumption correlates well with a particular school of sf writing that comprises a number of writers I rather dislike, such as Niven and Pournelle, Poul Anderson, Gordon Dickson, and of course Robert Heinlein - what might be thought of as the Analog Military Academy, being a confraternity of right-wing American authors with an enthusiasm for technological expansion, economic opportunism, and a somewhat naive view of mankind's prospects in the universe at large. Coffee is, after all, a terrifically all-American drug; it peps you up in a fashion that is both clean (you have to ship an awful lot of caffeine, plus not go to the bathroom, before it does you any harm) and socially stigma-free, to give you that extra edge to push harder and compete better. It's an inseparable ingredient of capitalist living, in fact, and naturally you tend to encounter it in especially right-wing-Americanised futures, often (curiously enough) in conjunction with brandy. You flip through *The Avatars* - I certainly don't recommend you try and read it and watch what Dan Brodersen drinks; it's brandy and coffee, coffee and brandy, brandy, coffee, and more brandy, plus a great deal of bluff, smelly pipe-smoking besides. By contrast, can you think of any British sf story giving comparable prominence to tea, except in a deliberately comical way?

Let me illustrate what I mean with a glance at the drinking habits of that most blond and Nordic of all Aryan supermen, Kimball Kinnison - described in the blurb to **Second Stage Lensmen**, from which this quote is taken, as "Number One man of his time". This is how Kinnison recovers from the near-total nervous collapse following his narrow defeat of a rogue Arisian brain:

The Lensman made his way to the galley. He could walk without staggering already - fine! There he fired himself a big, thick, rare steak - his never-failing remedy for all the ills to which flesh is heir - and brewed a pot of Thralian coffee; making it viciously, almost corrosively strong. And as he ate and drank his head cleared magically. Strength flowed back

into him in waves. His Lens flamed into its normal splendor...

(For the Lens as phallus see any number of as yet unwritten psychoanalytical exposés.).

.....He stretched prodigiously; inhaled gratefully a few deep breaths. He was QX.

QX being superintelligent slang for OK, of course. Thralian coffee is presumably like Blue Mountain, only more so; on this kind of mindless substitution, more anon. But notice how Kinnison takes his coffee like a man: "viciously, almost corrosively strong". A lesser human would no doubt be reduced to a quivering jelly, but Kim Kinnison is so completely all-American that he takes coffee like the magic bullet wonder drug we'd all like it to be. He must have a bladder of steel, that's all I can say. Compare the diet of Oscar Gordon in *Glory Road*, prepared him by his liberated Amazon lady-friend:

"Breakfast later," she said. "Just a cup of coffee for you now- too hot and too black. Best you be bad-tempered."

Sticking with Smith, we find the medicinal properties of coffee even more prominent in *The Galaxy Primes*, in which characters aren't allowed out of their cabins in the morning and into the story until they've downed a pot of coffee. I'm not kidding: five out of eight chapters open with a direct or implicit act of coffee-drinking. A couple of examples:

Next morning, Galock was the last one, by a fraction of a minute, into the Main. "Good morning," was all he said, with a slight smile.

"Huh? How come?" James demanded, as all four started toward the dining nook.

Garlock's smile widened. "Lola. She brought me a pot of coffee and wouldn't let me out till I drank it."

Or again, at a more intense juncture of the novel's subtle interplay of character:

Next morning, early, Belle tapped lightly on Garlock's door.

"Come in."

She did so. "Have you had your coffee?"

"Yes."

"So have I."

Neither Belle nor Garlock had recovered; both faces showed strain and drain.

"I think we'd better break this up," she said quietly.

As you see, for many characters the cup that refreshes is an emotional need. Here's another sobering document of the problem of caffeine addiction in the year 3000; it's from Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship who Sang* in which Helva the spaceship with a heart of gold is having a trying time with yet another mismatched human partner.



I suppose it's labouring the obvious to point out that *The Ship who Sang* is a sweet, tasteful, blissfully platonic essay on the female orgasm; in which woman is a frustrated vessel, man is the pilot she needs to mount her and ride her to the stars, and it's only when after many disappointments she finds at last the perfect partner that she gives triumphant voice to the rapture of passionate song that wells Julie-Andrews-like within her. At any rate, here's one of the less-than-perfect partners in the throes of his addiction:

"Have you any honest-to-God coffee?" he grated out, swivelling the chair to launch himself from it to the galley.

"Be my guest," murmured Helva, unprepared for such vigour after several days on Theeda.

Onro's shoulder took a bruising as he careered off the threshold of the galley, wrenched open the cupboards, knocking containers about.

"Coffee may still be in its accustomed place on the third shelf of the righthand locker," Helva remarked dryly. "Excuse me; a container just rolled on to the floor."

Onro retrieved it but cracked his head smartly on the corner of the cupboard door he had left open.....He gulped the now steaming hot coffee. Even as he swallowed, the springs in his taut frame began to unwind.

"Creatures of habit, aren't we, XH? I've been dreaming of coffee for 18 mortal days and nights."

Poor Onro. You can tell he's not going to be the one with whom Helva attains the bliss of perfect union; he can't even find his way around her body without bumping into things.

Notice how, in the Smith and McCaffrey examples, we aren't offered any explanation of why coffee is still a staple in the remote future; it's just assumed things will proceed pretty much as now, except that the coffee comes from a planet called Thralia instead of an island called Jamaica. Sometimes an author will try to sugar the unlikely brew with a different name, even though the drink's recognisably just coffee, and in a mysterious passage from Andre Norton's *Lord of Thunder* we're even told as much:

He went to the heating unit, measured out a portion of powdered 'swankee', the coffee of the Arzor ranges, and dialled the pot to three-minute service.

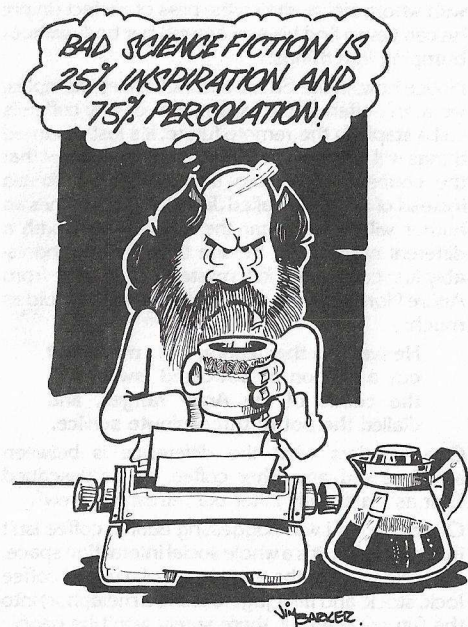
One wonders what the difference is between swankee and any other coffee, as it's described later as "a slightly bitter but refreshing brew".

Of course, as I was suggesting earlier, coffee isn't just a hot drink, it's a whole social interaction space. Can one transfer the experience of a cup of coffee lock, stock, and filter jug (to blend a metaphor) into the future? After all, there surely won't be people reduced to waiting tables in the metonymous cafés of the leisured interstellar age, so who can possibly serve up these metonymous cups of Java? Ah, but you reckon without the miracle science of robotics:

He turned to the robowaiter and ordered coffee for both of us, to keep us occupied until the others arrived. It would be fresh-brewed, of course. Sanders didn't tolerate instans or synthetics on his planet.....The coffee arrived then, two big steaming mugs accompanied by a pitcher of thick cream. It was very strong, and very hot, and very good. After weeks of spaceship synthetic, it was an awakening.

I can't tell whether that last phrase is meant as a joke or not; not being an enthusiast of George R.R. Martin's clodhopping attempts to write good prose,

I'm inclined to think it's unintentional. The robowaiters are on the first page of the *Song for Lya* collection, in the story "With Morning Comes Mistfall". I know some people rather like that story, but for me it was doomed, even apart from that insufferably wet and Martinish title, from that first page. Apart from the fact that the waiter's a robot, Martin's made no attempt to adapt his café to the remote future in which it's located. It might as well be Byres Road on a Wednesday morning.



In case the tenor of my argument is beginning to get obscured by all this murky brown gleurp, let me pause to recap. Whenever I read through an sf theme anthology or theme article, I'm much more struck by the general unimaginativeness, by what the authors haven't thought of, than by the ideas they have; and I'm sure many other readers feel the same way. I believe that this is best illustrated by studying an utterly trivial and banal theme that keeps surfacing in the literature, because it highlights with such depressing accuracy the ways in which a certain style of writer fails to think. I submit that no good sf story set in an age of interstellar travel has a cup of coffee in it; so all you have to do to find out whether a dubious-looking novel is worth reading or not is to flip through looking at what the characters have for breakfast. I find that with practice you can do this pretty fast.

III

Consider, after all, why it is that people enjoy science fiction at all, why they get hooked, and why they inevitably become dissatisfied with it later in life (without, I hope, giving it up altogether). This may seem a rather large question, but I don't think the answer is necessarily all that complex. One can argue that what first grabs is the speculation, the intellectual fascination of dramatised thought-experiments about the nature of things, but that's surely something that comes in later. For the young - say thirteen-year-old - reader, it's the entertainment and exhilaration that count more than the ideas, and most especially a kind of satisfaction you can get from science fiction and from no other reading; that of **having your mind boggled**. In your teens you may find your mind most effectively blown by Asimov or Heinlein; in your twenties you'll be more likely to seek the same experience through Cordwainer Smith or Ian Watson. But it's essentially the same kind of satisfaction you look for every time you pick up an sf book; the sensation of having your consciousness stretched to infinity in all directions. As one's sf reading career goes on, it's an experience that comes less and less, partly because you've read all the truly mind-expanding stuff and there isn't really an awful lot of it, and partly because you inevitably get more critical as you read more. But can you think back to when you first read Asimov, with all those marvellous titles suggestive of cosmic immensity - *Pebble in the Sky*, *The Stars Like Dust*, *The End of Eternity*, *The Currents of Space*? The breath-halting vistas those phrases conjure up, and did conjure up for me as a pre-teen reader, dissolve away utterly when you go back and reread them, and find that they're actually pretty run-of-the-mill adventures, with a lot of talk and not much real epic sweep, and that most of the images you most vividly remember owed more to your own imagination than to the printed text. You can't believe in the Galactic Empire any more, when you realise Asimov's still got all his characters smoking cigarettes and the women (I noticed the other day) carrying handbags.

This feeling of God-I-must-be-getting-old came home to me with particular suddenness recently when I was arguing with a friend about *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*, which I feel is about as bad a book as ever got nominated for the Hugo (except for 1981's other nominees), and he said, "But didn't you feel a sense of wonder?" And I stopped short, and tried to think of any authors who'd made me live that beautiful old cliché in the last year or two.

And the only authors I could think of still writing books that make me think **wow**, this is COSMIC are three notorious eccentrics: Ian Watson, though much of his boggling technique is rather too intellectual to count properly; Barrington Bayley, who has a gloriously unbridled imagination but couldn't write his way out of a Safeway bag; and the amazing but as yet rather neglected Rudy Rucker, who looks to be the best new talent on the scene for years despite being an evident mental case of hyperDickian proportions.

So I sat down and tried to compile a notional theme anthology of truly mind-boggling sf stories, the stuff I can read and reread and still think **WOW.....** So far as I know this has never been done, though I have a dim recollection of a Silverberg anthology of stories of the very distant future, which I can't seem to trace in the Encyclopedia. It does mention that Harry Harrison tried to commission a bookfull of new stories on the theme and didn't get enough. At any rate, I think you could just about fill one collection, no more, with the existing material - not counting novels, of course. Apart from several Bayleys that might make the grade, there's things like Damon Knight's "Ticket to Anywhere" (the one about the guy who goes through a one-way teleport gate unearthed on Mars to see what happens, and finds himself embarked on a grand spiral in towards the centre of the galaxy); a number of Cordwainer Smith pieces but perhaps most especially "No, No, Not Rogov!" (in which a bit of petty cold war intrigue unforeseeably results in a glimpse of a single image from the year 13,582); Aldiss's "Old Hundredth", that marvellously elegiac evocation of Earth after man; Ballard's "The Waiting Grounds", about the character who stumbles on a megalithic site on a grotty dusthole planetoid that gives him a vision of the entire history of the universe, and where unseen aliens from all over the galaxy are furtively congregating to await some colossal cosmic event. I daresay most readers could add a couple more brainbusters of their own, the point remains that there are really astonishingly few such stories around. For all the claims that sf apologists make for the genre's mind-expanding powers, the science-fiction imagination seems virtually incapable of facing up to the cosmic immensities that ought to be its stamping-ground. Instead of soaring to the outer reaches of infinity, it keeps scuttling back to the hot drinks dispenser.

I don't mean to suggest that the only good sf is the stuff that grapples head-on with the vastness of space and time that is the most noteworthy feature

of the universe in which we live. I'm only surprised the theme's as rare as it is, particularly when compared to the volume of sf about something as brain-anaesthetisingly fatuous as coffee. Although you can find some very striking scenarios of the distant future in writers like Van Vogt, Cordwainer Smith, or Jack Vance (I don't mean just the Dying Earth stuff), I can only think of three authors who've made this theme, of getting to imaginative grips with the sheer expanse of space and of history, a central and explicit preoccupation in their writing. The most interesting, because he's the only one of the three with any real literary talent, is Brian Aldiss, most obviously in his story-cycles **Galaxies Like Grains of Sand** and **Starswarm** (what titles! anyone who wouldn't buy a book with a name like that, sight unseen, is getting middle-aged between the ears), but also in things like **Hothouse** and even **Enemies of the System**. (The cycle of linked stories is the traditional medium for this kind of sf, Simak's **City** being much the most successful and famous example. It's interesting to note that a number of caffeinate authors go in for this form - Heinlein's **Future History**, Niven's **Known Space**, and I daresay that wretched Pournelle book I mentioned earlier but couldn't bring myself to read.) You may remember Aldiss's definition of sf as the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe. I very much like that, not so much as a definition as a kind of manifesto, a statement of what all sf does to some extent and the best sf does in a big way, and therefore ought to be our priority in writing the stuff. It explains Aldiss's own ambitions very well.

The other two are dead authors Aldiss has expressed admiration for, William Hope Hodgson and (of course) Stapledon. I find it suggestive that these three figures are all British writers with little or no roots in the pulp magazines tradition, belonging rather to the Wellsian stream of speculative romance. Contrast this with the literary embarrassment, people like Niven and Pournelle, Heinlein, Anderson, McCaffrey, all authors deeply planted in the soil of genre magazine sf. I mean, can you imagine a Stapledon character with a fresh steaming mug of Java? "Then one sentient nebula ground the beans whilst another placed the filter in the drip-funnel; and for a period of about three stellar lifetimes they watched the coffee brew, cooling as it did so from a temperature of a billion degrees to a comfortably drinkable 3⁰K".

Of course, I'm not insisting that all sf writers should blush to their boots for shame, and go straight home and consign to the incinerator anything that isn't set on a timescale of a million centuries in an

arena the size of a galactic supercluster. That'd be to throw out the baby, the bathwater, the bath, and the Strathclyde Water Authority. But I do feel that the most exciting questions science fiction addresses are the really big ones, and most especially what will be the ultimate impact of mankind on the universe. I can't think of a more challenging imaginative thought-experiment in sf or for that matter at all, than to try and envisage what the human race will be like in a billion years from now, or how it'll end. SF has its own range of answers; extinction, usually in the near future, occasionally through some long-term cosmic or genetic disaster; unlimited expansion through the universe (a popular theme in American sf); expansion that levels out into a stable or stagnant configuration, or perhaps a cycle rise and fall of civilisations or even universes; or best of all, transcendent evolution into something greater, perhaps something beyond the comprehensible universe altogether. These are all immensely powerful ideas, the real stuff of visionary literature. Why isn't there more of it in what gets written? Because the writers are lazy and the readers are stupid? We all know that's not true. Not in this country, anyway.

I think it's partly due to our bloody great persecution complex. There's immense pressure on science fiction to prove its relevance by tackling themes of direct pertinence to the here-and-now (something, as I've suggested, most sf writers don't do particularly well), just so that the Sunday Times review sections will stick us in with the fiction instead of the science fiction. That's the height of the genre's serious literary aspirations, isn't it? to get a patronising nod from what we deferentially and rather self-consciously call "the mainstream". We ought to junk that word, honestly. It's the sort of bumlicking term that the ghetto applies to the metropolis beyond the walls. But, really, just because there's a wall between us and the rest of literature doesn't mean it's *us* that's in the ghetto.

Consider. All literature, says he, resorting to pompous and magisterial generalisations, has as its central theme the confrontation of man with the universe at large; but only science fiction has imaginative access to the whole of space and time. All the rest is stuck with a "universe" consisting of one snotty little planet and a load of stuck-up organic excrescences who have the audacity to think they are the universe. So I propose we chuck the term "mainstream" literature. It's time sf readers stopped being embarrassed by their relative uninterest in (not ignorance of; uninterest

in) literature outside the genre, shrugged the chip off their shoulders, and started thinking of earthbound literature as the ghetto.

After all, all earthbound literature can do to escape the rich but desperately constricting round of human beings and what they do to one another is to back up the blind alley of mysticism. This may be all right for some; religion is a dead easy way to find answers for difficult questions like what am I made of, why am I here, and what's out there beyond. But the lesson of the twentieth century is that a great many more questions have scientific answers than used to be believed, and that science therefore is entitled to get first crack at the real sods. It's becoming increasingly apparent that earthbound literature is no good for getting at the biggies. As soon as it starts looking beyond the earth, it gets stuck into either scientific speculation, which is sf, or unscientific speculation, which is mysticism. It can't even burrow inwards into its traditional preserve of human minds and feelings, because sf's acquired territorial rights over inner space as well thanks to the development of scientific approaches to sussing out the human psyche.

So for Christ's sake let's stop being embarrassed about never having read *Vanity Fair*, and get a bit more aggressive about the educational gaps of those gormless earthbounds. "You mean you've never read *Childhood's End*? but most educated people have read it three times before they're twelve!". "Haven't *heard* of Stapledon? Crumbs. You won't have heard of Dickens, them, either? Eh? Extraordinary not having heard of Stapledon, in that case. Did you go to school somewhere peculiar?" "Never tasted tequila?" Aw, come on. Next you'll be telling me you've never read anything by Lem, ha-ha. You *what*? Oh, sorry, bit slow catching on. I *thought* you must have been kidding about the tequila."

I firmly and sincerely believe that science fiction will inherit the literary universe. I'm sure you do too in your heart of hearts; it just seems too ludicrous a sentiment to voice when so much of it is so limited in its quality and aspirations. If we just took a bit more pride in sf's mission, we wouldn't have to tolerate all this stupid shit about coffee. "Black wine, from the mountains of Thentis". For God's sake, what are we *reading* this stuff for? Let us all engrave on our hearts those final deathless words of *Things to Come* (in slightly doctored form).

"All the universe - or a 4 oz. jar of Maxwell House! Which shall it be, Passworthy? Which shall it be?"

NICK LOWE

MACFAIRCON'S RANT

JOHN BRUNNER

Come all ye true-born SF fans wha in the north
dae dweel,
Wha ken the rovin' spacewoman an' rats o'
stainless steel -
Wi' Harrison an' Mitchison an' mony anither
guest
The Faircon held in eighty-twa is boon' tae be the
best.!

For Mitchison's a bonnie dame, she's famed the
world aroond,
Frae Argyll untae Africa her name is wide
renowned -
Wi' Harrison.....

An Harrison's a canny lad wha weirs a writer's
breeks,
In Ireland an' America they hearken when he
speaks -

(Spoken: Ye canna help it!)

Wi' Harrison.....

Sae tak' the low road or the high or tunnel 'neath
the sea
Tae jine wi' us in Glesca toon at ane braw
hostelry-
Wi' Harrison an' Mitchison and mony anither
guest
The Faircon held in eighty-twa is boon' tae be the
best!

G Sing Em Am D7 Guitar Chords

G G7 C D7 G Em

Am D7 G C D7 (end)

Chos. G D7

D7 Em Dmajor

Air: traditional, "Macpherson's Rant" as performed by Robin Hall and Roy Guest; the melody for the chorus is in the lower part.

To be sung in the manner of Alex Campbell, but soberer.

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LOVE AND MONEY

Ian Sorensen

One of the main problems in running a Science Fiction Convention is finance. Getting it, using it, trying to break even, resisting the temptation to run off with it. As Faircon's Treasurer I take a great interest in all of the above. Especially the first and last ones! This year I have given great thought to how to maximise Faircon's income. (The rest of the committee compete to maximise Faircon's expenditure). How do you get more people to go to the Convention? I was reminded of the following story.

Once upon a time there were two friends who won the pools. They decided to buy a pub, thinking that they couldn't do better as an investment. After all, everybody likes a drink now and again. Business, however, was much less than they had anticipated. So one day they sat down to work out what other type of business had a greater demand. Suddenly one of them jumped up saying "Why don't we open a brothel! It can't fail!". But his partner was more dubious. "Surely," he replied "if people won't buy drink, they'll never buy broth!"

This led me to think "what could attract more people than a science fiction convention in a luxury hotel?" The answer was a science fiction convention in a brothel! I was quite excited by this idea. I began planning the whole thing. The best brothels are, as everyone knows, in Paris. So Paris was to be the venue. But what to call it? Brothelcon lacked a certain something. Then I saw it. Hold it in a small Parisian brothel and it

would have to be called Soupéon.

When I put this to the rest of the committee they seemed less than enthusiastic (although a trip to Paris to check possible venues was thought to be a good idea). So, it was back to the drawing board. What would bring in more members than a science fiction convention in a luxury hotel? Changing the hotel hadn't worked, so how about changing the convention? What books outsell SF a hundred to one? Mills and Boon do. This was it! "Mills and Booncon"; no, "Romanticon". That was the name. Thousands of devoted readers would surely flock to the convention, eager to meet each other, meet authors, drink and swoon.

The more I thought about it the more it seemed a workable idea. Guest of Honour - Barbara Cartland; Fan Guest - Mary Whitehouse. The Main Programme would have films like 'Love Story', 'Brief Encounter', 'Dr. Zhivago', 'The Last Snows of Spring' and talks or panel discussions like 'My First Kiss', 'Should You Kiss on the First Date' and so on.

The Video Programme would show 'A Kind of Loving', 'Peyton Place', and, of course, 'Dallas'. If they were available then I'm sure old 'Dr. Kildare' shows would be a great success.

The Fancy Dress would be interesting. I'm sure it would require a 'Best Bodice' and 'Best Bodice Ripper' category. I'm quite looking forward to it. See you all next year at Romanticon '83.

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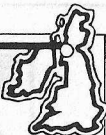
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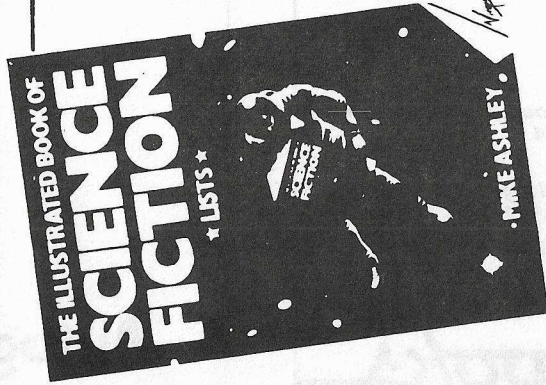
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