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= 12 = PHIL COLLAS. 1st? 2nd? 3rd? 4th? WELL, ONE OF THE EARLIEST

The Inner Domain, appearing in *Amazing Stories* for October 1935, made Phil Collas the fourth Australian writer to see print in the science fiction magazines, so it seemed at the time. But on more careful consideration we may be able to credit him with a better priority.

H. M. Crimp had already been in *Amazing* twice, but all we know of him is Dr. Sloane's remark that he was "an author in far distant Australia." As I have suggested, the evidence is slight and suspect (see Note 11). We could choose to exclude him from the roster.

Alan Connell's first contribution to *Wonder Stories*, *The Reign of the Reptiles*, had been in its August 1935 issue. But how long had it been waiting for publication? Not, I suspect as long as *The Inner Domain* had been lying in *Amazing's* inventory. Sloane was notorious for his backlog, and could have accepted the story a long time before.

J. M. Walsh, best known of this early group, had been featured in *Wonder Stories Quarterly* Summer 1931 with *Vandals of the Void*, and followed it up with another novel and three shorts in less than a year. But consider that Walsh had moved to London in 1929. There he was a lot closer to New York and much better able as an established professional to deal with American publishers.

To break into that market from the wrong side of the Pacific as Collas, Connell and the enigmatic Crimp perhaps did was a vastly more difficult feat.

Like many early science fiction stories, *The Inner Domain* has more content than its 14,000 words can deal with adequately, and would have made a tolerable novel. Firmly in the lost-race tradition, it has an advanced subterranean people in deep caverns under the Great Sandy Desert, favorite hiding place for such cultures in a few other tales. Originally established by a vanished high civilisation of a race evidently not quite identical with *Homo Sapiens*, then taken over by Aborigines in a still remote age since when they have prospered and attained a scientific level

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well beyond ours. Contact with the outer world comes when a matter-transmission experiment draws a party flying overhead into the cave realm. Later a time-scanning device probes into the remote past to reveal the original civilisation and its fate, destroyed by unexplained amorphous monsters.

Had he written any other SF? Identifying him as having been Chief Philatelic Officer of the Post Office, now retired and living in Melbourne, I wrote to the author to ask about this, incidentally asking whether he knew any facts about H. M. Crimp.

"The Inner Domain had been written about three years earlier," he told me. "Later on, I had difficulty with two allegedly lost manuscripts sent to USA. I did not do any more SF writing as by that time I had moved into philatelic fields, where most of my working and writing interests have since been." This was his only story printed professionally, though he had two short borderline pieces in the Australian Stamp Monthly and one in The United Amateur, of all places, in the USA. What a pity, by the way, that he was a victim of the vanishing manuscript phenomenon which struck so often in the chaotic American pulp publishing scene before the war. Add to the frustration of being half the world away from the few receptive editors, and that would discourage most aspiring writers. So we lost him to philately, the field in which he became Australia's leading expert.

Born 15 March 1907 in South Australia, Felix Edward Collas (always known as Phil) was a typical Australian in forsaking the rural scene for civilisation as represented by Melbourne at the earliest opportunity. Philately became his profession, and in over thirty years of association with stamps broken by war service in the RAAF he wrote and edited many monographs and serials, published a lot of research and popular contributions, held many offices and in short was a conspicuous figure, receiving honors including an MBE in 1970.

Discussing the bibliography of Australian science fiction, he wrote: "It is, no doubt, quite difficult to go back sufficiently in time to be certain of encompassing all that has been published...when I was quite young, say 60 years ago, I lived in the country. My father was a great hoarder of old magazines, housed in a shed where I used to while away many hours. And I can remember quite distinctly that my first encounter with what later became known as science fiction was in the pages of a popular monthly magazine of the early 1900's, The Lone Hand. This story, probably circa 1908-11, concerned an Australian destroyer which, by means of a force field, negated the efforts of an attacking Japanese warship. In the early 1900's invasion from Japan, or other Asian country, was thought by many people in Australia to be a distinct possibility. Erle Cox's Fools' Harvest (1939) was based on a much later extension of that fear. So...in the early years of Australian magazines such as The Lone Hand, the Australasian Journal and others, there were possibly a number of other stories with SF characteristics. But of course there would be real problems in undertaking the tremendous research necessary.

"In Melbourne, in the late 1920's and early 30's anyone who read the pulp style of SF then available did not have a high rating in the eyes of the majority, being regarded as slightly mad, and I think that in those years, when I bought the stuff secondhand, I had only one friend who openly confessed to reading and liking SF." It added injury to insult that the reason for buying the magazines secondhand or remained was that new they were outrageously expensive: half a dozen 1930 Amazings would have cost most workers better than a day's wages. "I do regret that just after the war I sold my very large accumulation of SF magazines...Nevertheless, I am still a compulsive SF reader." And no, he didn't know anything about Crimp, though he remembered reading Walsh.

As would be expected, the two "short borderline pieces" in the Australian Stamp Monthly were slanted for a philatelic readership. An Episode of the Future, in the March 1932 issue, briefly sketches developments in air mail services and in space flight, leading to the first interplanetary mail to Venus. The Postal System of Lemuria, in May 1932, is a fragment "translated from the original script by Louis Le Menteur" and is a gentle spoof of the subject. The contribution in The United Amateur, March 1932, titled A.D. 2026 -- An Unknown goes to Work, is typical of the mere sketch of daily life in a future age that was once a common category. The date may indicate when Phil wrote it.

Let's look at the Oct 1935 Amazing Stories and see the setting of *The Inner Domain*. Amazing was then a fairly sedate looking magazine in the old 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " untrimmed size: this month's cover is brighter than usual, with a red spaceship, Earth and Moon against deep purple space varying the usual composition in browns and greys. The featured story is *Another Dimension* by George H. Scheer Jr., who wrote a total of four thud and blunder epics, three in a series of which this is the second: it involves space warfare and various other marvels besides dimensions.

There is what proved the last of Joseph W. Skidmore's execrable Posi and Nega stories, *paris* junk about a personified electron and proton which is arguably the worst material ever run in Amazing at least before the Shaver revelations. There is *The Chemistry Murder Case*, a simple detective short by Miles J. Breuer. Nat Schachner has his only story in Amazing, a surprisingly naive future war tale strikingly different from his far-reaching *Thought-Variants* in the contemporary *Astounding*. Given Sloane's habit of sitting on manuscripts for years, it may have been a very early effort. And Clara E. Chesnutt makes her only appearance with *Escape from Ceres*, a routine space prison story. Sloane has one of his editorials on measurements (really) and no doubt wrote the several short fillers on astronomy, and Bob Olsen has a poem, *Landscapes of Luna*.

In Discussions the majority of letters come from outside the USA, including one from Adelaide's John Gregor. He will achieve undying fame as editor of Australia's first amateur science fiction publication, *Science Fiction Review*, three years later, and will be heard from occasionally in later years. Definitely the whole issue belongs to the early years of science fiction and seems generations rather than years remote from the forties.

== 13 == VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE, OR, NOW WE'RE GETTING INTO TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Edwin Lester Arnold (1857-1935) wrote some readable fiction which did not prove very memorable. But *Phra the Phoenician* was one of the best known treatments of reincarnation, realistic rather than mystical in its approach. Other books are listed by Tuck (*1) and Bleiler (*2) of which *Lepidus the Centurion* is the only one that anyone might have mentioned up to 1957. No doubt the odd collector here and there had discovered others, but I am not aware of any discussion in connection with the antecedents of science fiction up to that time, of *Lieut. Gullivar Jones: his Vacation*. (*3)

In 1957 this book was revealed to the wondering eye like the treasures of King Tutankhamen (to exaggerate a little) by Roger Lancelyn Green, who deserves more credit than I see him given for *Into Other Worlds* (*4). He covers the same ground as seventeen and a half others and deliberately avoids the modern science fiction movement. But it is obviously an original survey based on a sincere interest and appreciation. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the pre-20th Century interplanetary tales, and it gives useful descriptions and extracts for those not proposing to go beyond a superficial reading of them.

Its importance here, however, is its discussion of Arnold's book. Green rightly comments that it is a "...dream-story with the slightest and least memorable of plots and the sketchiest of scientific backgrounds," yet presents an extraordinarily "haunting and convincing picture of the immeasurably ancient world of Mars."

*1. Tuck, Donald H. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, v. 1. Advent, 1974. p. 19

*2. Bleiler, Everett F. *The Checklist of Science-Fiction and Supernatural Fiction*. Firebell Books, 1978. p. 10

*3. Arnold; Edwin Lester. *Lieut. Gullivar Jones: His Vacation*. Brown, Langham & Co. 1905. Also as *Gulliver of Mars*. Ace, 1964. PB

*4. Green, Roger Lancelyn. *Into Other Worlds: Space-Flight in Fiction*, from *Lucian to Lewis*. Abelard-Schuman, 1957

He introduced this long lost oddity to us and made it plain that it fitted inconspicuously into the reticulated evolution behind *Amazing* and all that followed.

No doubt many readers immediately thought of Edgar Rice Burroughs on reading Green's epitome, but direct influence seems less likely on examining the book itself. I have not yet seen specific suggestions of earlier sources that both Arnold and Burroughs might have known, or of other writers who might show some influence from Arnold in even more ephemeral writings: but we don't really know enough about the period.

The title was one of the book's many curious features, and clearly it bothered Don Wollheim enough to take the dubious step of giving a very little known work a new title for the Ace edition. Certainly it bothered me. Leaving the matter of the strange spelling of Gullivar for philologists to ponder on there was also the peculiar subtitle. Why Vacation? Yes, to be sure Jones returns to dully normal Earth at the end of the book, but most of us would not think of describing his visit as a holiday, nor is it anything he plans in the first place. It occurred to me that Arnold might not have chosen this word at all: that it might be the result of a misunderstanding or simple error, the original word being Vocation.

A vocation is a profession, a career, a calling, a metaphorical summons. If you set out to become a priest or a monastic in the Catholic Church you are said to have a vocation. (You could be said to have a problem, but that's something else.) The implication is that you have not merely weighed the pros and cons of a way of making a living with unusual requirements and decided to commit yourself to it: you have been influenced by an external force. Perhaps we are to imagine a deity acting like a sergeant calling for volunteers — "You, you and you."

So if we consider how Jones is spirited away to Mars, which is as ambiguous as John Carter's trips and seems even less to depend on his own volition, it makes sense to think of some inscrutable entity requiring his presence on the red planet for reasons of its own. Vocation is a logical word for it.

Now, what is the correct title of the original edition? Green gives as Vacation. If this is wrong, from 1957 onward the error would be perpetuated. Reference works printed since Green's could be merely following him without verifying the title in earlier bibliographies, and indeed these could also be mistaken. The original edition of Bleiler (*1) supports my case by having it as Vocation, but it is the only book in step. Otherwise, the book was rare and the mistake in some secondary source could have been repeated over the years.

I have yet to see a copy of the 1905 edition, but on making a few inquiries I had an assurance from George Locke who had the book handy that on the title page the word is indeed Vacation. "So the mistake if any happened right at the beginning."

Is this another beautiful theory slain by a homely fact? By no means. We have merely established that the change must have occurred in the production of the first edition.

As we all know, it is well within the bounds of probability that a printer could misspell an unusual word, or actually decide that his copy must be wrong and change it. It is also possible for an editor to do the same, or even decide that Vacation would be a better word. I believe that what Arnold wrote and intended was Vocation, but that at some stage someone else made the change.

After this book sank without trace he abandoned fiction, as far as can be discovered. It is understandable that fifteen years of public indifference after the initial modest success of Phra the Phoenician would have diminished his urge for self-expression already. Now that he had a new novel to thrust on the public, it appears that his former publishers — Harper, Chatto & Windus and Longmans, Green — had lost interest in him. The firm of Brown, Langham & Co. were not in the same class. Is the imprint known at all otherwise? Might it even have been a vanity press? If Arnold left his manuscript at the mercy of an obscure publisher for want of better, and then found his title mangled in the finished product — might not the experience have been enough to make him give up altogether? How would you react if it happened to you?

*1. Bleiler, Everett F. *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature*. Shasta, 1948; unauthorised reprint, Fax 1972

To digress a little, I have not forgotten some of the things the printers of the short-lived Australian magazine Science Fiction Monthly did to my Science Fiction Scene department.

I referred to Buck Rogers as "a battle-scarred veteran", not a very brilliant or original pun perhaps, but meant as a joke to lighten up some grumpy remarks about comics. And it came out as the traditional cliché of a battle-scarred one.

Writing about giant insect stories (Leinster's The Forgotten Planet was new then, and part of it had run as a short story in an earlier issue of the magazine) I set out the traditional "square-cube rule" case against these colorful creatures, then commented: "A plausible argument, but quite wrong", and proceeded to demolish it. But the word came out as "strong" which was no help.

Referring to Wells' The Time Machine, I recalled how in his visit to a desolate scene under a dull red sun millions of years ahead, the Time Traveller "finds monstrous crabs taking an interest in him." In print this became "... taking no interest in him."

Writing of Jack Williamson's The Blue Spot (a little-developed short serial which I suppose few remember now), I was made to say: "...what stands out in it for me is the ultimate extension of the power-mad dictator: an immoral dictator spending millions of years at the job." Well, yes, I would go along with the judgment that he was immoral. For one thing, he bred his wretched subjects into a number of distinct species adapted for various tasks. But what I had written was "immortal".

Well now, let's consider the situation of the author of several books which have made little or no impact, now trying something very unconventional on the public. Never mind what we think of his title seventy-five years later, it was no doubt chosen with care. Even to the spelling of the name with a instead of the familiar e, and the archaic and stilted his instead of the simple possessive. And someone has changed a word so as to lose its meaning. Unhindered by any factual details of the setting, let us visualise the scene.

Here is the office of the Brown, Langham organisation, perhaps a poky little room up four flights of creaky stairs in some shabby neighbourhood, where someone probably named neither Brown nor Langham receives this moderately wealthy dilettante whose novel he has contracted to publish. Arnold is a man of 48 who used to be a colonial planter, not one imagines an author likely to suffer fools gladly. He takes the finished book and handles it with pleasure, then what has been done to his creation dawns on him. Seized by ungovernable rage he takes his walking cane to the unfortunate publisher and chases him out of his den and down the passage howling imprecations. I'm only guessing, but I like to think it happened somewhat like this.

= 14 = WHO WAS RICHARD SHAVER?

There seems no need to go over the whole ridiculous history of the Shaver mythos. Science fiction survived it well enough, and I doubt that it left any particular trace behind it. Still, if today no one cares about wisdom of the ancients and bad guys living in caves and zapping us with all-purpose rays, there seems some doubt about the simple facts which would surely be better clarified.

The truth about the supposed originator of the cult remains obscure. Various stories were told, but according to later accounts it all began with Howard Browne tossing a crank manuscript in the wastebasket and Ray Palmer retrieving it to look at (perhaps just to disparage his judgment) and finding some good story possibilities in it. On the face of it this seems plausible. Anyone who ever worked in an editorial office knows the phenomenon of the crank manuscript, and Palmer or any experienced fiction editor must have had a good eye for something (however crazy) guaranteed to appeal to a lot of dimwits. So Palmer picked out the good bits and worked them into a couple of slam-bang-kapow shockers that started a wildly successful series. So far, so good.

What is not believable is that the writer of the original frantic nonsense would be adaptable enough to suddenly develop into a competent writer of mass-produced adventure fiction. Not good fiction, granted, but adequately written for its intended readership, moving briskly along. And voluminous, turned out quickly to meet the demand. Not the work of a factory hand who heard disembodied voices and was being persecuted by the forces of evil.

Well, all right, perhaps Palmer or anyone who was available may have written all the stories credited to Shaver. He may have been satisfied to have his name used, and his message disseminated in fictional form, and one supposes to be paid something for his cooperation. The Shaver stories do not seem to show a distinctive style, and they could easily be the work of several people. I have two objections to this. In the first place, we don't have to ask where a writer gets his ideas, even a hack, especially a hack. Someone put together the original framework for the stories? But why not Palmer? He didn't need to borrow ideas from some disturbed citizen. I suspect that some elements of what became the Shaver Mystery could be found in Palmer's magazines before they were brought together. The story *Giants out of the Sun*, by "Peter Horn", in *Amazing*, May 1940 seems a probable forerunner to me.

For another thing, we have to explain stories signed Shaver that do not belong in the canon. In particular, consider *The Tale of the Red Dwarf*, in *Fantastic Adventures* May 1947, a whimsical pseudo-folk tale. It is completely inconsistent with the usual Shaver preoccupation with malevolent cave dwellers, with its horror of caves and bizarre sexual anxieties broadly hinted at. Would someone who had ever seriously believed in something like Shaver's evil Deros lurking underground and sneakily harrasing surface people write such a story, or let his name be put to it?

In short, I think we have some open questions here. Can we hear from a reliable witness who actually talked to Richard S. Shaver?

= 15 = BLOCKHEAD

Does a collection of short stories and vignettes merit the title *The Best of Fredric Brown*? I feel that it does not. It is a good sampling of his short works and includes a few that almost anyone would have to choose — *Arena*, *Knock*, *Star Mouse*, *Letter to a Phoenix*, *Answer*, *Experiment*, *Come and Go Mad*. It makes a book I'm happy to own, and I don't have the stories conveniently together in any other collections.

But Brown's novels are stronger. *The Lights in the Sky are Stars* is an excellent treatment of the human motives behind space flight; *What Mad Universe?* is an extraordinary tour de force -- one of the few successful humorous science fiction novels, and at the same time one that can be read as a serious work though admittedly rather far out. *Martians, Go Home!* Has another unique comic premise. And I for one find a lot to admire in his detective novels. But none of these lend themselves well to sampling, and including extracts in a "Best" selection would hardly have worked. So after all we have to make do with shorts only.

Robert Bloch, who made the selection we see here, begins his excellent introduction with the following words: (*1)

"I hope they don't misspell his name.

"At the height of his fame, with more than two dozen books and over three hundred short stories to his credit, certain careless critics and reviewers were still referring to 'Frederic' or even 'Frederick' Brown.

"While their comments were generally (and deservedly) laudatory, he resented the spelling errors. He was a stickler for accuracy, and he took justifiable pride in his correct byline — Fredric Brown."

Just so. Now, removing the highly removable dust jacket by Richard V. Corben and contemplating the permanent cover of the book, what do we see? Behold! And also Lo! There at the head of the spine appears the name BLOCK.

*1. *The Best of Fredric Brown*, edited and with an introduction by Robert Bloch.
Nelson Doubleday, 1976