

SCIENCE FICTION *News*

No. 32

August 1971

LIKE A HOLE IN THE HEAD

The SECOND PACIFIC BOOK OF AUSTRALIAN SF

edited by John Baxter

Pacific Books

149 p. PB \$1-00

Despite all appearance of desperation in scraping the barrel, this offering is on the whole no worse than the previous insult to the intelligence. Broderick, Bryning, Chandler and Wodhams are out, and on the other hand there is some painful straining to bring in big names which does not help. Some of the other writers appearing in the first collection have not written anything else to be considered, but other unknowns take their place along with Baxter himself alone and in collaboration and a couple of others.

Nevertheless, whether by accident or design most of this collection can be called science fiction without being too generous, and if there is nothing definitely worthy there are several that would not be out of place in *Amazing*. The cover is worse than the first one, which is quite some feat.

The *Immortal* by Olaf Ruhen is an oddity, an example of the spaceman-stranded-among-savages plot, previously unpublished but obviously written no later than early 1958. *Siren Singers* by Robyn Tracey is another of the same genre, but in the

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Never-never interstellar format with near-as-dammit humanoids (fair hair and violet eyes, no less). Some 1200 of the story's 1600-odd words are devoted to the aliens' language: interesting, but all a waste of effort.

The Case of the Perjured Planet by Martin Loran is a confused and confusing attempt to blend satire on the hardboiled detective story with the formula about the interstellar government inspector and the colony planet with something to hide. There is a real point (even if not a new one) but it's hard to find for the irrelevant pseudo-action.

Robinson by David Romo throws away an idea with some possibilities by using it for what we used to call an O Henry ending instead of actually taking a look at it. Incidentally, this is a fault of several other stories in this collection: to discuss what they are about explicitly is to give away the surprise which is all they have to offer, which makes the reviewer's task no easier. This practice, permit me to remark, is pernicious in the author and a deplorable weakness in the editor. Science fiction is not best represented by stories that no one would read twice.

No Sale by John Williams is a deadpan satire on the used car business, a little too angry to be amusing. The picture of the roads as a battlefield for homicidal maniacs led to a number of stories about a time when drivers habitually shoot at each other as well as ramming, riding down pedestrians and so on, but this version at least brings in an economic aspect of it.

The Man of Slow Feeling by Michael Wilding is another chestnut, one of the whimsical what-if notions about perception that Calvin Perego and Maurice G. Hugi were batting out about 1937. It

just might appeal on grounds of nostalgia, but has no other value. After being knocked on the head a man has a three-hour delay in receiving certain sensations. Not sight and hearing, nor are motor nerves affected -- but that would make it hard, wouldn't it?

Apple by Baxter shows a strange assessment of his own talents. Post-nuclear war mutants again, this time trees that grow giant fruits -- the size is not defined, but seems to be of the order of a mile in diameter. Mechanical strength of tissue? Nutrients? And there are also giant insects to provide action in defiance of the square-cube rule -- here a giant codling moth which proves to be a wasplike carnivore as well. Well.

Dancing Gerontius by Lee Harding is a wholly unbelievable bit about an elaborate ritual for killing off surplus senior citizens. Yes, you have indeed read something like that before.

A Happening by Frank Roberts is a sick piece about a child kept in a cell which does not seem to have any SF element. It has what seems to be meant as a supernatural event, if that's your dish.

Whatever happened to Suderov? by Steve Kaldor is a fair piece of routine entertainment: its setting in a future interplanetary context is not very realistic, but it is not offensive, and it does unfold a readable anecdote about a rash election promise that may have been carried out: not exactly a surprise ending since the general idea is obvious from the very title.

Also in the book we find two pieces of verse from somewhat distant points on the spectrum of significance and merit. Space Poem by T. F. Kline is versification at its crudest. It may be meant half seriously, or more likely as a parody of the

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space adventure story of a generation ago. On another plane we have an extract from a longer work, Rutherford by Douglas Stewart. It has only indirect relevance here, and in any case taking part of a poem out of context is a questionable practice.

Vale, Pollini! by the late George Johnson is of no SF interest, being the story of a practical joke like the Ern Malley hoax. Enthusiasts of deception and credulity would do better to study that episode. But if you enjoy reading about bohemian artists bumming on Mediterranean islands you will probably find this more readable than most of the book.

In his Introduction Baxter says at one point: "These fine stories are equal to anything done in the world today." But then, earlier he claims to have made "a serious analysis of just what these anthologies were supposed to do", so it seems a fair guess that he knows no better. A poor excuse is better than none, but makes the book no less contemptible. Believe it or not, there has been a fair amount of worth while science fiction written in Australia. But the naive reader will not find that out from this source.

-- G. S.

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL, 3. Sidgwick. 284, 172,
167 p. HC £1.50. Reissue of Overmind, by
Phyllis Wadsworth; Caviar, by Theodore Sturgeon;
The Time-Hoppers, by Robert Silverberg.

BRIAN ALDISS OMNIBUS, 2. Sidgwick. 159, 252,
174 p. HC £1.95. Reissue of Space, Time and
Nathaniel; Non-Stop; The Male Response.

ALDISS, Brian W[ilson] and HARRISON, Harry [Max-
well] eds.

FAREWELL, FANTASTIC VENUS! A History of the
Planet Venus in Fact and Fiction. Panther.
11-268 p. PB A95c. (1st as All About Venus,
Dell PB 1968)

ANTHONY, Piers [i.e. Piers Anthony Jacob, 1934-]
MACROSCOPE. Avon (W166). 480 p. PB \$1.25.
Review: Analog Aug p. 167

ELLISON, Harlan

ALONE AGAINST TOMORROW; Stories of Alienation
in Speculative Fiction. Macmillan NY. 312 p.
HC \$6.95. 21 stories

GOULART, Ron[ald Joseph, 1933-]

BROKE DOWN ENGINE, and other troubles with
machines. Macmillan NY. 192 p. HC \$5.95.
13 stories.

--- CLOCKWORK'S PIRATES b/w GHOST BREAKER. Ace
(11182). 5-111,7-142 p. PB 75c. Ghost Breaker
is accollection of 9 stories, mainly SF.

Current Books

GRINNELL, David

TO VENUS! TO VENUS! R.Hale. 189 p. HC £1.10
(1st Ace PB 1970 b/w/ Tubb, E.C. The Jester at
Scar)

HARRISON, Harry {Maxwell} ed.

The LIGHT FANTASTIC; science fiction classics
from the mainstream. Scribner. 216 p. HC \$5.95.
Introduction by James Blish, 13 stories by
writers better known for non-SF works: Amis,
Kersh, Szilard, Kipling etc. Some of these are
rather tenuously related to SF.

HILL, Ernest, 1915-

The G.C. RADIATION. R.Hale. 159 p. HC £1.10

HOYLE, Fred and Geoffrey

SEVEN STEPT TO THE SUN. Harper. 246 p. HC
\$5.95

KNIGHT, Damon ed.

DIMENSION X. Simon & Schuster. 351 p. HC
\$5.95. Five stories with nothing particular in
common; The Man who sold the Moon by R.A.Hein-
lein; The Marching Morons by C.M.Kornbluth;
Fiddler's Green by R.McKenna; The Saliva Tree
by B.W.Aldiss; The Ugly Little Boy by I.Asimov.
Review: Analog Mch 1971 p. 168-9

LAUMER, Keith, 1925-

The OTHER SIDE OF TIME. Walker. 160 p. HC
\$4.95. (Short version was in Amazing Apr-June
1965)

MAINE, Charles Eric {i.e. David McIlwaine, 1921- }

The RANDOM FACTOR. Hodder. 187 p. HC £1.25

- PLATT, Charles, 1944-
 The CITY DWELLERS. Sphere. 158 p. PB 25 np (1st Sidgwick 1970)
- PLANET OF THE VOLES. Putnam. 192 p. HC \$4.95
 (vole, n. Kind of mouselike rodent -- Concise Oxford Dictionary)
- STURGEON, Theodore
 STURGEON IS ALIVE AND WELL; a collection of short stories. Putnam. 221 p. HC \$4.95
- VONNEGUT, Kurt Jr. 1922-
 CAT'S CRADLE. Gollancz. 231 p. HC £1.40. (1st Holt 1963; Gollancz 1963; Delta 1964; Dell 1970)
 Reviews: Analog Nov 1963; F&SF Sep 1963; Galaxy Aug 1963; New Worlds 135. Memorable story of a world-lethal secret, also remarkable for some original thoughts on religion in society.
- WAHLOO, Peter, 1926-
 The STEEL SPRING. Delacorte. 187 p. HC \$5.95.
 From the Swedish. Reviews: Analog Jly 1971 p. 164; Christian Science Monitor 10.9.70 p. 2; Library Journal 1.12.70 p. 4196; NY Times 31.1.71 p. 38
- WILSON, Colin
 THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE. Crown. 315 p. HC \$5.95
 Review: Analog Jly 1971 p. 165. A marginal item: psychic time travel, with Lovecraftian pre-humans
- WOLLHEIM, Donald A. and CARR, Terry, eds.
 WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION, No. 1. Sphere.
 319 p. PB 40 np (1st Ace as World's Best Science

Current Books

Fiction, 1968; Gollancz 1969)
Review: Analog Jan 1969 p. 164

S C I E N C E F I C T I O N N E W S

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August 1971

issued monthly by

Australian Science Fiction Association
Box 852, P.O., Canberra City, ACT 2601