

CHANTICLEER

I choose my favorites in almost every field by whether or not I want to return to them. If I want to read a story or date a girl the second time, it's evidently has something worthwhile. And if, upon completing that serial I still want more, I've found a favorite. ((Tucker just adores used books.))

BOOK-LENGTH STF: This is something of a tough decision to make because I've read so many good books and so many fine serials that the mere reviewing of them in memory makes me want to drag them all out right now and re-read every one of them. I believe however that I can narrow down the choice to three particularly good "worlds" and should you threaten to deprive me of any two of them, I would hold onto "World D" by Hal Trevarthen. The remaining two are "Brave New World" by Huxley and "When Worlds Collide" by Balmer and Wylie.

There hasn't been a lot of mention of "World D" in fan circles outside of Liebscher's fanzines, mostly I suppose because there are so few copies of the book in fan-circulation. Perhaps only a dozen in all known-fandom, at a guess. I'd like to have a hundred copies of the volume to give away for Christmas presents.

Someone like Campbell may stack all his nova, thought-varient, and what-have-you yarns atop one another until hell freezes and still not approach "World D" in scope, theme, arm-chair science and all the off-trail twists you can think of. There are at least three different books in this one. The only apparent weakness worth complaining of is the milk-sop romance between a couple of healthy people who know that they want but are afraid to touch it---but for that one should blame their parents (or the author) but not them.

STF SHORT STORY: "Helen O'Loy" by Lester del Ray, in Astounding for December 1938. Positively, and then some. Sentimental sap that I am, this love story between a man and a desirable feminine-type robot touched me here---you know where.

BOOK-LENGTH FANTASY: Merritt's "Moon Pool," the whole and complete one as published in book form. I have that edition in which the villain has first a Russian and then a German name. My tabulations on this book show five readings and I'm about ready for the sixth. I hold this as Merritt's best, surpassing by a comfortable margin "Dwellers in the Mirage." (And incidentally, a Chicago book store still offers new copies of the "Pool" in the above mentioned edition for \$1.79 each.)

FANTASY SHORT: In the February 1940 issue of Unknown you'll find a subtle chiller by E. A. Grosser entitled: "The Psychomorph." That's it, brother. If you don't remember it, it is one of those "Is you is or is you ain't?" tricks Campbell employed so very well in "Who Goes There?" In this particular case the hero-character discovered it was just after he had successfully bumped-off what it wasn't.

BOOK-LENGTH WEIRD: Now I'm stymied. My weird-likes are few and far between because I seldom read weird tales: I don't care for them unless they happen to be larded with fantasy or have been published in Unknown. However there is one distinct weird novel which I read fourteen years ago and which still haunts my memory. It was published in Clayton's Strange Tales. It concerned vampires. It's too bad I can't recall the name of it. ((In all probability Tuck refers to "Murgunstrumm" by Hugh B. Cave; it appeared in the January, 1933 issue. It's a real, goshawful chiller-diller.))

WEIRD SHORT: A still more limited field than the next above and for the same reasons mentioned. I might report tho that I am unable to get Henry Kuttner's "The Graveyard Rats" out of my mind, and every time I find a new anthology containing William Faulkner's "A Rose For Emily" I read it again.

NON-STF NOVEL: "The Adventures of Hiram Holliday" by Paul Gallco. A corking adventure novel concerning a middle-aged chap, an almost has-been newspaper rewrite man who takes his first vacation in thirty years in just-before-the-war London. There, in a series of events hardly believable to himself, he skewers a Nazi with an umbrella and saves a Balkan princess from their hands.

NON-STF SHORT STORY: Dorothy Sayer's excellent "Suspicion." It's like this you see: there be a nasty poisoner loose in the town, and our unfortunate hero is suffering the early pangs of arsenic poisoning. No one is gladder than he when at last the criminal is caught and jailed. However, the discordant note comes in beautifully at the end in that arsenic appears in his cocoa (prepared for him by his ever-loving wife) after the criminal has been apprehended. Embarrassing, ain't it?

NON-STF NON-FICTION: "Personal History" by Vincent Sheean; it was published perhaps ten years ago, and there is nothing I can say of this book that will add to its laurels. Everything has already been said.

FAVORITE FANZINE: In this, I do not judge favoritism by how many times I read it but by how glad I am to discover each succeeding issue in my mailbox. There hasn't been anything since Spaceways that caused me to look in the box day after day, hoping the next issue is there.

FAVORITE STF AUTHOR: Jack Williamson. I've hung onto this gentleman for years; one of these days he'll send me a dollar in sheer gratitude.

FAVORITE FANTASY AUTHOR: A. Merritt. Tiffany Thayer runs a competent second.

FAVORITE PROZINE: Astounding, the only one I read steady and almost the only one I read at all these latter years. Altho, dammit, I am growing weary of getting only three or four stories per issue when I yearn for half a dozen. And I heartily dislike Campbell's practice of filling any one issue with stories of a similar theme. If its time-travel month at Street & Smith, Astounding will have three or four of them in the same issue; if its telepathy, whang! you find an issue overflowing with telepathic tales. I say, break 'em up.

FAVORITE FAN: It sure as hell ain't Liebscher. ((You cad. You realize, of course, that this means I'll not vote for you in the next poll.))

ENIGMATIC PENTAMETER

--"I'm In Love With
Channy" Davis

Ooth rootha wiss
Kiyinna will
Oop utta
O veralsin
Mess esmur
Feschodda

Ca dnoos

[illegible]

Lettuce and celery combined
Is known, I think, as celtuce
But when, I wonder, when
Will we be eating mayoneltuce

HIGHER THINGS - By Michael Harrison - Published by Macdonald & Co. - London

Whoever Michael Harrison may be, he has written an unusual and fascinating story, one to be read carefully and pondered over. The element of fantasy is simple. James Farraday, young and discontented bank clerk, suddenly discovers that he possesses the ability to fly, not mechanically, no flapping of arms or wings, but merely by wish, a sort of levitation which hardly required conscious thought. His first, entirely unexpected flight brought such a shock that Farraday deferred a second, and deliverate, attempt for months. Then he metaphorically spread his wings and took off.

Actually the tale is not one of physical adventure. Farraday considers flying to Tibet or Patagonia, but, in reality, confines himself to hops around England except for a visit to Hitler. What makes the novel exciting and gives it an importance too rarely found in fantasy is the mental adventure, intellectual turbulence. Farraday (or the author) is an anarchist. Not a Communist or Socialist or anything else which so many people fail to understand and confuse with each other, but a simon-pure anarchist, hating nationality, government, law, rule of any kind, and finally hating the entire human race.

Farraday's progress (or deterioration if you wish) from sullen acquiescence in his position as bank clerk to his ultimate determination to leave the earth entirely can be considered either as a manifestation of insanity or as the logical development of a doctrine which, in effect, teaches the annihilation of social and political relations. The reader may recoil from all the doctrinal implications (I, for one, am too old and too fat to want government displaced by an anarchy in which some huskier guy could, with impunity, bump me off because I had a couple bushels of potatoes or because he didn't like my face -- in other words, I like police protection) but none can deny the skill and cold reasoning of their presentation. Anarchy is equated with complete freedom, all restraints disappear, controls no longer exist in the mind of the one man on earth who can fly. Robbery and murder prove that in Farraday there are no social or moral inhibitions. In his revolt against economic servitude he gives way to ruthlessness.

The Hitler visit is a remarkable affair, partly because of the conversation between the two men but mainly because of shrewd and unique analysis of the reason why a depressed outcast could become dictator of millions. It will make you think. The close of the book is vague, though there are one or two hints of vast stretches of time and space, subtle references to the esoteric side of relativity, and indications of matterless life pondering for eternity. Maybe the author will write a sequel. In any event, this rambling reviewer highly recommends the novel.

THE SHIP OF FLAME - By W. S. Stone - Published by Alfred A. Knopf - 1945

Polynesia is a land of beauty and to its primitive inhabitants of long ago it was also a land of magic, everpresent gods with a background of fear and terror. From Hawaii to Tahiti, Raratonga to the Marquesas, the islands are peopled by men and women whose origins go far into the dim past. Perhaps their ancestors were among those driven out of India by Aryan invaders millennia ago -- the bulk were slaughtered or enslaved but some, daring proto-types of Columbus and Magellan, fled across the seas to fill distant islands.

Just one theory, one of several which have been evolved to account for the exotic and mysterious race now rapidly disappearing before the onrush of European and American disease, vice and war. (Anyone interested in the subject can learn a great deal by securing - and using - a bibliography in the Bishop Museum of Honolulu. I discussed the matter rather extensively in my "History of Guam" as I was intensely concerned not only over the origins of Pacific natives, especially the Chamorros, but over the identity of the pre-Columbian men and women whose skeletal remains showed that they had grown to an amazing height of eight feet. It is a fascinating study - who were the slaves, "Mangchahgs" by name, found by Magellan in the Marianas, utterly unlike the real Polynesians and now entirely lost? What had been their original home? India, Australia or Mu?)

Polynesian folk lore and legendry is earthy, animistic and at the same time a shimmering, gossamer tapestry of wonder and loveliness. The gods are intimate and active, some beneficent, other inspirers of fear, to be fought, tricked or placated. Mountains, trees and sea, rivers, caves and shores are not merely inanimate forms of nature - they are alive, moved by supernatural beings. No legend, Polynesian or otherwise, for beauty, courage, high daring, gallantry, surpasses "The Ship of Flame" which stems from Tahiti but in its course traverses half the Pacific. It is a simple tale of a youthful Polynesian who sets out in one of those marvellous vessels, which were as staunch and sturdy as any ships the Vikings ever built, to avenge the death of his father in the maw of the gigantic tridachna clam, a malignant entity, symbol of the molluscs which destroyed so many divers. The war canoe is built with miraculous aid from fairies who inhabited a mountain top, launched with ceremonies of barbaric splendor, battles winds and waves sent by evil spirits. And at the end is heroic struggle against the relentless forces of wickedness.

William Stone and his illustrator have produced a memorable volume, glowing words and superb paintings forming a proper setting for an age old tale. "The Ship of Flame" is fantasy in the sense that all legendry is fantasy. Certainly no story of Polynesia has ever had more exquisite presentation.

WHO KNOCKS? - Edited by August Derleth - Published by Rinehart Y Co. - 1946

By the time this review appears in print it is likely that all readers of "Chanticleer" will have gone through Derleth's latest anthology from cover to cover. Certainly no lover of fantasy will miss anything put out under the banner of the Master of Arkham. There is, in fact, no real reason for writing this review unless it is to compliment the editor of "Who Knocks" upon again having hit one of his usual jackpots.

To be brief, there are twenty spectral tales from twenty authors and each deserves inclusion. Derleth has concentrated upon stories "in which the animating force is in the nature of a return from the dead". Under such a broad heading are included straightforward ghost stories such as "The Shadow on the Wall" by Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman, psychic residue in W. F. Harvey's "The Ankardyne Pew", spectral vengeance in "Squire Toby's Will" by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, haunted spots as in "The Dear Departed" by Alice-Mary Schnirring, and various other manifestations.

Horror is not always present and is not emphasized beyond the usual unease mounting to fright which comes with the first thought of ghostly apparitions. There are, though, a few manifestations of evil to bring shudders. I need only mention E. F. Benson's "Negotium Perambulans" and H. R. Wakefield's enigmatic "The Seventeenth Hole at Duncaster". Lovecraft is represented in this grouping by "The Shunned House", not one of his best - but what difference does that make, we have all read everything by HPL.

During the past year or two there has been at least a score of fantasy

...claries, some good, some poor. To this reviewer "Who Knocks?" and Der-
th's "Sleep No More" are at the head of the procession.

THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND - By William Hope Hodgson - Published by Holden
Hardingham, Ltd. - London - 1908 and 1921.

The most ghastly, terrifying, mysterious and unsolveable story I have
ever read. It is unique, standing utterly alone in its genre, a solitary
pinnacle of brooding horror. A tale unbelievable and unexplainable in even
one detail. An eternal question mark to which there can never be an answer.

Two Englishmen on a fishing trip to a remote part of Ireland some 75
years ago stumble across ruins of unknown age and before they are repelled by
strange rustlings and a feeling of primeval evil discover a note book con-
taining the rambling, not always coherent experiences of an old recluse who,
with his sister, had once inhabited the structure. Startling and terrifying
is, not only the contents of the journal, but the complete lack of congruity
between its fairly recent age - perhaps a decade or two - and the antiquity
of the ruins.

A reviewer cannot attempt to retell the story - only Hodgson himself
could do that - and can only give a faint indication of the grotesque impos-
sibilities contained in the diary. Apparantly the writer had lived in this
remote house for many years. One afternoon, without warning, he was trans-
ported (physically or astrally we are never told) to a vast, darkling plain
surrounded by gigantic mountains where lurked Kali, Set and other monster
gods whose presences are but dimly discerned and whose purposes are never
disclosed. Centered in the plain is a forbidding building of jade, replica
of the recluse's house, besieged by swine headed monstrosities. Who or what
occupies the building is never told. The vision ends as suddenly as it came
with no explanation of its meaning.

Back "home" (though a slight doubt creeps in about the authenticity of
"home") the recluse finds himself under siege by scores of the same swine-
headed beasts, thought they are invisible to the sister. They can be killed
(some with what perhaps is occult assistance) and the disappearance of the
corpses hints at cannibalism. Attacks are varied by further "visions" in
confusing and incomprehensible fashion, no reason, no sequence, no continu-
ity. A fragment of the journal tells of a journey (actual or imagined) to
the Sea of Sleep with just a hint of something terrifying. Another vision
carries the recluse to the end of the universe, even to the end of time.

There are glimpses of bubbles of "thought life", eons of ineffable joy
with his beloved who is abruptly torn away, scenes of the damned - though who
or what they are is never revealed - , glimpses of demoniac gods, a vision
of the living center of the cosmos, and a score of other fantasies. And
when the recluse "returns" from his journey to the end of time he finds his
home unchanged except that, incredibly, his dog is a pile of dust.

The denouement is one of the most ghastly in all literature. Is there
a Heaven or a Hell? Is there Justice? Is there a benevolent Deity or is
the cosmos prey to evil?

The story, in a sense, has no plot. It has the same superb, grotesque
non-sequiter formlessness as the best of Dali. There is no sequence, no
logic to anything that happens. And no explanation. One can accept it as a
parable, an insane hallucination, a vision outside our time and space - or
one can just accept it. Certainly there has never been a more compelling,
more terrifying, more incomprehensible piece of writing. I'm no newcomer to
fantasy and horror but "The House on the Borderland" jolted me back on my
heels.