

Science Fiction NEWS

No. 24

December 1970

THAT WAS THE YEAR, SUCH AS IT WAS

1970 in science fiction was hardly the stuff that editorials are made of. Things happened, yes: but there was little achieved.

Two magazines ceased publication. Looked at objectively, the wonder is that any of the remainder survived, none of them deserved to. Vision of Tomorrow was that rarity, an ambitiously conceived magazine. The fiction it presented turned out to be mostly poor to indifferent, the art work was not good enough for the slick format, but it was obviously aiming at something far above the mediocrity of the established magazines. Gillings' memoirs were valuable historical material and interesting reading, and Baxter's observations on SF films were better than most criticism of the field. But adequate distribution was never achieved, and however excellent a magazine may be it has to reach its readers first of all. Venture Science Fiction was a magazine with little to recommend it, giving the impression (no doubt correct) of being produced with a minimum of effort to use a little more of the printing capacity available on material not good enough for the well established F&SF. The lead short novels were usually not bad, but they were about all. Goulart's reviews deserved more

R E V I E W S

BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES
by Michael Avallone

Bantam PB, 1970
134 p. 75c

This is a somewhat trite narrative which purports to be a continuation of the book *Monkey Planet* (or *Planet of the Apes*) by Pierre Boulle. There is little to distinguish it from its predecessor as far as style goes. If anything this is even more juvenile. The last chapter of Boulle's book is fairly heavily invalidated by discrepancies in the first chapter of this one, as anyone who enjoyed *Monkey Planet* will see -- and I can't imagine anyone else reading it.

We could well be in for a spate of *Monkey* books. Take note, a new film, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, is being planned in Hollywood.

It may well have been, in the beginning, a novel idea to present a civilisation run by beings equipped with the somewhat clumsy bodies of apes, yet otherwise behaving very much as men do, while the human beings have degenerated to a point where speech has become a lost art, intelligence has dwindled to an alltime low and animal instinct is the *modus operandi* of survival. But beyond this one moral, imagination stretches but little. Shades of Batman and Robin creep in: "You!" he gasped. "It's Doomsday..." Taylor spoke bitterly... "For God's sake, help me..." "Stay away from me!" "You damned animal!" and so on ad infinitum. I expected "Zap! Pow!" at any moment.

There is obviously some sort of market for this

kind of twaddle, although it is hard to see how a new story can emerge without its first chapter heavily invalidating the last chapter of this book -- as before.

I should add that my fourteen-year-old daughter disagrees with the above criticism, and insists she enjoyed it immensely.

-- Audrey Tarver

STELLA NOVA: the Contemporary Science Fiction

Authors

ed. anon.

Unicorn & Son, Los Angeles,
1970

An odd publication. From the prospectus we received in 1968 and other evidence it seems to have been initiated and compiled by Robert Reginald, but his name does not appear: instead we have two references to "the editors". It appears in a most exasperating format, excellently reproduced by offset in a large quarto size, in a wretched plastic comb binding which makes it awkward to use; and something peculiar happened to the main introductory pages, which are typed for a larger page and used anyway, with type disappearing into the binding. The foolishness embodied in the title and the name of the publisher has a few other echoes as well. Nevertheless --

Nevertheless, this is a book of incalculable value, one of the most important reference works yet produced in the field. It is what has so often been proposed and never gone on with, a Who's Who of science fiction writers. Indeed, it is

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more than that. It goes beyond the information we look for in such a source (the author's identity, main biographical data, pseudonyms, other important facts) to give where possible a full bibliography of published volumes; and many authors contributed remarks on their own work, approach and intentions, and often on the field generally. Some of these are most illuminating. There are dozens of rare insights of the value of science fiction there, many revealing comments on the writers' purposes, observations of the history and potentialities of the field.

There is Poul Anderson: "What I've tried to do is keep introducing fresh ideas, especially about the potentialities of science, technology and the universe; to put forward a realistic rather than romantic view of life; and to maintain a literary standard."

J. G. Ballard: "Most sf anyway is being produced by other means -- science itself, the visual arts, and so on -- the sort of imaginative sf that is required now is beyond the range or abilities of most of the present writers, if not all." And he doubtless thought it meant something.

Robert Bloch: "The monsters and marvels moving unnoticed in our midst deserve, I believe, the fuller consideration of writers and readers alike."

Ben Bova: "I do get bothered by stories that are scientifically wrong -- after all, the name of the game is science fiction."

D. G. Compton: "I write about the future because this enables me to write about the present once removed, and therefore more easily."

Robert Moore Williams gives us a brilliant psychoanalytically based essay on creative writing, one of many quotable bits being: "You don't discip-

line writing, it disciplines you. You don't write, you are written. You don't go to school to learn to write, you bring it with you. Probably both the psychologists and the professors of literature will disagree with me. I couldn't care less if they do. You don't learn to write by listening to psychologists or to professors of literature. You learn to write by writing."

These few samples are only from the incidental comments. There is a wealth of information in the book, much of it never made public before. As for its accuracy, as far as one can judge it is very high. There are very few apparent errors anywhere. But the facts supplied by the writers are their own responsibility and may always have been embellished or euphemised; often full details are not given, and of course many writers could not be traced or declined to help. Certainly there is more here than has been accessible anywhere before.

Inclusion is limited to writers in English who were alive in 1968 and had had a book published since 1960. While there is nothing wrong with setting firm limits like these, keeping firmly to them has resulted in some rather strange features. This reviewer is included, while Donald H. Tuck, F. G. L. Cockcroft and Everett F. Fleiler, to name three important bibliographers, are not. Bradford M. Day and Norm Metcalf are there but Donald B. Day is not. We have George H. Smith but not George O. Smith or E. E. Smith, or Cordwainer Smith. Joseph Ross is here, but more memorable staffers of *Amazing Stories* who are not include Raymond A. Palmer, Norman M. Lobsenz and Howard S. Browne. Authors

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who have broken into print by digging into their pockets to have a vanity press give their worthless manuscripts the dignity of hard covers are included, but authors who have only appeared in magazines and anthologies are not: a few names that come to mind are Frank Bryning, Joseph Slotkin, Ross Rocklynne, Sam Merwin and Joe Hensley.

The main text pages are not numbered, but by my count run to 307 plus preliminaries and a 36-p index; there are entries for 483 authors.

Rather stiffly priced at US\$ 15.00, the book is for sale only from A. Stephens, 409 Barnett Rd., Medford, Oregon 97501. It's a very good buy.

-- G.S.

MAGELLAN
by Colin Anderson

Gollancz, 1970
189 p. A\$3.65

A shortish, well written novel with something to say. A pity the symbolic, allusive style obscures most of it. I would have Preferred a longer, more overt text.

Magellan (meaning Magic Land?), built by surviving Earthlings after the Holocaust, is the Utopia of our dreams. Seven-year-olds philosophise madly; few leave school till they are thirty; death is virtually unknown; there are over thirty-five television channels from which to choose; and psychotherapy is administered immediately to anyone showing the least sign of malcontent. There

are pills for combatting any and every misemotion.

Natural happiness does not exist in this computerised Utopia. Everyone is expected to be happy. But problems solved bring new problems in their wake. Magellan is highly overpopulated and pregnancies are available only on licence.

The ruins of the Old City outside the walls of Magellan become the refuge of thrill-seekers: here they can indulge such primitive desires as bloodshed and murder. As the novel opens, such a murder has been committed and we see the hero, Euri (why not Orpheus?) being pursued by the ghost of his victim back to the safety of Magellan.

Unfortunately the reader does not get an actual account of the murder, and an explanation for it is not forthcoming until halfway through the book. Thus one starts on a note of mystery and only the dogged reader will bother to read on to discover the whys and wherefores.

The first half of the book is exceedingly scrappy. We are taken on a guided tour of the city, the history of which is divulged in a series of clues rather than a continuous narrative. The determined reader is rewarded around page 52 when there are some chickens. This episode is superb narrative and demonstrates the writer's ability to paint word pictures. One can even forgive his ignorance of the culinary arts, although he should know that chickens are not cooked newly dead but hung for a while. And although the concept of computerised cooking is not new, it is appalling to the gourmet who knows that loving care is essential.

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ial to the succulence of food. Here we have chickens killed and cooked in two seconds flat: there is no mention of plucking or drawing the birds.

The second half of the book flows a good deal more freely than the first and is meatier. Magellan destroys itself because it is incapable of solution. The end is heralded by crumbling walls and apparent destruction of the physical universe. We accompany the hero into the promised Eternity, which turns out to be nothing more than his own private Hell, as he seeks his wife Chrys amid the stuff of dreams -- often materialising in the nightmares of others too. This, to some readers, could be upsetting or even terrifying. The account is in no way relieved by an atom of humor, but one may recognise maniacs one has known, and identify with the hero who is comparatively sane.

But the computer at the center of the Earth, programmed to fulfil each one's desire in Eternity, grows weary of the task and abdicates. The hero is reunited with his wife and together they discover and face reality.

The trip is well worth \$3.65 as it will be found necessary to read it twice to get out of it all that the author intended.

-- Audrey Tarver

DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS
by Greg Benford

Ace PB, 1970
191 p. 60c

"This is science fiction that combines all the scientifically accurate background

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of Heinlein with the narrative drive of Zelazny." Thus the back cover blurb. Nothing could be further from the truth. Benford is a writer who cannot handle the novel, if this is any evidence of his skill at the craft. The book is based on a short story of the same name, which I have been unable to find [Magazine of F&SF Apr 1969 -- ed.] but I suspect it would have been much more successful as such. I am wary of novels based on shorter versions, having found only two such novels worth while: Philip Jose Farmer's *The Lovers* and Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* are the only two I have read that are worth the time it takes to read them. They are beautifully constructed, professionally written, and above all they don't go on for pages with unimportant events. Benford has none of these traits. There is however one interesting concept. Man has grown into a group organism. One man relying on the other, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, etcetera. The aliens conquer man by isolating him, by making him afraid of spaces larger than a foxhole. As I said, an interesting concept, but it does not save the book, merely makes it more bearable, which I cannot see as justification for its existence. If you get a chance to read the short do so, but don't waste your money on the novel, unless you're a masochist.

-- Michael Cameron

NEW WORLD OR NO WORLD
ed. Frank Herbert

Ace PB, 1970
254 p. 95c

Anyone who has been a follower of science fiction for a few years knows the negative side of being aware of some of the things

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that are reasonably sure to happen sooner or later. Sooner or later they go right ahead and happen, and lo! and also behold! Every slob now knew it all along and will be telling you he told you so if you give him a chance. You can't say you told him so, because as a matter of fact you gave up trying with him long ago and didn't bother. Now it's happening with pollution. Same old story: the facts have been obvious for years, indeed generations, for all to see, but very few did see; the obvious dangers were standard ideas in science fiction, though not used much since they lack good story possibilities. And now that it's really getting serious and starting to hurt people the moulders of mass awareness have caught on to it.

Very well. Our environment is getting poisoned. And we're all going to hear a lot more about it before anything effective is done about it.

This book has been put together by Herbert out of recorded discussions in five daily Today TV programs on environmental problems broadcast last April, given coherent form and with his own brief remarks interpolated here and there. I am sorry to say it has not been indexed; let us hope it is done for the next edition. The book is worth having as it stands, however, for its lively, concise reportage of the situation in the USA, a pretty fair projection of where Australia is heading. People involved with pollution in all kinds of fields talk about what is going on and how to fight it, and even if we've heard it all by now it is instructive to have it brought together.

-- G.S.

THIRD FROM THE SUN
by Richard Matheson

Bantam PB, 1970
180 p.

The stories in this collection are predominantly fantasy rather than science fiction: the exceptions are exceptionally mediocre. In the title story a rocket pilot realises his world is heading towards destruction and thus hijacks a spaceship to take his friends and family to safety...on the third planet from the Sun. Bradbury handled the same theme in reverse in his *The Million Year Picnic* and enhanced a simple idea with his poetic style: Matheson's attempt has little to commend it.

Lover When You're Near Me is an overlong horror-fantasy about an alien female telepath who seduces reluctant Earthmen stationed on her planet. The cloying atmosphere becomes tedious after about the first ten pages. A similar story is *Mad House*. A man imprints telepathically his frustrations and hatreds as an unsuccessful writer into the fabric of his house, with disastrous results. These stories are not science fiction, and are the longest in the book.

Similarly *SRL Ad* is the story of a college student who answers an ad placed by a Venerian girl. This is hardly likely but short and with some measure of entertainment. *F--* is a satire portraying a future world in which food has replaced sex as the subject of social taboo. This sort of thing has been done before. *Dear Diary* is a very short SF story that is in no way memorable. All the remaining stories except *Shipshape Home*

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are exclusively horror or fantasy. Shipshape Home concerns a couple living in apartment building that is actually an alien spaceship designed to trap specimens of Earth people. The wife starts to suspect something when she notices that the janitor has an eye in the back of his head. An interesting idea competently handled, but no award winner. This is a book that the science fiction reader can pass up.

-- Robert Bowden

The DISAPPEARING FUTURE
ed. George Hay

Panther PB, 1970
158 p. A 80c

Well, this is a real curate's egg. Thirteen items, six fictional, seven factual, and representing a wide range of content, style and value. None of the six fictional bits interest me particularly: I don't say six short stories because one, The Thorns of Berevi, by Anne McCaffrey, is a slight fragment, hardly even an anecdote, but if it is extracted from a longer story that might be good; two others are Goonish rambles by Michael Moorcock and Anthony Haden-Guest which don't have apparent coherent narrative, for a start, so whatever literary form they are it's not fiction. The other three are not very original, which is not to say they have no merit. Hay rather rashly asks in his Foreword, decrying certain other anthologists, "Is this the time to fall back upon souped-up Orwell and re-warmed Dada?", because he then offers us both.

But there is more in the book, otherwise it wouldn't deserve a plug, and this review is about

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to develop into a plug. On the factual side, we have *Deus ex Machina?* by Kit Pedler, with some points to make about robots as modern concepts suggest they may develop; *The Temple Scientists*, by Edward J. Mishan, a look at technocracy and related SF ideas; *The First Forecast of the Future*, by Professor I. F. Clarke, discussing the anonymous *The Reign of George VI, 1900-1925*, published in 1763. These three items are well worth having.

More important are the pieces offered by James Blish and Samuel R. Delany. Delany's article, *About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy-five Words*, as a rarity, an essay on the writer's craft which really makes a contribution to that much abused subject; and its specific applications in SF are rarely significant. Blish takes a fresh look at the question of the value and importance of SF in *Future Recall*.

The book is strongly recommended for the last two alone; anything else is a bonus.

-- G.S.

TUNNEL IN THE SKY
by Robert A. Heinlein

Ace PB, 1970
252 p.

A new edition for adult readers of Heinlein's 1955 juvenile. In typical Heinleinian style it tells of a graduating class of survivalists in a future time when, through hyperspatial tunnels, men can be dumped on countless alien planets. Rod Walker is dumped for a survival test on an uninhabited planet for a period of up to

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ten days; however, due to the cosmic interference of a nearby nova the test lasts a good deal longer.

Anyone who enjoys Heinlein or survival stories will like this.

-- Robert Bowden

THAT WAS THE YEAR...

space, we badly need more intelligent coverage of books. The magazine had one notable virtue: it did nothing to encourage the lunatic fringe.

In books...try to name, say, the ten best of the year and immediately you find one difficulty: there were not that many worth naming, not if you mean genuinely outstanding, original books appearing for the first time. Many good books were available in new editions and there was no shortage of good reading: but new books? In 1960 science fiction seemed to be living on capital.

In films there were few surprises: the endless monsters shambled on unchecked, and the other offerings did not make much impression. Yet there were good ideas and good intentions there, notably in *The Mind of Mr. Soames* and *Skullduggery*. *The Forbin Project* is a sober and sobering treatment of the old cliché of the rebellious thinking machine.

CURRENT BOOKS

HARRISON, Harry [Maxwell] 1925-

The STAINLESS STEEL RAT. Walker. 158 p. \$4.95.
(in Astounding US Aug 1957, Br. Dec 1957, The
Stainless Steel Rat; Analog Apr 1960, The Mis-
placed Battleship. Pyramid PB 1961)

Reviews: Amazing May 1962 p. 138; Analog
May 1962 p. 171; F&SF June 1962 p. 88;
Galaxy Aug 1962 p. 194

--- ed.

The YEAR 2000. Doubleday. 288 p. \$4.95.

Review: Venture Aug 1970 p. 107

HEINLEIN, Robert A[nson] 1907-

The DOOR INTO SUMMER. Pan. 190 p. PB 5/- (in
F&SF Oct-Dec 1956. Doubleday 1957; Signet PB
1959; Panther PB 1960) Reviews: Astounding US
Aug 1957 p. 143, Br. Dec 1957 p. 117; N.Y.
Times 3.3.57 p. 37; Australian 23.3.68

-- 6 x H. Pyramid (X2023). 191 p. PB 60c. (Reis-
sue of 1961 ed. 1st as The Unpleasant Profession
of Jonathan Hoag, Gnome 1959) One short novel,
five shorts: The Unpleasant Profession of Jon-
athan Hoag; "All you Zombies"; They; The Man who
traveled in Elephants; Our Fair City; And he
Built a Crooked House. Some marginally SF.

MOORCOCK, Michael [John] 1939-

The BLACK CORRIDOR. Mayflower. 126 p. PB 5/-
(1st Ace PB 1969) Review: Vision of Tomorrow
Jly 1970 p. 54; Amazing Mch 1970 p. 132

NOLAN, William F[reancis] 1928- ed.

A WILDERNESS OF STARS; stories of Man in Con-
flict with Space. Gollancz. xi, 276 p. 32/-

Current Books

A Wilderness of Stars...contd.
(1st Sherbourne, Los Angeles, 1969) Ten stories
by Issa Mary, Clarke, Anderson etc.

SIMAK, Clifford Donald] 1904-
STRANGERS IN THE UNIVERSE. Berkley (11589).
191 p. PB 60c. (1st Faber 1958; Panther 1962.
7 stories from original ed. Simon & Schuster
1957)

VANCE, Jack
TO LIVE FOREVER. Ballantine, 185 p. PB (Re-
issue of 1956 ed.) Rev. Astounding US Mch
1957, Br. July 1957; F&SF Feb 1957; Fantastic
Feb 1957

WALLACE, Ian
DR. ORPHEUS. Berkley (S1767). 223 p. PB 70c.
1st Putnam 1969) Review: Analog July 1970
p. 166

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SCIENCE FICTION NEWS

(new series) No. 24

December 1970

issued monthly by

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

The Australian Science Fiction Association aims to bring together people interested in science fiction, to promote the study and appreciation of the field. All serious readers are invited to join. The annual subscription is three dollars. Write to the Secretary for further information.