

SCIENCE FICTION *News*

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MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE DRIVE-IN...

Surveying the last few months' new offerings in science fiction cinema, it is hard to know how to react. Even to say with confidence whether it has been a good, bad or indifferent season is a poser. But yes, it has been more interesting than we have learned to expect. Things are changing, however gradually, and the bottom of the range does not seem as deep. True, there are still some pretty abysmal productions by any standard, but they are fewer and less unspeakable. Even the monster pictures are better: the old days of quickie monsters are over in an age when all feature production is smoother, more expensive, more elaborate. The ancient shockers that have been showing up on television -- particularly the extraordinary series that has been cynically billed as "adult movies" lately -- point up the difference. No one these days would get to the production stage with anything as stupid and clumsy as *The Giant Claw* or *Beyond the Time Barrier* -- or we hope not.

The *ANDROMEDA STRAIN* is a ridiculously ambitious production for such an elementary plot, none other than the deadly plague brought back from a Space that many people must by now conceive as an inexhaustible storehouse of marvels. But it is done with care and contains no boobies. The sets and effects are striking and believable, executed with great originality, and the story is dramatically and scientifically sound. Judge for yourself how much of the symbolism the critics

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discover in it is intentional, how much accidental, how much imaginary -- much as with 2001, although this film does have a rational plot to begin with. Reviews: Monthly Film Bulletin July, Films and Filming August. Brief mention and some stills with The Future -- a slight Return, article on director Robert Wise's work generally by Roy Pickard, Films and Filming July

JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME. Speaking of symbolism, now, this is quite a dose of it. Treat it as a projective test if you like; or just take it as a story about some experimenters fooling around with time travel who induce an expendable human guinea pig -- an attempted suicide nobody would seem to miss -- to take a short trip back into his own past. From then on things get at the very least confused: we get a series of random glimpses of various times in the year being relived as the experiment goes awry. Perhaps the point is that reliving the time doesn't mean being able to change it; or that given the chance we'd only make the same mistakes again. More likely there isn't meant to be a point ("A point? For a dollar you expect a point?") and it's a cheap way of making a picture. If you insist on looking for meanings the whole thing is littered with cryptograms: a time machine that looks something like a pumpkin and something like a mollusc; a little time-travelling mouse; the sea and images of drowning; nightmare telephone conversations. Reviews: Monthly Film Bulletin August, Films and Filming September.

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES. "There is no end of sequels to Planet of the Apes, and why should there be? They are popular". That's the exhibitor speaking, in Greater Amusements. And

it's obviously true, there are untold millions of slavering ape-lovers ready to see more nonsense like this. This time it took time travel to make a further film possible (are we going to get a deluge of time travel pictures?) but the way is left open for the fourth in the series this time. Actually the idea is quite good this time, once you get over the obvious difficulties, with a pair of intelligent superchimpanzees thrown back to the present and creating an interesting switch on the old monster menace theme. As in the previous two there moral implications to think hard on. Review: Monthly Film Bulletin August.

EARTH II. Evidently made some years ago, this is being shown in Australia at present. A murky plot about a manned orbital station and international dissension involving its use. A quaint Yellow Peril element does not help much -- however, the props and effects are said to be good.

THX 1138. Standard early-SF plot about him and her in a dehumanised culture of the dim future; robots and people who think like them. But intelligently directed and avoiding the silly touches common in anything of the kind. Surprisingly few SF films go beyond the immediate future and they usually get lost very easily, but this one seems to succeed even though rather too much reminiscent of 1984. Review: Monthly Film Bulletin July.

WILLARD. Perhaps weird rather than SF, certainly classifiable as horror: man learns to communicate with rats and organise and control them. Nasty enough for you?

Review Section

DOUBLE, DOUBLE.
by John Brunner

Sidgwick & Jackson
7-222 p. HC
£1.50, A\$4-30

Charitably disregarding the artwork on the cover of Double, Double...said artwork bearing a remarkable resemblance to a local female wino who spends her Sundays glugging Sedna...I plunged into the novel itself, all prepared for a good story. Alasalasalas. This must be an early attempt by the man who wrote Stand on Zanzibar. Let's hope that any more early work released to the public is labelled so. As a curiosity, to see how his (I hope) later style develops it is interesting. As a story, it drags.

One of the reviews quoted on the inside front cover, purportedly from Analog, says 'The details are very good...Sure, you know exactly what is going to happen, but you don't know how.' Come, come, reviewer, you must have had a bad day when you read the book! Another review quoted says 'Brunner has taken the oldest of old hats and be-ribboned it so gaudily that it doesn't look at all like it once did...a lot of fun.' Maybe it's because I can't stand any kind of sewing, including millinery, that I didn't like it. I used to read this kind of book with bated breath when I was about nine years old. My tastes must have become jaded by now, since it surely didn't have any appeal for me.

Every character in this book, with the possible exception of the little old lady, could have had his/her dialog transferred to another character

and I doubt if, examining style rather than context, any reader could pick up the swap. Brunner has a most unpleasant habit here of having his characters end a great many of their speeches with 'hm'. I don't remember having found this in any other of his books. I trust it eventually annoyed him too.

On to the plot. Take one decomposing pilot, who in a state of better composition (apparently better than Brunner's own) has plunged into the deep sea, a Deep Sea Monster, a pop group, sundry scientists and police, a little old lady -- the first victim of the Deep Sea Monster -- a few victims, a very tiresome villainous journalist later turned noble and philanthropic, and you have Double, Double. Undoubtedly someone else could have done a far worse job of stringing them together. That's an idea. Perhaps Brunner was given the characters and bet he couldn't write a novel using them! The Monster rampages around, terminating -- or perpetuating, depends on which way you look at things -- his victims, until Fate hand in hand with Science catches up with him to produce a medium happy ending. Remember how sloshy novels have the hero and heroine sailing, riding, walking or flying off into a good old sunset undoubtedly on the verge of a better, happier life? Well, this novel ends as follows: 'He took Cress' hand and together they walked into the sunshine.'

Oh well, read it if you must, but there are better book around.

-- Denise Palmer

OF MEN AND MONSTERS
by William Tenn

Ballantine, London
11-251 p. PB 95c

Invasion of Earth by creeps from

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Elsewhere is old enough an idea to have antiquarian appeal mainly. Or is it? The War of the Worlds -- which is still one of the best on the theme -- was contemporary with Oscar Wilde, but it's only superficially dated. Not so much age as too many unoriginal examples have diminished the appeal. The trouble is mainly that most invasion stories do not go beyond The War of the Worlds and do not even go as far. What happened in that book, which served as a formula for many later versions, was this: Without any warning cylinder-loads of nasty tentacled Martians began landing. They immediately attacked with superior weapons and stampeded the population; organised opposition was slight and not effective to begin with, and it looked like a Martian occupation on a long term footing. Wells hinted at how things might go, with Martians running the show and humans accomodating to them and planning to strike back eventually, but this was not developed seriously. Then as luck would have it the Martians suddenly took ill of Earthly diseases they hadn't reckoned on and died obligingly. Other invasions may be foiled by human effort in one way or other, finding weak spots, developing new weapons or just slugging it out, but that remained the pattern.

What we don't get very often is a look at what life would be like under the invaders, either temporarily or permanently. Usually they are left as Bad Guys and not given much substance beyond their performance as an invading force: their motives not much explained in many cases, their normal way of living left nebulous. And how Earth would fare if they succeeded in taking over even for a while is too hard for most writers.

This is what Tenn has tackled in this, his first novel. His invaders have taken over Earth so effectively that Man is reduced to the position of a minor pest living in burrows in their walls. What the natural world is like is not mentioned, it is beyond the knowledge and interest of the people of this world.

In the first segment of the book, published as *The Men in the Walls* years ago in *Magazine of Fantasy & SF*, a young savage from a barely human tribe of domestic vermin makes a foray into the environment of the gigantic Monsters and learns something about them but more about himself and his people, and about the ways of more sophisticated burrow-dwellers. It is interesting, but not markedly different from many stories about people living in times when modern civilisation has broken down in one way or other. After all, the general probabilities of their culture are fairly well defined. "Manners, none; customs, disgusting" as someone has said.

The rest of the book develops along somewhat different lines and introduces an unusual view of the situation with some surprising consequences. It is by no means just a matter of a defeated and degenerate race after all, and there is something to think about. Read it.

-- Cleve Gilbert

The JOY MAKERS
by James Gunn

Bantam (\$5953)
3-201 p. PB 75c

This book began its career as three separate and distinct short stories: *Name your Pleasure* (*Thrilling Wonder* Winter 1955); *The Naked Sky* (*Startling* Fall 1955) and *The Unhappy Man*

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(Fantastic Universe Feb 1955). I have the impression that I have read one of them, Part 2 of the book, but I don't know if the book is simply the three stories or whether the whole thing has been rewritten.

What impressed me most about the book was the number of quotations concerning happiness. I wonder if the author sat down and painstakingly raked up as many as he could, making the task actual research for the book, or whether he began with them from general reading and they provided the basis for the idea of the book. Chicken and egg. The flyleaf claims that the book is about 'a quest for happiness' and lists three words, Hedonics, Hadonism and Hedonist, with meanings, and is neatly rounded off with the note 'Where the pursuers became the pursued'.

However, the book itself. Part 1 deals with the introduction of a portion of society, one city, to Hedonics, 'psychomedical science dealing with the nature and pursuit of happiness'. It is a fairly readable mixture of pseudo-medicine and mumbo jumbo, and shows the effect on one man of his refusal to deal with Hedonics Inc. It also gives the basic idea of how the entire Earth could be taken over by the company (business tycoon won't have anything to do with it, but wife will, and signs over all her possessions to it, necessarily including half her husband's property -- remind me never to remarry!).

Part 2 deals with one of the Hedonists, a sort of doctor-cum-priest, who is in charge of a sector of the population and who in turn is responsible to the Council. Hedonics, in this portion of

the book, appears to be a mixture of Pollyanna's Glad Game (anybody else inflicted with that godawful literature in childhood?), constant drug therapy, and, at last, Corruption in High Places. Oh yes, and I forgot to mention a sort of free love, where the Hedonists have to train the members of the population to be ready for marriage.

The protagonist of Part 2 is a Good Hedonist, who is horrified to find out about the Corruption in High Places. The Council decrees that he is to be eliminated (because he has been suggested for a place on the Council, which would automatically mean one of the other Councillors would have to retire and thereby cause his unhappiness -- totally against the laws of Hedonics). His subsequent rescue by one of his wards, whom he had been preparing for a fictitious marriage (query -- if the Hedonist prepares only the females, who prepares the males, or are the poor females tossed the unskilled caresses of their uninitiated husbands?) together with the treachery of his erstwhile friends and colleagues occupy the rest of Part 2, with the final bit of it showing him, together with former ward, making their way to another planet. This provides the basis for Part 3.

Part 3 is set in the remote future and begins on another planet. We can tell that this is the remote future from the names: vowels are removed from some names so that Douglas becomes D'glas. The Venusians (Venerians?) / yes, this is correct -- ed.7 have been out of touch with Earth and the other planets for hundreds of years, and naturally want to know what is happening. They are all hedonists, since that is where the Hedonist of Part 2 fled to from Earth. The venture of one

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of the Venerians to Earth to find out just what had become of their fellow humans provides the basis for Part 3. Alas and alack, it is a rather tired old story of the world having been taken over by machines. (I infinitely preferred Williamson's *With Folded Hands*.) The entire book was perhaps not quite for my jaded palate, but in parts I found it interesting, and it is certainly better than a lot of the stuff currently being marketed as SF. Try it for yourself.

-- Denise Palmer

WASP

by Eric Frank Russell

Bantam (S5913)

154 p. PB 75c

I enjoyed reading this yarn again, and it hasn't aged any since 1957. The trouble is, the objections that could be raised in the first place are still as valid. I suppose it's science fiction of a sort, but there is not much in it that would be out of place in a typical spy thriller (come to think of it, most of those qualify, as fantasy, don't they?).

The Wasp of the title is a secret agent planted in an enemy country to raise hell with morale and the war effort with sabotage and what have you. Russell calls the war an interstellar one and has his operator dropped on another planet, but that's about as far as the science fiction element goes. The technology is not much different from what we are used to, which is just as well since otherwise police work and counterintelligence would be a lot better, good enough to make his whole operation impossible.

The enemy are called Sirians. Inhabitants of a planet of Sirius, originally at any rate. Well,

all right, they have to come from somewhere. But just a minute. It appears that the Sirians have an empire comprising at least ninety-four inhabited planets, which since the Sirians are humans means ninety-four Earthlike planets. How many planetary systems does that mean their empire includes? Well, for a start that limits the field to stars pretty close to Sol, just any old star won't do. As a matter of fact, Sirius is not a likely candidate. To make it easy just assume -- which is a rash assumption -- that every suitable star has an Earthlike planet. Since among the fifty nearest stars there are at most 8 suitable stars, we have a volume of space with about 600 stars -- say, the space with a radius of 42 lightyears of Sirius. Sirius being 8.6 light-years away, it is easy to see that Earth would be close to the center of the Sirian Empire and would be among the first two or three planets reached and incorporated. It appears that Earth has some other planets under control as well -- since we're said to be outnumbered twelve to one, probably about six. I don't know where they would be located. And the book is full of things that don't make any more sense on examination. Here's another one. As I mentioned, the Sirians are human. Not evolved to roughly the same body plan, same number of limbs and so on, which is reasonable -- they are indistinguishable from man enough for a man to pass as one with no more than cosmetic disguise. Very well, how did they get on a planet of Sirius? It's easy to think of a possible explanation: why didn't Russell?

If the Sirians are a development of future colonists -- something that seems impossible from

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internal evidence however -- it would at least explain why they speak a language of apparent Earthly origin. Most of the few words we are given look like someone trying to speak German or Dutch (their currency is in Guilders) but for variety their security service is the Kaitempi, echoing the old Japanese Kimpetei.

The technology, as I said before, is not consistent with interstellar empires of the future. If war should come about between powers at a level capable of interstellar flight, it would be carried out with weapons capable of destroying whole planets or wiping them clean of life, or with biological agents that could selectively kill or paralyze or stupify whole populations.

So do what I did. In reading this book, think of it as having happened in some unspecified country, possibly in South America or the Soviet Far East, about 1950. Then it becomes believable, and the career of a lone Wasp stinging a totalitarian state apparatus into impotence is engrossing reading. I repeat, I liked it.

-- G.S.

UNIVERSE 1, an anthology of new science fiction stories
ed. Terry Carr

Acc (84600)
11-249 p. PB 95c.

Everybody and his brother-in-law seem to have hit on the idea simultaneously: the way to make a magazine sell better is to camouflage it as a series of paperbacks and get around the deadly withdrawal from sale as soon as the next issue hits the stand. If it works as well as it well might it will probably kill off the

existing magazine format, not an encouraging prospect. Science fiction needs at least the continuity of purpose and interaction of views that the magazines have been providing, inadequate as it is. If it is reduced to the impersonality and unapproachability of book publishing it will be hard put to survive.

Just to pursue this thought briefly, let's all jot down a list of really significant stories, not just excellent stories but those that helped to shape science fiction, that were first printed outside the SF magazines. Not novels, there are some of those, but shorts. Written any titles down? I didn't think so. Wells? No, since Wells.

Well, back to Universe then. The crummy format to which we've had to become accustomed in paperbacks is disappointing in a magazine, and the awful illustrations are at least as bad as what Galaxy or Amazing have been using lately. The contents, though, are fairly good, with a dozen shorts by mostly promising names. Discounting a silly piece of adolescent write-enough-paragraphs-and-it-turns-into-a-story from Barry Malzberg and a deadpan joke from R. A. Lafferty the rest range from readable if trivial to solid, meaningful SF. West Wind, Falling, by Gregory Benford and Gordon Eklund, stands out particularly and illustrates how much is to be said about well established concepts in a strikingly original story of a long-term space expedition. Time Exposures, by Wilson Tucker, is also far from new in basic plot -- actually a SF detective story, proving that they can still be written and even successfully.

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Mount Charity, by Edgar Pangborn, is another worth getting the issue for, even though if you've read Pangborn's books it's not new. The rest of the stories don't do much more than add more pages in my view, but if you like Joanna Russ, Ron Goulart or Robert Silverberg in potboiling mood all are there.

Verdict: Yes, maybe.

-- G.S.

LOOKING BACKWARD

October, October...Why, three important first issues of magazines came out in October. Galaxy in 1950; Imagination, surprisingly, the same date. The Magazine of Fantasy -- which added "and science fiction" in a baffling identification only with its second issue -- in 1949.

Galaxy is now so unremarkable that it is hard to realise how exciting it was when it first appeared, with its half-representational artwork that was a profound relief from the comic-book stuff that was then usual, its adult air and pleasing format, its lineup of top writers, its firm and mature editorial tone, its famous "You'll never see it in Galaxy" manifesto. Why, here was a new magazine that actually meant to challenge Astounding on Campbell's own ground. For at least fifteen years the field had consisted of one magazine, just one, that consistently aimed for high standards all along the line, treated its readers as adults and tried to develop science fiction accordingly -- and, well, all the rest. The other magazines were all very well, your experienced reader

would have acknowledged, you read them too, they ran a lot of fair entertainment, now and then the odd story good enough to have been in Astounding, but they knew their limitations after all. And Gold changed that picture immediately.

Simak's Time Quarry led off as a serial, and also in that first issue were Sturgeon with The Stars are the Styx, Katherine Maclean with Contagion, Fredric Brown with The Last Martian, Richard Matheson with Third from the Sun, Fritz Leiber with Later than you Think, Isaac Asimov with Darwinian Pool Room. Standards wavered a little in the following months and gradually the magazine lost its initial impetus as the field around it began to catch up, but that was quite a first issue.

Hamling was no Horace Gold, and his Imagination not even a poor man's Galaxy, but in its own way it was an interesting magazine and certainly in another class than the Amazing and Fantastic Adventures on which he had served his apprenticeship under Ray Palmer. The first issue had some Bok art work -- a strongly individual artist who should have made more of a mark on SF than he was allowed to do -- and some good fiction led by Look to the Stars by Willard Hawkins and Wind in her Hair by Kris Neville; but Chester Geier, Rog Phillips and Edward Ludwig didn't frighten Campbell. Some stills from a B-class film called Rocketship X-M that had been rushed into production to pick up some crumbs from Destination Moon didn't add much to the magazine.

The year before, a modest collection of mainly modern style weird yarns with a photomontage cover called The Magazine of Fantasy had made very little impression even though Boucher and McComas were al-

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ready names to reckon with. Sturgeon had a pleasant little whimsy called The Hurtle is a Happy Beast, and Winona McClintic a curious glimpse of a curious future called In the Days of our Fathers.

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Monthly publication of the Australian Science
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Box 852, P.O., Canberra City, ACT 2601

The ASFA aims to bring together people seriously interested in science fiction in their mutual interests. Inquiries and suggestions are welcome.

G. B. Stone, Secretary

MEETINGS

SYDNEY. ASFA Sydney Branch, 27 November, 7.30 pm.
8 Douglas St., Randwick

CANBERRA. Canberra Science Fiction Society, 23
November, 7.30 pm.
Room 2, Griffin Centre