

THE BRITISH

# SCIENTIFICTION

FANTASY REVIEW

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AUGUST, 1937

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# SCIENTIFCTION

## THE BRITISH FANTASY REVIEW

Editor: WALTER H. GILLINGS

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Vol. 1. No. 4

August, 1937

## GO OUT AND PREACH!

By THE EDITOR

IT is most encouraging to observe that, despite the reputation they have gained as merciless critics, science fiction fans have found **Tales of Wonder**, the experimental magazine of British fantasy, to their liking. With very few exceptions, those who have instinctively compared it with its American forebears have decided that, although it is of necessity much more restrained, it is, on the whole, well worth their shilling. From a less personal viewpoint, they are mostly of the opinion that it represents a good start for scientification in this country, since its very restraint is calculated to ensure the ordinary reader's continued interest once it has been aroused.

All eagerly inquire when they can expect further issues; but for the moment it is impossible to say if there will be any, although prospects are definitely promising. The present issue will remain on sale as long as nonchalant newsagents care to stock it, and the number of copies sold cannot be computed until the surplus of those distributed is returned to the publishers; but once this has been ascertained they will be in a position to make an announcement which, it is hoped, will not prove disappointing.

Meanwhile the chance of a favourable verdict will be strengthened if fans who have read and enjoyed the magazine will do their utmost to introduce it to their friends and persuade them to buy copies, if they are not already aware of it. Since it has not been widely advertised, except amongst established readers, it depends a great deal upon personal recommendation if enough new converts are to be made to ensure the success of this initial—and vital—experiment. If, therefore, science fiction fans want to assure themselves of more **Tales of Wonder**, they must see to it that others are available to supply the minimum circulation necessary for further issues.

By so doing they will also be assisting the progress of **Scientifiction**, whose influence has already been extended by this latest development and whose future success is to a great extent dependent upon its outcome. Many who previously were unaware of the existence of a Review of science fiction have had their interest aroused by the appearance of the first British publication presenting it; and it is only by securing the interest and support of a wider circle of readers that **Scientifiction** can continue to fulfil the useful purpose it has already demonstrated, and which more and more enthusiasts are recognising.

So don't forget to do your bit . . . Go out and preach!

# HOW SCIENTIFICTION BEGAN

## Hugo Gernsback's Great Experiment

By "FANTASIA"

SCIENTIFICTION, as we know it best—through the pages of specialised magazines—is but eleven years old. Yet there are many readers who, having been converted to it more recently, know little of the various stages through which it has passed. Mainly for their benefit, therefore, I propose to tell for the first time the fascinating story of its gradual development in America since the days of the first science fiction magazine. Though I have also in mind the possible evolution of British scientifiiction through similar stages, now that it has commenced its career in periodical form.

It was in April, 1926, that there appeared on America's crowded newsstands a new kind of magazine. Nothing quite like it had been seen before, although its contents were not new, consisting largely of reprinted stories by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe. Adopting for it the appropriate title of **Amazing Stories**, its editor, Hugo Gernsback, introduced it as the magazine of Scientifiiction, a word he coined himself, meaning "charming romances intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision."

Gernsback, an enterprising New York publisher, was first to see the possibilities of such stories as subject for specialisation, and had introduced them many years before into his other "Experimenter" publications—**Modern Electrics, Science and Invention, Radio News**. Increasing demands for this type of story prompted him to launch a magazine to publish science fiction exclusively, making an irresistible appeal to lovers of imaginative literature and those seeking scientific knowledge in palatable form. He emphasised: "Not only do these amazing tales make interesting reading—they are also instructive . . ."

### Fiction and Fact

He pointed out their prophetic value, showing that predictions made by Wells and Verne in their fantastic romances were becoming—and had become—fact; adopted the motto, "Extravagant Fiction To-

day—Cold Fact To-morrow," to reflect the spirit of the magazine. The title-page pictured Verne's tomb at Amiens, portraying his immortality—a symbol that became very familiar to readers in later years.

Said pioneer Gernsback in the first of his popular editorials: "New inventions pictured in the scientifiiction of to-day are not impossible of realisation to-morrow. Many great science stories destined to be of historical interest are still to be written, and **Amazing Stories** will be the medium through which they will come to you. Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature but progress as well."

The magazine was an instant success. All magazines are at first. Its readers were so delighted, they wanted it published twice monthly, and Gernsback was overwhelmed with expressions of appreciation from the nucleus of what was later to become a vast circle of fanatical science fiction fans. Of course, there were critics. Many who encountered the magazine could not stomach the apparently wild ideas it presented. Gernsback replied to their attacks, defending his "impossible" stories with the argument that one day they might come true. He formulated his policy on this foundation in inviting authors to write for his new magazine, allowing them free rein to their imaginations so long as they based their speculations on scientific fact.

### Early Stories

But the stories grew more and more imaginative as issue succeeded issue. Fantastic adventures on other worlds and in the mysterious Fourth Dimension, time travel, cosmic disasters, artificial life, giant insects, immortality, invisibility, war between the planets: all these startling themes, which have since been exploited again and again, made the contents of the magazine amazing indeed!

For in addition to the stories of Wells and Verne—"Off on a Comet," "A Trip to the Centre of the Earth,"

"The Man Who Could Work Miracles," "The Island of Dr. Moreau"—reprints were made of the work of American authors of this type. Among these were Professor Garrett P. Serviss, G. Peyton Wertenbaker, George Allan England, Murray Leinster, Austin Hall, whose names are seldom if ever seen in the science fiction magazines to-day. Their stories were illustrated by crude drawings, the work of one who was to become "the world-famous Paul," and followed by others equally gifted in fantastic art.

Attractive titles—"The Man Who Saved the Earth," "The Man from the Atom," "The Runaway Sky-scraper," "A Columbus of Space," "The Mad Planet"—headed the pages of those early issues, now so prized by the few collectors who possess them, coveted by those who do not. Years afterwards, when a demand for back numbers led to a buying-and-selling racket amongst fans, they were sold for many times their original price of 25 cents. To-day the first issue is fetching two dollars in America!

The fact that most of the stories in the first few numbers had appeared elsewhere gave some readers the impression that the magazine would publish only reprints. Editor Gernsback dispelled this idea by declaiming: "To-day is the day of Scientifiction. Authors, great and small, are taking more and more to this type of fiction, and we are getting an excellent supply of stories." His problem was not to find enough new material but to find room for all the reprints demanded by readers, and as the magazine progressed new stories took up more and more space, so that several promised reprints did not appear.

### The First Fans

Three months after launching the magazine, Gernsback engaged C. A. Brandt, "greatest living expert on scientifiction," to help deal with the material submitted. Brandt, who became Literary Editor, had by then collected almost every piece of science fiction ever published in English, German, French and Scandinavian. He is still with the magazine, like Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane (Associate Editor), who subsequently became Editor. These two stalwarts

have seen **Amazing Stories** go through many metamorphoses, of which I hope to tell later.

Meanwhile, see how Gernsback discovered the germ of that delightful disease, science fiction mania, which even then afflicted a few, and which later became an epidemic so infectious as to sweep two continents:—

"One of our greatest surprises since we started publishing **Amazing Stories** is the tremendous amount of mail we receive from—shall we call them 'Scientifiction Fans'?—who seem to be pretty well orientated in this sort of literature. From the suggestions for reprints that are coming in, these 'fans' seem to have a hobby all their own of hunting up scientifiction stories . . . There is not a day that passes but we get from a dozen to fifty suggestions as to stories of which, frankly, we have no record, although we have a list of some 600 or 700 . . . Some of these fans are constantly visiting the book stores with the express purpose of buying new or old scientifiction tales, and they even go to the trouble of advertising for some volumes that have long ago gone out of print . . ."

I wonder—did he realise what he had started . . . ?

(To be Continued)

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Howard V. Brown has illustrated all **Thrilling Wonder's** covers except the current (August) issue, done by Wesso.

Future issues of **Thrilling Wonder** will contain "The Mind Magnet," by Paul Ernst, "When the Earth Lived," by Henry Kuttner, and "The Tenth World," by John W. Campbell, Jr.

"Pulpwood Editor," autobiography of Harold Hersey, American editor, has a section devoted to science and weird fiction magazines.

"The World of To-morrow" is the title of a series of boys' books now being published by George Newnes.

**Les Primaires**, the French magazine, is publishing several of Dr. David H. Keller's stories.

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**COLLECTORS!** Advertise for those books and magazines you want in **Scientifiction**. Two words, one penny; minimum twelve words. —15 Shere Road, Ilford.

# MESSAGES FROM SPACE

Relayed by "The Moon Man"

**B**ELATED arrival of science fiction in Britain has inspired its hitherto discouraged authors to greater efforts. Dust-covered MSS, long since dispirited of as unfit for U.S., unwanted here, now being exhumed and revived for future use . . . Several writers also busy producing new stories, both for American and hoped-for English markets, mainly due to invigorating appearance of **Tales of Wonder** . . . Though smarting under severe review of his "Crisis!—1992," by C. A. Brandt in August **Amazing** ("exceedingly poor, amateurish attempt, not worth reading"), Benson Herbert has written another novel titled "Universe Ultimate," dealing with manufacture of universes in cosmic laboratory . . . Says he: "I'm positive it's the cover of **Tales of Wonder** gave me the spurt of energy!" Full name of cover artist "Nick," by the way, is John Nicholson . . .

Maurice G. Hugi and Festus Pragnell among those now trying to please transatlantic editors. Hugi, just "Tubby" to his friends in view of his 17 stone, has never appeared in America yet, but determined to do so . . . For first time since '33, **Amazing** has accepted short story by Pragnell called "The Brain of the Hive," describing how scientist intercepts thoughts of bees . . .

## U.S. AUTHOR'S VISIT

Not content with sudden science fiction success, Eric Frank Russell aiming to make debut in **Black Mask**, quick-fire Yank detective mag. "If I can crash the crime pulps," he says, "It's fare-thee-well to 's.f.' except for when I'm smitten with a dumbfounding plot." . . . Likewise, John Russell Fearn, tired of thinking out thought variants, plans to follow up his now regular appearances in **Thrilling Mystery** with stories in similar mags . . . Also working on book-length detective yarn for England and novel of Blackpool life, based on his own experiences. These will keep him occupied for two years . . . His "Climatic Control," just accepted by **Amazing**, reveals in "Man Who Stopped the Dust" fashion what would happen if we had cloudless skies at will . . . Raymond Z. Gallun, Wisconsin author, wrote Fearn recently: "Periodically I get a yen to roam and I have a habit of yielding to the yen." Fearn wrote back inviting him to Blackpool, expects to see him over here shortly . . .

## SFA STILL GROWING

Recently-joined Los Angeles members have formed branch of the British Science Fiction Association, which is attracting more and more U.S. fans

**Astounding** Editor F. Orlin Tremaine just accepted honorary membership, with Prof. A. M. Low and Dr. Olaf Stapledon . . . Latest projects are science fiction circulating library for use of members and launching of **Amateur Science Stories** to publish their literary efforts, selected by judging committee . . . Author-members Russell and Pragnell dropped hints to tyro-writers in SFA Quarterly **To-morrow**. Warned Russell: "Don't take it for granted that because your first story has been accepted you know all the answers and have nothing else to learn . . . An author has finished his education the day he is lowered into his grave . . ."

To those desiring to assist development of British fantasy by writing for future (?) issues of **Tales of Wonder**, Editor Walter H. Gillings says: "New ideas and thought variant plots are not necessary . . . The more simple, straightforward story is required in order that it shall be acceptable to a reading public unused to the many fantastic notions introduced into American science fiction . . . In this country, development of the science-fantasy medium is only just beginning and **Tales of Wonder** has to go over all the old ground again if it is to capture the interest of a public large enough to enable it to survive . . ."

## TAKE YOUR PICK!

"Radium," by Rudolf Brunngraber (Harrap, 8/6), published recently, described by Peter Belloc, **Daily Sketch** critic, as "best scientific novel I have read

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# SOCK HIM, FANS—HE CAN TAKE IT!

Eric Frank Russell, England's Newest and Toughest Author, Says A Mouthful

With only four stories published as yet, the champion of realism and humour in fantasy reveals in an interview his intense dislike of the "active" science fiction reader, whilst inviting the rest to help him with their criticisms.

A TOUGH guy, well over six feet tall, with smiling face and twinkling eyes, and a pair of huge hands that give the impression they would be more at home punching cattle in the wide open spaces than tapping a typewriter—that's Eric Frank Russell, latest recruit to Britain's small band of science fiction authors, and one who is destined to go far, if he continues at his present rate of progress.

It was but a few months ago that this hard-boiled, likeable Liverpoolian brought to American fantasy what it had lacked for a long time—humour. Endowed with true genius for inventing sparkling witticisms of his own special brand, he writes in a breezy, vigorous style which is more American than English, yet creates an effect of realism that many transatlantic writers have failed to convey. He has ideas, too, and although we have as yet seen little of his work, it is evident from the enthusiasm with which it has been received that we shall be seeing a lot of this new author; therefore, I make no apology for introducing him to you so soon.

Aged 32, a commercial traveller by profession, Russell lives with his wife and three-year-old daughter, Erica, at Orrell, Liverpool, where until recently he did much pioneer work for the British Interplanetary Society. His friend and colleague in this work was Leslie J. Johnson, former BIS secretary, with whom he collaborated in writing the time-travel story, "Seeker of To-morrow," which marked his third appearance in *Astounding Stories* last month.

"I wrote the story, while Johnson provided the plot," he boomed at me in a deep bass voice by way of explanation. "In other words, he

produced the skeleton; I put the flesh on it and clothed it."

## Readers Know Best

He started this way two years ago, having previously confined himself to writing articles for various magazines, many being of a scientific nature. One of his most notable achievements in this line was a series of articles on "Interplanetary Communication" which ran for nearly a year in a monthly publication circulating privately, and was illustrated with drawings, graphs and diagrams done by himself. He had by then also won several prizes for his poems, some sixty of which appeared in all sorts of magazines—"You know, those effusions nobody reads, but which editors find handy as fillers . . ."

On turning his hand to science fiction, he decided that the best judge of what the reader wants is not the author or editor, but the reader himself. So he invited his fellow fantasy fans to provide him with their ideas and started to turn them into stories written in collaboration. But his first effort, "Eternal Re-diffusion," whose plot Johnson also provided, was rejected by the American magazines on the ground that it embraced a theory which would go over most readers' heads.

His first effort to get into print was "A Saga of Pelican West," which appeared in last February's *Astounding*, and received a mixed reception for its disregard of the scientific element, though it was liked for its racy humour. As he described it, "It was just a thick-ear yarn which I expected would get brickbatted to blazes. I deliberately slanted it at *Thrilling Wonder*, as it was all action and no science, and when *Astounding* grabbed it I was thunderstruck."

### Criticism Welcomed

This story and "The Great Radio Peril," which followed in the April **Astounding**, were Russell's unaided efforts, but he has also written stories—not yet published—in collaboration with Arthur C. Clarke, **BIS** treasurer, and a Spanish author named A. Miguel Gautisolo. His only other story to appear in print to date is "The Prr-r-eeet," which has proved to be one of the most popular yarns in **Tales of Wonder**. Most of his early efforts would have been published long before if the British fantasy magazine planned by Newnes last year, for which they were originally written, had materialised.

Amongst his neatly-typed MSS now seeking acceptance are "They Who Sweep," a sequel to "The Saga," which takes its title from one of his poems of space-travel; "Trumpeter, Sound the Recall!" a story of future warfare in which 100,000,000 men get killed because one man throws away a banana-skin; "The Atompacker," with menace-from-space theme treated in humorous style; and "Submicrowave Hypnosis," showing how thought control is put on a business basis.

"And don't forget," he admonished me, "that if you read any of my yarns and think them absolutely lousy, I'll be tickled to death to hear it—and get your reasons for the lousiness thereof. All my readers—or both of them—need not hesitate to sock me if they think I deserve it. I'm tough enough to take anything they like to dish out, and it's only genuine criticism that can set my senile feet in the right direction.

### It Comes Easy to Him!

"Though, in fairness to myself, I must say I haven't yet written a single story in which the leading characters feature as irresistible forces that overcome immovable objects. Sometimes I picture them as helpless victims of forces beyond their control, but in every case they get themselves out of their difficulties by dint of ordinary human ingenuity coupled with favourable circumstances. In other words, I try to picture them as ordinary human beings, full of human faults and failings, and not up-to-date versions of Marzipan the Magician.



ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

"Considering that most of the science in what we call science fiction is absolute balderdash, and that even scientists themselves cannot strictly define what is and what's not science, the most important thing in writing science fiction seems to me to make it plausible. And that's where I have an advantage over many authors," he added with a grin. "For, being a commercial traveller, I can tell thumping whoppers with complete gusto and get away with it . . ."

### Started Young

In his time, Russell has also been a soldier, telephone operator, quantity surveyor and government draughtsman. He's been around, too. Born at Sandhurst, he's lived in Chatham, Croydon, Bradford, Aldershot, Longmoor, Portsmouth, Weymouth, Pembroke Dock, Brighton and Southport, as well as Alexandria, Cairo, Khartoum and Port Tewfik. While in Egypt, in his early youth, he spoke Arabic fluently—"but now I can remember little more than the best cuss-words."

He considers he looks unusually sane for one who dabbles in science fiction, which he claims to have read for 25 years. "My first introduction to it was at the age of seven, when I absorbed 'The Water Babies,' and followed up that classic thought variant with the Brothers Grimm's 'Snow White and Rose-Red.'

"The six best science fiction yarns I've ever read are Paul Ernst's 'In-

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# "TALES OF WONDER" GETS HOME!

British Science Fiction Magazine Excites Fans,  
Attracts Many New Readers

**G**REAT interest and enthusiasm has been aroused by **Tales of Wonder**, Britain's trial magazine of science fiction, which appeared at the end of June and is still on sale. Distributed throughout the British Isles and on the Continent, it has attracted the attention of a large number of readers to whom it is something entirely new, as well as hundreds of fantasy fans who were eagerly awaiting its publication.

As yet it cannot be determined whether the magazine has made a favourable impression upon the ordinary reader for whom it was primarily designed, nor if its unique appeal has been strong enough to enable the publishers to pronounce the experiment a success. For this can only be decided in terms of copies sold, and as no reports are available at the time of going to press, it is too early to state with certainty if sales will justify further developments of this sort.

## Fans Want More

But it is evident from many encouraging letters received from enthusiastic readers that science fiction fans, at any rate, are delighted with the issue and anxious that more should follow. No sooner had **Tales of Wonder** appeared on the bookstalls than they, having devoured and weighed up its contents, hastened to send their congratulations to the publishers and Editor, declaring almost unanimously that it is equal to—in some respects, better than—the familiar American products.

Many confess their surprise at the excellence of the magazine and the stories it contains, admitting that it exceeds all their expectations. Others express admiration for the way in which the issue has been presented so as to appeal to the reader who is unfamiliar with American scientifiiction and still be of absorbing interest to such hardened readers as themselves. Opinions naturally vary as to the merits of the various stories, but the general verdict is to pronounce the issue, as a

whole, and considering it is the first of its kind in England, of a standard superior to many of those coming from U.S.

## American Stories?

It should be emphasised that there is no particular desire to compete with the American publications, whose more advanced stories are generally preferred by the old-established reader, but whose startlingly imaginative conceptions are presented in such a manner as to be incomprehensible to the uninitiated reader. It is hoped that **Tales of Wonder**, with its comparatively simple stories, will meet with sufficient response to enable it to develop this medium all over again, and so create a wider interest in science fiction generally.

In this respect, the views of F. Orlin Tremaine, Editor of **Astounding Stories**, America's leading fantasy magazine, are of special interest. In a recent letter to Walter H. Gillings, Editor of **Tales of Wonder**, he states: "Instead of fearing the coming of a British competitor into the field, I look forward to the time when such may exist, because I feel the interest developed would have a secondary value to us in extending the influence of **Astounding Stories**."

It is probable that, if further issues of **Tales of Wonder** are published, as is confidently expected, stories by American authors will be used as well as those of the British writers represented in the current issue, with others. Reprints, if published at all, will be kept to a minimum, and only consist of stories which have not been available to the majority of science fiction readers.

The present issue will remain on sale for several weeks, and it is hoped to make a definite announcement as to whether another will follow in the next issue of **Scientifiiction**.

## WHAT FANS SAY

Following are extracts from fans' letters giving their reactions to the magazine:—



"It came as a pleasant surprise to find what a good effort has been made to encourage fantasy in this country. Opinions will no doubt be strongly divided; but the non-science fiction reader for whom the magazine is mainly designed should easily understand the themes of the stories, thoroughly enjoy them, and ask for more. One cannot expect an entirely new magazine of this nature to start with super-thought-variant themes, which would be alien to probably 95 per cent. of British readers . . . For a first effort of this kind, the artist made an extremely good job of the cover, which is particularly striking and apt to attract the bookstall browser's attention."—Edward J. Carnell (Plumstead).

"The Editor has carried out a difficult task in an admirable manner. Frankly, I had thought it impossible to provide science fiction suitable for the beginner and for the rabid fan in the same magazine . . . There is a tone about **Tales of Wonder** which no American magazine possesses, possibly because the stories are written in good English. If I tell you that it left me in the state of breathless exhilaration which the magazines of 1932-3 used to, but which I have not experienced of recent years, you will realise how much I enjoyed it."—J. M. Rosenblum (Leeds).

#### "Just What We Wanted"

"**Tales of Wonder** is good; just what we wanted in this country. Written in the English vein, the stories have just the necessary polish to make the magazine perfect. I am looking forward to the next issue, and hope it won't be long. Just one word of advice: please don't start a picture-serial such as appears in **Thrilling Wonder** these days."—Norman Barratt (South Merstham).

"I read **Tales of Wonder** with great interest and send you my sincerest compliments on a really remarkable achievement . . . You have set a standard in your first issue that it would be hard for the American magazines to beat, in spite of their long experience with such stories. I only hope you will have enough support to bring out further issues."—Arthur C. Clarke (Paddington).

"A regular reader of the three American science fiction magazines, I was overjoyed to find **Tales of Wonder** on the bookstalls. This fine magazine should be published at least quarterly; better still, monthly or semi-monthly, even if it should render necessary the reprinting of old stories. Though new stories are preferred, I should not object to reprints (Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe excepted)."—T. Moulton (Blackpool).

"For a country that previously had no more to offer than **Scoops**, I think **Tales of Wonder** is no mean achievement . . . The material used is of a reasonable 'magazine science fiction' standard, and the merits of John Beynon's 'The Perfect Creature' and Eric Russell's 'The Prr-reet' contributed much to my enjoyment of the issue. I imagine that stories of this type will be most successful in luring the necessary 20,000 readers."—Maurice K. Hanson (Leicester).

#### AN AUTHOR'S OPINION

Here is a review of **Tales of Wonder** by Benson Herbert, the British author whose story, "The Elixir of Death," unfortunately had to be omitted from the magazine, but which is included in the current **Mystery Stories**, published by World's Work:—

The first issue of **Tales of Wonder** (he writes) seems well calculated to attract a wide class of readers. The cover alone is sufficient to intrigue anyone with imagination, and the format and neatly-cut pages come as a relief after the American pulps. As to the contents, readers of H. G. Wells will feel quite at home with the themes of "Superhuman," "Man of the Future" and "The Perfect Creature," while to satisfy the regular fans we have "Seeds from Space," "Revolt on Venus" and "Invaders from the Atom."

The stories which will probably appeal most to English readers are those which portray the reactions of ordinary folk to abnormal events, such as the delightful comments of P. C. Stubbs in "Invaders from the Atom." This story makes good use of this type of science fiction, for what could be more appropriate than the anti-climax of Rama San, after his momentous journey from

an atomic universe, gazing with puzzlement at the varied assortments in a village shop-window?

### Too Steep?

Although, from another angle, I do not feel altogether happy about Mr. Hugi's story, since the plot is likely to be strange and difficult to grasp for English readers. Moreover, it starts with the wonders and only comes down to the reactions of human beings half-way through the story. In contrast to this, "Seeds of Space" should appeal to the uninitiated, for it commences with the human characters until we get to know them thoroughly; then the wonders are cautiously introduced by slow degrees until at last the highly original plot is completely revealed.

In one feature at least, most of the stories score over those of our American friends—in plausibility of style, which should also make for the success of the magazine. "Monsters of the Moon" is "tops" for plausibility. It would be difficult to find another short story giving such a graphic and realistic picture of the possible conditions on the Moon's surface. For this well-thought-out story and the striking "Seeds from Space" we should be able to look forward confidently to the continuance of the first serious science fiction magazine published in this country.

**[What do YOU think of Tales of Wonder? Write in and tell the Editor; your opinion is valued.]**

## FANTASY'S TOUGH GUY—Continued from Page 7

credible Formula,' Dr. Breuer's 'Gostak and the Doshes,' Hans Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes,' Alexander Phillips' 'Martian Gesture,' Weinbaum's 'Martian Odyssey' and Norman Knight's 'Frontier of the Unknown.' My three favourite authors are Charles Fort, Charles Fort and Charles Fort.

"I consider Fort the only real genius science fiction ever had, and when I get fed up with one of his books I simply look around for another—by Charles Fort. Incidentally, I believe I'm the only one this side of the Pond who has his 'Lo!' 'Wild Talents' and 'Book of the Damned,' and I'm hoping to complete the collection before I die by obtaining his 'New Lands.' My only regret is that he didn't live long enough for me to meet him in person.

### Hard Words

"Now let me tell you my pet bugbear. This is the very small proportion of science fiction readers who regard themselves as the only real supporters of it. They are a small but noisy crowd who save up all the magazines after they've well and truly brickbatted each issue, form small and useless societies which satisfy their own conceit on the principle that the smaller the puddle the bigger the frog looks, and finally acquire a second-hand duplicator and turn out reams of

mimeographed illiteracy.

"These are the guys who write goofy letters to the letter, organise 'staple wars,' and generally scandalise one another. I fancy they consist mostly of callow youths between fourteen and twenty who suffer from inferiority complex, superfluous energy and dreadful hickies, and find themselves at the awkward stage of life when they're too old for marbles and too young for women. To me it's a matter of great satisfaction that the leading science fiction magazine has adopted the policy of ignoring these moronic children as persons of no consequence whatever."

W.H.G.

**(In the next issue—an interview with John Russell Fearn).**

"Galactic Patrol," fifth story of Dr. E. E. ("Skylark") Smith, begins in September **Astounding**.

"A Comet Passes," by Eando Binder. "The Hothouse Planet," by Arthur K. Barnes, and "The Cavern of the Shining Pool," by Arthur Leo Zagat, will be in the October **Thrilling Wonder**.

An omnibus volume of the late H. P. Lovecraft's tales, poems and essays is being prepared by Donald Wandrei and August W. Derleth.

Artists Brown and Wesso will do **Astounding's** cover illustration alternately in future.

## Fantasy Book Reviews

### THE WONDER OF WEINBAUM

DAWN OF FLAME and Other Stories, by Stanley G. Weinbaum  
(Milwaukee Fictioneers, \$2.50)

WHEN, about three years ago, I came across "A Martian Odyssey" in one of the magazines, amidst a lot of pretty dull stuff, I did a thing one seldom can do with a pulp magazine story—read it straight through twice. It had that little extra something the others hadn't got. Here among a lot of science fiction painfully ground out to pattern was a story which seemed to breathe fresh life into the whole business, by someone who had really enjoyed writing it.

I made a note of the author's name—Stanley G. Weinbaum—and thought to myself that if he could do it again, more confidently, he would make dull, uninspired hacks of the rest of us. I looked forward to seeing that fresh, charming imagination grow more certain and communicable as experience gave increased sureness of touch. So it did—rapidly—until, to our great loss, it was cut short at the end of 1935.

His literary associates have now published a Memorial Volume of Weinbaum's tales comprising "A Martian Odyssey" and "The Worlds of If," reprinted from *Wonder Stories*; "The Lotus Eaters," "The Mad Moon," "The Red Peri" and "The Adaptive Ultimate" from *Astounding*, the last having appeared under the pseudonym, John Jessel; and a hitherto unpublished novelette which gives its title to the whole.

#### What Might Have Been

Reading his stories together in this way, one can see how Weinbaum's confidence with his pen increased while his imagination lost none of its freshness, his light humour none of its tickle. In all of them there is a pleasant freedom from excess verbiage, a direct approach—in a word, simplicity. He had another sense, too, which never played him false, an instinctive appreciation of what might be taken for granted and what must be explained. It was part of that directness and restraint which he seems

not to have learned as he went along but to have used from the beginning.

The title story differs from the rest in that it gives the impression he was writing more in his own vein without cocking a mental eye at any particular editor; and he goes along with greater gusto than ever. It looks forward to the 23rd century, when western civilisation has broken down and a new world is in process of erection.

He builds his state of affairs logically, so that one feels it could exist, expressing the results of much observation and cogitation with a simplicity that shows no straining after invention. His perception of the features which may be assumed without explanation is shown here better than anywhere; equally remarkable is the restraint with which he has confined himself to a purely objective view. To set such a scene and allow no shred of cynicism or satire to show through it implies the attitude of the real artist.

I read all the seven stories in this book with great enjoyment and turned the last page sadly because I wanted more. With Weinbaum's death I fear we have lost a great deal more than most of us guess. We are left to re-quote his own quotation in "The Worlds of If": "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been!"

John Beynon Harris

\* \* \*

STRANGE HOUSES, by Cora Jarrett (Heinemann, 7/6)

THIS book is based on a powerful, but little-used, fantasy theme: transfer of the personality, outlook and memory of one person to the brain of another so that two individuals, while appearing unchanged to others, are yet to themselves utterly different people.

Imagine waking up one morning to find yourself possessed of the

body, features, voice and worldly goods of another man or woman, like the hero of one of Wells' short stories, or the millionaire's wife and the New York chorus girl in this book. The transference is accomplished by a sinister scientist who falls dead of heart failure while performing his dastardly act, apparently from the shock of finding that his experiments have produced such unexpected, terrifying results.

Hardened fantasy fans may complain that the explanation of how the two women are transformed is not detailed enough. But we must remember that Miss Jarrett has produced her book for the ordinary novel-reading public, who have a strong objection to long scientific lectures in their stories. The science in this book is about as much as the average novel-reader can be persuaded to swallow, and the story is mainly concerned with the efforts of a bewildered group of people to unravel the tangle the scientist has created.

### Creepy Horror

The surprise and horror of the two victims of his devilish experiment are well drawn, and at times one's flesh creeps with the soul-chilling horror of it: the dismay of the old woman, to whom youth and beauty are no recompense for possessing a body that has sinned many times, and the bewilderment of the young woman, wondering whether the other's money—if she can get it—is worth the price of being old and unattractive.

The author has taken pains to make her two people, whom she calls Alpha and Beta personalities, as different from each other as possible, yet fit into each other like the two pieces of something torn in half; and I strongly suspect that the ribald, lewd, drunken Dorinda really represents the suppressed desires of the prudish religious maniac with whom she changes souls.

**Festus Pragnell**

\* \* \*

**ADrift IN THE STRATOSPHERE**  
by Prof. A. M. Low (Blackie, 2/-)

**P**ROFESSOR Archibald Montgomery Low, who is entitled to 48

letters after his name, is President of the British Interplanetary Society and an honorary member of the Science Fiction Association, has done much to popularise science and explain some of its mysteries to the layman in several fascinating books. Consequently, when a work of his appears under such a title as this, with its dust-cover bearing a well-drawn picture of a rocket-ship, we anticipate some interesting reading—and he does not disappoint us.

This story, which ran as a serial in **Scoops** under the title, "Space," tells how three young men are accidentally shot off in a space-ship equipped with intricate devices of which they know nothing. Their efforts to bring the machine back to Earth only succeed in making it rise higher, beyond the reaches of the stratosphere. At length they manage to operate a complicated radio receiver which will pick up any message and translate it into English. Through this they learn that a super-civilised but hostile race on Mars has observed their approach and is bent on destroying them.

### Islands in Space

The Martians bombard the space-voyagers with death-rays, try to paralyse them with the "Gabble," drive them crazy with the "Imagery of Evil" and blast them out of existence with a "Death Ship"; but by accident or otherwise the visitors contrive to survive all these terrors. Eventually, having made their escape, they land on an island floating in space, inhabited by a friendly race of hooded giants. Here they are introduced to many scientific wonders before they return to Earth.

Though the book is primarily designed to appeal to the modern youth interested in radio, television, rockets, and their possible future developments, Professor Low has skilfully demonstrated how science and adventure may be intermingled without one being detrimental to the other, and marshalled an array of ingenious ideas which should interest every science fiction fan.

**Douglas Mayer**

# THE FUTURE OF FANTASY

Stories That Are Only Dim Ideas In Disguise

Criticised by D. R. SMITH

**T**HERE is a tendency these days for scientific fiction to fall into two distinct varieties. On one hand we have the thoughtful scientific story of the more advanced type, on the other the thrilling juvenile fantasy. Mature fans mostly prefer the first type, so long as good science is combined with good writing; but there is a distressing bias towards stories with little or nothing but extravagant science. A hastily-written story with a plot hashed round a vague idea or wild theory is regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of scientific romance, and it is assumed that only the veteran reader can appreciate the beauty of this type.

The assumption is correct in that none but a hardened reader could stomach such stories as these. Neglect of everything but the scientific part of the story, coupled with the urge to remove that part as far as possible from the realms of honest-to-goodness science, has produced stories of lower standard than did the despised policy of the old **As-tounding Stories**. The thought variants now so proudly presented are at their best but carelessly-written stories expounding half-formed theories that do not stand the test of a moment's logical thought, and at their worst only mixtures of incoherent inanities.

## Impertinence!

Such things, for instance, as "The Expedition from Kytlm" and "The Destruction of Amul," dimly-conceived ideas presented with the minimum of garnishing and poorly disguised as stories. Think what John Taine could have made of the first of these by adding a plot and skilful presentation! And would the idea behind the second have been noticed in the complex structure of a Campbell epic?

It is nothing less than impertinence on an author's part to expect the reader to create his own story round the author's idea. The basic measure of a story's worth is the degree to which it removes the reader to the locale chosen by the author, whether herding cattle on

the Bar-20, trailing criminals with Peter Wimsey or exploring intergalactic space with Dick Seaton. It implies well-drawn characters, vivid presentation, a coherent plot, and in scientific fiction, natural science.

By natural science I mean reasonably accurate modern knowledge, either practical or theoretical, or cleverly-presented extravagance. The science must *sound* right; the author should be very wary of the fundamental laws known by anyone interested in science, and only a well-established writer with absolute confidence in his ability to do so should attempt to put over extravagant science. Edward E. Smith is one of few who can do this with complete success; the result, presumably, of a trained scientific mind.

## A Thoughtful Thriller

The thought variant enthusiast will argue that scientific fiction differs from ordinary fiction in that its purpose is to make him think, and that thought variants do this while the thriller does not. I can counter this by referring him to a typical thriller—Ray Cummings' "Brigands of the Moon." It will at once be said that the science in this story is doubtful, yet it can be criticised logically, which is more than can be said for most thought variant science.

But the merit of this story lies in the fact that it takes you out into interplanetary space as few stories can do; and in doing this the author accomplished a feat more difficult than any confronting a non-scientific writer—to transport the reader where no one has ever been. This, the hardest task of all, is taken by many writers to be the easiest, to the detriment of their work. Though most thought variant authors do not even make a respectable attempt at this.

There was food for thought in "Brigands of the Moon," and it was so strongly yet unobtrusively presented that the reader was *compelled* to think. How many thought variants achieve this—their only object—so well?

### A Hint to Hacks

It is obvious that the thought variant ideal is not attainable by the hasty writer working with one eye on the clock and his mind on going to the movies. Nevertheless it has been demonstrated that, properly treated, this type of story is capable of great things, and that when well-written is appreciated by the ordinary reader more than other types less skilfully composed. Olaf Stapledon's "Last and First Men" and "The World Below," by S. Fowler Wright, are read and enjoyed by people far removed from the circle of science fiction fans, and show the excellence possible to scientific fantasy.

Though this excellence is not altogether unknown to the American magazines, as consideration of such stories as "Night" and "Forgetful-

ness," by Don A. Stuart, "The Eternal World" and others by Clark Ashton Smith will prove. It is in the hands of the masters, therefore, that the future of the thought variant lies, and the hack writers and amateurs had better confine their efforts to raising the level of the scientific thriller until it is comparable with non-scientific thrillers.

After all, we fans may plan big things, but the hopes of scientific romance really rest with the authors. It is both ridiculous and reprehensible that we should attempt to force the ordinary reader into desiring scientific fiction of the average quality published in the pulp magazines. The authors can—and must—solve the problem, if it lies within their capabilities; and if they are at present doing their best, then thank heaven for Wodehouse!

### MESSAGES FROM SPACE—Continued from Page 5

since Mr. Wells' great contributions to scientific fiction" . . . "Swastika Night," by Murray Constantine (Gollancz, 7/6), is nightmare fantasy of the future set in 2600 A.D., when Hitler is worshipped by half the world and women are just animals . . . "Zero to Eighty," by Akkad Pseudoman (New Jersey Scientific Publishing Co., \$3), relates life of man who flew round the Moon in 1961 in projectile launched by electricity, steered by rockets . . . "The Hampdenshire Wonder," J. D. Beresford's tale of a superhuman being which inspired Olaf Stapledon's "Odd John," available in sixpenny Penguin series, with Stapledon's "Last and First Men" . . . E. T. Bell, Ph.D., author of "Men of Mathematics" (Gollancz, 12/6), none other than Eric Temple Bell, Professor of Maths. at California Institute of Technology, writer of science fiction under name of John Taine . . . "Strange Insects and Their Stories" (Harrap, 10/6), is latest book by A. Hyatt Verrill, another U.S. fantasy author of early days . . . "Psychophones," an Elixir of Youth and the "Egg-religion of Selflessness," all brought to Earth by beings from space, form basis of M.P. Shiel's forthcoming book, "The Young Men are Coming."

### STRANGER COMES BACK

Article on "Scientifiction" by I. O. Evans was in July *Armchair Science*. "Such stories," he said, "vary much in value. Some are pure nonsense, exhibiting great ignorance of elementary science . . . But some show real originality of mind and grasp of scientific fact; make us realise the astounding possibilities of the universe. Such stories, surely, are not mere waste of time . . ." Meanwhile, Editor-Professor Low's messages-from-Mars serial continues . . . Ralph Stranger, British scientist-author whose story, "The Message from Mars," marked his first—and last—appearance in *Wonder* five years ago, comes back to science fiction with serial, "The Lost Kingdom," now running in *Modern Wonder* . . . Story deals with exploration of Antarctic in giant, rocket-propelled submarine . . . John Russell Fearn has written series of articles depicting exploration of the Solar System for *Modern Wonder*, to begin next month . . .

Unique group of researchers investigating supernormal phenomena, calling itself "The Probe," has headquarters in London . . . Aims to throw light on purpose of man's existence on Earth, invites associate members to ape Charles Fort by collecting reports of queer happenings which may help solve such mysteries as time-travelling and the fourth dimension . . . Secretary H. S. W. Chibbett is old science fiction fan . . .

# IS THE FANTASY FILM DOOMED?

Horror Has Had The Laugh On Science

Says H. D. WILSON

IN the April issue of **Scientifiction**, that distinguished science fiction author, John Russell Fearn, discussed the future of fantasy films and apparently found the outlook promising. As one who has also made a close study of the various excursions of the movie-makers into this field, I share his enthusiasm, but not his beliefs. I have seen the majority of "scientifilms" yet produced, but I cannot see any future for the fantasy of scientifilm.

Serious, thought-provoking scientifilms like the prophetic "Things to Come" are, unfortunately, but isolated instances among a preponderance of lurid horror. Practically without exception, the horror theme has been predominant, a feverish striving for extravagant thrills at the expense of science. The recent spate of lunatic scientists, death rays and monsters can hardly be calculated to stimulate public interest in science fiction. Too often the laugh has been on science, as in such notorious examples as 'Bride of Frankenstein' and 'Werewolf of London,' designed as box-office shockers and taken with tongue-in-cheek by movie audiences.

## Horror Played Out

Further, the novelty has worn off. The film trade itself admits that the horror cycle is played out; consequently, production plans for fantasy and scientifilms have never been at such a low ebb since the hey-day of 1930-31, when "Frankenstein" heralded horror into movie fashion. But the scientifilm has been so closely identified with the horror film that the public will never take kindly to serious excursions into scientific speculation like the abandoned Wells-Korda programme, and there is no indication that such possibilities will ever again be considered in view of the fact that the fantasy film itself seems doomed to oblivion.

In Hollywood the Universal company, pioneers of the fantasy film,

has been reorganised, and has announced its intention of confining the fantasy element to serials and other minor productions. The Radio—RKO studio, which has closely followed the Universal policy of producing fantasy films in recent years, has also revealed its intention to abandon this type of production. These two facts are hardly compatible with optimistic reports of an imminent boom in scientifilms emanating from Hollywood, but seem rather to presage the complete disappearance of the fantasy film. The position is serious, and demands instant action on the part of every fantasy and scientifilm fan.

## Insults to Intelligence

I agree with Mr. Fearn that the fantasy film is nothing new; and therein, I think, lies the reason for public dissatisfaction. From the days of the preposterous "Thief of Bagdad" can be traced the development of the fantasy film, which ever since has been getting more banal and incredible, so that invariably it is an insult to the intelligence. It seems a pity that the scientifilm should suffer on account of the fantastic nonsense that was "She," "King Kong" and "Chandu the Magician," to name only three orgies of trick photography and spectacle. It is only in sane and reasonable development of scientific theory, like "Things to Come," that the scientifilm has any chance of survival.

We must agitate for more films of the calibre of "Metropolis," "The Girl in the Moon," the original "Frankenstein," "Deluge," "The Invisible Man" and "The Tunnel," all of which, when shorn of their incidental trimmings, had definite scientific reasoning as a basis for their plots, and illustrated the point where the horror film leaves off and the real scientifilm begins. For that the future of the fantasy film is threatened is not in itself so regrettable as that we should see the scientifilm also pass into oblivion.

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