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# DESTINY'S CHILD #1

November 1945 Vanguard

Merry Christmas!

—o—

Lowndes for President!

—o—

April Fool!

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# The World of VAN VOGT

— by damon knight —

John W. Campbell has said editorially more than once that "World of Ā" is "one of those once-in-a-decade classics of science-fiction." I offer the alternate judgement that, far from being a "classic" by any reasonable standard, "World of Ā" is one of the worst allegedly-adult scientifiction stories ever published.

I'm going to try to prove that assertion by an analysis of the story on four levels: Plot, Characterization, Background and Style; to be followed by a brief comment on Van Vogt's works as a whole.

Plot:

"World of Ā", like all of Van Vogt's longer work, is organized as a story-within-a-story-within-a-story -- an extremely complex framework, vital parts of which are kept hidden until the end. It is, in fact, organized very much like a crime-detection novel -- with two significant exceptions: that in a crime-detection novel, a) all clues which are eventually used in solving the mystery must be given to the reader beforehand, and b) all characters, no matter how fantastic their actions may be caused to appear, must be plausibly motivated.

"World of Ā" abounds in contradictions, misleading clues and irrelevant action. Shorn of most of these, and with the narration sequence straightened out, this is what happens in the story:

The original Gosseyn discovers a process whereby he can reproduce his personality in a series of identical bodies. About five hundred years before the beginning of the story proper, one of this series of

Gosseyn is mutated, developing an "extra-brain" which enables him to perform apparently miraculous feats -- "teleportation" and the like. This Gosseyn goes to Venus, where he discovers that an extra-Solar race of humans has established a secret base on that planet. The base is commercial, not military, but is kept secret because its establishment is in violation of agreements made by a Galactic League. The Gosseyn, realizing that this base constitutes a threat to Sol, superintends the building of the Games Machine in an attempt to remake the Solar population into a completely sane and well-integrated race. Then he visits other star-systems, presumably via the transportation system of the aliens.

When he or his duplicate-successor returns, he finds that a Terrestrial group, supported by certain members of the alien staff on Venus, is plotting to destroy the null-A system and the Games Machine. At the time the story begins, this group, by means of an alien invention called the Distorter, has forced the Machine to accept traitors for more than half of all executive, judicial and police positions on both Earth and Venus. The Machine knows what is happening, but is unable to broadcast warnings because of the Distorter. Thus the revolutionaries' purpose is in fact accomplished; all that remains is to destroy the Machine and formally take control.

The Gosseyn insinuates two spies into the traitorous group: Patricia Hardie, daughter (?) of President Hardie (chosen for that post by the Machine under the influence of the Distorter) and "X", a duplicate Gosseyn. Then he brings to life another duplicate, Gosseyn I, who is the first protagonist of the story. Gosseyn I's memory has been tampered with, as presumably the others' have also, and he does not suspect his true identity. Gosseyn I is now manuevered by the dominant Gosseyn in such a manner that he comes to the notice of the traitors, who believe for some reason that he is tremendously dangerous to them. It is never stated just who they think he is, but one clue (page 38, first instalment) suggests that they take him for the first mutated Gosseyn, the one who discovered the base on Venus and traveled among the aliens. At any rate, they torture him in an effort to find out what he knows; he escapes; they follow and kill him.

Gosseyn II comes to life on Venus, with all the memories of Gosseyn I except of what he had been told (false) about his identity. An agent of the Games Machine picks him up, tells him to allow himself to be recaptured by a certain member of the gang, which he does. The gang takes him back to Earth. He escapes, is recaptured, but the gang decides not to kill him again. He goes to the Machine, which tells him that

he must kill himself, in order that Gosseyn III, whose extra-brain is fully developed, may come to life. He tries to do so, but meanwhile the Machine is attacked and destroyed, the body of Gosseyn III is accidentally killed, and his suicide attempt is frustrated by Patricia Hardie, acting for the dominant Gosseyn. Venus has been successfully invaded, he learns, and the traitors are openly in power.

Previously he has stolen the Distorter (which was in Patricia's bedroom all the time) and sent it to the Machine. He now retrieves the Distorter on Patricia's instructions, depresses one of its tubes -- and finds himself again on Venus, with the Distorter. Here he is again captured by the gang, which now decides the thing to do is help him develop his extra-brain, keeping him under control by means of a "vibrator" which changes the atomic structure of everything around him so he cannot memorize it (sic) and effect an escape. Then they discover that the Machine had intended the Distorter to be sent to a certain place, and deduce that the "invisible chess-player" -- the dominant Gosseyn -- must be there. The leaders of the gang descend on the place with a horde of henchmen. The dominant Gosseyn, with Gosseyn II's help, destroys them -- getting killed himself in the process. By this act, presumably, null-A is saved and the war is over except for mopping up.

Therefore:

The dominant Gosseyn knows that by assassinating the leaders of the traitor group (whose identities and whereabouts are known to him) he can end or set in abeyance the threat to null-A.

He is able to do so.

Instead of doing so, he uses Gosseyn I and Gosseyn II to worry them and make them delay their coup. During the time thus gained, as far as the story tells us, he does not do anything whatever.

The dominant Gosseyn knows all about the extra-Solar base and the civilization behind it.

He sends Gosseyn II to "investigate" it.

The dominant Gosseyn is able to produce as many duplicates of himself as he pleases, and is not obliged to wait until one dies to bring the next to life. (See page 178, last instalment.)

He tells Gosseyn II, through the Machine, that he must kill himself in order to make way for Gosseyn III.

The dominant Gosseyn knows of the existence of the Distorter.

He makes no attempt to find it and put it out of action.

After the Distorter comes into the possession of the Machine, which is then destroyed, the dominant Gosseyn realizes that the Machine's action in stamping his address on the crate constitutes a danger to him.

He sends Gosseyn II to retrieve the Distorter, but does not instruct him to destroy the crate.

And therefore:

The acts of the dominant Gosseyn are the acts of a madman.

There is no valid reason for any act performed by either Gosseyn I or Gosseyn II, except one: Gosseyn II helps the dominant Gosseyn to destroy the gang leaders. This act would logically have been performed at or before the time the story begins -- in which case there would have been no story.

These are by no means all of the major contradictions and irrelevancies in the story. For example, the whole struggle between the dominant Gosseyn and the villains becomes meaningless when we learn that null-A cannot be destroyed by armed attack:

> "'Many will die. But I assure you, Gosseyn, we shall live through it. And now that the people of Earth know what is going on, the death-defying strength of the $\bar{A}$ system is going to start showing itself . . . The fools! . . . They have nothing that we can't take from them. And what we have -- integration, superiority, consciousness of right -- cannot be seized by force of arms.'"

Again, there is a mass of material in the story concerning the suspected existence of native intelligent life on Venus. There is a long sequence in which Gosseyn dreams he is seeing through alien eyes -- eyes which see things in a way no human eyes could possibly see. This has no conceivable reference to the extra-Solarians later discovered on Venus, who are human beings.

Some of these loose ends and inconsistencies, I think, are simply examples of carelessness -- as for instance the part Patricia Hardie and her father (?) President Hardie play, which is either self-contradictory or ambiguous from beginning to end. Others, however, in particular the long passages which have no relevancy whatever to the rest of the story, are susceptible of a different explanation:

Van Vogt is going to write, or has already written, a sequel.

I have not given this factor any weight in discussing the passages in question, because I believe that if it is so, it is no excuse. I am writing under the assumption that a story, series or no, must be able to stand by itself; that even if it is written as part of a larger work, it must be at least coherent when read alone.

However, I think that a few predictions about the sequel might be interesting when and if it appears. From what I know of the way Van Vogt's mind works, I suspect that some or all of the following will be brought out in the second story:

The original Gosseyn was born much earlier than the reader is now supposed to believe. The Gosseyns may be identified with the Wandering Jew, or even with Jesus Christ.

The battle for Sol is three-sided; there is a third force, more powerful than either of the others, which has not yet been revealed directly in the story. This force may be a race of beings who operate in the fourth dimension, or in "another aspect of reality."

The Gosseyns have been aware of this force, and their efforts have been directed principally against it, not against the small fry who appear in "World of A".

The Gosseyn who is dominant at any given time is in fact more powerful than the entire Galactic League put together. Gosseyn II has not yet learned who and what he really is.

Finally, I predict that when the entire $\bar{A}$ story has been told, it will be found to be very nearly as muddled and self-contradictory as is the first part by itself.

Characterization:

Van Vogt tells us fairly clearly what all his major characters are like. Gosseyn I-II, besides being a superman, has a highly intelligent and well-trained mind. So do "X" and, in the final scenes, Patricia. Crang, Thorson, and Prescott, although they lack the benefits of null-A, are intelligent and strong-minded representatives of a galactic culture. These

things being established, the characters should act in accordance with their natures. They do not.

In Chapter IV, Thorson's agents have captured Gosseyn I and are taking him to the palace where he is to be examined and then killed. He is entirely in their power, and they are confident of their ability to dispose of him.

The agents have instructions to pretend, en route, that they are gangsters.

On page 15, second instalment, Crang makes a long speech which is meaningful only under the assumption either that he is a Terrestrial, or that he wants Gosseyn II to think so. Since Gosseyn has no reason to suspect that the former is untrue, and no way of finding out, the false impression he receives is of no possible value except to mislead the reader -- a motive which could hardly have influenced Crang.

On page 158, last instalment, Thorson makes a long and completely irrelevant speech to the effect that human beings are the dominant race on tens of thousands of planets, and that phony evidence of natural evolution has been planted on all these planets. I take this to be a hint toward what Campbell calls the "full implication" of the story which is supposed to strike the reader one or two days after he finishes it; but from Thorson's standpoint it has no purpose whatever.

On page 45, second instalment, Gosseyn II is told by the Machine that it cannot broadcast warnings of the plot because the Distorter is focused on its public communications system. On page 65, last instalment, Patricia says the same thing. Both times, Gosseyn II accepts the statement without question, in spite of the obvious fact:

The Machine is able to communicate with perfect freedom through at least some of its twenty-five thousand individual game rooms, as well as through "roboplanes" on both Earth and Venus -- witness its conversations with Gosseyn II. Nothing would be simpler than for it to direct contestants or other persons to broadcast a warning.

Gosseyn II's prime motivation is a tremendously urgent desire to know the truth about himself. Yet:

On page 170, first instalment, a "roboplane" sent by the Machine offers to answer any questions he wishes to ask. Gosseyn II spends more than three-quarters of a page in introspection, using up all the time available in so doing, although he has been told that the time is limited. He does not ask a single question.

On page 36, second instalment, Gosseyn II has managed to frighten Prescott into talking, and Prescott is about to reveal where the gang got the Distorter. Dr. Kair returns, interrupting him, and Gosseyn allows himself to be sidetracked.

On page 64, Gosseyn II is closeted with Patricia, who has just revealed that she is an agent of the "invisible chessplayer." Bursting with impatience, he demands that she tell him what she knows.

She evades his questions.

He does not press the point.

Van Vogt's characters repeatedly commit the error known as the double-take. This phenomenon is funny because it represents a mental failure, just as a drunk's staggering represents a physical failure. Its cause is inability to absorb a new fact until a ridiculously long time has elapsed. In "World of A" there are twelve examples in all, nine of which are Gosseyn's.* Here are a few of them:

"'So this is the superman!'

"It seemed a futile insult. Gosseyn started to carry on with his examination of the man's physical characteristics; and then the import of the words penetrated:

"The man knew who he was."

"'Let's start at the beginning. Who do you think I am?'

"The moment he had spoken, he felt breathless. His muscles grew rigid; his eyes widened. He hadn't expected to utter the question just like that, without leading up to it by careful adherence to the laws of persuasive rhetoric."

" . . . 'X' . . . laughed heartily.

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* The full list is as follows:

First instalment:
page 9 -- Gosseyn
31 -- Gosseyn
35 -- Gosseyn
35 -- "X"
157 -- Gosseyn
175 -- Gosseyn

Second instalment:
page 42 -- Gosseyn
174 -- Gosseyn

Third instalment:
page 66 -- Patricia
79-80 -- Gosseyn
161 -- Gosseyn
172 -- Thorson

"'You don't think we're going to tell you that. Dead men, of course, tell no tales but -- '

"He stopped. He alughed again, but there was an edge of irritation in his amusement. He said:

"'I seem to have let something slip.' . . . "

"Gosseyn, intent on the possibility that he might be able to snatch one of his own guns, felt a vague puzzlement, a consciousness that there was something wrong with the words that he had heard. He gathered them together again in his mind; and this time they penetrated.

"'You're going to WHAT?' he said."

"He was in the tunnel of the aliens.

"On Venus!"

(Half a page later:) "He was about to climb to his feet when for the first time, the very first time, the transportation angle of what had happened, struck him. He who had been on Earth a minute before was now on Venus." !!!

(Exclamation points mine.)

Background:

"Null-A", generally speaking, is a rigor of logic; or else it is a system of mind training and/or mental-physical integration; or else it is a "semantic philosophy". Specifically, it includes the "cortical-thalamic pause" plus a few rules of logic lifted from 20th-century texts, and it also includes fencing, breathing exercises and classical dancing. In short, it is anything having the remotest connection with pedagogy which happens to occur to the author.

And this gigantic and amorphous agglomeration is given a purely negative label: it is "not Aristotelian".

Aristotle was a philosopher who lived and died three centuries before Christ. His importance even today is purely historical; his influence has been filtered through twenty-three centuries of succeeding philosophers and logicians until it is no longer recognizable except to the student. Yet six centuries later, in Van Vogt's world, it is sufficient to identify a supposedly radical new system of logic, to say that it is "non-Aristotelian".

"World of Ā" takes place in 2560 -- fully six hundred years after the invention of the atom bomb. In the six hundred years preceding 1945, mankind progressed sociologically from feudalism to capitalism; economically from muscle-power to machine-power; technologically from wheelbarrows to jet planes. During this six-hundred years period, more than thirty times as many significant additions were made to man's scientific knowledge as were made in the four thousand years preceding; and the process to date shows a continual acceleration. (Reference: "Nine Chains to the Moon" by R. Buckminster Fuller.)

Yet in Van Vogt's world the advancement over 1945, either stated or implied, amounts to no more than: a) a world government; b) a handful of gadgets; c) limited development of space travel; and d) a scientific system of education -- the latter developed by a superman.

This would be a plausible, if sketchy, background for a story laid from fifty to one hundred years in the future. For a story which takes place six hundred years from now, it is as bad as no background at all.

Furthermore, in Van Vogt's world:

There are no more national barriers, and society is supposedly organized on a scientific rather than a political basis.

Yet there are still poor people ("They had been poor, working their small fruit farm in the daytime, studying at night.") and people who live in palaces.

Space-flight has been technologically possible for more than six hundred years; it has been an actuality for a large part of that time.

Yet no interstellar flight has been attempted, and only one planet in the solar system itself has been colonized.

Van Vogt's conception of his gadgets is worthy of note in itself. Study of the gadgets mentioned in "World of Ā" reveals two things: first, Van Vogt has not bothered to integrate the gadgets into the technological background of his story; and second, he has no clear idea of their nature.

Gadget 1: the electronic brain. This appears in two forms: the "roboplane" and the "lie detector". Even in the latter form, where its only function is one which a simple mechanical or even a chemical setup could perform as well, the brain is a highly complex one -- it has both intelligence and volition, and it has a perfect command of idiomatic English. In the "roboplane" form, it has a sense of humor as well. No other

part of the technology indicated in the story so much as approaches this achievement -- mechanical duplication of the almost inconceivably complex human brain. It is as out of place in Van Vogt's bumbling twenty-sixth century culture as a radio would be in pre-Roman England. It sells for thirty-five dollars, now.*

Gadget 2: the "ingravity parachute". It is impossible to say whether or not this is out of place in the cultural level described, since the account of it in the story adds up to precisely nothing. It is not a mechanism which counteracts gravity by applying force in the opposite direction, because this would be bulky, heavy and dangerous. Neither is it a mechanism which counteracts gravity directly, because this is a fuzzy Aristotelian idea and manifestly impossible. What is it? It is "a metal harness with pads to protect the body".

Gadget 3: the Distorter. This, of course, has no relation to Solar culture, being an "alien" instrument, but its function appears reasonably plain at the beginning: it is a device which can be focused on and made to interfere with electrical currents at a distance. Having established this, Van Vogt proceeds to ignore it: in the last instalment the Distorter suddenly becomes a transport device and whisks Gosseyn II from Earth to Venus. It is as though a can-opener had abruptly turned into a conveyor belt; but the reader is apparently not expected to be surprised.

Style:

Examples of bad writing in "World of A" could be multiplied endlessly. It is my personal opinion that the whole of it is written badly, with only minor exceptions; but this is a

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* It would be hard to say from the story exactly what value Van Vogt had in mind for the 2560 dollar. Here are the figures:

| | |
|---|---|
| Rooms for the Unprotected (exorbitant) per night . . . . . | $ 20.00 |
| Food and "costs connected with the Games", per day . . . . . | 10.00 |
| Breakfast: orange juice, cereal with cream, kidneys on toast, coffee . | 2.00 |
| Rental, phonograph, with home recording attachment, for one week. . . | 1.50 |
| "Lie detector" . . . . . | 35.00 |
| Jeweled gold cigarette case . . . . . | 25,000.00 |

Extrapolating from the food items, purchasing power of the 2560 dollar would seem to be in the neighborhood of one-half to one-fifth that of the present-day dollar. Extrapolating from the phonograph rental and "lie detector" items, it would seem to be something like ten to fifty times as great. Figure it out for yourself.

purely subjective judgment and is not susceptible of proof. Therefore, I quote below only a few of what I consider to be the worst examples:

"He stood like that, eyes half closed, his mind in a state of slow concentration that made physical relaxation one of the important systems for the maintenance of sanity."

"His mind held nothing that could be related to physical structure. He hadn't eaten, definitely and unequivocally."

"Gosseyn compared his awareness of the night and the fog to the physical world as it appeared to man's senses."

"Had she driven up in the car that afternoon KNOWING he would see her. If so, she knew that HE knew who she was . . . . If THAT was true, then there was no doubt . . . " (Et cetera, ad nauseam.)

"He'd have to find that out for sure, of course, but the feeling that it was so lifted the sick pressure from his innards."

"Gosseyn's intestinal fortitude strove to climb into his throat, and settled into position again only reluctantly as the acceleration ended."

"Something closely akin to fire poured into his brain, and burned away there like a blazing beacon."

"His brain was turning rapidly in an illusion of spinning."

"There was a drabness about his surroundings that permitted thought."

"His leveling off on a basis of unqualified boldness permitted no prolonged time gap."

"The final stairs led down into the dungeon;" ... "After about ten minutes altogether, Gosseyn saw its source: Massive windows in a tree." ... "an immense garden inside the tree." ...."'I was so unwilling to recognize that I was in this business that the first thing I did was get myself killed."..."He was in this affair, in it as deep as he could go."

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I have been progressively annoyed by Van Vogt ever since "Slan!" The first part of this article has vented much of

that annoyance, but there is a remainder: there are trends in Van Vogt's work as a whole which either do not appear strongly in "World of Ā", or could not be treated in a discussion of that story without loss of objectivity.

There is the regiphile trend, for example. It strikes me as singular that in Van Vogt's stories, nearly all of which deal with the far future, the form of government which recurs most often is the absolute monarchy; and further, that the monarchs in these stories are invariably depicted sympathetically. This is true of the "Weapon Shop" series, the "Mixed Men" series, and of single stories such as the recent "Heir Apparent" -- the hero of the latter being a "benevolent dictator", if you please. (Cohen desires me to add here that said story contains a character called Merd Grayson.)

I am attacking Van Vogt on literary, not on political grounds, and so I shall not say what I think of a man who loves monarchies. Neither do I think it relevant that these stories were written and published during a time when both Van Vogt's country and ours were at war with dictatorships, except insofar as it serves to accentuate this point: Obviously Van Vogt is no better acquainted with current events than he is with ancient or modern history.

The absolute monarchy was a form of government which evolved to meet feudal economic conditions everywhere, and which has died everywhere with feudalism. Modern attempts to impose a similar system on higher cultures have just been proven, very decisively, to be failures. Monarchy is dead, and it can never revive until the economic conditions which produced it recur. It is no crime for Van Vogt as a private citizen to wish that this were not so; but ignorance, for an author, is a crime.

Another trend which appears in Van Vogt's work is an apparently purposeless refusal to call things by their right names. "Ā" and "lie detector" are two examples; another is the term "robot" which was employed throughout the "Mixed Men" series. Etymologically the usage was correct; the word, as first used by Capek, meant an artificially created protoplasmic man; but it has since been altered through wide use to mean a mechanical device which performs some or all of a human being's functions. "Android" -- first used, as far as I know, by Jack Williamson -- has assumed the original meaning of "robot" in science-fiction.

"Robot", in the aforementioned series, was a key word: to garble its meaning was to render the entire story meaningless. Van Vogt is certainly aware of the changed meaning of the word, as shown by his use of the term "roboplane"; yet he did not hesitate on that account to call his androids "robots". I do not pretend to know why; the best I can do is to label it one of Van Vogt's many blind spots.

Still another trend is the plot wherein the leaders of two opposing parties turn out to be identical. ("Slan!", "T h e

Weapon Shop"). This trend, however, appears not only in Van Vogt's work but in that of several other recent Astounding writer's; and I suspect that the final responsibility for it rests with Campbell.

This plot device was used by G. K. Chesterton to beautiful effect in "The Man Who Was Thursday", and it was effective precisely because the impression the author wanted to give was that of utter and imbecilic pointlessness. In Van Vogt's hands it gives the same impression, but without Chesterton's charm.

In general, Van Vogt seems to me to fail consistently as a writer in these elementary ways:

1. His plots do not bear examination.

2. His choice of words and his sentence-structure are fumbling and insensitive.

3. He is unable either to visualize a scene or to make a character seem real.

By a glib use of quotations, and, I think, still more by a canny avoidance of detailed exposition, Van Vogt has managed to convey the impression that he has a solid scientific background. A moderately diligent search of his writings, however, will produce such astonishing exhibitions of ignorance as the following:

> "Journeys /to Venus/ had been forbidden until some means was discovered to overcome the danger of ships falling into the Sun.
>
> "That incandescent fate had befallen two ships. And it had been mathematically proven, not merely by cranks, that such a catastrophe would happen to every spaceship until the planets Earth and Venus attained a certain general position with relation to each other and Jupiter." (From "A Can of Paint", September 1944 Astounding.)

It seems to me, as a matter of fact, that Van Vogt's reputation rests largely on what he does not say rather than on what he says. It is his habit to introduce a monster, or a gadget, or an extra-terrestrial culture, simply be naming it without any explanation of its nature. It is easy to conclude from this that Van Vogt is a good and a profound writer, for two reasons: first, because Van Vogt's taking the thing for granted is likely to induce a casual reader to do the same; and second, because this auctorial device is used by many good writers who later supply the omitted explanations obliquely, as integral parts of the action. The fact that Van Vogt does nothing of the sort may easily escape notice.

By this means, and by means of his writing style, which is discursive and hard to follow, Van Vogt also obscures

his plot to such an extent that when it falls to pieces at the end, as it frequently does, the event passes without remark.

In the final scene of "The Rulers", for example, when Van Vogt's hero is about to be done in by the villains, we learn for the first time that the hero just happens to have the power to make the villain's hypnotized henchmen obey his commands. This denouement is not based on anything which precedes it; it is simply patched on, in the same way that despairing hack writers used to bring in the U. S. Marines.

In "Enter the Professor", the hero is confronted by a dilemma -- he's been injected with "seven-day poison" by the villains and must return for the antidote; but if he does, he can't squash them in time. Five pages before the end, the hero has a brainstorm and we are led to believe that the solution revolves around a character named Phillips, a double of the hero's who has been properly planted in the beginning of the story. The actual solution, however, turns out to be a bluff backed by an armed ship hovering over the villains' city, a thing which could have been done at any time -- a solution of the dilemma by proving that there was no dilemma. The hero pulls some trickery involving Phillips, but this is completely extraneous; it has no bearing on the problem.

In "A Can of Paint", hero's problem -- how to get the perfect paint off his body before it kills him -- is solved when he discovers that the "Liquid Light" in it is "absorbed" by a bank of "photoconverter cells" which he happens to have on hand; that is to say, that the doshes are distimmed by the Gostak, and how are you mr. jones?

Altogether, it is a strange world that Van Vogt wanders in. In that dark and murky world, medieval rulers ride rocket-ships; supermen count on their fingers; the leader of the Left is also the leader of the Right; and every hero packs a .32 caliber improbability in his hip pocket.

In the absence of Heinlein, Hubbard, de Camp and the rest of Astounding's vanished prewar writers, Van Vogt stands like a giant. But he is no giant; he is a pygmy who has learned to operate an overgrown typewriter.

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Editor's Note: If there is anyone who wishes to try to answer damon's arguments, why not do so in the pages of DC? This issue will, of course, be sent Van Vogt; any reply from him will, of course, be published.....
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# S I G H I N G  C O R N F L A K E S

Crying Snowflakes: It's nice to know, at any rate, that if I ever write a couple of dozen poems, Willie will be glad to arrange them in a volume and publish them. He will, apparently, publish a volume for anyone who has written a couple of dozen poems.... This, I'm afraid, is about the worst he's given us yet, and he even seems to have lost his magic touch with the format; in the good old days, when he and I published crap, we at least used to obscure its lack of value slightly by dressing it up real purty -- but now he either doesn't give a damn, or isn't aware he's gotten into a rut, or something. I suspect most Vanguardians will simply say the poems stink, without even an attempt at constructiveness; but even though they are such that even I could make worthwhile suggestions, I'm not interested enough to make up the deficiency. There's just one thing I'd like to know: does anyone really believe that (just for instance)

You fed me too long
On the dreams...and the lies...
Now truth makes me shudder
...And I can't close my eyes...

is a little whit more effective than

You fed me too long
One the dreams and the lies;
Now truth makes me shudder
And I can't close my eyes.

? I would really like to know, if there are any who would insist on the former, if they would contrariwise insist on (again just for instance)

I'm
...Forever...
Blowing bubbles...
...Pretty bubbles...
In the air...

You see what I mean, I trust?

Tumbrils: Even if there were nothing else pleasing to me in Jim's publications, things like "Inspirational Little Talks about the Wonderful Post-Pound Vanguard" would more than make up for it. I have read damon's "Pop-Guns at Thirty Paces" in advance, and found it an effective answer to the lead topic here, containing practically everything I might have said about the subject myself (not that I agree with damon's entire apparent attitude on the subject). I can't honestly say that I enjoy things like "Oepsetes" any better'n I do the Nutall stuff, but I am much happier to see them published. As for BBB; I is not so hot, II is amusing but hardly proves anything, and III is indisputably wonderful.

Agenbite of Inwit: I am in some doubt on just what to say about this; if it's an example of the type of material Doc wants, with genuine quality understandably set aside temporarily, I8m all for it; if this is the quality he intends to present, I'm agin it. The cover, "Contentment," and "Ode" I think poor, while representing types I'd like to see more of; "Classroom Beachhead" is only fair. There's no point in saying what you'd expect me to say about the other two poems. Doc's own sections I find entirely acceptable.

Phantasphere: I find the "phantagraph-in-vanguard" line objectionable, carrying as it does the suggestion that DAW still considers Vanguard a sort of Junior FAPA. However, when he also gives us an honest-to-gosh Phantagraph

in the same mailing, the entire situation merely becomes somewhat ridiculous. The sonnets themselves are fine; I can understand them, I appreciate the work that went into them, and I like them. It's too bad they couldn't have been given a better format.

Afterthought: A step towards a good neighbor policy between FAPA and VAPA, which I still think is a good idea. Doc's article is a fine one, and shows a commendable wide-awakeness to the doubtless unwittingly dangerous attitudes of people like Warner. Jim, perhaps, has not done anything towards making himself loved by FAPA members, but there is little reason from any standpoint for him to do that. The comment on Blitherings is extremely informative.

Joe's Jottings: Joe has gone far, and will undoubtedly go farther. The cover is pleasant; JoeK's own stuff is not only pleasant, but enlightening and intelligent as well. Caley I found genuinely funny, though Matthews I could have done without. I hope this does appear every mailing.

Revised Constitution: I'm all for it.

Tales of Antiquity: "The Great Westward Migration" is very funny, though perhaps a trifle overlong; but the big advertisement is funnier -- very very funny indeed, as a matter of fact.

Parnassus: Apparently dedicated to proving that Kepner would like to be a second Michel but isn't capable of it, Rogers is unable to review books, Kepner (again) is not a poet, Saha is one of the most confused people in the world, and none of them are worth their ink as editors (in appearance, as Emden points out, this is very like and just one step above the old CC publications). I will give Jimmy the benefit of the doubt on "The Ghospel"; perhaps it contained some very good local humor, though who can tell? At any rate, it is much more in the tradition of The Gholy Ghible than it is in that of "The Hexateuch." I would not blame the Kidd for weeping.

The Phantagraph: A thinking person's constrained to agree with the man, sure, but I would still be happier about Donald if he had waited a day before saying it. No matter what your opinion of the war was, its end meant so much to almost everyone personally that it was certainly worth it to let go and celebrate for a night.

High Points: EBW at her best (which is not saying much) and DAW at his worst do not make for a very good publication.

K'taŏps-s*: About the only thing worse than a cover done by DAW is a front page heading by DAW on a magazine that has no cover. "Unity * Humanity * Universality" is only successful in making it almost impossible to take the contents seriously; I hate to see my lettering butchered so horribly; calling it a Little magazine is a little too snide; and the cover as a whole looks like hell. I will leave most of the controversial contents

* K'taŏgm-m, in New York, is often pronounced Kittygum. My alternate title has a couple of alternate pronunciations.

to be answered by those more directly concerned. However, as for "The Wise Man Seeks the Truth," if it is treasonous for a warring countrie's supporters to entertain false notions about the enemy's strength, a great many Americans were guilty of treason in the war just ended; and I am still not convinced that a war between the USA and the USSR, or any next war at all, will leave the world and civilization totally wrecked for years to come. And in Tumbrilliantine, an interesting picture of Blish is drawn: in one sentence he leaps with the bravado of the youthful hothead, and in the next his ancient and decrepit wheels are clanking and squeaking. At first glance I thought there were too many asterisks in "Paragraphs from Pinnacles"; after reading I decided there weren't enough by far. The quoted stuff, generally, is better this issue, and there is a better balance between quoted and original material. Yes, I laughed at "The Nimble Shorts". But I still can't understand why Wollheim seems to be incapable of publishing a really good amateur magazine.

Fling: There were several things I forgot to say in my rush to get it out, but on the whole it was a lot of fun to do. Incidentally, The New Yorker was interested in that Atomic Envelope and Printing item after all -- in fact, they paid me for it!

Temper!: The cover was one of the cleverest ideas in the mailing. I'm afraid about all I can say on the "Political Panel" would fall into the "yessing" category; however, since I have accepted Zissman as my chief political instructor and inspiration, I hope her future material will be a little better organized. (This, I realize, couldn't have been, but I can dream....) The reprint was worth the trouble, and the setup is very nice. "Picture of Grace" was well-done, anyway. I especially liked "Sum of the Parts", and I liked the slipping scanties story even more -- in fact, it was terrific.

discrete: I do not care for the cover -- or for most of the art, Art, aht and peekshas. The sketches of Kidd are satisfactory, and not out of place; "Peter Rapit," "The Goose," and "The Toadstool" (especially the latter) seem very much out of place, besides not being as good as the originals (that, I realize, would have been practically impossible). damon's comic strip and "Martian Boyscout" are quite suitable; the sketch of Judy is poor, no matter what the excuse; the rest is not worth mentioning. And I still don't like the format. In spite of all this, I like discrete. The Lyons piece was over my head, though I finally got it. "Admonition" is fair. "Four Variations", I'm afraid, is another example of local humor that won't get across to outsiders. "Fairy Tale" is sensational. "Sottisier" got off to a rather good start in spite of everything. "The greener the grass" is pretty phooey, and "Parallax" not as well done as I had hoped, though naturally interesting. "Futurian University" is wonderful, local humor or no; and Page 12-B is wonderful, too -- durned if it ain't! "Im Discretions" are up to their usual standard, and I'm glad to see Emden on my side of the mailing review question. It might possibly be of interest

to someone that a year ago, even though I was fond of fanart and fanudes, I wouldn't have liked "The Toadstool"; I have been subject to the same influences as Emden during the year; and I still don't like it....

Stefantasy: The magazine is a great improvement, although the title is not. The printing is undeniably beautiful. The story was not bad, "The Hollywood Menace" okay. I had seen the perpetual motion gag before, and ordinarily do not try to solve math puzzles; but I like to watch the contortions of others in trying to solve them, so the department is welcome. The science stuff is just what we need. By the way, I've seen some of those "waterproof" matches, and they work marvelously; they will, I understand, be on the civilian market very soon. The ads are very funny, but I've seen so many of the same general type elsewhere that I'm beginning to tire of them.

Renascence: This strikes me as, all in all, a much better job of editing than the first issue. "Notes and Comment" is excellent, as editorial notices go. Blish had a lot to say in his inquest, and he said it well, although I'm not really seriously interested in "hot" music either. I still approve thoroughly of Doc's record reviews. The Workshop is a tremendous innovation. I liked Doc's "Prologue", not so much his "I" in "Masks." "The Conversation Lags" turned out to be a type of thing I like very much. "Shaft" I pronounce good, while admitting that Bostman is still pretty much beyond me (although mostly because of the German, in this case).

V A: Completely satisfactory throughout.

**********

A FROG HE WOULD --lazarus

down there
the subway trains always come exactly when you want them to
wait if you wish, dash if you don't
and you always get the kind of seat you're in the mood for
frontwards, backwards, or sidewise
i know it's hard to believe; you'll just have to take my word
for it
not up
dope
down.

OH. --TOPSY

From Schonectady cam a young dopus
Who recited a word-missing opus.
When they asked him the cause,
He said, "I'm at a lause:
It isn't that I'm a prude or anything
but I just never learned the words
that would make the censors say
'Sorry, no soapus!'"

## THE HUNTING OF THE SNAFU

It is, of course, completely irrelevant that there is a Snafu Fur Specialties Corporation at 200 West 40th Street in New York City, but this time The New Yorker really wasn't interested! They do have pretty rejection slips, though....

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FTC ISSUES CEASE, DECEASE ORDER TO JOHN B. STETSON CO.
(Headline in The Daily News Record)

Drunk with power, these government agencies!

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In addition to Skinnay Ennis and His Company, and Frances and his Company, and Frances Langford, performances were indulged in by Don Wilson, the announcer, Tony Romano, the Town Criers, the Cappy Barra Boys and the noisemaker, Rufe Davis. (Archer Winsten's Movie Talk in the N. Y. Post) But everything after Frances and his Company was a terrific letdown!

I got home last Tuesday, and after spending the rest of the week at our cabin, got back last Tuesday. (Art Saha in Parnassus #1) Found at last; the second Tuesday of next week on which I'm going to pay everybody the money I owe them.

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Guest Section

d. knight: (Reading "Soul Proprietor" by Robert Bloch in Weird Tales) "She stood stark naked in the shadow of a single lamp. Her magnificently moulded body was debased in an attitude of adoration on the floor."

C. Cohen: "A barefoot boy with shoes on, stood sitting on the deck!"

****

Here is a little forecast of what I think the near future may be in the event of Interplanetary travel: 1980 World War III. 1981 Conquest of Moon. 1990 Mars Reached. 1992 Venus Explored. 1998 Colonies Planted on Venus and Mars. 2100 Fourth World War. 2160 Jovian Moons Colonized.

After this war Russian control over Europe grows until it culminates in war with the Western world. The former axis nations stripped of their territory are forced to expand along with the United States to the planets. England, France and Russia are so busy playing power politics that they fail to obtain new colonies in time. Anger over this grows until World War IV flares into being. Because our interests happen to be the same, we go to war with Germany and Japan against our former allies. This war is mostly fought on Earth and leaves Europe a wreck. The Communistic regime is crushed and Russia becomes a Monarchy under a new dynasty. England becomes a semi-republic and is stripped of her overseas empire, sinking to a small island without much political influence.

May sound like hooey, but it is an attempt to use the past to fore-

cast the future. In case of no Interplanetary travel, cannot say what the future will be. (Edwin Sigler in The Vizigraph --Planet Stories, Winter 1945) Oh, come now, Mr. Sigler; aren't you overestimating the influence of Interplanetary travel in the past just a bit?

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EDITORIAL:

I would say last minute editorial, but it isn't the last minute. It's 'way past it. If I had finished cutting the stencils last night, this would be a much better mag. But I didn't, and I feel that now is the time to say the hell with it. If it were not quite so dark out, and I could see to trace the cover stencil on the window, I might let you see the pretty cover I drew. And if it were not quite so cold in my new apartment, I might take the time to make this emergency stuff neater. But as it is, to hell with it. I've got to catch a train to Schenectady tonight. And before I do, I've got to go over to Judy's and mimeo as much of this as possible (any that's left I'll leave in her capable hands -- thanks in advance, Glory-to-Ghu!).

I really did have a lot more stuff for this issue, but you'll get it eventually anyhow. However, SCIENCE*FICTION is more important than this thing, and that'll come first.

As for the substitute cover -- "Merry Christmas!" -- I'll bet that's the first time you've been wished it (seriously) this year -- "Lowndes for President" -- I second the motion! -- April Fool!" -- because I decided that since this mag is such a mess, it isn't the first issue of Destiny's Child after all -- but the second issue of Fling! -- fooled ya, didn't I? -- yeh, me too -- -- -- -- -- oops, sorry.

G'bye.

Wonder what I forgot this time?.....