SCIENCE FICTION *News*

No. 43 July 1972

REVIEWS

The TALE OF THE FUTURE, FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE PRESENT DAY; an annotated bibliography...comp. I. F. Clarke. Library Association, London, 1972. 196 p. £3.75

This new edition of the 1961 work preserves the defects of the original, but adds ten years and about 1100 listed books, making about 2350.

A certain lack of precision is apparent in the long subtitle that tries to define its field by enumeration: "satires, ideal states, imaginary wars and invasions, political warnings and forecasts, interplanetary voyages and scientific romances -- all located in an imaginary future period..." Strange bedfellows there, aside from the dated expressions; and satires and "ideal states" in particular would not be adequately covered if only those set in the future were listed.

In fact, many books seem to have been interpreted as set in the future arbitrarily, perhaps on the argument that "it hasn't happened before." None of the Venus and Earth's Core books of Edgar Rice Burroughs included, for instance, have a whisper of futurity about them.

The chronological grouping of main entries is useful, and so are the brief annotations that give some indication of the theme: it would be easy to quote a lot of inadequate ones, but few are actually

misleading. However, there are some highly unsatisfactory features. For one, the authors are not identified properly. Forenames are uniformly reduced to initials, which is withholding information. Three books are listed by an "E. Wallace" for example. Is that Edgar Wallace the detective story writer? I don't know, and it wouldn't have hurt Clarke to tell me. At the very least, the name as it appeared on the book should have been given. It would have taken little effort to establish many full names, identify pseudonyms (this has been tried, but badly), add many dates and possibly a little background for authors in a field where it is likely to be significant. For another irritating defect, the title index refers only to the year of listing, not even giving the author, which may leave one to search up to eight pages. Omitting the author is hiding information.

As for accuracy, it could be better. Simple typographical errors are few, but there are enough obvious discrepencies in titles -- inconsistency with definite articles, misspelling of unusual words -- to cast doubt on the more obscure entries. Only a few, but too many.

Failure to distinguish between author and editor is another fault that occurs a few times.

The scope of the list is restricted to British imprints, and books of American origin are noted as such -- but not reliably: I actually counted 31 errors which I thought enough to stop counting. Arthur C. Clarke, J. T. McIntosh and Eric Frank Russell were listed as Americans for from one to three of their books only, while such familiar American writers as Asimov, Bester, Blish, Clement, Heinlein and Hamilton were implied to be British.

For more specific boners, John W. Campbell is listed as a pseudonym of Don. A. Stuart -- and he is also confused with Hubert J. Campbell. This is inexcusable, for both men were important figures and John is by any reckoning one of the most important in the history of the field. And the facts are readily available. Theodore Sturgeon is listed as a pseudonym of E. H. Waldo, though we learn from Moskowitz that the name was legally changed when he was twelve. Stanton A. Coblentz is listed as a pseudonym of A. C. Stanley, which is not supported by any other authority.

All of these were in the first edition, and along with lessor errors are repeated here. But this time we also have Jack Vance listed as a pseudonym of Henry Kuttner. Now, for a beginner there would be some excuse for this, if the book was put together without doing any real research. Both Library of Congress and the British National Bibliography have entries accepting as correct this ridiculous hoax started by someone while Kuttner was still alive. However, he died in 1958 and Vance, who has done most of his writing since than, continues to flourish -- as anyone who took the trouble to find out a little about modern science fiction would find out.

Another, and more serious, failing is the citing of later editions as the first. In some cases they were in fact first British editions of American books which may have been first published long before. But, as Clarke points out in his preface, an author's vision of the future is a reflection of his view of his own time and popular concepts of the future are valuable information on the popular world view at the time. So the date of first publication is all-important, because it

is the time when the book normally had its principle or only impact. Even first book publication is sometimes quite misleading when a work was first serialised some time earlier.

Thus we have The Skylark of Space by E. E. Smith listed here for 1959, when it had no more than a nostalgic and curiosity interest as a once influential story. Unless we understand that it was written in 1920, too far ahead of its time for publication until 1928, it can mean nothing to us. Even more strikingly, Ralph 124C41 Plus by Hugo Gernsback is listed, not for 1911 when Gernsback wrote it against deadlines to astonish Electrical Experimenter readers with all the things he wanted to see invented, but for 1952. And there are other cases of ten to twenty years.

And yet, there is so little accessible information on the literature of the future that, for want of better, this book is worth having.

-- G.S.

The OMEGA POINT — Ace(62380)
by George Zebrowski — 8-169 p. PB 75c

A first novel. Author Zebrowski (Austrian born of Polish parents) grew up in "England, Manhattan, Miami and the Bronx". Ace lists a number of well-known magazines in which his short stories have appeared, adds that "in 1969 he became editor of the Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America" and tops off with the information that he has been a teacher of SF "on the college level at SUNY-Binghampton, Harpur College, where he studied philosophy."

Given these impressive credentials, it would be pleasant to report his maiden book a resounding success. That I didn't find it so may be due to personal bias. I've done time myself in the salt mines of philosophy. Nowhere have I sweated harder than over Pierre Teilhard du Chardin from whose The Phenomenon of Man Zebrowski's title and theme derive.

For years, TPOM produced in me the most humiliating sense of bafflement. Then one ego-restoring day I bought a paperback (The Art of the Soluble: Pelican) and found an ally: no less than Sir Peter Medawar, distinguished among other scientific achievements for being joint winner with Sir Macfarlane Burnet of the 1960 Nobel Prize in Medicine.

In a devastating essay Medawar dismisses Teilhard's much vaunted profundity as "nonsense, tricked out with a veriety of metaphysical conceits" thus enabling a slob of my calibre to lift his head again. Such talk will undoubtedly seem heresy to many, Zebrowski for one. He goes right along with Teilhard's "Omega" thesis of a Supreme Consciousness, or "Centre of Centres" which (simplified by Medawar from Teilhard's excruciatingly opaque prose) is an ultimate point that "assimilates to itself all our personal consciousnesses."

Zebrowski's plot -- what there is of it -- is designed to illustrate this concept. He presents us with the State of the Universe in the 61st Century. Earth has colonised innumerable planets. In the process it has all but annihilated the humanoid inhabitants of Hercules, whose more ancient civilisation proved rival and challenge to Earth's.

The few Herculeans left, scattered among the galaxies, are of two kinds: "multiple-fused personalities", Omega-points in microcosm, who carry in their living bodies the collective consciousnesses of many dead; or outright individuals, who know no consciousness except their own. Of these last, Gorgias (a mere three centuries old and in his prime) is practically the sole survivor. His life is dedicated to avenging the destruction of his father and his race. In his unique Whisper Ship he is hunted as an outlaw, but still manages to harry Earth Federation bases among the stars, and even make raids on Earth itself.

One such foray, designed to assassinate Earth's greatest musician in mid-concert, opens the action. It is brilliantly successful. Gorgias gets clean away with two of Earth's top Intelligence officers in hot pursuit.

For the rest of the book he broods among the planets. He searches for an ancestral cylinder that will enable him to conjure up an army of Herculeans and confound his enemies. He dreams in italics. He makes visits to Myraa's World, where the female multiple-fused personality who is to be his personal Omega-point in microcosm resides. Under Myraa's gaze Gorgias meets his destiny, and as a somewhat reluctant resident of her very body, his final moment of truth.

It would be unfair not to stress Zebrowski's merits as a writer. He takes pains: he has genuine pictorial flair and command of style way above average. But alas for the cold hard facts of fiction! Winged words and golden quotes from the philosophers are not enough. There must be characters and dialogue that fulfil their proper function before a book can blow our minds.

Zebrowski's characters are archetypes (last man, atavistic mother/mistress figure). The subjective type of experience they are trying to communicate is unconvincing because it's rooted in abstraction -- a vague confusing hypothesis that I personally believe is not communicable.

Teilhard couldn't do it. Neither can Zebrowski, though he does manage to avoid the "obscure pious rant" that distresses Medawar. Nevertheless, the metaphysical conceits remain. And so, in my opinion, does the tediousness.

OK! I said I was biased. Philosophy buffs are welcome to read it, and shoot me down in flames.

-- Angus Gordon

WHAT'S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE?
by Ron Goulart
Sidgwick & Jackson
184 p. HC £1.75

What's Become of Screwloose? is an anthology of Goulart. Unfortunately the copyright date does not give any indication as to the time of the actual writing of the pieces. A pity, since I derive enjoyment from trying to trace the writers' development.

The title story is a mishmash of animated electronic appliances, androids (in this instance it is quite possible that they could be included in the first category), psychiatry, and not much plot. His humor doesn't appeal to me, but I try to be impartial.

Junior Partner I thoroughly enjoyed. It is a wish fulfilment dream for employers!

Hardcastle is set in the wonderful imaginary future when labor saving devices really do! The

story of an animated house trying to do the best for its humans. A bit after the style of Williamson's With Folded Hands, but I trust Goulart had no intention of attaining the same standard.

Into the Shop, which has been much anthologised, is set on one of Goulart's favorite worlds, Barnum. Once again Goulart's preoccupation with animated gadgets can be seen hare, this time a police vehicle which combines the roles of simple vehicular transport, policeman, judge, jury and executioner. Rather good, if one's palate has not been jaded by overexposure to Goulart's gadgets.

Prez. This time the protagonist is a cyborg dog. Quite a good plot, but predictable.

Confessions is a pseudo-crime story, displaying Goulart's sometime favorite non-sequitur technique and peculiar humor. Enjoyable if you like both of these aspects of Goulart: I don't, so shall refrain from commenting further.

Monte Christo Complex, again, is a pseudo-crime story. The same remarks apply to it as to Confessions.

The Yes Men of Venus. I shall make the tautological remark that it is a parody. As parodies go, it is enjoyable, unless you get that shrinking feeling, almost a feeling of shame for the parodist on reading something a bit too obvious.

Keeping an Eye on Janey is a sendup of modern publishing houses, especially those that feature the sloppy, sobby romantic novel. (Still, what romantic novel does not at some stage or other not deserve that criticism?)

Chameleon Corps man Ben Jolson makes his miraculous way through Hobo Jungle, as usual employing

his incredible talents to defeat the baddies.

To sum up -- a collection of Goulart is a lot easire to take than a novel. I wonder whether he really does have an inferiority complex about the human race, and really is frightened of the day when the machines take over! He certainly seems obsesses with both themes. The book, anyway, is worth reading, whether the prospective reader is a confirmed Goulart fan or not.

-- Denise Palmer

MEDICAL MYSTERY TOURS

The METHUSELAH ENZYME, by Fred Mustard Stewart. Bantam (06532) 274 p. PB $1.50
The ORGAN BANK FARM, by John Boyd. Bantam (07049) 182 p. PB 75c

To cash in on the popularity of The Andromeda Strain Bantam have reprinted two medical fiction books of 1970 vintage. The ready acceptance of such efforts is attested to by the seven previous printings of the first mentioned book. The preoccupation of people with their own bodies appears to be unlimited, as evidenced by the abundance of pseudo-medical quacks and their seemingly endless gadgets and miracle cures. It is helpful if writers catering to such markets have a strong streak of cynicism.

There is an inhuman ugliness just under the veneer of materialistic progress which is apparent often in the USA where tradition is a spur rather than a restraint. Many SF authors, particularly American, seem attracted to developing the money/power/greed syndrome which is passed off as the heritage of free-enterprise democracy. The result of such projections is a sterile, soulless ugliness

far more frightening than anything in Orwell's 1984, because, unlike Orwell who realised the evils, these authors appear sublimely unaware of any alternatives to the bleak horror in which they maroon characters who are travesties of human beings and are guided by the most primitive of motives, and who like their creators seem to lack awareness of alternatives.

It must be considered a possibility that if a person is motivated to write by a desire for money and power, then this message comes through in the book. And I thought I was safe from Harold Robbins in SF!

The Methuselah Enzyme is a suspense story told around the discovery of a youth elixir. Although the setting is artificial and the plot contrived, the book manages to hold the interest of the reader through all the well known suspense gimmicks from Agatha Christie to Alfred Hitchcock, right up to the surprise ending which contrary to the instructions on the jacket I am going to reveal -- everybody grows old and goes out hunting for young people from whom to extract more Methuselah enzyme -- the unintentional parody here is not without humor. Thus all of the characters come to a bad end, but since none of them were too attractive to begin with it is difficult to feel sorry for them.

The Organ Bank Farm is rather a painful experience. The author specialises in little snippets of knowledge which to the specialist are gross simplifications and to the average reader are unnecessarily erudite. The text is cluttered up with ambarressingly grotesque sexual imagery and quotations used (more erudition) are butchered by the context. The phraseology at times is almore unbearable, for example "in a love beyond lust". The

complex story line concerns eternal life, but many facets are left undeveloped with the result that the whole thing is inconsistent rather than unpredictable as intended.

It would seem that 1970 will not turn out to be a vintage year.

-- Mouser

EARTHSTRINGS, by John Rackham b/w
The CHARIOTS OF RA, by Kenneth Bulmer
Ace Double (10293) 5-141, 5-130 p. PB 95c

Rackham improves. This book I could finish, with no sweat at all. He's given away the mystic meanderings of Dark Planet that lost me before the end. Instead he's come up with a suspense story garnished with futuristic touches, which apparently qualifies these days for a certain category of SF. Sure, it's formula-type: newspaper reporter Jeremy White gets crash-hot assignment -- establish whereabouts of daredevil best-selling author Ket Carew. Did he perish in catastrophe that overtook star colony Beta Hydri? Was he involved in shady dealings designed to deprive colonies of autonomy and keep them tied to Earth?

In the process of eliminating these question marks, White tangles with the big money. Carew's sister Abigail (heir to Triple-C Chemicals), his millionaire mistress Fanny and her equally rich, enigmatic playboy companion Miguel Santana.

Rackham serves us this standard fare with considerableaplomb. He's generous with dialogue: not even his worst enemy could accuse him of having a tin ear. In addition his reporter is engaging. Though he gets more lucky breaks and gorgeous chicks than seem quite feasible, he still manages to appear

both modest and surprised.

Rackham strikes me as a writer who is always on the verge of producing something good. In the interim this present offering is amiable and unpretentious. I commend it to you for that.

The Chariots of Ra

My first encounter with Bulmer and it's left me feeling dazed. At first I thought he was crazy. Then I realised it was the inspired craziness that springs from a mind where ideas proliferate so rapidly there simply isn't time to let them mature. So Bulmer shoots them out to make room for others. There are enough embryonic themes in this one novel to spark off a dozen more.

Such largesse is a bit bewildering. Especially to those who suffer from idea-starvation and tend to coddle the few sparse specimens they produce like sensitive plants. There's no tip-toe approach with Bulmer. Action is immediate and relentless. Characters spring up like weeds and are discarded. Monsters (he's wonderful with monsters) rage into being and are as dramatically whisked off-scene. There's never a dull moment. But one wishes desperately sometimes that some of the moments could be prolonged.

What's the story about? Pike and Tully, two ordinary American boys bent on delivering a Cadillac to the West Coast, are kidnapped by a bunch of octopus-like creatures the size of bullocks, wielding clubs in their multi-tentacles. With brutal haste they are whipped through an electronic time-portal into another "dimension". Thereafter they are hounded through a whole series of dimensions acquiring some truly astonishing companions as they go.

Tully is separated from Pike and dumped into the dimension of Amoun Ra. This ancient culture, with its charioteers and twin cities ruled by twin princesses, revived frissons from Rider Haggard. Indeed, I suspect that vibes from a great many successful writers of the past must be somehow beamed (through a private time-portal perhaps?) into Bulmer's teeming imagination to keep it charged.

There's no point saying more. I know it all sounds absurd. But oddly it isn't. Have a go, and see for yourself.

Overall verdict: if it's escapism you're after, this double is surely where it's at.

-- Angus Gordon

The BARONS OF BEHAVIOR — Ace (04760)
by Tom Purdom — 5-189 p. PB 75c

The basic premise of this book is acceptance of Freud's division of humanity into distinct psychological groups. The setting is the not very distant future, and the theme politics and the manipulation of the voters by the politicians' knowledge of their types.

Ralph Nicholson, psychotherapist, enters the congressional district of his political opponent in order to study its inhabitants. He does this under the influence of a drug which, while making him mentally more alert, renders him physically helpless. In this condition he realises that the district contains primarily one type, oral-oriented. Boyd, the congressman who "owns" the district, is thus very easily able to manipulate the populace. Nicholson's problem becomes a need to turn his dis-

covery to his advantage, using his knowledge of the type to defeat Boyd and have his political dummy, Mead, become the successful candidate.

In extrapolating the future, Purdom introduces the reasonable assumption that the social use of drugs will become widespread; also that corruption and graft will not disappear from politics, or from law inforcing bodies. That men may be manipulated successfully once their type is completely known, and a model constructed which will predict their probable behavior, smacks somewhat of determinism, but is fairly convincing.

The writing is quite good, and the action continues well, without dragging. I do have a complaint, however. Why is it that authors will try to predict the evolution of language and idiom? It can be done convincingly at times, but why should "cancer" be introduced as a term of opprobrium at that late stage when it is not in use now, although the disease has been with us for so long? Some words have come into the language as terms of denigration from the jargon of medicine (e.g. pest), but these are very few and far between. Cancer just doesn't seem to be a convincing addition.

The book maintains interest throughout, but is certainly not likely to become a classic. Readable.

-- Denise Palmer

The MAD KING — Ace (51402)
by Edgar Rice Burroughs — 5-252 p. PB 75c

Burroughs has a real if curious place in the early history of science fiction. But this does not mean that all his work

has that dubious honor. Now that Burroughs is enjoying a considerable revival, all his long forgotten minor works are being exhumed and reprinted -- in fact, this is the second new edition in a few years. Unfortunately, it does him little credit. It doesn't have whatever it is that Burroughs very often has. In fact, it is obvious why it wasn't a popular book in the first place.

It's Ruritania all over again -- even the American tourist who just happens to be a double to the king. Ho hum.

-- G.S.

SLIM PICKIN'S

The COMPLEAT WEREWOLF and other stories of fantasy and science fiction, by Anthony Boucher. Ace (11622) 7-252 p. PB 75c

The GENERAL ZAPPED AN ANGEL; new stories of fantasy and science fiction, by Howard Fast. Ace (27910) 9-175 p. PB 75c

The WORLDS OF THEODORE STURGEON. Ace (91060) 11-286 p. PB 95c

Remember when there was only a small amount of science fiction published...just the few magazines, and an occasional book that more or less by accident belonged in the field, and some isolated stories in general magazines? No, you probably don't. If you can you probably don't want to. But there was such a time, and it wasn't any golden age either even though its best products were a lot better than you had a right to expect. Well, in those days we used to willingly grub around the magazine racks after those stray stories in Argosy, Thrilling Adventures, Blue Book or the Saturday Evening Post, and when we found

one it was with a sense of discovery, not the mild pleasure of reading a Clarke story in Playboy. And we also used to browse through short story collections the same way. If we found a book with two or three stories you could by any stretch of exaggeration call science fiction we were overjoyed at the way SF was flourishing.

All right. That was thirty or forty years ago. This is 1973, and it's not good enough to serve up all this garbage in the name of "fantasy" and include a couple of SF stories to make it a bit more respectable. We're past the stage where eager beaver scientifictionists rush anything of possible interest.

In the Boucher book we get Expedition, a classic sendup of the invading Martians theme that is also a serious attempt to rationalise them, and the two connected stories QUR and Robinc, which were original in their day but not particularly striking now. Packaged with the title story, one of the excruciatingly cute pieces Boucher wrote for Campbell's Unknown, and six of even less interest, no thanks.

The Fast collection has three that you just might find worth reading. The Mouse is not as good as Fredric Brown's version of the idea of an intelligence-augmented mouse under extraterrestrial patronage in The Star Mouse. The Insects is something vaguely like Bradford's Even a Worm or du Maurier's The Birds. And The Vision of Milty Boil is a pretty silly satire well at home in a book with such a title story. (It's a version of the old one about someone shooting down an angel, like H.G.Wells' 1896 effort The Wonderful Visit.)

The Sturgeon is better. Sturgeon doesn't write

real garbage very often and most of the book can be read without much pain. The six SF stories are not all very good, ranging from There is No Defense and Maturity to the strictly formula The Skills of Xanadu. The non-SF includes the Unknown item Shottle Bop, which is even cuter that Boucher's stories which it no doubt influenced. If you can take funny ghost stories this must be one of the best written, at that.

What we need is some systematic assembling of the best of writers of some importance instead of these haphazard dredgings from their early pot-boilers. They do nobody any good.

-- G.S.

The DRAGON MASTERS b/w The FIVE GOLD BANDS
by Jack Vance Ace Double (16640)
5-108; 5-139 p. PB 95c

The Dragon Masters displays on its cover that enviable bit of blurb: "The book that won the Hugo Award for best science fiction novel." According to the Appendix in Penguin's edition of The Hugo Winners, the prize was awarded in 1963 and was actually for best novelette, the novel prize going to Philip K. Dick for his The Man in the High Castle. No matter! Novel, novelette, it's still, after ten years, a satisfying read.

Vance has a distinctive style that gives uncommon richness and body to his stories. His allegiance is to the medieval. He loves old sonorous words and sensuous detail -- not of things sexual, but of architecture, nature, and the panoply of arms and dress.

In his world of Aerlith there are two rivals:

Joaz Banbeck who rules Banbeck Vale, and Ervis Carcolo who lords it over Happy Valley. Both men breed dragons, fierce lizard-like mutants, that form the backbone of their fighting strength. And there is much fighting to be done. Not only one another, but their common enemy the Basics: creatures believed to be from the red star Coralyne, who periodically descend in their spaceship to carry off humans and dragons for slaves.

Aerlith supports an additional group of inhabitants, with whom Joaz, Ervis and their respective followers live in somewhat uneasy symbiosis. These are the "sacerdotes", an ancient sect of humans, cave-dwellers who trade their metal and glass for food. They are unclad except for their flowing hair, and their creed is such that they must answer every question with perfect truth. No outsider knows their Mysteries, nor how advanced their technology is. But bullying Ervis wants to starve their secrets out of them and seeks Joaz' help.

Joaz also believes the sacerdotes have a hidden weapon that would enable him to defeat the Basics and capture their spaceship for himself, but he prefers persuasion to coercion. He appeals to the Domie Sacerdote and meets with a flat rebuff. While Joaz is brooding over his failure, Ervis launches a surprise attack. Almost on the heels of the rivals' battle, the shattering invasion of the Basics takes place. From this point action boils to a crisis. The sacerdotes are blasted out of their passivity, and in a maelstrom of heroic combat the final drama is played out.

When a book receives an accolade like the Hugo it raises the question why. What qualities make it superior? Or for that matter, superior to other

works by the author himself? Dismiss the element of chance. Presuppose a basic excellence of style, crafstmanship and entertainment -- and then what? What further ingredient is needed to make it a winner? At the risk of sounding priggish, I feel it's essential that the author should touch, however lightly, on some of the fundamental issues that bedevil us all. Inthis case: is it right to use force to protect those for whom one is responsible? To what degree is it morally permissible to remain an observer when one has the means to help others survive?

Vance weaves these issues unobtrusively into the fiber of his story. They give it substance, an added humanity that, to me at least, singles it out for special success.

The Five Gold Bands

A straight adventure story that (according to Ace's copyright information) predates the other by about twelve years. It concerns the secret of the stolen space-drive without which Earth will become extinct. Information on how to construct it is contained in five gold bracelets, worn by the five Sons of Langtry (an extraordinary collection of mutants) who control the universe.

Soldier-of-fortune Paddy Blackthorn -- a stock Irishman -- gets hold of the bracelets, finds each contains a vital clue to the details hidden elsewhere about the blueprint of the space-drive, and, with all hell on his heels, sets out on the treasure-hunt of all time. As well, he acquires a pert Irish colleen, who provides decorous sex-interest, and a running fire of banter I found an irritant.

Vance's inventive powers are well in evidence, and his gift for creating exotic names. This book

doesn't equal the other. But the double is first-class value, and not to be missed.

-- Angus Gordon

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

SCIENCE FICTION NEWS No. 43, July 1972

issued monthly by

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