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It is true that many scientific concepts are handled (often mishandled) by science fiction writers in such a manner that they give occasion for regrets, particularly

ALAS, POOR EINSTEIN

There is little doubt that one of the prominent features of scientific fiction is the lack of rudimentary scientific knowledge displayed by many of its authors. To consider one phase of science, the Theory of Relativity comes in for some appalling treatment which seems to indicate that the writers are incapable of assimilating the simplest explanations of the Theory.

In proof of this I have gathered a few examples from various stories illustrating some of the ridiculous mistakes that have been made.

One of the first mistakes that leaps to the mind of the scientific fiction reader is that made concerning the so-called finiteness of space. Einstein distinctly states that space is finite but unbounded and explains this as meaning that, if it were possible to set off at a terrific speed in a straight line and continue in that straight line for long enough one would return to one's starting point, so that while it is possible to give a finite value to the radius of the universe, it is impossible by travelling in a straight line to come to the end of space; and many of Einstein's postulates have been already justified. John Russel Fearn, who states himself that he has his own method of tackling the scientific part of a story, in "The Blue Infinity" takes the Earth to the end of space and beyond it into a new universe just by travelling fast enough in a straight line. Cases similar to this are common enough even Laurence Manning, normally a very reliable author in one instance allows his heroes to reach and pass the edge of the universe after only four million years of at the speed of one hundred and fifty thousand miles

Alas, Poor Einstein

(continued)

per second.

Further, an even more frequent misuse of the Theory is the manner in which authors use the magical words "the fourth dimension". Miss L.F. Stone seems to regard the fourth dimension as a fairyland where all that is evil is banished and beautiful girls clad after the manner of the more modest Greek goddesses await the earthman who bridges the gap. In one of the latest stories of this type she causes her scientist to say "The fourth dimension is simply an extension of matter into the realm of invisibility." (That, by the way.) Clyde C. Campbell in "Inflexure" talks about a "Four dimensional star" and a little further on we have advanced scientists making remarks like this: "We now possess four dimensions." "At a speed approximating that of light a body possesses infinite mass, two dimensions are infinitely extended, length is contracted almost to infinity and time exists at right angles to the other two dimensions." That last statement which I may have improved a little in copying out is in explanation of the previous one. One last example is garnered from "Dimensional Fate", by A.L. Burkholder, where, when something was placed in the [THE] apparatus its "Electron speeded up until they far exceeded the speed of light, whereupon they became fourth-dimensional."

The Lorentz-Pitgerald contraction is terribly treated particularly by some of the younger authors. J. Harvey Haggard, for instance in "Relativity to the Rescue" cause his villain to state that "at immobility, all mass is lost and an object extends to infinity."

Even wilder statements are made by a Mr. Charles Schneeman in a letter to "Amazing Stories" some time ago. He disproves the following statement, which, (never having heard of Einstein, apparently), he attributes

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Primarily for the English science fiction fan, but also useful to others, we hope, is:

SCIENCE FICTION THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC

Two major scientific works which have been well-heralded have appeared since the last issue of "Novae Terrae". One is the Wells film "THINGS TO COME".....The other is the book written by the President of the British Interplanetary Society, "ROCKETS THROUGH SPACE" by P.E. Cleator.....The H.G. Wells film has had a definitely good reception from the film critics as a whole. It is agreed that the settings and machines of the future designed by Vincent Korda and the ways Ned Mann and his assistants have modelled, photographed, and generally produced these are the highlights of the film. The direction of William Cameron Menzies is satisfying, and the acting of Raymond Massey and the other principals is quite good. The film is occasionally pompous in the typical Wells tradition and the dialogue is definitely poor. As an ordinary programme picture it is quite good, but as a science fiction film it is excellent.....

"ROCKETS THROUGH SPACE" had an excellent reception from a number of reviewers and anyone at all interested in astronautics cannot afford to miss the event of a new book on the subject in English, especially a good one such as this. It is published by Allen and Unwin at 7/6.....

.....A serial broadcast recently in the Western Children's Hour featured a Mad Scientist with his army of mechanical men and a friendly Martian combating him.....

In the realm of 2d weeklies the amusing Greyfriars Herald Supplement in "The Magnet" has been running "St. Sam's In The Stratosphere" a burlesque on science fiction. The present serial in "THE MAGNET" is also slightly scientific—a tidal wave washing England and Western Europe. No's. 514 and 519 of the Boy's Friend Library are science fiction, one dealing with a fight against the Insect Men, and the other describing Britain in barbarism in the year 2000. (We are indebted to P.S. Hetherington, First-Class SFL

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No. 2.--- The Perfect Science Fiction Film

The merits of a science fiction story can be awarded on both the scientific and literary angles of it and parallel to this a science fiction film can be judged on its scientific and cinematic merits. It has been pointed out that the production of the scenes in a science fiction movie is extremely difficult. A writer can in several hundred words give a detailed description of a scene on an alien planet in which he outlines the major noteworthy points and so calls up some kind of an image in the reader's mind, the mental picture formed containing minute details supplied by the reader's own mentality. But in the cinema ready-made pictures are dealt with which must be complete down to the smallest details. In opposition to this inherent difficulty it should be remembered that the cinema is an excellent medium for the portrayal of fantasy. If sufficient care is taken there is practically no end to the effects that can be obtained, witness "The Invisible Man", "The Tunnel", ("Transatlantic Tunnel"), and "Things to Come".

To be perfect a science fiction film must have an original plot, plausible and correct on the scientific side in the light of present-day knowledge. The dialogue must be appropriate in respect to the locale of the action, though certain difficulties arise, for in a film depicting the far future the languages of earth as spoken then obviously could not be used. The chief flaw in the otherwise superfine "Things To Come" lies in its dialogue which is written in a very literary and ornate style throughout. This extreme should equally be avoided and dialogue should be life-like and as far as possible in keeping with the general tone of the production.

It is scarcely necessary to mention that all sound effects should be recorded as efficiently as possible and similarly all photography and trick-work should be excellent. Such is the calibre of the trick-work-photography in "Things To Come" that when the lights go up at the end of the show one feels astounded by the accuracy

The Perfect Science Fiction Film (Cont.)

of the present-day world compared with the beauties of the world of the future as depicted. That is as it should be in every science fiction film..... realism a dominant feature.

These characterizations should be in the hands of a set of competent actors, who play their parts as though they believe in them. If it is necessary to use pocket television outfits, take concentrated food tablets or operate gravity-nullifying belts, the actors should do it naturally with the utmost nonchalance, as we today would light a cigarette. Apart from this there should be little difficulty in the histrionic direction except for acquiring actors with imagination who realize the significance of the production they are taking part in.

The cinema is essentially a visual medium, so that it is used to its best advantage when the action, development of the plot, thoughts of the characters, etc., are all explained in pictures. Thus in the "Hands Of Orlac" when Peter Torre is thinking bitterly of a woman's scorn for him, the director shows him gazing into a mirror and the image in the mirror is that of the woman denouncing him. When advantage is taken of the cinematic medium in this manner, the finished film is a living, vital product which holds attention, and a film made in this way is a far better production than what might amount to a photographed stage-play, canned, and presented later on the screen. A perfect science fiction film, then, like any other perfect film will be made throughout in this manner -- every position, angle, and movement of the camera meaning something and each contributing a part to the film as a whole. The artifices of the director and editor of the film can be practically endless, and even the scientific part can be presented as pictures, if care is taken.....

All the factors mentioned above must be mixed well together, put in the atomic force combinator and after thirty minutes, if the release mechanism is operated, the receiver tray will be seen to contain

A perfect science fiction film.
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Alas, Poor Einstein (Cont.)

solely to John W. Campbell, Jr., (never having heard of Einstein, apparently), that at the speed of light a body would have infinite mass, by saying that "although a body would have attained infinite density at the speed of light, at the same time it would have infinitesimal mass. (Volume). In other words the weight would remain constant." The "Volumes" in brackets is presumably the work of the Editor, but in any case the statement shows a considerable confusion of ideas.

I have chosen a few, not all by any means, of the more serious mistakes leaving out entirely the smaller, but still unforgivable, errors that are always cropping up. I have no objection to anyone completely disregarding Einstein's theory in a story, but to use it with such errors is inexcusable, if only because of the discredit it brings on scientific fiction.

D.R. Smith.



"NOVAE TERRAE" is produced by the members of Chapter 22 of the Science Fiction League, the Nunston, England, Chapter. Our next issue will contain a short article on the activities of the Chapter.



If you are at all interested in rocketry or astronautics you will be greatly interested in:

- The Conquest of Space by David Lesser.
- Stratosphere and Rocket Flight by C.G. Thelp
(Fittan 3/5)
- Rockets Through Space by P.M. Gleator
(Allen and Howin)

also, the Journal of the British Interplanetary Society, and "Astronautics" the production of the American Rocket Society.



MORE TROUBLE IN NEW YORKby E. J. Carnell
(of Plumstead,
London.)

You are no doubt aware, as was every science fiction fan at the time, of the Tucker-Wollheim dispute, which, starting as a rag, ended in almost another World War, and how eventually Don Wollheim and Co. were ejected from the SFL. The story has had a strange ending since the opening of 1936.

Probably you have read in "Wonder Stories" of how several ex-members of the League had been attending regularly Chapter meetings in New York, and the resulting arguments by Mr. Hornig and Co. Shortly you will read Mr. Hornig's side of the matter, in "Wonder", but here, I am giving you the side of the opposing force.

Don Wollheim wrote a story for "Wonder", "The Man From Ariel", for which he didn't get paid, so he wrote another one, this time only the plot being accepted, but still no pay. So Messrs. Sykora and Michel took his part, and they started a slanging war against the staff of Gernsback. These three were at the time members of the New York Chapter, with Mr. Sykora the Director -- the result being the ejection of the three from the League. Subsequently these three began to appear at Chapter meetings of the East New York SFL as they were still interested in science fiction work. Then up pops Mr. Hornig at a meeting and a new war started.

The reorganized New York Chapter held their first meeting with Charles Hornig in the chair when in walked William Sykora, Don W. and eight of the "boys" who then proceeded to tell the crowd all the causes of the trouble. After this the East N.Y. branch had a meeting, which was packed out, and again all the facts were gone into, the outcome being that the members decided that it was none of anyone's business who they invited round for tea. Then George Clark, Director of Brooklyn Chapter, stepped in and denounced both sides.

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The outcome of all the pros and cons was that the offenders would not be barred from League activities, but, that should a suitable apology be forthcoming, they could return to the fold. As nobody rushed to accept this offer, the music went round and around some more, with still more alarms and excursions. Apology be forthcoming.

The outcome of the whole affair was that the East N.Y. Chapter resigned from the League and with the help of their friends have started the Independent League for Science Fiction. Just how far they will be able to carry this project will remain to be seen, though if enthusiasm counts, I can't see the idea petering out very quickly.

It will be interesting to see what the other side has to say about it.

Science Fiction This Side Of The Atlantic (Cont.)

No. 735 for the item immediately above.) In "The Scout" there is a serial running now, "Britain In The Ice Grip", slightly scientificational..... Gaumont-British science fiction movie "THE TUNNEL" has recently been released. It is a powerfully acted, picture with Richard Dix and Leslie Banks in a quite distinguished cast. The scenes of the gigantic radium drill and the destruction of the transatlantic tunnel by an undersea volcano are wonderfully convincing..... In "THE DEATH BOX" by Alexei Tolstoy (Metuen 7/6), a scientist discovers a new ray able to cut people in two, and split battleships, etc.; He takes it to an island near the New World, and becomes dictator over the latter for a time. The book has good characterizations and a serious philosophy of life.....

NOVLE TERRAE is;

2d. a single copy, 1/9 for a year (12 issue) post-free.
in U.S.A., 5 cents a copy, 45 cents a year, post-free.