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No. 47

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REVIEWS

The INFINITE MAN, by Daniel F. Galouye
Bantam PB (N7130) 202 p. 95c

Galouye's first book is listed as Dark Universe. Not having read it, I'm at a loss whether to regard this second venture as a wild experiment, or typical of what the author thinks SF is all about.

"Overcomplexity," one of his characters complains, "is what has the Primary One confused." Not just the Primary One, brother -- this reviewer too!

Galouye crams his apocalyptic novel with themes currently enjoying best-seller status: possession, occultism, the drug scene and its spinoffs -- bizarre sects that practice religion with kookie rites. He throws in some improbable scientists, global war with Turkey, metaphysical musings on Good and Evil and winds up with a plot that, baldly, goes like this: --

Director Duncan of Project Genesis discovers to his horror that It, alias The Constructor, alias The Creative Force, has become confused by the supercomplexities of Its own handiwork and taken refuge in a human host: the body of "hopped-up bum 'bo groover" Milton Bradford. Once It has abdicated control, physical and mathematical constants, to say nothing of the laws of chance, begin to alter and fall apart.

Duncan, in a desperate bid to save the universe from collapse, struggles with help of his scientific pals to reach It through Bradford's psyche and beg It to resume control. However their efforts are obstructed by a key colleague who has become unwitting host to the mortal enemy of It -- none other than The Destructive Force. The final battle between these two polarities finishes the book with a BANG (sic).

If this frenzied doomsday stuff has any appeal it's lost on me. But those who freak-out on crystal may think otherwise. Galouye's characters are cardboard. But his hyped-up style comes closest to conviction when he's dealing with the argot and idiosyncrasies of the hippy/dropout scene.

A brew of trendy ideas laced with science gimmicks does not add

up to good SF. Without evidence of insight into the way the mind of a trained scientist works, the thing degenerates into so much nonsense. Galouye has mistaken his genre: mysticism would appear to be more within his scope. I suggest for the future he should concentrate on that.

To sum up: if Armageddon's your bag, there may be something in this for you.

-- Angus Gordon

THREAT

The ALIEN WAY, by Gordon R. Dickson. Bantam PB (N6658) 214 p. 95c
 DEMON SEED, by Dean R. Koontz. Bantam PB (N7190) 182 p. 95c

These two books deal with a favorite theme of SF, that of the threat to mankind's continued existence on this planet. In the first the threat is posed by an alien race, the meeting of which is now regarded as inevitable, provided that man does not first destroy himself by misuse of technology -- this threat being examined by the second novel.

That Dickson's novel was first published by Bantam in 1965 but not since suggests that its initial reception by the SF public was not exuberant, and one may be forgiven for thinking that its reissue is prompted more by the author's winning of the Hugo and Nebula awards subsequently than by any intrinsic merit of the novel itself. Nevertheless it is of interest to read the developmental efforts of a writer of acknowledged talent because, despite the overall mediocre effect of *The Alien Way*, his ability to attractively present characters in dramatic situations is quite apparent.

Dickson's chief asset would appear to be ideas: the method by which contact is made with the aliens is ingenious, as is the conflict between instinct and intellect which in the alien *Rum1* has followed a different evolutionary path -- an understanding of which only the hero, who is in direct telepathic contact with their leader, can glimpse. It is the inability to bind these ideas into a palatable recipe that is the book's failing. The author's reluctance to reveal the plot which is hardly worth concealing leads to an excess of pseudo-dialogue which is indicative of his lack of confidence in

his ability to write attractively. The brilliant fashion in which the alien psychology is pictured is offset by the plodding implausible way in which the humans, apart from the hero, behave. In places the construction is poor, and the presence of superfluous social comment marks the author as decidedly old fashioned. His mathematics also are not over sound. "Every generation or so one like you crops up in a family. Ninety-nine per cent of them end up as disasters. Only," he added softly, "one in a million is...remembered as a success." One can't help wondering about the other 9,999.

Unlike Dickson, Koontz is unlikely to be the recipient of any literary awards, so with any luck we will not see a reissue of *Demon Seed* in eight years' time. The plot concerns a self-regulating computer which takes over a computerised house in which a young woman with various sexual hangups has secluded herself. It is simply unreadable, and on page 57 which was as far as I could get the author himself best describes the situation as "some hideously sick parody of sex."

-- Mouser

ALIEN PLANET, by Fletcher Pratt. Ace PB. 189 p. 75c

This novel was originally published in 1932, and according to the foreword is the last literate science fiction novel to appear in a science fiction magazine wherein the traditional techniques of the "marvelous voyage" and the "manuscript found in a bottle" are combined with a penetrating and satiric representation of human society through the method of exploring an alien culture. By the use of such words as "literate" and "penetrating" this statement is made difficult to refute, and any standard applied to it must vary with each reader.

I found it difficult to decide on how to review this book because of several factors, not the least of which was that the novel is over forty years old and no matter how gifted the author, or how interesting the subject in 1932, the style and theme are naturally dated, and like other SF from the Great Years (as this book is labeled) it has not stood the test of time.

I should state that the only other stories of Fletcher Pratt's I have read are his collaborations with L. Sprague de Camp on Harold Shea's adventures into fantasy, which I enjoyed very much, and perhaps I was expecting too much from Alien Planet. de Camp has said in his article on Pratt in "Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers" (Fantastic, Dec. 1972) that he was the controlling influence in the Shea stories, to Pratt's creative imagination. It is unfortunate that Pratt did not let his imagination go in Alien Planet, as it is quite flat and deadpan, even uninteresting. The hero, Alvin Schierstedt, finds himself blasted into outer space, sets foot on Venus and Mercury and travels to another solar system with almost stoic indifference and little show of emotion.

Briefly: Ashembe, a visitor from the Murasheman solar system, crashlands on Earth in his Cometary Car, makes acquaintance with Alvin, and under threat from the local constabulary takes off, with Alvin, for a tour of the Solar system, in the end returning to his home planet. Then comes a very detailed dialogue on the customs, mores, housing, government, caste system etc. of the Murashomans. All of which finally proves to Alvin that man cannot be happy unless he is free. Any concept of democracy is unknown to the Murashemans and everyone's station in life, career, marriage, children etc., is planned by the Scientific Board. In the last few pages of the book Alvin becomes familiar with a revolutionary group but it is here that the story ends after the group is discovered by the authorities, thus condemning Alvin to the life of a mental or an outcast.

Alien Planet is probably a book for collector's interest only.

-- Peter McKay

** Originally titled A Voice across the Years, and published (Amazing Quarterly Win 1932) as a collaboration with J. M. Stephens, who is not mentioned in this edition. Pratt's part in writing it is not known, but in a number of other cases he revised the work of less talented writers. -- G.S.

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ALL THE GODS OF EISERNON, by Simon Lang. Avon PB (15339) 302 p. 95c

Blurb'd "A Science Fiction Epic", this is a competent, if slightly overwritten novel, that owes as much to the Vietnam War as it does to Dune.

Like Herbert's book it has some of the scope and sweep of myth. But its dialogue is more racy, its legendary history easier to follow and its heroics more direct.

Eisernon, home of the Einai, is a green world of lush jungles -- Vietnam transposed to another planet. Its benevolent rulers for over a thousand years have been the Han: these are a strain of grey-eyed, golden-skinned people, part Earthling, distinguished from their fellows by their green blood and gift of telepathy. Various enemies through fear or envy have reduced their numbers. But a handful continue to survive as monks and physicians in Sum Chi T'ath, the Place of Peace.

Action opens in the heat of battle. Eisernon is being invaded by the Krail, warrior types from another planet. Capture will make it a stepping-stone in their drive to dominate the surrounding stars. Members of the Galactic Federation have come to Eisernon's aid: these include a large predominantly American contingent from Earth.

A rocket strike all but kills Priyam Dao Marik, Han doctor and central figure. Thereafter his fortunes, those of his love Hannem-mishli, their allies and foes are worked out in a crowded fast-moving plot that bristles with medical detail and builds to a poignant -- somewhat unconvincing -- end.

Parallels with Dune abound. The author lacks Herbert's ability to project his own utter belief in the world he has created, but some of Lang's imaginative scenes equal Herbert's, and his characters live and demand our interest.

Both books belong to the tradition of high adventure. This differs from the frankly escapist adventure of the pulps in that it doesn't hammer home that the good guy always wins. Moral values are explored, but the reader is left to draw his own conclusions in a far more moving and subtle way.

At its best this category of writing has almost the timeless, inspirational quality of legend. Those ill at ease with the new surge of what's termed "Life-style SF" may find it both antidote and reassurance.

-- Angus Gordon

MISTER JUSTICE, by Doris Piserchia b/w HIERARCHIES, by John T. Phillifent. Ace Double PB. 176, 141 p. 95c

Mister Justice is a 21st Century combination of The Shadow and The Phantom who time travels. He goes back in time, witnesses an evil deed, but is unable to do anything at the time of the crime due to he's not really there, you see, so he exacts retribution later in his own time. The story starts off like an old time radio or movie serial with slam-bang action in the first chapter. No less than 22 short separate scenes of violence, retribution and Mr. Justice rubbing out wrongdoers present a rapid fire action introduction. The law system of 21st Century USA is nonexistent so he takes it into his own hands.

After the action of the first chapter the remainder of the tale seems to lag a bit. It deals with a search for Mr. Justice to eliminate him by firstly a child genius (who grows up during the book) in the employ of the US Secret Service, and secondly the baddies, who run everything, crooked or legitimate. Many characters now appear but are dealt with only superficially, and I must have missed something in the plot at this stage as I became very confused about what was going on. The authoress makes the story a metaphysical exercise as characters time-jump backwards and forwards and I found I had to concentrate hard to stay with it.

The final scene apparently has only Mr. Justice and the chief baddie, Bingle, left alive in the USA, as Bingle had attempted to become Dictator, anarchy, depression and disease had set in and everyone else perished, was killed off or fled the country.

A macabre character is Bingle's chief assassin, Godiva. I am not really sure where she fits into the story, but she eliminates men at Bingle's request. One fellow she crushes with her arms and legs after performing the sex act (what a way to go), and another is caught by Godiva, stripped and womanually stimulated and probably dies in a fit of ecstasy.

This book is hard reading and I couldn't recommend it for light entertainment. Mrs. Piserchia's prose really turned me on in some isolated parts, but I suppose that is what is wrong with it, it is isolated, with little separate parts, no mingling or concentrated

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wholeness about it, no gelling. But I am sure we will hear more of Mrs. Piserchia's work.

Hierarchies is different. It's straightforward simple Space Opera. Too simple, full of needle guns, oscillating magnetic fields, Computer-Loop Integrated Personality-Profile Examiner and Recorder ships, Pauli-drive generators, punch beams, space pirates, pressor beams, tractor beams, laser rifles, detonite pills, oscillator guns and to top it all the heroes wear suits of invulnerability.

In between all this zapping, beaming and oscillating our heroes, private security agents, wisecrack their way merrily through their adventures in the company of a luscious lady, blond and beautiful, and a pregnant sorki (an alien pet). This is all so familiar to anyone who has ever read anything. The action could have taken place on a luxury liner, on an island, in a desert, in a jungle, among big city gangsters or way out West. However, the author has for better or worse chosen the medium of science fiction to tell his tale. I don't propose to insult anyone's intelligence by going into any detail on the story. We do get a beautiful Freas cover of the blond heroine, scantily clad, with sorki.

There have certainly been better quality Ace Doubles than this one.

-- Peter McKay

MACROSCOPE, by Piers Anthony. Avon PB. \$1.25

This is, to say the least, a large book, and its faults spring from this very fact. It contains enough plots and subplots to generate about another dozen novels. Unfortunately the entirety lacks cohesion, and quite a bit of the time the reader might want to follow up one plot only to be shunted on to another.

Ivo Archer is the non-genius remnant of a conclave of geniuses who were brought up from childhood under special conditions. He alone has the key to the whereabouts of the super-genius Schön (whose name is supposed to give the key to his nature, one I'm afraid I couldn't solve). Just where Schön is to be found becomes fairly obvious before much talking has been done about him. Ivo is called upon by one of the geniuses of his former creche, Brad

Carpenter, to overcome...you'll never guess it...a killer ray, but one with a difference in that it is a mental killer ray, and destroys the genius type intellects which encounter it. Ivo, not being a genius, is presumed immune; and he is too, but not because of his lack of genius.

There is the usual complement of a beautiful female. This one is Brad's girl friend, and even when he is reduced to a drooling idiot by the ray can never be Ivo's, for one unconvincing reason or after another.

One thing I most definitely take issue with the author on is his method of having the characters know their own identity. They are to be dissolved into goo, but what to be sure that they are the same people when they are resurrected. They ensure their subsequent identification by going over each other in entirety. No sexual connotations either, or very few. Quite obviously, though, if they are all false resurrectees they would have false memories, and nothing would be proved by such an examination.

Anthony has a craze for puns, with which he liberally bespatters the book. If you don't like puns you might find it a bit hard to take. All the impossible things (including Ivo's winning an entire satellite in a game) are a bit hard to take, infringing the rule of one basic impossibility per story. Even so, the book is entertaining, and well worth buying.

-- Denise Palmer

The PROBABILITY MAN, by Brian N. Ball. Sidgwick & Jackson HC.

4/4.20

A word of warning for those who like their novels to be complete. This is one of those books where nothing is resolved, and the "hero" (not a very heroic one) finds himself in the same mess as when he began.

It begins well enough by plunging the reader into a mass of events without leading up to them with any explanations, which at times can be tedious. Private Springarn is in the middle of someone else's war, gets himself out of it, discovers he doesn't really know who he is, but has tantalising glimpses of memory. Incidentally,

throughout the book he doesn't ever find out his real name.

Ball introduces the concept of "frames" of reality. These are Re-enactments of old reality" into which people of the 29th Century are written. The writers are the "plot directors", one of whom Springarn used to be. He incurred the enmity of his fellows and the Chief Director by activating the Talisker Frames on a distant planet. The Director tried to find out what was happening in those Frames and found himself transformed into a snake man. The other villain of the piece is the Alien, with which Springarn collaborated to activate the Talisker Frames. Ball also introduces Horace, a robot who certainly never heard of Asimov's Laws, and has an ear for flattery; together with Sergeant Hawk who appears rather more likable than Springarn, and Ethel, who finds herself transformed from a rather ugly dumpy person into something other-eal, with wings on it!

The action is fast, but does not really manage to hide the flaws of the whole thing. The hero becomes rather tedious: one is never quite sure whether he is the "new" Springarn, who is intended to be a goodie, or the old, who is definitely evil, or a rather messy amalgam. Ethel doesn't care which he is: she follows him with an incredible single-mindedness.

One very large fault I have to find with the novel is that no extra reality is allowed to penetrate, external to the Frames and their directing. Springarn does refer to the galaxies of the 29th Century, and to the people thereof, but none apart from the technicians and directors are introduced. One is left at times with the feeling that the entire populace has plunged itself into the worlds of the Frames.

For a reasonable story which doesn't really have an end, go ahead and buy it. One consolation, the continuation has been written, so you can find out how Springarn is eventually extricated from Talisker.

-- Denise Palmer

NEW WRITINGS IN SF, 22, ed. Kenneth Bulmer. Sidgwick & Jackson HC
 £4.60

Taking over a long-time project after the death of its guiding spirit is an unenviable task. Whether Bulmer will choose to follow the late John Carnell's approach closely cannot be deduced from this volume. Of course it has much the same flavor, being written by much the same group that has monopolised the series for years past. It may be accident or design that it does not show the usual emphasis on psychic phenomena.

Taken at face value as a volume of shorts not published before, it is a book worth having. Arthur C. Clarke is represented by the short prologue to the since-published novel *Rendezvous with Rama*, no more than a fragment; Brian W. Aldiss has some meanderings, or ravings if you prefer, which hardly deserve print. Otherwise we have eight stories of varying appeal and approach.

Harry Harrison's *An Honest Day's Work* is an extended joke that some readers may not find very amusing. It does give an unusual slant on the hoary theme of alien invasion of Earth.

Christopher Priest's *The Inverted World* is a short version of the *Galaxy* serial, and has some original thinking behind it if nothing else. There have been few stories seriously treating ideas about really different physical environments, but it is surely one of the things science fiction ought to be about.

Three stories are about interstellar flight and special problems involved, all rather remote contingencies perhaps. E. C. Tubb's *Evano* is a thoroughly nasty piece which I hope is never proved a true prediction. After *Belsen* it is difficult to call anything impossible in treatment of individuals by authority, but this is close, I hope. James White's *Spacebird* is a typical piece of White's queer biology; the title tells the story. S.J. Bounds' *Monitor* takes up the old concept of a quarantine system for returning interstellar explorers in case they bring back something unwelcome.

The remaining three are all deadpan satires. Donald A. Hollheim's *The Rules of the Game* faintly echoes Priest in a way, and recalls Max Sheridan's *Zones of Space* of prewar vintage, in

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which physical laws and constants varied between specific parts of the Universe. Laurence James' *The Square Root of MC* is yet another Liary Colesto story. John Kippax' *The Time Wager* is a remote descendent of Fredric Brown's *Paradox Lost*. Time travel is worn pretty thin now, and is hardly justifiable unless the writor has something new to say about its paradoxes.

On the whole, however, this book is fairly good reading.

-- Trimalchio

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