

No. 17

May 1970

CURRENT BOOKS

CLARKE, Arthur C[harles] 1917-

EXPEDITION TO EARTH. Harcourt. viii, 181 p.
\$5.75. (1st Ballantine 1953; Sidgwick 1954;
Corgi 1959) 11 stories; also included in An
Arthur C. Clarke Omnibus, Sidgwick, 1965)

Reviews: Astounding US Nov 1954, Br. Apr 1955;
New Worlds 32; Authentic 53; Galaxy US May
1954; N.Y. Times 14.2.54 p. 24; N.Y. Herald
Tribune 20.12.53 p. 9; Christian Science Mon-
itor 24.12.53 p. 11

-- PRELUDE TO SPACE. Harcourt. xii, 209 p. \$5.75.
(1st Galaxy Novel 3, 1950; Sidgwick, 1953; Gnome
1954; Ballantine PB 1954; Pan PB 1954; also in
An Arthur C. Clarke Omnibus, Sidgwick, 1965)

Reviews: Astounding US Nov 1954, Br. Apr 1955;
Galaxy US Apr 1951, Jly 1954, BR. 21; New
Worlds 21; N.Y. Times 28.3.54 p. 21; N.Y. Her-
ald Tribune 21.3.54

-- REACH FOR TOMORROW. Harcourt. viii, 178 p.
\$5.75. (1st Ballantine 1956; Gollancz 1962)

12 stories. Reviews: Astounding US Sep 1956;
Galaxy US Sep 1956; N.Y. Times 15.7.56 p. 20;
N.Y. Herald Tribune 11.11.56 p. 10

Books

CLARKE, Arthur C. contd.

TALES FROM THE WHITE HART. Harcourt. viii, 179p.
\$5.75. (1st Ballantine 1957) 15 stories, mainly
humorous. An excellent collection out of print
for a long time: there seems to have been no
British edition at all. Reviews: Astounding US
June 1957, Br. Oct 1957; Infinity July 1957;
N.Y. Times 17.3.57

CONKLIN, [Edward] Groff, 1904-68 ed.

13 ABOVE THE NIGHT. Dell (8741). 286 p. PB 75c.
Presumably retitled, but original title not
known.

HEINLEIN, Robert A[nsen] 1907-

PODKAYNE OF MARS. Berkley. 176 p. PB 75c. (1st
in If Nov 1962 - Mch 1963. Putnam, 1963; Avon
PB 1964; New English Library PB 1969)
Reviews: Analog June 1963 p. 90; Amazing
Sep 1963; Fantasy & SF May 1963; Library
Journal 15.3.63 p. 1383; N.Y. Times 9.6.63
p. 28; N.Y. Herald & Tribune 12.5.63 p. 27

KELLER, David H. 1880-1963

The FOLSOM FLINT, and other curious tales.
Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisc. xix, 213 p.
\$5.00. 17 stories, mainly weird but some SF.

LAFFERTY, R. A.

The REEFS OF EARTH. Dobson. 144 p. 21/- (1st
Berkley 1968)

COOPER, Edmund

The LAST CONTINENT. Hodder. 192 p. 21/- (1st
Dell 1969)

R E V I E W S

The PEOPLE TRAP, and other Pitfalls, Snares,
Devices and Delusions, as well as Two Sniggles and
a Contrivance

by Robert Sheckley

Gollancz, 1969

222 p. \$3.25

I first read most of the fourteen stories in this collection in Galaxy (though not when they first appeared as a rule) as an adolescent, and I found them entertaining but not up to the standard of what I regarded as required of the very best SF short stories. Nowadays I've less of a preference for shorter SF and rarely read all the stories in the magazines. Sufficient time had passed so that I'd forgotten enough of the stories to permit me to read them as if for the first time. In general I felt that I enjoyed them more this time than I remembered, and consider some of them on a par with the best, e.g. Shall We have a Little Talk, Restricted Area and The Last Weapon. I've become a trifle more subtle since those callow days, meaning I can read satire as satire now and don't take everything as a straight story as was my wont then.

I don't recall reading the title story elsewhere, nor is it listed in the magazine credits, so I assume it was written especially for this collection (it's a satire on overpopulation). Which must prove something, since it is the worst story of the lot by a considerable margin. The others in contrast are all eminently readable. Some of them use a gimmick which I usually disapprove as unfair to the reader, but after reading this lot I've been forced to modify my disapproval to apply only to gimmicky stories presented without deliberate comic -- or as the blurb has it, outrageous -- intent. A prime example of this is Restricted

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Area, whose whole plot, gimmick and all. I can give away since the publisher does so anyway on the jacket. An exploration ship lands on a very unusual planet best described as "pretty", inhabited by friendly furry creatures, whose flora bear many different species of supremely edible fruit; no irritating underbrush to tire weary explorers and no microorganisms to make them sick. There is however a mile-high metallic shaft poking out of the ground. After a while everything starts to run down. Just that -- run down. Soon, though, the shaft starts to turn and everything gets lively again, and the spaceship crew decide to clear out before they're forced to meet the parents of the super-child turning the key. Sheckley has style to make it worth while reading even after you know the plot.

Other enjoyable stories include *The Last Weapon* which, of course, demonstrates the last weapon most effectively; *The Odor of Thought*, which pines a stranded spaceman at the mercy of blind predators who hunt by telepathy and has him beat them at their own game; *Fishing Season*, where the fish are people (what else?); *Dreamworld* where -- you guessed it -- this world is the dream world; and *Ghost V* wherein the hero, one Richard Gregor, is threatened by something calling itself a Purple-striped Grabber, which grabs things named Richard Gregor, usually eating them with chocolate sauce.

As a final comment, let it remain that I don't read short stories by choice. Yet of finishing this book I searched through my collection for other Sheckley short stories. I'd like to know which ones were the Sniggles, but I'm pretty sure Redfern's *Labyrinth* was the Contrivance.

-- John C. Young

SPOCK MUST DIE
by James Blish

Bantam PB, 1970
118 p. 60c

I haven't read Blish's other Star Trek books, which adapted some of the TV scripts, mainly because I thought they were aimed at children, and besides I'd seen them all. So I can't compare this book with them. However, this is not such an adaptation but a short novel, as Blish says, "built around the characters and background of the TV series conceived by Gene Roddenberry".

I rarely watch TV drama shows (occasional exceptions like Z Cars) but I did watch Star Trek and was indeed an ardent fan from the first five minutes of the first program, my emotions amounting to unabashed glee, as I recall. Occasionally I was critical of some of the more far-fetched plots but when there were scripts by Sturgeon, Ellison and Brown I was enraptured.

Consequently I brought to this novel wide familiarity with the background and characters, a near fanatic devotion to them, and the knowledge that Blish can be a good writer when he wants to be.

I didn't quite get what I'd hoped to out of the book in consequence, but in the main I was well satisfied.

The story is one that could have appeared on TV (though in several parts) and not been out of place in comparison with other episodes, and Blish appears to have used techniques such as a preponderance of dialog over description to convey a TV atmosphere and make it easy for the reader to imagine watching it. This, I feel, was a mistake. I would have preferred a style closer to that used in the Cities in Flight series; that is, I wanted a

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novel rather than an adaptation that isn't,

Still, I had a ball reading it. There is a confrontation with the Klingon Empire, the chief Terran (or Federation really) rival, in fact a war with them. Kirk and Spock show no detectable character deviations from their TV personas, though of course there are differences of emphasis, and of course Kirk and Spock manage, with the help of the redoubtable Scotty, chief engineer, to win the war all by themselves. Rollicking good stuff.

-- John C. Young

LOOKING BACKWARD

May's Famous Amazing Classic is not much of a story, but it's certainly a significant one. In the absence of an editorial note (why reprint these stories without some sort of comment on why they are worth reprinting?) many might read a few paragraphs, shudder and go on to the next item; this column comes in handy for rectifying these omissions somewhat.

Master of Telepathy, by Eando Binder, in the December 1938 Amazing, has to be acknowledged a milestone. Up till then, telepathy was found in SF once in a while, but it was a different concept and had usually a different purpose. It was an ability that extraterrestrials sometimes had (often not naturally but by means of a device based on advanced nonhuman science) and served to cut out the communication problem and keep the story moving. As a plot element it was little used. You

may remember that Burroughs' Martians could do the trick at times, though most of the time he didn't bother to introduce it, correctly realising that it detracted from the action and created too many difficulties. Otherwise its general status was as a narrative crutch like the manuscript in a bottle or the story told in a bar...

Until December 1938, when this story introduced the myth of "Extra-Sensory Perception", the creation of J. B. Rhine, taking the tenuous evidence alleged to have been found that people may sometimes make more correct guesses than expected by someone without a knowledge of statistics and building on it a fanciful structure of magical mental powers. In the Palmer manner, it is supported by a footnote stating that "in 1934...Duke University [wrong, it was Professor Rhine personally, not the University, who was responsible for the ESP business] announced its epochal experiments in parapsychology, thereby raising that study of psychic phenomena from a pseudo-science to an exact science. [begging a lot of questions but implying no more than that some attempt had been made to find experimental evidence -- not the same thing as finding it or explaining it] Since then there have been many verifications from other laboratories of these classic researches. [a flat lie] The strange telepathic and clairvoyant powers of the human mind have been amply demonstrated." [They had not then and have not now.]

This story simply assumed that latent powers exist which could be developed by simple exercise, and had a suitable subject become a superman who is barely prevented from making himself dictator of the world. A typical example of the "dangerous invention" plot.

But it was from ~~this~~ that all the later lunacy

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about telepathy and so forth began as an element in SF. As fiction, some admirable works have been inspired by it (two or three, at any rate: The Demolished Man, The Stars my Destination, Wild Talent and, er...) as well as the other 99.99%. As scientific speculation its value remains nil until someone demonstrates detecting of a thought. Just one repeatable demonstration. Science is still waiting.

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