

Science Fiction NEWS

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FOUR FROM HORWITZ

Four paperbacks of marginal interest from Horwitz Publications and their subsidiary Scripts may forshadow a new phase of SF publishing in Australia. They seem to represent something not seen before.

Numbered 1 and 2 in a juvenile-slanted Adventure Classics series from Horwitz are *The MOON MAID* and its continuation *The MOON MEN* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the latter including *The Red Hawk*. This trilogy is one of the less well known works of Burroughs, and has about as much claim to being science fiction as the Mars books -- that is to say, by any standards precious little. But his part in the origin of SF is a real one, if rather curious, and its history cannot be told without acknowledging him. Reprinting him today is something else,

Anything written in the early 1920's must be expected to show its age, but here it is painful. The Prologue to *The Moon Maid* casually sets the scene of 1967, when no sooner has the continuous war begun in 1914 ended with the good guys finally wimming ("The absolute domination of the Anglo-Saxon race over all the other races of the World") than the first clear radio message comes through

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from John Carter on Mars. Whether Burroughs meant to go on to link Earth and Mars and move into something closer to modern SF than is a matter for idle speculation, but in this series he went off in another direction, or rather two: the Moon, and the future, which makes this one of two ventures he ever made into prophecy.

There is some preliminary business about reincarnation and memories of future descendants to explain how the narrator knows what is to happen at intervals up to the 25th Century, and the fact that Burroughs thought it necessary to waste words on such a point dates the story as thoroughly as anything else in it. Then things get moving with what begins as a first voyage to Mars in a ship using Burroughs' Eighth Ray, the propulsive force in light -- though here it seems to have developed into something more involved, as there is a specific one for each planet. It is clear from the brief explanation given of how the ship works ("I shall not bore you with dry, technical descriptions of our motors and equipment") that Burroughs knew even less elementary science than you may have supposed, even by 19th Century standards. But we know well that the ship is never going to get to Mars, sparing us a fifteen year trip. His maths could have been better, too: with an average speed of twelve hundred miles per hour they reach the Moon (where of course they are to land instead) on the twelfth day, and since the Eighth Ray method made orbits obsolete they were supposed to be going to Mars more or less in a straight line.

And so to the Moon, not by virtue of bad navigation (like the later Carson Napier who headed for Mars and reached Venus) but of sabotage by one

of Burroughs' sneeringest villains.

From then on it is only a matter of passing through the Moon's hollow shell via crater into its interior -- for like Earth the Moon has a hollow core -- and we're back in the jungle and the usual Burroughs pattern of adventures. The hollow moon is sketchily described, with few unusual features beyond a species of vaguely described intelligent quadrupeds, and two somewhat less believably warring human races. After the usual fights, chases and captures it's back to Earth. So much for *The Moon Maid*.

The Moon Men has the villain -- still sneering -- invade Earth at the head of a Lunar fleet and destroy the feeble defences offered by a peaceful world with his trusty electronic rifle (disintegrator to you), but this too is only a bit of background to a story of revolt against tyranny in the Lunar-ruled world three generations later, now decayed into barbarism. The final story, *The Red Hawk*, has savageterrians gradually defeating savage Lunerians.

All of this does have antiquarian interest. It is quite characteristic, with all the usual features of Burroughs in full force, and at the same time seems to represent a deliberate effort to produce a different kind of work, even if the new ideas introduced are not developed. No doubt the Burroughs reading public that obviously still exists will enjoy it, but from the point of view of science fiction its interest is limited.

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The other two, bearing the Scripts imprint, are something else again.

SQUAT
by David Rome

Scripts, 1970
144 p. FR 80c

The publisher helpfully labels this opus "Sexual adventure on other planets", but if you're looking for pornography you'll be disappointed. There are a few episodes, described in the sketchiest fashion, and some selfconscious tittering over variations conventionally supposed to be uncustomary.

Otherwise we have a book rather difficult to describe. Its setting is a never-never future on an imaginary distant world with brief glances at some others, and it has a very few conventional props taken from SF, but the plot, such as it is, seems to be one of intrigue punctuated with violence reminiscent of the spy story crossed with the Medievalist tradition. It's full of yawning gaps in logic and horrendous anachronisms and self-contradictions: interstellar flight in a culture of 14th Century European style social institutions, and even those appallingly oversimplified. It is obviously meant to have complications involving hidden meanings, with characters acting from motivations other than what appear on the surface, but unfortunately not enough detail is there to make it intelligible. There is even the cliché of the ruler organising the conspiracy against himself, which Chesterton parodied in *The Man who was Thursday* some sixty years ago.

In short, a book with absolutely nothing to recommend it.

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TOWER AT THE EDGE OF TIME
by Lin Carter

Scripts, 1970
140 p. PB 70c

Pseudo-Burroughs? Perhaps ultimately John Carter was the inspiration for this opus, by way of Otis Adelbert Kline, Robert E. Howard and a score of indistinguishable hacks in Planet Stories. Interstellar flight and barbaric cultures -- incidentally, a cleaned up, prettied up rather, romanticised kind of barbarism that never existed outside of this kind of fiction. Swords and ray pistols. Pirates and mercenary warriors -- and somehow their way of living is implied to be fun and adventure -- "alchemists" and "sorcerers", idols, slavery, hereditary aristocracies and assorted other horrors. And monsters, of course.

If this is anyone's idea of science fiction he is welcome to it. True, it does have a plot of sorts, culminating in a hallucinatory trip through time that has some imaginative appeal, but you have to plough through a lot of pointless shenanigans to get there -- or skip through, as I did, the book's florid style being more than I could read continuously.

Much as we would all like to see some science fiction published in Australia, it is impossible to welcome these books. If they sell well it will only mean more of the same kind of garbage; if they do not at least we are spared that, but it will mean less hope of eventually being offered something better. Science fiction loses either way.

-- G.S.

Looking Backward



On the 5th of November, 1939, five young readers held the first meeting of a new group formed to give their common interest in science fiction an outlet. It is by no means true that this was the beginning of organised interest in SF in Sydney, but earlier attempts had been to slight effect and this was the beginning of more or less continuous and consistent activity.

Of the original members, William D. Veney and Bert F. Castellari had been the founders of a high school group in 1937; two more, the brothers Eric and Edward Russell, had later joined them and others in a body called the Junior Australian Science Fiction Correspondence Club, which had contacted a few readers outside Sydney but had been more a local body: this meeting was intended to make a formal start with a reconstituted group abandoning the overambitious national concept. The remaining founder, Vol Mclesworth, had headed a Junior Science Correspondence Club oriented more to scientific hobbyists but with some interest in science fiction.

None of this group had been in touch with the Sydney Chapter of the Science Fiction League, the loose international association of local clubs sponsored by Wonder Stories, which had been formed in August 1935 and met regularly for about a year: of its members only Charles LaCoste and Kevin Smith had any contact with later activities.

The new group was indeed intended to be a new Sydney Science Fiction League in preliminary discussions. But already the founding members had

some direct contacts with amateurs abroad, and were aware of the controversy between the two factions in New York, also supporters of one or the other elsewhere. It was to show their support for the New York Futurians, of whom Donald A. Wollheim was the best known advocate, that they adopted the name Futurian Society of Sydney.

The early phase of the FSS, from 1939 to 1942, was one of intense activity and involvement in SF. Membership rarely exceeded a dozen and it is easy to say what might have been done along more constructive lines; but the average age of the members was only about 17, in a time when teenagers were very far from their present emancipation, and there was a war on. Science fiction was then almost entirely confined to the magazines, which ceased to enter the country in May 1940, apart from the skimpy and erratic British editions. The general public and the establishment had never heard of it at all, and the anti-intellectualism always characteristic of Australia was increasingly augmented under war conditions. These early Futurians functioned as an extremely introverted in-group, living vicariously the life of amateurs in the USA. It might also be noted that in those days the university was effectively restricted to the more privileged classes, and the mostly proletarian Futurians did not have access to the student community with all that implied.

There was a flurry of amateur writing and publishing. Most of it of course was of little value, but considering all the handicaps it was fairly creditable by the standards of the time. Almost every member helped produce a small publication at one time or other or at least wrote material for it.

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Eric Russell produced Ultra, a bimonthly duplicated magazine using a wide range of material; Molesworth produced a variously titled (mostly Cosmos) and generally variable little magazine; Ron Levy and others put out Zeus, concentrating mainly on humor and satire; Noel Dwyer, dropped from its editorial committee, produced two rival issues of his own; Castellari, with Veney and later Levy, issued a fortnightly single sheet, Futurian Observer, concisely presenting what news there was in SF and frankly criticising the other editors; Colin Roden a weekly news sheet, Science and Fantasy Fan Reporter, with Molesworth and Graham Stone also contributing at times. The idea of making contacts in other States was kept up intermittently, the FSS sponsoring a nebulous body variously called the Futurian Association or Federation of Australia. Small groups did appear in the Futurian Society of Melbourne and Hobart Science Fictioneers, and in these cities Warwick Hockley and Don Tack joined in with their own duplicated publications.

All this gradually came to a halt as the war became increasingly oppressive and members were drafted one by one, and after a period of greatly reduced activity outside of meetings the FSS was suspended for the duration.

Revival came in June 1947, when the first meeting of the second phase of the FSS was held. Much the same group of teenagers met again as young adults, and activities were rather more sedate. ...But that's another story. This issue we're just remembering how it all began in November 1939.

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

- ANDERSON, Poul [William] 1926-
A CIRCUS OF HELLS. Signet (T4250). 160 p. PB 75 c. (Part in Galaxy Aug 1969 as The White King's War) Review: Analog Dec 1970 p. 169
- ASIMOV, Isaac, 1920-
I, Robot. Signet (P3540), 192 p. PB 60c (Reissue of 1956 ed. Also Gnome 1950; Grayson 1952... In German as Ich, der Robot, H.Reich 1952) 9 connected stories on possibilities of intelligent machines, all written before computers were out of the adding machine stage.
Reviews: Astounding US Sep 1951 p. 124; N.Y. Times 4.2.51 p. 16; Australasian Post 19.3.53
- NIGHTFALL: Twenty SF Stories. Rapp. 343 p. 35/- (1st Doubleday 1969) Mainly less familiar Asimov shorts, with notes giving valuable data on background.
- OPUS 100. Houghton. 311 p. \$5.95. A sampler drawn from Asimov's 99 previous books. Mainly non-fiction of course, all of it recommended, but includes five complete stories, brief extracts from another nine, with the author's remarks. Reviews: Analog Feb 1970 p. 163; Galaxy Dec 1969 p. 121, 158.
- BEECHING, Jack
The DAKOTA PROJECT. Sphere. 173 p. PB 5/- (1st Cape 1968; Delacorte 1969) Modern version of Swift's Modest Proposal -- solve the problem of backward countries and depressed minorities by genocide and cannibalism. Review: Analog Mch 1970 p. 164

Current Books

BRADBURY, Ray [mond Douglas] 1920-

FAHRENHEIT 451. Ballantine (01636). 147 p. PB 75c. (Based on The Fireman, in Galaxy Feb 1951. 1st Ballantine 1953; Hart-Davis 1954; Corgi 1957) Film version 1966, directed F. Truffaut.

Reviews: Astounding US Apr 1954 p. 145, Br. Sep 1954 p. 119; Galaxy Feb 1954; Br. 16; New Worlds 23; SF Adventures May 1955; Nation (US) 19.12.53 p. 554; N.Y. Times 8.11.53 p. 43

BURROUGHS, Edgar Rice, 1875-1950

The WIZARD OF VENUS. Ace (90190). 158 p. PB 60c. Short fragmentary item (48 p) previously unpublished; the rest of the book is a non-SF story, Pirate Blood, also previously unpublished. For Burroughs students and collectors.

CLEMENT, Hal [i.e. Harry Clement Stubbs, 1922-]

MISSION OF GRAVITY. Pyramid (T2063). 174 p. PB 75c. 1st in Astounding US Apr-Jly 1953, Br. Sep-Dec 1953. Doubleday 1954; Hale 1955. In German as Unternehmen Schwerkraft in Terra-Sonderband 12) Reviews: Astounding US Oct 1954, Br. Mch 1955; Galaxy Aug 1954; Imagination Aug 1954; SF Monthly (Aust) 12; N.Y. Times 23.5.54 p. 19

FERMAN, Edward L[ewis] 1937- ed.

The BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, 15th series. Ace (05454). 253 p. PB 75c. (1st Doubleday 1966; Gollancz 1967; Panther PB 1969, believed incomplete)

GILMAN, Robert Cham [i.e. Alfredo Jose de Marini y Coppel, 1921-]

The STARKAHN OF RHADA. Harcourt. 190 p. \$4.95. Intended as a juvenile. Review: Analog Dec 1970 p. 167

- HAMILTON, Edmond [Moore] 1904-
 RETURN TO THE STARS. Lancer. 207 p. PB 75c.
 Sequel to The Star Kings.
- HARRISON, Harry [Maxwell] 1925-
 ONE STEP FROM EARTH. Macmillan N.Y. 210 p. HC.
 9 stories on the theme of matter transmission,
 originally signed Hank Dempsey.
- HEINLEIN, Robert A[nson] 1907-
 TUNNEL IN THE SKY. Ace (82660). 7-253 p. PB 95c.
 (1st Scribner 1955; Gollancz 1965; Pan PB 1968)
 In a rather grim future period of interstellar
 imperialism, training for pioneering service ex-
 tends to high school. Several classes of vol-
 unteers taking their life-or-death Survival tests
 on a strange planet find themselves stranded.
 Reviews: Astounding US Mch 1956 p. 157, Br. Aug
 1956 p. 126; Amazing Feb 1956; F&SF Feb 1956;
 New York Times 13.11.55 p. 10; Saturday Review
 12.11.55 p. 81
- HERBERT, Frank [Patrick]
 WHIPPING STAR. Putnam. 186 p. \$4.95. (in IF Jan-
 Apr 1970) Review: Analog Nov 1970 p. 169
- STAW, Bob, 1931-
 SHADOW OF HEAVEN. Avon (S398). 175 p. PB 60c.
 New English Lib. 125 p. PB 5/-, marked "abridged".
 Review: Analog Aug 1970 p. 167
- VONNEGUT, Kurt, 1922-
 The SIRENS OF TITAN. Dell (7948). 319 p. PB.
 (Reissue of 1959 ed. Also Gollancz 1962) Welcome
 reprint of this brilliant book. Review: Astound-
 ing US May 1960, Br. Sep 1960.

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