

Science Fiction

October 10. Pohl and Kornbluth (2).

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last time

Paradoxes of SF and “mass culture”: whither the brow?

Not highbrow but not large-scale publication

Specialized fandom but aspires to popular success

(Pohl as “one of us”)

In-crowd depends on a taste for estrangement

Galaxy and a new(?) position in the SF field

“Maturity,” politics

“finest”

contemporaneity (Hearst memorial/Reagan memorial)

still unravish'd brides

unravish'd brides

The talented slovenliness that would confuse Venus with a star had to come from somebody on Tildy's staff. (7)

composition

***Gravy Planet* (1952)**

pt. 1 = chaps. 1–6. Originally “Fall Campaign,” written by Pohl, submitted to Gold, edited or rewritten by Kornbluth
pt. 2 = chaps. 7–12. Written by Kornbluth, edited by Pohl
pt. 3 = chaps. 13–19, plus 3 more. Written “turn and turn about” (says Pohl; likely mostly by Kornbluth).

***The Space Merchants* (1953)**

widely rejected, finally sold to new publisher Ballantine
re-edited; ends at chap. 19

(sources: Pohl’s 2010 preface; Gary K. Wolfe, notes to
American Science Fiction: Four Classic Novels, 1935–1956)

setting

My main gripe is mostly that this is not really a science fiction story, at least up until this point of about half way into the story, rather it is “Trading places” with a futuristic backdrop. The science is mere exaggerations of Earthly problems without much new conflict to add on. A change in setting would relieve this story of the science fiction heading without hindering any plot points.

“thetinger,” 10/7/13

setting

Brink's Express guards were swarming around our plane, and their lieutenant demanded identification from each emerging passenger. When it was my turn I was what was going on. He looked at my low-number Social Security tattoo thoughtfully and then saluted. (21)

critique (fisherwoman)

Science is *always* a step ahead of the failure of natural resources. After all, when real meat got scarce, we had soyaburgers ready. When oil for civilian purposes ran low, technology developed the pedicab. (19)

critique

Harris, with his coat off, was playing cards with two young employees. Two more were gaping, glassy-eyed, before a hypnoteleset, obviously in trance state. Another man was lackadaisically punching a calculator, one finger system. (68)

(added by the class)

critique

The pattern of the B labor contract was clear. You never got out of debt. Easy credit was part of the system, and so were irritants that forced you to exercise it. (108)

blogging prompt

Group 2: choose a single passage in *The Space Merchants* that seems to you to offer a critique of the present (either the present of 1952 or the present of 2013). Copy out the passage, and explain carefully what the critique is *and how* the novel carries it out.

Group 1: you may write, or comment, in any way you like.

Bonus: find and blog an ad which resonates with the world of advertising as Pohl and Kornbluth render it.

next time

Pohl and Kornbluth: finish the novel