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SIXPENCE



Operation Fantast

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PROGRESS

Well, we think we can call it that—you see, we have a different cover this issue, and some inside illos, also. Apart from that sort of progress, we have also developed a harder heart. If you have received this issue it means either that you have subscribed, that you have written something that appears in it, or advertised in it. Other receivers will be those we do business with, or those we love like brothers (or sisters) and a further class to whom we think we owe something, for past support. One or two folk are getting a "last chance." Please check on the order form which class you belong to, and take appropriate action, uh?

Having got that gentle reminder off our chests, we proceed to take you to task on another matter—those votes for the best item in the issue. We are unable to form a really fair opinion when, from 1,000 issues, we get back only 50 votes. That was the result from July, roughly. Votes were allocated as follows: PREDECESSOR, Ian Williamson 22; Heritage, Cedric Walker 17; Science Review, KFS 9; Recent British Books, Ted Carnel 12; Shaver Mystery, Ron Deacon 2; of the latter one voter observed—"This goes to Ron for impudence." So far we have about 50 votes on issue 2, and Charlie Duncombe is in the lead, and I hope that by the time this actually gets printed, we shall have received more. To the odd 250 folk who are getting this 'zine for the first time, we culled your names from the prozines, in case you are wondering. If you like the 'zine, send your sub along to Phil Rasch, or either of the other folk named above, and ensure that you get further copies.

On the cover of our next issue we hope to have another Peter Ridley, and another story by him also. We have asked John Newman to produce us a yarn, and he has promised to do his best, and you all know John's items are pretty good. We hope that in time we shall be able to really forecast our contents, but at the moment it is a bit difficult—we have some good stuff on hand, but to fit it in . . . ah! That's different.

Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year,

Joyce and Ken Slater.



ROAD

By SANDY LAURENCE

The city was dark and quiet. From suburb to suburb respectable citizens lay plunged in sleep. Only night shifts, night clubs and late buses disturbed the nocturnal tranquility. The dance halls were closed, the musicians had packed their horns and gone. Home to their wives, or night club jobs, or had seen their girl-friends home and were returning to their beds to sleep the sleep of the just.

A strang race, these dancemen. They speak a bizarre jargon all their own! "That's the end," they say, and "Yeab—he's solid." Their music is of an obsessive, yet stangely secondary interest in their lives. Of such was Bob Sullivan, possessor of a quite extraordinary ability to play "knocked-out trumpet." Slangy yet cultured in speech, living with every heart-beat the litting, lifting drive of his music.

For once, to-night, he'd been paying the musicians' wages instead of drawing them. He'd paid for the privilege of drifting around the ballroom floor with a person whose charms were for him inordinately great. Their adieux had been exceptionally fond and fervent, for in five days they were due at church, there to begin a permanent and happy sharing of the peaks and valleys of life. Altogether, in fact, a most satisfactory evening.

So Bob Sullivan strode off down the moonlit road, swinging the small leather case which contained his dance shoes, pursed his lips and filled the air with extempore melody. His whistle rose high and held there, sending variations of the blues across the still night, at once a peaven of joy and a lament. Joy in anticipation of his future life, lament for the single joys which he'd know no longer. Deep and blue, his melody reached out to the stars, encompassed them and filled the universe with meaning.

He strode on down the road, enwrapped in starry visions of the future, almost unaware of the material world outside his private universe of woven dreams. The wonder of that golden world which only youth can know engrossed him so deeply he noticed not the road nor the way he trod, until the lack of moonlight forced its way past his subconscious mind, and pulled him up with a jerk.

"Where the hell have I got to now," he spoke aloud to emptiness. Puzzled, he looked around. The moonlight had gone. Also the reservoir, the fence, the houses. The street lamps had changed, from electric lights to inefficient incandescents. Their light was wrong, too. Subtly and indeterminately wrong.

Somewhat alarmed, he cast back along his tracks, searching for the road he had lost. No break, no bend. No crossroad. And a disturbing subconscious impression that the sky above had given place to a gray ceiling.

He spoke aloud again. "I guess I'm lost. How, God knows. But I should get somewhere if I get cracking. I ought to cross the railway if I keep straight on."

On and on, but no change. Alarm, growing within him, forced his feet faster against the pavement, but all his efforts seemed to meet with no result. Then a sigh of relief.

"Gawd! here's something at last."

The road stopped dead at a pair of high, wrought-iron gates. Bob got hold of the handle of one, and pulled. Nothing happened. Nothing.

Except that horror rolled over and yawned at him. For the gates opened. Just like that. In broad daylight, or an electrically lighted street, it would have been a photo-electric cell and an ultra-violet beam. Here, in this gray nowhere, it was horror unimaginable. From there, he lost charge of events. Some invisible force pushed him through the gates and slammed them behind him. The same relentless, psychic pressure forced him on into grayness.

Abruptly, after light-years of travel he was dumped, quite unceremoniously. There was a door in front of him. An unpleasant door. It reminded him vaguely of a huge mouth. It—gaped. A youth of astonishing, golden beauty confronted him.

"Hullo, Bob, so pleased to see you. My name's Ozymandyas," he extended his hand. Bob took it. It was abnormally hot, and dry.

Look, mister," he pleaded "Where am I—I just gotta know that."

"Why, in hell, of course. Entrance 117B."

"Oh," feeling very insignificant. "I'm kinda dead, then?"

"Sure you are—it's always a shock at first. I'm taking you straight to the Old Man—you're being well looked after; we don't get many Englishmen with Irish names."

He led Bob to a blank wall, pressed a button. The elevator descended, opened. The elevator attendant had a hula-girl's body and a dragon's head. Her fiery breath singed Bob's tie. "So sorry," she said. "Such a nuisance at times, this kind of build." Bob thought this an understatement.

"Seventeenth floor, please," said Ozymandyas.

"Himself, eh," said the dragon-girl. "You must be somebody, buddy. I ain't got that far in 17 years. How's about seeing a girl afterwards, and givin' out with the dirt. I can give you plenty of what it takes.

Looking at her luscious curves, Bob guessed she could. Remembering her super-halitosis, he said, "Yeah, sure, I'll think it over."

"Seventeenth floor. None but Lucifer and Treatment Distribution," sang the dragonette. They stepped out on to thick plush. The lift had carried them directly into the huge waiting room. Ozymandyas led Bob to a door marked "Managing Director Private," and knocked. A voice said mildly, "Come in." The Golden Youth opened the door and allowed Bob to precede him.

Inside, Bob stopped dead. "The Devil!" he exclaimed. "Precisely," drawled the personality behind the desk. "Pleased to see you, Sullivan. Thank you Ozymandyas, you may go now."

Bob took stock of Lucifer.

Silver hair, stock rotund figure. No horns. No slit-like pupils. No cloven hooves.

"I'm sorry," said Lucifer, "to have upset your conventional ideas. Cigar?" Bob rather shakily refused. Cigars always made him sick. From somewhere he drew courage to ask, "What can I do for you?"

"Well," said Lucifer, "this is more or less a personal foible of mine. You see, I've been running this place for some time, and occasionally I like personally to meet a human. Since your race multiplied, I've had very little to do with individuals. So I like to see one of you now and then, just to relax. Tired businessmen on Earth like to relax, don't they? They've only got about 50 years to worry about. I've got eternity."

"H'm, can't say I envy you," said Bob. "But why me, in particular?"

"Your ancestry was Irish, and the Irish are much more considerate of the half-world. Whisky?" "Yeah—thanks," said Bob.

"Belphegor!" called the devil. "Won't answer a buzzer," he explained. "Very conservative, my Belphegor."

The door opened. If you've no objection to having your liquor served by an articulated octopus with a human head, go have a drink with Lucifer. The liquor's good.

Belphegor handed Bob a long glass. About two feet in fact. "Why the skyscraper?" Bob wanted to know. Belphegor grinned—quite a bizarre effect. "Those who drink with the devil should use a long glass," he paraphrased, and articulated out. Lucifer smiled. "Bel will have his little joke," he said.

For a little while they smoked and drank in silence. Then, draining his glass, Lucifer said "Well, young Sullivan, to business. I'll take your story and assign you myself. That's a privilege, my friend. Tradition, also. I know your past, but out traditions are our laws. So proceed, my lad, shoot the likker my way, and give out with the dirt."

Bob started. "Hep, huh?" he gasped almost automatically. "Listen, gate—" he began, and from there he proceeded with his life story up until leaving Phyl . . . was it that night or a century ago?

The devil's face was grave when he had finished. Silence. Too much silence. Then: "Anything else?" asked Lucifer. "I'll tell you a secret. I don't know everything. There may be something you have not told. But I must know. That is also the law. If you do not tell me, we have ways of finding out."

Bob blinked. "O.K., I'll talk. I've missed out two things. I was a Jazz fan and a fantasy fan."

The Devil seemed to swell. His eyes shot fire in his anger. "A fantasy fan!" he hissed. "A fantasy fan! How I hate them! I'm trying to get a decent place down here—I've made it fairly high-class already. Now a fantasy fan. Out! Out of here, I say!"

He rose above the desk pointing a suddenly-dusky forefinger at Bob. Wings sprouted from his shoulders. That finger extended towards Bob seemed to impel him, out through the window, dizzily down through inderterminate greyness back to that corridor-like road, towards a square of white in the distance.

Driven by that unholy compulsion, he rushed on, terror rendering him insensible of the fact that the pressure was lessening.

Then Satanic laughter reverberated through the abysmal grey; Gargantuan and evil, it shocked his already tortured soul.

"Haw! haw! haw! hey, Lilith, darling, ring up Paradise and tell! Sands and Time they sent Young Sullivan down 20 years early, and he's not due here anyway. A fantasy fan. Haw! haw! haw! did he look scared. Tell 'em jaxon, tell 'em baby, I ain't laughed so much since de Rais was born."

And Bob was suddenly running with rain in his face. Running like hell. Like h—? He stopped, abruptly. Could it have been a dream? A dream perhaps induced by the triple excitements of swing, alcohol and sex? But wait—the pubs had nothing but very weak bitter, he'd had only half-a-pint, the band had been commercial and uninteresting.

Soul-scared and chastened, he climbed on to a bus. In front of him some one said "Yes, on'y gonna be married Sat'd'y, they, an' 'e was fahn dead near the reservoy."

Bob blanched. His heart beat like a Gene Krupa drum break. The conductor asked, "You alright, chum?"

"Yes, thanks," said Bob. "Threepenny, please." As he handed him the tickets, the conductor dropped his ticket clip.

"Well I'll go ter 'ell," he said—then: "Gorblimey, he's fainted!"

RECENT BRITISH BOOKS

By E. J. CARNELL

This column did not appear in O.F. 2, because I was attending the S-F Convention in the U.S.A. A report of that convention will appear in another journal, but it is mentioned here because readers will doubtless be interested in the explanation of my absence.

In the interim it would seem that British publishers have realised that fantasy is a form of literature worthy of attention, for more books of this type have appeared on the market than it is possible to cover in the space at my disposal. I shall therefore touch on the more significant items.

The most interesting fact is the publication on both sides of the water of Sydney Fowler Wright's *THE WORLD BELOW*. (Books For To-day, London 9s. 6d.) (Shasta, Chicago, 3.00). After being out of print for 15 years, this much-sought-after work will—in fact, has received a great welcome from all connoisseurs of fantasy. Reviews of this book have now appeared in many publications, and so it may be better for me to give a little historical data which will doubtless be of interest. Originally intended as a trilogy, the first part, *THE AMPHIBIANS*, was produced by Merton Press, London, in 1924; a small edition, and badly printed. A subsequent edition followed in 1925, from Swan Press, Leeds, 1,000 copies at 7s. 6d. bound in buckram, and 5,000 copies at 2s. 6d. in paper boards. The second part of the book, *THE WORLD BELOW*, including *THE AMPHIBIANS* as part 1, was then printed by Collins in 1929, and by Longman Geen, New York, in 1930. It is only recently that Mr. Wright has been able to recover the copyright, and even then it was very difficult to discover a copy of the original work, in order that new plates could be made. It was intended that the plates should then be flown to Chicago for the use of SHASTA, but luckily a copy of the American edition was discovered by Mr. Korshak, and this delay avoided. Of the book itself, sufficient to say that it stands alongside *LAST AND FIRST MEN* as one of the most outstanding examples of imaginative literature that have been produced in this century.

Now to touch briefly on other reprints. Most of Charles William's fantasies are available again at 8s. 6d. or 7s. 6d., and these books, although somewhat philosophical in content, are masterpieces which should not be overlooked by the collector. Many items of H. G. Wells' work are available, the main one of these being *THE SHORT STORIES OF H. G. WELLS*, comprising 63 tales in 1038 pages, two editions, one at 21s., and the other, printed in Holland, at 7s. 6d. Publisher in both cases is BENN, and the former is recommended for collectors. *The Wandering Jew* trilogy by G. S. Viereck and P. Eldridge are also available again from Citadel Press, at 12s. 6d. each.

In new books, strictly sf, only one main item is new—William F. Temple's *THE FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE* (John Long, 9s. 6d.), this being an enlarged and completely rewritten tale based on the story that appeared in *Amazing* Nov. '39. More have appeared in the fantasy field, however, including several true fantasies, and several borderline cases. Of the true fantasy tales, I think Eric Romilly's *BLEEDING FROM THE ROMAN* (Chapman and Hall 9s. 6d.) is the most likely to find favour with the fans, dealing with a modern Briton cast back to the days of Ancient Britons. Others worthy of mention are Susan Alice Kerby's *Mr. KRONION* (Laurie, 8s. 6d.) which deals with a visit of Jupiter to modern Britain, and *THE ARRIVAL OF MASTER JINKS*, by Connery Chappell (Falcon, 8s. 6d.) touching on the results to be expected from a drug that enables a mother to have a baby in one month. A special mention must be given to a tale that will delight many readers of fantasy—*SEVEN DAYS IN NEW CRETE*, by Robert Graves (Cassell, 9s. 6d.)—a future civilisation based on magic rather than on science is the basis of this story. Forthcoming items worthy a glance by the fan are a collection of Algernon Blackwood, published by Nevill, at 12s. 6d.; a Lord Dunsany collection titled *THE MAN WHO ATE THE PHOENIX* (Jarrold, 9s. 6d.); *THE BOWL OF NIGHT*, a lost-race story, by Edward Liston; (Jarrold, 9s. 6d.); and Frank Belknap Long's *THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS*, which will be reprinted in UK by Museum Press at 8s. 6d.

All in all, it looks as if it is going to be pretty expensive for the 'complete collector' to keep up with even the British market.

SCIENCE REVIEW

By K.F.S.

I rather missed out last time, because Uncle Joe detonated his atom bomb 'twixt the time I wrote the article for No. 2, and the time it was sent out. However, that is the fault of the iron curtain, I guess. I have also been taken to task by various readers for not commenting on things which have been published in all the newspapers—may I point out that my aim is to give a little extra publicity to those items which have not "hit the headlines"? It would be futile for me to re-write items from the newspapers, for they are far more capable of giving the matter more attention and more space. To pass on, therefore, to items which have not been greatly publicised.

We commence with astronomy. The detailed survey of the Southern Hemisphere has brought to light a new double star, consisting of two red dwarves. It is estimated to be among the nearer of such stars, Proxima Centauri (.41 light years) being the nearest known. The combined mass of the two stars is considered to be not more than 1.9th that of Sol.

Indirectly connected with astronomy comes the report of an investigation by Ralph B. Baldwin on the probable cause of moon's craters. Comparison between shell craters, bomb craters, explosion pits, and similar terrestrial phenomenon (which the ingenuity of mankind has in recent years made available in considerable quantity) has been used as a basis for extending a graph of measurements of depth and diameter up to the sizes of the measurable moon craters. The resultant forms an almost perfect straight line for the average. Terrestrial meteorite craters have been included and fit nicely into place . . . the conclusions that can be drawn tend to show that the craters are of similar origin—explosions. As the only known agents capable of producing sufficient energy to cause craters the size of the moon's are meteorites, it would appear that these are the cause. I am pretty sure I know one agent that will soon be able to produce craters almost as big . . . and that is Genus Homo.

Mention of explosions in turn brings to mind the recent American 'test' blow-ups, made in connection with the construction of the Tennessee Valley Dam at South Holston, which were recorded up to 1,250 miles from the point of origin. The records give important information with regard to the thickness and general make-up of the earth's crust, and have some interesting side-lines. The "dream" of some sf authors of earthquake control by relieving pressures before they reach danger point may yet be the result of such investigations. And I fear that space will not permit me to say more this issue.

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SOUL

By ROSS KIRSTOLYNE

(The experiment was of immense significance. It was to be taken as conclusive, too, with the fine instruments of a future year—in fact, of overwhelming importance—)

Karl Fontone was dying fast. And there all around him, seated in shadow, in his large modernistically-furnished room, was a small silent group of doctors, news-reporters, and others, their eyes fixed on the green-illuminated instruments dials surrounding him . . . waiting; waiting to watch him die.

Outside, a late-autumn night was closing in, and a chill wind was whining through the skeletal branches of the trees. There was a trace of hail in the rain splattering against the vitaglass windows.

The little group was tense, expectant. Their faces, seen in the green glow from the dials, were strained and anxious, and yet, somehow, excited. For this was a very special death; Fontone was the first volunteer to surrender his last hours to intensive scientific scrutiny. Yes, there had been those, in the old days, who had left their bodies for examination, after death, but none who would ever sacrifice their last hours on Earth. But then Fontone had been a scientist and philosopher all his life; he had regarded the enlargement of scientific knowledge as Mankind's supreme aim, and had devoted his whole life (and now his dying hours) to the investigation of the "occult." Science had, to all appearances, utilised his offer to the full . . .

In the middle of this room a grotesque experiment was arranged. The finest instruments of 1997 had been used. Lying comfortably on his bed, Fontone himself was almost completely hidden with a huge solenoid—a coil of many thousands of turns of superconductive wire, which encircled both Fontone and the bed for their entire length. To this were attached various large-dialed sensitive galvanometers and other meters; and the whole arrangement had been placed on an extremely finely-balanced weight-indicator, the dial of which rose behind the head of the bed. The loss of weight, at death which would be due to evacuation of the lungs was marked with a red arrow

"According to the calculated time we have four more minutes to wait," whispered the supervising doctor.

The watchers hunched forward in their chairs. An eminent doctor; two brain-surgeons; a magistrate; a reporter from 'The System'; and of course the Church was represented . . . Only the troubled breathing of the dying man, with the purr of the air-conditioner and the tick of the instruments were to be heard . . .

The pulse indicator stopped abruptly. There came one last gasp as Karl Fontone faded into oblivion. The group strained unanimously forward, staring; the weight-indicator needle dropped slowly to the jarrow—and stopped; the meter needles did not move.

How long the group sat there, still gazing at the green dials, would be hard to say. Outside where the wind had dropped, was the utter blackness of a moonless night; inside, the dark emptiness of stunned minds . . . Never a quiver from the needles.

Despair!

With a muffled groan, one of the congregation crumpled slowly forward to the floor . . .

ERRATUM

In General Chuntering I have noted the possibility of the continuation of the BRE UNKNOWN. This is now definitely 'out'—last issue is Winter, 1949. Atlas are substituting a BRE Thrilling Wonder Stories, however, which will be of interest. Also on the market from a different publisher, is a BRE WEIRD TALES, Nov. 49, duplicate of the even dated USA edition. Further information later. K.F.S.

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SPACE DAWN

Ahead the stars shone bright and far,
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Darkness held, When not with star.
The spaceship moving swiftly on, with flight told
For destination—all aboard tried and bold.
The weary poet by ship chime and bell
Arose to view—no dawn could tell;
No mists low on the lake ripples,
No scuttering winds, clouds sped on.
No fresh breezes of new wine and apples,
From fog laid fields and quiet towns;
Nor the first rays of early morn
To see, on his first space trip, a sun.
But to space veterans no finer morn
Than the roar of jet bursts strong,
More exhilarating mighty jet blasts
Than breezes cool from mountains cast.
And newer star fields to enthral,
Than countryside, and mists, and all.

George Andrews.

GENERAL CHUNTERING

Idly turning the pages of some more-than-10-years-old fanzines, we came upon an item by Ray Bradbury, which we had long forgotten. This shows a Bradbury strange to modern fen—a light hearted Bradbury, who, in a "serious" scientific article, records such glorious facts as "mushrooms grow in damp places and therefore look like umbrellas," and "water is composed of two gins—oxygen and hydrogen. Oxygen is pure gin, hydrogen is gin and water." TITBITS, August devoted a couple of pages to THE END OF THE WORLD. Descriptions of the five most likely ways are given.

with a rider that tells us we need not worry—A.D. 10,006,000,000 is the date it all happens . . . TITBITS also brings up one of the "missing ship" tales which has not received much comment in the fantasy fiction field—the loss—

or rather the disappearance of—the Danish KOBENHAVN, a five masted sailing vessel with 45 cadets aboard, which vanished about 21 years ago . . . in the fan-field, I would draw your attention to the ISFCC, the International S.-F. Correspondence Club, which will welcome world-wide news and views from all fans. Top-man of this outfit is Richard Abott, Rt. 1, Box 57, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio . . . other fan activity worthy of note is the resurrection of the S.F.I., as a pretty hard-working organisation desirous of welding the world (of fandom) into one President is Julian C. May, 2334 N.76th Court, Elmwood Pk., Illinois. Julian did the block at the head of this column, by the way . . . and while I am at it, I mustn't forget my friends of the N3F who have appointed me as their official representative for UK and associated (geographically speaking) European countries . . . the N3F are hoping to devise a scheme whereby members this way will be able to get subs to mags . . . that also is a hope of the S.F.I., by the way. These three would appear to organisations to join, if you want to be an acti-fan . . . my attention was drawn to yet another proof that Stf is on the upgrade, when Roger Dard, of Australia, pointed out to me that the prize-winning story in "TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE" was titled "The President of the United States. Detective," and instead of showing Mr. Truman peering at finger prints with a magnifying glass this tale tells of an attempt to conquer the world by a Chinese Dictator, in 1980 . . . SPACEWARP for May, in the column "File 13," edited by Red Boggs, shows another trend . . . friend Boggs, whose column runs from the delightfully ludicrous to the intelligently critical, devotes three pages to a diatribe against August Derleth, for intending to publish a large amount of "crudo" . . . although I am not in agreement with Red in all respects, I fear there is an inclination on the part of some fantasy publishers to include material which cannot be called "classic" by any standard of opinion . . . the only way to stop 'em, of course, is not to buy the books which are below par . . . and in this country, the increased price will make that easy . . . some assorted enquiries about the future of the BRE UNKNOWN WORLDS prompted me to write to the publishers, asking for info; they sent me a very pleasant reply, and informed me that the future is not yet certain . . . however, from the tone of their letter it would appear that there is a definite possibility that new material will be considered when the USA story-mine is exhausted. For the benefit of USA readers a three-issue sub (annual) costs 2s 9d. sterling . . . a 45c. I.M.O. should cover that, and O.F. will gladly arrange for you if you send the cash to Phil Rasch, or alternatively, you can send it direct to the publishers, Atlas Publishing and Distributing Co., Ltd., 18 Bride Lane, London, E.C. 4, England . . . collector fans who are book-lovers and do not yet receive THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOKMAN, distributed free by Bookman's, 1746 Columbia Road, N.W., Washington 9, D.C., deserve a solid kick on the place they sit on . . . Roy W. Loan, Jr., is doing a swell job of listing all current books, assisted from the British end by the omnipotent Ted Carnell . . . Roy tells me that Ted did some good work for British fandom when he was over there, and the fact that F. Edwin Counts, of Battle Creek, Mich., wrote to O.F. with the offer of two years of SF mags for free distribution was one of the outcomes of Ted's good work . . . at the moment, the mags have not arrived, but I am still hoping . . . British fans interested in the OAHSPÉ Bible will shortly find a copy available in the O.F. Library, or write me, and I will tell you where to get one yourself . . . BRE Super-science saw print in October, the issue being the same as the Jan. '49 USA one, except one short had been dropped. Price 1s. . . FANSCIENT, Don Day's zine, broke a few records in its second anniversary number . . . two colour cover, and 64 pages . . . lovely work, Don. . . . We also congratulate Other Worlds, who turned out an excellent first issue, apart from too much Shaver element . . . SATEVEPOST has also gone back to the sf story. Sept. 29) containing two, one by Will F. Jenkins . . . British fan Shivaji Lal is temporarily in Ireland, studying medicine . . . Roger Dard, from Down Under, tells me the Sydney Futurans seem to have become a thing of the past . . . next year's convention goes to PORTLAND, and the USA lads want to know how many British Fen will come next year? . . . any offers? . . . STRAND MAG. Nov. carries an interesting article on Dr Rhine's experiments . . . SATEVEPOST, Sept 24, had two sf tales . . . and that is all . . . KFS.



The Natives were Friendly

By

PETER J. RIDLEY

A pinpoint of brilliant white illuminated the blueish forest, with glaring intensity. Carl Lang slid a yellow filter across the vision port. Although the interior of the scout rocket was kept at a constant 60 degrees, he felt hot. He wondered how the others were faring.

Not a tick out of his alto-gieger so far. Might as well give up, he thought wearily, it was like hunting for a needle in a million haystacks, trying to find a deposit of plutonium. Pity the Rolls-Thortons only used plutonium, they'd take other fuels for planetary-drive, but for the over-drive only plutonium would do.

He sent his mind back over the anxious days when the "Starshine," caught in an ether tornado, had strained at her seams, as completely out of control she had been flung hundreds of light years out into unexplored space. Their over-drive fuel almost exhausted they found a planetary system. And so the search began.

A low ticking jerked his mind back to the present. Radio activity, probably not plutonium, but he must check. Reading off the position he slowed the scout, and turned back to the deposit. A dull brown patch of bare rock showed amid the blue forest. With easy skill Carl dropped the scout on to it.

He read the Radio-Activity gauge; 56.6 caltas. His suit could take that for a few hours. Grabbing his Probe he negotiated the airlock, and dropped to the ground.

Quickly he dug in the terminals of the probe, and switched on. The indicator slid round the dial, and stopped at uranium, indicating a 14 per cent, pure deposit. He upped the terminals, walked a hundred paces, and sank them again. The needle moved shakily round the face of the indicator, and stopped at plutonium 30 per cent, deposit.

A stolid man, Carl checked the result first, then permitted himself a smile of triumph.

A few hours later the "Starshine" had landed near the deposit, and work had commenced.

Captain Baines had a few words over the intercom before the crew went to work, he reminded them that the "Starshine" was a merchant ship and carried only side arms, on no account must the intelligent inhabitants of this planet be provoked. Their only chance of returning to Earth lay in this deposit of plutonium, if the natives should attack they would be at a great disadvantage, clad as they were in pressure suits and sparsely armed. It was, he continued, essential that the population should be treated with all friendliness.

Armed with two of the ship's air rifles, Carl and Thon Harmor ploughed their way through the forest in search of game. So far they had seen exactly nothing, which was hardly surprising, space suits being hardly the best things to walk silently in.

"We'll never catch anything while we're moving, let's hide ourselves and wait," suggested Thon.

They did so.

About 20 minutes passed uneventfully. Then Carl saw a movement. Through the curtain of foliage, about a hundred yards away, burst a surprisingly humanoid figure, in one hand was clasped a heavy club.

A second figure erupted through the leaves. Reptilian, a miniature edition of Tryannosaurus Rex, it sprang towards the human, who had turned to fight.

Thon had his rifle to shoulder in a second, and drew a bead on the reptile. Instantly Carl's right hand swept up, sending Thon's missile high above the protagonists, unnoticed by either. In a moment the battle was over and the victorious repile disappeared carrying its prey.

Thon turned viciously on his companion.

"Why the Devil did you do that?" he snarled. "I could have saved that human, and ensured the friendliness of the natives."

"Not by killing that reptile," drawled Carl.

"What does the life of a reptile mean?" spat Thon.

"To us it means a whole lot," replied Carl. "You see, Thon, my friend, that 'reptile' was wearing a belt and weapon holster."

PROTECTION FROM WITCHES

Mr. Henry J. H. Bartlett gives us permission to reproduce a letter written by him to his local paper, which may be of interest to students of demonology:

"In a recent press conference, Dr. Kenneth Wilson of Blandford is quoted as having said on the subject of witchcraft, 'In 1884 a bullock's heart filled with nails, pins and thorns was found in a chimney near Bridport.' An extract from the Bridport News, in April, 1901, states: 'A week or so ago the son of Mr. Fowler, sweep, while sweeping a chimney in one of the cottages in Shipton, came upon a curious relic of past days.'

"He had reason to go up the chimney, and about eight or ten feet from the ground he found an old canvas bag hanging or fixed in a cranny in the wall, and inside this was discovered a navel and dried bullock's heart, stuck through and through with thorns and pins. This is the fourth heart found in this neighbourhood in the past few years.'

"This was one of the charms against the witches' spell in days gone by, and was hung in the chimney with the idea that the thorns and pins added torment to the witch and broke her spell."

Readers of Operation Fantast are probably aware of similar customs in their own localities, and the editors would appreciate information on such customs, for publication.

FANDOM

Many interesting letters arose from Dr. John Aiken's article, which we ran in the last of our duplicated issues (March '49), and it is regretted that change to printed format has precluded the publication of letters from readers. However, in the normal course of business your editors had reason to write to Dr. Olaf Stapledon, and took advantage of the occasion to send him copies of O.F., and especially requested him to give Dr. Aiken's article his attention.

In his reply, Dr. Stapledon wished the Science Fantasy Society well, and expressed the hope that it will help to raise the general standard of Science Fiction. He also made the following pertinent observations on "When Will Fandom Grow Up? . . .

"as requested, I have read Dr. Aiken's article, with much interest. I find myself in a hole about Science Fiction. I never was a fan of it, and I read very little of it. I recognise it as a legitimate medium of expression, and I think it has a future. But it is also rather dangerous, because it may so easily be indulged in as mere escapism. Apart from this danger, to which Dr. Aiken does not explicitly refer, I think he has given a good account of the matter.

I must add that the notion of science fiction as a "religion" does not appeal to me. It may in some hands be a vehicle for religious ideas (in the deeper sense), but that is another matter. I would add merely that, if science fiction is to do all that he hopes of it, it must become much more than science fiction, much more than scientifically plausible. It must be humanly plausible also, and it must have some significant reference to the contemporary world. Short of that, it will remain what it is now, an activity of a small group of people, some of whom are gifted with imagination, but most of whom fail to see science in its true relation to man's life as a whole."

FROM A SMALL TOWN PAPER IN NEBRASKA.

White man crazy.
Make big tepee. Plow hill.
Water wash, Wind blow hill,
Grass all gone.
Sqaw gone, Papoose too,
No chuckaway, No corn, No pony.

Indian no plow land.
Keep grass. Buffalo eat.
Indian eat buffalo.
Hide make tepee, Moccasin too.
Indian no make terrace, no build dam.
No give damn. All time eat.

From Eva Firestone.

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