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S C I E N C E F I C T I O N
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No. 48

REVIEWS

COMMUNE 2000 A.D., by Mack Reynolds. Bantam PB. 95c

Reynolds has written several novels on the basic theme of a society with Universal Guaranteed Income -- negative income tax -- in which the dissatisfied go off to live in special interest towns ("Communes", though they don't sound much like communes to me). Here he treads the same ground again. The basic idea is suspect, because artificial utopias have seldom worked in history. The lectures -- oops, sorry, discussions between the characters -- which are meant to tell us how and why the commune movement grew up did nothing to convince me, but I confess that I soon started to skip over them. These lectures are interspersed with some quite funny set scenes (Reynolds doesn't intend them to be funny). Oh, yes, I forgot, there was a plot in there somewhere, I think. But not much of it.

I found this a hard book to read, for several reasons. Some of them are outlined above. Another is Reynolds' view of futuro slang -- he postulates a new set of words, which is okay, but there are so few of them and every character uses them all the time. Conversation today isn't so tedious as it apparently will be in twenty-six years. In general the writing is pedestrian, and padded.

Three frightening things. First, Reynolds has written much better books than this -- not only fresher and better plotted, but better written. This reads like a first draft, and it's bad when authors are paid for first drafts. Second, the book is labelled "A Frederik Pohl Selection", and apparently Bantam intend to put this label on the cream of their crop only. And third, the book has been moderate-

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ately well received by two of the professional magazines -- although I guess that a book which more-or-less pleases both Lester del Rey and P. Schuyler Miller would have to be pretty bad.

-- Wal Wallis

BUG-EYED MONSTERS, ed. Anthony Cheetham. Sidgwick & Jackson 1972.
HC 9-280 p.

Ah yes, monsters. Good for a lot of action, particularly in early SF. Often of doubtful scientific basis, but one of the field's recurrent themes. Someone ought to put together a collection of the best examples from the time when they really flourished -- before 1939 when de Camp debunked them devastatingly in his article Design for Life, and some forgotten genius coined the mocking term Bug-Eyed Monster.

Those ten stories -- except Howard Koch's radio script Invasion from Mars from 1938, wrongly dated 1940 here -- are all later. Most are good, if rather too familiar, though not all come anywhere the standard of Brown's classic *Arena*. Blish's *Surface Tension* is really too silly and unbelievable to be so often revived. Farmer's *Mother* is as shocking as ever. The rest are not remarkable. For the record, Not only Dead Men by van Vogt, The Deserter by Tenn, Stranger Station by Knight, Greenslaves by Herbert, Balanced Ecology by Schmitz and The Dance of the Stranger and the Three by Carr.

Cheetham's previous connection with science fiction if any is unknown, but as an editor he's a lazy slob. His stupid Introduction, leading off with an inaccurate quotation, mentions a Chandler story which isn't included and enriches our language with the word "octopoid". Fredric Brown and A. E. van Vogt each have their names misspelled twice. And the book's poorly printed pages abound in errors like "seel" (sell), "mad" (made), "wahle" (whale), "floet" (fleet), "ealry" (early), not to mention repeated lines.

Unless you badly need the text of *Arena* and *Invasion from Mars* (authenticity not guaranteed), I'd say skip it.

-- G. S.

FEMININE FANTASY

HEROES AND VILLAINS, by Angela Carter. Picador 1972. PB 151 p. \$1.40

This is the first novel in the field of Heroic Fantasy which could only have been written by a woman, and as such deserves considerable attention, not only because it further expands the boundaries of Heroic Fantasy but because of the insight it yields into the feminine mind. While we can readily accept from the psychiatrist the fact that men and women entertain quite different types of fantasies it is not until we see the fantasies of the opposite sex in print that we appreciate the magnitude of these differences, and in so doing realise how droll the usual run of heroic fantasy must appear to the liberated female reader of today. The same forces which compelled Jane Austen to hide behind a male pen-name and the sex of George Eliot to remain so long in doubt still linger, but as they are gradually pushed aside literature finds a hitherto unrealised dimension -- one for which the HF fan must be particularly grateful, as it is a branch of fiction which is always threatening to degenerate into a collage of heroes, demons and gods slashing one another to pieces with medieval weapons.

Heroes and Villains combines virginal fantasies and Gothic horror with the modern fears of brutality, violence and the bomb. The bomb has been used perhaps two centuries before the story begins and three types of people make up the known world: the Out People, wild and terrifying mutations; the Barbarians, nomadic scavengers who cling to a harsh existence; and the communities of the Professors where some attempt is made to retain and expand knowledge. The predominant passion in these communities is fear of the other groups, fear which when combined with boredom leads to a high level of madness.

Marianne, the central character and in many ways the only character, elects to leave the Professors and take up with their traditional enemies the Barbarians. Obsessed with the violent deaths of her father and brother, she falls in with Jewel, a Barbarian leader partially educated by a renegade Professor, who is a strange mixture of evil and attraction. The author's failure to include a sexual encounter between Jewel's tutor and Marianne indicates that the subject matter has not been fully exploited, and the fact that there are more scenes in bed than in battle suggests that the book has potential for at least another

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hundred pages. No doubt the author felt that too much extraneous matter would detract from the central issue which is Marianne's love-hate relationship with Jewel and her dilemma of having only unpleasant alternatives to choose between.

As *Heroic Fantasy*, Angela Carter's first novel is atypical, sacrificing adventure for character study. A miniature *Titus Groan* except that the setting is almost a parody of the present day, not however for the sake of moralising but rather to focus attention on the problem of individual choice as precipitated by the combination of freedom and individuality. The solution which is offered while fatalistic is also realistic, and the very credibility which it generates will hopefully further open the HF field to work of a more serious nature, and hopefully again to more women writers.

-- Mouser

The SUICIDERS, by J. T. McIntosh. Avon, 1973. PB 75 c

Once upon a time Mr. McIntosh wrote an excellent novel called *One in Three Hundred*. Apart from that, all his good work has been in the shorter lengths: his books have been pot-boilers. Well, the pot is boiling again.

We have here a standard piece of slow-paced adventure -- one planet attacks a neighbour, a professional trouble shooter is called in. A space liner and its captain also get involved. I don't want to say any more about the story line, as it is quite a well written book and would make good reading for a train journey.

But there's something that bothers me. The plot involves a group of six characters with extra-sensory powers. They seem to be evil for the sake of being evil (I never could believe in that sort of motivation), and their powers are referred to as "witchcraft" in the book and on the front cover; the back cover refers to "an occult group" and to "supernatural forces". Avon and/or McIntosh are trying to cash in on the current wave of interest in the occult. But the plot and the ideas have nothing to do with witchcraft -- in fact there is nothing that wasn't present in the psi stories of the late 50's. Very irritating, as there is some good SF waiting to be written

which will use witchcraft effectively.

To sum up: better than competent hack-work. Don't expect to think very hard while reading it, though.

-- Wal Hallis

[Aren't you splitting hairs there, Walt? ESP and similar concepts may not be part of the traditional beliefs about witchcraft and the occult but they are just as much supernatural. Both areas are outside the scientific world view. G.S.]

The RETURN OF THE DOOMED HERO

The SLEEPING SORCERESS, by Michael Moorcock. N.E.L. 1972. PB 140 p.
\$1.00

Elric lives! screams the back cover and many who thrilled to the adventures of the Melnibonean albino would snatch this book from the shelves without further hesitation because not since the early sixties has Moorcock chosen to write of his most famous character. Elric was responsible for establishing Moorcock's reputation...nevertheless while Elric may still live his doom seems to be fast catching up with him, because here we have Moorcock writing well below his best. Perhaps it is the doom of Elric to be the ideal character for magazine stories whose discontinuity adds to his enigmatic nature, which pales in the glow of the novel. As if aware of this, Moorcock has written one story which comprises the first third of *The Sleeping Sorceress*, while the remainder of the book consists of another virtually unrelated story into which have been interposed two chapters of *The King of the Swords*, in which Elric and Corum the hero of the latter book combine to complete some task of relevance to Corum which Moorcock painfully strives to make relevant to the present book. If the cosmology of the *Eternal Champion* which is glimpsed in most of Moorcock's heroic fantasy were at all consistent then such diversions could be forgiven. As they stand however, it is just a case of trying to make too much out of too little, and now that this has become so obvious it may be a good guess that Moorcock is at least temporarily departing the field of heroic fantasy. A later book, *The Champion of Garathorm*, where a horrific attempt is made to wrap up, serves to confirm this guess.

-- Houser

THIS IS YOUR SECRETARY SPEAKING

Since my views permeate anything I write for SF News I rarely bother to intrude a personal note. SF suffers from far too much cult of the personality, and if you want to read what a lot of rather uninteresting characters have to say about themselves there are always plenty of other places for just that. My private affairs are nothing to bother you with. Nevertheless, they exist and from time to time have effects on my SF activities.

Of course, what we really need for a job like this is someone with nothing else to claim his attention. Anyone who runs a voluntary organisation involving publishing and correspondence ought to have no other interests. He would have to make living, we'll concede that, but at some completely undemanding occupation. He wouldn't have any family or any other responsibilities. He wouldn't take part in anything else in any involving manner. If we had someone like that, you're welcome to him. In fact, whoever you have lives in a real community and has needs, duties and problems.

Thus in the last two years I have had a lot of other matters than SF to think of. Among other things I have left a job that meant a lot to me besides bread and butter, where I was doing something that was in the community and national interest, because I was being victimised. (I did what I could to hit back at the time, but it wasn't enough. Recently I've had an opportunity to expose the slimy twisters involved: two independent Government investigations going on at present happen to touch on the area and I have given my side.) So I have taken a position in quite a different field. I have also moved from Canberra back to Sydney. And there have been various other events that have claimed much time and effort.

Now that matters have stabilised somewhat I hope to make a better showing in SF again.

It seems worth remarking that these days my enthusiasm for SF is not quite what it used to be. Having been actively interested most of the time since 1940, obviously neither the field nor I have stood still. The basic problems today are not promoting SF, getting abysmal standards raised a little and helping serious readers develop their taste -- they are more trying to preserve a fading tradition, sorting out the acceptable from the garbage and saving the field from the carpet-

bagging charletans, parasites and meatballs. If it can still be saved, which I am beginning to doubt.

As I think of my long entanglement with the movement I wonder how much of a movement there would have been in Australia without it. No doubt others would have done -- did do -- a great amount. There were periods when I was doing little or nothing, and there have been others who had important achievements. If I hadn't been around something still would have been done, but it's interesting to wonder just what form it would have taken. Someone else would have had to bring the wartime Sydney group together again. Someone else would have had to start the equivalent of the ASFS in 1950 or thereabouts to seriously look for more SF readers all over Australia. Someone else would have had to find and introduce the original nuclear groups in Melbourne and Adelaide and Brisbane.

And all the others who were active for a while, or even for many years off and on, who did a lot of good work for SF, who were often more conspicuous on the scene than I was -- Molesworth, Veney, South, Judd, Moyer, Mathews, Crozier, McCubbin, Joyce, Crane -- if they had not been drawn into activities in the same way would they have done something similar of their own accord? Or would others have done the equivalent instead?

Perhaps, perhaps. I'll just remark that I don't believe there were ever any potential creators and doors who didn't come out because something was already going on, so if something hadn't been they wouldn't have been any more visible. The only important figures I can think of who might still have done something similar are Don Tuck and Roger Dard. Neither had much need for Australian activities to react with.

Well, so much for that line of thinking. More to the point is what happens now.

Will SF News get back to monthly schedule in 1975? I would like to think so, but I don't undertake this. All I promise is that it will aim for it, and produce as many issues as possible. As for content, we'll go on with the few contributors who keep up the reviews, and if more members want to join in so much the better. We will re-

his is...

sume listing current books and indexing reviews, but it is as well to remark that this will no longer aim at a really comprehensive coverage. It will aim to list all new SF books that seem to be worth reading, or which have some special point of interest such that some of you wouldn't want to miss them, or which are reviewed intelligently. We will report on anything significant happening in SF which you might miss otherwise -- our title perhaps implies more than that, but "news" is a pretty elastic term and was chosen for its generality. I admit it would be more appropriate to a publication appearing regularly and much more frequently. Should we change it? Let's have suggestions if you think so.

As you know, a lot of work has been done on indexing information on SF retrospectively. I hope to put some of this into shape for publication. I have material for a supplement to the Australian SF Index 1925/1967; I intend to update the SF Book Review Index and add earlier entries; there remains incomplete the Index to British SF Magazines, which could be completed this year; another major project is the index to SF short stories in books to which a number of you have contributed, but it's too important to begin until it can be got through with promptly. There are other ideas, but all I can say is that I'll do what I can.

While the Association was represented only by an infrequent token issue I haven't been asking for subscription renewals. Because I expect to produce more in 1975 I'm asking for them now. It's still three dollars a year, unchanged for over a decade of steady price rises. May we have your support?

-- Graham Stone

The NEW PROMETHEANS: Readings for the Future
ed. John S. Lambert.

Harper & Row 1973
xiv, 425 p. PB \$4.95

This collection has about the worst piece of book design of the century. The running head is made into a running interpolation slashing across the text two inches from the top of the page. For this piece of insanity that is close to genius, it's recommended to collectors of queer formats: not, although some of the contents are excellent, to anyone else.

A little over half the book is nonfictional discussion of the future from various positions, of rather disparate standards. They include familiar pieces by Bernal, Eisley, Fuller, Haldane, Hardin, Julian Huxley and Loderberg, easily accessible in other printings, as well as some pretty unimportant stuff.

The rest is fairly recent science fiction: some very good, like Ursula LeGuin's *Nine Lives* and Zelazny's *For a Breath I Tarry*, which no doubt are already on your shelves once or twice; some just acceptable, which you probably have too.

There is an overall plan, and quite a range of ideas is introduced. If it had an index it would almost be worth while. As it is -- we don't need it.

-- Trimalchio

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Others -- ask us.

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Afterthought. To anyone who may say, to the review of Bug-Eyed Monsters on p. 2, 'Good gracious, we can find typos like those in SF News on occasion!'. There's a lot of difference between something produced by one unpaid volunteer and the product of a long established firm of some pretensions. The typesetters at S&J have one or more proofreaders and an editor all responsible for picking up these clangers. If standards mean anything they ought to do it.

-- G.S.

Afterafterthought. On proofreading the stencils I spotted "cack" for "back" on p. 5. Not being an admirer of the kind of literature under discussion there I thought of leaving it there as a piece of unconscious criticism.

-- G.S.

Aftorafterafterthought. It occurs to me, following the line of thought expressed in the middle of p. 7, that I and the others I mention accomplished one thing we didn't intend: we provided something for cranks and phonies to exploit to the detriment of SF. Yes, there is a lunatic fringe. My policy has always been to give it no encouragement by so much as noticing its presence, since what it desires is basically attention. This is why I never replied to any of the personal abuse occasionally directed my way. I remember the campaign against me around the time of the 2nd Sydney Convention, as some of you may do as well. There was a caricature showing me as running amuck, for instance. Actionable, of course, but no one really wins a libel suit. Besides, the poisonous little twit who drew it was a minor. What he really needed was a kick in the arse. But anyhow, I made no response because whatever I had done would have meant that an attack like that was affecting me. On reflection, I think I may have taken this attitude too far. There were times when I could, and should, have hit back. If it had got around that anyone who stood in my way got trodden on, things might have been quite different.

-- G.S.