

# SCIENCE FICTION NEWS

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## SLICK MAGAZINE FOR AUSTRALIA

The event of the year for science fiction in Australia is the appearance of a new magazine, *Science Fiction Monthly*. A 98-page digest, printed on superior paper, with two-colour interior artwork and headings, it steps immediately out of the all too familiar pulp class to become one of the best produced science fiction magazines appearing anywhere. The material is of overseas origin, fairly well selected. Price is two shillings.

Contents of No. 1 are the following: "The Dimensional Terror" by Harry Walton; "The Ultimate City" by Richard Tooker; "Incident in Space" by Lawrence E. Larky; "Alpotu" by John Scott Campbell; "The Desrick on Yandro" by Manly Wade Wellman; "Mercury Bill and the Amorous Hunk" by Charles A. Stearns; "Postscript" by Eric Frank Russell; "A as in Android" by Milton Lesser; and "Worlds Within Worlds" by Roger Dee. The cover is by Alex Schomburg.

No. 2, due in October, contains: "The Other Side of Zero" by Prof. D. H. Menzel; "The Spiral Intelligence" by Frank Belknap Long; "Death of a Sensitive" by Harry Bates; "Intelligence Test" by Harry Walton; and "Flight over Mars" by Zane Vere. Cover by Paul.

The magazine is published by Atlas Publications, 262 Queens Parade, Melbourne.



First two covers: by Alex Schomburg and Frank R. Paul.

though actually printed in Sydney. No rate for subscriptions is quoted, but they are probably acceptable. We presume that distribution only covers Australasia. Atlas also issue a series of 2/- novels by British pulp writers, but their magazine project is on a much more ambitious level.

Titles so far in Atlas' Science Fiction Library series: "The Echoing Worlds" by Jonathan Burke; "World at Bay" by E. C. Tubb; "From What Far Star" by Bryan Berry. These are 114-page digest-sized paperbacks: some less overworked material would help here.

## MAGAZINES ABROAD

It reverted from monthly to bi-monthly schedule in the U.S.A., while the British edition discontinued with No. 15.

The British editions of *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic* seem to have ceased also, with issues No. 8 in each case. The British *Galaxy Science Fiction* increased price from 1/6 to 2/- with No. 26. The long overloaded British field is evidently undergoing a shakedown. . . . Of the local-origin magazines, only *New Worlds*, *Science-Fantasy* and *Authentic* have been appearing with

complete regularity in recent months: *Nebula* has not been able to appear on time always, though editor Hamilton is confident that it will change from bi-monthly to six-weekly after No. 13. *Vargo Statten—British Science Fiction Magazine* has changed its title to *British Space Fiction Magazine*, on which we decline to comment.

Australian writer Frank B. Bryning has been selling to *Fantastic Universe* lately: "Operation in Free Orbit" appeared there in February, and "Action-Reaction" in March. More are to follow, we believe. Bryning has written a number of excellent stories, straight SF at that, which have previously appeared only in Australian mass-circulation media.

## BOOKS

Of all the things wrong with science fiction book publishing, the fault most in need of correction is the imbecility displayed on the package: the childish artwork and worse sales talk.

The office boy who wrote the jacket blurb for "Valley Beyond Time", by Vaughan Wilkins (Jonathan Cape, 12/6), says the book is "more charged with romance and excitement than anything dreamed of by the purveyors of science fiction." Someone should have broken it to him gently that it's supposed to be science fiction, or something approaching it. It doesn't get very close, though. It's a rather tepid version of a plot done better by writers like Farley, Merritt and Stevens in pre-Gernsback days: a lost-race fantasy. The theme is Saint Brendan's Isle, thinly rationalised with some patter about "dimensions" to make it appeal better to a science fiction-conscious public. Then, after Wilkins goes to that much trouble, see what happens.

"Valley Beyond Time" fails as science fiction, though it's a fair borderline novel.

Groff Conklin has edited "Science Fiction Mutations" (Vanguard, \$3.50), something that was inevitable sooner or later. Twenty-one shorts based on heredity and mutation themes. Stephen Arr's brilliant "Chain of Command", which should be the story to end all stories about mutated mice, is among the more recent selections, and Dr. Miles J. Breuer's "The Hungry Guinea Pig", represents early SF. The general theme is fairly widely interpreted, with Nourse's "Family Resemblance" present. Other contributors include Kuttner, Russell and F. L. Wallace.

"Mission of Gravity" by Hal Clement (Robert Hale, 9/6). If you didn't read this novel when it ran in *Astounding* in 1953, run, don't walk, to get it now. That is, if you're interested in real science fiction, and we do mean science. If you want sociology, atomic wars, cloak and dagger stuff, fantasy, human relations, or anything else but the genuine article, just forget it for a while and read the book anyway.

Science fiction is ultimately based on, or if you prefer, is an expression of, a unique quality of man: comprehension and mastery of nature. The human intelligence seeks to become the equal of its environment, and it is this drive which leads to the development of science, and of science fiction. And what is true of man is doubtless true of other highly developed life-forms on other worlds. In "Mission of Gravity" not only is the setting and action of the story scientific in the truest sense, but the problems raised are dealt with in the same spirit, and their solutions are valid as well as suitable for narrative purposes.

The setting is a world of which current science knows little, though that little is of great significance—61 Cygni C, the first planet of another star to be discovered, giving an assurance that other planetary systems than ours were at least possible. Its immense mass, which made its discovery possible, makes it remote indeed from our experience, but Clement has succeeded in creating a vivid picture of life on its surface.

The lack of data seems to give plenty of latitude for the creative imagination. But Clement has made guesses as to the planet's constitution, orbit and general physical state upon which basis, adhered to as absolute data, the planet is constructed: the size of Uranus, but vastly heavier; eccentric orbit and concomitant high rate of rotation, giving a violent climate and a surface gravitational force ranging from 600 at the poles to 3 at the equator. And given a suitable chemical environment, abundant low-temperature life. Life which has produced an intelligent species.

The time is in a future of interstellar flight, when human scientists are studying 61 Cygni C from a safe distance, only to be faced with the necessity of retrieving a stranded ship from a 600-G region, possible only with the help of the planet's natives. A job for Barlennan, a tough, shrewd sea captain of the dominant species: fifteen inches long, half an inch high. His long, hazardous voyage is gripping reading even if you simply take Clement's word for all the details. But every point in the detailed picture has its scientific reason if you look for it, though the narrative never bogs down in explanation.

At a time when so many writers are mixing scientific extrapolation and speculation, "Mission of Gravity" points the way to what science fiction can and should aim for. Now, when is some British publisher going to give us Clement's "Needle" and "Iceworld", not to mention his short stories?

"The Old Die Rich" by H. L. Gold (Crown, \$3). Twelve shorts that remind us that Gold's contributions to science fiction began not with the advent of *Galaxy*, but in the late thirties, when his stories in *Astounding* fitted Campbell's reorganising policy. The volume includes straight SF as in the title story, straight fantasy like "Trouble with Water" and indefinables like "At the Post". Each story is supplemented by working notes showing how and why it was written as it stands, and Gold's self-critical evaluation.

A really bad piece of pseudo-science fiction is "The Man with Absolute Motion" by Silas Water (Rich & Cowan). A garbled version of early popular misconceptions about entropy, it has plenty more wrong with it besides. (Paracelsus, so help me, is an authority!) The same publisher announces something called "Scream from Outer Space" by one John Robert Haynes.

But, to even things up, Rich & Cowan

have also produced "Seeds of Life" by John Taine. First of Taine's novels to be published in England, it is perhaps not his best, but is certainly representative. Its man-into-superman theme should go over well with the present vogue of mutations, as topical to-day as when it first appeared in the Fall 1931 *Amazing Quarterly*. It has not dated otherwise, either, but remains a fine example of biological science fiction. But it's still not as good as "The Time Stream" or "Before the Dawn", or "Tomorrow"—perhaps Taine's best work, which hasn't yet seen hard covers.

Of the next two titles announced, "A Handful of Darkness" by Philip K. Dick is new to this reviewer, but sounds promising; Dick is a competent and original modern writer. The remaining book is a new edition of "The Demigods" by Alfred Gordon Bennett, first published in 1939 and since translated into French and Italian; one of the outstanding insect stories.

"The Chrysalids" by John Wyndham (Michael Joseph, 10/6). Events following that atomic war we're apparently still going to have. Wasn't this book published in the U.S.A. recently as "Re-Birth"?

"The Mindworm" by C. M. Kornbluth (Michael Joseph, 12/6). Shorts by one of modern science fiction's best writers. A few years ago critics were fond of complaining about underemphasis on the "human element" in SF; they still do, in fact, but now many writers have followed their advice—and the bad example of modern general fiction—and are writing stories closely concerned with human beings and often only vaguely with the real world. Raymond A. Palmer, criticising *Galaxy* recently, says: "I think your stories aren't SF, largely, and some of them are just no good. They are studies in psychoses. Mine aren't much good either, but they're just bad SF, not something out of a nut-house with ivory balconies. . . ." Not that Palmer is in a position to talk about psychoses: neither is this generalisation any truer than most generalisations. But it is certainly true that an alarming number of stories in most of the more literate magazines to-day can hardly be called science fiction, so extreme is their withdrawal into subjectivity.

But Kornbluth knows what he's doing too well to get lost. He never loses sight of the interaction of man and the external world, and specifically the impact of science on human activities. The stories in this collection (with the exception of two fantasies) are genuine science fiction, even though the professional critics will probably be satisfied because they deal mainly with people.

"Angelo's Moon" by Alec Brown (Bodley Head). On the jacket of this effort we read: "When a novelist of the stature of Alec Brown . . ." (Never heard of him. Have you?) ". . . produces what might be fashionably termed a science fiction novel. . . ."

(Continued on page 4)

## IN GENERAL

Newspapers are still discovering that science fiction exists. Latest case is the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, which ran a page two headline feature article. "Science Fiction Fans are saying, 'I Told You So'" is the heading. The article follows the usual lines, though for a change it gives a fairly representative brief account. The Brisbane Science Fiction Group gets reported accurately and favourably, probably setting a world record. Date of the issue is September 1st.

It isn't science fiction any longer, but many readers will be interested to know that the Royal Air Force *Flying Review* for July, 1955, features "Can Man Survive in Space?" by Heinz Haber, extracts from his "Man in Space".

*Lilliput*, August, 1955, has "Have we landed on the Moon?" by S. L. Solon. We quote: "When I began to examine . . . the preparations which are going on for the accomplishment of space flight . . . I realised that the possibility of space flight was not only a future hope, but that, in fact, space flight had been feasible for six years. I followed up some interesting clues, and in this article I give the results." He thinks it probable that there were preliminaries and unmanned crash-landing flights from 1949 to 1952, and a manned Moon landing in 1953—which, however, came to grief. Interesting speculation.

"Invasion of the Planet of Love" by G. P. Elliott, a mildly satirical short SF story, appears in a recent issue of *Stand* (published quarterly at 5/- a year by Jon Silken, 40 Lee Park, Blackheath, S.E.3), London). No date or number on the issue—it has a light blue cover by Herman.

"The Big Puff" by Thomas Whiteside (Constable, 10/6), a popular book on modern American advertising, has a chapter, "No Lobster Men from Neptune", about the television programme *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*. Whiteside interviewed the team who write and produce the show, and saw some action. Willy Ley is an active back-roomer as the programme's technical adviser: it is well thought out, avoids horror, violence, monsters and crudities generally, and tries to show a future that might be—contrasting pretty favourably with other broadcast pseudo-science fiction. Incidentally, a series of Tom Corbett books for youngsters is written by Carey Rockwell, published by Publicity Products (Venture Library), London.

## ON THE SCREEN

George Pal's next science fiction film will be titled, *Atlantis*. David Duncan, author of *Dark Dominion*, will do the script for it.

Artist Paul Blaisdell has designed a monster to appear in *The Day the World Ended*: now it develops that he will be the monster—that is, he will act the part in a monster-disguise of his own design. (Sounds like poetic justice.) The picture will be handled by the American Releasing Corporation, whose president, James H. Nicholson, was an active scientist in 1930.

Some of the publicity for *This Island Earth* features the line "Based on the book that thrilled millions!" Author Raymond F. Jones no doubt wishes it were even 1 per cent. true. But it may be indicative of a little more recognition for science fiction—so far it has been more usual for film advertising matter to play down the original works.

Charles Beaumont spoke for all when in criticising what Hollywood is doing to science fiction he wrote recently: "The correction of a single mistake—Hollywood's mad insistence upon hiring writers who know nothing about SF, and care for it less, to write SF—might do wonders toward bringing about a renaissance." It may be a step in the right direction that Frank Quattrocchi, a science fiction writer with a sound knowledge of the field and plenty of enthusiasm for it, has been commissioned

to write a script, already accepted for immediate filming. It's some kind of a mutation plot (we're probably due for a run of these now), and Paul Blaisdell's name is mentioned for the effects. It may be colour and wide screen.

Alfred Bester has adapted his own "The Demolished Man" (now there's a case where a writer without the background, couldn't begin to do the job!), but no details are out yet as to its production.

"The Adaptive Ultimate", by Stanley G. Weinbaum has been acquired for TV filming by Science Fiction Theatre. Old timers might not have chosen that one, but will agree that there are excellent film possibilities in Weinbaum's works. "The Worlds of If", "The Point of View", and the interplanetaries like "Tidal Moon", would be good material for gadget films, and future-adventure ones: while "The Black Flame" could be a wonderful cast-of-thousands spectacle.

M.G.M. are doing an epic with Jupiter the scene—complete with a Walt Disney designed beastie. Robots, too.

We're in for space stations on the screen now as well as in every other medium. 20th Century-Fox have started work on *On the Threshold of Space*, *Space Station U.S.A.*, *Space Island*, *The Thirteenth Moon* and others had been under discussion before President Eisenhower recently popularised the MOUSE Project, and since then eighteen titles have been registered—while as definite projects, J. L. Castle's novel, "Satellite E One" is likely, and "Visual Transcription" intends editing together several TV pictures to make "Satellite".

—SPENCER STRONG

### BOOKS (CONTD.)

(Since the publishers have gone to the trouble of prominently labelling it as a science fiction novel, the blurb writer is on pretty safe ground. Or is he? The way he puts it introduces a doubt, and scepticism is something this book is ill fitted to withstand.) "... the reader can be certain of something unusual, something with substance, involving real emotions and real intentions. His warmest admirers would not dare to prophesy beyond that, for with the fields of imagination open to the science fiction writer, a novelist of his ability and range has limitless opportunities of expression."

After all that build-up, the book is about as bad as you might expect. True, a novelist with ability and range does have limitless opportunities of expression in science fiction: but Brown doesn't seem to qualify. It reads as if he is trying to imitate run-of-the-mill magazine SF of about 1930, without even a 1930 background.

"Shadows in the Sun" by Chad Oliver, reviewed here July, has now been published in England by Reinhardt.

In "The Fourth Programme" by W. S.

Adams (Lawrence & Wishart, 5/-), the B.B.C.'s listeners find themselves listening to a broadcast that begins: "I, the Lord God, am speaking. . . ." It turns out to be a hoax, of course, but the events that follow veer perilously close to sociological science fiction. Interesting.

"Untouched by Human Hands" is a collection of shorts by Robert Sheckley. The title story appeared as "One Man's Poison"; others include "Warm", "The Impacted Man" and "Cost of Living". If anything illustrates how far modern science fiction has developed from its infancy, this is it. But in a notice in *The Bookseller* there actually appears this gem of profound thought: "a varied collection of stories in the Wells Tradition". Nobody who had the faintest inkling of what the Wells Tradition is, or, indeed, had ever read anything Wells wrote, could say anything of the sort. And even if it were true, it would tell the modern reader precisely nothing, so much has poor old Wells been abused in this way by lazy and ignorant reviewers. The boys have cried "Wells" far too often.