

BABBLINGS

Many thanks to Walter Coslet's Manuscript Bureau for providing me with much of the material for this issue.

If any of you feel the urge to break into print, and write an article, short story, poem, or any other form of printable literature, send it along to me. I can always use a little more material. Witness the slininess of this ish. Any unused material sent to the Mss.Bureau, unless otherwise instructed.

Seeing as how I'm a completist of the worst sort, I'd like to get sample copies of fanzines. If they interest me (and almost anything does!) I'd be interested in subscribing or exchanging.

for About the last place you'd think of looking items of fantastic interest is in a book with a name like Low Man on a Totem Pole. IT turns out to be the not entirely frivolous reminiscences of H. Allen Smith, an ex-newspaperman. And he was interested in Charles Forte. Interviewed him, in fact. It is a must for the poor confused fen who wonder who in heck that Forte guy was. And it is interesting enough reading for even the old timer who knows all about everything. The whole book is fascinating reading, but only the one chapter is of real value to the more serious reader.

An interesting recent publication is entitled Gentlemen: You Are Mad!, by Pierrepont B. Noyes. (New York 1946, Baxter Freres, \$2.50, 1.) It originally appeared in 1927 as The Pallid Giant. It is very definitely science-fiction. It deals with the finding of a hidden cave in the Pyrenees, and in that a book telling the history of an earlier race of men who wiped themselves out with atomic power. The main theme of the rather slow-reading novel is that fear is the cause of war, and all other international troubles. This theme is embellished, and woven into the plot of a second rate story of an elder, wiser, lost race.

Just in case any of you read the last issue of Amazing, and wondered about that rather complex radio diagram that some character by the name of Rowland found floating around in his head, allow me to state, that to the best of my knowledge, it is not a workable circuit. I am not sure what it would do, but it wouldn't be a very practicable transceiver. There are several parts missing that are rather important. It looks rather like a radio engineer's nightmare.

T. H. White, the author of The Sword in the Stone, has written another fantasy, entitled Mistress Masham's Repose, which was favorably reviewed in a recent issue of The Saturday Review of Literature.

In Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine for March 1946 there is a very short story by Robert Nathan, entitled "A Death in the Stadium." It is not a pleasant story, nor is it strictly a fantasy. But it is a very fine bit of irony, and it is further a rather harsh judgement on the human mob. Well worth the few minutes it takes to read.

I have a duplicate copy of Supernatural Horror in Literature which I would like to dispose of. It's in absolutely mint condition. For the bargain price of \$2.45, post-paid. Would also consider trading for suitable books or mags.

THE FOUR POLES OF SUPERMAN

by
Paul Carter

The reader has perhaps seen Doc Smith's criticism of The New Adam, in which he stated that a superman story was by definition impossible to write, because it would take some one able to understand Homo superior to write about him--in other words, the author would have to be a super-man himself. E.E. stated further that the only successful tale of this type would be one in which the superman never appeared directly.

It seems to this writer that the doctor's criticism is a little harsh. It is rather like saying that no one but Beethoven could write a commentary on the Choral Symphony, or that only a deity could write a theological dissertation. Granted that Homo sup. could not grasp Homo sup. in entirety--but there is no reason that superman could not be represented accurately within the limits of our comprehension; we can't grasp the fourth dimension, either, but we can draw a three-dimensional representation of it, and call it a tesseract. Why not a "translation", as it were of a supermind into the terms of us apes.

It is the purpose of this article to examine four such translations, to see how four different "sapient" authors have tried to re-represent this appalling question mark, Homo superior, in intelligible terminology.

Weinbaum's approach in The New Adam is precisely the reason that that yarn was so severely criticised. His superman is definitely alien. He is so alien that no reader-sympathy is aroused for him. I'm going to be jumped on for that statement, but think it over. The science-fiction fan, and particularly the Weinbaum devotee, may agree whole-heartedly with the philosophical concepts involved--that's not the point. But Edmund Hall is a cold intellect, and his career is decidedly futile. His suicide---an act which in a lower species is admitted to be subnormal---and his rejection of the pursuit of knowledge, in particular, tend to spoil The New Adam as a novel--that is, as a sapient novel. However, Weinbaum did accomplish his objective. Mr. Wollheim's angry frustration over the book (Super Science Stories Mar. 1940) is an admission that Stanley G. had created a being wholly foreign to his (Wollheim's) experience.

It may be argued whether the book was a success or not---and there we run into difficulties. Edmond Hall is so unnatural, and the book is so overloaded with lengthy conversation, that the element of realism is almost totally lacking. But---here, nevertheless, is a being whose actions are incomprehensible to the reader, yet whose actions, seen in the abstract, seem to make some kind of sense. May we conclude, then, that Weinbaum did succeed in creating---a superman?

Edmond Hall was such an unsympathetic being that one might wish, for realism's sake, that he had conformed to Doc Smith's dictates, and been revealed only indirectly. What, one wonders, would have happened had Hall been described only through the reactions of his sapient associates, Stein and Varney? We cannot know, of course, but there is a tale extant which covers the same ground, which will illustrate the point.

This Second Pole of Superman is exemplified in "But Without Horns," by Norvell W. Page (Unknown, June 1940). Here is Smith's perfect superman story. A handful of men, pursuing an entity which is never seen throughout the story---gathering horror as the Thing which is called John Miller routs armies, takes over a city, starts a plague, experiments on women---and then the poignant climax when the gallant ape-men enter the house where It resides---and emerge, exalted, worshipping that which they have seen, as dogs do men.

Realistic? Yes---as realistic as the imagination of the reader is capable of making it. But there's the rub. Some years ago Basil Davenport wrote: "If [the supernatural] 'cannot be imagined, cannot be described,' the reader may also remark that it cannot thrill." John Miller is at best a creepy-crawly horror of the "ghoulies and ghosties" variety. He may be an accurate translation, but he is not exactly what we are looking for. We are in quest of a convincing superman story, and Page hasn't quite got it. He comes closer than Weinbaum, perhaps, but he has evaded the issue by a trick.

A trick of a different sort was employed in "Slan" (ASF, Sep-Dec. 1940). It is best expressed in the words of the author, A.E. van Vogt (overheard at the Pacificon): He had been discussing his four monster stories, and then he added: "I tried to create that same alien fascination in human form---and so I wrote "Slan.""

Weinbaum editorialized, Page horrified, Van Vogt---fascinated. Here, then, is the Third Pole of Superman---a deliberate attempt to interest the reader in the character per se. Few will deny that, as far as he went, van Vogt succeeded. Jommy Cross's adventures are definitely of the "fingernail-chewing" variety, and the story is a thriller, in the literal sense of that word. One feels at the end that he has been let in on something meaningful.

But---if Page leaves too much to the imagination, van Vogt leaves far too little. "Nothing human is alien"---and vice versa. Jommy Cross is just a little too real, as a person; his "alien" fascination" to a great extent ceases to be alien when housed in a human body. He is not a real superman.

Thus far Superman has appeared to us as a philosophical abstraction, a darkly brooding horror, and a high adventurer. Cannot a compromise be worked out?

We submit for your examination Stapledon's Odd John.

John's behavior is just as strange, by our standards, as that of Edmond Hall. But we are not forced to tax our little minds by an attempt at reader-identification. That is taken care of by Stapledon, who thoughtfully provides us with a Boswell to do all our worrying for us. We are confronted with a narrative by one who is plainly, irksomely human. He is given such information as we can understand; but he is a bit too much the egotist to pass along the things he cannot comprehend. Stapledon thus neatly gets around Weinbaum's pitfall---he doesn't have to fall back on abstractions to carry the story along, and does not need such absurdities as Edmond Hall's poetry. He also escapes much of the objection to "But Without Horns" by giving us a concrete physical picture of Superman to work on. And the reader-identification is with Fido, not with John---which eliminates the Jommy Cross paradox.

Fault could be found with Odd John too, of course. Frank Robinson doesn't like the sex angle; I still charge that off to Fido's imperfect understanding of John. In this respect, Stapledon made

the same "mistake," if mistake it was, that Weinbaum made---i. e., the incest, etc., don't make sense to us "sapient" readers. But, all in all, with a few minor slips, Olaf Stapledon has done such a beautiful job of selection, telling what can be told, deleting or glossing over what is beyond our ken, pruning and trimming, that the end product is startling in its verisimilitude. And through it all shines Stapledon's philosophy, expounded with a lucidity rare in sci, and especially difficult in this medium. We nominate Odd John as the Fourth Pole of Superman, and the most successful approach to the concept that has yet been published.

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 ..ON THE DOTTED LINE..

by
 Donn Brazier

"and by the way, I just bought one of those Reynolds Pens everyone's raving about. It does the darndest things...writes under water, on cloth and perfectly while flying at high altitudes. Now I'm sure of getting those signatures on the dotted line! All the Best, 'Dick.'"

"Well, Dick," the manager beamed, "you've broken all sales records."

"It was easy," Dick smiled, fingering the Reynolds Pen in his vest pocket.

"How did you do it? Especially that mermaid off Guam, the one that signed on the dotted line for our deluxe, fancy wrapped herring---that must have taken a little doing?"

"Not when you trap the prey in his own roost." Dick poked the Reynolds Pen under his boss's nose with a slow flourish. "It was this that did the trick, yessir, wrote right there underwater, on her own coral reef."

"That gremlin that signed for our bird's nest soup needed some urging, too, I'll bet," the boss said.

"Not at all, not at all, signed on the dotted line immediately. Got him at 35,000 feet, on the intake of a P-30. Had no trouble at all, no sir, not with this here pen." And Dick waved it again.

"Good boy," The manager patted him on the back. "Now go after those deros!"

After filling his Reynolds Pen with luminescent ink, Dick disappeared into the bowels of a cave below New York City. He was back in the main office a few days later.

"Well, Dick, how was it down there?" the boss asked, confidently.

"Dark."

"Poof. How about the deros, the dotted line? Come, come, did they want our irradiated carrot juice?"

"They were very derogatory, chief. 'That lousy robot food', they called it!"

Get it? Rabbit food!

THE SCIENCE-FICTION FAN, or "SUNK PRETTY LOW"

by
James R. Adams

"Pardon me, Mister---don't mean no offence. But that book you got under your arm---Phenomenal Phantasy Stories. That's a science-fiction mag, and if you value your senses, you'll drop it here and now, and not revel in its glories.

"I know. You see, I'm a science-fiction bug. A reg'lar nut over the stuff, and I can't escape its clutch. Look at this silly look on my mug---that's the stamp of the fatal malady known as 'Kepthenoseinsfmagstoomuchitis.'

"I recall I started out just like you---picked up a copy just to while away a night. But that book gave me the fatal kiss 'fore the night was through. Believe me, Mister, I was a wild-eyed fright.

"I set out to buy every stf mag I could find. Bread money, pin money, rent money---all went for my vice. I lost my job, my wife, and all my worldly goods, but did I mind? Not so long as I could locate more mags, and meet the price.

"Back date mag shops was my constant haunt. I'd even snatch mags from people passin' in the street. Once--on foot, mind you--I made a hundred-mile jaunt. What for? To get volume 1, number 1 of Stellar Adventures from a fan in Baltimore, and make my file complete.

"I trudged back, mile after weary mile; sore, bedraggled, and my brains boilin' with fever. Imagin my chagrin when I found that very ish had been layin' on my bureau all the while! I could of bashed my head in with a cleaver.

"But that's the way it gets you, this science-fiction stuff. Your eyes bug out, logic packs up and skedaddles, and your head's in a constant whirl. Swear it's worse'n bein' addicted to snuff, or gettin' all mushy over a girl.

"But, startin' today, I'm renouncin' my creed. Science-Fiction and me are through, washed up, done. And, bein' one who's been through it all, I'm advisin' you to follow my lead---before you get buggy-eyed and ravin', like you'd been struck by the sun.

"You're convinced? Well, good for you, my friend. Bravo! Just hand me that mag, and I'll drop it in the trash bin here by this telephone pole. Tutm tut, now. There's no call to thank me, sakes no. I'd do the same for any poor misguided soul.

"Well, good evening to you, sir, and may your life be a song, unsullied by the monstrous touch of science-fiction---to which I say fie! Now hurry home to your wife, friend, where you belong. Go, with my benediction. Good-by, good-by...

"There goes a likeable chap---saved from the fate of fates. Of course rescuin' him was but my duty. Still, it's good to know his kiddies will never be faced with empty plates. But now, let's have a look at the booty...

"Hamm. The novel, 'Headless Horseman from Mars,' looks good, and how! The novelette, and the shorts, too, look all right. I'd better take my own advice, and hurry home now. There's goin' to be good readin' tonight!"

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This is a filler,
Ain't it a diller?
Can't do much worse,
Nor the reverse.

ROSES AND AN OCCASIONAL BRICK

By Rick Sneary:

The first issue of SPARX is good. Tho I'm on the spot. I feel like saying it is too small, but knowing what Walt asks for putting out a zine, I don't feel that I can. And after all, you aren't the first to put out a two page 'zine.

Your cover was very good...

As I haven't read "The Last Objective," I can't very well say I agree or disagree with Carter. ((You ain't supposed to. He's the author, so what he says goes. SEE?))

By Walter Coslet:

...Well I guess that brings me up to date with you, except for reviewing the first issue of SPARX, of which, for some reason or other, I don't seem to be able to find my copy at the moment. Shameful of me! But anyway, I liked what there was of it... ((Hope that this'll be enough for you. Thanx for the nice comments. Hope that they'd be as nice if you could find the 'zine. Maybe I ought to print this in disappearing ink. Then no nasty letters. But then, this hecto comes pretty close to invisible ink.))

By Dave McGirr:

Your issue of SPARX arrived about 5 weeks ago and I have finally ((about time)) decided to comment. Ha! ((Ha! yourself.))

Cover. Quite good! and by Ron Clyne too! Ha! 'tis rather a cute dragon. Paul Carter's thing was a so-so to me, anyway--part I liked best was of your and him meeting (grammar?) ((Yup. It's wrong. Ha!))

Must disagree with you slightly---on fan feuds. I like 'em---not the knock down and drag out kind, tho---the friendly type, or mock feuds---they're fun. As long as they don't get serious. That's where you should stop. ((Every man has a right to his opinion. But I still say that a little feud is as bad as a little inflation, which is as bad as a little of something else---I can't remember what.))

OHBOYOHBOYOHBOY!!!NOWYOU'REINFORIT THISASTINKER OHBOYOHBOYOHBOY!!!

NASTY PROBLEM

I will give as a prize a copy of the Dunwich Horror, Bart House edition, to the first person who sends me the correct answer to this problem. Contest ends 31 December 1946.

Given the following figure. To draw one continuous line, which need not be straight, and may cross itself, which intersects each line segment in the figure once and only once. To the right of the figure you will see an incorrect answer as an example.



