

Science Fiction NEWS

No. 22

October 1970

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

ALLEN, Henry Wilson

GENESIS FIVE. Pyramid (T2162). 190 p. PB 75c.
(1st Morrow 1968)

BRUNNER, John [Kilian Houston] 1934-

The ATLANTIC ABOMINATION. Ace (03300). 5-128 p.
PB 60c. (Reissue of 1960 ed.) See p. 11.

BURROUGHS, Edgar Rice, 1875-1950

The LOST CONTINENT. Ace (49291). 7-123 p. PB.
60c. (reissue of 1963 ed. Originally as Beyond
Thirty in All-Around mag. Feb. 1916; 1st sep-
arately in an anonymous pirated edition, 1956;
with The Man-Eater, ScienceFiction & Fantasy
Pubns. 1958. No British ed.) A rare Burroughs
item set in an incredible future -- The USA
isolated from World War I (which it didn't en-
ter) for over 200 years while Europe descends
to savagery. Not one of his best works.

Review: Astounding US Aug 1958 p. 145; Br.
Nov 1958 p. 118

COMPTON, D[avid] G[uy], 1930-

The ELECTRIC CROCODILE. Hodder. 222 p. HC. 25/-
As The STEEL CROCODILE. Ace (78575). 5-254 p.
PB 75c. Review: Venture Aug 1970 p. 106

Current Books

EDMONDSON, G. C. [i.e. José Mario Garry Ordóñez
Edmondson y Cotton, 1922-]

The SHIP THAT SAILED THE TIME STREAM. Ace
(76094). 5-189 p. PB 75c. (reissue of 1965 ed.)

FARMER, Philip José, 1918-

BEHIND THE WALLS OF TERRA. Ace (71135). 5-188 p.
PB 75c. Continues series: The Maker of Universes,
The Gates of Creation, A Private Cosmos.

-- LORD OF THE TREES b/w The MAD GOBLIN. Ace
(51375). 5-122, 5-130 p. PB 75c. Some might con-
sider these SF

HARRISON, Harry [Maxwell], 1925-

The JUPITER LEGACY. Bantam (S5445). 218 p. PB
75c. (Reissue of 1968 ed. Original title
Plague from Space) Cover blurb on this ed. "As
great a spellbinder as The Andromeda Strain!" -- a
mediocre but popularly successful book on much
the same theme. Reviews: New Worlds 164 p. 148;
F&SF Mch 1966 p. 46; ASFA Journal 2/1, 1970, p. 3

HEINLEIN, Robert A[nson], 1907-

TUNNEL IN THE SKY. Ace (82660). 7-253 p. PB 95c.
(1st Scribner 1955; Gollancz 1965, Pan PB 1968)
Intended as a juvenile, the treatment detracting
only slightly from the effect of a rather grim
story. Reviews: Astounding US Mch 1956, Br.
Aug 1956; Amazing Feb 1956; F&SF Feb 1956; NY
Times 13.11.55 p. 10; Saturday Review 12.11.55
p. 81

LORY, Robert

A HARVEST OF HOODWINKS [12 shorts] b/w/ MASTERS
OF THE LAMP. Ace (58180). 10-117. 5-136 p. PB

R E V I E W S

THE FURIES by Keith Roberts.

Hart-Davis, 1966; Berkley PB, 1966; Pan PB, 1969

PAVANE, by Keith Roberts

Hart-Davis, 1968; Doubleday, 1968; SF Book Club, 1969

Since The Bo'sun's unflattering remarks about Pavane in his column some months ago I have thought I should set out my own opinion; then decided I should read Roberts' other book to make a better judgment; I read The Furies in May but one thing after another has delayed me until now (September!) before getting around to it.

The task is made difficult by the extraordinary difference between the two. Dealing with the second first because it is the simpler, I find a straightforward action story, no different in principle no different from a western, crime or spy story. Furthermore it deals with the results of alien invasion, and how many times has that theme been handled?

The invasion is one by by giant wasps, who overrun England, killing a large part of the population. The whole story in essence is very like one of Wyndham's books (particularly The Day of the Triffids) because the bulk of it is concerned not with the invasion itself which just happens, but with what happens to certain people after it.

It is important, of course, that all these happenings must be logical and well described. In this case Roberts has worked hard describing the behavior of the wasps and their battles with the humans. His descriptions are vivid; whether they are correct or not is another matter, but his action passages have a roller-coaster feeling about them -- once started there is no stopping to take breath. Years ago I clearly remember I felt the same about Russell's

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Three to Conquer, indeed I finished it in one night because I couldn't put it down.

So the central idea of *The Furies* is not new, there is no interesting technological or sociological extrapolation, but it succeeds because it is well written. It is only SF because of the central idea: the rest is racy adventure.

Now to *Pavane*. Here is an alternate-history story, about an England and a world which never existed, but might have been had certain events happened and others not happened. Of course, this has also been done before (though nowhere near as often as the invasion idea); one thinks immediately of Randall Garrett's series in *Analog* a few years ago with a detective theme. Roberts and Garrett took about the same point at which history diverged, but their end conditions in the mid-20th Century differ.

In describing this divergence point in a prolog, I do think Roberts sticks his neck out. He indicates that if Elizabeth I had been assassinated in 1588 (and really, it's a wonder she wasn't at some stage or other) modern life would not have eventuated, which is all right. But it seems to me he suggests his depressed history would naturally result from a successful Spanish invasion of England and Roman Catholic rule. This is regrettable -- it could bias a reader immediately -- I can only beg you to carry on.

His history is given in six episodes, each self-sufficient, which appeared in *SF Impulse* as a series.

The *Lady Margaret* is about transport in Roberts' England. He gives the country no railways, but steam locomotive towed road trains; no private motor vehicles, only horses and horse-

drawn carriages.

The Signaller concerns long distance communication, which takes the form of a chain of semaphore stations across country and continent.

Brother John gives a little about printing processes, but mainly deals with the beginnings of rebellion against the authority of Rome. "At times the giant moved and grumbled, turned in a restless sleep. Soon, he would awake."

Lords and Ladies returns to the family which featured in the first part, a generation later. It doesn't (I think) tell us of anything happening, but prepares the reader for later steps. It at least tends to dispel any feeling we are developing about Roberts' denominational sympathies, when one character says: "Do not despise your Church; for she has a wisdom beyond your understanding. Do not despise her mummeries; they have a purpose that will be fulfilled."

Corfe Gate brings the rebellion against Rome into full swing. Centering about an individual castle in the west, the war spreads as all the native English nobility fight for the right to answer to their own King Charles only.

Coda, the conclusion, is quite short and ties up a few loose ends by having the grown up son of a character in Corfe Gate visiting the old battlefield. I confess that although I can see here expressed the point of the whole thing: "The Church knew there was no halting Progress; but slowing it, slowing it even by half a century, giving man time to reach a little higher toward reason; that was the gift she gave this world", which explains why the alternate history was better. I am confused by a passage adjacent to this: "Because once, beyond our Time, beyond all the memories of men, there was a great civilisation. There

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was a Coming, a Death and Resurrection; a Conquest, a Reformation, an Armada. And a Burning, an Armageddon."

So I finish the account here as I finished the book with a question: is it an alternative history, or is it set two or three or more thousand years in the future, with history repeating itself up to a point? This, to me, is the thing that spoils the work, which I have to overlook if I want to enjoy the book, because I feel sure the latter is intended but I prefer to believe the former gives more satisfaction. I also believe that this question introduces a flaw -- it makes it look as if Roberts started with one idea and finished with a different one.

On the credit side, his descriptions of the steam engines, the semaphore machines and so on are excellent. He put a lot of work into this, and apparently studied works on the Inquisition for background. In Corfe Gate there is an action scene where a steamer charges a group of horses, written in a style reminiscent of the roller-coaster descriptions in *The Furies*. But nearly the whole book is written to suit the behavior and general tone of life in another age. The whole narrative, to me, has nothing of this Century or the last; it has the feeling of a period when haste was carried out in a leisurely manner. By comparison, Georgette Heyer's Regency period novels bustle in manic fashion.

The title? Reference to it appears in a speech by a Lady Eleanor. She sees life as "Like a dance somehow, a minuet, or pavane. Something stately and pointless, with all its steps set out, with a beginning and an end." All I know about

the pavane is that it was a repetitious dance -- so the history-repeating explanation may be right.

I'd say it's a good book. It's cleverly done, carefully written, a craftsman's job with considerable literary art displayed. I liked it, my only objection being to the doubtful point gone over above. On the problem of the religious aspects, well, once upon a time SF didn't touch religion, politics and (shudder) sex, but now why not permit religion provided that it is done properly and well? The only difficulty is that the writer might offend -- true also of other topics -- and with this Roberts certainly could.

He's not alone there. Remember Clarke's short *The Star*, about a world wiped out by a sun that went nova, observed by us two thousand years ago as the Star of Bethlehem? Remember Blish's *A Case of Conscience*? Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*? All of these could offend a person sensitive to religious matters, but they are all great work. However, now I come to *The Bo'sun's point*: is it SF? I don't think, strictly by the old rigid formulas, it is, although it may be argued it is set on a parallel time track or in the future and is therefore SF. I do think it is a historical fantasy, that is it rearranges history in a fanciful way to suit the author. The technical bits do not save it, because they are nothing we don't have now. (Heavens, a double negative!) To qualify as SF, any technical items must extrapolate from today. Also must social features, and so on. So by these standards, it's not SF, it's something else -- quite good indeed, just different. (I can see I'm going to have my work cut out explaining why Garrett's stories are SF.)

But I think *The Bo'sun* is wrong in condemning it as a book. I find great merit in it. One important

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reason why I make this claim is that I find merit in this writer, who can -- has written two books close together which differ so much in content and style. I'd just like to spend some time with Roberts finding out his rationale for the story, his own religious beliefs, whether he meant it to be SF, and a few other things.

-- Ronald B. Ward

Comment:

"Actually I didn't mean to say the book wasn't SF (though I don't think it is), but that I didn't like it, didn't want it, didn't finish it in fact. This was an example to illustrate my complaint about the way the SF Book Club works -- you subscribe for all the books chosen, willy-nilly, whereas some book clubs offer some choice. The American SF Book Club, for instance, asks you to take only four at least out of the year's dozen offers, a much better proposition. You also ought to be allowed to count books from the stock of previous selections in the quota. Why can't it be worked this way?

"I should say that I have no serious objections to the books offered since my bleat except that I already have half of them, which again shows the difficulty I was getting at, that one doesn't want every choice automatically."

-- The Bo'sun

Editorial comment:

"It might have been" is one of the silliest, as well as the saddest, sentences in the language. No one ever gets another chance, and it is futile to say "if" of the past. Books

like this do not fit into the logical framework of science fiction because their rationale is not consistent with the scientific approach; science, after all, consists of the establishment of facts and the elimination of falsehoods. Most science fiction dwells on possibilities -- however remote -- suggested by what we have come to know. The bulk of science fiction takes as its main background element the plurality of worlds, though this alone has long ceased to be enough. (At one time you could have written a science fiction story on the theme that there were not any other worlds, the observed planets were optical illusions or whatever, though it would have taken some ingenuity and I don't know if anyone did write such a story.)

Now if Roberts had explained his variant history with some claptrap about time travel and branching time lines, I would have reservations about it but time travel is conventionally allowed as science fiction: there are obvious and subtle paradoxes in the way, but I believe a system of postulates could be constructed to make time travel logically possible. However, there is no attempt even at the crudest kind of time manipulation here. Dismissing with contempt the nonsense about it all being in the future -- history doesn't repeat itself, full stop -- we have "It might have been". We know that it was not.

What we have here is a species of historical fiction, and we are not here to discuss historical fiction.

Is it good historical speculation? Not very, when we come to look at it closely. It's all very well to talk in generalities: England and Spain as contending powers over centuries, progress and reaction, the role of the Church and so on. But to

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get down to cases, could Spain have really beaten England in Elizabeth's time? Not just at sea -- hard enough -- but politically subjugated, occupied, managed? Spain was already overextended and unable to administer and exploit all those conquered lands, unable to maintain a passably sound bureaucracy or legal system, already afflicted by the rigidity and inability to adjust that characterised public life as long as the empire endured. Could England have been kept in hand better than Holland?

As for the Church...I don't think it will offend anyone to acknowledge that the Church in the 16th to 19th Centuries was most obviously a strongly reactionary institution standing resolutely in the path of any social change that could be called liberalising, in an age when practically any change had to be in the direction of the open society. And we've all heard about the Protestant Ethic theory of the Industrial Revolution. No doubt a depressed, backward England would have changed the economic picture. But I would expect not a general retardation but the rise of other centers and some differences in emphasis, for instance an earlier forced development in North America.

Roberts' picture of retarded technology appears to me whimsical rather than logical. Railways weren't developed for fun but for practical reasons; steam carriages were not a good proposition without good roads, in a fine vicious circle. They did run quite successfully here and here where the roads existed, but railways soon took over what business they had, and then they stood still while the standard of living rose to the level of supporting large numbers of private steamors; but then internal combustion nosed them

out. And take semaphore telegraph systems. They did exist before electricity -- but not in depressed areas, only between active centers of trade and state activity. I feel they were put in merely as a picturesque touch.

In any case, is it science fiction? Even taking history as a science -- and a lot of historians are doing their best to make it so -- I doubt it. We could scarcely avoid including any historical novel with a detailed setting which introduces hypothetical characters and events. Robert Graves' I, Claudius and Claudius the God, King Jesus and Count Belisarius would have to be counted in, for a start, all have conjectural answers to open questions, reconstructions of what may really have happened after our knowledge of the facts ends as well as suggestions of what lay behind events we do know of. de Camp's An Elephant for Aristotle? Yes, it visualises a conceivable but unknown expedition. The same goes for all the rest of historical fiction -- Rafael Sabatini and Lloyd Douglas, F. W. Kenyon and Paul I. Wellman. Where do we draw a line?

The answer is obvious: right here.

-- G.S.

The ATLANTIC ABOMINATION, by John Brunner
Ace, 1970. Reissue of 1960 ed. PB

Brunner can be a good writer when he wants to. Unfortunately this is not one of those times. The plot is very much formula: a monster who once ruled men's minds is woken up by explorers under the sea; he tries to take over the world. Reads like a move script, and a very B-grade one at that. As a

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portrait of pure evil and selfishness the monster is well drawn, but this does not justify the existence of the novel. It is interesting to note that it was originally published in 1960, and it may have been quite good then. But to reprint such a book is a pure joke. Why Ace would do such a thing I have no idea. Perhaps cutting in on Brunner's sudden fame of late.

"Godzilla, Gorgo, King Kong -- stand aside for The Atlantic Abomination!" I think not.

-- Michael Cameron

Editorial comment: Funny thing. At one time there used to be a myth about early SF being better than the contemporary version. Prewar readers will recall talk of "classics" and of course if you thought of Wells or other real pioneers and forgot their satellites there was something in it. Then SF did really grow and mature magnificently. Now, after a while it leveled off, and there really isn't much difference between 1960 and 1970 if you ignore the difference in fads. But from Gold onward, editors and critics have been yelling "Every day in every way we're getting better and better" until from repetition we came to believe it. Don't. You have to go back a long way to come to a time when the best is not still excellent and the average still readable.

-- G.S.

Current Books

- MCCAFFREY, Anne [Mrs. H. W. Johnson, 1926-]
DECISION AT DOONA. Rapp. 246 p. 28/-. (1st Ballantine PB 1969) Reviews: Analog Nov 1969 p. 171; If Oct 1969 p. 149
- MATHESON, Richard [Burton], 1926-
THIRD FROM THE SUN. Bantam (H5548). 180 p. PB. (Reissue of 1955 ed., also 1962) 13 stories. All from the earlier volume Born of Man and Woman; NB, contents not same as Gorgi PB 1962, each has three different.
- PANSHIN, Alexei, 1940-
MASQUE WORLD. Ace (02320). 5-156 p. PB 60c. Reviews: Analog Mch 1970 p. 167; F&SF June 1970 p. 52; Galaxy Feb 1970 p. 143
- POHL, Frederik, 1919-
The AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT. Gollancz. 191 p. 25/- (In Galaxy Oct 1965 - Feb 1966. Trident HC 1969; Ballantine PB 1969) Reviews: F&SF Apr 1969 p. 45; Venture Aug 1969 p. 124
- and KORNELUTE, Cyril M., 1923-1958
SEARCH THE SKY. Penguin. 170 p. PB 5/- (1st Ballantine 1954; Rapp 1968. In German as Die letzte Antwort) Reviews: Astounding US Oct 1954 p. 148; SF News Nov 1969 p. 19; Canberra Sunday Post 6.9.70 p. 18
- PRIEST, Christopher
INDOCTRINAIRE. Faber. 3-227 p. 28/-. Based on short The Interrogator in New Writings in SF 15.
- SCHER, K.-H. and MAHR, Kurt
The VEGA SECTOR. Ace (65974). 5-189 p. PB 75c.

Current Books

The VEGA SECTOR contd. 5th volume in the English version of the Perry Rhodan series, two short novels: Space Battle in the Vega Sector; Mutants in Action. Great stuff by 1930 standards.

SCHMITZ, James H. 1911-

A PRIDE OF MONSTERS. Macmillan, NY. 248 p. \$4.95. Five stories: Lion Loose; The Searcher; The Winds of Time; The Pork Chop Tree; Greenface.

SILVERBERG, Robert

VORNAN-19. Sidgwick. 252 p. 30/- (1st as The Masks of Time, Ballantine PB 1968)

Review: Analog Feb 1969 p. 167

SIMAX, Clifford D[onald], 1904-

COSMIC ENGINEERS. Paperback Lib. 159 p. PB 60c. (Reissue of 1964 ed. In Astounding Feb-Apr 1939. Gnome 1950) Review: Astounding US June 1951

-- WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN? Ace. 5-191 p.

PB. (Reissue of 1967 ed.) Pan. 191 p. PB 5/-

Review: ASFA Journal 1/9, p. 247

van VOGT, E[lfred] E[lton], 1912- and HULL, E[dna] Mayne [Mrs. van Vogt]

THE SEA THING, and other stories. Sidgwick. 222 p. 27/- (1st as Out of the Unknown, Fantasy Pub. Co., 1948. As The Sea Thing, Powell, 1969) Six stories: The Sea Thing; The Ghost; The Witch; The Ultimate Wish; The Wishes we make; The Patient. Despite titles, some could be called SF.

-- The WINGED MAN. Sphere. 159 p. PB 5/- (in Astounding May-June 1944 signed Hull. Doubleday 1966; Sidgwick 1967.

WYNDHAM, John [i.e. John Wyndham Parkes Lucas
Beynon Harris, 1903-69]
CHOCKY. Pergamon. 184 p. ill. 10/-; Penguin.
154 p. PB 4/- (1st Joseph 1968; Ballantine PB
1968) Review: Analog Aug 1968 p. 167

ZELAZNY, Roger [Joseph], 1937-
THIS IMMORTAL. Ace (80691). 5-174 p. PB 60c
(Reissue of 1966 ed. Short version in F&SF Oct-
Nov 1965 as ...and call me Conrad)
Review: Australian 11.5.68 p. 12

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PHILMUS, Robert M.
INTO THE UNKNOWN. University of California
Press. 174, ix p. \$6.95. Historical study of
"the evolution of science fiction from Francis
Godwin to H. G. Wells" -- i.e. of 250 odd years
of false starts before SF came into existence,
about which too much has been written already.
This skimpy volume does not seem to add anything
significant to the work of Nicolson, Cove, Bail-
ey, Franklin and the rest.

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We have a few copies of the following:

The INDEX OF SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINES, 1951-1965, comp. Norman Metcalf. Offset, paper covers. By author and title. Similar style to Day's Index to 1926-50. \$8-00

(Incidentally, Day's Index is in print and can be ordered at \$9-00)

INDEX TO THE SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINES: annuals covering 1966, 67, 68, 69. Issued by New England SF Association. Offset, text in computer print-out form and not very easy to read. Each \$1-00

INDEX TO FICTION IN RADIO NEWS AND OTHER MAGAZINES, comp. T. G. L. Cockcroft. Covers the early SF stories in Gernsback's radio and science magazines from 1911 to 1928. By author and title. 12 p., offset. 70c

INDEX TO THE WEIRD FICTION MAGAZINES, comp T.G.L. Cockcroft. Covers Weird Tales, Strange Stories, Strange Tales (US), Strange Tales (Br.), Oriental Stories/Magic Carpet and Golden Fleece. There is a fair amount of SF in some of these. In two parts, author and title indexes, offset, total 100 p. The set \$5-00

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The UNIVERSES OF E.E.SMITH, by Ron Ellick and Bill Evans. Guide to the Lensman stories, indexing all characters, places etc; similar treatment of

the Skylark stories; bibliography of Smith. Recommended as much for browsing as reference if Smith appeals to you. Quality PB \$2-20

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