

SCIENCE FICTION *News*

No. 36

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CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

ASIMOV, Isaac, 1920- ed.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? Doubleday. x, 441 p.
HC \$6.95. 16 stories by authors ranging from
Weinbaum and Don A Stuart to Tevis and Niven

BODEISEN, Anders

FREEZING DOWN. Harper. 179 p. HC \$5.95. Another
on the freezing for ultimate cure of the incur-
able theme. Translated from Danish.

Reviews: Library Journal 15.2.71 p. 654 and
15.6.71 p. 2145; New York Times 28.2.71 p. 32

COOPER, Edmund

The UNCERTAIN MIDNIGHT. Hodder. 192 p. PB 25 np.
(1st Hutchinson 1958)

CRISPIN, Edmund ed.

BEST SF SEVEN. Faber. 212 p. HC. 12 stories,
another selection of varied material.

DARLTON, Clark

The SECRET OF THE TIME VAULT. Ace (65975).
9-117 p. PB 60c. (Perry Rhodan Series, 6) This
is to be a regular monthly publication according
to an announcement in this issue; with a film
column and a correspondence section it is now
something like a magazine. The content, though,
will continue with translations from the German
series. See review, p. 5.

ELLISON, Harlan et al.

PARTNERS IN WONDER. Walker. 471 p. HC \$8.95.
15 stories by Ellison in collaboration with 14
others.

Current Books

GRAVES, Robert, 1895-

SEVEN DAYS IN NEW CRETE. C.Chivers, 281 p. (1st Cassell 1949) Marginal --- a mystical utopia of the remote future.

LEM, Stanislaw

SOLARIS. Walker. 216 p. HC \$4.95. Translated not from the original Polish but from a French version, which leaves us little better acquainted with this influential writer.

Reviews: Analog June p. 169; F & SF May p. 42; Galaxy May/June p. 96

POHL, Frederik

DIGITS AND DASTARDS. Corgi. 153 p. FB 25 np. (1st Dobson 1968) Six stories and two popular articles on binary numeration.

SMITH, Edward] F[inner] 1890-1965

GALACTIC PATROL. W.H.Allen. 255 p. HC £1.50.

(In Astounding Sep. 1937-Feb 1938. Fantasy Press 1950)

-- GREY LENSMAN. W.H.Allen. 256 p. HC £1.50 (In Astounding Oct 1939-Jan 1940. Fantasy Press 1951)

Galactic Patrol was the original beginning of this series, though later Smith revised his earlier novel Triplanetary to fit and wrote First Lensman to link it up. It introduces most of Smith's important ideas and in its class is hard to match. Grey Lensman follows directly and almost finishes the series to all appearances. Read these two books if you don't know what adventure could mean in prewar SF. It's good to have them in print again.

Review Section

LEAPING LIZARDS

HUMANITY PRIME

by Bruce McAllister

The SECRET OF THE TIME VAULT

by Clark Darlton

Ace (34900)

285 p. PB 95c

Ace (65975)

125 p. PB 60c

Despite the assurance of evolutionists that the dinosaurs and any other reptiles capable of disputing Man's dominance of Earth died out long before Homo Sapiens existed as a species, a dim racial memory of them must linger on. Both these books, as many SF epics before them, feature lizard-men as mankind's extra-terrestrial opponents for the domination of the Universe. At this point the similarity of the two books ceases abruptly.

Humanity Prime must be a contender for the best first novel of the year. Written by a highly talented writer in his early twenties, it is a reminder that science fiction can apply equally well to the less precise sciences of biology and psychology.

But for a single last-ditch colony the race of Man has been totally obliterated from the Universe. The survivors are unmolested for an unspecified lengthy period on a radioactively unstable planet without technology, during which time they mutate and return to the womb of the sea. The description of mankind in a totally different environment is plausible, consistent and embroidered with a lyrical prose which at times touches poetic heights. The approach to the basic plot is reminiscent of Daniel F. Galouye's *The Lost Perception*

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(a very fine novel) while the script echoes Cordwainer Smith, particularly in the naming of the characters -- always a good indicator of the author's preoccupation with words. McAllister is more ambitious than both these writers, he has not been frightened to sustain his story and give it depth in places where a more cautious author would proceed with the plot. For example, one of the sub-plots concerns the cybernetic spaceship which brought the remnants of mankind to the planet. It has a random decision factor due to its organic brain having come from an Italian mama of eight, whose personality conflicts in a schizophrenic fashion with the electronic brain of the ship.

The spectre of Freud haunts every chapter, particularly as the author invests his Humanity Prime with a strongly developed death-wish, one aspect of which is a voyeuristic interest in the deaths of others. This rather sordid theme is handled in such a masterly fashion that it becomes a thing of wonder and beauty. The problem of communication is also given effective treatment, while other themes such as problems of marriage, the fall of man and the different levels of awareness of existence lend to this novel a cosmic quality which prevents it being easily forgotten.

Although the action takes second place to the descriptive material, there is sufficient to hold the interest of the reader. The hero is confronted with a succession of crises which he solves in a straightforward fashion despite the fact that one is never sure that he will manage it in time. This paves the way for a surprise ending which in such a low-keyed novel is a surprise in itself, as is the failure of the "something in the woodshed"

sub-plot, which is very anticlimactic. It is refreshing to know that there is quality science fiction still being written, and it is to be hoped that as this author matures he will not abandon the field, which has given him such a good start.

If your only objection to Buck Rogers, Blackhawk and Superman is that they never appear together, then this is the book you've been waiting for -- The Secret of the Time Vault is no. 6 in the Perry Rhodan series which is claimed to have sold 60 million copies in European languages. Frankly I was rooting for the lizards, but alas, to no avail. Perry Rhodan smashes his way to another Earth-saving victory at the last moment but still cannot complete his mastering of Thora, the beautiful platinum blonde Arkonide (shades of Lois Lane) ...but he still has 499 more episodes, all of which -- promises the publisher -- will be published in English. In searching for a name to classify this sort of stuff and so distinguish it from SF I considered such terms as moroni-fiction; but then realised that there is already a completely satisfactory category: trash. The USA has shown that increasing affluence is associated with literary degeneracy, now Europe is showing it once again, and no doubt for reasons of nostalgia Ace has decided to let us have a peep at Perry Rhodan -- Feacelord (wow!) of the Universe. Warning: don't let the kids catch you reading it.

-- Houser

NEW WRITINGS IN SCIENCE FICTION, 7. Bantam (S5998)
ed. John Carnell 3-168 p. PB 75c

Editor Carnell says "This seventh Bantam of New Writings in SF is a selected "best"

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from three volumes of the original British editions. None of the stories has been published in the U.S.A..."

The Pen and the Dark by Colin Kapp makes an excellent opener. One of his "Unorthodox Engineers" series, written for the New Writings series, its title derives from a sinister pillar of Dark and the penumbral shadow which surrounds it. What causes this eerie blot on the idyllic face of the planet Ithica? Can it be removed? Engineers extraordinary Fritz Van Noon and Jacko Hine are determined to find out. The technological problems Kapp, a metallurgist, poses, are anything but dull.

In Gifts of the Gods Arthur Sellings takes a light-hearted look at that weighty problem, junk, and the havoc it creates. One of the author's last stories before his death in 1968.

The Long Memory by William Spencer and The Man who Missed the Ferry by Douglas R. Mason both have as their evil genius the overcrowded city of the future. Short on dialog, inclined to "tell" rather than "show", neither strikes me as remarkable.

Robert Presslie's The Night of the Seventh Finger hinges on the problems of a fifteen-year-old girl in a satellite town. The SF element is banal, but the story gets by due to some amusing teenage argot and a subtle sting in the final sentence.

According to the foreword, John Rankine's Six Cubed Plus One has been dramatised as a one-hour play since publication and shown by the BBC. The old theme of the tyrant master-mind taking over a group of innocent students gets a shot in the arm

thanks to the author's good humor, witty characterisation and deft twists to round it off.

Defense Mechanism by Vincent King is described as a "sense of wonder" story. Editors appear to regard this vague phrase as self-explanatory, but it always makes me fear the worst. Does it mean I'm in for some mystic mishmash? Happily, not in this case. Author King creates a haunting, vivid picture of a moribund megalopolis seen through the eyes of a member of its surviving citizenry.

One gripe: I see no justification for blurb-ing this story, or 'The Pen and the Dark, as "short novels". At 23 and 29 pages respectively it's surely absurd.

To sum up: recommended. More for the collection's overall standard of writing than any essential "newness" of ideas.

-- Angus Gordon

CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY
by Robert A. Heinlein

Ace (10600)
253 p. EB 95c

Somewhere between the "Fut-
uer History" series and his Hugo winning streak of
the 1960's Heinlein wrote a happy decade full of
reading enjoyment for the ordinary SF slob (like
me). Numbered among these were The Puppet Mast-
ers, Star LummoX, Time for the Stars and Double
Star. Not least of them is Citizen of the Galaxy.
Starting from about Starship Troopers we began to
get deliberate sexual, societal, political and
even mystical elements, which while not detracting
from his overall popularity within the SF reading
group, and increasing it outside, added a dimension
or two to his work. Some found it pleasing,

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others distasteful, but it was a dimension largely unpredictable from his earlier work.

As it happens Citizen of the Galaxy comes from that earlier, less preachy period and is mostly free from such preoccupations. This means I can review it simply as a narrative (and a lively one) and not be concerned with excusing, analysing, deploring or supporting these features of his writing. Thank heavens.

So. What do you get out of science fiction? Escape? Here is escape. Entertainment? Here is entertainment. Perhaps the enjoyment of an intelligently contrived adventure into that stereotyped science-fiction future we would, in our more optimistic moments, like to believe in? Here it is. The chance of identification with a protagonist whose life encompasses such fanciful, but compellingly alluring, elements as the stars, the destiny of the human race seen as farers between the stars, and other scientifically romantic things? Here is your hero, as only Heinlein can draw him.

His name is Thorby and his story begins as a slave, a very young and defiant slave, sold for nine minims in the Plaza of Liberty. Later he becomes a Star Trader, later still a Stellar Guardsman, and finally, after discovering that he is (of course) of no mean heritage, the Nemesis of the slavers.

If you have read Heinlein before with pleasure you can probably tell from this that you will enjoy this book. Not that it is wholly satisfying. The firstquarter of it is better than the rest taken together, something that should not happen and usually does not with Heinlein. This is due to

the killing off of one Baslim the Gripple. One has formed great expectations of Baslim by the time he goes -- in a fashion singularly out of character, he gets caught! -- and is just settling back to enjoy him start laying about the slavers, demonstrating to Thorby as he goes along just how it is done, when he gets his. It seems to leave a vacuum which the developing Thorby never quite fills. The ending too, unfortunately, in a fashion reminiscent of Elsewhen (possibly Heinlein's worst story) is anticlinactic and directionless.

Even so, Citizen of the Galaxy is far better value, and better SF, than most of the rest. Read it.

-- John C. Young

SIX WORLDS YONDER b/w The SPACE WILLIES

by Eric Frank Russell

Acc (77735)

5-125, 5-131 p. PB 75c

Russell followers will relish this set of six stories, all from Astounding. The Waitabits -- those slow-moving inhabitants of the planet Eterna -- are here, and still my favorites. Followed by Tieline, Russell's moving story of the lone custodian of a space lighthouse and his craving for some memento from Earth. Top Secret gets its messages mixed up as zanily as ever. Nothing New has its planet of immortals; Into Your Tent I'll Creep its canine villains; and Diabologic (also included in Boardman's Connoisseur's SF) continues to tie everyone in knots with its crazy logic.

Russell wastes little time on the technical encumbrances of interplanetary travel. He adopts the attitude that all is possible, and we go adventuring with him from there. Realists may object,

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but they can hardly deny that it makes for an exhilarating imaginative spree. Although their styles are continents apart, I feel that Englishman Russell shares with Bradbury one special quality -- the power to light the fire of space excitement. A talent that may be undervalued in these cool post-moon-landing days.

The Space Willies started life as a short story entitled Plus X in Astounding. Revised, enlarged and renamed, Russell has turned it into a full-blown, if not entirely successful book.

Its hero, John Leeming, is a typical scout pilot -- "cocksure, reckless and slightly nuts." Sent on a spying trip he unexpectedly crashes his ship on a Combine held prison planet. With no weapons other than his wits he must contrive a means of out.

Russell gives his readers plenty for their money in the way of boistrous action and near escapes. But his Zangastans are too cloddish to make Leeming's intellectual tussles with them seem an equal contest. Tension sags on this account, and the end, though handled with aplomb, falls a little flat.

Verdict: Good value. If Russell isn't already an old friend of yours get to know him without delay.

-- Angus Gordon

SEA SIEGE
by Andre Norton

Ace (75695)
5-189 p. PB 60c

Whilst this book may have been classed as science fiction when the copyright was taken out in 1957, it seems definitely dated now.

The time setting is one generation after the World War. Narrator is Griff Genston, his father an eminent scientist involved in hush-hush government work. The setting of an island in the West Indies provides the races for the white man/black man separation in due course. All the "action" takes place on and around the island, and Miss Norton has events building up but no apparent action in the usual sense of the word.

The story itself is divided into two parts, before and after the event. Young Griff meanders through the first half while the scene is set and events build up to the climax. It is here that the reader finds it difficult to foretell what will happen but the story is compelling enough to read on and find out. The event which divides the story could be summed up as Death and Destruction, while the remaining part, the "after" provides Monsters. Part Two then proceeds to answer "what would happen if --?" While it leaves a lot of questions unanswered, it does provide an interesting theory on development of black/white culture.

Having read several of Andre Norton's other books I can only say this was not what I expected from Norton. Though the story is cohesive, logical, easy to read and so typical of the Norton style of story telling, one comes away from this book feeling as though one was merely a disinterested observer.

To sum up: Different Norton, somewhat dated. Read it for something different, but don't expect too much.

-- Sandra Hyde

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STAR GATE
by Andre Norton

Ace (70071)
198 p. PB 60c

Andre Norton is a formula writer and Star Gate represents a successful application of the formula. The fact that she has chosen SF as her field does not mean that the same formula could not be successfully applied in any other branch of fiction -- Star Gate would rewrite readily as a historical adventure novel. Adventure, action and heroism sprinkled with the inevitable Norton dash of magic are the ingredients, while no less predictable is the plot -- good vs. evil. Characteristic of most formula writers (27 similar titles are listed at the back) the characters are flat, clear-cut and predictable while the animals that populate her worlds are painfully analogous to their Terran counterparts. In 1958 when this novel was first published there was very little heroic fantasy being written, but now there is competition of such calibre as Moorcock, Vance and Laumer it is time that Norton was relegated to the juvenile list. However, she is always readable and never outrageous, so it is a good thing that Ace are keeping her books in print, since we all travel in trains now and then.

-- Mcuser

The WARLORD OF THE AIR
by Michael Moorcock

Ace (87060)
9-186 p. PB 75c

This could have been, and to some degree still is, a very interesting book. But as it stands, one is forced to ask rhetorically: why was it written? Well, to make money, yes. But why did he --

At first glance, and if you don't read publishers' blurbs (this book has one that gives the game away) the harmless deception the author sets out to work on the reader is reasonably successful, and at first the book does read like an unpublished early SF novel about a man from the milieu of the turn of the Century mysteriously displaced forward to a strange world of three generations later. It purports to be the work of another Michael Moorcock, grandfather of the current edition, written in the first decade of the Century and now brought to light. As a matter of fact, there really might be such a manuscript which has been tampered with to soup it up a bit, but if so the operation has spoiled what appeal it might have had.

It's no news that primitive SF writers' projections of how the politics and technology of their future would turn out are often fascinating stuff today when in hindsight we can see where they went wrong. Not always: some of them are pretty dull and some while entertaining are not very original. But quite often. One might ask at this point what is the point in writing a spurious early SF story when there are countless real ones in the public domain waiting to be resurrected. In what way would it be any better than the real article? There are two ways to approach it. One would be to satirise the early SF writers, who are very much sitting ducks, play it for laughs. Cruel, but it could be effective. The other would be to write a really convincing pastiche, one that would deceive all but the most astute reader, and show the kind of predictions that really could and should have been made. Quite a lot harder -- but worth doing. Moorcock has chosen neither.

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The lengthy buildup -- we don't get to the year 1973 until page 50 -- is in character, and the introduction to the marvels of the future that follows is acceptable -- mild political changes, universal peace, airships, sound and color movies, Marconiphone broadcasting, monorail -- though there are some doubtful touches for the overly suspicious. But when we meet a bigoted pipsqueak named Ronald Reagan the rot sets in. So far it could be merely editorial tampering; but before we're finished we have met, among others, a centenarian Lenin. Not to mention an atomic bomb tried out on Hiroshima. A pity. It could have been quite a good book with a little better judgment.

-- G. S.

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