

Science Fiction NEWS

No. 26

February 1971

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

Anon. ed.

The INNER LANDSCAPE. Corgi 1970. 190 p. PB 5/-
(1st Allison & Busby 1969) Three stories:
Danger: Religion! by B. W. Aldiss, and The
Voices of Time by J. G. Ballard, which could be
called SF; also a weird item, Boy in Darkness
by Mervyn Peake.

-- SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL, 1. Sidgwick 1970.
180, 175, 191 p. HC 30/-. Reissue of three nov-
els: The World Jones Made by Philip K. Dick;
The Space Swimmers by Gordon R. Dickson; Waters
of Death by Irving A. Greenfield.

ABE. Kobo, 1924-

INTER ICE AGE 4. Knopf 1970. 228 p. \$5.95. Il-
lustrated by Machi Abe. Translated from Japane-
se by E. D. Saunders. A rare example of Jap-
anese SF, in fact possibly the first translated.

BLUM, Ralph

The SIMULTANEOUS MAN. Atlantic Monthly Press
1970. 238 p. HC. \$5.95.

Reviews: Analog Jan 1971 p. 165; Library
Journal 1.5.70 p. 1763; N.Y. Times 26.4.70 p.
46; Saturday Review 11.4.70 p. 36

Current Science Fiction Books

- BOYD, John [i.e. Boyd Bradfield Upchurch, 1919-]
The ORGAN BANK FARM. Weybright 1970. 260 p. HC.
\$5.95. Review: Analog Feb 1971 p. 167
- The RAKEHELLS OF HEAVEN. Bentam 1971. 184 p.
PB. 75c. (1st Weybright 1969) Reviews: Analog
Jly 1970 p. 162; also p. 6 this issue.
- LAUMER, [John] Keith, 1925-
GALACTIC ODYSSEY. Mayflower 1970. 143 p. PB.
4/-. (1st Berkley 1967; Dobson 1968)
Review: Analog Apr 1968 p. 162
- The HOUSE IN NOVEMBER. Putnam 1970. 192 p. HC.
\$4.95. Longer version of The Seeds of Gonyl,
in IF oct-Dec 1969
- MADDOCK, Larry [i.e. Jack Owen Jardine, 1931-]
The TIME TRAP GAMBIT. Ace (01043) 1970. 255 p.
PB 75c. (Agent of TERRA Series). Review: Analog
Jan 1971 p. 168.
- NORTON, Andre [i.e. Alice Mary Norton, 1912-]
UNCHARTED STARS. Ace (84000). 7-254 p. PB 75c.
(1st Viking 1969) Sequel to The Zero Stone.
Juvenile, marginal. Review: Analog Nov 1969
p. 169
- SILVERBERG, Robert
A ROBERT SILVERBERG OMNIBUS. Sidgwick 1970.
144, 142, 182 p. HC. 35/-. Reissue of three
novels: Master of Life and Death; Invaders
from Earth; The Time-Hoppers.

contd. p.10

R E V I E W S

MASK OF CHAOS by John Jakes b/w

The STAR VIRUS by Barrington J. Bayley.

Acc Double FB (78400) 1970

5-120, 5-134 p. 75c

Says the blurb: "He soon compared his plight on Tome to a sojourn in Eden -- until Mike met a flame haired woman with an apple. She taught him to see the horror behind the masks, to look beyond what people and things 'seem' to be. But then again he wasn't what he seemed to be. He didn't need a mask, he was a mask."

In this novel, the name of the hero is Micropig, and the name of the heroine is Abattoir. At least, that is what she calls herself. The book is entirely in keeping with the names, and perhaps not quite on the same literary level as the blurb!

There seems to be a trend amongst some writers to invent words of the future. This does not bother me when one can see that these words are quite likely to evolve. Jakes, however, just seems to pick words at random and use them indiscriminately as nouns, verbs, adverbs, virtually without attributing meanings to them. I thought at first that "goz" and "shid" were respectively god and excrement, that was until the characters started saying "Goz me" and "Shid me".

The story is weak. The first few pages held my interest, and it could well have turned into a good book, had the author tried a little; as it is, it became melodramatic nonsense.

Almost the entire population of tome wear masks. The people of the Downbelow do not wear these masks, and Mike and Ab see that, alas, the Downbelows are monstrous. In fact, all the inhabitants are disfigured! And why? Ye gods and

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little fishes, the planet is a type of Picture of Dorian Gray! The evildoing and evil thinking of the inhabitants have, through the ages, actually disfigured them. And this is why they wear masks.

Mike, or Micropig, is part human, part machine. The author doesn't think it necessary to disclose to the reader why Micropig had been tampered with, or where he originally came from, and he certainly doesn't know. Mike just has to beat his arm against his side to go into fast action and become a sort of superman -- or perhaps Captain Marvel. His actions are vaguely reminiscent of Billy Batson shouting "Shazam!"

Ab describes herself as a professional woman, i.e. not a woman of the usual professions, even the oldest, but one whose profession is to be a woman. She and Mike are teamed up to play in the Game, with Ab being the brains and Mike the brawn. The Game is well and truly rigged, in that the heroic duo are supposed to find out the rules, and then beat the Game. Can't be done. The only rules are to keep them losing. They manage to get out of the Game by neither winning nor losing, try to stir up a riot, and eventually get off Tome.

There is one redeeming feature in the book: at the end, Ab and Mike part. Ab goes back to plying her profession (which seems to entail displaying violent temper most of the time) while Mike (a far less appealing moron than Charly of Flowers for Algernon) thinks about joining the crew of another spaceship. Despite the author's apparent repentance in not making the ending too sickly (but he could at least have killed them off and thereby purged himself) there is one word which aptly describes the book. Yuk.

The STAR VIRUS is a story of space piracy,

magic lenses, baleful aliens and lots of blood and gore.

Rodrone, the hero, obtains the lens by a sort of permitted piracy. He finds that he can see different scenes -- which he feels are real -- in the facets of the lens. All but one are constantly changing: that one is the siege of a city led by a mad monk (I don't know how he worked out that the monk was mad). Inevitably, towards the end of the book, the mad monk turns around and displays his face to Rodrone; of course, it is Rodrone's own face.

Rodrone, once in possession of the lens, is pursued vigorously by the baleful aliens, the Streall. They also want the lens, and it is thought that perhaps they made it. The Streall, however, only found the lens, manufactured by a much older culture, and used it to control the Galaxy. A Barrier was put around the human Galaxy to prevent them venturing out into far space, in fact they are in isolation (hence the description of humanity as the "Star Virus"). The lens is eventually used to destroy the Barrier, and allow the "Virus" to run loose through the universe.

This book was nowhere near as nauseating as *Mask of Chaos*. It was rather weak, but had a few good thoughts in it. Some of the author's notions, however, give one to think on the rest of his attitudes. For instance, Rodrone has a wife whom he hasn't seen for five years. "He still regarded her as his wife and constant companion." Bayley must be rather naive and idealistic, or perhaps he's an invading alien who has accidentally let his identity slip by his ignorance of human psychology. Another rather sickly instance. The captain of a deadliner (ship which travels between stars, subjective time being very short, hence

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the crew do not age very much while many years of objective time have passed) on which Rodrone has obtained passage, is killed, and one of the crew announces pathetically to Rodrone that "You're our Daddy now."

On the Palmer Scale for grading books from one to a hundred, this book I would grade as less than fifty, although there is a possibility that some junior readers might find it just what they like in the way of space opera.

-- Denise Palmer

The RAKEHELLS OF HEAVEN
by John Boyd

Bantam PB (S5479)
184 p. 75c

Admirers of Boyd's *The Last Starship* from Earth will welcome this lively and, in my opinion, better constructed showcase for his talents.

As before Boyd focuses his wry gaze on social mores: this time those of Harlech, an alien planet. His vision is original, and he writes with what I can best describe as literate gusto. He also (praise be!) knows how to create characters who are individuals, not the cloned clichés common to so much of SF.

In this instance his principals are astronauts: space scout John Adams (Protestant, Alabama) and his running mate Kevin O'Hara (Catholic, County Meath). They are on a two-man probe to an outer galaxy.

Action opens when Adams makes an unscheduled return alone to Earth. Why has he aborted his mission? Where in hell is O'Hara? These are the questions the debriefing psychiatrist is raring to find out.

In a flashback, which runs from Chapter 2 to

the penultimate page, Adams tells: the details of how he and O'Hara arrived on Harlech, their investigation of its curious culture, and subsequent shenanigans among its predominantly undergraduate population add up to a story that is frenetic, frank and often extremely funny.

Boyd has a high old time exploiting the ambivalence and interplay of personality between Adams and O'Hara. But he manages to keep a tighter overall hold on the plot than he did in *Starship*, and his ending contains a nicely calculated twist.

A word of caution: if you feel either religion or sex is not a subject for levity, give this on one a miss. If, however, you think Louis Pauwels has a point when he says "Science fiction is a playsuit under which are hidden the real truths of this age", you're likely to find Boyd's offering fits that definition very well.

-- Angus Gordon

The WIZARD OF VENUS
by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Ace FB (90190)
158 p. 60c

The very existence of this book is a little disorientating. Burroughs died almost 21 years ago, and his heirs are still feeding his unpublished manuscripts to an undiminished readership. The situation has an other-worldly quality as quaint as any world of Burroughs' imagination. It is not surprising that the master left behind a half a million words of more or less unfinished writing: that was the way he worked, with several projects going at a time and fragments put aside to be worked at again when a story failed to shape up well. What is surprising is the thirteen years it was all left unexamined and forgotten

Before a change in management led to Burroughs' sons rediscovering it. The Wizard of Venus, which is the first third of this book, was soon put into print in the collection Tales of Three Planets. It is a further episode of Carson Napier, getting himself lost and stranded again in his habitual style. It is hard to have much sympathy for this outrageous accident in quest of a place to happen, by the way. Here he has it made, comfortably set up as the adopted son of royalty and with all threats to himself and his bird Duare out of the way. Does he concentrate on living the life of Riley? He does not, even though he does have the intention. He has to tug nose himself as the great inventor with an atomic powered aircraft, take the monster for a trial flight, and yes, you've guessed it.

Some of the laughs are intentional. As is the case here and there in Burroughs there is some agreeable satire here. The Wizard of the title is a bad guy who has a successful petty despot business using hypnotism and stuff. He cowers the populace by supposedly heaving vocalizations into the local equivalents of pigs (pork, not fuzz). It's quite worth reading, if, and it's a big if, you can tolerate Burroughs in the first place.

The rest of the book is first printed here, and is the preliminary version of a typical Burroughs book by the look of it. It is not of any relevance to SF but is a tale of piracy in the western Pacific in modern times, no more authentic in detail than Tarzan's Africa, titled Pirate Blood. Interesting as another piece of Burroughs in an unpolished state, to anyone making a study of his work; but to the general reader, or the sciencefictionist, I think not. -- Cleve Gilbert

LOOKING BACKWARD

February 1934: first issue of Scoops, a two-penny weekly aimed at the ten-year-old reader. An experiment never repeated, it wasn't as bad as it might have been considering the total wrongness of the whole concept. Written by inexperienced writers largely unfamiliar with the SF of the day and reminiscent of British juveniles like Chums more than anything. There was a background of Wells, Verne and Doyle however.

February 1941: first issue of Stirring Science Stories. Another oddity -- halfway through the issue the title changed to Stirring Fantasy Fiction and content to the weird. Its three issues are a collector's item for early Kornbluth, Blish and other writers of substance. Other first issues were Astonishing Stories, 1940; Captain Future, 1940; Avon Fantasy Reader, 1947.

Alexander M. Phillips first appeared with The Death of the Moon, Amazing, 1929. Lunar space ark makes Earth but the survivors are gobbled by dinosaurs. Two new writers in the Feb 1937 Astounding, Oliver Saari with The Stellar Exodus and Eric Frank Russell with The Saga of Polican West, a Weinbaum imitation space opera. H. B. Syfe with Locked Out, Astounding, 1940. How to break into a spaceship in flight. G. S. Youd with Christmas Tree, Astounding, 1949. Medical and social hazards of space flight, an outstanding story. Youd usually writes as John Christopher. Kendall Foster Crossen with two stories, Restricted Clientele, Thrilling Wonder, and The Boy who cried Wolf 359, Amazing. Harlan Ellison with Glow Worm, Infinity. Hubert Rogers had his first cover for Astounding, 1939, illustrating Jack Williamson's Crucible of Power.

Current Science Fiction Books

SILVERBERG, Robert, ed.

The SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME; the greatest science fiction stories of all time, vol. 1.

Doubleday 1970. 558 p. HC. \$7.95. 26 stories.

Reviews: Galaxy Dec 1970 p. 93; If Sep/Oct 1970 p. 63.

[Yet another collection proclaimed as representing the best SF stories ever. All the old familiar titles are there, most of them indeed very good, and recommended to anyone -- if you can find anyone -- who may not have read them. We need no more books like this one. What we do need badly is a few books bringing together stories representing significant periods, phases, ideas. There have been a few drawing on individual magazines, a few built around themes. But it hasn't been enough. From what we have one might suppose that SF is a uniform commodity with nothing to distinguish 1930 from 1970 but a little dating.]

STONE, Idolla Purnell, ed.

14 GREAT TALES OF E.S.P. Fawcett Gold Medal

(T2164).1970. PB 75c. Introduction by (who

else?) John W. Campbell. If you can double-

think "extra-sensory perception" as SF, this is for you. Review: Galaxy Aug/Sep 1970 p. 185

STURGEON, Theodore, 1918-

STARSHINE. Pyramid (X1977) 1970. 174 p. PB 60c.

(Reissue of 1966 ed. Also Gollancz 1968) Six

stories, a mixture of very early and mid-50's.

Derp Fool; Artnan Process; The World Well Lost;

The Pod in the Barrier; also two not SF, The

Haunt and How to Kill Auntie.

Obituary:

VIRGIL FINLAY, 1914-1971.

Warden Virgil Finlay died in Rochester, N.Y. on 18 January after a long illness. A man of modest disposition who was content to let his work speak for itself, Finlay kept to himself so thoroughly that practically nothing is publicly known of his life. Born in 1914, he was a professional artist all his adult life but for his military service in World War II which took him to the occupation of Okinawa; he was a convert to Judaism; little more can be said.

Looking at his work, however, it is soon obvious that his was a rare talent. Somewhat attenuated at times, particularly in later years, but at first exquisitely detailed, with a style all his own which few others would imitate if they could. The classic Finlay of the 1930's and early 40's was one of the quite distinctive artists associated with science fiction, who had no small part in making the movement the uniquely individual entity it was in distinction to conventional popular fiction. More, he was one of even fewer with a strong personal vision developed enough in its expression to stand comparison with recognised artists outside that milieu. It is possible to consider Finlay in comparison with men like Beardsley, Doré, Wallace Smith, Robert Gibbings or Boris Artzybasheff.

His first science fiction illustrations were for *The Impossible World*, by Eando Binder, lead novel in the March 1939 *Startling Stories*, and by the end of the year he had begun his association with *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, the magazine perhaps best using his services in the early period; for readers of the time he will be remembered above all for his striking interpretations for Merritt's novels.

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Virgil Finlay

Perhaps the best of all his work, however, now most inaccessible, was done for *Weird Tales* in 1935-40. There the meticulously detailed fine line work (no stippling -- every dot placed individually) was developed in awesome complexity with perfect control and a lively realisation of many remarkable creatures of imagination. Someone should do the world a service by producing some reproductions of Finlay's best, particularly of this period.

The color work was more conventional, at its best beautiful and characteristic but often no more than pretty. One unclarified mystery is the cover of the August 1939 *Astounding* attributed to him but poorly executed and utterly unlike his style. Several cases where photographs had been visibly copied -- in one three movie stars were identifiable at a glance -- remind us that he was, after all, an underpaid commercial illustrator working under pressure. But much of the considerable volume of work he gave us shows that he was very much more.

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