
ECCENTRIC'S ORBIT

Volume One June 1944 Number One

Published for circulation through the Fantasy Amateur Press Association by Mike Fern, c/o 3722 3rd South, Arlington, Virginia. Unless otherwise indicated, none of the opinions herein are those of the publisher. This is the first of such attempts at inflation of my ego, and is intended for circulation in the Summer 1944 FAPA mailing.

It seems that all fans who enter the publishing game must litter the first available page of their offering with a personal history or an apology for thus disturbing the mental equilibria of their readers. Ordinarily I am not one for respecting tradition; but in this case, it would seem well to follow the herd.

To begin with, I was born. Why is something I occasionally wonder about. At any rate, since the autumn equinox of 1923, I have been here on this (screwball) planet. Most of my life has been spent in Hawaii, the majority of the remainder in the state of California. (My parents never worked for advertising agencies, and I do hanker to see how the other half of this country looks.)

My interest in stf dates back to the Blue Books in which was When Worlds Collide. Someone carelessly left them lying around the house. The next year found me in California, but some time ensued before I discovered the stf pulps. I managed to keep abreast of things stfic for a year or two, but when I swam back to Hawaii in 1935 the financial difficulties peculiar to one's youth set in again (I had been subsidised previously by a tolerant if baffled grandmother) and my interest perforce waned.

Three years later these obstacles had been surmounted, and I began collecting stf on the largest scale the local newstand would permit. I rediscovered Astounding in time to send a frantic letter to Campbell, and thereby fill out my file of Grey Lensman; but the local newstand would not (or could not) get ASF regularly, so I had to suffer until I went to Honolulu during the summer of 1940. Then Honolulu suffered. Spring of 1941 saw me return to the island Eden that was my home, and lose contact with Astounding and Unknown until August 1942.

The summer of 1942 found me on the mainland for the duration, and I made my first contact with fandom ---Anthony Boucher, who introduced me to the GGFS, organised (sic) fandom, fmz, stfventions and other things without which my life now would not be worth living.

Eventually, like all true fans, I moved to Los Angeles---and was subjected to regular and heavy doses of bacillus fuzii. I recognised the symptoms early, and thought it might be possible to gain the glory of fan publishing with but a fraction of the expense and toil. The dread day was forestalled temporarily by collaboration with Mel Brown on the first Fan Slants. Now, however, I bow before the will of the gods, and hasten to take up the typewriter and stylus. Something---at this time I know not what---will be slipped into an envelope, and mailed to you. It is my desire that it meet with your approval; if not the postman and I are prepared to fend off your brickbats. At least, I hope the postman is.

CONTENTS

"I Bow..."	Ye Ed.
Selfmade Superman	Walt Liebscher
Forgotten Masterpiece	Edwin M. Clinton Jr.
The Long and the Short	Ye Ed.

S E L F M A D E S U P E R M A N
Or, Sex Takes a Holiday
-Walt Liebscher-

Al Ashley was an immaculate conception in the eyes of his parents. People who oogled him, shortly after he left his floating lily pad, thought he was more of an immaculate deception. They offered condolences to his mother and stated, in disguised, but nevertheless lugubrious voices, that "after all, he was human." Of course, we must take into consideration the fact that these people were inclined to be lenient in their observations.

Ashley's abilities were recognised by his parents at an early age--- which is why they kept him in chains. Shackles had an astounding effect on Ashley, for today he can cast aside the chains of conventionality with a mere shrug of his two-inch shoulders.

After associating with this "indefinable" for several months, one is not surprised at such inanities as his thrice-daily "ritual of the potatoes". Years ago he browbeat Abby Lu into the habit of serving potatoes at every meal.

The aforementioned "ritual" is so replete with complexities that it is extremely difficult to describe the "orgy" with mere unsemantic words, as no words in the English language can describe anything so utterly revolting.

Ashley is always the first one at the table. As Abby Lu knows his every peculiarity (she's a wonder at training dogs) she knows good and well that she must serve the potatoes first. At first sight of the spuds Ashley drools ecstatically, gloms onto them with his clawlike digits, smells them windily once or twice, then lays them on his plate with a flourish. He then attempts to smash

them into obliteration. Having failed at this (he always does) he becomes frightfully enraged, and spends a full hour arranging them in perfect squares, then masticates them with a leer.

When the floor show is completed, the rest of us start eating, for we know he'll be calm through the rest of the meal. Wiedenbeck claims he is epileptic. I'm not sure, but he's the only person I know of, or heard of, who has a fetish for potatoes.

But I veer from the Ashley ego-biography. When he was five years old his inventiveness came to the fore. He's looked horrible ever since. His first royalty-paying creation was the "self-ciling yo-yo", and he still has the two cents to prove it. At five-and-a-half his inventiveness vanished completely. He's looked horribler ever since. Since this early age he hasn't given birth to a single new idea.

When still very young he fell off a ten-story building and landed on his posterior. This accounts for his queer topography. When he walks down the street he gives you the impression that he is legs clear up to his navel.

However, his physical peculiarities are far overshadowed by his pedantic ego. He is very helpful to new fans and budding fanarticle writers. Let us say that a fan writes a book review on "The Hard-Boiled Imbroglio", then asks Ashley's help in polishing it up. The result would most certainly be "What Al Ashley Thinks of "The Hard-Boiled Imbroglio", a fanarticle by Rose Budder.

After a disheartening beginning, young Ashley grew up to be something "out of this world". He looks it too.

But despite his unhuman appearance Al Ashley is a good egg, and one of my best pals, though to hear us quarrel you might be inclined to

F O R G O T T E N
M A S T E R P I E C E

-Edwin M. Clinton, Jr.-

Think back, now. What does the thought of Astounding, 1940, bring to mind? The climax of the Campbell regime, yes. One of the most unforgettable years in the history of science-fiction---the impression is rather of a highly finished product, as it were. Let's see, now---there was "Final Blackout", and "Slan", and the conclusion of "Grey Lensman". There was "Vault of the Beast", there was "If This Goes On--" and "Farewell to the Master", "The Roads Must Roll"---

That, at least, is what the popular consensus seems to indicate is the icing, the cream, the very ultra of one of our best years. Yet there is one bit which, somehow, seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle, one which, to this mind, at least, was one of the most unforgettable, poignant, realistic stories ever published. Maybe you, the individual reader, or some other reader of this article know the piece in question; if so you are one of the apparently few who recognised and remember the greatness of Lester del Rey's "The Stars Look Down".

A sincere, polished product from its opening sentence, this novelette appeared just one month before the first installment of the monumental "Slan". Herein, probably, lies the cause of the forgetfulness which has been the reward of del Rey's best effort. Rather lost

S E L F M A D E S U P E R M A N
think we were mortal enemies.

And, other fans respect him, at least for the moment. You see, Odd John was peculiar looking also, and he killed himself.

in the blinding brilliance of that longer giant; swept aside in the tremendous flood of acclaim which greeted "Slan". Yet undeservedly so.

It might be a good idea to dig out that August, 1940 Astounding and reread "The Stars Look Down" before going any further with this article; then we can get along together, because this discussion, while not technical, is going to be thorough.

In other words, our platform is laid, our banner is in the air: We demand recognition of this story.

There is a feeling, upon finishing "The Stars Look Down", of emotional satisfaction. A satisfaction that does not involve the melodramatic, the sensationalistic, or the sentimental---all of which are intrinsically false. Del Rey has carried his narration through with a smoothness and a naturalness that has seldom been equalled in science-fiction. Yes, the reader is well aware, beforehand, of what the last page and a half are to relate: but here it does not mean hack--by all means! ---or stereotype or formula. It is simply that such a conclusion is more perfect dramatically, much more realistic without being sentimental, more natural emotionally. Indeed, where the sentimentality of some authors would have filled a page with broken hearts and shattered dreams and tear-filled eyes, del Rey states his case and completes his denouement in one stern, frank, short paragraph:

"At least I have seen it, Tom; the stars look different up there." Erin took one final look and turned back into the room. "Until the reporters come back here, how about a game of rummy?"

Simple and powerfully effective.

Del Rey's characters have always been real;

particularly is this true in "The Stars Look Down". In this case what lends the aura of naturalness and humanness to these puppets strutting across twenty-five printed pages is the same restraining hand, the determination to be terse and to-the-point, that was noted above relative to the conclusion of the piece. "The Stars Look Down" is not meant as a character study---it might be called the profile of a dream; the characters are factors, essentials in developing this profile---the conflict of personality that is required to carry the idea forward. But the conflict is not one of all-good against all-bad, of black against white, of hero and villain. Although the story is told through Erin Morse, the reader knows that Gregory Stewart, just as surely as Erin, is sincere. Perhaps he is unscrupulous, but ultimately his end is sincere; and when at last his blindness is swept aside by sheer, irrefutable fact, he rises to giant's stature, actually surpassing Erin in the mind of the reader.

Erin himself said to his lifelong enemy:

"Your rules may be queer, from my standards, but it seems you do have a code of your own. I'm glad of that, even if it is a bit rough."

Even into his minor characters del Rey injects that element of humanness; he seems to sense the tremendous human effects, the terrific emotional kickback involved in this big dream of Erin's and of Gregory Stewart's. There is the unforgettable little moment at the end of the first chapter, when the boy who operates the ferry to Erin's island recognises Erin as "one of them crazy guys who's been playing with skyrockets", and raises the ferry charge. Somehow this seemed to touch upon the whole foundation of the story, to give the reader a full sense of this tremendous determination gripping these two men.

But above all it is the detail that makes these people so real, the casual remarks, the incidental actions. Del Rey is always very careful that Stewart is not a villain, that he is not just the opposing force in the story. His dream is just as big to him as is Erin's to himself.

Subtlety---Stewart: "I could have wrung your neck when I heard Mara's son was dead, instead of letting you off lightly with five years---" We know instantly that this seeming hatred between these two men springs from more than conflicting scientific opinion. In fact, discussion between the two men never seems to reach heartfelt enmity---there is always a sense of regret, perhaps, a faint shadow of the friendship they had once known. When Stewart offers Erin a berth on his ship, which he is confident will be successful, there is more in the offer than a desire to flaunt success in his rival's face. For after all, both had begun their quest for power to cross space together.

But what of the actual dramatic construction of this story about which we are pounding the table so vehemently?

One thing stands out above all: del Rey can be dramatic with pointing up his drama.

Perhaps that is not the right way to put it. But what we are driving at is this: the drama, of situation and of emotion, is frank and simple, almost terse. There is no superfluity of words, no suspenseful buildup---del Rey has an ability that approaches the uncanny, an ability to pack terrific punch and power in very, very few words, very simply put.

The story opens on this tenor and concludes similarly, as already discussed. Read that first paragraph---instantly one grasps the whole spirit of the story. By the time you have fin-

ished the first chapter, no basic detail is lacking, nothing of the emotional stresses that make up the story has been neglected. And all--without a violent act or word of any sort, only the intense, unrelenting force of simple, factual statement. We know of Erin and of Gregory Stewart, we see that their disagreement and their mutual hatred has its ultimate foundation in a love for one woman. We are aware of the background from which each has sprung---Erin, inheriting wealth, Stewart springing out of poverty---and of the effect this had on their characters. We know of the intrinsic sincerity of both.

The second part is rather supplementary. Del Rey gives us a clear-cut, all encompassing picture of the men who share Erin's dream; we receive our first impression of the actual quasi-warfare between the two experimenters--through the damage wrought by the incendiary bomb.

In chapter three we see the approaching, inevitable battle. Notice the drama in the last three paragraphs of the chapter. The sense of impending clash is extreme here.

If del Rey up to this point has succeeded in conveying the impression that the success of Erin Morse's atomic ship is only a matter of beating Stewart to the punch on detail, or that Stewart is outclassed, he shatters the feeling in the fourth chapter. The key is Doug Wratten's poignant tragedy; we know that this must have a definite meaning--and our fears are upheld by Stewart's next move. There is now only frustration and a subtly conveyed pity for Doug.

Chapter five the author devotes to a sort of prelude to the climax--if such the story has, in the accepted sense. A last resort, a final effort on the part of Erin's group--brilliantly made more real by the Chinaman's part in the scene.

Six and seven are

the culmination of the forward movement; it should not be referred to as the climax, for such is the construction of the story that there is no sharp break, no clear and definite pinnacle of action---only a steady forward surge, followed by a slow settlement and rearrangement of data. While the battle scene, the only sequence of actual violence in the story, forms a break, it is more intrinsic than external.

Chapters eight, nine, and ten can be considered almost as one: Stewart has failed, Erin has succeeded, only to learn that he can never fly another spaceship. There is only one other man with the ability to pilot Erin's ship when it leaves for an actual space voyage, and that is Stewart himself. The feeling of relaxation here is intense; there is in the mind of the reader a sense of the culmination of a forty year old struggle ending on an off-key note---the ending is both obvious and unavoidable. Stewart's dream is greater than his pride---as we have always sensed---and he must fly the ship.

We have mentioned before the effectiveness of del Rey's unsensational conclusion, and there is no need to discuss it further. One thing more, however, deserves notation. Reread the last page and a half, and notice the feeling of hustle and haste--and Erin lost in the shuffle, very lonely, a Moses indeed. There is a mood brought about by careful word choice that is extremely effective here.

Perhaps this has been a little too critical, a little too technical, a little too detailed. But somehow, when one finishes a tale that remains unforgettable and distinct against the flux and flurry of passing years and hundreds of stories, there is a desire to know and understand why it is a great story.

And often, why--forgotten.

THE LONG AND
THE SHORT

DAW's article in the last Phantagraph proves that Heck has just about shot his bolt insofar as the un-sibilant hiss is concerned. Koenig, we hope, will soon realise that he has beaten thru his drumhead and search for something to replace the old one. We would like to see our favorite chastiser and castigator take out after those imprudent fanpublishers who are so hell bent on evening their pages as to foist on unsuspecting readers ghastly punctuations like fo-od and sp-ace. Such a campaign on Heck's part would not only assure him of unlimited material for years to come; it would be an insurance against budding young editors who, otherwise, might inflict upon an agonised readership alimentary residua on the order of y-you o-te

If, by some strange miracle, the day should dawn when no more such manifestations of immaturity were to be found in the fan press, The Great Perfectionist could launch a drive to rid the world of those who believe that the possessive pronoun, 3rd person neuter, is spelt it's. This is another misconception which follows young publishers around, and seeks to slip through their typing fingers ---an easy task, since most of the neophytes are followers of the Columbus System (discover and land).

GIVE US BACK OUR ELEVEN DAYS!
--John A. Bristol, circa 1752

Mention of The Unsurpassed Reactionary set us to thinking about his recently completed work, the Encyclopedia Fanatica. This monumental opus, while it covers fandom's past thoroughly, stops dead at a point in mid-1944. It is not likely that a full-blown revision of the Fancylopedia will be attempted before 1950, or at least,

1948. There's been talk of an Annual or Yearbook to keep things updated until the second edition is upon us. It wouldn't be a FAF project; nor would it be a NFFF or MFS undertaking. At least, it does not seem so now. But something should be done; memories are short and a lot of important material can slip into limbo in no time. I would like to see an editors' committee formed to carry on this work. As for who would be best fitted for it---I don't know. Perhaps the Checklister, with his immense files. Perhaps Bob Tucker, or some other fan who gets all the fanzines. Perhaps Harry Warner, or Fran Lancy, or any one of a dozen top fans. Perhaps Lionel Innman, or someone equally likely to be fully acquainted with the "bright-eyed thirteen-year-olds" (who are more apt to be about 17). I'd be willing to do my share, but doubt that I could do much until I'm again firmly settled. This sort of thing---I believe---should be thrashed out before, not in, the fall mailing. I suggest Swisher---if he can take it on---to coordinate things temporarily.

I suppose I should apologise to D. Thompson for making off with the title of his yarn of some time ago and twisting it to fit a masthead. Do you consider these 7 lines apology enough, or must I bow in your direction each mailing, DB?

Art by ever-suffering JWiedenbeck

Cow Kissers: Al
Ashley and E. E.
Evans like sugar
liberally sprinkled
with cottage
cheese, & also go
for shredded wheat
seasoned with hot
milk and salt. We
R E T C H ! ! ! !



This is indeed a Bastard Publication: Out of Nova Press by a (wandering) Outsider. Whether either parent will acknowledge its offspring is doubtful at this writing