

## NFB film documents history of danger drug

By PAULA TORNECK

If you were born between the years 1941 and 1971, this film will interest you.

The CenterStage forum held a National Film Board film presentation and panel discussion, October 23, on the effects of DES (diethylstilbestrol); a drug given to women during the years 1941-1971 to prevent miscarriages.

By 1938, DES, which is a synthetic estrogen, was first discovered by endocrinologist, Charles Dodds. Parallel to his discovery, in England Doctors George and Olive Smith recognized its benefits and felt it would be the solution to the problem of miscarriage. However, they did not foresee its harmful side-effects.

30 years ago, a study was performed to insure the effectiveness of this 'wonder drug.' The study proved that the drug was useless. The women who were taking a placebo instead of DES had the same occurrence of miscarriages as the women taking DES. Even with this information and the fact that this drug was causing cancer in lab animals, the prescribing of the drug did not stop.

Since 1971, the year DES was finally taken off the market, the drug has been linked to many serious health problems that effect both mother and child. The DES daughter may have such problems as infertility, several miscarriages, the conceiving of children with birth defects, and, in the most extreme cases, the development of rare genital cancer which can only be corrected by surgically removing the uterus, cervix and vagina. The DES son is not as common as his female counterpart. The effects he may have include trouble in fertility (low sperm count) or again, in the most extreme cases, testicular cancer.

The director of the film, Bonnie Audrukaitus, brought all this into consideration when filming this

hour-long National Film Board (NFB) documentary expose. Being the first film on this controversial topic, it focused mainly on Harriet Simand, a DES victim who went in front of the media to familiarize people with the effects of this extremely harmful drug. Together with her mother, both residents of Montreal, she initiated the DES Action Group in Canada.

The panel that followed the film featured Harriet Simand, Dr. Barry Rosen from the DES Registry at Wellesley Hospital, Pricilla Cook a DES exposed person, Anne Rochon Ford the spokesperson for the DES Organization in Canada, and Connie Clement as the moderator for the evening. Again, the panel stressed the urgency of banning the dangerous drug. Rather than developing a discussion on the controversy, the panel became an opportunity for a question/answer period for the audience. The desire for more information on the topic was clear.

If you're interested in finding more information on DES, the film will be screened again on Wednesday, November 27, at 12:15 p.m. at the NFB Theatre.

## Canuck sci-fi writers zap Festival audience

By CHRIS WARREN

The four-evening science fiction stage of the International Authors Festival was launched Wednesday evening with a gala(ctic) reading by contributors to the new Canadian sci-fi anthology *Tesseracts*, collated by Judith Merrill.

More consistently vigorous than other readings, the evening included several (mercifully) brief readings by the less experienced, some all-too-short contributions by novelist (and York creative writing teacher) Susan Swan and Christopher Dewdney, a sci-fi sermon by A.K. Dewdney, and two long but cybernetic—er, energetic readings by Phillis Gottlieb and Spider Robinson.

The evening, interfaced by Toronto poet, anthologist, and general literary handyman John Robert Colombo, went ahead at several warps. A frantic Scottish voice was

heard to exclaim, "We're going t' bust th' engines, sar!" But Colombo, smooth, wry and affable, kept things moving without any sign of cracking the fuselage.

Merril herself, a tough-voiced, stern-looking woman, read poems by the three Roberts, who, for



the totally Earthbound, are Roberts Zend, Sward, and Priest. The title of her collection, she explained, was "seized upon by Press Porcepic, who thought the name was fictional." It is not. As she defines it a *tesseract* "is to a cube what a cube is to a square." And if you can't figure that out, you have no business reading this article.

As for *Canadian* sci-fi, she chose to define this as sci-fi written by beings "who live and work in Canada." This reviewer thinks it'll probably be up to the readers of the anthology to define what, if anything, distinguishes the stories (and poems!) of these "people who live and work in Canada" as Canadian. The most frenetically nationalistic, anti-American, geographically and seasonally (winter) identifiable Canadian was Spider Robinson—who was born in New York.

Go, as spec-fic writer Harlan Ellison would say, figure.

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