

the reference library *P. Schuyler Miller*

CHRISTMAS STOCKING

During the year I try to report on outstanding "juvenile" science fiction as it is published—at least, on books that might just as well have been carrying the adult label except that they probably sell better to libraries if they're tagged for teens. Occasionally I get my hands on a lot of juveniles at about the same time and suggest them for Christmas gifts or—if you don't see this until after Christmas—as a way of spending some Christmas money. Because there are so many of these books piled up in front of me, I am going to change the usual format of the department and comment on them one by one, from the best on down the line.

"The Programmed Man," by Jean and Jeff Sutton (Putnam; 192 pp.; \$3.95) is one of those stories that might very well have appeared in any of the adult SF magazines—at least those of a few years ago. It's an intricate, lively spy story set in the far future when a galactic

empire is beginning to crumble. This and the next are right in the league with the stories Keith Laumer and Poul Anderson write about the same kind of milieu.

"The Beyond" by the same husband-and-wife team (Putnam; 223 pp.; \$3.75) is almost as good. There's a nicely nasty situation in which the galactic Establishment has exiled all its psionically talented to a prison planet. When a "Beyond," who can teleport, is reported there, they decide even that is not safe enough and send the cops to cut his throat. Only an agent of a more reasonable government agency, himself a telepath, gets there first.

"Dark Piper" is Andre Norton's novel-of-the-fall (Harcourt, Brace & World; 249 pp.; \$4.25). I enjoy her books for the way in which she creates worlds and races, leaving a great deal to her reader's fertile imagination. Even in long series like her "Witch World" books for

Ace, she never spells out the whole background or explains all her puzzles. Some teachers and over-literal adults hate this; the fashion is to dot every "i" and cross every "t". In this book an old soldier returns to a frontier world which wants only to be left to grow deeper moss. It's the end of a planetary war—hard characters are roving space—and he anticipates that they'll be along some day, looking for trouble. When the trouble starts, he and a group of children and teen-agers are holed up in a series of almost forgotten tunnels and caves. He is killed, and the kids grow up by making their own way out into a plague-swept world where mutant lab animals are taking over.

"The Pool of Fire," by John Christopher (Macmillan; 178 pp.; \$4.25) concludes the trilogy that began with "The White Mountains" and "The City of Lead and Gold." Extraterrestrials from a world with what sounds like a chlorine atmosphere have taken over Earth and an underground is trying to defeat them, infiltrating its young people into the invaders' dome cities. We're now among the books that really are juvenile—"written down" to junior high-school level or younger.

"Mission to the Heart Stars," by James Blish (Putnam; 158 pp.; \$3.75) is a sequel to his "The Star Dwellers." His young hero is one of an embassy sent to the rulers of

the confederation which assumes proprietary rights over the entire galaxy, in the hope that they can persuade the stellar bureaucrats to shorten Mankind's fifty-thousand-year probation. They discover that even on a galactic scale, bureaucrats and oligarchs are far from flawless. For my taste, Blish has watered this and the next book down far more than he needed to do—as witness the books by the Suttons, which the same publisher bought, and their long series of extraordinary Heinlein juveniles.

"Welcome to Mars," by Blish (Putnam; 160 pp.; \$3.75) was written before Mariner sent back the photos of the real Mars, but it wasn't necessary to change the book much. For the sake of the story, Mars is given a breathable atmosphere and there are "Martians." For the sake of the twelve-to-sixteen audience, its hero is a backyard genius who equips a tree house with a gravity control, goes zipping off to Mars, is followed by his girl-friend in an even leakier packing-box prototype, and stays alive until the U.S. Cavalry arrives. Unbelievable, but sort of fun.

"Rocket Rescue," by D. S. Halacy, Jr. (W. W. Norton; 192 pp.; \$3.95) brings us down to sixth grade level; the publisher's code says ten to fourteen year olds are the target. It's a simple, straightforward, well told story of almost documentary vein, like some of Heinlein's juveniles but more ele-