Review

The compleat Computer

by Dennie L. van Tassel

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(Global Book Resources),
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This is an excellent book which contains something for every-one. It is described by its cover blurb äs "a compendium of tales of the amazing and mar-vellous, poetry, informative news items, articles for edifi-cation and enjoyment, car-toons plus many other illus-trations with a spetial section of splendiferous science fiction art in füll color". Allowing for a little poetic licence, this doesi give a fair idea of the Contents and their flavour.

The key feature of the book is that it contains edited high-lights by a number of authors. Apart from the illustrations, suggested exercises and read-ing lists, there are 100 texts. These are taken mainly from American sources and most date from the late 1960s and the 1970s dealing with the past, present and future of human interaction with Com-puters. The editor has done a good Job in placing all this under one cover. Useful read-ing lists are supplied, but it is irritating that detailed sources and first Publishing dates are not always given.

The main value of the book lies in its edücational poten-tial—particularly with school-children and students on Computer appreciation courses. At the present, financial considera-tions prevent all children from being taught programming, but every further and higher education Student should now receive some education in co'mputers. For such courses this book would prove a most useful adjunct.

Recently at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology we carried out an experiment which suggested that the image of Computer program-mers (and by implication Computers?) was a poor one. Using a disguised technique we found that the majority of two groups of students pic-tured the programmer äs "un-attractive". Psychology students rated him third out of 20 Job titles in unattractive? ness, while optics students rated him fourth (in each case the mathematician and physi-cist came out worst). To my mind this, is a reflection on the students' own interaction with the Computer. Had the students the benefit of a short course where not only were they taught programming, but a text like Van Tassel's was also used to show the human side of Computers, then I think the result would have been very different.

All this is not to say that this book paints only a rosy picture of the computer's im-pact on socie-ty. It is probable that the editor himself was a "computemik" (one of "those starry-eyed young men who may be found loitering at com-puter installations at all times of the day and night"). Despite this he has tried to present a balanced view with articles on the dangers to peace, freedom and privacy. In this book one can also find put why one Computer ordered a piano, why another is used for storing footprints (sie), why a terminal in the bathroom might be very useful, how a missing hyphen cost $15 million, where a Computer is used to do the commune housekeeping, why Computers are banned from being used *during* American football games, and much more. If this interests you, read the book yourself!   *Chris French*