

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## M-F DEBUNKED

ON REQUEST, I shall be glad to furnish S. Mandel and P. Fingesten ["The Myth of Science Fiction," *SR* Aug. 27] with a list of science-fiction stories that:

1. are sensitive and poetic works of art.
2. are brilliant satires of the present, past, or future.
3. are among the finest, most literate, most adult writing of our day.
4. possess a biting wit, a hilarious sense of humor, and a lucid feeling for the ridiculous in man's present-day materialistic strivings.
5. present "woman" and "love" with poignant and poetic maturity.
6. contradict every sentence of the Mandel-Fingesten opus.
7. prove that "debunking" is an art in which M & F are still embarrassingly inadequate neophytes.

K. BOLGEN.

Newburgh, N.Y.

## FACTS OF SPACE-LIFE?

WHY SHOULDN'T SF characters conform to the sexual facts of life and their environment? Mandel and Fingesten do not realize that life on a spaceship would be analagous to life on a warship or old-time sailing vessel. SF has covered most aspects of the relationships between space-men, just as Conrad, Nordoff and Hall, Dana, Melville, and others have covered the relationships between seamen. I would suggest that M & F read a little more Havelock Ellis, a little less the popularizers of Freud.

ROGER A. NEEDHAM.

Lansing, Mich.

## THE GODS OF TV

WHILE IN AGREEMENT with M & F, I cannot help feeling that SF is no more a form of escape than the fiction which appears in most popular women's magazines. And what of the "confession" magazines, the "confidential" magazines, and the unending spate of magazines dealing with that most widespread of all mythologies: the gods and goddesses of Hollywood and, lately, TV-land? Are these more nearly in line with "... the normal aspirations of the human spirit"?

ROBERT LEE COOK.

Boulder, Col.

## NO MANDEL FOR ME

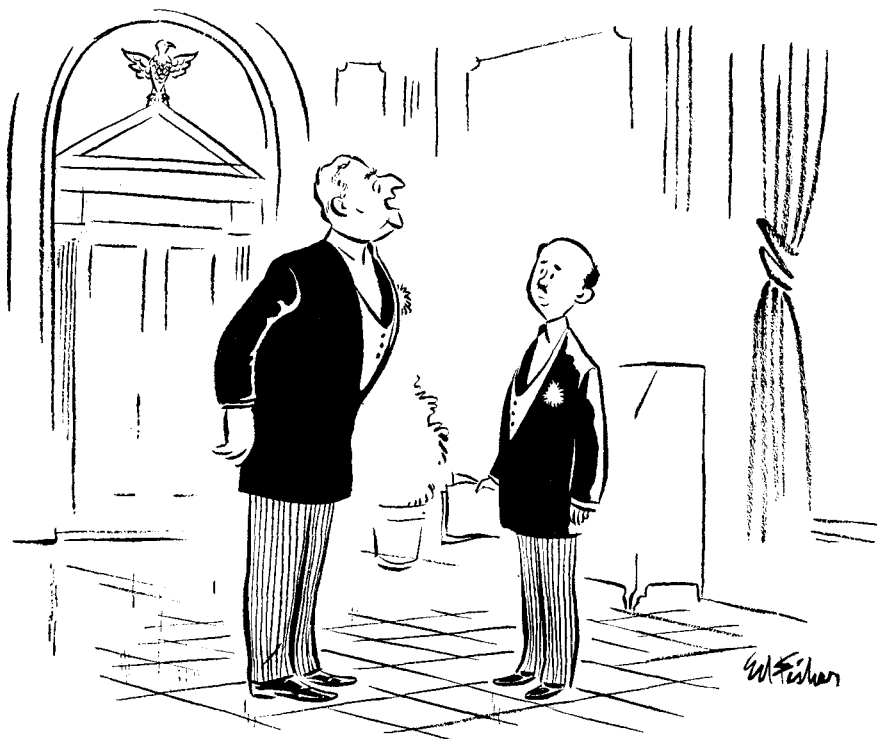
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE has shown me that engineering English teachers are overbearing, hypocritical know-it-alls.

GARLAND EDWARD WHETZEL.

Charlottesville, Va.

## WHO'S DOWN-TO-EARTH

AND DURING all these years I have remained blissfully unaware that SF was corrupting my manhood. That I should be spending my leisure hours with girlie magazines or, better yet, with the works



"I'm afraid you'll have to play a behind-the-scene role at the Big Four conference, Smilby—we want to give every appearance of negotiating from strength."

of the topflight novelists of today—those praised by *SR*—because of the wholesome, down-to-earth picture they give of life as it really is!

HOWARD L. MYERS.

Winston-Salem, N.C.

## GENERAL FRUSTRATION

M & F ARE NOT explaining the popularity of science-fiction, but attacking science and what they believe to be its evil influence on the present and the future. They do it poorly. Their citations of history and "human nature" are naive. Their identification of mathematical knowledge of the physical universe with Pythagorean mysticism is pure ignorance or pure malice. On second thought, being a reader of *Astounding Science Fiction* and hence of philosophical mind, I incline to a more modern belief and assign the entire article to the interaction of ignorance and malice in a general situation of frustration.

GEORGE RICHARDSON.

Hingham, Mass.

## PERVERSE ENDS

FAR FROM MAKING an ideal of dictatorship, scientific or other wise, SF is full of innumerable horrible examples—of which "Brave New World" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four" are the best known—of what happens when science and machines are turned to perverse ends. And is it out

of order for SFers to hope for greater rationality and intelligence in government?

Barre, Vt.

LEONARD BECK.

## TROUBLESOME PIMPLE

IT IS ENCOURAGING to hope that, somewhere in outer space, there may be planets inhabited by intelligent beings who are not constantly engaged in either warfare, perjury, or character assassination. Our world just happens to be a small pimple in the scheme of things.

JOHN C. ROGERS.

Alexandria, Va.

## DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE

M & F WERE ALMOST as entertaining as the best science fiction. I have been reading and publishing SF for a half-dozen years, and it was fascinating to discover that they presented it as something wildly different from what my experience has shown it to be.

LYSANDER KEMP.

Jocotepec, Mex.

## GOOD STUFF, TOO

BUG-EYED MONSTERS and space cadets rank with Davy Crockett and cereal heroes, but "Nineteen Eighty-Four" and "Brave New World" rank with the world's best literature.

ED DOERR.

Indianapolis, Ind.



## This Other Stratford

## STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

**I**N A LAND where Shakespeare has become a form of worship, most productions of his plays tend to be well-delivered and gracefully performed, but not very imaginatively produced. But this season director Peter Brook undertook the staging of a work so difficult it remained for years the sole Shakespearean play never performed at Stratford. And as sometimes happens when a determined artist faces a new challenge, Mr. Brook has with "Titus Andronicus" come up with his best work since "Venice Preserved," and has evoked from Sir Laurence Olivier the most powerful acting that great actor has shown on a stage since he shook all our souls in "Oedipus" nine years ago.

"Titus Andronicus" opens on a formal scene in black, brown, and gold, with a struggle for power going on between two sons of Rome's deceased emperor. Into this marches a grizzled old warrior garbed in worn, red leather. It is the proud general Titus, back from a bitter but victorious campaign in which he has lost three of his sons, and from which he brings as captives Tamora, queen of the defeated Goths; her three sons; and her slave and paramour, a coal-black giant named Aaron. Titus's remaining sons ask to lop the limbs and burn the entrails of Tamora's eldest surviving son as a religious sacrifice to appease their brothers' shades. This Titus grants, gruffly rejecting Tamora's anguished pleas for mercy. Then, to a weird brassy dirge, the barbaric piety of this Roman play emerges. The priests clothed in green satin robes and carrying flaming horned tapers remove the victim's shirt and mark his body for slaughter before leading him off into a burial vault from which a few minutes later emanates a suggestion of sacrificial smoke. Here is Titus's first mistake: to put tradition ahead of compassion. He follows it with a deadlier one: he declines to become Rome's new emperor when the offer is made. Olivier plays the role with a whiff of Churchill; and he makes Titus's handing of the purple to the voluptuary Saturninus seem an unthinking decision, arrived at on the conservative grounds that the eldest son must rule, regardless of merit. But having refused power, Titus will not, as he hopes, retain his position as Rome's most honored elder statesman. Rather he has tied himself onto a mad machine of misery and horror.



—Central Press Photos, Ltd.

Olivier—"a whiff of Churchill."

Thanks to Mr. Brook's sensitive direction, this horror—which includes a dozen killings and other mutilations—never becomes gruesome or ridiculous. We are spared the sight of the physical disasters. Titus's daughter Lavinia, after she has been raped and has had her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, appears with wrists swathed in gauze and streamers of red ribbon issuing from her mouth. When the heads of Andronicus's two sons are brought in they are covered with black cloth and enclosed in steel baskets. And when Andronicus's severed hand is carried out Mr. Brook has committed the wise heresy of changing Shakespeare's "between thy teeth" to "between thy stumps." Wisely too, the cutting of Tamora's two sons' throats, while Lavinia holds the basin to catch their blood in order to mix it into a pie for Tamora to eat, is removed to an off-stage kitchen. And the four stabbings across the banquet table at the play's end are kept from being ridiculous by the variety with which they occur.

The fact that on opening night there was no snickering at the nonsensical rush of macabre events was partly due to the staging, and partly to a strict restraint of the play's comic elements. For instance, when Titus feigns madness and solicits the gods by shooting messages to them by bow and arrow Mr. Brook adds pathos by having Titus suddenly faint.

**T**HE most interesting character in the play is Aaron, played with gusto by Anthony Quayle. Because he is a

slave he feels free to commit the most outrageous crimes with relish, taking advantage of the "honor" and religion of those who enslave him. He indulges his obsession without remorse or pity. His only charitable emotion is exhibited for his illegitimate offspring by Tamora. When the baby is sent to him for execution Tamora's son exclaims, "Thou has undone our mother." To which Aaron replies, "Villain, I have *done* thy mother." This gets the only real laugh of the evening. Otherwise Mr. Brook takes no chances of letting the audience get in a merry frame of mind; he had carefully eliminated Aaron's best and funniest speech, in which Aaron recites some of the terrible things he would do if he had further opportunity.

Vivien Leigh, as the chaste Lavinia, is at her best in the melancholy scene where she manages to spell out the names of her ravishers with a stick held between her stumps. In general, however, she seems too sophisticated to be chaste, and at the moment she is actually being dragged off to lose that prized chastity Mr. Brook has not been successful in finding some way to indicate the beginning of the violence to be perpetrated, so that Lavinia seems to be taking it all too calmly.

But it is the performance of Olivier that lifts "Titus Andronicus" above the perfunctory. Starting as a man tired of "worldly chances and misadventures," he genuinely envies his dead sons the peace and honor of the tomb. Yet he shows his general's heart when he suddenly shifts from the smiles of homecoming to snap a severe order to his prisoners. When he tempestuously kills his own son for impiety we feel raging inside him a feverish battle between paternal grief and the preservation of public honor. And as the last in this series of transitions which establish Titus's character, he gives us a flash of the merry twinkling-eyed Olivier as with a rippling gesture he invites all to a hunt.

As the tragic events of this hunt are piled upon Titus, Sir Laurence goes from shame to anger, and from anger to agony. When he chops off his hand in an attempt to save his sons he emits one sharp cry followed by a period of quietly huddling his hurt. It isn't until the middle of his next long speech that he allows the full pain to rise in him. On the words "I am the sea" he infuses a sustained blast of power that no actor of our time can top. Yet when the heads of his sons are brought to him he does top this thunderburst with a contrasting silent helplessness from which finally emerges a low hysterical laugh. In