

FANZINES 15

March 2002

By Ted White

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SF COMMENTARY #77 (Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele St., Collingwood VIC 3066, Australia; also available as .PDF files from his e-mail address: gandc@mira.net or from the *e-fanzines* site at <http://efanzines.com/SFC/index.html>; available for “the usual” – “letters or substantial emails of comment, artistic contributions, articles, reviews, traded publications or review copies [of books]” – or subscription: “\$US30 for 5, or equivalent, airmail; please send folding money, not cheques”)

SF Commentary sits at the high end of the “sercon,” or serious discussion of SF, group of fanzines, a position it has occupied for many years now. In this *SFC* is following a proud Australian tradition first established by John Bangsund in the mid-’60s with his *Australian SF Review*. Both fanzines engaged SF’s literati from throughout the world, and both have offered important venues to some of the major voices in SF criticism, who in turn have written seminal pieces on some of the most important authors to emerge in the field in the second half of the 20th century, starting with Phil Dick and Ursula LeGuin.

What’s most impressive about the way Gillespie (now) and Bangsund (then) have accomplished this is that neither gave in to the academic stuffed-shirt navel-gazing which has grown up over the past forty years around SF and all but smothered SF criticism. *SFC* maintains a civilized and literate tone throughout, but draws more upon the British tradition of letters and the ties of fannish community to accomplish its purposes. It is not by accident that Gillespie has long called his editorial in *SFC* “I Must Be Talking To My Friends.”

Only a couple of years ago *SFC* celebrated its 30th anniversary with issue #76. That was a monster issue which had been more than half a decade in the making, but #77 is no slouch either, running 84 pages of small (but readably set) type, with color covers on glossy stock.

The issue opens (on page 3) with “Four Reasons for Reading Thomas M. Disch” by the late John Sladek. It is reprinted from a relatively obscure Australian book of essays about SF authors, *The Stellar Gauge*, which was published in 1980. The piece is typical Sladek and deserves the position of honor here.

Gillespie’s editorial occupies the next 8 pages and covers a variety of topics. “Criticanto” offers 10 pages of thoughtful book reviews by Marc Ortlieb, Roslyn K. Gross, Ian Mond, Steve Jeffery and the editor. A 16-page letter column catches up with responses to *SFC* #s 73, 74, 75 and 76 – the oldest letters going back to 1993.

The remaining nearly-half of the issue is taken up with “Scanning in the Nineties: Part 1,” all but the introductory first two pages by Colin Steele, who wrote these reviews between 1993 and 1999. Subsequent issues will offer similar “columns” by Gillespie, Alan Stewart, Paul Ewins, Doug Barbour “and a few more.” Steele’s reviews are grouped by category: Reference & Non-Fiction, Australian SF, Australian Fantasy, Australian Horror, British SF, British Alternative Reality Fiction, British Fantasy, British Horror, American SF, and American Horror. The issue closes with a five-page index (in four columns of small type) – a feature which is truly useful in a fanzine of this sort.

If fanzines which talk about science fiction are your meat, *SFC* belongs at the top of your list.

—Ted White