

# PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

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Past, Present and Future, a quarterly for inquiry and reflection on science fiction, is produced for limited free distribution by Graham Stone, GPO Box 4440, Sydney 2001, Australia.

== 46 == PHOSPHOR, by J. Filmore Sherry

While the conditions were favorable for science fiction to break out in the main centers well before 1900, and many writers were groping in the same general direction and books that have some place in the development are legion, Australia's place in this early stage was negligible. As with other movements, Antipodeans had some awareness of what was going on in British popular fiction, and rather less so American, but their own authors tended to write along conventional lines giving some attention to local issues and their national identity aspirations, but otherwise not pursuing new directions to any noticeable extent. Such Australian books as did have elements of nascent science fiction made no impression abroad, the outside world scarcely knowing that Australia existed; and they made little if any impression locally. Consequently primitive Australian science fiction works are as obscure as they are sparse. Only a few are familiar to collectors and some do not seem to have been mentioned as of interest before. The much enlarged version of the Australian Science Fiction Index that I have in preparation is intended to list all relevant books and I hope not to overlook too many.

The book introduced here was brought to my notice by the late Walter Stone, president of the Book Collectors' Society of Australia. Did I know of Phosphor, he asked. He had not seen it mentioned as such but it seemed to qualify as an early local example of science fiction. I had never heard of it. Well, he had a copy I could have. So I added a previously unrecognised work to my own collection as well as to the record. Let me describe it.

Phosphor: an Ischian Mystery, by J. Filmore Sherry. Centennial Publishing Co., Melbourne etc., 1888. 9-102+1 p. 6½" paper covers, stapled. Black and white pictorial cover signed Jacobi.

A pink slip pasted in this copy reads: "What will it cost to print? The Centennial Publishing Company undertake to revise and prepare manuscript for publication either in serial or book form. Estimates and designs furnished..." Evidently a vanity press operation at least on occasion. The firm had confidence in its products though. Their announcement for Australia's Century, 1888 modestly describes it as "A grand and important work, far surpassing in literary merit, extent, typographical

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finish, binding and general effect any volume as yet issued in the Southern Hemisphere..."

This book is well printed on good quality book paper, but the cheap stapled binding and crudely drawn cover make it unattractive. The story is no classic. It has a typical Victorian framing device of a manuscript introduced by a supposed editor who nervously disclaims its authenticity, not to mention some wholly irrelevant family history stuff and laborious preliminaries, all presumably more readable at the time. But it is p. 29 before we get to the beginning of the actual story with an awkwardly contrived explanation of the narrator's premature entombment -- the result of experiments with snake-venom antidotes by which he inadvertently achieves suspended animation.

Since this is only a means of getting into some inhabited caves, the setting of the action proper, by p. 45 -- when falling or walking into a hole in the ground would have done as well -- it must have tried the reader's patience even then and helps to explain the book's obscurity. But once getting to the real action it moves along more briskly. There is an extensive cave system lit by luminous fungi and populated by hybrids of man and monkey (species not given: since this is in Mediterranean Europe we might guess Barbary Apes), and the visitor from the upper world has the usual experiences. There is also some volcanic activity introducing subterranean lava flows, and fleeing from the disaster that wipes out the cave environment he makes it back to the surface alone, not saving his hairy bit of crumpet. A familiar ending.

A short Appendix on phosphorescence shows an attempt to find a scientific basis for the convenient lighting system. The human-monkey hybrids were a new and daring concept to 1888 readers. Though it leads us nowhere in particular and certainly would not create a body of readers eager for more, it has to be accepted as early and primitive science fiction, or pseudo-science at any rate. It was meant to be scientifically possible.

Sources? Well, suspended animation was already a standard convention used in several utopias located in the future before Bellamy's *Looking Backward* also appeared in 1888 -- though Sherry's use of it has a longer history, the somewhat better known William Shakespeare using it in *Romeo and Juliet*. Caves had figured in a number of imaginative works, perhaps more often as means of access to isolated places on the surface as in Paltock's *Peter Wilkins* (many 19th Century editions) and Haggard's *Allan Quartermain* (1887). Sherry could have read Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1872) or Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871) which described inhabited caves. More generally, caves were associated with primitive man in the public mind at the time, cave archaeology having had its first great period since the 1860's, and the expression cave-man being a recent term for paleolithic ancients.

Locating the caves under an actual Italian island is a weakness, but the whole tale is so thin that this does little to detract from it. The absurd descriptions of volcanism show that the author had neither seen an active volcano (which is not a sin, not many of us have in person though today we've all seen film of one) nor read any proper description of one.

A weak effort, but one of Australia's first. Nothing seems to be known about the author, and this is his only known work.

#### ADDENDA

= 47 = WHO WAS L. TAYLOR HANSEN? (see Topic 5 and Addenda 29, 36)

Negative evidence from Dennis Lien: "I find no record of an L. T. Hansen ever receiving a PhD in Anthropology or any other subject at an American (at least) university. Hansen is credited with only three books by NUC, CCLC etc; two of these were published by Palmer and the third is self-published;---

"Some Considerations of and additions to the Taylor-Wegener hypothesis of continental displacement, by L. Taylor Hansen, Los Angeles, the Author, c.1946. 88 p. 28 cm. maps.

"No word by Hansen shows up in the dictionary catalog of the Peabody Anthropological Collection at Harvard, and as this catalog analyses journal articles as well as books, I take this as meaning that Hansen did not publish in reputable anthropological



journals. Nor can I find any biographic or obit information on him. So my assumption is that he's a typical Ray Palmer nut and/or ringer."

My own investigation indicated that Hansen did not write for respectable general periodicals. As for the intellectual standard of his nonfiction in *Amazing*, not having read it I cannot judge. Whoever it was writing as L. Taylor Hansen was a layperson: but if only recognised experts were to be considered you know where we'd be. As we know, though science fiction was not recognised by orthodoxy in the 30's and 40's even to the extent it is today, it was often better on unresolved matters than the officially established myopia.

Consider for instance Hansen's 1946 book. It might not be much good, but we can see by the title that it had some value. Ever since good world atlases were available, it had been obvious to anyone with half an eye that many opposite coastlines were too close to a good fit for coincidence. Obviously the land surfaces of the continents were on top of areas of crust that had slid about over the globe and had formerly been connected in places that could be seen. Taylor and Wegener said that much was evident and went on to theorise how it had happened. But orthodoxy didn't want to hear it, and for two generations went on insisting that the continents couldn't have moved so they hadn't. Conventional paleogeography as a result was all wrong, based on rising and falling sea levels and climatic changes assuming static land masses, and in fact it was pseudoscientific garbage. But of course Taylor and Wegener were right, as any fool would have known and a lot of laymen did. In the 1960's detailed ocean floor surveys showed that the continents can and did and do move and how, and now geologists will probably tell you they knew it all along. So while Hansen's book on the subject may be not so hot, he was on the right track in even discussing the theory.

As for his/hers being a ringer, Hansen's early fiction predates Palmer's editorship by eight years. Someone else might have written under the name later, but we have no reason to think so. We still know nothing about him. Or her.

There is a further possibility that opens up more difficulties not considered so far. Suppose that Louise Taylor Hansen at some time in her life married and changed her surname.

If this occurred back in the roaring 20's before the stories were written, then we can't guess what her maiden name was -- and therefore what her brother's surname was. If she wrote the stories anyway, so far so good. No problem. But if he wrote them? She was on the spot dealing with editors, so they went under her name. Then later, when he began writing the *Scientific Mysteries* series for Palmer, it was natural enough to go on using her name in *Amazing*. But if he wrote for publication somewhere else -- and particularly if it was some hidebound publication whose editor would have convulsions at mention of *Amazing* -- why then, he would use his own name. So perhaps he did write elsewhere but we've missed it because we weren't looking for Albert Jones or Peter Lobachevski.

If she changed her name in the 30's after the early stories were published, then later if she wrote the later material she would go on using her maiden name because it was established. And if he wrote it? Again, he might as well go on using her name rather than his own, for *Amazing*. But elsewhere? He might as well use his own. We haven't been looking for Albert Hansen or Peter Hansen, have we? Then, too, he might have written different kinds of stuff elsewhere. If he wasn't formally qualified to write in the fields he covered in *Amazing* but merely read up on them in the handiest public library, then he could do the same to write articles on politics, history, whatever. He might only have written about anthropology and related fields for Palmer.

We're not going to get any further with this unless we can find someone who knows some facts. How about some of the people on the scene around Palmer's office in the 40's?



= 48 = RICHARD S. SHAVER (see Topic 14)

Nobody told me about The Shaver Papers, in The Alien Critic (\*1), I found the item on scanning some back issues I acquired recently. It's a selection of extracts from letters from Shaver to Richard E. Geis in the 1973/4 period. To the same basic concepts running through the stories and articles of the 40's is added a new chimera, messages from the ancients to be found in patterns on cross-sections of rocks. Any old rock, or certain rocks in particular, is not clear to me. Be this as it may, Geis was corresponding with a real individual and apparently the same man who first put together the body of doctrine associated with his name. The style of the letters supports my contention that Palmer or others must have written the stories, for this is the earnest believer struggling to express himself.

Well, that disposes of my lingering suspicion that a real Shaver never existed or alternatively that Palmer composed the myth and attributed it to one of the crank letter writers all editors know. I asked if we could hear from some reliable witness who had personally contacted Shaver because our evidence seemed all from Palmer.

It remains possible that Palmer added a lot to the original stuff -- that some of Shaver's ideas were not original but had been suggested by other fringe occultists before him, that Palmer was attracted to Shaver's claims because they made a coherent pseudo-history to accomodate some elements of the occult Atlantis tradition that already interested him, that hints of this can be found in Amazing before Shaver such as the gigantism, dangerous radiation and interplanetary contacts in the Story Giants out of the Sun by Peter Horn (David Vern? Palmer himself?). I don't at present feel like spending a lot of time following this up but perhaps someone else might. Go to it, anyone.

So I'm putting down as confirmed: Richard Sharpe Shaver, 8 Oct 1907-5 Nov 1975. There was said to be an elder brother, Taylor Victor Shaver, who died in 1948 leaving one unfinished story, The Disappearance of Guy Sylvester, to be tidied up for publication by Chester S. Geier. I suppose if we allow one Shaver we can add another.

= 49 = STELLAR PUBLICATIONS' SCIENCE FICTION SERIES (see Topic 9 and Addenda 39)

From Tom Cockcroft: "I can tell you for a start that there were no colored covers...You probably still have copies of issues of Wonder that have advertisements for the first twelve, or should I say the same advertisement repeated. I encountered this for the first time in the Nov 1931 Wonder, the first of the large-size issues that I ever saw, and the one in which I first encountered an example of the work of Clark Ashton Smith, of whom I'd never heard before. (\*2) I was greatly impressed; this was probably late in 1937 (it would be seven years before I'd get to read the Smith story that preceded this one, in Out of Space and Time -- missed the Tales of Wonder and Startling appearances (\*3)).

"I was delighted by the advertisement for the Series, and for the page of New Science Fiction Books (fifteen books, each briefly but scrumptiously described -- years later, I learned from Reader and Collector that these books were remainders that Gernsback could buy cheaply, and which were generally on sale at half or less of the prices that he put on them)...". Let me just interlocute here in Hugo's defence. OK, he was selling these books for more than remainder outlets were asking. But those outlets weren't known or accessible to a lot of readers. And he did a useful service in drawing attention to these books, bringing them together in a list of a whole 15 science fiction books when they were a scarce commodity. By the way, doesn't this give him yet another record as the first SF book dealer? Back to Cockcroft.

(\*1) The Alien Critic, pub. Richard E. Geis. (Later Science Fiction Review). v. 3, no. 2 (no. 9), May 1974, p. 38-9.

(\*2) Beyond the Singing Flame. Wonder Stories Nov 1931; Tales of Wonder 10, Spr 1940; Startling Stories Summer 1944; Out of Space and Time, ed. A. Derleth. Arkham House 1942.

(\*3) City of the Singing Flame. Wonder Stories Jly 1931; Tales of Wonder 10, Spr 1940; Startling Stories Ja 1941; Out of Space and Time, ed. A. Derleth.



"Anyway, as to the Science Fiction Series: what greatly surprised me...was that they (the first twelve) did not have the beautiful -- as I considered them to be, when I saw them in the advertisement -- cover pictures; the cover bore the title and the author's name, but the picture was inside as a frontispiece, or perhaps pictorial title page. So the the advertisement was just a little deceptive, or even deceitful. Ah, now -- I've found what I was looking for -- when the booklets, or at least the first six, were first advertised, the effort was not made to give the reader the impression that the picture was on the front cover. In the third issue of Science Wonder Stories (August '29) there's an advertisement on p. 285 that shows the front cover of the first of the series, much as it probably is, and portions of four others that indicate that they are similar.

"I have only two -- and have never owned any others -- The Invading Asteroid by Wellman, and The Immortals of Mercury by Smith. The latter has at least one paragraph missing from it; the complete story is in Tales of Science and Sorcery (\*1); the cutting was done to make the story fit the pages, as it is the last page is on the outside of the back cover.

"I see that much the same advertisement is in Air Wonder Stories of the same date...also in the September Science Wonder the illustrations of the first six... are shown in the advt. on p. 291."

Just to carry on the vein of rampant nostalgia, my own introduction to Clark Ashton Smith was The Dark Age in Thrilling Wonder Stories Apr 1938, not typical of his work and it didn't impress me much. I suppose I read World of Horror in Tales of Wonder 8, Autumn 1939 but I can't remember it; but I did like the two Singing Flame stories which ran together in TOW 10. I didn't sight a 12" sized Wonder till I met Bert Castellari late in 1940 and was staggered by his modest collection; but I got my first two of the standard pulp size Wonder together with three or four back number Thrilling Wonders given to me by Scott Little, a radio ham who lived nextdoor to me in 1939 -- who incidentally gave me the special "50 Years of Radio" issue of Radio-Craft in which Hugo talked about his early experiences. SF had been changing overall of course, but there was a striking difference between the Thrilling Wonder of 1937 which was just the same magazine as the latest issue and the August 1934 and June 1935 Wonders which seemed quite dated and olde-worlde by comparison -- yet interesting for that very fact for the suggestion of what the magazines of a decade before could have been like. Indeed, SF magazines didn't go back a decade before either. These were my first Paul covers and I was sold. August 1934 was for Dimensional Fate by A. L. Burkholder, not much for Paul really and the story won't bear description though it read well then. June 1935 was for Laurence Manning's simply marvellous Seeds from Space, a Stranger Club yarn in which intelligent trees are going to take over Earth, and our hero saves the world by getting them drunk on manure. Both issues, I believe, were still offering the Science Fiction Series. I too thought the covers as shown looked beautiful. Paul's work in black and white was a bit heavily drawn and was improved by reduction.

= 50 = THE MOON TERROR, by A. G. Birch and others (see Topic 21)

Dennis Lien again: "My copy of The Moon Terror has a dark blue cloth cover, not a black one." Was I wrong in remembering it as black -- or have we a binding variant here?

PREWAR SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE EDITORIAL STAFF (see Topics 23 and 40/45)

Continuing with brief notes on some of these people, details from Cockcroft and Lien for the most part.

= 51 = EUGENE A. CLANCY, co-Editor of The Thrill Book for some issues

Born 1882, died 29 March 1952. Obituary in the New York Times 30 Mch 1952: "Magazine writer and editor, father of Hal Clancy, Boston Traveler columnist ...For the last seven years he had been South Shore correspondent for The Boston Herald. Mr. Clancy wrote more than 1,500 short stories, serials and novels.

(\*1) Tales of Science and Sorcery, by Clark Ashton Smith. Arkham 1964.



Eugene A. Clancy

In 1913 and 1914 short stories of his were included in volumes of 'best short stories of the year.'

"He was born in New York and was graduated from St. Francis Xavier College there in 1905. During the second World War he was executive secretary of the Quincy Council of Social Agencies. Besides his son, he leaves his wife, Lillian, and two grand-children." Lien: "Of incidental interest is the appearance of Red Mountain Limited, an Adventure Story. in 1925 from Chelsea House, N.Y."

= 52 = WILLIAM LEVI CRAWFORD, editor and publisher of Marvel Tales and Unusual Stories; later of Fantasy Book and Spaceway

Born 10 Sep 1911, still living and running the never completely quiescent Fantasy Publishing Co. Inc. Fantasy Book's editor was listed as Garret Ford, generally understood to be a collective pseudonym of Crawford, his wife Margaret and possibly Forrest J. Ackerman or someone else. Spaceway also credits Ford as associate editor. Mrs Crawford states in Reginald's Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature (\*1) "This name came from my name, Margaret Crawford. I never acted as editor: Bill selected all material used, and therefore Garret Ford should be listed as a pen-name for him. I do not believe Forry Ackerman ever used the name for any reason..." But why bother to list his name below Crawford's in Spaceway?

= 53 = FREDERICK HAYDN DIMMOCK, editor of Scoops

Born Luton, 1895, died Welwyn Garden City 1955. Did some writing and editorial work otherwise, and was on the staff of The Scout, mostly as editor, from 1913 to 1954 with a break on service in World War I.

= 54 = CHARLES D. HORNIG, editor of Wonder Stories Nov 1933-Apr 1936; Science Fiction Mch 1939-Sep 1941; Future Fiction Nov 1939-Nov 1940; Science Fiction Quarterly Summer 1940-Winter 1941.

Lien: "I recall reading within the last one to two years an article by him in...probably Starship or Science Fiction Review. I could not find it in my largely-boxed collection, but did not look overhard as I assume someone in FAPA will tell you of it this time." Nobody has so far, I can't see it in my files. Help, anyone.

= 55 = C. P. MASON, associate editor of the Wonder group

Lien: "There is a 1942 anthology published in NY by the New Home Library, called Great Love Scenes from Famous Novels, selected by Carl P. Mason. Whether this is Wonder's sometime associate editor, also yecept Epaminondas T. Snooks, I couldn't say, and think that I do not much want to." An understandable reaction.

Cockcroft: "You'll remember the two articles that C. P. Mason had in Thrilling Wonder in 1938. (\*2) One of these was a reprint from Mechanics and Handicraft, Paul illustrations and all, and probably the other one was too." Most likely I'd say, they are connected and both illustrated by Paul.

= 56 = RONALD OLIPHANT (not Oliphand), editor of The Thrill Book 1 Jly-15 Oct 1919

Cockcroft: "I'm responsible for that 'Oliphand!' It should be Oliphant, of course. There's a correction in my vol. 2. Oliphant was still around in the magazine editing business in the 1930's. I've seen him listed at times as Roland, but only in amateur publications." No further information.

(\*1) Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, ed. Robert Reginald Gale Research 1979. Vol. 2 p. 868

(\*2) Rambling through the Solar System. Thrilling Wonder Stories Oct 1938; Hypercosmos. Thrilling Wonder Stories Dec 1938.