

PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

No. 2

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Past, Present and Future is a quarterly for inquiry and reflection on science fiction, produced by Graham Stone, Box 4440, GPO, Sydney 2001, Australia; for FAPA and limited free distribution otherwise.

= 9 = STELLAR'S SCIENCE FICTION SERIES

Hindsight paints a gloomy picture of the year 1929, but at the time witless optimism came easily enough, and Hugo Gernsback was an adept. Among the many projects he launched in that frenzied year, and less well known than the four new science fiction magazines, his Science Fiction Series has points of interest.

The Series scored several firsts. First appearance of the term Science Fiction in print outside the magazines; first book, first paperback and first series of books to be identified as science fiction; first publications in the field sold only by mail. They were in a uniform 8", 24-page format, and were issued in three batches of six: the first six were offered in September 1929, the second Jan 1930, the third Nov 1932. They were reasonably priced at 5 for 50c, 12 for a dollar, later reduced to 5c each. I cannot remember ever seeing any offered for sale by dealers, and prices today would obviously be on the stiff side.

Evidently some sold better than others, for by 1932 nos. 1, 3 and 4 were sold out. By 1933 the first six were no longer offered. It would be interesting to know how many were printed and sold

The first twelve had covers by Frank R. Paul. Were these in color? The point is not clear, though I would expect so.

The stories in the series mostly have not reappeared anywhere -- and neither did some of the authors. Let's run through them.

No. 1. The Girl from Mars, by Jack Williamson and Miles J. Breuer, an ambitious effort and not bad as 1929 SF goes. It can be found in the collection The Early Williamson (Doubleday 1975, etc.)

No. 2. The Thought Projector, by David H. Keller. Like many other Keller stories this has never been reprinted. The good doctor is not one of my own favorite early SF authors, but he has a place and was well thought of in his day. If enough people are left who appreciate his somewhat aberrated vision, someone ought to think about a Complete Collected Works.

No. 3. An Adventure in Venus, by Reg. Michelmore. That's "in" Venus. Michelmore seems to be unknown otherwise.

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No. 4. When the Sun Went Out, by Leslie F. Stone. Another natural at the time. Leslie F. Stone had had juvenile fiction published as early as 1920, and had just entered SF with Out of the Void in Amazing Aug-Sep 1929, which was well received. No doubt Gernsback had been holding this story and kept it when he lost control of the original magazine, as we know was the case with The Girl from Mars.

No. 5. The Brain of the Planet, by Lilith Lorraine. This author's first SF publication and probably first prose. Does anyone know for certain?

No. 6. When the Moon Fell, by Charles H. Colladay. At least, that's the name given in the advertisements in Wonder Stories. Bleiler II (*1) gives it as Morrison Colladay, who figured later in Wonder. The Library of Congress (*2) which catalogued some only of the series, agrees and gives him a middle initial M. Does anyone have any information on this writer? This is his first known appearance, and if Charles is correct it is his only known appearance.

No. 7. Two shorts. The Mechanical Man, by Amelia Reynolds Long, is the cover title — Bleiler II to the contrary. Ms Long was, I believe, an established detective story writer by then, but this was her debut in SF. The second story is The Thought Stealer, by Frank Bourne, who appears otherwise unknown. I wonder if he was related to Miriam Bourne, then Associate Ed. of Amazing.

No. 8. The Torch of Ra, by Jack Bradley. This is the first known appearance of this name, though as with others he could well have had stories in magazines of the 20's unknown to us. He had one story in Weird Tales, The Haunted Hands, June 1930; in SF he was seen again only with The Rhizoid Kill in Planet Stories Nov. 1952 (also in the Australian SF Monthly, no. 15). I find this record suggestive, but if Bradley is a pseudonym I know not whom to accuse.

No. 9. The Valley of the Great Ray, by Pansey or Panzie E. Black as variously given in the advertisements. Bleiler II has the name as Pansy, as does Golden Fleece Historical Adventure Magazine which ran her only other known story, Graah, Foiler of Destiny, in Mch 1939. I confess that the name Pansy (spell it as you will) is to me permanently associated with the classic Only a Mill Girl, A Fruity Melodrama. "Her name is Pansy." "Oh, Fiddlesticks!" "No, Pansy." Can anyone offer anything more useful?

No. 10. The Elixir, by H. W. Higginson, who is otherwise unknown in SF. The LC doesn't list, but does have a detective novel, The Murder of the Archbishop, by Harold Wynyard Higginson, 1887- . (Crowell 1931). Can anyone add anything to this?

No. 11. Two shorts. Title story is The Thought Translator, by Merab Eberle. This writer is otherwise known for The Mordant in Amazing, Mch 1930. Who can tell us anything about him/her? The other is The Creation, by M. Milton Mitchell, not Milton Mitchell as Bleiler II has. This name has not appeared since.

No. 12. Again two shorts. Title story is The Life Vapor, by Clyde Farrar, otherwise unknown to SF. LC does not list this, but does have an engineering writer Clyde Leo Farrar, 1896- . The other is Thirty Miles Down, by D. D. Sharp. He had already had his first story, the gruesome The Eternal Man, in Science Wonder Aug. 1929, and was to write another 17 up to 1943. What hard facts do we have about Drury D. Sharp, anyone?

No. 13. Men from the Meteor, by the variously spelled Ms. P. E. Black.

No. 14. The Flight of the Aerofix, by Maurice Renard. This had been translated from the French (by whom is not reported); the original, Le voyage immobile, is the title story of a collection: there was a "nouv. ed." by Cres, 1922; I have not traced the first edition, and no doubt the story first appeared somewhere first. H. Renard (1875-1939) had one other story, translated by Georges Surdez: Five After Five, Thrilling Wonder Apr 1941. I wonder if it came from the same book.

*1. Bleiler, E(verett) F(ranklin). The Checklist of Science-Fiction and Supernatural Fiction. Firebell Books, Glen Rock, N.J. 1978.

*2. A Catalog of books represented by Library of Congress printed cards issued to July 31, 1942. Pageant Books, NY 1958/60.

No. 15. The Invading Asteroid, by Manly Wade Wellman. He was then the rising young author of The Disc-Men of Jupiter and When Planets Clashed, and in prewar SF was best known for his petal-pussed Martians. Later generations know him as a weird writer, for the quasi-human Shonokins and guitar-plunking John (we're still waiting for the full words and music of those songs, Manly, if you're listening.)

No. 16. Immortals of Mercury, by Clark Ashton Smith. He was established with a dozen stories in the Wonder group behind him -- most of his best known SF in fact -- and many in Weird Tales and elsewhere. This story is in the collection Tales of Science and Sorcery (Arkham 1964).

No. 17. Another with two shorts. Title story is The Spectre Bullet, by Thomas Mack, otherwise unknown. The other is The Avenging Note, by Alfred Sprissler, who wrote no other SF but has one story, Bitter Return, in Weird Tales Oct 1931. I suspect that these two were left over from the abandoned Scientific Detective/Amazing Detective Stories.

No. 18. Once again two shorts. The Ship from Nowhere, by Sidney Patzer was the title story. This unidentified pseudonym had two stories published besides, The Great Invasion in Wonder Quarterly Summer 1931, and The Lunar Consul in Wonder Nov-Dec 1933. The other is The Moon Mirage, by Raymond Z. Gallun, who is well known from many magazine appearances since.

Perhaps we can discover some facts about some of the obscure writers in this series. I have not had an opportunity to examine any of these booklets, and would be interested to hear from anyone owning any or all of them. Are they as rare as I suppose?

= 10 = STELLAR'S SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS AND COLUMBIA'S SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS

Hugo Gernsback must also receive the credit, or should we say debit, for introducing the word "classic" into science fiction. Reprinting earlier stories had been the name of the game from the beginning, but by 1930 the movement was under way, many new authors had joined in and already there was a body of work written as science fiction, for a conscious readership that knew what it wanted. Clearly stories resurrected from the dark ages now had to be justified as having special value. There was nothing wrong with the word classic except the way it was applied haphazardly to anything a few years old.

With the magazines now using mostly new work, why not exploit the backlog with something special? So in Jan 1930 was announced a series of Science Fiction Classics. Unfortunately, No. 1 was a poor enough choice to kill the series in a time of worsening depression: Between Worlds, by Garret Smith, a 1919 Argosy serial. The book was an a 9" paperback format of 93 pages. It seems to have been abandoned almost immediately, not advertised regularly like the SF Series. On the other hand in 1940 the new management found the remaining stock and offered it again in Thrilling Wonder, so there should be more copies around. All the same, I have not sighted one.

On considering Columbia Publications' Science Fiction Classics series one is torn between anger and amusement. Borrowing the name of one Stellar project and the format of the other, this set of six booklets was issued in 1942. All were drawn from Columbia's magazine Science Fiction -- three from its first issue, Mch 1939, the others from Mch, June and Oct 1940. So they could not claim venerable old age in lieu of merit. Charles D. Hornig, who edited these issues of the magazine, may sincerely have selected them as the best of a bad lot, or even thought they were a passably good lot. As Gernsback's editor for Wonder's last two and a half years he should have had some idea of what the relative standard was. Of course, he was not in the best position to produce a particularly good magazine. By the time the booklets were published he had left the firm, and his successor Robert W. Lowndes cannot have been very happy about them.

They are 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " 24-page booklets, well presented on good paper, and three have the black and white illustrations from the magazine printings. All also have a small vignette of an unmistakable Paul spaceship on the cover. I cannot place it, but I suppose it was part of a magazine illustration.

No. 1. Martian Martyrs, by John Coleridge (i.e. Earl and Otto Binder). Front. by Paul.

No. 2. Valley of Pretenders, by Dennis Clive (i.e. John Russell Fearn).

No. 3. The Machine that Thought, by William Callahan (i.e. Raymond Z. Gallun). Front. by Paul.

No. 4. The New Life, by John Coleridge.

No. 5. The Voice Commands, by Dennis Clive. Front by Ashe (whoever he was)

No. 6. Rhythm Rides the Rocket, by Bob Olsen.

Certainly none of these rated as classics. A pity. If the idea had been used sensibly using really worth while and popular stories it could have benefited SF quite a lot.

== 11 == THE MYSTERY OF H. M. CRIMP

H. M. Crimp has long been recorded as an Australian, but nothing concrete is known of him. He had two stories in *Amazing*: *The Call to Migrate*, Dec 1932, and *The Mosquito Army*, Apr 1935. Both of course deal with insects and projects to manipulate their behavior, plague locusts and malarial mosquitos respectively. The editorial comment on the first story says nothing of the writer's origin; that on the second says: "It is interesting to note that this story comes from an author in far distant Australia."

Internal evidence? There is nothing in either story to identify the writer with Australia, or with anywhere else. Certainly there is no clue to any knowledge of Australia or interest in it. Both stories deal with world-wide events from an American viewpoint, not strongly identified with any one place but moving from California to New York to Louisiana to various localities.

What I suspect, and tentatively suggest, is that Crimp may have been an American temporarily resident in Australia at the time he submitted *The Mosquito Army*. This might have been up to three years or more before its publication, since *Amazing* tended to take a long time to get stories into print.

The name does not show up anywhere else that I have discovered. Does anyone know anything at all about H. M. Crimp?

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