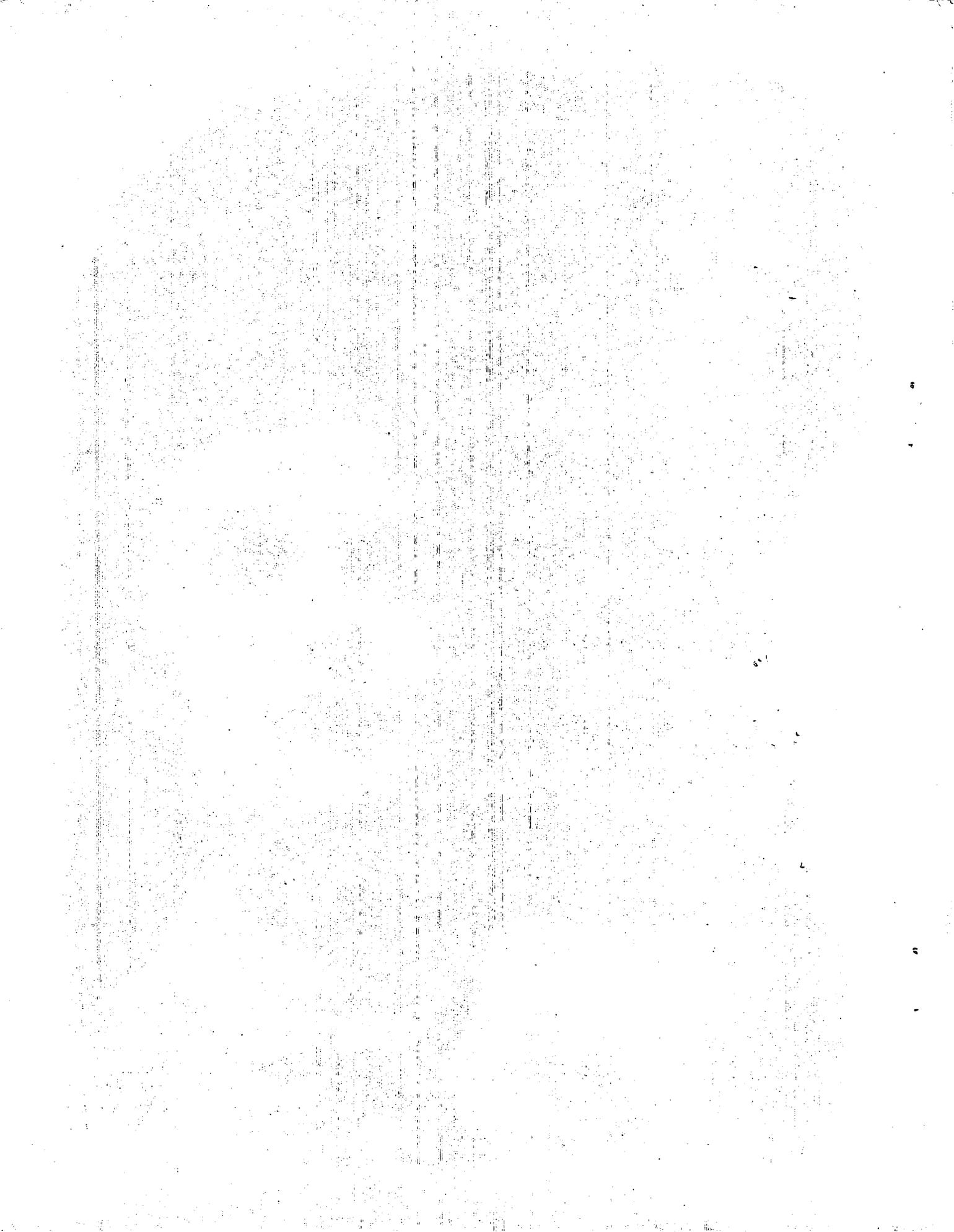




Virgil
Finlay





SCIENCE FICTION.

Contents of Number twenty-four

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This is the twenty-fourth issue of The Mentor. It is published at intervals by Ron L Clarke - who is also the editor and printer - at 6 Bellevue Road, Faulconbridge, and is available for the usual or Al.50 for two issues (pa\$h).

This issue is dated March, 1978 and is (C) for the contributors.

(As a point of interest, since typing with an electric typewriter means using contact plastic sheet on the front of the stencil to avoid clogging the keys and a backing sheet under the stencil to give a sharper image, the only mistakes corrected are those I have noticed by proofreading myself on the first run. Since it is nearly impossible to line the stencil up dead-on after taking it out of the machine for someone else to proof-read, I am afraid some mistakes will slip through. Be assured that they are typos.)

THE MENTOR'S EDITORIAL

This issue is something special to me. Not only is it the first of the "Fourth Series" of The Mentor, but it is the beginning of a new active period in Sydney Fandoms. Lastly, but not the least, it marks the completion of our family, with the birth of a son, Tim, on the third of February, 1978, two days before our three year olds (Evelyn's) birthday.

My mailing list is no doubt much out of date, but I hope to update it with the help of Eric Lindsay. Even so, many of you who receive this issue may not wish to continue to receive it, wether through back of interest (GAFIA) or you don't wish to respond. Knowing this, if I don't receive feedback by way of LOC, trade, etc, these people will be removed from the list.

Ren ewing the Olde Plea, I am short of material. If you think you have any I can use, send it to the editorial address. TM is slanted, as always, towards S.F. reader.fans, so I'll publish fiction, sercon and funny articles in sf and related subjects that catch my eye. The odd poem, LOCS and selected (more so now) artwork.

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This issue is being typed on my wife's machine, an electric ADLER Gabriele 5000. I am quite satisfied with the machine, but we did have some trouble with it to begin with.... When we first got it, and Susan had unwrapped it from the Christmas paper and we had carted it home to the Blue Mountains, Susan typed some five hours straight. Then the motor gave out. So we dragged it back to Adler in St. Leorards in Sydney and they replaced the motor. When my parents brought it back here I did a quick check to see it was working ok, then they went back to Sydney. Later that night Susan found that the keys weren't returning from the upper case, or when they did, it was halfway through a word. Back to Adler. They sent it back and my parents brought it up. Shortly after they had left for home we didcovered that Adler hadn't fixed it. So it was back to them a third time.

Since it has come back that time, it had worked without trouble.

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We have been lucky with the big bushfires just before Christmas. We live on a ridge - our house is a couple of hundred yards (one hundred metres) from the bush. On the day of the fire, Susan rang me at work in Sydney at 2.15 and I was able to catch the 3.00 train. It didn't go as far as Faulconbridge - it stopped at the station before, but I was able to get a lift on a motor cycle owner by a bloke who lived near, and so was at home when the fire hit, the sky went an angry sooty orangy twilight and the smoke made the eyes water so much it was impossible to see. However at the critical time the wind changed slightly and when the fire reached the end of our road it veered north and went around our ridge.

THE ROLE OF MEN IN SCIENCE FICTION.

By John J Alderson

The reading and contemplation of many thousands of science fiction stories has brought to light an ideal. I doubt that in reality that ideal will ever be realized; certainly hope not.

The first and foremost attribute possessed by science fiction heroes is an amazing loin-power. He serves every female he meets that's on heat, without hesitation, and as most of them seem to be on heat most of the time that's no mean sacrifice of time and sweat. Not only that, he is expected to do it with some finesse. That in real life the male has lots of inhibitions about such service, a moral code that usually prevents him, ethical considerations that would leave him with a fearful conscience, a wife or girl-friend who has other views of these matters, and a very lively awareness of being trapped, is all ignored; real life must never intrude into science fiction and its considerations never allowed to blemish the ideal portrait of the hero.

The science fiction hero is able to scoot off to the other end of the universe, and does so regardless of how the fish are biting or that he has promised to play a round of golf with an old school mate tomorrow (actually most of them show little sign of having spent long enough at school to have found a school-mate). He is a creature without ties and despite numerous assertions to the contrary, without will-power. He fetches and carries and fights for his masters without question, though he sometimes does back-chat the immediatary that gives the orders. He is a messenger-boy, a post reserved for those whose intellect does not fit them for a higher calling. In reality a man would not touch any of these science fiction jobs with a forty foot pole but science fiction is somewhat removed from reality.

The science fiction hero is a very formidable fellow. Usually he is a mass of brawn, a veritable killing machine. If he does not stand head and shoulders over his foes then he has some other even more frightening talents (they all, for instance, know karate), such as being pretty deadly with the ray gun, the zap gun, a disintegrator or they can whip a star through hyperspace and crash it into an offending planet at multi-light speeds. Naturally some have great mental power and can kill their enemies with a mental bolt. And though planets are washed with blood the hero is so undisturbed by all this that most of them do not even bother to wash their hands afterwards. The reality is that whilst men don't mind a little stoush now and then they prefer to be able to have a drink with the enemy the next day, but this is not reality we are discussing, its science fiction.

The science fiction hero has giant mental power. In a few minutes he can solve problems that other men have studied for generations and found the answer still wanting. He can invent things so well that they can be used against the enemy with great effect without prior testing, whilst in matter of minutes he can devise counters for enemy weapons. Yet a woman can still twist him

around her finger and he doesn't see through her most transparent schemes despite his ability to see her naked through space armour. In reality men are pretty dumb when it comes to mental capacity and they are much more aware of the wiles of women than they let on but then reality is hardly a basic for science fiction writers.

Science fiction heroes have tremendous will-power. Not only are they a match for aliens with heads ten times as big but they have an indurance that would outlast granite. They can stand tortures that would reduce lesser mortals like you and I to tears, and remain true to their faith or whatever. Regardless of what happens, however many times they are knocked down they rise up again and fight on with undiminished vigour. They will take on foes in overwhelming odds, and like Samson lay the dead in "heaps on heaps". Undismayed they will calmly save the very universe itself from destruction and God himself from being toppled off his throne, and in the very moment when all this hangs in the balance if a woman in season comes along he will leave all and serve her and satisfy her sexual passion: he knows who is his real master. In reality of course all men haven't been tamed thus yet, but science fiction deals with that happy day when man everywhere will recognise his master.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that the science fiction hero is none too logical. Despite the superficial attributes of brain-power he is given, it is only too obvious that he really wins all his fights either by sheer brawn, luck, or the mistakes of the enemy. Indeed he is very fortunate that the enemy is even less resourceful than he is himself. Usually he finds himself with something nagging at the back of his mind, something that most readers remember long before he does, but then if he had a better memory or a better brain there would be much less story. In reality men are logical creatures most of whom know better than to meddle in things they don't understand; the rest either become economists or politicians, but then we are talking about science fiction, not reality.

The science fiction hero is rather garrulous, despite what we said above about his memory he can and does quote page after page of scientific textbooks, but perhaps he should not be unduly criticised for this as the writers of text-books are notoriously long-winded because the bigger the book the bigger the royalties. His fault lies in not being able to translate their jargon into English, which is perhaps just as well because then even a science fiction hero could see that it was rot. On the other hand the necessity to talk about ordinary human subjects reduces him to silence. In reality those who quote from text-books do so because they don't know when they are talking about and the writer of science fiction....nuff said.

A few years ago I found myself owning some female sheep (ewes to the initiated) and hoping to get some money to pay off a bit of the overdraft I bought a ram and put him with them. The girls all trotted up to look at their latest acquisition - a ram is the only property that sheep recognise. They looked him over for his fighting qualities and smelt him to make sure he was virile. A ram's place is in the middle of a mob of sheep about two thirds to the rear where the ewes can immediately find him to have their sexual needs attended to, and where he is safely away from wandering unattached females. If danger threatens, the flock, the ram is pushed forward to deal with it. If the mob gets into trouble the ram is expected to go home and get the boss to fix things; (they do too by the way). The ram is the analogue of the science fiction hero, a chattel.

The science fiction hero is the fantasy creation of a masturbating female, and science fiction written either by females or "old women".

GRIMES - SAN AND THE NAKED LADY

By A. Bertram Chandler

Grimes is multilingual - which his creator most certainly is not. The stories featuring him have been translated into all languages from Japanese to Russian, the long way around the world. Normally I have little or any direct contact with my foreign publishers. Messrs. Hayakawa in Tokyo are the exception.

Before the first book - THE ROAD TO THE RIM - was even translated they were writing to me and, even, galling me long distance, mainly about the illustrations. The Hayakawa paperbacks are very well produced, with bright covers and about six interior black and white illustrations. You can almost follow the story by looking at the pictures. Some of these adhere very closely to my own ideas, others are decidedly off the beam. The Mannschenn Drive, for example... I tried to explain what it looks like over the telephone but the artist's conception of that weird machine is nothing at all like mine. And there's the full dress uniform worn by officers of the Survey Service on ceremonial occasions. What I have always had in mind is a rig very similar to the full dress of the Royal Navy - a cocked hat, a frock coat, sword belt and sword. At no time did I think it necessary to specify the colour of waistcoat and trousers. But more than once Grimes has appeared in the illustrations in a sort of hybrid attire - the frock coat, the cocked hat and the sword worn over a plain grey waistcoat and striped grey trousers... Sort of half naval officer and half diplomat.

I received in the mail today copies of the two latest Hayakawa/Rim Worlds novels - SPARTAN PLANET (FALSE FATHERLAND) and THE INHERITORS. I rather gained the impression that the artist had really enjoyed himself with both books. In SPARTAN PLANET he had a lot of fun with the anachronisms - Spartan hoplites, carrying automatic rifles, standing guard over Grimes' grounded space vessel while overhead sails one of the airships of the Spartan Navy. I've one very minor whinge about the interior pics. Maggie Lazenby - who, as a full commander, actually outranked Grimes, has been demoted to lieutenant. And Grimes, although only a lieutenant commander, has scrambled egg on the peak of his cap. Furthermore it is not a mere commander's scrambled egg; it's an admiral's scramble egg. And I resent his wearing more scrambled egg than I, his creator, am entitled to!

In THE INHERITORS Maggie is back in correct uniform with three full stripes on her sleeves or shoulderboards. The Morrowvians are all wearing their correct uniform; if you've read the book you'll remember that Morrowvia is a world with no nudity taboo and a climate conducive to naturism. I was disappointed to find that in the only picture in which Drongo Kane appears he has his back to the camera. On the other hand, the Dog Star Line's Captain Danzellan is just how I myself visualised that portly, dignified shipmaster.

But it was the cover that made my day.

I've been writing full length novels for about twenty years - tempus don't half fugit! - and I've always wanted to have an undressed blonde on the jacket. Everybody else had them, but never me. In the case of THE BITTER PILL Dennis Wren actually asked me what I wanted as a cover picture and I told him. Did I get it? No. I got a rather boring photograph of the Earth as seen from space.

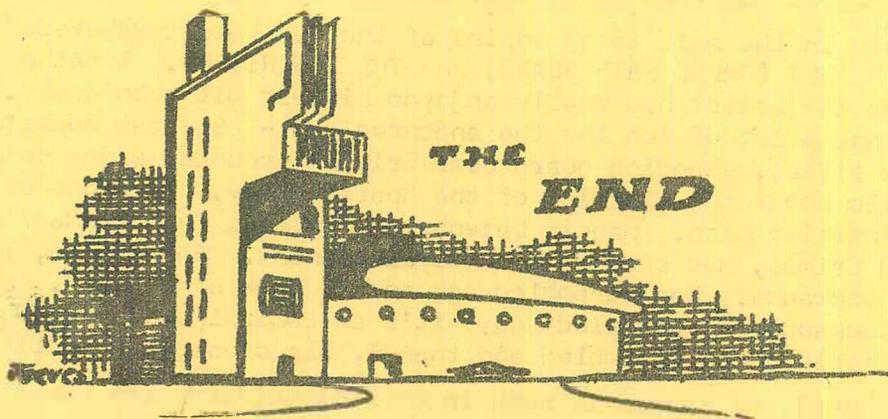
And now, at long, long last...

A dark-skinned, silver-haired, indubitably mammalian wench with, in the background, a snarling cat's face and with the shadow of a rocketship falling over the girl's naked body.

Just under a week ago I saw my first streaker - a girl, nude save for her sandals, walking quite unconcernedly up and down Macleay Street in Kings Cross. Today I got my first book with a naked blonde on the cover.

Things come in threes.

I wonder that the third big (and Happy) surprise will be.



E L E G Y I N A C I T Y B A C K Y A R D

In Rookwood Cemetery there they lie - hundreds of 'em,
thousands of 'em,
grouped in denomination across - Catholic and C.of E.,
Methodist and Jew,
and Presbyterian and Russian Orthodox - all have stakes.
Containing many persons.
All singularly dead.
And buried.
Ah, me, which gang to choose? which better than the other?
which crowd to join? which cluttered plot to take me on my oath?
Whose side to be on?
for eeni meeni mini and mo - only one such lot can go
come Resurrection Morning.
What mess of potted humans, so many,
who? Who cares of Harold G. Gisborn, died 1873, aged 28? -
of drunkenness perhaps, his tombstone reels -
and In Loving Memory of Lillian Ariadne Skyle
shies oppositely from embrace by his weathered tongue.
In life Lilly should have had it so good -
on udder side she got stalwart Captain Svenson
vot 1891 ship sailink from Sydney mitout.
And Lillian Ariadne wants not for close company -
head to her head is one Matthew Benson,
a handsome devil we'll warrant, aged 45 -
near enough to you, Lilly, that you might clasp hands
at your common depth a fathom beneath.
For Auld Lang Syne.
But Mrs Sarah Benson could object -
though now on top, does she still hold bold Matthew down?
My god, but the undersoil is peopled thick,
thicker than Bondi Beach on a summer holdiday.
Cheek by jowl they rest. Rest it is.

In peace.

Can they know ought else? even be they put through a mincer
to the clashing of cymbals - and to such sundry clamor -
while being tossed unmercifully, and needled most unseemly.
Peace they got.

Quiet neighbours. Layers of quiet neighbours on all sides.
And not one noisily walking the floor.

Leastways, there's no complaints.

An offense in life is no objection to the dead -
the Rev Arnold Clydeborne rests easy,
with the sweet skull of Miss Jennifer Mirchett, aged 22,
scarce more than a meter from his own.

A virgin, perhaps, a harlot, perhaps.

Between them, maybe, both.

Oh to be near so much in death
to what in life is doled but sparsely.

Down, you heathen, down!

But listen! is from below the scrape of digging?
hoary old reprobate tunneling to go whoring?

No wonder the flowers in the pic le jar are wilting.

But Jesus Mahomet Mighty Buddha - there's thousands here!
bit the dust, to dust, to be bitten.

Alas, poor Ibrahim Schnutzkopf, I knew him well,
loving husband, loving father, loving swindler, grasping old bastard,
death here is the stingey,

R.I.P. - Riddance Is Pleasant.

Thousands of them, each in time and place wreathed,
of last consequence in decisive farewell.

Wet tears of grief for most, yes,

but for lucky ones tears of joy and wreaths of smiles -

and in this we can give the bad their due,
for their dying is only their own misfortune,

a circumstance that may be rejoiced.

But thousands of 'em, in rows, marks at uneven attention, rows,

scrunched together, cracked marble clinging to its gold,
the green-rimmed slab a slob leaning back
more pitted than ivied. Urns upset,
long grass and rusting cans - crosses, scrolls and open books,
pretentious honour flaking beneath grime and grit.
A dog turd on the grave of John Harvey Youngmont, 1883- 1915.
Such thoughtful canine fertiliser
is not out of place in this scrubby pasture of many weeds,
of beer bottles brownly glinting,
of stone gone drab slouched gray,
wedges of grass bursting breeches
inexorably to bury the monuments to the buried.
Seed may not fall on stony ground,
but stony ground does greet the harvest.
For keeps the quarry has gone to ground under a rockpile,
guilty of dying, rank rank on rank, pathetic in trite promotion.
Remembrance carved to endure eternal
chipped, choked, sunk, forgotten.
A block of granite for ever -
Henry Obadiah Falrose, born 1869, died this 3rd Day of May, 1912 -
bless you, sir, whoever you were.
Whoever you were.
Whoever you were, a fine fellow no doubt -
a fine piece of granite at least -
your name should be legible for another 100 years or so, Henry, old lad.
Whoever you were.
Oh my, what crass conceit and uproarious hilarity
in the pompous buffoonery that solemnly, respectfully,
transmutes tragedy to glorious - his name engraved for posterity,
his name proclaimed bravely, more proudly than in life,
blazoned, even, and endeavoring not to dim -
jostling motionless with his kind, bundled bunched in static file,
atop and atop - "Read me!
"Know my name!" the myriad etchings plead,

"I was Here!"

Names. This place is a virtual forest of names -
and it is horror that not one sublimely confident inscription
does conjure an image of a once-was life.

Names, thousands of 'em - anonymous people with names.
What stupidity, what pitiful futility
is this testament to mortality,
this preserving of nobodies in jumbled tumbled masonry.
Here lies Mary Evelyn Cott, Died Dec 10th 1898, Aged 33 Years.
Good luck, Mary.

Rot your bones, Mary.

Whoever you were.

Whoever you were, Mary, do you hear? Rot your goddam bones!

There is no rubbish dump an eyesore more

than ground made waste by the depositing of human carcase.

Rookwood Cemetery, scabby manufactured litter-bin of defeated scenery.

And signposted, so well -

Baptists this way, Congregationalists that.

And Independents, independent beyond their last breath,

follow the thumb and go west,

to their own minority ghetto in this necropolitan slum.

Over one square mile, containing magnificent scenic driveways

past vaults and mouldering mausoleums,

and peeling tombs, and numberless assembly arrayed as ugly jagged teeth,

crudely primitive and self-conscious,

a pox upon the sward.

A square mile of unbeauty.

A square mile of perpetration of pollution.

A vain square mile of perpetuation of perpetuation, doomed,

mutely doomed to lose all vestige of identity

and by unknown.

In consecration is the landscape desecrated.

William James Wilcox, Passed Away 18th Feb. 1901.

You've been over half a century dead, William -

whoever you were. The worms that got fat on you
have baited hooks long since.

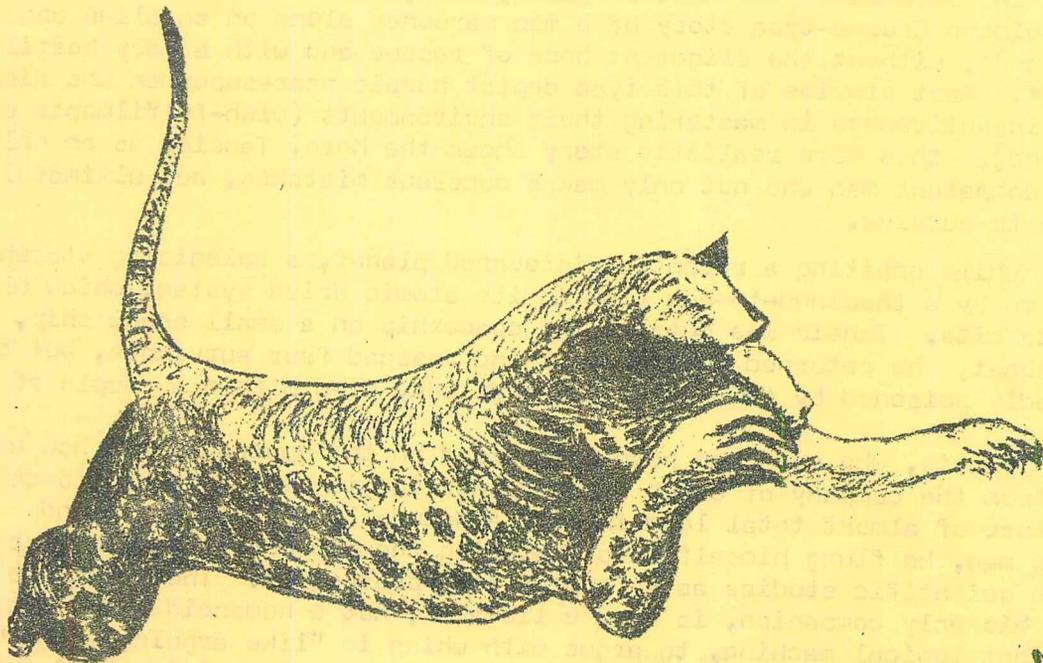
Whoever you were. Whoever you were
there ought to be a law against you and your ilk,
a statute of limitations against you growing old so gracelessly
in extenuated deterioration.

Token.

In unlovely loving memory,
Presumptuous obtrusiveness.

A curse upon your prolonged posthumous presence, sir, madam
- whoever the devil you were.

(c) Jack Wodhams.



18

S P A C E F L I G H T T O I N F I N I T Y :

C H A R L E ' S L O G A N ' S
" S H I P W R E C K "

A N D

C H R I S B O Y C E ' S
" C A T C H W O R L D "

a review by diane southgate

The space voyage to a strange unknown planet is probably the second most common plot in science fiction, and it is generally what the non-fan thinks of when he hears science fiction mentioned. The sheer open-endedness of the theme, its endless possibilities, however, keep it from being a hackneyed theme and make possible a fresh and vivid approach. The two books discussed here are illustrations of this -- utterly different in mood and style, they were both tales of space travel to distant worlds, and both shared certain stock details of science fiction -- space ships, aliens, a computer as a major character, humans surviving in basically hostile surroundings. In both cases the pessimism was not overstated and seemed the logical outgrowth of the conditions of the story rather than a mere fashionable "downbeat ending".

In "Shipwreck" the mood is quiet, grey, understated and gentle. It is a Robinson Crusoe-type story of a man marooned alone on an alien and unknown planet, without the slightest hope of rescue and with a very hostile environment. Most stories of this type depict heroic near-supermen who display brilliant inventiveness in mastering their environments (wish-fulfillments of independence); this more realistic story shows the hero, Tansis, as an only averagely competent man who not only makes numerous mistakes, but ultimately even fails to survive.

While orbiting a recently discovered planet, a colonizing starship is destroyed by a thousand-to-one flaw in its atomic drive system, which blows the ship to bits. Tansis was outside the spaceship on a small scout ship, a space-lifeboat; he returned to the wreck and rescued four survivors, but they were so badly poisoned by the radiations that they died within a couple of months.

Tansis, who had been born and raised on the spaceship and had never been far from the company of other human beings in his life, now had to cope with a future of almost total loneliness. A naturally well-balanced and phlegmatic man, he flung himself into exploring the new planet and immersed himself in scientific studies as a form of self-protection. The scoutship computer, his only companion, is very believable; not a humanoid "Hal" but a semi-sentient logical machine, to argue with which is "like arguing with the rule book." As the computer has been programmed to be "suspicious" of mutiny and to prevent any unorthodox use of the scoutship, Tansis must explain the anomalous situation in great detail in order to get the machine's co-operation -- it just hasn't been programmed to the possibility of the parent vessel being destroyed.

The planet turns out to be richly supplied with life, but this solves no problems. The entire land surface except the poles is covered with blue-green masses of ribbon-like vegetation, which he gradually discovers is one giant communal plant! It is not only inedible but so filled with narcotic poisons that it cannot be broken down into edible substances in the laboratory. In Spring it renders the air deadly with clouds of narcotic and halucogenic pollen. Even the smoke from the burning vegetation is dangerous.

There is no animal life whatsoever on the land, except microscopic creatures in pools of water in some of the tree-trunks; however, the ponds, rivers and seas contain a variety of animal life, including a number of large seal-like sea creatures who seem to be intelligent, and are certainly willingly to be friendly. Tansis first meets the sea creatures while exploring on a hand-made raft; he returns repeatedly to attempt communication, but though the aliens project feelings of warmth and sympathy and on one occasion he seems to achieve a sort of mystic communion, he is not really able to understand them. (There is a suggestion that the aliens are very advanced spiritually, and can understand Tansis, want to help him but cannot do much as he cannot understand them.)

Despite starting his lonely sojourn on the planet with much more of the advantages of civilization behind him than Robinson Crusoe had on his desert island, Tansis is actually in a much more desperate condition; the planet is, after all, an alien world, and even the atmosphere is poisonous at times; and there is nothing edible on it apart from a few species of microscopic algae and similar minute life. Gradually his food supply runs out and eventually he must learn to cultivate vats of algae for food. Slowly the complex equipment of the spaceship starts to break down, and cannot be replaced. Even the computer begins to make mistakes and eventually will be undependable or even dangerous. Tansis' own mind breaks down, and he has hallucinations of the other people on the spaceship, especially his family and the captain, who seems apparently to be a resented authority figure. Despite this, he is still able to cope with the situation, and learns enough chemistry from the computer to synthesise food from some of the native algae after his earth algae supply becomes poisoned by the pollen-contaminated atmosphere.

Much of the book is taken up with details of his attempts at bettering his chances of survival by building a windmill (as a power-generator), by experimenting to find edible native food, by building equipment to process algae, and so forth. Realistically, he progresses mainly by trial and error, and frequently messes things up.

Despite the harshness of the planet, and the monotony of the plant life, it is not without its own kind of beauty and interest, and Tansis also enjoys a large stock of classical music, novels, etc. A pathetic irony is seen as he struggles to obtain enough food to survive on, while surrounded by all this cultural and scientific treasury. He is a man who has lived all his life in a totally artificial and controlled environment, under highly regulated conditions -- the author even notes at one stage that Tansis had to learn to throw things because throwing was strictly forbidden on the spaceship -- too much that might be damaged. He is very much a product of his culture and original environment, which is referred to occasionally and sketched in a few well-chosen details.

Gradually weakened by a combination of malnutrition, cumulative poisoning, and lack of hope, he finally succumbs. His death, in the presence of the aliens who have gathered to give him support in his last moments, is unexpected up to this point by the reader, and yet how inevitable. This moving scene has a hint of cosmic reconciliation and a sort of spiritual welcome -- as if the only way he could fully adapt to the planet would be through death -- and possibly reincarnation as an alien.

These gentle and mysterious beings would want to accept this good and sensitive man.

In "Catchworld" this mystical aspect is much more obvious. A small group of people rather than a solitary individual represent the human element. They are the crew of the "Yokoku", a spaceship, one of a fleet sent to destroy an alien planet, the home of a mysterious and hostile race of "Crystalloids" who have been attacking Earth. There is a hint that these aliens are inspired in their aggressiveness by an immensely ancient, superhumanly intelligent being, "the Crow". The universe in this novel is not coldly indifferent, as in "Shipwreck", but actively vindictive.

It soon becomes obvious that the crew of the spaceship have been manipulated in various vile ways -- for example, they have been conditioned to experience a kind of orgasmic pleasure at the mere thought of killing off their enemies. And later more and more dark revelations show how they were chosen and manipulated into volunteering; apparently they were chosen in early childhood and brainwashed without their knowledge. Worse is to follow; the scientist in charge of the project seems to be a kind of irrational sadist who is carrying out some kind of experiment on them. They have been deliberately selected as a crew because they are people who are totally incompatible, and who could not function as a normal team under any conditions! Despite this, they succeed eventually in achieving a certain amount of co-operation -- you'd say that merely finding out that they were deliberately selected to be unable to co-operate would give a strong motive for co-operation.

But their situation is yet grimmer. The computer in charge of the ship is an experimental MI (machine intelligence), a kind of super-Hal, who seems to know everything they are thinking. To their horror, they realize that it is intended that they will be part of the Machine Intelligence eventually -- it will absorb their memories and even the structures of their bodies. They will still exist, but in holographic form, and subject to the computer's choices. A problem of identity is raised here -- if you are really a hologram but feel real, are you still real? The answer seems in this case to be 'yes'. I was reminded of Stanislaw Lem's "Solaris", where a similar situation was seen.

The most powerful human personality on board is that of the Captain, Tamura, a Japanese. There is a flashback to his early life in a kind of militarist monastery, where he committed murder in order to participate in the vengeance spacefleet. His drive and ruthlessness makes him a match for the computer, and something of a terror to the other crew members -- it is the only way he can keep order under the hopeless conditions. However, as the people gradually realize that they are under a sentence of death as they can never return to Earth, and a holographic life might offer many advantages (including potential immortality) they finally accept absorption and seem by the end of the journey to have been

integrated into a superhumanly powerful group-mind or gestalt. One man, Allardyce, a rather psychotic character, doesn't get absorbed and cannot see or hear the others in their holographic form. He wanders around much of the time in a panic, until the others manage to make themselves visible to him and calm him down.

They reach Altair, where the alien invasion fleet came from, and receive weird electronic static and signals from the aliens, who seem to be trying to communicate. Suddenly the vessel is invaded by terrifying entities, apparition of legendary demons, acting in hostile and menacing ways. The demons include Pazuzu (the Middle Eastern demon in "The Exorcist") and Lilith, who manifests as a ferocious and arrogant vampiress. She explains that demons are actually aliens who visited Earth Millenia ago. Apparently the two species, demons and humans, affected each other's evolution. Later the ghastly demonlord Bael appears, and tells them that they have been lured to this planet by the plans of the Crow, as have many other alien species.

However, the demons seem to be intent on doing damage rather than giving information, and are combatted by MacGillvery, a crew member who has apparently practiced the forbidden studies of archaeology and black magic. There are startling scenes of demonic possession, ceremonial magic, and exorcism, with magic circles being drawn, words of power chanted, and plentiful demonic swearing. Obviously the author of this novel has seen "The Exorcist" (or read the book). An intriguing aspect is that the demons find the magic of technology and electronics as unnatural as the humans find the demon's own powers. By means of MacGillvery's occult knowledge the fiends are driven off, but not before they have "killed" some of the crew members, including MacGillvery himself, and wiped out the entire crew of the only other surviving ship of the original fleet.

After the vengeance fleet had left, Rulkotter, the psychopathic scientist who had planned the original "machine intelligence", creates a horrendous giant brain, cloned from human genetic material, and sets it as crew for a faster-than-light ship developed after the vengeance fleet departed. In a typical Sf paradox, this wretched brain, which has become, unbeknown to its creators, a paranoid schizophrenic sadist, has reached Altair, the alien planet, at the same time as the "Yukoku" had done so. The final chapter of the novel is one of fantasy adventure and cosmic paradox as the true nature of the Crow and the components of its composite mind are revealed

Allardyce, stranded on the surface of the planet, is pursued amongst weird alien life-forms by the evil Crow-mind, and uses the survival techniques of his African Bushman ancestors, advised and aided by Tamura, who has merged with the group-mind that developed out of the merging of human and machine-intelligence consciousnesses that emerged under the stress of the demons' attack. A final after-note to the story gives a few details of the origin of the evil giant brain and gives a feeling of depressing irony.

Like "Shipwreck", "Catchworld" though mainly centring on the experiences of a very small group, extremely isolated, gives a vivid sketch of the protagonist's culture. The society envisaged in "Catchworld" is not pleasant - it is typical "Nasty Big Brother" in fact. Harsh laws, inequality, suppression of knowledge, brave people being cold-bloodedly betrayed to their deaths, vile experiments on retarded children, extremely depraved paranoid sadists in position

of dictatorial power. Despite this there are some admirable aspects -- racial prejudice has been overcome, as is shown in the multi-racial crew on the "Yukoku" -- whites, blacks and asians -- although there still seems to be nationalism. Japanese nationalism of a highly aggressive sort seems to be rampant, though directed towards the aliens rather than other Earth nations. As is inevitable in a world where unprovoked and inexplicable alien attacks and destruction of entire cities has taken place, the human attitude towards the cosmos is one of "If you see something moving, better shoot first and ask questions later." This is a far cry from "Shipwreck's" attitude of gently curiosity towards other life-forms.

I much enjoyed these books, especially "Shipwreck" (Robinson Crusoe" type stories always fascinate me) and delighted in their fresh re-combinations of traditional themes and plots to express their authors' cosmic visions in vivid and enjoyable ways. I was also very taken with many of the minor details -- a peculiar water-lilly-like carnivorous animal in "Catchworld", which Allardyce tried to catch and which instead gave him a very unpleasant near-drowning, was rather intriguing, as were the weird tatoos which MacGillvery had inflicted upon himself and which he had covered with artificial plastic skin.

Further novels by these two authors would be well worth watching for.

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