

SCIENCE FICTION *News*

No. 29

May 1971

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

BLUM, Ralph

The *SIMULTANEDUS MAN*. Bantam (N5878). 182 p. PB 95c. (1st Atlantic Monthly Press 1970; Deutsch, 1970) Reviews: Analog Jan 71 p. 165; N.Y.Rev. of Books 21 My 70 p. 37; N.Y.Times 26 Apr 70 p. 46; Saturday Review 11 Apr 70 p. 36

BRUNNER, John

A *PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR CAUSES*. Hodder. 192 p. PB 25 np

DICK, Philip K[indred]

The *PRESERVING MACHINE*, and other stories. Gollancz. 252 p. HC £1.80 (Ace 1969) 15 shorts from the 60's

ELLISON, Harlan, ed.

DANGEROUS VISIONS, Vol. 1. David Bruce & Watson (277 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1) 359 p. HC £2.25 (Contents not known, but presumably first of two parts of Ellison's 1967 collection of way-out writing. At this rate it's costing somewhat more than the US edition, an unusual event)

Review of US ed: Amazing Apr 68 p. 136

GOULART, Ron

GADGET MAN. Doubleday. 161 p. \$4.95 (Quasi-sequel to *After Things Fell Apart*)

Review: Analog June 71 p. 171

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HOWARD, Robert E[rvin] 1906-36

ALMURIC. New English Lib. 125 p. PB 25 np (Ace 1964. From Weird Tales May-Jly 1939) Nearest to SF by this master of bloodthirsty adventure: somewhat Burroughs-like tale of a world rich in monsters.

MOORCOCK, Michael, ed.

BEST STORIES FROM NEW WORLDS, 7. Panther. 175 p. PB 25 np.

NORMAN, John

OUTLAW OF GOR. Tandem. 3-254 p. PB 25 np. (Ballantine 1967; Sidgwick 1970) Another neo-Burroughs with the third of a series. Tandem call it "science-fantasy" but, allowing for ignorance or inaccuracy, it's meant to be scientifically possible.

OSBORN, David

The GLASS TOWER. Hodder. 254 p. HC £1.75 (No details available, but presumably this is Tower of Glass by Robert Silverberg, who wrote under this name years ago.)

PARKER, T[homas] H[enry] and TESKEY, F[rancis] J[ohn], eds.

PATHWAY TO THE STARS. Blackie. [6], 58 p. PB 34np. (Juvenile compilation on aviation and space flight. Must be pretty short selections)

SILVERBERG, Robert

TOWER OF GLASS. Bantam (S6902). 184 p. PB 75c (Scribner 1970; see also Osborn, David. The Glass Tower) Review: Analog May 71 p. 162

contd. p. 11

The DAYS OF GLORY
by Brian M. Stableford

Acc PB (14000)
5-158 p. 60c

This is the most pretentious load of drivel I've had the misfortune to read since the Andrew Jones biography (mercifully I've forgotten the title of that monstrosity, much as I soon hope to forget this one.)

The style is lamentable. Characters are described at length rather than portrayed in depth; and what little plot there is, is obscured in the welter of pseudo-psychological jargon which presumes to justify the existence of the Dramatis Personae.

And what an abundance of characters there are! As they say in the motion picture industry, a cast of thousands -- and that's without the extras. Perhaps the overlong descriptions are justified by the fact that the reader could hardly be expected to remember who was who otherwise. Thus we have magnificent names such as Eagleheart and Starcastle -- two of the main characters -- suffering loss of impact by the inclusion of countless other similar names -- Hornwing, Blackstar, Starbird, Stormbow, Starflare etc.

What little there is of a plot concerns an interplanetary war between "Man and his Mirror Image" (the cover blurb). As we read on, we find the mirror image to be nothing more than a group known as The Beasts, which long ago man created in his own likeness -- not a bad idea, if only Stableford could write as well as he can think. Now the Beasts, goaded into action by Eagleheart and a few

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other power and glory seekers, set out to prove their supremacy over man through violence and bloodshed.

The book's worst fault -- if any one can be said to be worse than any other -- is its prediction of events before they happen, together with the reasons why. I hope I'm not over-emphasising the importance of surprise in a novel, but I do object to the complete suppression of my own imagination. Surely a book should leave the reader some little work to do, some guesswork as to the outcome, just enough to keep him reading on to see if he was right. Or am I being old-fashioned?

Obviously the author is fond of his book; and if the intention was indeed a narcissistic affair between Stableford the writer and Stableford the reader, to the exclusion of all others, it is indeed a most admirably successful work. And I know at least one person who is, right now, eagerly awaiting books 2 and 3 of the trilogy which begins with this one. The rest of us would be well advised to put the 60c saved towards the purchase of Chronocules (see below).

CHRONOCULES
by D. G. Compton

Ace PB (10480)
5-255 p. 75c

Don't be put off by the title. This is an immensely enjoyable book with an easy flowing style. The characterisation is good, especially that of the central figure, a village idiot by the unlikely name of Roses Varco. The plot is only fair, but this is made for by the way it's written. I wanted to go on reading to find out what would happen, and, as the story built up to the promise of an exciting climax, I was quite literally unable to put the book down, thus forget-

ting to fetch the dry washing in, missing my shower and being half an hour late for an engagement.

Chronocules (defined in the book as particles of Time) has the alternative title Escape into Tomorrow printed on the back cover. I like neither title and would have preferred something more eye-catching to tempt me at the bookstore. It is sobering in this moment of enthusiasm to realise that had I not been asked to review this book I would not have chosen to read it.

— Audrey Tarver

DARK OF THE WOODS b/w SOFT COME THE DRAGONS
by Dean R. Koontz Ace Double PB (13793)
5-108, 8-143 p. 75c

One thing I like about Ace's SF is the self-conscious directedness of the books towards SF people as a class, with an implicit acceptance of this readership as a serious one with particular requirements. Hence we have cover art work from the like of Freas and Gaughan; straight blurbs, not hysterical, not adolescent-directed; and the implication that the fiction content is at least as carefully edited for quality as that in the best of the magazines; all of which is a profound relief from the comic-book hard-sell approach often found elsewhere. This particular double is an excellent example.

Koontz is a name I did not associate with any particular stories remembered for quality or any other reason, but I did recognise the by-line. A pity I have not been reading all the magazines lately, for if this book exemplifies what I'm missing I'm missing a lot that's worth while.

Soft Come the Dragons is the title story of a

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collection of short stories from various SF magazines, Dark of the Woods a short novel. None of the short stories are outright spectacular, but all are eminently readable, entertaining as well as thought-provoking (there can be too much of the latter at the expense of the former) and memorable -- for various reasons -- to boot. There's not a flop in the lot, nor any of the type appearing lately which seem only to appeal to a selected portion of the SF readership: I think you know what I mean without belaboring it.

As well, what seems to be happening in the magazines lately, the rehashing of tired old ideas and even basic plot lines (admittedly this is a perennial complaint) well past the point of boredom, is absent here.

Not that the stories are all that original, they just don't share the undistinguished quality of most of the rehashings. The Twelfth Bed, for instance, can be taken as a tending-towards-horror story of the dangers in terms of depersonalisation and relinquished human control, in the increased automation of hospital care. What basically happens is that a young man is mistakenly admitted to a solely robot-run home -- prison -- for the aged. He is as unable to get out as the other inmates, and tragedy follows. The fear of the coming of the robots and of the impersonality with which automation in general tends to treat human beings had, I had thought, been done to death. But not so.

Similarly, A Darkness in my Soul treats of genetic engineering designed to produce "psionic" mutants, in this case a telepath and a being whose "ESP" attribute is a controlled intuitive "genius" heuristic inventive faculty. Yet the story is different, worthwhile, and displays a reader-holding

capacity in its statement of the peculiar paths the search for meaning in life takes for such creatures.

You get the idea? All the other stories have like elements of worth placing them a cut above the general run. It was a similar reaction in my case as I used to get from a Sturgeon collection, if not quite as impressive.

Other stories of note include *Dragon in the Land*, which tries to breathe some hope into the truly awful prospect of biological warfare, despite the use in the story of the ultimate in it (which of course backfires and gets out of hand), the disease which kills immediately and with no symptoms whatsoever except the simple fact of death; and *A Season for Freedom*, which makes a grisly extrapolation on our violent ways, typified by American cities like Dallas with its phenomenal murder rate, which have progressed to the stage where the only escape, the only way to achieve a sense of freedom, is to...but that would give away the story's pointed ending.

Dark of the Woods, the original short novel half of the double, is, again, not by any means spectacular in any given fictional achievement sense. Especially plotting in the first half is weak -- dangers manifested to our hero seem too contrived -- but the story is clearly intended as simply an adventure yarn for adult SF readers, with a pointed warning not to get too idealistic about our eventual place amongst the stars. The way we are going, says Koontz, we are obviously more likely to indulge in genocide than in any sort of friendship, if we can get away with it, but that still, individuals will continue to crop up who will be against such things. In this case, one man saves an alien race from extinction at the

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hands of the rest of the human predators. All you need is love, and a super-fortress inside a mountain.

-- John C. Young

NEW WRITINGS IN SF -- 6
ed. John Carnell

Bantam PB (S5795)
PB 75c

This is the American paperback edition of one of the series more familiar in this country under the Corgi trademark. At last count the series ran to seventeen volumes, with little to justify this proliferation if the present collection is typical of the rest. The seven stories range from poor to passable, and my comments are in order of appearance rather than merit.

The Inner Wheel by Keith Roberts is a longish story which, to quote the blurb, concerns "the grim story of a man enmeshed in the web of a Gestalt mind". The only difference between this story and a standard thriller plot involving the detection of a group of criminals is the substitution of the group mind. A conventional plot dressed up with an SF theme which failed to come off.

Horizontal Man by William Spencer is set in the far future where man has achieved eternal life at the expense of spending it on his back in a machine-tended world of vicarious experience. The premise of the story has not been thought through to its logical conclusion and the development of what is presented is marred by the disruptions of the walter of detailed descriptions of the experience recordings.

In The Day before Never, Robert Presslie tells the story of a ruthless plot by some of the remainder of the human race to rid themselves of an equally ruthless and technologically superior race of aliens

incongruously dubbed "barbarians". It's James Bond, future style, with a trick ending which seems particularly appropriate, since the aliens are, after all, a vastly superior and exceedingly ruthless lot.

Another alien invasion story, *The Hands* by John Baxter, is concerned with the rather implausible modus operandi of the takeover. If you haven't got it all by the end of the first paragraph I'll be greatly surprised. This is not even a passable attempt at treating a frequently recurring plot.

The Seekers by E. C. Tubb is a space exploration story, positing that Heaven is where you find it.

In *Atrophy*, Ernest Hill provides another glimpse of humanity which has traded its heritage for machines. It could be regarded as depicting a stage in the progression to the ultimate utopia of horizontalism in another story in the collection.

Advantage by John Rackham tells of the relationship between a "psi" and his boss who is building himself a legend by exploiting the other's ability.

If you have read any of the other collections in this series you will know it for what it is -- mildly inventive, uneven in quality, but at best no great contribution to short SF. If this is your bag or if you are a completist you'll buy it.

BEYOND CAPELLA by John Rackham b/w

The ELECTRIC SWORD SWALLOWERS by Kenneth Bulmer.

Ace Double PB (05595) 1971

5-132, 5-121 p. 75c.

Beyond Capella is a very standard treatment of the implacable alien force belting hell out of humanity and their great fight back. The story takes its title from the locale of the first encounter with the aliens. The plot and characters

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are stock and I had the distinct feeling of having read it all before somewhere else with only the names and technology changed to protect the author's bank balance.

The measure of this piece of hack writing may be judged from the following example of the disregard of both writer and publisher for the intelligence of their readers. From the very beginning the aliens are referred to as "snakos". Nevertheless, nobody has ever seen an alien, nor has there ever been any wreckage recovered or sighted after an encounter with the spherical ships of the enemy. In an incredibly gimmicked finale the enemy is proved to be not a race of snakes but one many-tentacled snake (many-tentacled snake) in another universe poking its tentacles into our universe and destroying space ships by firing darts at them.

By way of contrast, *The Electric Sword Swallowers* is a delightful and irreverent frolic which tilts at sacred cows ranging from Dr. Asimov's three laws of robotics to marital relationships, mysterious guardians of the Galaxy's future, political intrigue, war games and toy soldier collectors.

The story concerns the adventures of its anti-hero, one Ferdie Foxlee, an apprentice ectoplasmic electronics (eepee) engineer. The eepee bit is the manufacture of electronic humanoid creatures activated by a piece of protoplasmic brain (sic).

The fireworks begin for Ferdie on the planet Curdiswano when he booby traps the eepee bedmate of Councillor Markgroff to disintegrate at an appropriate stage of his evening revels. He undertakes this breach of ethics at the behest of the Councillor's elephantine wife. It needs scarcely be said that things go dramatically and hilariously wrong with Ferdie proscribed by the planetary government

and fleeing into the waiting arms of a big-time under
underworld operator.

Ferdie and his well found companion, Mad Jake
Horlibey, escape, by means of a grandstand play
you would have to read to believe, to Knorvarday, a
world ruled by King Napoleon and given over to the
re-enactment by mass-produced epees of every
major battle in the Galaxy's history. It is here
that the remainder of the action takes place.

It is loaded with anachronisms and inconsisten-
encies and there is a message in there if you are
the kind who looks for them. This is the kind of
story that could get completely out of hand very
rapidly. However Bulmer keeps it under control
most of the time. The pace is varied, although I
think it is weakest when Bulmer starts in to moral-
ising and hits its peaks with his racy description
of Ferdie's incredible escapades. A thoroughly
readable story.

-- Lindsay Carroll

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SIODMAK, Curt, 1902-

DONOVAN'S BRAIN. Barrie. 191 p. HC £1.50. (Knopf
1943; Chapman & Hall 1944; various PB eds; in
Famous Fantastic Mysteries Aug 1950; in French,
German, Italian, Portugese, Spanish; two film
versions, one as The Lady and the Monster) Famous
old shocker; dead thug's experimentally revived
brain becomes a superhuman entity.

SMITH, E[dward] E[lmer] 1890-1965

FIRST LENSEMAN; the second novel of the Lensman
Series. W.H.Allen. 256 p. HC £1.75. (Fantasy

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most PB's)
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Current Books

Press 1950; Boardman 1955; Pyramid PB 1964)
TRIPLANETARY; the first novel of the Lensmen Series. W.H.Allen. 254 p. HC £1.75 (In Amazing Jan-Apr 1934; Fantasy Press 1948; Boardman 1954; Pyramid PB 1965) Good to see a new edition of this series. If you haven't read Smith it's time you did: he represents the highest development of the theme of interstellar strife which he virtually began with the Skylark stories. But aside from the action and technological extrapolation the depth and ingenuity of plotting in this series of six books are recommended.

STURGEON, Theodore, 1918-

STARSHINE, Corgi. 160 p. PB 25 np. (Pyramid 1966; Gollancz 1968) Six assorted shorts, three of them among his first few published. Review: Analog Dec 67 p. 164

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