

tell us that the instability of the Sun affects the Earth's gravity; all silly mistakes. And in the same book we get, '... only one species [of spider] has ever been known to sting', which is as wrong a statement as he could have made. Spiders don't sting, they bite; and not one species, but all (as far as I know) bite. From a man who studied medicine and so, presumably, biology, this statement is surprising.

In *The Drought* I found the explanation of the cause of the drought quite clever, but was not happy at the uncompromising way Ballard dismissed the distillation plants as unworkable, while at the same time having them produce tons of salt a day. There must have been a considerable accompanying volume of water produced—and this was just one bit of the coast. Ballard's lack of basic physics jarred again when he had Ransom fill a bucket with water, which came out of the tap at a trickle—because there was no pressure. Yet there would have been as much pressure as there always had been.

And so on, and so on; irritating faults which make the reader squirm at the couldn't-care-less attitude of the author. There is no justification, no excuse, for mistakes of this nature; the facts are there to be checked—and why didn't Ballard do so?

(This article will be concluded in the March issue of *SF News*.)

THE FEBRUARY SFBC OPTIONAL BOOK

TRADER TO THE STARS by Poul Anderson

SFBC 8s 6d, post free (Gollancz 15s)

THE MARCH SFBC CHOICE IS

THE PARADOX MEN by Charles L. Harness

SFBC 7s (Faber 18s)

THE MARCH SFBC OPTIONAL BOOK

SPECTRUM IV

edited by Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest

SFBC 12s 6d, post free (Gollancz 21s)

PLEASE MAKE USE OF THE ORDER CARD ENCLOSED
WITH THIS NEWS

The April RU Optional Books

CHIVALRY by Léon Gautier

The April Extra Title

(From the introduction to the book by Jacques Levron)

'... In essence a study of the customs and usages of the Middle Ages, a definition which describes the exact nature of the work and sets its limits. [Gautier's] aim was to show the greatness of the Western knights, who defeated the barbarian and halted the Mussulman, as well as the virtues which they had to practise, and further, he wished, by dint of concrete examples from the old poems ... to present us with a picture of the daily life of the knight—his private and public life from the cradle to the grave. ... This life of a knight, unfolding before us like a richly worked tapestry, also serves the purpose of imparting to the reader a great deal of information on matters more or less bound up with the subject ... presented without the heaviness which pedantry would inflict.'

Many plates and illustrations.

SFBC 37s 6d (Phoenix House 55s)

THE BIRTH OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION: Greece and Rome

The April Special Title

Edited by Michael Grant

A BEAUTIFUL, thoroughly satisfying book which exemplifies the very best qualities in modern publishing. *The Birth of Western Civilization* is a work of excellent scholarship; it is also, in a purely visual sense, stimulating, elegant and often beautiful. The skill and care given to the composition of the whole volume, as a physical object, bring about a working—and most enjoyable—partnership between the eye and the mind. The text, consisting of eleven essays, and the many eloquent illustrations, survey with thoughtfulness and enthusiasm one of the most dynamic and fruitful periods in the history of the world—the era shaped and crowned by the achievements of Greece and Rome. 727 illustrations; 226 in colour, 501 photographs, drawings and maps. Bibliography and chronologies.

SFBC 96s, post free (Thames & Hudson £8 8s)

THE FEBRUARY OPTIONAL BOOKS

ASQUITH by Roy Jenkins 32s, post free (Collins 45s)

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH by J. G. Davies 30s, post free (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 50s)

THE MARCH OPTIONAL BOOKS

THE LAROUSSE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MODERN HISTORY 63s (Paul Hamlyn £4 4s)

THE ART OF HENRY MOORE by Will Grohmann 75s, post free (Thames & Hudson £6 6s)

COUNT BOHEMOND by Alfred Duggan 8s, post free (Faber 21s)

PLEASE MAKE USE OF THE ORDER CARD ENCLOSED
WITH THIS NEWS

science fiction news

No. 105

February 1966

Selectors: John Carnell, Dr J. G. Porter

The March SFBC Choice

THE PARADOX MEN

by Charles L. Harness

Introduced by Brian Aldiss

'THE body of writing known as science fiction is not woven in one piece like a blanket. It is made up of smaller units, like an old-fashioned patchwork quilt. Writings of many men go to make up the science fiction quilt, a fact that critics, with their need to generalize, tend to forget. The various patches represent different types of story.

'Of all the types of science fiction story, my favourite is the wine-dark patch in which we find Charles Harness's novel, *The Paradox Men*. Here we find tales that challenge us with their wildness, only to sweep us away into belief on a tide of excitement and convincing detail. Though their themes may be unified, they are built from a number of strange and unexpected things. They combine madness and logic, beauty and fear. They are not fantasy, nor are they scientific fiction. They are pure science fiction.

'These pure science fiction novels may be categorized as Wide-screen Baroque. Their plots are elaborate and generally preposterous, their inhabitants have short names and short lives. They traffic as readily in the impossible as the possible. They obey a dictionary definition of baroque; which is to say that they have a bold and exuberant rather than a fine style, they are eccentric, and sometimes degenerate into extravagance. They like a wide screen, with space and possibly time travel as props, and at least the whole solar system as their setting. ...

'Now brilliant though Bester and Vonnegut are, and compelling though their books are, one cannot read them without the feeling that they have passed the point of no return into parody and have degenerated into extravagance. It is not always clear from their later books that they take either themselves or their medium seriously. Nobody is obliged to be serious about anything, his ego or the universe, whichever happens to be the bigger; but the especial delight of Harness's book is that it takes what he is saying seriously.

'In fact this is where his novel differs from the other Widescreen Baroques: he is saying something serious. For all his surrealist effects, the derring-do, the flights of fancy, he is saying: Living is Vital. This may not be a very profound message, but it was immediate and profound enough to power the pens of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Their feeling for life, for "this sensible warm motion", was most sharp when set against torture and death, and it is the same with Harness's characters. "The Thief knelt without a word and gently gathered Haven's body into his arms. The body of the older man seemed curiously shrivelled and small. Only now did Alar realize what stature the bare fact of being alive contributed to flesh and bone."

'... Let me not do *The Paradox Men* a disservice by over-praising it. There are absurdities in it, and not only deliberate and delicious absurdities such as the typically Harnessian foray into space travel with a ship that acquires the mass of "some twenty million galaxies concentrated at one point", or the ingeniously explained arrival of the T-Twenty-Two before it sets out. Harness shares a weakness for regality (and female rulers) with van Vogt. He uses the clichés that seem inseparable from this particular breed of science fiction; we have met both before and since men like Alar who have lost their true identity, which must be found before they can save the world single-handed. And a critical objection to the entire performance might be that impossible now, and was impossible when the novel first appeared, to see how present-day U.S.A., Canada and the whole of South America could develop into this Imperial America; if Harness could have shown this, it would have been a master stroke!

'But for all that, and for all its slam-bang action, *The Paradox Men* holds a particular enchantment. I have likened it to novels I admire—*Tiger! Tiger!* and *Sirens of Titan*—but they lack the tenderness for humanity that gives the present book its freshness and its last scenes their conviction. Unlike most of the science fiction being written in England, America and Russia, the values here are not purely materialistic.

'It is an unfortunate rule—in the science fiction field as in other fields—that the bad writers write too much, the good too little. Charles Harness has always written too little. That is why it is especially pleasing to introduce his only novel to a British audience.'

SFBC 7s (Faber 18s)

One more SFBC Optional ...

SPECTRUM IV

Edited by Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest

Contents:

'Unreal Estates' by C. S. Lewis, Brian W. Aldiss and Kingsley Amis

'The Marching Morons' by C. M. Kornbluth

'Gadget vs. Trend' by Christopher Anvil

'Such Stuff' by John Brunner

'The Sellers of the Dream' by John Jakes

'The Large Ant' by Howard Fast

'Barrier' by Anthony Boucher

'The Great Nebraska Sea' by Allan Danzig