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..... December, 1943, Fapa

Fellow Faps:

As recorded in Banshee #2, I went to Boston to deliver the stuff I had for the December mailing to Swisher. While there I learned that the mailing was going out at least a week late. And when I arrived back home, on Monday, December 6, I found a missive from Paul Spencer, containing an edition of his column. Paul had not gone overseas or anything of the sort, but was still in Seattle. So without even thinking about it I decided to publish these Sayings for post-mailing. And then I decided to publish a couple of other items at the same time. Here they are. Marlow's column hasn't come in yet, but it might, and if it does it will also be in this issue.

This mailing would have been darned big even without the Shangri-Laddition, and with that it is undoubtedly the largest ever. Incidentally, I am counting the Cosmic Circle stuff mailed by the LASFS as three items, since it made up that number of mailings when sent out separately by Clod. Gee, what a lot of fun it's going to be to comment on all this! Of course, the bulk of it comes from a comparatively small percentage of the membership, but it shows what can be done. Maybe in the next mailing we'll have something from nearly everyone. What about it?

Personals: Doc, I didn't receive your post-mailing. This was probably due to your sending it to the address in the last FA, which was by then out-dated. To keep my files complete and because some of the comments on your material were quite intriguing, I'd like to have it. I'm willing to pay for it if necessary, but please send me an extra copy, if any. ... Elmer, read the foregoing. It applies, without any changes at all, to you as well as Drygulch.

A note about my own stuff in the main mailing: The International J J O'Malley Fairy Godfather Association has nothing to do with the Tucker variety of godfathers. When I wrote the announcement I didn't know that the suckers who helped sponsor the fifth anniversary of LeZ would be called f g's. My brand is entirely different; in fact, different from anything that has ever appeared in fanzines. The only way you can get one is to write me and ask to be a member. The advantages are immense. Don't miss this opportunity! So far, there is one member. A postal card is sufficient. If you continue to ignore this, you're undoubtedly a moron. I have spoken

I am contemplating a change of policy for both Caliban and Banshee, one which I think will find favor with everyone (and be more work for me, prob'ly). It will become apparent in the next mailing, unless I veto it, which is unlikely. See you then.

(1-9-44)

= Harry Shaw

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SAYINGS OF THE SPENCE

Quarterly (?) Quibblings

by Pfc. Paul Spencer

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It's rather dizzying to consider all that's happened to me since I wrote the last "Sayings." I composed that, I recall, on my desk in my room at the Pawling (N. Y.) School for Boys -- said school having been occupied by the Army for the purpose of teaching Air Forces men (?) cryptography. I had been out of basic training only a couple of weeks, and had never been farther west than Pennsylvania. Ah, how many years have gone their weary way since then! It must be nearly six months....

After graduating from crypto school, I was hustled off, diploma in hand, Pfc stripes on arms, to Bolling Field, D. C. There I visited "the nation's capitol," failed to contact either Speer or Singleton (because by the time I'd located them I and everyone in my squadron was quarantined for possible mumps, and after the quarantine we shipped out), and learned what it is to be a general duty man. It means KP and assorted details, interspersed with close-order drill. Well, after a month and a half of that, I was glad to ship out, even though I went to what has been called (in one of the army's less profane moments) "the hell-hole of creation" -- Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. As a matter of fact, I found it a hot, rigidly disciplined place but I endured it surprisingly well. I spent my time taking overseas training -- such diversions as bayonet drill, combat sports, and l . . . o . . . n . . . g hikes (with rifle and pack).

This, too, came to an end. I expected it to be followed by immediate shipment overseas, but no, I went some fifteen or so hundred miles to McChord Field, Washington (just outside Tacoma), and thence after a week to Seattle. At the latter place I am now, doing, for a change, cryptographic work. I room in the city, and when not actually on duty am practically a civilian again. Oh, that this would last the duration! But it won't.

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A person of my bookish habits wouldn't neglect to investigate the local public library. I didn't; I looked it up, and examined their card-index for material by such authors as Dunsany, Cabell, Hodgson, Machon, a. s. o. I was disappointed in my search for Hodgson (they have just one short story of his, in an anthology), but was restored to good spirits by fairly decent representations of the others. And I was really startled to discover on their shelves Stapledon's "Star Maker." I'd longed to read this ever since perusing the enthusiastic review of it in Cosmic Stories. Now having read it at last, I'm prepared to say it lives up to everything Wollheim said of it.

You might suppose that Stapledon's imagination would be pretty well spent by the time he finished "Last and First Men" with the death of mankind five billion years hence; yet his questing mind has in "Star Maker" gone far beyond this point -- so far, indeed, that the whole drama of man becomes insignificant by contrast. That "Star Maker" is not more widely known as one of the very greatest classics of scientific fiction is probably due to its rarity, certainly not to lack of merit. Stapledon has a tremendously bold imagination, considerable scientific knowledge, and a fine literary style; all these gifts are much in evidence in this volume.

There is a touch of mysticism here and there in "Star Maker," but wherever possible Stapledon has adhered to scientific plausibility in

this awe-inspiring account of the journeyings of a disembodied mind through all the depths of space and time. The story is a dazzling panorama of strange worlds and alien life-forms, from the creation of the cosmos to its destruction. The purpose of the book is, in the main, to secure a cosmic viewpoint -- paging Claude Degler! -- from which to survey man's contemporary affairs. Inescapably, there is a touch of satire and didacticism, as there is in "Last and First Men," but the book merely gains thereby; in fact, this element is somewhat better handled, with less extravagance, than in the earlier story, yet it is not less fascinating.

The last few chapters, I felt, were rather disappointing -- a bewildering attempt to grasp the nature of the Creator -- but aside from this Stapledon has been amazingly successful in carrying out this immense project, and taken all in all "Star Maker" is surely one of the most original and profound works of science fiction ever published.

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Another book I read recently is the Clark Ashton Smith anthology, "Out of Space and Time." It's a handsome volume, very tastefully laid out (except for the lack of running-heads of the story-titles), but on the whole I was disappointed in its contents. I've read much better material by Smith than the tales he selected for this collection. True, such stories as "The Dark Eidolon," "Sadastor," "From the Crypts of Memory," and "The Weird of Avoosl Wothuquan" are not to be sneezed at; nor is there a really poor story in the book. But "The Eternal World" is not there, nor "The Coming of the White Worm," nor "Visitors from Mlok," nor "The Ice Demon," and such mediocre material as "The Return of the Sorcerer" and "The End of the Story" is. It is to be hoped that the projected second Smith volume will give us a more representative group of stories. Do not misinterpret my words, however: "Out of Space and Time," even if not definitive, deserves a place on the bookshelves of every fantasy lover. There is much dross among the gold, but there is gold.

Smith, incidentally, seems to me a very poor story-teller. When it comes to spinning a yarn, to knocking the reader out cold with a climax, he is pretty close to a total failure. He qualifies for distinction on the basis of his grotesque and colorful concepts, his sonorous style, and the unique manner in which he communicates the strangeness of other worlds. His art is essentially pictorial.

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Among the unfinished business of Arkham House is the Merritt omnibus. Uniquely appropriate now that Merritt is dead, it actually -- if I construe correctly a letter from August Derleth -- may be stillborn because of the author's death. The copyright situation. It surely is devoutly to be hoped that before long the difficulties will be surmounted and that the book -- to contain four novels and all the short stories! -- will be available to the thousands who are eager for it. I imagine that Merritt is far and away the most popular writer of pulp fantasy.

He has been vastly over-rated, of course; to discourse of him in the same breath as Milton and Shakespeare partakes of blasphemy. Among pulp writers, he has the stature of a Colossus; place him in general literature and he dwindles alarmingly. He did, after all, sell to Argosy, a pulp magazine, which he could never have done without admitting into his stories a strong dash of "formula." The pulp-reading public must needs have its manly hero, its sweet heroine, its rapid-fire action, its stupid melodrama. Moreover, Merritt at his purest is not free from faults. His style bristles with reiterated pet phrases -- "moon-fire" etc. -- and that silly dash. All his books concern the struggles between two forces representing Good and Evil, and each force

in turn is represented by a woman, Evil generally by one with gold-flecked green eyes. There is a gruff, hearty, lovable old warrior of Viking stock who keeps turning up. And Merritt rather overdoes the wonder -- I picture him writing with his mouth perpetually hanging open in awe.

Very critical persons, like Trudy Kuslan and Bob Jones, repudiate Merritt for these reasons.

There are many, however, like myself, who fail to find in these things sufficient irritation to override the glories in the works of him who not unjustly has been called the Lord of Fantasy. His gorgeous descriptions, his quite unparelled richness of imagination, his occasional dippings into philosophy -- these give his writings a poetic beauty and a profundity rare in any kind of literature. His prose, bombastic at its worst, is at its best tremendously powerful and deliciously musical.

The first Merrittale I read was "Creep, Shadow!" (which the Avon Book Company and many others will call "Creep, Shadow, Creep!"). I remember being utterly enthralled by it; and I must have read it six times at least. I still admire it, particularly the episode in Shadow-Land -- as fine a thing as Merritt ever did -- but it is really a minor work, and has a blasé cynicism in it which maddens me. Of much greater worth is the next of his novels to come to my attention, "The Moon Pool." For sheer richness and color of imaginative imagery this is probably supreme in literature. It has dreadfully hackneyed elements, such as the dastardly German (Russian?), but what do they matter beside the Shining One -- Muria -- Yolara -- the Dragon-Worm -- the Silent Ones?

"The Metal Monster," on the other hand, is to me even more impressive -- bigger. It isn't as full of color and beauty, but I'll never forget The Smiting Thing, The Thing that Followed (cut from the FFM version), The Drums of Thunder, The City that Lived, The Vampires of the Sun, and all the other marvels of the Metal Folk. This certainly must be included in the omnibus, if and when -- and in the original version, complete with all the big splashes of philosophy and science, though some of Merritt's tonings-down should be incorporated.

There is, of course, the school which ranks "The Ship of Ishbar" as Merritt's masterpiece. Indeed, despite the blood splashed liberally throughout its pages, it has the least amount of pulp formula of any of Merritt's novels, and possesses a strange supra-mundane beauty, an exquisite pathos connected in my mind, for some reason, with Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde." It does not display his imagination at its best, but it is unquestionably his loftiest work, and the one of the purest quality.

The only other important Merritt novel is "Dwellers in the Mirage," a fine atmospheric tale and -- after a fashion -- psychological study. The rest are adventure or horror done better than anyone else could, but not major works. There remain, of course, the short stories, all beautifully done, and pretty well free from the faults of the novels.

Yes, let us refrain from over-rating Merritt, but 'twould be a greater shame to under-rate him.

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While we're on the subject of Arkham House (who are NOT paying me for all this advertising!), I'd like to raise a question which has been bothering me for a long time: why don't they publish a Robert E. Howard anthology?

At the time of Howard's death, the air was full not only of lamentations, but of rather vague plans -- hopes would be more accurate -- for a collection of the late master's fantasy. Since then, the name of Howard has lapsed into something distressfully resembling obscurity.

True, his name is held in veneration by the Old Guard, but compare his fame with that of the less original H. P. Lovecraft! And Messrs. Derleth and Wandrei have to my knowledge given no indication of any plan to issue Howard's works in book form -- they, of course, being the logical people to do it.

I frankly confess complete inability to account for this curious neglect. I am not, it is true, an authority on Howard's writings; I've read only "The Phoenix on the Sword," "The Tower of the Elephant," "The Scarlet Citadel," "Worms of the Earth," three or four Solomon Kane stories, and one of the tales of King Kull -- but these all impressed me very favorably, particularly the first four, which, I judge, represent Howard's artistic maturity. He did not, of course, write for the weak-stomached; his pages are drenched with gore, and he leers, half-malignantly, at nameless abominations which irresistably produce horrified gulplings and shivers from the victim -- er, reader. But, after all, one of the main purposes of weird fiction is to scare the reader silly, and Howard was very successful in terrifying, at least, me. Nor should the abundance of action and blood-letting be labelled, derisively, "blood-and-thunder"; it is an electrifying manifestation of a tremendous lust for excitement, of living life to the hilt, embodied most strikingly in Conan the Cimmerian.

On the score of imagination, Howard fails us no more than on those of excitement and terror: I am not likely soon to forget the elephant-headed idol which sat on its throne in the ancient tower, and wept, nor the multitudinous ghastly creations of the evil sorcerer in "The Scarlet Citadel," nor yet the anomalous entities lurking beneath Roman Britain in "Worms of the Earth." And Howard's style (as I recall it -- I haven't laid eyes on a work of his in several years) is powerfully vivid, with an exhilarating rhythmic sweep.

I suppose we must wait the duration before anything concrete can be done, but let's at least lay the foundations for production of a representative collection of Howard's fantasies.

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I conclude this installment of my column with the embarrassed feeling that for all one can glean from it I've never so much as heard of the FAPA. Fact is, I'm rapturously in love with it, but those carrying on the various discussions seem far better suited to the job than I, and as for criticisms of the fapazines themselves -- well, I regard all the current (Fall) batch with complete contentment. Well done, good and faithful slans!

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LA FINO

FLASH! (1-1-44): Many of U probably noe already, but if not -- BY GOVT ORDER, NO MORE 20 LB MIMED PAPER CAN BE MADE! IF paper in this & future issues is fantastically mixt, *excuse it pliz; (THAT BLOT TOO!) but necessity is the mother of CONSERVATION! (VOICE OF THE)

(and imitation is U-noe-what!)
Larry