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AN OUTSIDER'S IMPRESSION

by

Maurice Wellard

When, in the course of conversation with the Editor, it was suggested that I should attempt a short article, in which I should set forth my objections to science fiction, I was loathe to accept the invitation.

My reason for hesitation was, first, that I do not wish in any way to ridicule, or otherwise deprecate, H.E.B.'s opinions; and second, that, as an outsider to all but the elementary concepts of science and as an absolute layman in the realm of science fiction, my words cannot carry a great deal of weight.

On the other hand, I feel that I cannot let the matter go entirely unchallenged, although I know that criticism is one of the best methods of advertisement.

It is a mere statement of fact that a Pomeranian dog makes a great deal more noise than his larger relative the Great Dane and I wonder if this analogy might not be applied to science fiction. Why all this fuss about one small class of literature? Is it necessary for the 'little dog' of science fiction to bark so loudly in order to draw attention to itself? I have never heard of societies being formed, for example, for the purpose of extolling Wild West writings, or, perhaps to better purpose, Aesop's Fables.

If science fiction is so revolutionary and elevating it can well look after itself, for surely true merit is its own advertisement? The science fiction fan will not allow it; perhaps it shows conceit, or, maybe, fear that his treasures will be scorned or disregarded if he does not herald them with fanfares of trumpets.

As to the literature itself, it can be both amusing and entertaining and often instructive, when it is written in English. But, unfortunately, it is often in a jargon that is not only unintelligible but offensive.

A more literary style would enhance its merits and it has some merit when it is not ridiculous.

That it does sometimes become ridiculous is a fact to be deprecated by the writer and fan if it is to render a true service to mankind.

AXES AGAINST AKKAG

In Red and black the monstrous sky o'erlooked,
 With towering pinnacles of vapour twined,
 Akkag's remote and ancient builded walls
 Whereon the pride of blackest knighthood jibed
 Secure behind those iron bastions raised
 When all their fathers strove unanimous:
 Gigantic task and superhuman toil:
 To raise defence. But now, effete and weak,
 Thaar sons, barbarians' mightier thews must buy;
 For mercenaries' swords are bloodied wet
 And bitter grows the anguish laden air
 As slaves are driven through the echoing gates
 And vile oppression holds Akkag in thrall.

axes Against Akkag !

As wine amphorae bubbled empty, Lords
 Of Life raised shaking hands, the dancers' veils,
 Like sea-spume drifting to a music strange,
 Confused their senses, heightened passions dark,
 While priest-smoke rose in fragrant rainbow hues,
 And all Akkag lay dreaming snugly, we -
 In face of flaming sky and gods' displeasures
 Sent as Plague and Hungry bellies, we -
 In brazen armour plain and scarred,
 Intricate inlay not for us, Advanced
 With axes honed and hungry for the strife,
 Then we, that dreadful desert distance come,
 With Prayer and Jest and Curse went ravening down.

Axes against Akkag !

Splitten skull and shivered spine,
 Viscera spurts from axes seeking,
 Crimson flames besmear the sky,
 Chestly shadows eyeless slaughtered
 Moon rimmed axes steeped in blood.
 Kill and Kill and Kill again.
 Kill until the tumbling towers
 Spill in blazing pyres of sparks,
 Kill until the Dawn lags awe-struck,
 Reluctant shines on corpse sown embers.
 Is the last Lord cut to Ribbons ?
 Is the last Barbarian burnt ?
 Charred and gory, on our axes we may rest.

Axes against Akkag !

In red and black the monstrous sky o'erlooked
 Akkag upon that immolation day.
 By splitten skull and shattered spine and all
 The ghastly cavortings of vengeance wreaked;
 Barbarian tools and Masters' leisured vileness
 Came that day to naught. So we returned,
 Our bellies filled, the lamp of life relit
 Through fairer, cleaner, far more human laws.
 So when in worlds, wherever sited, Lords
 Self styled with mercenary hirelings paid
 With blood and anguish of the common folk
 May flourish - we, with axes gleaming just
 Come ravening down as once we razed Akkag !

Axes against Akkag !
 AXES AGAINST AKKAG !

Harry Beesea.

---oOo---

POST WAR PANACEA

Saint Peter's cross is tall and high
 Above the proud domed Vatican,
 Bright gilded symbol raised by man,
 Beyond whose veil he dare not pry,
 Must never ask a what or why;
 But bowed beneath the Roman ban
 Unthinking life decays. Oh can
 his bondage pass without a sigh ?

Black and smoky stands Saint Paul's,
 Rubble ringed and faithful yet,
 Shoulders dusty from the strife
 Rising as the trumpet calls:
 Here are Britain's troubles met,
 Here begins our fuller life.

H.K.B., Italy, 8-8-45.

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EDITORIAL

It would, perhaps, be unethical not to point out that "An Outsider's Impression" was written in 1943 after frequent discussions between Maurice Wellard and the editor on the real value of science fiction. Maurice is a completely normal type of person who reads "Good" books and is as well cultured as most people are today. His attitude towards science fiction you may judge for yourself. "The Only Flower" by Jack Curtis originally appeared in "Unique" Vol.1.No.3. for April, 1938. Editorial address is: 84, Drayton Park, Highbury, London, N.5. England.

H.K.B.

THE ONLY FLOWER

by Jack Curtis

For many days he travelled through a country where the sun never shines. There are many shadows and one may not see too far into the distance for the twilight and the mists obscure the light. There is a path that follows a narrow stream through the forest, among the huge trees that seem to be furtively watching. Perhaps there is a stealthy movement among the everpresent shadows and the traveller draws his cloak more closely about him and walks along a little faster. But still the trees rustle ominously, although there is no wind; the mist swirls.

The path crosses a marsh where the reeds sigh and whisper among themselves, while the traveller's feet bruise the cold snails and the fat adder hisses among the damp rocks. There are little pools of water in which many legged insects engage in soundless death struggles. Water snakes glide swiftly across the path and huge frogs blink their glossy eyes.

Once, long ago, there was an adventurer who travelled this dismal route. He was called Garthymir and he came in a many-oared boat from a sunny island far across the sea. He left his boat on the clean sea beach and set out across the desert toward the land of shadows and mist.

For many days he travelled until, at night, the stars had changed their constellations and the nocturnal winds brought strange odours which troubled his mind and stirred to life half-forgotten memories of things in another existence.

At last, the day melted imperceptibly into a grey twilight and he knew that he was entering the land of shadows. He passed thru the dark forest; still there was a furtive movement of the ominous trees and the shadows crept in stealthy undulation. He came to the marsh; the cold reptiles blinked at him and the many legged insects rustled in the reeds. Still the dank mist swirled about him and through the grey twilight, vast indistinct shapes seemed to move.

He followed the path to its logical conclusion, through the dim forest, across the miasmatic swamp, to the Outer Shore.

There the character of the road changed: it was no longer an indistinct trail or a weed grown path; it had become a stone-paved highway - a deserted highway passing through a lonely countryside, parched and arid, a lifeless desert. Above, strange stars of jewel colours casted their unwavering light on the traveller and the empty road before him.

For a long time he travelled, until, behind him, the road narrowed and vanished; and the gloom concealed the distance he had traversed.

Ahead, a vast form was gradually materialising from the surrounding shadows, a monstrous citadel of dull granite. Battlements and towers rose in distorted confusion, resembling a huge hideous mushroom growth. There was no sign of any inhabitants; no glimmer of lights from the narrow windows; no sound of the tread of weary sentry, pacing the grey hours. There was only a great gateway, like the gaping jaws of some malignant monster.

Through the sinister portals Garthymir entered, hardly conscious of the giant war machines looming in the obscurities of the

court yard. Through a second huge arch and through a second court he continued until he encountered a colossal steel door set in the massive walls of grey stone. He touched the door and it swung inward, soundlessly; revealing a long corridor.

From the end of the corridor flickering gleam emanated; a light that seemed to be iridescent—now one colour and now another. He went toward the gleam and found himself in a hall of such proportions that vapours obscured the ceiling and rows of columns marched away in straight lines to the vanishing point of perspective.

Before him lay a pool from which clouds of marvelous and strange colours rose. Fascinating tones of fragile celandine; smouldering burnt orange; shrill, screaming cerise, pulsating cinnabar and others still more weird and beautiful.

As the vapours rose, each tint produced a different effect on him. Some caused him to feel deliciously warm or pleasantly cool others brought the sense of lush tropic nights, the hot, throbbing darkness of the jungle. One seemed a tinkle of music from tiny silver bells, the sound of which crystallized into a gracefully curved arch that sparkled for an instant, then faded. Another brought to his mind vast surges of the open sea, with the soft green fragrance of sandal wood, a hypnotic contrapuntal rhythm of hollow drums, murmurs of ecstasy, flaming words in a marvellous forgotten language.

The colours slowly faded and in the centre of the pool appeared the Only Flower.

As its outlines gradually took form, Garthymir felt a surge of desire so tremendous that, for an instant, the gigantic columns ceased their endless marching toward the distance and a blaze of light filled the hall, blinding him with its intensity. He moved toward the pool, which seemed to have grown smaller, and, leaning over, took in his hand the Only Flower.

Immediately a brazen gong-note vibrated about and thru him, and the hall misted and vanished.

He was again standing on the stone-paved highway, under the jewel stars holding in his hand the Only Flower.

For a long time he journeyed until again the grey dusk obscured the way he had come, and ahead appeared the chill swamp, with its ever-changing mists. He crossed the marsh where the insects fought in the pools and the cold reptiles blinked their glassy eyes at him. But when he had passed through the brooding forest with its furtive trees and had almost reached the yellow desert, he stopped.

For the little old grey spider who crouches in his shadowy cave spinning his dusty web, had laughed a little silver laugh because he knew. And he reached down with fingers of mist, and lifted Garthymir up and hung him on the web.

What became of the Only Flower no man knows, and hardy adventurers still seek in obscure places hoping some day to find it.

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