

Stencilled in an awful hurry by D. Webster at Idlewild, Fountainhall Road, Aberdeen - from letters he never has time to answer - & duplicated and distributed by JMRosenblum.

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A couple of minutes' thinking the other day brought one or two ideas into your editor's head: it is a fact, firstly, that Fido is a science-fiction fan-magazine; and also that this sheet, being issued with it, should entertain its readers a little by including some science-fictional fare. Luckily, my correspondents do sometimes mention stf. to me, so on searching through their letters, I find:-

MAURICE HANSON starts a letter thus: "I've just been reading four of your Unknown's. I can't say I'm terribly impressed by any of them; which won't worry you since you haven't read them anyway. But if you ever do, I mention that that the stories that stick to my mind - & therefore presumably the only ones to interest me - are "It", "All Roads", "Warm, Dark Places" and "The Tommy-knocker". The long stories in all four issues are much of a nauchliness; God knows how people can rave over them. The recipe for an Unknown smash-hit appears to be to plant a set of barely-sketched stock characters in a boringly bizarre world, let them stew in a juice of dull Edgar Rice Burroughs adventures with complete disregard for literary form, climax and denouement, season with occasionally mildly amusing anachronisms and archaisms, & be generally daft in an effort to produce "whackiness". Or, more simply, imitate the classic style of "Have a cigarette" said the elemental." With a skilful writer - such as Sprague de Camp or Hubbard - this can be stimulating and amusing until the novelty wears off. It is the 'sinister' stories such as "But Without Horns", "None But Lucifer" and "Sinister Barrier", & the occasionally well-done shorts that make Unknown worth reading. So there!"

And that's jest the beginning - says ye ed, laughing nastily. I'm pretty sure JFB has much to say on the subject, though I can't remember where. And ERIC HOPKINS did have much to say on stf. classics, if I could find it, which made good reading. Having had "The Time Stream" & "The Final War" forced on him, quoth he: "It was obvious from the start that Taine had produced something superior amongst the SF brood but the sweep of the thing did not quite capture my imagination. The action is a little confusing but I suppose that is excusable when the plot is considered. It is a thoughtful story but loses points, as a story not SF, when science pokes its nose in at the destruction of Eos & begins to cut planets in halves. Poof! All that stuff about "whirling vortices of light" and - "if we hit the ellipse on the edge with the !??! beam, we'll swing it back into position. Otherwise we shall be annihilated!" And why not? That stuff, as I was a' going to snarl, gets me - the wrong way. One of the things I dislike about Williamson. And just part of everything I larf at in EEFmith. I repeat - Poof! I should say that "The Final War" is the better of the two, viewing them as stories; you understand, not as SF. The latter is excellently vivid & grim, and grinds onwards in a most logical & un-sentimental fashion. The style is good despite various quaintnesses of phrase, due to the author's Germanic origin. I guess; brutal, striking, quite suitable to the theme, and thankfully free from coruscating rays &c. Yes, a very good story & undeserving of entombing in a SF mag. Spohr's prophesies of military developments are interesting in view of our first-hand knowledge of contemporary warfare(!) [Story was printed in WONDER, '52/ Disregarding his obviously science-fictional creations like the paralysing rays (fictional so far, anyway), we find he foresees immense Maginot-like underground fortifications, annihilating weapons making these defences necessary, & a degree of military & civil organization which I can only call an amazing foresight of totalitarian warfare. Eh, what? I think we have several wars to go before we reach the pitch of organisation attained in Spohr's State - to refresh your memory - males 15-16 on war work, over 16 as soldiers, & females on war work 15 & upwards, the story ending with girls being taught as artillerymen. --but we are having a taste of our descendents' splendid inheritance viz. civilians 16-60 conscripted as firefighters, & now the registration of girls for war work. I'm not saying it isn't necessary, mind you, but you can see where we are going from here. Just there, in fact,\*\*\*Summing up: I agree that both these stories are well above the mean (&

2/ how mean!) of SF but! if these are representative of the best in that field, that field is sufficiently proved barren."

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J.F.BURKE: "The identification of fans with prominent people is quite an interesting game; and I had some fun in my bath last night (yes, I do have baths) working out one or two similarities. Yourself I would place as Ford Madox Ford, of whom you've probably never heard. [A dashed low trick. The name seems faintly familiar, but I've no idea who the gent is. Why doesn't somebody tell me these things?] Eric Hopkins...mm...let me see now...[note, gentlemen - I'm giving you the number of dots exactly right each time] a combination of poet and very discerning critic - ch, yes, Herbert Read to the life, with the substitution of music for Read's artistic leanings. In fact, it's a perfect analogy. Have you read Read's latest, "Annals of Innocence and Experience"? It's a really thoughtful, interesting book."

And HERBERT READ gets his own back in a recent personal letter (he keeps calling me Dear Slug or Dear Mug, but what can one do with these poets?): "I have already told Sam that he is like George Orwell in my opinion. "Blitz", I said, shewed that he has Orwell's gift of vivid description, his realism, his left viewpoint, his sympathy with his fellow men, and his sly manner of slating this national system's faults when it's not looking. [That's not what Smith thinks about "Blitz". Yessir, quite an Orwell.\*\*\*I don't see you as a Sassoon - you don't write poetry for one thing, do you? No. Stay! - what impudence. Haven't you seen GG?] - and besides, Sassoon served. But O'Brien might suit you in view of your short story scheme. Viewing you dispassionately, I should be forced to pull your ears & poke you in the wind to fit you in anywhere but maybe I'm too accurate. Sassoon will do; like yourself he doesn't seem particularly disturbed by the world tho' he was in the last war. But you wouldn't remember that.\*\*\*This game is not so easy as it seems at first. Now lemme see. Johnny is definitely a mongrel out of T.S.Eliot by D.H.Lawrence! Yorick! You mixed a metaphor! His is the "Waste Land" mentality which has failed to follow Eliot to a religious solution but has been intensified in disgust of his fellow men under DHL's influence. John is not really contemporary in mood, I think.\*\*\* Eric Williams (where is the fellow?) [God knows. Even JFB doesn't, now. Of course, JFB isn't God.] is very definitely a Wells. He has the sense of the world's poor organisation & idealism and great ambitions for remedying these which could otherwise be attributable only to H.G. (or had: maybe he's altered them)."

ECH: "...the game's accuracy is well illustrated by the comparison of Smith with Poe, Tchekov, & Agate already!" . . . . DRS: "...But I would remind Youd and yourself that there is such a thing as a law of libel, and that if people insist on saying that I'm like James Agate I shall be forced to use it. Stop me, I can stand insults as well as the next fellow, but there's a limit to all things!" . . . . Yippee!

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And here R.G.MEDHURST replies to CSYoud's 10 points. Readers who care are advised to have both The Snag & GA 5 at hand, for even those who missed the beginning of this argument (which took place behind scenes) should be interested in it as an exercise in how arguments & quarrels arise & are propagated. "Point No.1. Accept your statement, C.S., that Warbull is finally withdrawn - with regret, if it means that work of the caliber of "Blitz" is to be lost to Fido readers. Had thought I'd made the Warbull withdrawal a basic point of my 'plaint, but maybe clarity eluded me. 2/ Thankee kindly, but I wasn't really waiting with all that impatience for a personal reply. Presume the "whopping big lie" refers to the par. commencing "that we regret", on p.1 of Snag. Read it again, Samuel! Have attempted to deal with the point of the Unanswered Letter in another place (Arthur's "Fan Mail" to be precise) Sorry you're out gunning for other fans who may have got entangled in my nefarious doings. 3/ Agreed, very bad taste. Sorry, I thought you liked that sort of thing. See, e.g., "Paean" in GG 1. Information as to why that was an bad taste, on request. At the moment, I must use Doug's space with due care. [Wish you would, dammit!] 4/ "I have never refused to give a hearing to the opposition." Yes, I'll have to give you best, there, because to cite evidence refuting this

3/ would be to drag other, more harmless, fans into the range of your wrath. And cf. last sentence of rejoinder to 2/, above. Yes, you "still will - in Fantast". Only thing is - you haven't. [Give him a chance...]. In view of Doug's Peace Campaign [See below], though, I give you full permission to continue to suppress my original remarks. 5/ Bravo! 6/ The point in question being par.4, p.2 of Snag? Read it again, Samuel. You'll find the venom of the Snag is really directed in a different direction from that of your sensitive self. 7/ No special answer appears to be called for. Except that "snob" isn't quite the word you were looking for here, I think. 8/ Par.3, p.3 of Snag? - Once more, I'd recommend a second reading. With whatever exercise of ingenuity I can't see how I'm objecting to that GG article (amusing stuff, incidentally, but not quite up to your usual style, it seemed to me). 9/ Oh, Sammy, a distressing blunder! I'm so sorry but as it happens, that "Socialist Standard" article was an attack on the "People's Convention"! 10/ Fear you're allowing spleen to vitiate judgement. Quoting from a letter signed C.S.Youd, dated 26-11-39, "I should make some mention of your excellent articles in "New Worlds" & "The Futurian". I thoroughly enjoyed both, especially since they contained what has become as rare in fan as in professional stf. circles - originality." Cf. with sentence 2 of 10/. Interesting notion at the end. Apparently you believe that having passed through a "stage", that stage is drained of significance for the rest of mankind. Sir Isaac Newton died a convinced, nay, a rabid, orthodox Christian. I passed thru the Christianity stage some time ago. Ergo, I am a greater man than Newton! What is your record, Communism, 3 months, Pacifism, 4 months, &c.? (The figures are probably inaccurate.) Well, Samuel, I admit you have more brain than the generality of men, but I have no evidence you are a towering genius, an Odd John. And I thus have no good reason to suspect that you have exhausted the potentialities of, say, Communism, by dabbling in it for a few months. Do you really seriously think that a brief time of reflection is sufficient for you to dispose of subjects to which men of genius, or near genius, have devoted life-times? So I wouldn't be so distressed if I did stand where your foot fell 2 years ago. Actually, I don't think I do, in view of, among other things, your confusing of the S.P.G.B. case with that of the "People's Convention"! "... The Peace Campaign. I asked RGM to be fairly meek & mild in reply; he has been - fairly. No answer, I think (& hope), is required, but if we must have one I think CSY will reply similarly. Recent communication with 1 or 2 Fido readers has confirmed in me the view they don't want "libel sheets". Good. Let's not have them. That leaves just one....

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W A R !

I regret to state that an active state of hostilities now exists between DRSmith & DWebster. With ample warning & even a formal declaration of war Smith launched his attack, scorning all the perfections of modern civilised warfare. He did not plant a 5th. Column in Aberdeen, he didn't even flood the place with propaganda (I've heard all his propaganda months ago, & it rolls off me like a ping-pong ball rolling down the Wall of Death). He says:- "It is becoming increasingly obvious that even Youd cannot approach yourself in sheer deceitfulness. I refer of course to this extra sheet, after protests of peace-making, and the downright vilifying to which you subject me at every turn. You, Youd, Medhurst, Hopkins and others are all of a kind (a kind rotten to the core), and only Burke and myself have managed to keep our heads in this adolescent squabbling, and come out as friendly as we were before." . . . I leave you to it.

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They haif said: quhat say thay: lat thame say. JFB: "...G.A. (I refuse to use the disgusting new epithet)..." JMR: "...this month's G.A. (I refuse to say Tart which has an even more uncomplimentary meaning than usual in this part of the world)..." RGM: "Sorry to say I'm not keen on Les Tart as a pet-name. Somewhat unpleasant associations." DR3: "....Gentlest Art....GA.....the Gent...." ECH: "Passing on to the 4th. Les Tart, might I grin hideously at Sam's accepted title for G.A.? I'm surprised at your rood minds. Fans, alas, grow naughtier with the years (& the experience)." My, my, what a collection of sissies! I'm quite willing to fall in with the wishes of the majority, & if a purely

4/ frivolous tart is too strong for our stomachs, I may say that as a snob (CSY - three varieties) I am attracted by the pleasant genteelity of The Gent . . . .

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ANTON RAGATZY: "The statement of yours regarding feelings and intellectual reasoning is all right in modern society -- but you can control feelings just as easily -- in fact easier -- than you can control reasoning. If one can't argue with a person because his feelings are radically opposed to your own - then it's too late to try reasonable conviction -- time for training and directing of feelings in youth."

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A variety of extracts from Eric the Hop: "I make it clear that I do not think football &c. should be banned or is disgusting - in its place. But you'll note that I listed all the leisure pasttimes which I call 'ocular', i.e. they do not require any effort on the part of those who are being entertained by them. And if they are to be the sole goal of our daily labours we might as well manufacture larger gas ovens & all stick our heads in them --at once. I have no objection to anyone looking at the amusements I listed - I have seen many a football & boxing & cricket match, and shall always remember Bluey Wilkinson winning the World's Speedway Championship at Wembley - but nobody could say that those & girls were my only dsires. I have read a little & bought a few books - 208 at the moment - but how many of Britain's forty-odd millions have not? My purpose of describing the people as looking at amusements all their leisure was to emphasise the fact that most of them do nothing else. And that's my objection. By all means go to football, &c. - they're interesting in small doses although 'twere better to play them, I've done that too - & live in brick houses if it's not irritating [friend, you would gurgle with joy if you set eyes on an Aberdeen of white, sparkling granite], but let's keep them in their proper place, the background, & the real leisure for worthy objects. Such as the politics some will not discuss, apparently.\*\*\*[which is admirable so far as it goes - but it doesn't go nearly far enough. There's much more in the Hopkins manuscript - dealt with, Charles, in a large chunk in my letter. Comments appreciated.]\*\*\*Arthur is very optimistic: he would rid the country of "poor material" in a generation, with good education. Individualised education would help a great deal towards a happier community but as you & I agreed, there are many who cannot be reasoned with because of natural dumbness, truclence, weak-headed parents, &c. And you must have their support before you have the power to educate them.\*\*\*You cannot abolish the proletariat (i.e. those who live by selling their labour to the employers). You can make everyone a proletarian, an employee of the State directed by the people, which is Socialism & fair. The real difficulty of Arthur's definition is poor nomenclature. He really means that the people should be taught or persuaded (!) to appreciate the Arts & I'm with him for you cannot appreciate the Arts without appreciating human nature & its strengths, weaknesses, subtlety yet simplicity. But satisfy their immediate needs first: adequate food, clothing, housing, leisure, & assurances that sickness, unemployment & retirement do not automatically release the State's responsibility for their welfare.\*\*\*True education, which is the drawing out of the individual's qualities & supplying of them with knowledge & material, would distinguish the reasonably intelligent from the subnormal (as the p.f. calls 'em) if carried up to the age of 18 at least. Perhaps an example of the people's inability to think is that at least a third of the working class must vote for the Conservatives to take office, & they have had a handsome majority for 10 years. The Conservatives are not brutes but their activities in foreign affairs have hardly proved beneficial to the masses, have they? Neither is their home policy as altruistic as it could be."

SMITH: "I think myself that you rather spoil the effect of "The Elder Gods", by the way, by including the too familiar gibberish at the end. [Go to, sir. Can it be that I fooled even the wily Smith? Why thinkest I used the word "meaning"? Too weak a joke? Anyway, I can do much better purple-patching, as such, than that effort.] I trust you will give us something longer on the same lines in "Fantast", for we could do with at least one piece like this month's "Mataiya" in each issue. [Oi, Varp! Let's collaborate, & slay them.] April fool, April fool, April fool! DRS never wrote that VAR passage on p.3 - I did. His last letter begins "Oh dear, Webster" & continues in the same strain. Ever been had?

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