

A story of Merlin

By ROB ROWLAND

When a mainstream author attempts a work of science fiction it is either much better than most SF works or it is a mess. In the former category are 1984, Lord of the Flies and Brave New World. In the latter category, often the author lets his own assumptions about science fiction get away and thus wrecks his story. Nigel Balchin blew it when he tried it with the Kings of Infinite Space.

The trouble with much science fiction is that it has been too concerned with being science fiction and not "people fiction" which the rest of literature is about. It started back in the twenties and thirties with the gadget stories and the bug-eyed monsters. The first had tedious descriptions of phasers and superautomatic hair clippers. The second type featured something from our Canadian Arctic that just happened to be patriotic enough to eat a good portion of New York City.

In the forties John Campbell took over Astounding (now Analog) and introduced social science fiction. Unfortunately though social s-f brought out many of today's best writers the situation remained the same. Now it wasn't the gadget but the social background or the situation of the story that was dominant. Characters suffered and so did the literary quality of the story. Robert Heinlein who is among the best at constructing the social background to a story still relies on stock characters.

After the moon landing in July 1969 quite a few people, including Time thought that science fiction was dead. Just the opposite, has occurred. The Book Cellar which has the largest science fiction stock in the city, reports that their sales have been steadily increasing since that time. Last Saturday CBC radio ran a special on science, science fiction and astrology. The

program stated that science fiction was more popular than before and what they called the "space trip" was replacing the drug-peace

culture in the youth culture. Whether or not the latter is true, it is a fact the mystery of space is a mind expanding trip which is gaining popularity daily. With this new enthusiasm science fiction will have to pull up its quality of writing.

There have been many books both in and out of the genre built around the Arthurian legend. They range from Rosemary Sutcliff's historical The Lantern Bearers and The Sword at Sunset to H. Warner Munn's occult and Atlantean book, The King of the World's Edge.

Mary Stewart, has written many novels of intrigue with believable characters and this is why her books have outsold the run of the mill sex-adventure spy novel. Her latest book, *The Crystal Cave*, has been on the best seller list for months. *The Crystal Cave* is the autobiography of Merlin as a boy, youth and young man. Miss Stewart has managed better than most s-f or fantasy writers to weave the mystery and power of the best fantasy into a well constructed historical background. Her characters stand out as living human beings rather than the hero types of the normal fantasy.

If, after writing top mystery and fantasy, Mary Stewart tried science fiction it would probably be one of the best. Anyone setting out to try and write s-f today should read it and compare it with the other science fiction works we read. Since most science fiction fans can't afford the six bucks to buy the book they should hurry to get their names down on the voluminous reserve lists for *The Crystal Cave* at their public library.



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Whipped Potatoes

Standing over the little spud
His mind spun with the thought of the coming event.
The petite potato peeled clean, boiled to tender perfection
His sour-cream eyeballs glazed in defiance and anticipation
Slow he lifted the whip o' whips over his shoulder
And then brought it fast smack splat down hard
Again
And again.
Hard again hard swift on the carefully prepared
Little spud.
Whip whip whip

"Get thee smooth, starch-ball."
A little starch perhaps; brine do no harm
Drippy butter slithered sleek all around.

Afterwards, when the little spud was just a creamy mass
of gastrated glucose
He was questioned: Why this violent deed, man? There are other ways...
He could not steady his eyes as his mind mashed around with names like
Napoleon Solo
Bullet
Mattel G.I. Joe
Spiderman
and Beaver Cleaver (Beaver Cleaver??)
He later suggested: diversification, variety, change.
Got weak all over with the thought of corrugated 'taters
Each ripple cut with a razor blade.

by Rhonda Rovon

The Child and The Virgo Lady

The debut album of guitarist Sonny Greenwich, together with Don Thompson's first work as pianist/leader have finally been released. As expected these two albums successfully explore the many facets of contemporary jazz.

Greenwich's album, *The Old Man and The Child*, is an advanced work rooted in the concept of expressionism developed in the last recordings of John Coltrane, here evolved into a means of suggesting, in a wash of sound, the mood associated with the theme of the original tune.

Accompanied by percussionist Clayton Johnson and bassists Michel Donato and Clinton Houston, Greenwich and Thompson have adapted this concept to four relatively obscure pieces. *Haunted Heart* is the most familiar (if you're over 30) and the most straight-ahead musically.

Greenwich plays in his horn-like style, developing his ideas slowly, simply and always lyrically. No gymnastics — he saves them for Thompson's album. His strong clear tone flows though the apparently formless and vaguely

chaotic music of his fellows. (Of these, Michel Donato's very vocal conception of bass playing, as heard in his sobbing/singing support behind Thompson's stuttered solo on *Stranger in the City*, is particularly impressive.)

The Old Man and The Child (birth, awakening, manhood and death) is an extended experimental work. It is cyclically structured, opening with an otherworldly ensemble improvisation leading into Greenwich's theme statement. Thompson's harp-like solo is followed by a near classical counterpoint exercise by the bassists. The guitar returns to carry the group into "death" — a brief free section (apparently the tape of "birth" played backwards — something for philosophical jazz fans).

Thompson's album, *Love Song For a Virgo Lady*, is not entirely in the "New Music" category and provides an odd contrast to *The Old Man and The Child*. However, this contrast is necessary to give Greenwich's work some sort of perspective. Common to both albums is the intense personal

statement that makes the music so strong.

As might be expected, Thompson dominates the album with his swirling piano style emphasizing sound textures, rooted somewhere between McCoy Tyner and Cecil Taylor. This lends the depth and colour needed to compliment Greenwich's single note-lines. This compatibility is evident in the ballad *Emily*, which in other hands might have easily become cocktail-hour music.

Tenor saxophonist Ron Park replaces the guitarist on *Mumba* and *Love Song*, both Thompson compositions. The former is a driving, high-energy piece, again cyclical, introduced by two short free form passages rising dramatically to Thompson's solo. Park's break gradually dissolves into a final free exercise led by Donato. Like *The Old Man and The Child*, it stands as an achievement in the coherent structuring of improvised sounds.

These two works establish both Sonny Greenwich and Don Thompson in the vanguard of progressive jazz musicians.

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