

diablerie



diablerie

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by
Bill Watson

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THE EDITORS *Sally* FORTH —

BILL WATSON ~

SANDRA

MICHEL ~

MALIANO

concerning our Sifting through
contents: our pages before
reading as you prob-
ably did, you undoubtedly noticed the
profusion of cartoons, illustrations,
and sundry devices that should appeal
to the male instincts. That, at pre-
sent, is our sole aim: an amateur mag-
azine for the stronger sex. We there-
fore now invite the women to get the
hell out—diablerie is not for you.

And though the caustic and damning
comments fly thick and fast, we assure
you that will continue to be our pol-
icy. There will of course be slight
variations, but basically it shall re-
main the same.

We might mention here that we do not
wish to be taken wrongly in our stand;
we love all the gals and hope they feel
the same, but the idea of a "poor fan's
Esquire" has long appealed to us, and
we are glad to say at last our idea
has borne fruit.

more One of the more lament-
color, too able situations existing
in fandom is the excess-
ive lack of or absence of a variety of
color in the amateur publications. Most
are either somber black, an eye-strain-
ing hector purple, or a repulsive shade
of green. Readers with weak stomachs
can generally be seen running hell-bent
for the back-house when confronted with
either or the latter two, while the
first can become distressingly tiresome
after the first ten or fifteen pages.
We propose to keep our pages budding
with color, though we have not the
slightest intention of making the mag-
azine blatant.

We cannot, as yet, promise more than
two mimeograph colors per page because
our duplicator is not a precision mod-
el. We soon hope to obtain the latter,
and when we do—it will mean up to
five colors a page.

a word about We sincerely believe
the format that a decent format
is essential, and
therefore intend to keep our appearance
fairly neat and orderly. We are not,
however, going to standardize the
titles, hoping then to keep them re-
freshing and different. Neither are
they flighty or feminine, designed to
appeal to the male fan.

Running through various issues of
the professional and amateur magazines,
we noticed that those which repeated
the same makeup issue after issue tend-
ed to become rather tiring. We do not
want that to happen to diablerie.

about Not only is this your magazine
you to read, but it's yours also to
use as a platform on which to
voice your views and express yourself.
We know you have ideas—why not let us
in on them? diablerie cannot continue
regular tri-yearly appearance unless
you submit your stories, articles, and
poetry to us. Without outside contribu-
tions we know we shall become stuffy,
one-sided, and otherwise quite boring,
so let us see your work.

who you are makes Whether your name
no difference! be Joe Fann, num-
ber one in the fan
poll, or Caspar Milquetoast, never be-
fore heard of, your contributions will
receive equal attention. (next page)

Material by the older fans is certainly of value, but new blood is also essential. The older ones seem to be resting on their laurels anyway, so it is the new crop of fans-to-be whom we are looking to for assistance.

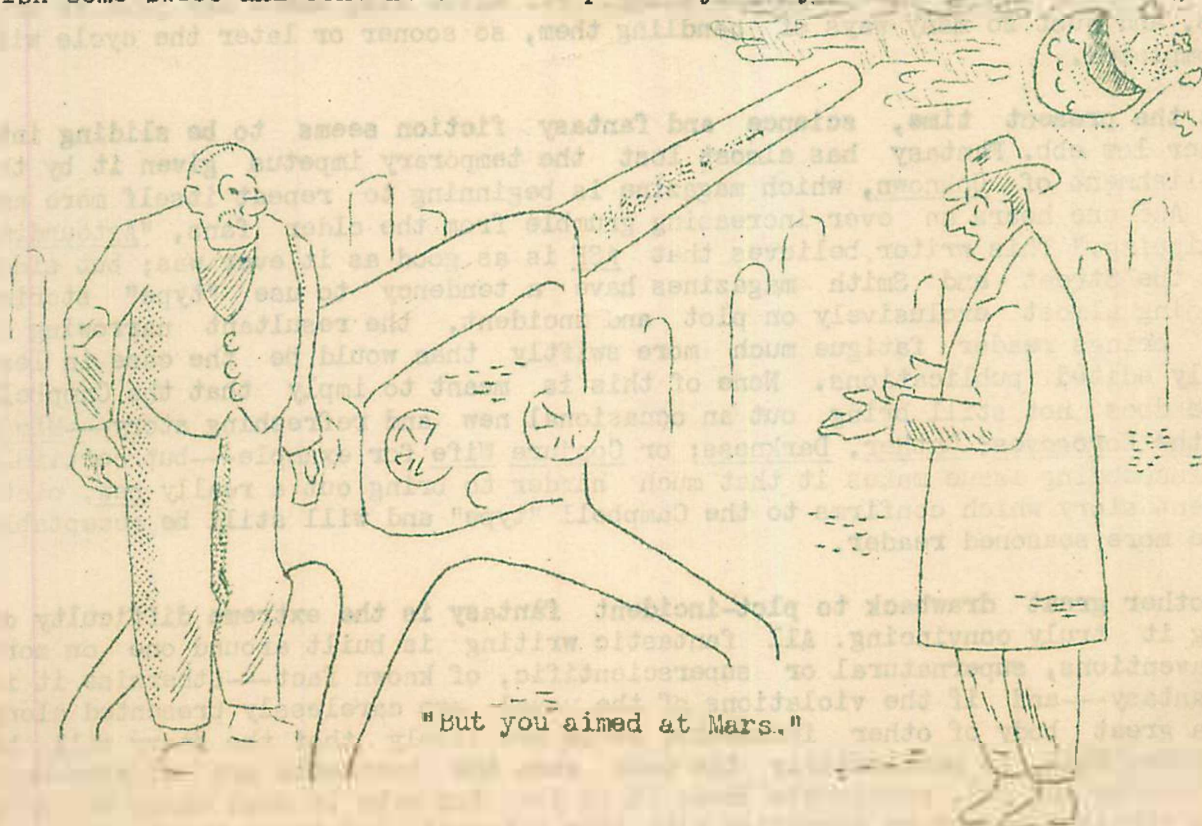
we detest Much good material has
censorship been passed by, we imagine, because some editors are literally all sweetness and light and are afraid to print material because it might hurt the feelings of some fool who needs a good kick where it will do the most good. Or the item might contain some even-so-naughty words that everyone knows aren't nice. We do not feel that way and are proving it with the appearance of one of two short stories next issue; either The Pink Slippers or Judgement. We know neither one of them are smutty, but also know Mama Daugherty (no personal offense, Walt) and others will find them as good a reason as any for boycotting our magazine. Not wanting to start an entirely unnecessary feud, we might pass up these two gems and publish some sweet and conventional and ex-

ually stupid substitute, instead. Those who will not like either of them, we say you have a right to your opinion. But to those who are going to howl loudly and call them obscene, we offer you—a hearty raspberry.

a call for Good artists seem to be
illustrators at a premium, nowadays, and as a result our cover schedule is a bit haphazard. Interiors can always be dragged from somewhere, but those covers have become a problem. Rising young artists are therefore welcomed here, if their work meets our standards.

If by any chance they don't, we will do our best to help the artist, either with criticism or by directing him or her to some magazine that might be able to use the drawings submitted to us.

our After three months of continual
cover prodding, coaxing, and casting threats, Bill Watson finally consented to do us a cover. We think it's a beautiful job, and are only sorry we can't have the original.



ACTION VS ATMOSPHERE

— FRANCIS T. LANEY —

Fantastic stories may be roughly divided into two general types: those which depend on plot and incident, and those which seek only to create a mood in the mind of the reader. The vast majority of pulp fantasy falls into the first category—much of it in fact consisting of the most artificial and hackneyed plot forms of the very cheapest popular fiction with a more or less thin overlay of fantasy. The most horrible example of this type is that old perennial in which the beautiful and chaste heroine gets into all sorts of difficulties and is dashingy rescued and dragged to the altar by the muscular pretty-boy, who of course showed up in the nick of time. Such cheap trash has no literary standing whatever; whether the action takes place in the wild and woolly west, in a Hollywood drawing room, or on one of the moons of Jupiter; Even though such a story may contain incidental fantastic passages of some merit, the tale as a whole is worthless. After all, if we use rot-gut whisky, it makes no difference how skillfully we mix a cocktail—it will still taste terrible.

There are of course many plot and incident stories which are of a much higher caliber; but any narrative of this type, however well written, is always in danger of duplicating some previous production. As time goes on, the same plots and the same incidents are hashed over and over until the reader begins to suffer from ennui and exhaustion. In fact, the all too rapid turnover among sf fans may very likely be due to just this one thing. For after all, there are just so many plots, and just so many ways of handling them, so sooner or later the cycle will be completed.

At the present time, science and fantasy fiction seems to be sliding into another low ebb. Fantasy has almost lost the temporary impetus given it by the establishment of Unknown, which magazine is beginning to repeat itself more and more. And one hears an ever increasing grumble from the older fans, "Astounding is slipping." This writer believes that ASF is as good as it ever was; but since both the Street and Smith magazines have a tendency to use "type" stories depending almost exclusively on plot and incident, the resultant narrowing of scope brings reader fatigue much more swiftly than would be the case in less rigidly edited publications. None of this is meant to imply that the Campbell regime does not still bring out an occasional new and refreshing story—Mimsy Were the Horogoves; Gather, Darkness; or Conjure Wife for example—but certainly each succeeding issue makes it that much harder to bring out a really new, plot-incident story which confirms to the Campbell "type" and will still be acceptable to the more seasoned reader.

Another great drawback to plot-incident fantasy is the extreme difficulty of making it truly convincing. All fantastic writing is built around one or more contraventions, supernatural or superscientific, of known fact—otherwise it is not fantasy—and if the violations of the usual are carelessly presented along with a great body of other incidents, it is not likely that the story will be plausible. This is particularly the case when the incidents are of slap-bang adventure or of mad, passionate love; it is far too easy in such cases to slip into a straight adventure narrative with love interest, and treat the (next page)

fantasy element so cavalierly and matter-of-factly as to be the next thing to ignoring it altogether. Obviously this does not lead to plausibility. On the other hand, if the author is engaged in building up a mood, the necessary atmosphere will of itself come very near making plausible the most far-fetched violations of cosmic law.



The other, and much less common, type of fantasy-science-fiction is the "atmosphere" story. Lovecraft says (cf. Notes on Interplanetary Fiction) that the sole purpose of the author should be to create a mood, and that the principle characters of a fantastic yarn should be merely a set of phenomena. This view is rather radical, and it is somewhat doubtful if a 50,000 word story would sustain reader interest if built wholly around the phenomena; but certainly these should have the center of the stage, with any human characters in a (next page)

wholly subordinate role. (cf. Last and First Men, Starmaker) It is to be regretted that Lovecraft did not leave us more than the one stf novel written in this manner; At the Mountains of Madness was a good start, but after all was merely an experiment. Lovecraft of course had a peculiar mind in that he strove to glorify purely mental and philosophical appreciation at the expense of the more common human emotions. Since few people can attain to this ascetic outlook, Lovecraft does not enjoy as universal popularity as many of the cheaper writers. Nevertheless, a judicious infusion of semi-Lovecraftian technique would improve most stf and fantasy fiction.

A writer who is not dependent on plot-incident, but is merely trying to express or create some mood, need never worry about triteness. If a truly realistic and genuine atmosphere is created, the subject matter is relatively unimportant; for, unlike the plot-incident narrative, the "mood" story does not rely on tricks of plot manipulation. Of course an atmospheric story has a plot, and progresses through a series of incidents. The all-important distinction is that the plot—instead of being an arbitrarily rigid, pre-conceived, and iron-clad plan—is merely a loose framework to keep the narrative unified; and the incidents are truly incidental and not the main feature of the story.

Many fantasy fans seem to feel that the Lovecraftian type of tale is played out, but this is a symptom of slipshod thinking. True, stories utilizing the Cthulhu mythos have been quite thoroughly exploited (in fact Lovecraft himself was at the time of his death gradually working away from this theme), but it must be borne in mind that tales of this cycle strove to present only horror, and this is but one of a myriad of moods and emotions which are fit subjects for fantastic fiction.

Relatively few pulp fantasies have been of the atmosphere type, and relatively few emotions and moods have been exploited in these few. Horror has been the main theme, though weird beauty has also found expression. What might be called a combination of cruelty and hero worship tinged with horror has been ably portrayed by such writers as Robert E. Howard and E. Hoffman Price. A feeling of insignificance and futility has been admirably expressed by Stapledon. While there have undoubtedly been other moods and emotions portrayed which do not come to mind at the moment, certainly there must be dozens of emotions suitable for stf and fantasy which are wholly untouched on. By way of clarification, imagine any scientific scene or situation, and then imagine what different emotions it might be made to engender. To write the type of story I have in view, it would be necessary only to create in the mind of the reader a mood analogous to the given emotion. This type of writing requires much greater skill than formula junk. Furthermore, it is highly probable that much experimental work would have to be done before satisfactory stf in this vein could be created.

A strictly realistic treatment is required to write truly literate fantasy, if we except the dreamy Dunsany-Smith sort of thing whose entire fabric is tinged with unreality. This means that artificial plot forms must be wholly done away with—we may have villainous actions, but no villain; principle characters, but no heroine or hero. In actual life, "good" does not always prevail, nor do events always come out the way we want them to. In actual life, our daily affairs do not confirm to rigid patterns, but show an almost bewildering variety and pointlessness. It should be obvious, then, that realism will give the author a much wider range of plot, since he will not be fettered by stereotyped formulas. He can do anything he wishes to his principle characters when it is unnecessary to preserve the hero in good enough repair to marry the (next page)

girl! Think over your favorite plot-incident stories—unless you are a Cummings-Burroughs addict, I'm willing to wager that they are realistically conceived and written, or at least are more realistic and less artificial than the run of the mill "pulpu kes".

Writers whose sole aim is acheiving a saleable level of mediocrity would not care to "waste" their time with atmosphere fantasies; nor would such writings stand a ghost of a chance in the commercial pulp magazines. It is highly probable however, that any science-fiction which may survive as "literature" will contain a minimum of action for action's sake, and will be written primarily as mood-creation.

t h e e n d

purpose

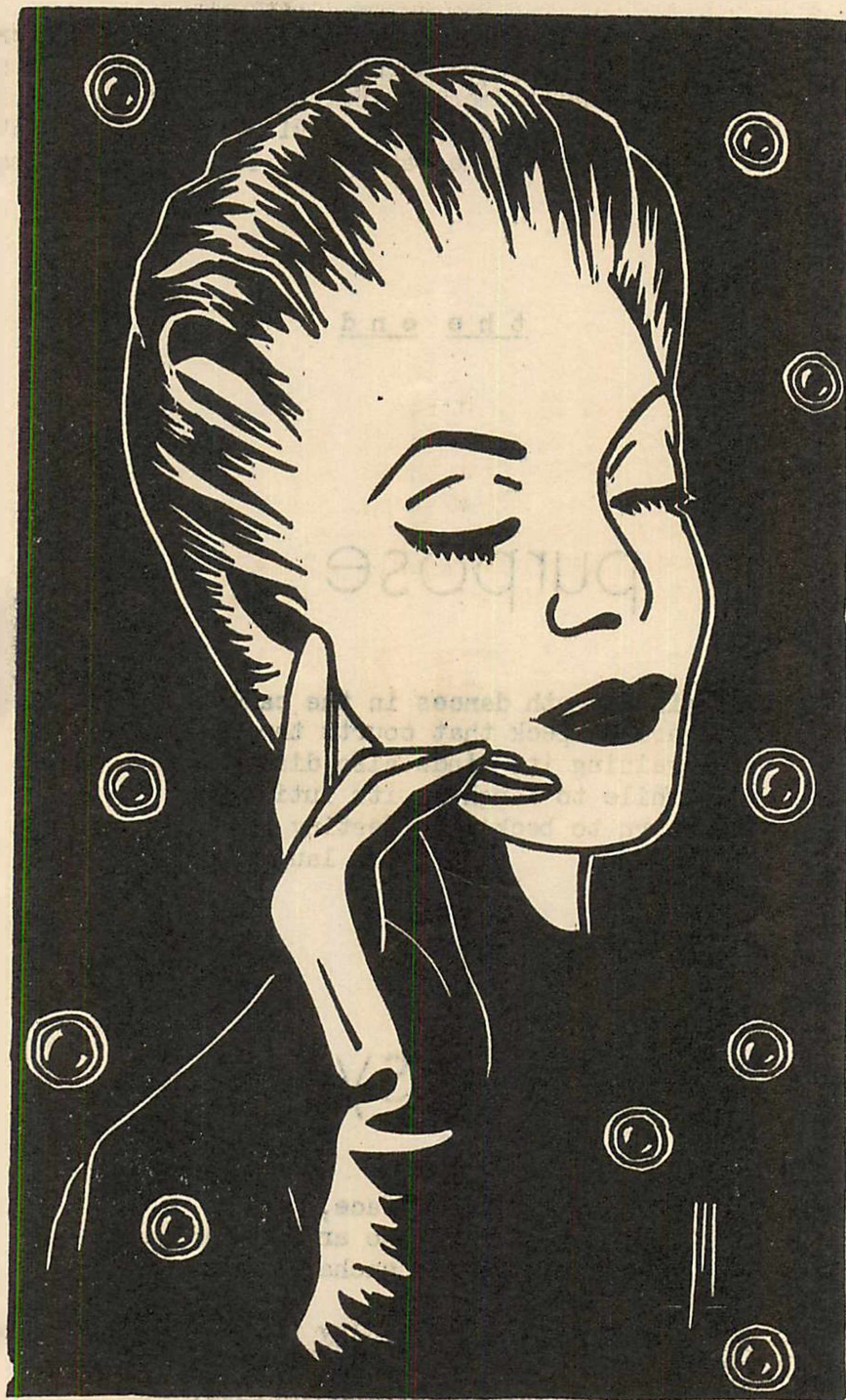
A silver-winged moth dances in the candlelight,
A soaring speck that courts the flame,
And gaining it, finds also dissolution.
I pause a while to laugh at its futility,
And then 'turn to beck'ning destiny . . .
Who laughs at me? . . .

fantasy

A flower stirs the water's face,
A ripple spreads . . . and so are dreams begun;
A web of fantasy that some enchanting Circe weaves.

Around the walls of mud and clay the dreamer's eye perceives
A golden beam that lances from the sun
To slay the drab and deadly commonplace.

—————BANKS MEBANE



This grey that stares
Lies not, stark skin and bone.
Leave greasy lips their kissing. None
Will choose her what you see to mouth upon
Dire hunger holds his hour.
Pluck forth your heart, saltblood, a fruit of tears.
Pluck and devour!

From A Memory of the Players in a Mirror
at Midnight—by James Joyce. Taken from
the book, Chamber Music, a collection.

thoughts *While* reeling

— E. HOFFMAN PRICE

With a whisky shortage which causes more alarm than the bombing of Pearl Harbor, rum, the forgotten drink, should come to its own again; rum, the favorite of the Royal Navy, the buccaneers of the Spanish Main, and of men of action in general, is coming back again.

In Spanish it is spelled ron; in French rhum; but once it's down the hatch, spelling and pronunciation make little difference, a refill is the thing.

For years, there has been a widespread heresy to the effect that rum, to be potable, simply must be mixed with something; or that it's a flavoring ingredient, just a dash to lend a tang to a beverage or sauce; that the stuff isn't and can't be drunk straight, except perhaps by men of iron, homicidal maniacs, Indians, and the very lowest of sots.

Just why this is, I can't say. Perhaps the catch phrase, DEMON RUM, has by implication and repetition sold an utterly false idea. Demon, well, all right, but I must add, "Nice little demon."

After all, rum is distilled from fermented cane juice or molasses; certainly as palatable an origin as that of whiskey, a loathesome mess of cereals gone bad.

When I was a junior in high school, back in 1914, I took chemistry. There was an experiment on distillation. A certain amount of molasses was put into a test tube to ferment. When the mixture ceased bubbling, it was cooked off. The manual directed that we check the identity of the distillate by setting it afire and noting the color of the flame.

I thought of a better way. I cooled and drank the 15 cubic centimeters which I'd collected. This was my first shot of rum. It was, I grant, somewhat raw. Worse yet, it was not tax paid, and thus I probably owe the Federal Government something over a dime in taxes.

I never repeated the experiment. There was no need. I saved up United Cigar Coupons for some months, and turned them in for a leather covered flask of unspecified cubic content. For twenty-five cents, any barrel house in San Jose would fill 'er up with rum, and often did. Those were the days!

Sorry, gentlemen, but I have long since lost track of my chemistry lab manual —however, any standard text will give you a fair idea of the setup; and molasses, thus far, is not rationed. A pot still, rather than a rectifying column, gives the finest product.

You see why I say that rum is the drink of men (and gals) of action? No horsing around with oats or shredded wheat or corn flakes, no malting nor any such fol-de-rol. And if you don't want to wait to make molasses, just try the straight cane juice.

(next page)

Ageing, of course, improves the flavor, as with any distilled spirits; ageing, and then, blending. The color of rum varies from water clear to a shade little short of India ink. The distillate, about 160 proof, is cut to potable strength, and flavored with molasses, or cane juice, or both. That's where the art comes in, and there is where you get the wide range of flavors.

Whiskey is either good or lousy; but, finally, whiskey is whiskey. Rums, however, vary, and enormously, though all do have the characteristic tang.

If you have the soul of a collector or connoisseur, rum is your field. Consider the geographical spread: the Demerara Valley of British Guiana; Trinidad; Barbados; St. Croix in the Virgin Islands; Martinique; Cuba; Jamaica; Porto Rico; Haiti and the Dominican Republic; the co-called "New England" rums; New Orleans; Hawaiian Islands; the Phillippines; East Indies. And others. As with vor varies with ate; and, start-basic difference, permutations and can get in pro-blending and age-



Panay Rum, pine island of uliar tang which ty cigar box. the cooperage, a hogany. At first the character-Panay and other comes pleasantly larly in con-your breakfast dinner coffee.

The French whether pale or and delicate, of character; just would expect of ting his soul in

water water everywhere but not a drop o' grog!

from the Philip-name, has the peculiar tang which lingers in an empty glass. This comes from so-called m o - a bit obtrusive, i s t i c tang of Island rums be-piquant, particularly in conjunction with coffee, or after

Martinique rums, dark, are suave and almost winey about what one a Frenchman put-to his work.

Jamaica rums have, to a greater or less degree, an ethereal tang, sometimes strong, sometimes barely perceptible, which reminds me of nail polish remover.

Demerara rums are rugged, earthy, solid; a stern and manly drink for stern and manly men, and, I may add, for the kind of gal appreciated by that kind of man. Since this is a discussion of drinking, I shall not digress long enough to give specifications of such a lady.

Lest I have misled you on Demerara, let me add that what I can best categorize as a rum drinker's gal once offered me a slug from a concealed bottle, and asked me to identify the gargle. I sniffed, swished it around my ball-bear- (next page)

ing molars, and demanded another sample. I slopped a drop on my palms, and rubbed my hands together, and sniffed the boquet. Finally, having killed nearly half the bottle, I said, "Darling, I am stumped. This stuff is a bit too full-bodied to be a fine old brandy, and it is way too delicate for any rum, sometimes I suspect it is rum, only it can not possibly be."

Derisive laughter at the baffled connoisseur, It was an 86 proof Demerara, one of Lemon Hart's special bottlings. Year after year, I've hunted another specimen, but vainly.

Trinidad rum, a classic, is quite scarce, but worth hunting.

Cuban, Porto Rican, and Virgin Islands rums, as they exist today, are things I prefer, out of a deference to distinguished readers, to ignore entirely. Save that they are doubtless distilled from cane products, they're scarcely rum; though the other day I did find a passably honorable exception.

Oddly enough, some very sound stuff is cooked off in this country. Far, far indeed from the truly great rums, but equally far from the enormous quantities of mediocre stuff which comes from islands which should and could produce better. Our "New England" rums—the name is put in quotes because some of it isn't, according to the label, actually distilled in New England, is a sound product, of medium body, on the dry side, and with a distinct tang of oaken cooperage. The best I've thus far found is bottles in bond, seven years old.

Normally, rum for the American market runs from 86 to 100 proof; and it is amazing how smooth the last named can be. The 151 proof, confined almost entirely to bars, where it's used for flavoring those ghastly fruit salad concoctions, such as Zombies, must be handled with care.

In small quantities, 151 proof Lemon Hart or Hudson's Bay can be drunk straight. Clark Ashton Smith handles the straight stuff in the blithe way of an Edmond Hamilton hero facing a dozen ray guns. Most people, however, quickly and painlessly paralyze themselves—unless they pause for a few moments of brawling and furniture-wrecking preliminary to passing out—by trying to mix 151 with coke. They will, in spite of every precaution and warning, pour too big a shot. The only safe way to dispense this concentrated rum, designed originally, I have heard, for use in the North Woods, where the voyageur's pack must be kept light as possible, is to cut it to 90 or 100 proof and serve from a decanter.

Since this is not an action story, I omit anecdotes about careless folks who took a bottle of that king of all rums, Hudson's Bay 151 Proof Demerara, and set out to mix Cuba Libres. Today's print is already too full of tales of violence and tragedy. My parting injunction is, DRINK MORE RUM, and, DRINK IT STRAIGHT, or with a bit of ditch water, hot or cold, to make grog.

There is more fun and less hangover in rum than in any other spirit. If I were to be stranded on a desert island, or to set out in a space ship, and had my choice of stimulant, my selection would be rum—rhum—ron, good no matter how you spell it.

t h e e n d

TO A *Pagan* GOD JUST DEAD—FYWERT KINGE

When one hears a Pagan God has died,
 Unless one fears one's own God's been defied,
 Such passing news bears no great weight
 No matter who the mighty potentate.
 Strange lands that will to stranger Gods adhere
 Cause us small worry; mayhap a little fear.
 Mournful men that follow the Pagan's bier
 Belong across the mountains, far from here.

Those who make their life beyond this pall,
 When at last comes their time to fall. . .
 They fall alone, unminded by the rest
 Though of them they may have been the best.
 Yet those who follow the common way
 Think but little and have less to say;
 And when they hear a Pagan God is passed
 They mock: "We hope he is not the last."

Around the mountain peaks where wild winds blow
 Far from the spots to which the rabble go
 The wayward and the trenchant come to meet
 And there, on that bleak and noble seat
 All the lore and doubt cast from a heedless world
 Is gathered to this haven and unfurled.
 Fear, then, welcome here, O fallen God.
 Let your defiance once more be unshod!
 Those who turned their backs upon your face
 Fear to venture near that part of space.

Valhalla, Olympus, Elysian Fields
 Still wave their ancient spears and shields
 And to this ignored and long-forgotten place
 Forever shunned by the Christian of the race
 That Pagan God will find a ready throne,
 Nor will he be obliged to reign alone.
 Those denizens from other space and time,
 Of aged dust and ancient slime,
 The brave, the kings, the men of old
 From times forgot and others yet untold
 Were Pagan. . . they would not be tamed.
 And though by this world unnamed,
 They are there and with them stands
 The Pagan who is gone to other lands.

If this be true, when you hear a God has died,
 Unless your own God's been decried,
 Is such passing news of so little weight
 Even if he were no worldly potentate.

ROOMINASHUNS

ON

INNCOMPETENCY

— MALIARO

If that old fire-eater and revolutionist extraordinary, Ezra Pound, was at this moment six feet under earth's aged epidermis and pushing up the proverbial daisies, he would undoubtedly be spinning not too merrily like a pre-war drunkard returning to bed after an ill-fated all-night consumption of hooch. And no one, who rightly knows the hap-hazard circumstances under which this article or reasonable facsimile of one was written, could possibly blame him.

Since, however, anarchist Pound is still quite alive and vigorously kicking, any protestations emanating from him will be ignored, and passed over to subjects that might eventually prove to be more entertaining and certainly lively.

Undoubtedly the worst perpetration with which fandom has all too recently been confronted is Claude Degler's asinine and imbecilic Cosmic Circle project, an organization which hitherto was lightly and nonchalantly scoffed at and then layed aside as being the feeble-minded idiotism of a more than half-demented egg-head.

Degler has proven to be quite an irritant quality on the usually thick hide of fandom, however, and is consequently being given a sound and entirely rational and logical verbal thrashing, which he apparently chooses to senselessly ignore.

Poor us, who have stolidly and almost moronically stood for the maniacal ravings of political and religious and anti-religious fanatics for ten years, to be bothered by such an obviously empty-headed ass—

But because of his continual warping and prostitution of the English language, and of science fiction in general, he has gradually grown to become an inhibited menace that should and must be halted, else he finally makes fools of us all through his incessant and indiscreet bellowings both to us and to those who know virtually nothing of science fiction's existence.

Proposing to dispose of this hare-brained Cosmic Circle originator and addict is one thing, but actually doing it is another horse of a startlingly different color. He is tumultuously consistent, and it appears, worse luck, that nothing short of the destruction of this ripe old planet—pardon me, Degler moves in cosmic circles only—destruction of this ripe old universe will stop his fanaticism.

The austere members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society appear to have done their level best to appease him and somewhat tone down his (next page)

radical conceptions, but they haplessly have not succeeded. Degler, who also spreads equally inane and obstinate propaganda under the pen name, Don Rogers, thunderously and vehemently tramps onward, alone with the exception of Raymond Washington, who because of immaturity has been easily influenced, making promises he cannot possibly fulfill, and fraudulently using the names of at least twenty five prominent fans over the nation.

In closing, Degler, alias Rogers, bases his whole cosmic-shaking program upon a thin web of assumption and doubly transparent lies. His Fanews Analyzer bristles with gigantic exaggerations and false statements, none of which he can back up with actual facts or pertinent figures.

He plans to visit here in a few days . . . I look forward to giving him hell!

t h e e n d

the.



Fandom's only all weird magazine, dedicated to the memory of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, has run only five issues and is already considered to be one of the top amateur publications appearing regularly.

The material is consistently the best that can be obtained in the weird and fantasy field, by Clark Ashton Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, Duane Rimil, and others. Columns too, by Franklin Lee Baldwin and Harold Wakefield. Robert Hoffman, also, who is generally present with many fine full-page illustrations.

The editors of diablerie sincerely recommend this publication to you all, for it features poetry, fiction, columns, and art. Things that are rarely obtainable all in one fan magazine, today.

The fifth issue, now out with a striking cover by Howard Wandrei, whose artistic ability matches Harry Clarke's, may be had for ten cents (10¢) or four issues, one year, for thirty five cents (35¢) from

Francis T. Laney
720 Tenth Street
Clarkston — Wash

Don't miss this magazine. By the time of the next Widner Poll, we wager that The Acolyte will be one of the top three magazines being published. . . When sending order, please mention this magazine.

IDEA MAN

— eddie clinton, jr

"Van Vogt?

"Oh, Lord, yes—Slan. Say, there was a story. Yes, he's written some beautiful stuff—Black Destroyer and Discard in Scarlet. I think Vault of the Beast was the best study in alien psychology I've ever read. And there was another one, too—Repitition. That was a pretty good yarn."

Then you smile and ask about the other fifteen.

"Fifteen others? Fifteen— Why, you must be mistaken. Wait, now, let me see. Hmmm. Oh—oh yes, Seesaw. That was a grand little yarn. Then there was. . . ah . . . ah . . ."

To the average science fiction fan, Van Vogt means five or possibly half a dozen stories of excellence and memorableness. Beyond that there is almost nothing—yet this man, who wrote the indisputably classic Slan, has written twenty science fiction pieces.

Let's list them in their order of appearance:

Black Destroyer
Discord in Scarlet
Repitition
Vault of the Beast
Slan
Not the First
Seesaw
Recruiting Station
Co-Operate—Or Else
Asylum

Secret Unattainable
The Second Solution
Not Only Dead Men
The Weapon Shop
The Search
The Weapon Makers
The Great Engine
M33 In Andromeda
Concealment
The Storm

Remember them now? Notice that those stories for which Van Vogt is noted were the very first ones he wrote. In fact, since Slan, there have been only one or two worthwhile bits—Seesaw and possibly Co-Operate—Or Else. The rest have certainly not fulfilled the promise of Slan.

Not that the stories aren't basically good—they are, with a couple of minor exceptions. (Not the First and M33 in Andromeda were purest hack; Secret Unattainable we can forgive and forget, because it was just story.) There is the same style, the steady, swift movement, the careful building up of suspense, the always-excellent atmosphere; but there is something, also, something rather indefinable, which sharply distinguishes his later from his earlier works.

Recruiting Station could have been excellent—but wasn't; likewise Asylum.

The Search was tremendous in conception and powerful in scope—but failed. The Weapon Makers—aside from the fact that it was a "series" story—had the makings of something comparable to Slan. As it stands, it is but a weak attempt to imitate the sweep and power of that epic. All these stories somehow fell short of complete realization for some inherent reason—and I think I see what it is.

Van Vogt, I am afraid, has become an "idea man". He has let the idea—the new thought—the whacky twist—the clever theory—dominate his writing; he has made the action, the unfolding of the story subordinate to the full realization of an idea. He is trying to put too much in too little space; not so much a condensation as a strained mixture of idea and action so intense that the development of the story as a whole is governed by the requirements of explanation on idea development.

The Search is an especially good example of this. The suspense here is terrific; there is a magnificent construction, a building up of a multitude of facts over almost the entire length of the novelette. Then, suddenly, is the last two pages, everything must be made to fall in its proper place; the denouement, instead of smoothly carrying the mind of the reader on to an ultimate and complete understanding of the story as a whole, is complicated and abrupt; it is a challenge to the human mind; one must needs pause and ponder this or that thought out. Instantly the reader has freed himself from the writer's control. All the atmosphere, all the careful lulling of the reader's mind that has gone before is thrown away. One finishes the story—not dissatisfied—but unsatisfied. The story has simply ceased to be a story, and has become a problem.

The same condition prevailed in The Weapon Makers. Here, as in Slan, was parallel construction, conflict of purpose, and suspense. But all was lost in the confusing hodgepodge of ideas, the weighty explanations, and most of all, and resulting from this, faulty construction. There is an indication here of haste.

When he takes time, Van Vogt is good—I have an idea he was very careful with Co-Operate—Or Else and even with the overly sensationalistic Secret Unattainable. Witness the excellent construction of the latter, the clarity of thought and smoothness of denouement of both. It is upon the denouement, beyond all shadow of doubt, that the success of any story, no matter what type it may (next page)

THE UNICORN

Smooth his golden mane, and try
the mettle of his jewelled horn,
and close his red, defiant eye,
for you have killed the unicorn.

Draw your arrow from his breast.
Softly—his is hallowed blood;
one last look, then let him rest
in the silence of the wood.

Leave him as he proudly fell;
silver dew will cover him.
Gentle winds will mourn him well,
wise old stars watch over him.

Leave him while the night is clear,
God has not forsaken him.
Will-o-wisps will find him here,
panic pipes awaken him.

Faery fires will ring him 'round,
elfin drums will lure him on,
glorious of sight and sound
to the vale of Avalon.

Leave him now—his hoofs are grating
on Olympus, and he'll soon
find an ebon filly waiting
in the meadows of the moon.

—Lou Goldstone

be, hangs.

Nor is this to criticize the idea story—for, in science fiction at least, almost any story is an idea story. But Campbell himself has said (Astounding, September 1939):

"It isn't alone—or even largely—the great idea that makes a story; its forceful presentation of that thought makes it live for the reader, and that depends upon methods of presentation, skill in handling of material, on the logical clear organization of the material."

Van Vogt might well note the last. For there is his great fault—or at least has been since Slan. There, paradoxically, was the ultimate in careful organization, in striking construction. If one were to prepare a careful outline of both Slan and The Weapon Makers, this would be obvious. Yet there is surely as much in Slan, if not more, as in his later novel. Van Vogt is just trying to put into mass production things of a weight that will not permit production on a rapid scale. Material of the gravity which he conceives cannot be thrown together, as Van Vogt is evidently handling it.

But perhaps Van Vogt should not receive all the blame. The magazine for which he writes must be filled every month, and good authors are worth their weight in gold nowadays. Possibly Astounding is asking too much of Van Vogt—as much, indeed, as from Heinlein. (In the latter case it worked; Heinlein was the type of writer, and handles the type of material—albeit excellent—that permitted rapid production. But Van Vogt's case is different; he throws, through natural tendency, a host of thoughts and ideas into one story—the whole being the sum of the parts. Heinlein's ideas were more specific and universal, thus allowing individual development.)

Truly, the promise of Slan has remained unfulfilled. But through all the thousands of words that have flowed from Van Vogt's pen since the immortal "—my daughter" the same style, the same sense of suspense and of the dramatic, the same insight into human character and into alien thought has remained. Van Vogt may never write another story as great as his first five—but they stand, immutable.

t h e e n d

Cartoons crowded out this issue because of a lack of space will be printed in diablerie #2. Bear with us, for the ~~next~~ issue will present a rather radical change in format, together with the addition of ten extra pages with which we hope to widen our scope. Lead short story second issue: The Barrier, by Eddie Clinton. We have the first draft of an article that may turn into something: Lies There A Country . . . by Bill Watson. Lou Goldstone, though quite busy free-lancing, has vaguely promised us a lithographic pictorial. We make no promises, but . . . "One never knows, does one?"

Ta-ta, and please don't forget to write us. Those letters ~~believe it or not, mean~~ a helluva lot to us. Your advice and ideas mould this magazine.

Next issue out May 15th . . . maybe sooner!

