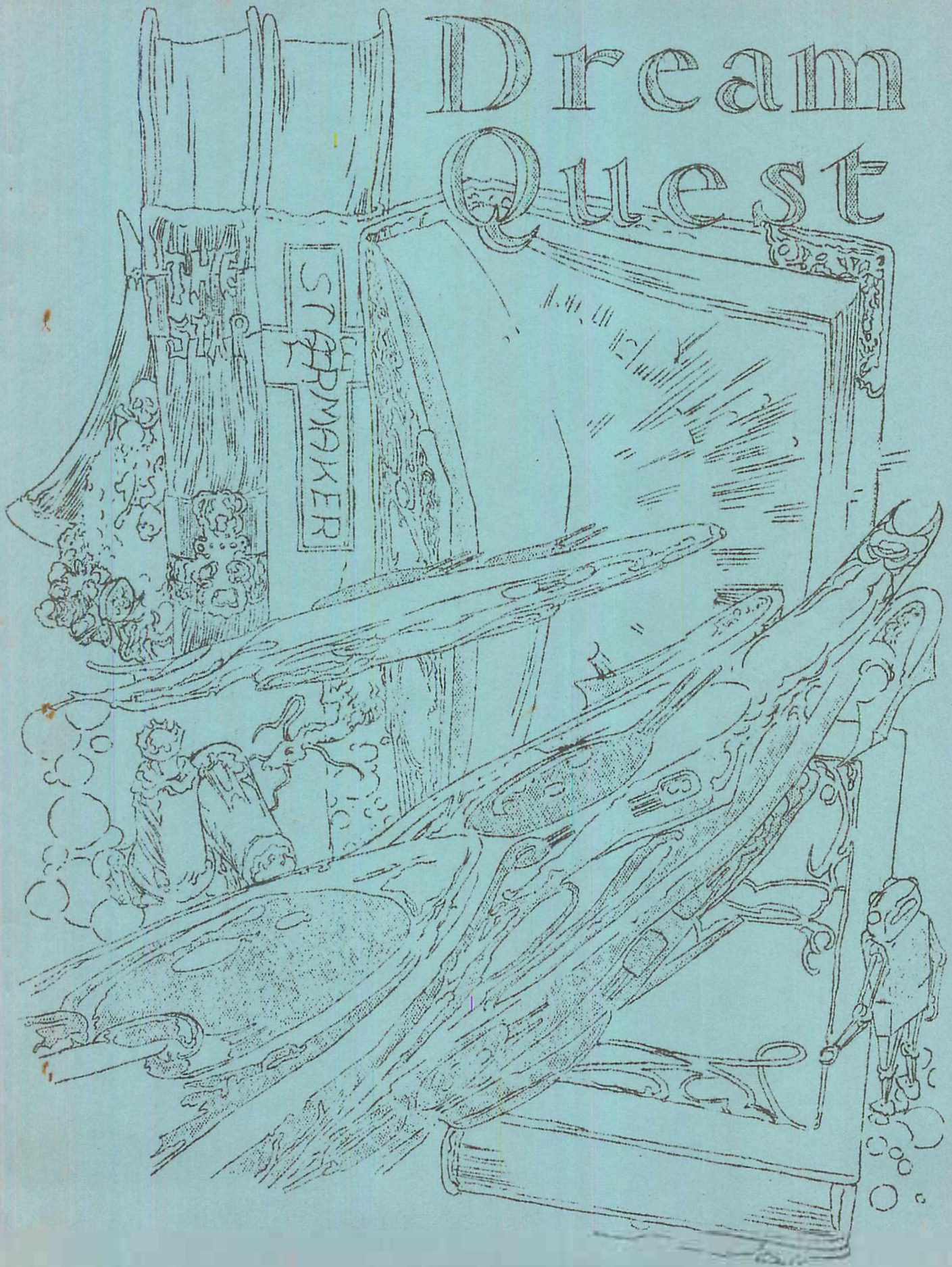
Dream Quest



dream quest

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ARTICLES:

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DEPARTMENTS:

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The Gas Jet

HERE it is -- the seventh issue of Dream Quest!

It's been a long time, and reports unofficial and semi-official said we had folded or suspended, but the truth of the matter is that we merely entered into a somnolent state. Whether there will be still more issues I can't say, but at any rate there will be this one . . . which ought to prove that there's still life, at least.

You'll note a few of our old features ("Pro-Phile," "In Arkham House") are still with us; others have bitten the dust in the interim. "Cave of the Winds," which I fondly believe was a good letter column, ran a final installment in Howard Miller's FAPA publication, Primal; so it naturally doesn't appear. But if I should get out another DQ I surely wouldn't mind including letters in it. Let this be advice enough for you.

This issue goes only to a few valued friends, and to those who still have issues coming to them on their old subscriptions. I'm not taking on any more readership . . . god forbid. I hope that not too many of you have moved since the summer of 1948 . . .

You all have seen this magazine before, so there's no need to jog your memories; but just for the record, DQ ran six issues between the summer of 1947 and the summer of 1948. During that time it presented the s-f fan world with some truly fine pieces of writing in all categories -- climaxed by that great fan story, "The Craters of the Moon" by Redd Boggs. It might be of interest that #7 was scheduled to feature Joe Kennedy's article, "Edgar Allan Poe." This piece was handed to Redd Boggs when DQ suspended . . . and after making the rounds of several fanzines, here it is . . . in Dream Quest #7. We extend thanks to those who were responsible for the article's homecoming, and to the powers above for its permanently interesting subject.

SINCE it seems at this time to be incumbent on fanzines to present some sort of opinion concerning our boy Hubbard's panacea, we'd like to get in our two bits' worth with this statement. It is self-explanatory in nature, but a word about its origin might be appropriate. The UR library staff has pasted this statement into the front of its copy of Dianetics, operating fortunately enough under the theory that fore-warned is fore-armed, I imagine. I would that each copy of the book sold in America could have tacked into it a statement similar

this one, or to C. Daly King's review in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science-Fiction -- but here it is:

"COPY

"Department of Psychology
University of Redlands
September 15, 1950

"Memorandum to: Library Staff
From: Dr. W. S. Gregory, Assoc. Prof. of Psychology
Subject: Dianetics by L. R. Hubbard

"Hubbard's book, Dianetics, should be in our university library, because it will provide our students with an unusual test of their intelligence and habits of critical thinking and of their ability to apply their understanding of scientific methods and of psychology. # Dianetics is not psychology. It is pseudo-psychology. Any person who accepts dianetics as anything more than a hypothesis reveals his own ignorance of both the scientific research methods and the established knowledge in the field of psychology. As hypotheses some of Hubbard's principles may perhaps merit investigation. # The following points are listed in the hope that they will stimulate intelligent evaluation of the book by any students who read it: # 1. Does endless repetition of the theme, 'This is scientific fact,' make a statement scientific? What proof of his ideas does Hubbard present? Is his interpretation of that evidence? What alternative theories can you think of that might be equally justified hypotheses regarding the nature of the 'engrams' which Hubbard's patients describe? # 2. How consistent is the author? How often and on what points does he contradict himself? # 3. Are any ideas presented in this book really new? Can you recognize the ideas presented by Hubbard as ones which he has 'stolen' from Pavlov, Rogers, Freud, Jung, and many others? (Note that Hubbard utilizes some principles and techniques of these men but applies new labels to them, and then claims they are his original ideas) # 4. What techniques are actually involved in dianetic therapy? To what extent are suggestion, hypnosis, rationalization, etc., actually involved, despite his denials that they are? # 5. What concepts does he defend which are not consistent with contemporary psychological knowledge? For example, on what basis can you accept or reject Hubbard's theory of pre-natal influence? # 6. To what extent may dianetics involve projection? How similar is dianetic reverie to a Rorschach or other projective devices? # 7. What dangers are involved in dianetics? For example, if a person feels hostile to his parents or feels rejected by them, what experiences other than abortion-attempts might have contributed to the development of those attitudes? How many of these other types of experiences are recognized by Hubbard? If other experiences are involved, would it be healthy to ignore them? # 8. What 'promises' of cures does Hubbard make? Are

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THE MISSING ELEMENT

HARRY WARNER JR

Maybe some day it will begin to appear in science fiction and weird fiction -- the missing element that has nothing to do with protons and neutrons, the missing element that has magic powers.

It's the element that almost every great piece of literature possesses -- the element of humor.

Not, let me hasten to add, that we want the 26th century equivalent of custard pies and jokes about Brooklyn. The element that I'm thinking about might be defined in several other ways: even as sanity in seeing the world clearly and seeing it whole.

A few people still can't understand why Shakespeare's characters sometimes make the worst sort of puns at the tensest moments of his tragic dramas, and some music lovers confess that they can't see anything in Mozart's "Don Giovanni" but an operetta-like comedy. Unfortunately, practically everyone thinks it's all right for magazine after magazine, book after book to appear with weird or science fiction stories in which there's not a hint of relaxation of the grim, frantically serious atmosphere.

Injecting the missing element into the literature of the future and the occult would be a mistake if it were done clumsily. As an awful example, in another line, I might recall the strange characters who used to pop up in every other chapter of boys' books -- there was a particularly dreadful one in the Tom Swift series -- with annoying cheerfulness and merriment.

We don't need four paragraphs of humor after every three pages of seriousness. What we really need is a different attitude on the part of the authors: the attitude that understands there are two sides to everything, that the tragic is simply the reverse side of the comic, that the crucial thing and immaterial thing often depend on simply the point of view.

What makes "Don Giovanni" so great, after all? I think it's the way Mozart caught an all-encompassing outlook on the world that he set to music. Don Giovanni is at one and the same time a symbol and a man, a character who is both an individual and a type. He's the same sort of wolf that you find lounging on the street corner and he's also an enormously compl[illegible]ing in magnified form the same struggle

...hat most individuals encounter with sex and mores. You can hear the opera as the adventures of a gay rake, or you can understand it as the manner in which women are openly horrified, secretly entranced by the Don, with Freudian overtones. Anyone who comes to the opera expecting to hear a mass of unrelieved tragic music, or anyone who listens to it as a series of catchy tunes, is bound to be disappointed. It's reality, which means that it isn't sad and it isn't gay -- it's both.

Or think of a great fantasy, Goethe's "Faust." When you read the first portion, you suddenly become aware that Faust has set out to experience everything and has ended up by carrying out a seduction of a bobbysoxer, nothing more important. Gretchen's tragedy is profound and it's still ridiculous in this sense. Gounod's opera never catches the dual significance and is merely a fine example of Victorian music. Yet this stupid teen-ager reappears at the end of the great Goethe drama, as the symbol of the "eternal feminine"; she is nothing and yet she is everything to the drama.

The first rule that every writer of fiction learns is to tell his story through the very minimum of characters. If he wishes to write a story about the Civil War, he does not make all of a division's men the heroes; he picks out three or four men at the most from that division as his heroes. But if that same author has any sense of proportion at all, he must realize that the fate of these three or four men had little or no bearing on the course of the war, they represent a hopelessly insignificant proportion of the men who participated in the battles.

Similarly, a story about the conquest of space must be told through the adventures of a handful of people, even if whole races are involved. Now, it obviously makes no difference in the cosmic scheme of things, what happens to those few men. If they die in the effort to reach other planets, others will succeed later on; in the broadest sense, they aren't any more important to the universe than we are concerned with the fate of four ants who right now are trying to transport the body of a half-dead gnat in Guatemala. Yet those humans are the finest things that we know, and they're all that we have to write about.

If our authors of science fiction don't keep those contradictory facts in mind, we'll continue to have the same monotonous fare that we've been getting. The writer obsessed with the importance of man will take him too seriously; the writer who thinks only of his actual insignificance will turn out hopelessly cynical stuff. The writers who show the greatness and smallness of man at the same time are the ones that I want to read.

Who are those writers today? Not many, I'm afraid, and most of them flash only occasional signs of the proper attitude. Heinlein had it from time to time. "Universe" was a fine example of a sane outlook on mankind. Ray Bradbury usually understands the difference between

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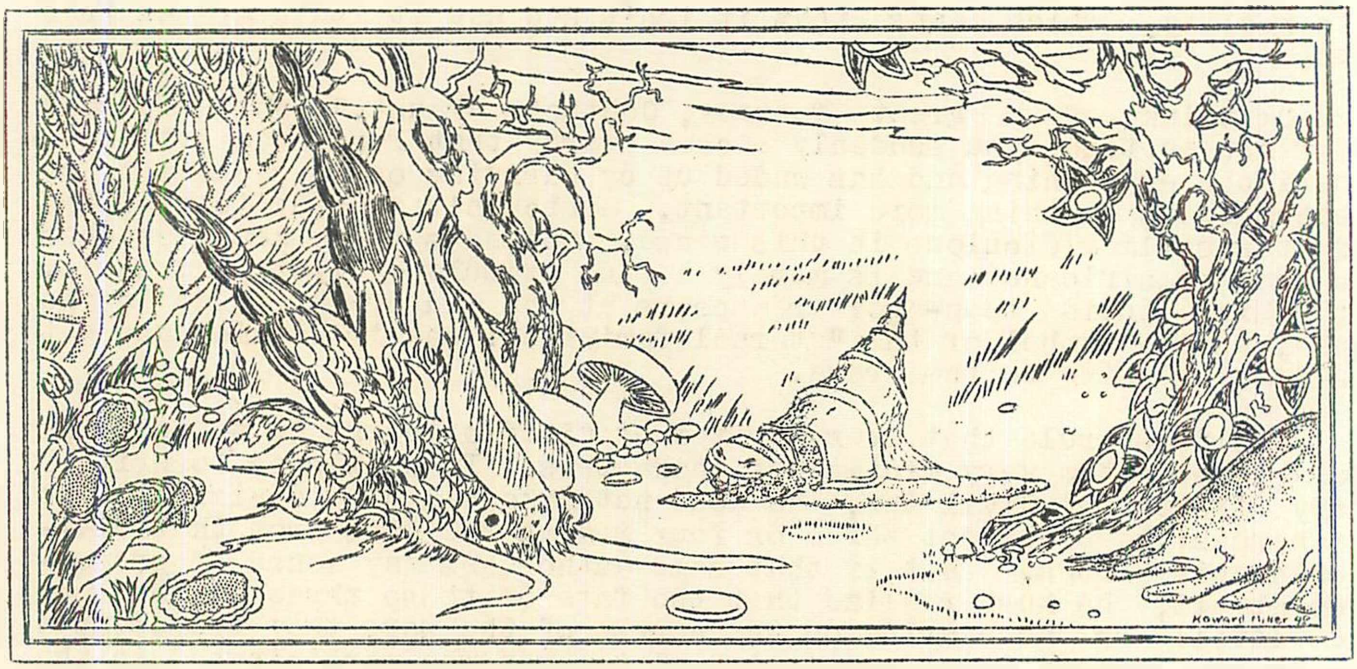
EDGAR ALLAN POE



I.

The Times of the Man.

IN THE DAYS of America's lusty youth, it seems strange to find Edgar Allan Poe, the brilliant neurotic who was to become one of the dominant literary figures of his time, writing not of the era of change and growth in which he lived -- not of the surging population of the East which was pouring into the expanding West ... not of covered wagons nor of Yankee clipper ships ... not even of the South which Poe knew well -- but of Gothic horror, hideous worms slavering in darkness, the Red Death of corruption, and the beauty which blooms in decay.

The bonds of English thought and manners were slipping away from the former colonies, and Americans were turning their eyes away from the Atlantic, toward the West which lay behind them. Men like George Bancroft, whose ten-volume History of the United States stewed with patriotism, were preaching the doctrine that America was to be the greatest nation in the history of mankind. Pioneer America was standing up, shouting its own worth to the world.

The ideals of Jefferson and others who believed that man was born to till the soil, and who dreaded the day when men would "degrade themselves to the slavery of...tending machines", were losing ground. For

PRISONER OF NEVER NEVER LAND

BY JOE KENNEDY

better or for worse, the industrial revolution had belatedly reached America. Railroads were growing hesitantly, but here and there men dreamed of the day when rails of steel would span the continent.

Here lay enough material to keep a literary man working from dawn to sunset. Yet cheap, popular fiction was predominant -- imported adventure tales, and novels in which ink-happy matrons and spinsters titteringly confessed the indiscretions of their youth. Edgar Allan Poe's devotion to pure art, and his high respect for the values of literature, was as surprising an influence as it was welcome.

How did the first half of the nineteenth century, this period of vigorous living and spectacular growth and change, produce the gloom-depressed, melancholy poet who was to pen polished lines of ghoul-infested belfries and cities beneath the sea? This problem has been thrashed back and forth for nearly a century. The extent of the critical material on Poe is staggering. At least twenty-six biographies, to my knowledge, have been written about the man. So profound is the controversy for and against him that one disgusted critic has commented, "A preoccupation with Edgar Allan Poe is the mark of a mediocre literary mind." But the question remains: Why did Poe write as he did? We must examine the man's life and character to see.

II.

His Life and Background.

Poe was born in Boston in 1809, the son of David Poe and Elizabeth Arnold. Both parents were actors, whose only earnings were from the stage -- and in those days, an actor who ate regularly was a phenomenon. David Poe was a Scotch-Irishman who had a fondness for a little more than "a wee drop". He is believed to have deserted his

wife, leaving her to support the three children of the family. This was a heavy burden for the woman, who has been described as "superior in charm if not in power on the stage." When she died of pneumonia in 1811, the children were farmed out, hither and yon, and Poe was fostered by Mrs. John Allan, wife of a prosperous Virginia tobacco exporter.

Spoiled and coddled by Mrs. Allan, sternly but carefully corrected by her husband, Poe grew to be a handsome, precocious, self-indulgent boy. When the Allans took a business trip to England, Poe went to school in Scotland and Chelsea, where he laid the foundations for his curious, patchwork knowledge of classical lore. In his tale "William Wilson" Poe records memories of his schooldays in England.

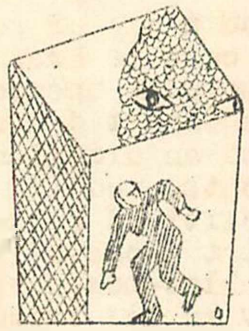
Autumn of 1820 saw him a schoolboy in Richmond again. He began scribbling verse -- tragic, satirical. He fell in love with the beautiful mother of one of his schoolmates, and when she died, he spent sleepless nights standing alone by her newly-covered grave. In her memory, he penned his well-known poem, "To Helen".

At the University of Virginia, which had just been established by Jefferson, Poe unsuccessfully tried to make money at cards. Apparently he was better at poetry than at poker, for he ran up a debt of $2500. Here he also demonstrated his inability to hold his liquor. "One glass," says a companion, "would send him into a frenzy." Yet he was a brilliant student of languages, and apparently influenced by Byron, performed notable feats of swimming. Despite his brilliance, he was moody, extremely sensitive, and proud. School-fellows stayed at a distance. When Poe began digging up evidence of his foster - father's infidelity, John Allan's esteem cooled. Poe left the university for Boston, where he sponsored the printing of his own poetry in a collection titled Tamerlane and Other Poems, today a fabulously rare collectors' item.

Under an assumed name and age, he joined the army for awhile. At this point, the records are incomplete. Some rumors have him fighting with the Greeks; another tale has him doing the night-spots of Paris together with Alexandre Dumas. At any rate, a formal reconciliation with Allan took place when Mrs. Allan pleaded with her husband in Poe's behalf -- on her deathbed. Poe wangled an appointment to West Point in order to please Allan, but after another feud, Poe lost hopes for a legacy. He decided to get out of the army, deliberately neglected roll calls and duties, and was finally tossed out on his ear for "gross neglect of duty" and "disobedience of orders". Sick, penniless and miserable, he landed in New York, where he lived in desperate poverty. John Allan's will, providing for his legitimate and several natural children, contained no mention of Poe.

Things were bound to take a better turn. "A Manuscript Found in a Bottle" brought Poe a $50 prize from the Baltimore Sunday Visitor and the friendship and patronage of novelist John P. Kennedy. Through Kennedy, young Poe secured a job as associate editor of the Southern Literary Messenger. Actually, this was literary hackwork, but Poe did well by it. His weird tales and stinging literary criticisms won him the nickname "the tomahawk man", raised the tottering Messenger's cir-

culation from 500 to 5000. Poe was bent on breaking the clutch of mediocrity on American letters --- and he fought with a will.



The strange marriage of the 26-year-old Poe to his cousin, Virginia Clemm, a child of half his years, brought him a measure of happiness -- and a flock of troubles. Poe was drinking deeply, to ward off attacks of melancholia. His drinking led to his losing his job, and he, his child-wife and Virginia's mother, Mrs. Clemm, landed back in New York when the financial panic of 1837 was at its height. These were days of poverty so intense that Poe lacked the money for a scuttleful of coal. Poor Virginia trained a cat to lie upon her breast, while her husband chaffed her feet to keep her warm. Fortunately for the family finances, one Professor Thomas Wyatt engaged Poe to edit a textbook, jaw-fracturingly entitled The Conchologist's First Book; or, A System of Testaceous Malacology. The work was plagiarized and even the illustrations were "lifted" from an English original. Poe wrote a wordy introduction and loaned his name to the book for a small fee. This raised a bad odor with Harper & Bros. when the circumstances of the book's preparation were learned.

Most of the family belongings were still in hock, and Poe had fallen into the opium habit. He worked furiously at letters and articles, attempted to set Mrs. Clemm up in boardinghouse-keeping, wrote Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. The book's sales were almost nil. The fear of insanity hung over Poe like a shadow. He struggled against his passions and weaknesses, wrote, revised, tore up what he had written, drove himself to the limits of endurance. From January 1841 until May 1842, he served as literary editor for Graham's Ladies and Gentlemen's Magazine, which became the most popular magazine in the nation, attaining the unheard-of circulation of 40,000. But precarious health, drink, ill-pay, and the revival of ambitions to publish his own magazine parted him from Graham's.

His poem, "The Raven", was published anonymously in the New York Evening Mirror of January 29, 1845. Poe received $10 for it, but it spread his fame throughout the English-speaking world. During the summer months, he boarded in New York at a farmhouse near 84th street and Broadway. He became a man about town, much esteemed by the literati of the day.

Virginia was dying of tuberculosis. At 24, she looked like a child, probably still was a virgin. She succumbed in January 1847, and her remains were buried in Fordham Village (later to be removed to Baltimore, beside those of her "Eddie").

To the already distracted and mentally tortured Poe, this event was a terrific blow. Suffering from lesion of the brain, he passed through temporary crises of delirious fever. Lapses into drink ruined his attempts to plan, and embarrassed his friends. He wrote for and edited a flock of eccentric and short-lived publications, pressed for

the hands of several assorted ladies, went to Providence to propose to a certain Mrs. Whitman, lost his nerve en route and landed in Boston, where he unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide by drinking laudanum. He wandered about, became a teetotaller for a time, and arranged to wed an old flame. He left Richmond for New York to bring Mrs. Clemm to the wedding, arrived in Baltimore five days before the elections. Political corruption was as common as hoop-skirts, and it is believed that gangs of vote-solicitors drugged him and made the rounds of the ballot-boxes with the semi-conscious poet. He was found in a tavern by an old friend, who took him to the hospital, where he died in mental agony on Sunday, October 7, 1849, screaming, "I wish to God somebody would blow my damned brains out!" At last a tortured brain had gone to rest.

III.

The Character of His Works.

"He has squared out blocks enough to build an enduring pyramid, but has left them lying carelessly and unclaimed in many different quarries." That was the way James Russell Lowell summed up Poe's writings. Even today, the vast task of checking all the documents and verifying all the legends about Poe is incomplete. Poe was the kind of writer who would publish and republish his works, trying to make each item better with every publication. Thus the task of determining the final, definitive version of many of his poems is a tremendous one.

Baudelaire's excellent translations of Poe's works have made "the tomahawk man" a strongly pervading influence in France. In a sense, Poe is the father of the symbolists and decadents of modern times. Yet his effect on established literary patterns has also been great. Like Bryant, he was opposed to long poems. He believed that a poet should compose only when in a state of highly excited emotion. In his twin essays, "The Poetic Principle" and "The Rationale of Verse", he states his doctrine that beauty is the language of the soul, thus beautiful poetry is the highest form of creative activity. The most poetic concept of all, he believed, is "the death of a beautiful woman."

He was a brilliant craftsman in his devotion to poetic form. Highly polished lyrics are characteristic of his poems, even when the subject matter makes the verses seem like hideous nursery rimes for a kindergarten of ghouls. Poe was a master of alliteration and internal rime, as revealed in this line from "The Raven":

"And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain...."

The same themes repeat themselves over and over in his poetry: man's loneliness, the futility of struggle, remorse for a wrecked life. "His poems bring no breath from the outer world," says critic E. Watts McVea. "Theirs is a land of dreams, of tempest, of fantastic terrors, of ashen skies, and through this land glide ghosts, birds of ill omen, and crawling shapes. His poetry is not stimulating and has no moral quality." Poe had no lessons to teach, no truths to present -- merely beauty for its own sake.

As in "The Bells", Poe depends on sheer technical skill to make his verse effective. Read silently, "The Bells" with its onomatopoeic "twanging and clanging", "moaning and groaning", and "tinkle, tinkle, tinkle in the icy air of night" seems well-nigh unreadable. Read aloud, the poem is captivating.

Above everything Poe wrote hangs the dread fascination of death, caskets, worms, moonlit graveyards, and all the other macabre trappings of neo-Gothic horror. The ultimate of terror is nearly attained in the description of "The Conqueror Worm":

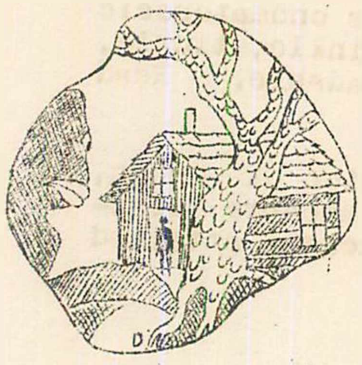
"A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes! -- it writhes! -- with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And angels sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued."

Poe's best tales are those in which he allows his poetic talents free rein. "The Fall of the House of Usher", in which every word heightens the effect of lurking fear, and "The Masque of the Red Death", in which terror is made to possess an eerie sort of beauty, are good examples of sheer poetry in prose form.

By any standards, "The Black Cat", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Cask of Amontillado", and "The Tell-Tale Heart" are highly entertaining yarns, and seem modern in treatment when compared with the obscure plots of Poe's contemporaries. "The Gold Bug" is a corking-good adventure narrative; and contains some interesting examples of cryptograms, on which Poe had done much work.

Much of the credit for the modern detective story has gone to Edgar Allan Poe's early contributions to this field in the form of narratives of crime-solving by detection. Although he wrote no whodunits in which the butler turns out to be the killer, his yarns "The Purloined Letter" and "Murders in the Rue Morgue" pointed the way for countless dozens of writers to follow. The theme of "The Purloined Letter", in which the letter is hidden in the most obvious place, and consequently overlooked, has been used over and over again by lesser writers -- and the cent-a-word pulp magazines. By the highly-developed standards of mystery writing today, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is not a wholly satisfactory story. The murderer should never be an ape, if the mystery writer wants to keep his readers happy.

Some of Poe's lesser known tales seem vastly underrated. "Shadow -- A Parable", for instance, measures every word and builds up a delicate picture of another world. In "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains", a gentleman wandering through the hills of the South gets a momentary glimpse of faroff India -- with surprising results. Personally, I am inclined to disagree with critics who have accused Poe to using nature merely as an ornament, or to fill in the background of his stories. In the exciting and colorful "Descent into the Maelstrom", Poe paints a verbal picture of natural terror as convincing as can be found almost anywhere in literature. The elemental fury of the sea is clearly reproduced in "A Manuscript Found in a Bottle." In certain other tales



and essays, including "The Island of the Fay", "The Sphinx", and "The Domain of Arnheim", nature figures again and again. But nature, to Poe, is always beautiful or terrifying --- never merely commonplace. The angry surge of black waves against the side of a ship, strange blue flowers blooming only in moonlight --- these things are hardly "natural" in the everyday sense of the word. They are examples of the forms of nature in their most powerful and dramatic manifestations.

It seems odd that Poe, the melancholy, gloom-ridden poet, who revelled in the trappings of death, should have imagined himself a superlative humorist. His attempts at humor are, at best, grotesque and pathetic. "The Angel of the Odd" is perhaps the classic example of humor which falls apart because it tries too hard. Humor, I believe, must be either subtle or realistic to be truly funny. Poe's feeble yarn, "Lionizing", for instance, is neither. It is merely a childishly exaggerated fable of a young man who crashed society circles because of his beautiful nose. "Corny" is a corny epithet in itself, but it surely applies to "Lionizing". Poe's humor does not attempt to tickle the reader's funnybone. It practically reaches out and slaps him in the face with a damp codfish. Surely broad humor and exaggeration have a place in literature -- the Paul Bunyan folk-yarns, for instance -- but in the case of Paul Bunyan, the exaggerations depict the character of the Northwest lumberjack in such a manner that even the tallest tales are convincing -- because they are basically about real people. This is hardly the case with Poe, who wrote about living mummies, bearded balloon-pilots, screwloose monarchs, and other characters which seem to have very little relation to real life. This holds over even into Poe's more serious narratives, for the men and women of his tales seem to have been constructed of cardboard, without warmth or character, and the world they inhabit is fundamentally without depth or reality.

Throughout his reviews and criticism -- and even in his attempts at humor -- Poe spreads a generous serving of foreign words and phrases, obscure idioms, and fragments of classic Greek. He pretends to be well-versed in the most profoundly obscure scholarship, larding his writings with italicized scraps of French and Latin -- at the expense of rendering himself incomprehensible to most of his readers. He also has a pronounced weakness for dialect writing, which happens to be a difficult art. Readers accustomed to conventional systems of spelling will have to ponder long and hard to decipher the Irish dialect in "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling":

> "Blood and thunder, Sir Pathrick, mavourneen," thinks I to mesilf, "fait it's just the mother's son of you, and nobody else at all at all, that's the handomest and fortunittest bog-throtter that ever com'd out of Connaught!" And wid that I giv'd the flipper a big squaze, and a big squaze it was, by the powers, that her leddyship giv'd to me back. But it

> would ha split the seven sides of you wid the laffin' to behould, just then all at once, the consated behavior of Mounseer Maiter-di-dauns. The likes o' sich a jabbering, and a smirking, and a parley-wouing as he begin'd wid her leddyship, niver was known before upon arth; and divil may burn me if it wasn't me own very two-peepers that cotch'd him tipping her the wink out of one eye....

That may have been funny in 1838, but it makes pretty tedious going today. Feeble as he may have been as a humorist, Poe had a reputation for being an idealist and a visionary which is hard to account for, considering his gloomy and dissipated nature, until one reads "Mellonta Tauta" and "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall", which glimpse a future world when navigation between the planets of the solar system via balloon will be a common, everyday occurrance. "Mellonta Tauta", in particular, contains some clever sections. The story purports to be a letter written on board the balloon "Skylark", April 1, 2848, as a party of future archeologists explore the ruins of New York City "once inhabited by a race of savages known as the Knickerbockers". Despite the flippant tone of the story, the reader gets the impression that Poe sincerely believed that a future civilization might be more pleasant to live in than the macabre world of his own imagination. The fantastic and imaginative romances of H. G. Wells may very likely have been inspired by a page or two from Poe's notebook. There is not a vast gap between Hans Pfaall's balloon trip to the moon and the exploits which Wells depicted in First Men in the Moon, and Jules Verne portrayed in From the Earth to the Moon and Round the Moon. It seems likely that later exponents of science fiction are at least partially indebted to Poe for lighting the way.

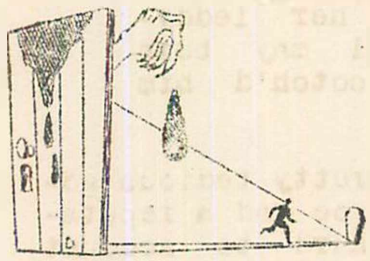
As a critic, Poe is noteworthy not because of the enduring nature of his comments, but for the fact that his own stringent reviews of contemporary writings of his day helped exact more strict literary standards at a time when literary values were lax and obscure. Poe's criticisms were frequently inclined to exaggerate minor technical blemishes and to underrate ethical and philosophical significance. Many of his opinions were strongly influenced by Coleridge, but his style was unmistakably his own.

IV.

Poe's Place in Literature.

This dreamer in the realms of the mystic and horrible, the late heir of romanticism, so deeply indebted to "The Ancient Mariner" and "Childe Harold" and the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann for his aura of the bizarre and weird -- how can his own contributions to literature be evaluated? Probably the best evaluation of Poe's stature in letters can be determined by his effect on those writers who were to follow him.

Hardly a poet of our century has not been directly or indirectly influenced by Poe's precision in versifying, his use of symbolism and imagination, his methods of constructing a poem so as to include words of color to please the eye, words of sound to appeal to the ear, even



descriptions of the feel of silks and tapestries and the smell of nocturnal flowers. His close observation of minute details was to have a far-reaching effect on the art of short-story writing. His preoccupation with the abnormal was not quite as unwholesome an influence as might be expected; even his grim portraits of Death itself certainly added a new tone to literature at a time when pink-sugar sweetness and light was the characteristic of "good writing", rather than the exception. His tales of mystery and detection helped open a new branch of writing. His criticisms did much to raise the literary tone of his own times -- and the times which were to follow. And finally, his stories of idealism and belief in future progress -- few though they were -- helped lift the art of storytelling away from the here-and-now, into the multiple possibilities of light fantasy and worlds of yet to come. He did not write of the growth and development of his native land -- this he left to writers better qualified by environment and temperament to do so -- yet he was nonetheless a pioneer in a field of literary expression he chose to make his own.

Lowell's famous remark about Poe, "Three-fifths of him is genius and two-fifths sheer fudge", is painfully close to the truth. Few writers have written so skillfully and capably as Poe, and few have written such a melange of sheer tripe. The fact that Poe was a literary pioneer does not make all his stories and poems worth reading today; indeed, many of them are doomed to be museum pieces pure and simple; and as Hervey Allen has so well put it, "only the cast-iron constitutions of professional scholars can solemnly digest their contents with the bowels of compassion."

Nor do his epoch-making strides in descriptive writing and colorful narration excuse the fact that, fundamentally, his preoccupation with death and decay are psychologically unhealthy. The man who prided himself on his "faultless logic", delighting in the neat perfections of mathematics, performing feats of problem-unravelling and cryptography, was himself a confused alcoholic and dope-addict, lacking the maturity to conduct other than the most fantastic and unnatural relations with women; whose letters and conversations have been considered paragons of logic, yet whose conduct of his personal life is a morass of muddy, shallow and confused thinking. Despite his preoccupation with the superfluities of bizarre and exaggerated humor, the man himself really had no healthy sense of humor at all.

"His originality, his literary craftsmanship, are unquestioned," says McVea, "but he lacked the will and the moral conviction which would have brought his great gifts to the highest fruition." "The qualities of his heroes," adds H. P. Lovecraft in Supernatural Horror in Literature, "appear to be derived from the psychology of Poe himself, who certainly possessed much of the depression, sensitiveness, mad aspiration, loneliness, and extravagent freakishness which he attributes to his haughty and solitary victims of fate." These critical comments seem to strike near the heart of the matter. Screaming with

mental terror, or the raven-like wings of impending insanity which forever stamped his life with fear, the tales and poems of Edgar Allan Poe shape up as grotesquely distorted fragments of thought, hovering upon the borderline of madness.

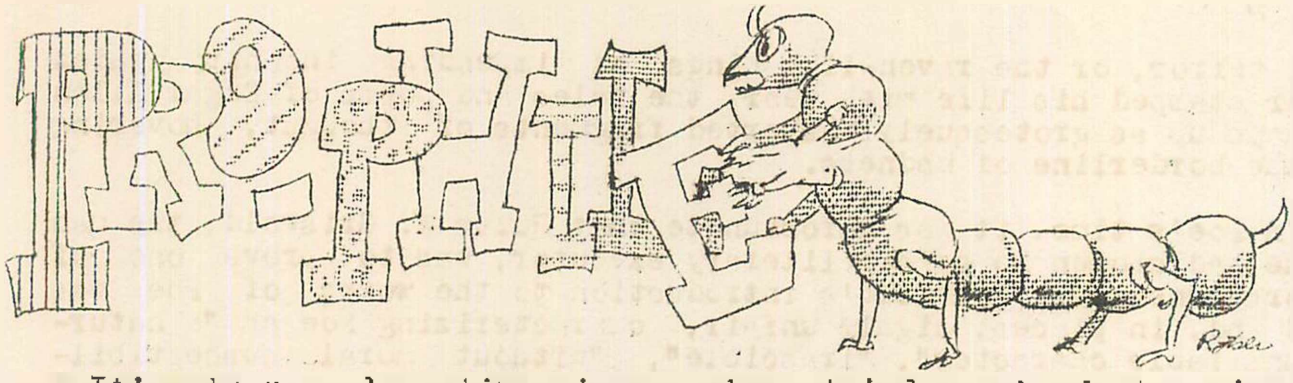
In Poe's time, it was unfortunate that Rufus W. Griswold, the man whom he had chosen to be his literary executor, was to prove one of his worst enemies. Griswold's introduction to the works of Poe was biased and, in places, highly unfair, characterizing Poe as "a naturally unamiable character", "irascible", "without moral susceptibility", "exhibiting scarcely any virtue in his life of his writings." It was also unfortunate that many of Poe's contemporaries were to judge the man and his works solely on the basis of his worst. Time has proven his originality and literary craftsmanship. His truly great productions, however, give a glimpse of the man's inner character -- which many of his friends considered gentle, affectionate, devoted, and obliging. It would be a serious blunder to characterize his great weird and adventure yarns as merely the output of a depraved mind, for the fact that his artistic accomplishments were great is not, I believe, because of the misfortunes into which he fell, but in spite of them. The fact that all of his works were influential does not render all of them readable, but the greatest of them -- his poems, his penetrating stories -- should last as long as the English language. The pseudo-Gothic and Oriental influences on his work, the stock devices of the horror-vendors -- apparitions, cataleptic attacks, and premature burials -- these were not the primary motivations of his work, but merely some of the outward manifestations. Poe's writings will live because they contain a terrifying record of a tortured human mind.

And yet Poe is very much unlike the protagonists of drugstore lending-library novels, in which the central character is always "lost in a world she never made." For Edgar Allan Poe was a prisoner. A prisoner in a fantastic never-never land he made himself.

WANTED!

"That Worlds May Live," by Nelson S. Bond
(in Amazing)
Gillings' Fantasy Review,

Don Wilson
Cal Hall
Redlands, California



It's been a long time since we have tried our hand at reviewing prozines, and we won't ever do a review like the ones we did for the old DQ. Those days have passed. There are too many magazines on the stands now to permit reviewing them all. There isn't enough space available in this magazine, nor is there enough time in a day to read them all -- even if one's stomach were able to stand it.

But since this magazine (sic) is intended more or less to bring back the spirit of the old Dream Quest for a time, we figured we might as well handle a few reviews in the olden manner.

The prozine field has burgeoned all out of proportion. It is but a short time today since there were eight prozines on the market -- all of them quarterly except Weird Tales and aSF. Those were the war years -- 1944 and 1945. Five years ago. The Shaver Mystery was just beginning its half-decade ruination of Amazing; aSF was in the middle of the reign of George O. Smith and a related raft of technical problem yarns; FFM was giving us the first of its long line of British novels of the world's end, lost races, and world's beginning. And Sergeant Saturn held sway over the letter columns in very much abbreviated editions of Thrilling Wonder and Startling Stories.

Oh, yes. There was Planet, too.

Today, these old standbys are still with us -- many of them, paradoxically, in reduced size. Amazing and aSF, then 178 pages, are both now cut to 162. FA has reduced to its lowest ebb in history -- 130pp. Planet too has undergone a cut in size.

But the field has boomed. We've seen Fantastic Novels revived as well as Super-Science, Future, and Marvel. We have seen the birth of the Avon Fantasy Reader, Fantasy Book, Out of This World Adventures, Fantastic Stories Quarterly, the Wonder Annual -- the lists may well be endless. A few of these events occurred early enough to be caught in the last few installments of "Pro-Phile" in the old DQ. Today there are something over twenty prozines on the stands (more than during the boom of 1940 and '41) and if publishers' plans materialize, there will be almost thirty by the end of 1950.

And what does this do to the field's quality? Science-fiction is a specialist's field. Those who don't know s-f can't do good work in it; even the good producers from so closely related a field as the weird have always failed of success when they tried their hands at science-fiction.

Why is this so? Probably because the developments in science-fiction during the last ten years (mostly thanks to s-f's fair-haired boy, John W. Campbell Jr.) have so woven together knowledge of science, a familiarity with standardized backgrounds used for development of future civilizations, a necessary lack of sentimentality, a respect for physics and chemistry, etc., etc.,that one pretty much has to follow the magazines to which he thinks to sell his stories from issue to issue for a couple of years before he can really tell what's demanded.

But the point is that a true science-fiction author is a rare bird indeed. There are barely enough to serve one or two good magazines. During the war aSF was hard-put to maintain quality in itself, while the other science-fiction pulps degenerated into a maze of sheer slop broken only by one or two Rog Phillipses and Noel Loomises.

And now we are looming toward thirty prozines.

You can drum up the consequences yourself without any prompting. Some of the magazines run reprints, which indirectly work against us by cutting sales on the legitimate magazines.

I hear via the grapevine that the wartime conditions beginning to prevail are going to cut the ground out from under many of the new prozines. This is good news. There's room in the field for about seven or eight good prozines, manned by editors who know full well what they're about. The rest should die right now, for the field's sake.

A further remark we would like to make is that the situation of one magazine's having a monopoly on the good science-fiction in the field -- a situation which has prevailed since 1940 -- should end. To date Ray Palmer* seems to be the only editor who has made a serious challenge on aSF's position. His success hasn't been notable. A few editors who've tried to drag up their standards have been handicapped by short-sighted front office policies, to be sure. Merwin is one of these. Other editors have made minor efforts in the right direction, but to this date aSF is so far above the others that there really isn't any comparison.

Part of the reason is, of course, the type of thing we have been led by habit to expect good science-fiction to embody. We have been used for so long to the Campbell variety of s-f being the only good available s-f that we just don't look for the other approaches to s-f to have anything good in them. This is one of the handicaps facing boys like Palmer.

But this naturally isn't the whole story. It is mostly sheer habit, ingrained into authors, editors and readers alike, that aSF prints the good stuff and that is simply all there is to it.

* This was written before the advent of H. L. Gold.

I think it will take a lot of time to get rid of this so-long-ingrained basic feeling.

Meantime, dianetics notwithstanding, aSF is likely to maintain the lead, and I would say from what I've observed of the field that other good reading is more likely to come from new innovators like Palmer and Spivak than from the established, revived, or newly-founded traditional "pulps." I think that intermittent reading of not more than five of the 25plus prozines will provide the most avid reader of science-fiction with all the stuff his little heart desires.

-- P R O Z I N E I S S U E S --

I apologize for not being able to include more prozines in this column, but lack of time and lack of real interest have here worked against me. I don't think any apology is necessary for leaving out the crud, but it is agreed that it would be well to give space to -- to name the good and/or representative ones that come to mind -- Startling, TWS, Super-Science, The Magazine of Fantasy and S-F, or the newly revived Marvel.

But there are probably other critics in the field well able to handle them all, anyway. Besides, this reviewer was always remembered for a certain predilection for Chicago publications, much to the disgust of many of DQ's readers in olden times, I fear.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, Vol. 12 #10, October 1950. 25¢.

I bought this issue for the novel in it, L. Ron Hubbard's "The Masters of Sleep" -- his sequel to "Slaves of Sleep," from the old days of Unknown. A breath of Unknown, says I, cannot be passed up.

But in this case, it wasn't a breath of Unknown. It breathed more like Oahspe or Doreal's Great White Brotherhood or any of ten thousand other cults to me, and I was thoroughly disgusted by the whole mess. It seems that our boy L. Ron is the originator of a new cult called "Dianetics." As, of course, everyone in the known world is aware of by this time. And it seems that our boy L Ron isn't able to forget about the fact that he is the new Messiah; and that he allows this belief of his to get into his writing. It seems that the only technique (according to this Hubbard) that ever is used by orthodox psychologists is the pre-frontal lobotomy, that they are all diehards who refuse to accept Mr. Hubbard's new panacea Dianetics, and furthermore they are all a bunch of bogey-men chasing saviours like Hubbard around armed with ice-picks and Freudian babblings.

With a story full of this kind of stuff, the obviously trumped-up adventures of Jan Palmer and his alter-ego, Tiger, fell pretty flat. Hamling asked Hubbard to write the story, I hear, and Hubbard really threw in everything but the wash-stand, sure of a chock.

Ah well, RGJones did a whale of a nice cover. Ziff-Davis covers are always pretty, even if they're a bit lurid.

IMAGINATION, Vol. I #1, October 1950. 35¢.

This is Ray Palmer's newest brain-child, and it should wipe away the last shreds of doubt in anyone's mind as to Rap's capability and good intentions.

There is a guest-editorial by Forrest J Ackerman and an editorial by Palmer which promise great things for Imagination's future; a magazine of dignity, tone, and high quality. Apparently the mag is to be a bit differently slanted than Other Worlds. All I hope is that Rap can induce enough cooperation from the authors to make his new baby pay off in quality as well as sales.

The stories are pretty well picked, though authors Geier and Graham have both surpassed their stories in here many times. Geier did "Environment"; anyone who can write like that should never, never stoop to hack. His "The Soul Stealers" in this first issue of Imagination is hack. "One for the Robot -- Two for the Same," by Phillips, isn't hack in the ordinary sense, but it's not an outstanding story.

The most intriguing item in the issue is Willard Hawkins' "Look to the Stars." It's a bit religious in theme and quite carelessly written, but its theme is quite powerful and interesting. A story of creation, its basic idea is that maybe old Earth herself is the guiding hand behind life.

Like O-W, Imagination uses aSF's size -- which, by and large, is far better than the old pulp format of most of the prozines. The cover of this first issue is by Bok; and the majority of interiors are done by Bill Terry, an artist discovered by Rap who's rapidly coming up to standard. But art is not an interest of mine.

This magazine is a fine step in the right direction, toward making the science-fiction field more literate, mature, and appealing.

Astounding SCIENCE FICTION. Vol. 46, #1, September 1950. 25¢.

This is the severalth issue of aSF which does not include a serial installment. Periodically the magazine has gone through these novel-less periods in its existence; but it's always bobbed right back with a serial after a time. We note with approval the imminence of a new novel in the Vishnu series by deCamp.

The two novelettes are Leiber's "The Lion and the Lamb" and Lawrence O'Donnell's "Paradise Street." Leiber's piece deals with the Confederation's quest for colonists who have flown the legal coop and set up a little civilization of their own based on anti-science. I didn't figure the angles in the story, and it did not carry me along. O'Donnell postulates a frontier world and the conflict existing thereon between frontiersmen and settlers. I expect that this story has appeared in slightly different guise many times in such magazines as South Sea Stories and Thrilling Western -- and since the end of all

ch conflicts is so obvious, I don't quite see the point of dragging up the old dog again. The Bible even ran this story, and it has become a cliche -- "The old order changeth."

Both of these novelettes illustrate Warner's complaint, voiced in his "The Missing Element" in this issue of DQ.

The three shorts read quite nicely. No one of them was memorable. For me, this issue's most intriguing items were both by L. Sprague de Camp -- an article on hoaxes, "Why Do They Do It?"; and a review of Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky's Worlds in Collision, which recently has shared best-seller lists with Hubbard's Dianetics. I suspectthat this is true because of the opposition to the book from high scientific circles, plus the fact that so reputable a publisher as Macmillan issued it rather than a more appropriate outfit like Venture Press. But I note this passage in deCamp's article on hoaxes -- one that is quite apropos in application to Hubbard, who too has climbed to best seller lists, it seems to me: "Or does he betray the stigmata of the pseudo-scientist and the magician by scorning 'orthodox science,' crying that he has been persecuted, or pretending to an exclusive or transcendental wisdom?" You may draw your own conclusions.

Miller (not the Miller who illustrates this magazine, let it be known) has done a fair enough cover. There are pictures inside.

Other Worlds Science Stories, Vol. II #3, October 1950. 35¢.

In an issue devoted solely to science-fiction, Palmer has assembled here a collection of rather relaxing reading which manages to be quite good-humored, all in all. "A. R. Stober's" "A Man Named Mars" is the cover-cropper -- a tale postulating that the earth is secretly governed from the moon, by various beings who in actuality were the old Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. Mars pulls for a war which will wipe out mankind and prevent him, therefore, from landing on the moon and discovering the lunarites' civilization; Aphrodite is in sympathy with the Terrans and manages successfully to bring peace at last to the earth. This theme has been used by many people, notably Doc Smith, to good advantage, and this particular use of it is quite expeditious, methinks. # "Earth Can Be Fair," by Hubert George Wells ostensibly, is in reality another of the clever short-shorts Palmer has been running. This one's obviously by our old friend FJA; his typical touches are apparent, as is his visage in Neil Austin's symbolic illustration for the sketch. Palmer's the only editor presenting these brief items currently, and I hope he continues them. # And there is a second trick item: "The Frowzly Florgels," by Fredric Brown, which is based on an illustration by Hannes Bok. It seems that the two had a bet, Bok betting that he could do a picture around which Brown could not write a story. "Florgels" is the result of the bet . . . and I'd say the boys' little joke came off right successfully, all things considered. # In the deCourcy's "Captain Ham," we meet Captain Hamling Fox III -- an egotistical liner-captain who's selected to pilot the first Venus rocket on a replica of its original run, selected for a celebra-

sion of the event's centennial. The cut of Fox illustrating the yarn is a perfect replica of the pic of William Lawrence Hamling which appeared on the ifc of one of the Ziff-Davis magazines several years ago; I bet the deC's and Rap together got great fun out of this bit of joshing. And I imagine we all recognize the counterpart of Captain Hamling Fox III all around us today. Good. # Rog Phillips' "Holes In My Head" is based on a rather improbable idea of dual personalities being brought out by drugging one part of the brain; and the development is inadequate to give this weak idea force. Has the master lost his touch? A thing I note with a certain amount of apprehension is that neither Other Worlds nor the "new" Amazing present any novels -- outside of the "trilogy," "Colossus," which Other Worlds ran awhile ago. I mentioned above that this issue of OWSS was "relaxing," or some such. Well, unless we start getting longer stories the mag is apt to remain just relaxing -- nothing more. How about some novels, Ray? How about another "So Shall Ye Reap," Mr. Graham? # Hodge Winsell's "The Starting Over" is inconsequential crud. Skip it. # John Wiley's "Venus Trouble" has a Venus technician operating a steam turbine for a year without using any fuel and puts a trouble shooter onto the trail of how he does it. I was reminded of some of the George O. Smith tales in aSF a few years ago. I'm not a technician . . . I am left stranded.

Amazing Stories. Vol. 24 #11, November 1950. 25¢.

Well, whaddaya know. I plumb forgot to mention one of the best stories in that Other Worlds -- David Gordon's "By the Rules." This is a tale of a galactic, stranded on Earth and prohibited from revealing his identity by the galactic government's prohibition on meeting planetary cultures until they're ready for it. (What a sentence.) For some reason the story struck me as something Asimov might have written. # But on to Amazing: Some of you may remember letter hack Milt Lesser of Planet's letter columns. He's hit the highest paying science-fiction market in the country, with his novelette, "All Heroes Are Hated." The theme of this thing is that due to an unfortunate space-incident years previous, all Terran-born spacemen were grounded to Earth and Earth had been cut off from galactic commerce. This was the reason "all heroes were hated." Did the story ring the bell? No. # The fact is that only one story in this issue does ring the bell -- a 3,300 worder (I approve of the Ziff-Davis policy of publishing the length of stories) by our very own Leslie A. Croutch, "The Day the Bomb Fell." Croutch recounts an interlude in the life of a six-year-old boy who was virtually the only survivor of an atom-bombing attack. It seems that writing talent turns up in the strangest places! By way of marginalia, it may be interesting to note that Croutch's Canadian background is evidenced by his inclusion of opening prayers in the boy's day at school. They do that up there. # Mack Reynolds (insofar as I know not the same Mack Reynolds who's a professor of salesmanship at the University of Redlands and recently-defeated candidate for Congress from California's 22nd district) is the author of an insult to Amazing's readership called "One of Our Planets Is Missing!" It is based on an incredibly sickening Fortean theme. # Only other item of

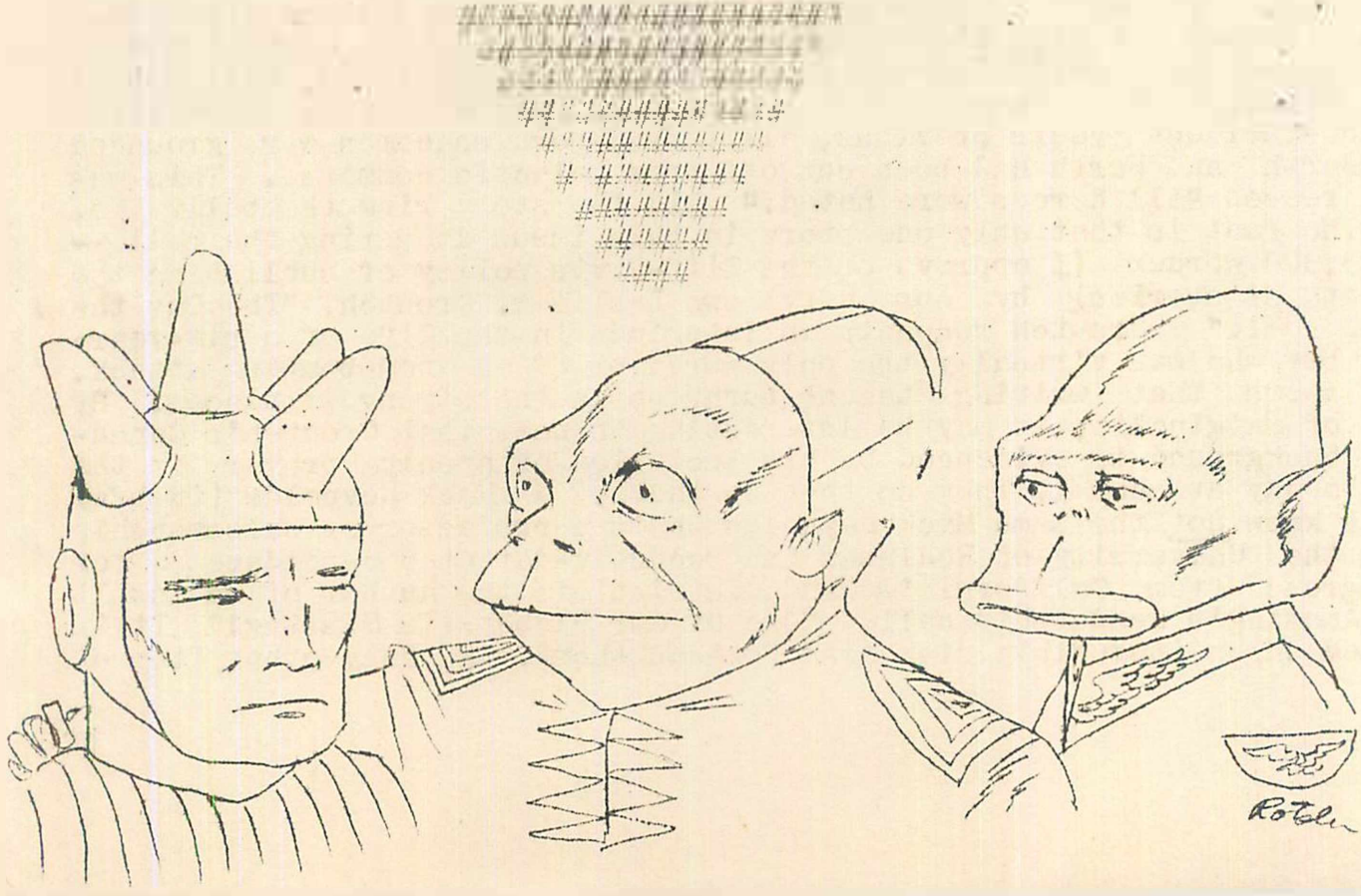
interest in the issue is the listing of a story called "The Devil in a Box" (casual presentation of Voodooism as completely authentic, and as if it were as common as Christianity) as by Alexander Blade on the contents page and as by Gerald Vance (once a pen-name of David Wright O'Brien) inside. Let's face it. Detective story author Browne, unlike fellow detective-author Sam Merwin, is not a connoisseur of s-f. Furthermore, Amazing is today as lousy as it was in 1946 and 1949; lousier than the earlier Palmer days, which gave us such interesting material as "That Worlds May Live," "Empire of Jegga," and the like; and it doesn't even have the former saving-point of presenting a couple of good novels annually. # Ah well. The cover was pretty.

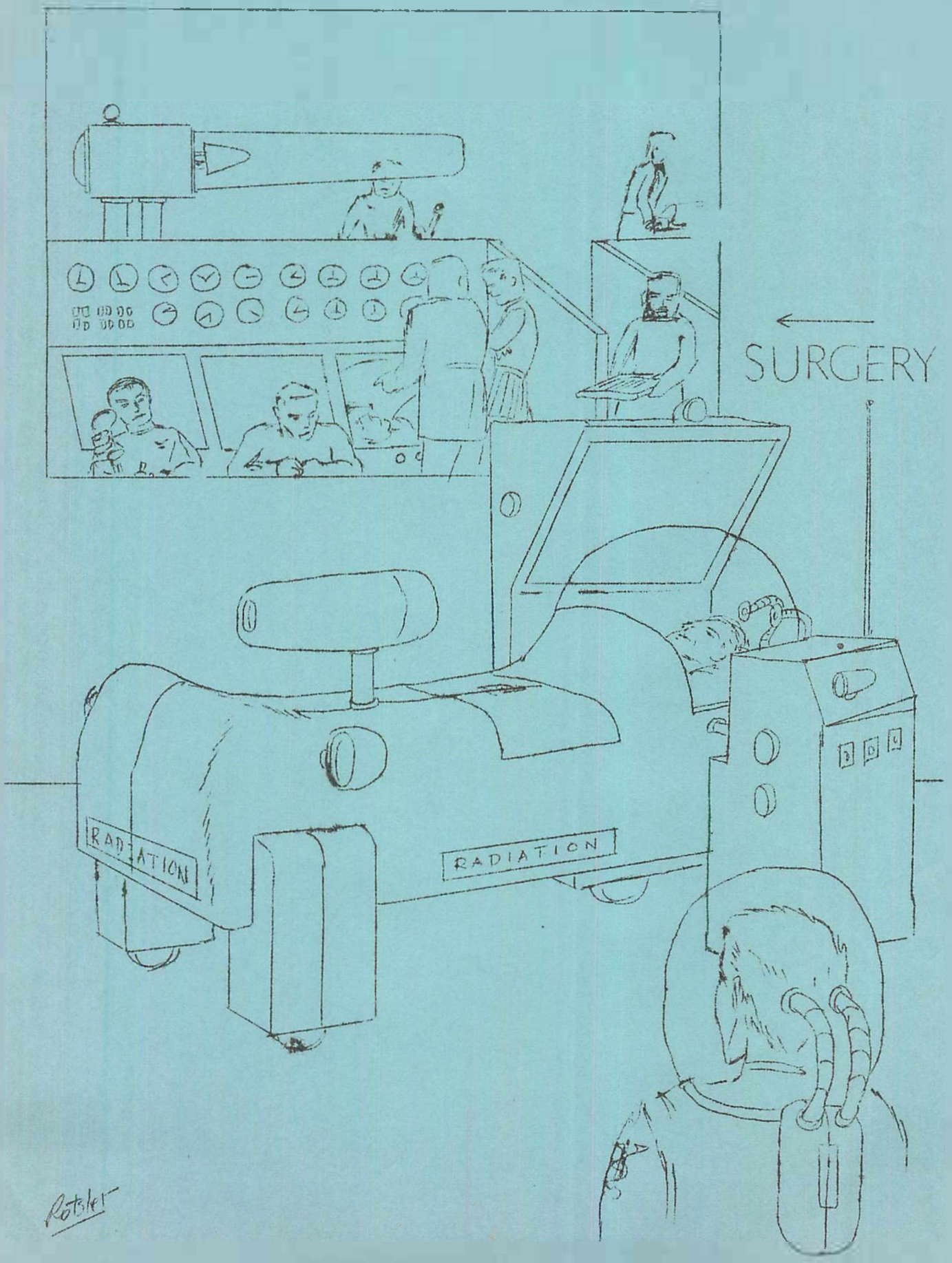
Galaxy Science Fiction. Vol. I, #1, October 1950. 25¢.

Though we haven't read this first issue yet, and won't until all three parts of Clifford Simak's "Time Quarry," the opening serial, are on hand, we predict that here, at long last, is a second good, fine, top-rate science fiction prozine. A new pace-setter; a rival to make Campbell sit up and open his eyes. Bravo. # Lack of space prevents us from doing further reviews. We'd rather like to mention the newest issue of Boucher's baby, which carries a Bonestell cover; or #2 of Imagination and Galaxy . . . but this issue has to hit the mails before the summer of 1951. By and large the prozine situation looks mighty good. Unless the rumor that Ray Palmer has died is true, we think that the digest-sized magazines, at least, present an almost uniformly happy picture at this date.

Good reading.

--Gilbert Swenson




SURGERY
RADIATION
RADIATION
Rotsler

THE GAS JET (continued from page 3)
they justified?"

In the light of the fact that this is a science-fiction fanzine, I'd like to add by way of connection with our so-called hobby-field an echo of Arthur H. Rapp's question, What would have happened if Dianetics had appeared in Amazing instead of aSF?

Yea, verily, the Fans' Bible . . .

Our thanks go to Redd Boggs for ready-cut stencils, ready sheets and other aid; to Joe Kennedy, for siccing us onto his long-lost article; to Howard E. Miller of the USN, and William Rotsler of Camarillo, for cheerful donation of their artistic talents; and to the Insurgent Element, for almost having a good excuse for refusing to write for us.

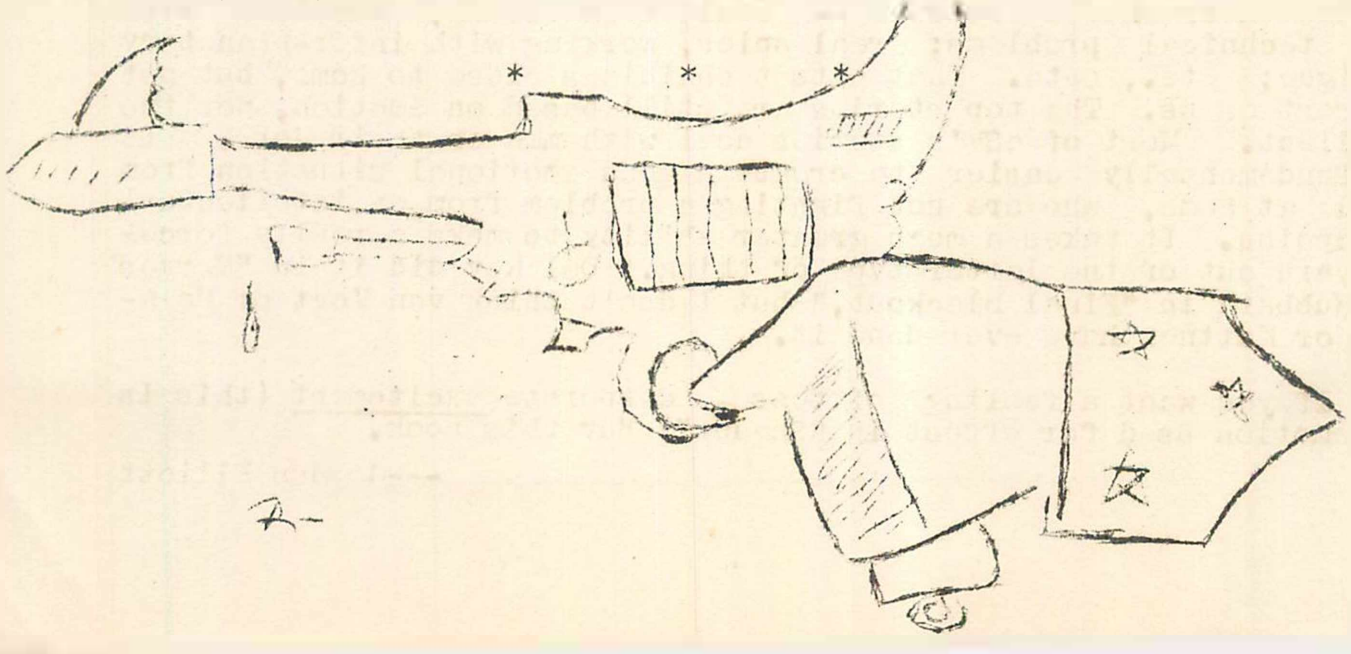
We hope that you enjoy this issue of Dream Quest, and maybe if you stick around a few more years there'll be yet another issue. In the meantime, keep the world safe for science-fiction and keep it armed against the frenetic acceptance of crackpot hypotheses.

--Don Wilson

-oOoOoOo-

THE MISSING ELEMENT (continued from page 5)
a morbid gloom and real tragedy -- that's why you remember the hotdog stand proprietor whose hopes for a busy season are dashed by the ruin of Earth, or the kids going on the picnic that will last for a million years.

But you won't find this relieving element in the complex junk of A. E. van Vogt, nor in the purple pages of H. P. Lovecraft; similarly, you won't find anything solid in the occasional attempts at "humorous science fiction stories" that used to appear in the Gernsback magazines. The element is no good in its pure form, but when it comes as an alloy -- you usually have memorable fiction.



- BOOK REVIEW -

Shadow on the Hearth, by Judith Merril
Doubleday, 1950; 277pp; $3.00

It would be borrowing adjectives to call this novel "one of the greatest and grimmest novels of science-fiction" (someone said that of "Final Blackout"), but I am tempted, anyhow. The jacket says, "A tense, prophetic novel of one woman's world -- after the bomb falls!" And it is just that. The woman is Gladys Mitchell, mother of two girls, aged two and fifteen. She lived in a suburb of NYC and the day the bomb fell in that city (one of many that hit over the countryside), her husband was in the city.

They waited for him to come home. They waited with an old Slavic servant-woman, accused by the secret police of being an enemy agent. There was an idealistic math-teacher too, who had taken to teaching math because he was too liberal in beliefs to be countenanced as an atomic scientist. We see what side of the fence Miss Merril is on. Come to think of it, we wouldn't expect the wife of Frederik Pohl to be on the opposite side!

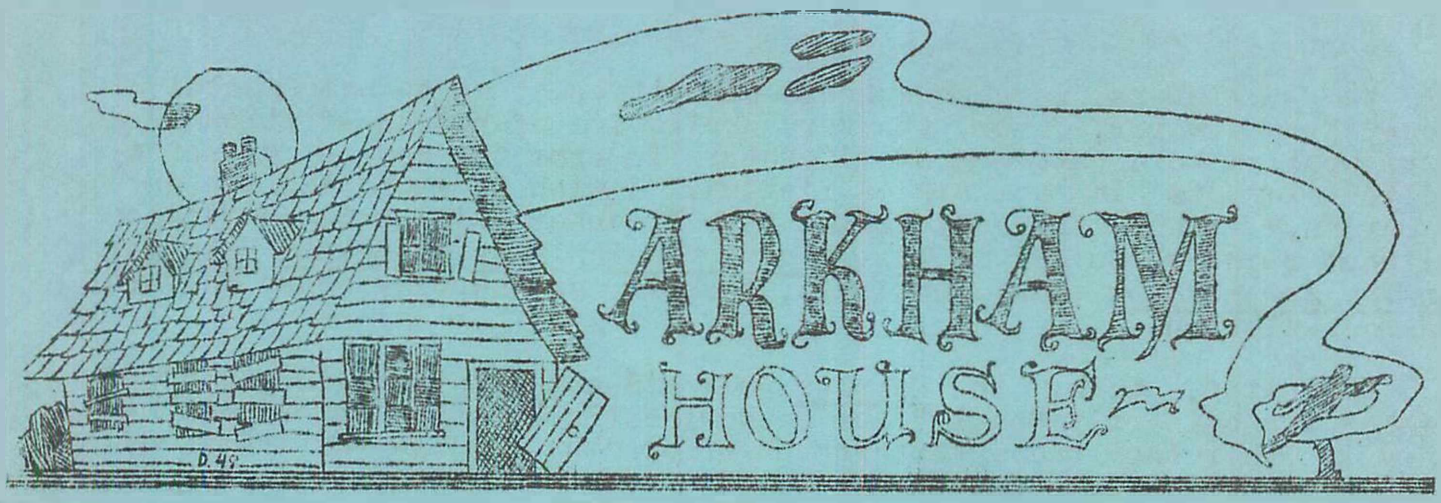
But the greatness of Shadow on the Hearth lies in its portrayal of actual humanity -- emotional, near-hysterical woman; stodgy Slav; enthusiastic adolescent who grows up overnight when confronted by the emergency; the little girl, who doesn't know what it is all about; all of them as real as your best friend, more real than any casual acquaintance. There are other characters too. They are few, which is good, and they are all, every one of them, as real as the central one.

We had a glimpse of Judith Merril's ability in "That Only a Mother," a short which she wrote for aSF awhile back. Here is a fuller demonstration of that ability. It is an ability which would be a godsend to the science-fiction field -- the ability to write stories around people who are real to most of us.

Admitted, most of aSF's top authors have always had the ability to make their characters real -- real technicians, tussling with real technical problems; real spies, working with inter-planetary intrigue; etc., etc. That hits technicians close to home, but not the rest of us. The top stories are still based on emotion, not the intellect. Most of aSF's stories deal with men on their jobs. It is fundamentally easier to create a good emotional situation from people at home, who are not fighting a problem from an intellectual standpoint. It takes a much greater ability to make a really forceful yarn out of the latter type of thing. Del Rey did it in "Nerves" and Hubbard in "Final Blackout," but I don't think van Vogt or Heinlein or Kuttner have ever done it.

If you want a feeling of tense, desperate excitement (this is the emotion used for effect in "Shadow") Buy this book.

---Gordon Elliott



BEST -- NOT BASIC
by Philip Gray

((Editor's Note: We were faced with a dilemma here, namely whether to use Bob Dougherty's excellent heading (on hand since 1948, done for Phil's old column, which he couldn't write this time) or not. Solution: Since it's a good piece of artwork, we're using it. Strictly speaking this article isn't about Arkham House, but we are not going to quibble this time over split editorial hairs. --DW))

SHOULD THE nucleus of a science-fiction library be an arbitrary number of "basic" titles in books, or an equal number of the best books available?

An answer to this question would depend on whether the collector wished a comprehensive library for the sake of having such, or whether he wished to engender a library from his own high standards for his own pleasure.

The completist is not discerning, the true collector is; it therefore follows that the latter would rather proceed from the "best" nucleus than from the "basic."

But the two categories, both collectors and libraries, often infringe. Somewhat less than two years ago August Derleth, in The Arkham Sampler, conducted a poll dedicated to the purpose of establishing a "basic" science-fiction list, the list of books to serve as a catalog of the basic twenty titles which a neo-collector ought to obtain first. The result showed much evidence of confusion concerning the demarcation of "basic" and "best"; either the twelve authorities interviewed disregarded the purpose laid down, or that purpose was not stated concisely. No doubt the unsatisfactory resultant could be attributed to both. In any event, I cannot believe that a beginning collector would find himself pleased if he started his library from the Sampler's collective concensus. In their individual lists, some

of the pollsters were so conceitedly different as to name technical non-fiction works, when the very derivative of science-fiction as a term applied to a category of literature is from the concept of scientific elements in a work of fiction. I wish to emphasize the word "fiction." When the day comes that I cannot enjoy science-fiction without recourse to either The Theory of Relativity or Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, then, gentlemen, I shall most happily cease to read science-fiction.

In brief, then, the Sampler poll did not obtain a list that was either predominantly "basic" or predominantly "best." No purpose was served other than the entertainment offered by reading the individual pollsters' selections and analyses.

I am not concerned with a "basic" list; the question of making one involves itself in a mass of statistics. In other words, a "basic" list would probably be a list of the most popular books -- a thing that is far and away from being a list of the best ones. But I am concerned, and sincerely, with the "best" books. For self-gratification, and in lieu of a result which no poll such as the Sampler's could hope to accomplish, I shall directly set out my list of twenty "best" science-fiction books.

It will be understood by the reader that I can select these titles only from books that I have read; no honest critic ever reviews a book on hearsay. Perhaps my qualification in this respect is lacking; I would readily grant it so. This is true even though, out of a hundred and a quarter different titles (exclusive of non-fiction!) that were mentioned in the twelve individual Sampler essays, there are less than thirty which I have not read. In excuse, if excuse is warranted, the majority of these unread titles are Utopias; many Jules Verne, E. E. Smith, and other juvenilia; some Stapledon; a play; and a book of verse. These unread items to not bother me nearly as much as some new books which, from other critics or samplings, I think might replace a few selections from my current list. Several such new issuances are Stewart's Earth Abides, Gottlieb's Key to the Great Gate, and various reprints of magazine stories.

In arriving at a definition of what science-fiction as a term embodies, I have found that elimination is an advantage. Thus, a man of today who journeys backward in time to a past civilization can influence the trend of those times only in the application of present-day knowledge. Hence such is not science-fiction. Space-travel is indisputably science-fiction when it is not a farce; this fact abnegates many alleged science-fiction books from that realm into one of absurdity. Stories with their bases on psychological or sociological problems, with the emphasis on these sciences, are to me either Utopias or ordinary stories.

That has to do with what science-fiction is. As to what is the best science-fiction, I must depend on my critical abilities and standards of literacy, which is a pointing out of fact rather than an

egotistical statement. My conception of science-fiction precludes, for instance, Sturgeon's Without Sorcery for an over-surfeit of a title misnomer, too much sorcery; by the same token deCamp's Lest Darkness Fall would be precluded for the time-travel-backwards case, if it were not already out of the running for ineffective writing ability. Likewise, Sturgeon's book would also not be considered because it lacks what is likely his most legitimate claim to a lasting fame in his chosen field: the novelette "Killdozer." Jenkins' Murder of the U.S.A. was precluded for insipid characterization; a not unnatural occurence, since straw characters were always this writer's main fault. Shiel's The Purple Cloud is heavy with mysticism, though it is excluded more for a general lack of a science element; otherwise it would be one of the chosen twenty. Stapledon is eliminated for various reasons, but mostly because I detest his perverted sexualisms and sadisms, and view his pessimistic bewilderment and confused hopelessness with the greatest of contempt. If Stapledon is a thinker -- a postulation I would not reject -- then whatever depth he might have to his thinking is obscured by a weakling's will, and after reading much of Stapledon I find his failure to himself more disgusting than pitiful.

If the critical do not find in my list many books which have claim there, please remember that, in my opinion, the ones selected are sometimes slightly better; if some are not, then that is a product of my own bias, which is something all critics have.

Also, this list is prepared as much as a guide for the neo-collector/reader, as it is for an expressing of opinions for the already informed.

The List

Adventures in Time and Space, edited by Healy and McComas: Of the dozen and more science-fiction anthologies extan this is the best in both quantity and quality; while half-hearted anthologies continue to be compiled from lesser and often blatantly trashy material, this book continues to be the first I would recommend to a beginning reader and/or collector. That is not to intimate that other good anthologies do not exist; they do, several of them. But in preponderance of excellent stories this one is surely the best.

The Adventure of Wyndham Smith, by S. Fowler Wright: Wright has the Britisher's frequent style of heavy writing, but with Wright the English language comes alive. His rhetoric straightens out into varicolored and penetrating impressions and a dry humor becomes apparent to the reader who takes the time to gain an acquaintance with the author's deeply-alive choice of words and phrases. With the deaths of H. G. Wells and George Orwell, S. Fowler Wright is today one of England's few literary greats in the field of science-fiction, perhaps even the greatest. Some readers are overly shy of Wright, while others speak of a disdainful dislike; in this respect I consider them unfortunate, to say the least.

Away and Beyond, by A. E. van Vogt: Even the casual reader must be aware of the controversial figure that is van Vogt; but when the flurry of pros and cons fade, this much will still be manifest. Van Vogt is a unique figure in the science-fiction world; he has compounded knowledge, vivid imagination, writing ability, and a tricky style little short of the artistic into some of the finest stories in the genre. Many of them are in this collection, along with some that ought better to have been disregarded; but the collection remains what it is -- the only collection of a master's work.

Doppelgangers, by H. F. Heard: A novel stressing the application of psychology to science, rather than unlimited action. An odd story and difficult to follow at times, but a story so mature in writing and concept that one wonders why none of the Sampler pollsters mentioned it.

Final Blackout, by L. Ron Hubbard: A grim and highly interesting "if" story, satisfying in the oblique characterization of the hero. I have no adverse comments for the story; it seems that every once in a great while someone chances to write a story that pleases everyone. This is such. That it is the only fine story that the author ever wrote, among a great number of pot-boilers and a great amount of hack, is nothing less than a pity.

Martian Chronicles, by Ray Bradbury: An interlinked collection of hates, madnesses, phobias, illusions, and much else that is rotten about man, all set against interplanetary exploration and exploitation of Mars. That Bradbury has a talent for writing that fringes on the genius goes without saying. That his own neurotic tendencies should be allowed expression and compensation so much in his stories is unfortunate. His constant petty harping on man's pettiness becomes wearisome, even if it is in some of the most brilliant writings that science-fiction can lay claim to.

A Martian Odyssey, by Stanley G. Weinbaum: Weinbaum's position in science-fiction has not yet been adequately evaluated; people seem afraid to give him his just due -- that he was a good and developing writer; that he gave evidence of that rare phenomenon, deep thinking; that the title story of this collection is one of the finest that science-fiction has produced; that his novel The New Adam gave rise to a new facet of the Superman theory that has since lain in limbo along with the book, which itself would have required but a revision to claim the term "great"; and that Weinbaum's lesser stories are very readable. The question of Weinbaum is not settled yet; it will not be until he is seen in the light of his relationship with and to science-fiction.

The Metal Monster, by A. Merritt: I regret that only this novel and The Moon Pool, of Merritt's novels, can be called science-fiction, for I consider both of them inferior to the other six. Perhaps this is because these two do not have the characterization that Merritt could apply to his human figures; but of the unhumans, the choice here

is surely the most of that. To some extent, the well-explored concept atones for the deterrent of excessive verbosity in description. The latter strikes me as Merritt attempting to out-do Merritt, with noticeably poor results. But Merritt was a master and this is a master's book.

Nineteen Eighty-Four, by George Orwell: Orwell bulked large as one of the genuine great writers and thinkers this half-century has produced and matured. That his concept of "double-think," as he applied it to politics, can likewise be applied to religion and any other of man's abstract thinkings, is a point to be well considered. The book, as a prophecy of what could be, is almost cruel in its revelation; but it is kind for the warning that Orwell left his fellow-men.

Nordenholt's Million, by J. J. Connington: Well-delineated characters in a world-threatened situation. A trifle dull in the slow spots, and commendably well-handled at the high points. Whatever the author might miss by way of action, he compensates for in good writing and characterization. I recommend the original British edition since I don't know how much was abridged in the recent magazine version, though I am told that it was considerable.

Out of the Silent Planet, by C. S. Lewis: A note of warmness for alien life -- repudiating the fallacy that aliens must war simply because they are aliens -- places this book in a class by itself. Men go to Mars, good and bad, and find a thoughtful and diversified Martian civilization. The best of its kind.

Star of the Unborn, by Franz Werfel: Probably not one science-fiction reader in twenty likes this book, and that is giving the readers the best edge of a guess. But Werfel employed about every gimmick known among science-fiction gimmickers, and employed them to better advantage than most. The average reader certainly won't like it -- but since when has the average reader been a judge of quality?

The Throne of Saturn, by S. Fowler Wright: A collection of bitter irony, fine narration, excellent developing of plots. Where another author hates man, Wright fears the machine -- a fear that is apparent in every Wright story where machines are involved or can be involved. Yet, that is a fear that the machine will ultimately influence man to the latter's downfall. I think this one of the three best science-fiction collections in print.

The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells: Perversely, I'll nominate one of Wells' books instead of an omnibus volume. This is it, all but six hundred words that haven't been printed in any of the editions since the first.

The Time Stream, by John Taine: I happen to prefer this one to Taine's other novels, some of which fall sadly low in comparison. This one had good characterization, not the norm with Taine, and an interesting atmosphere. Quite well plotted and singularly entertaining.

To Walk the Night, by William Sloane: An alien from another star, slowly revealed to a climax of terror. A book of the first importance.

When Worlds Collide, by Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie: Constantly in print and a steady seller for nearly twenty years. And for most of that time, about as accurate a description of space-flight as has been drawn. Keynotes are stark realism, character delineation, and convincing ction. It was omitted from the Sampler-compiled list when Derleth miscounted the votes for it. The sequel, After Worlds Collide, is of a lesser calibre and dispensable to enjoyment of the former; but it is well worth reading for its own sake.

Who Goes There? by John W. Campbell, Jr.: Frankly opinionizing again, I think this to be easily another of the top three science-fiction collections in print. Unbeatable for atmosphere and mood, very good in plotting and writing style.

The World Below, by S. Fowler Wright: Almost a satire on both present man and future Earth-inhabitants, the former for his foibles, the latter for their fallacies. The odd life-forms in a world far in the future are as sharp and entertaining as Hodgson's were. The story is such a one as Wright could be expected to have written.

The World of A, by A. E. van Vogt: More grown-up than Slan and with more to say. An original approach to the Superman idea, integrated strongly into a quickly moving plot. While the book is a good target for controversy, I notice that the critics have to talk pretty high-brow when they find fault with it -- and I have heard no arguments yet from the cons that outweigh the pros.

- THE END -

"Die Fledermaus, inflate the mouse..."

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and to their great magazine,

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