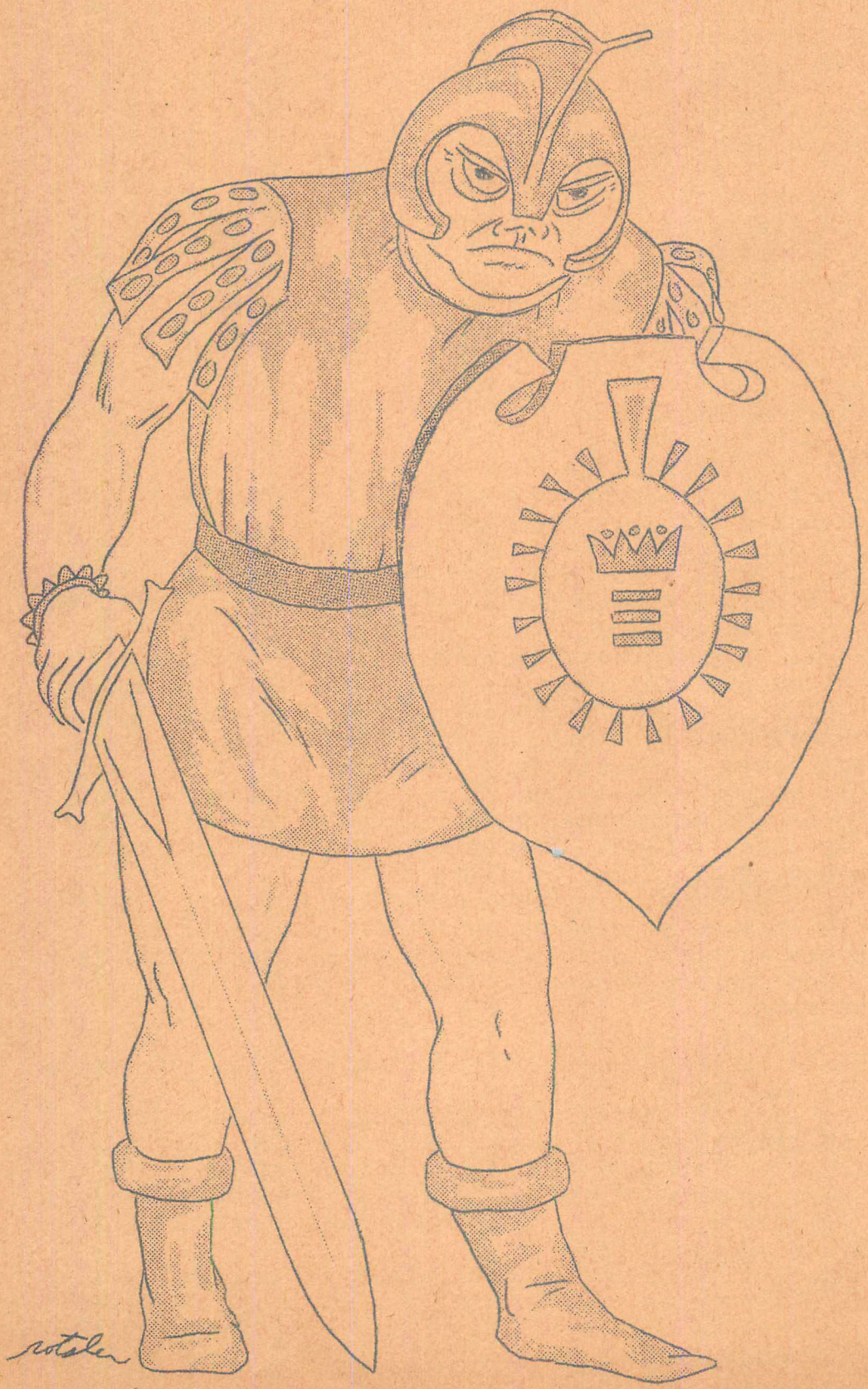
HOBGOBLIN

twelve



READ ANY GOOD ROWRBAZZLES ?

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Ace F-213, 126 pages, 40¢.
THE PEOPLE THAT TIME FORGOT by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Ace F-220, 124 pages, 40¢.

The first two books of a trilogy which was published in hard covers as one volume under the title of the first book. Ace, though, prefers to go back to the original Blue Book tripartite publication -- more books to sell that way. (I borrowed a copy of the original magazine publication, by the way, and was fascinated to note that the artist who illustrated the first story hadn't the faintest idea of what a Tyrannosaurus Rex looked like. His monster was very clearly a kangaroo!)

Burroughs was a pretty bad writer, and he couldn't plot worth a hill of beans either -- he'd throw his characters into impossible situations and have them solve everything halfway through a book, then go off on a new tangest thereafter. This didn't exactly make for classic unity of plot. His characterization was often ludicrous.

In fact, he was so bad that he makes delightful reading, and in fact I've told the plot of several chapters of the first book to friends with much amusement, provoking as many laughs as if I'd told a series of elephant jokes or something. ("I am an I.W.W. I became a German agent--not because I love them, for I hate them too--but because I wanted to injure Americans, whom I hated more. ...I am sorry--sorry that my plans failed. I hate you." One of the great dying-villain speeches of all time, by God!)

All this isn't to say that Burroughs was totally inept. On the contrary: he was an extremely good action writer, and he always kept things lively and interesting. These are real wish-fulfillment fantasies, and as such they're wonderful stuff. I must read the third of the series soon.

...AND SOME WERE HUMAN by Lester del Rey. Ballantine 552, 160 pages, 35¢.

I found this collection pretty disappointing. I hadn't previously read much of del Rey's early work, but I'd heard a lot about it, particularly about his ability to bring emotion into science fiction. But the stories here strike me as simply sentimental, not emotional in the legitimate sense...and that comment specifically includes the celebrated Helen O'Loy.

The Luck of Ignatz interested me particularly -- not because it's terribly good, but because it's amazingly similar in style and conception to the stories of Stanley G. Weinbaum. The characterizations are on the same superficial, slick level, the plotting is just as neat and formula-ridden, and Ignatz himself is a rather typical Weinbaum alien...only not as good.

THE EDGE OF TOMORROW by Howard Fast. Bantam A2254, 120 pages, 35¢.

Seven short stories, six of them from F&SF and one from Fantastic Universe. Fast writes well, and his social consciousness is beyond reproach, I suppose -- but he doesn't seem to be very familiar with the body of science fiction writing which has preceded him, and as a result every one of these stories seems pallid and old-hat. They're all about how destructive human beings are and how world peace must be established before we blow ourselves up -- hardly new ideas in s-f. Other indications of Fast's unfamiliarity with the field lie in the fact that his aliens all seem to be from Mars, and most of the stories are told in the form of official reports or letters to a friend or some such, apparently in an effort to make them more believable. Phooey.

The most interesting story here is The First Men, which at least has some interesting scientific theorizing in it.

LINE TO TOMORROW by Lewis Padgett. Bantam 1251, 184 pages, 25¢.

A collection of mostly lighthearted fantasies and science-fantasies. They're usually rather ingenious, too, with the single exception of The Twonky, which I found quite disappointing: setting up a problem and then having your hero completely overcome by it is fine if you're writing a satire like Clive Jackson's The Swordsman of Varnis or William Tenn's The Flat-Eyed Monster, but the ending of The Twonky is very disappointing, I think.

The best stories here are Private Eye and When the Bough Breaks -- the former despite the fact that the "scientific" explanation for the Eye is absolutely preposterous.

GENERAL FICTION

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE by Jane Austen. Signet Classics CD82, 332 pages, 50¢.
SENSE AND SENSIBILITY by Jane Austen. Signet Classics CD59, 314 pages, 50¢.

I approached these about half-convinced that no matter how good they might be I'd find them enjoyable primarily only as period-pieces, and I can't recall the last time I was so delighted to be wrong.

They're immensely enjoyable novels, charming, witty, droll, and completely absorbing. Jane Austen had a marvellous sense of plot and drama -- or perhaps of melodrama, because there's a continual more-heartrending-than-life quality about the stories. But she handles everything with a gentle, warm wit that's still thoroughly devastating when she wants it to be. Her characters are wonderfully vain, foolish, selfish, thoughtless, or pompous -- in short, except for her heroines they're almost all boors of one sort or another. But they're the most entertaining set of boors I've ever run into.

Of the two books, I prefer PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, because that book's Elizabeth is a much better character than Elinor in SENSE AND SENSIBILITY: she has more wit and charm. (Actually, since the latter book was written first, I take Elinor as a sort of eoElizabeth: aside from this one difference the two heroines are almost identical in character. And the younger sisters, Jane and Marianne, are again remarkably similar. I imagine the relation-

ship between each set of sisters corresponds closely to Jane Austen's own relationship with her younger sister Cassandra, since the two of them are said to have been very close.)

I have all of the other Jane Austen novels, as well as a collection of her letters, and I'm looking forward with relish to reading them.

ONE HUNDRED DOLLAR MISUNDERSTANDING by Robert Gover. Ballantine U7000, 213 pages, 95¢.

A book which pits two diametrically-opposed types of naivete against each other, the purpose being riotous humor. I found it less than riotous, but it's fairly amusing nonetheless, and shows a new talent well worth watching.

It's set up in alternate chapters narrated by Jimmy, the most incredibly obtuse white Anglo-Saxon Protestant patriotic pseudo-sophisticate in all literature, and Kitty, a young Negro prostitute whose earthy, no-bullshit view of the underside (as it were) of life acts as a wonderful foil for him. Jimmy is too stupid to realize that when a prostitute agrees to spend a weekend with him she's going to expect payment (he's convinced that he's impressed her with his manliness in bed during their first encounter at the whorehouse, and by his story that he's a burglar, an "underworld character," on the lam from the law), and she doesn't realize that he could have any other than a monetary basis in mind for their shackup. Kitty's naivete lies essentially in the fact that, though she realizes he's stupid, she just has no idea of how stupid a white college boy can be.

There's a lot of dead-center commentary on The Sick Society Of Our Times resulting from all this, and I found Kitty absolutely delightful throughout. Jimmy, though, is just too stupid to be either believable or funny, as far as I'm concerned. He simply irritates me.

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST by Ken Kesey. Viking, 1962, 311 pages, $4.95.

A very well-reviewed first novel, but a bit overrated, I think. Kesey's theme, regimentation in society and the impotence and alienation of the individual, is a good one, and he has a fresh and fascinating method of presenting it: McMurphy, a brawling heller of a con-man, is transferred from prison to a mental institution, and he sets out on a campaign to disrupt the neat little pattern of life in the institution over which the Big Nurse reigns supreme, and by doing so to give the apathetic and ineffectual inmates back a sense of self and worth. The parallels on a society-wide basis are obvious and important, and I only wish the book were a total success.

But there are faults. For one thing, Kesey has as his narrator a patient who begins the book as an apparently hopeless paranoid schizophrenic and by the end, through the efforts of McMurphy, he's recovered sufficiently that he's been released. This would be fine, but Kesey's prose is often too perceptive and well-stated for his hung-up and largely uneducated narrator. Also, in using the device of the madman-who-sees-truth (a tradition which goes back to Shakespeare's fools and beyond -- in a sense, all the way to Tiresias), the effects are too often more artful than convincing.

There's also a shallowness of characterization throughout the book which considerably limits its effectiveness. Kesey's

characters are almost all good ones, but they have all the depth of a good class-A Hollywood movie, which isn't nearly as much as the book deserves.

Still, the story is fascinating and suspenseful, and the individual scenes come to life with feeling and often high good humor. (The book has been called a tragicomedy, which is of course an oversimplification, but basically it's true enough.) In short, it's an imperfect but very interesting job, and Kesey is obviously a writer to watch.

STERN by Bruce Jay Friedman. Signet, 75¢.

Still another first novel, and easily the best of the batch. Stern is the name of the lead character, a terribly sincere man in his early thirties who feels the implacable weight of the world falling more and more personally on his back, crowding and crushing him. He gets an ulcer, eventually has a nervous breakdown, and throughout the book fantasizes in alternately Walter Mittyish and paranoid fashion on what he'll do to fight the world, and what the world will do to destroy him. This sounds pretty grim, but it's told with an intensely insightful humor which makes the book a delight throughout. And the really impressive thing about Friedman's style is that he handles both the funny stuff and the depressing stuff in exactly the same manner, adapting it subtly in each case to the purpose at hand. Friedman may just prove to be the most important writer to come out of the sixties.

It's interesting to note, by the way, as a footnote on where our Important Young Writers come from, that Gover is the son of a Kentucky hillbilly, Kesey is a wrestler in Oregon, and Friedman edits men's magazines of the Communist Alligators Raped My Wife sort.

THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY by Flannery O'Connor. Signet D1937, 160 pages, 50¢.

This is one of those Southern novels about God and sin and guilt and like that. It's interesting, and strikingly well written at times...worthwhile reading, I think.

But Flannery O'Connor has an irritating fascination with symbolism, and she overdoes it at almost every turn. Every bit of food becomes The Bread of Life, water is always baptismal, fire is seen as simultaneously spiritually destructive and cleansing ...etc. To her credit, she makes all the symbolism inherent in her characters -- but in doing so she makes her characters symbols themselves.

She also has, at times, a bad case of the as-if's, so that there are pages on end where everything is described as if it were this or as though it were doing that. Her most effective writing in the book is of thi type, but so is her worst writing.

THE PONDER HEART by Eudora Welty. Dell 887, 128 pages, 25¢.

I'm beginning to suspect that I'm a bit prejudiced against Southern novels, so maybe my reactions to this one (which appeared originally in The New Yorker, was a Book of the Month Club selection, and in 1955 won the William Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters as the most distinguished work of American fiction published during the previous five years) are a bit off of the norm. The trouble is, though, that I find the values held by Southern writers often irritating, and their continual self-conscious symbolism just too much.

There's certainly no question that Eudora Welty can write, and write very well. She has an excellent sense of the ridiculous, her characterization is thoroughly believable, and in general she brings off this book with grace, wit and charm. Unfortunately, though I like her grace and her wit, I don't like her Southern charm.

Briefly, the story's about the heroine-narrator's Uncle Daniel, a somewhat simpleminded rich landowner with a heart of gold. Uncle Daniel goes around giving things away -- candy, plots of land, trips to Lookout Mountain -- and thereby driving the more sensible members of his family to distraction. Eventually he marries a young poor-white-trash girl, who gives him a bad time and is found dead. Uncle Daniel is charged with murder, and the resulting trial is the high point of the book -- a low-key, high comedy spoof on the entire courtroom drama tradition. It serves effectively as the perfect satire on the trial in TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD even though it was written over half a decade earlier.

It's a good book, but I was still irritated by its typical Southern qualities. Uncle Daniel, for instance, though he's evidently intended to symbolize simple goodness, has annoying overtones, to me, of not-so-simple Southern paternalism.

And I haven't the faintest idea what the ending of the story is supposed to mean. This may be my own fault, but show me a reader who ever truly thought that was the case.

CRIME FICTION

TRENT'S LAST CASE by E. C. Bentley. Ballantine F690, 183 pages, 50¢.

One of the classics of the detective novel, and quite deservedly so. The book is an ingeniously set up double-triple-switch mystery, told in the leisurely style of the early part of this century. (It was first published in 1913.) It has not only an excellent mystery, but some delightful characterization and occasional side-excursions into good-humored philosophy, all tied up neatly with the plot at the end.

NIGHT OF WENCESLAS by Lionel Davidson. Avon H-101, 191 pages, 45¢.

An excellent novel which starts out as a typically amusing British comedy about a confused and fumbling young man whose personal crisis lies in the insurmountable problem of dealing with his somewhat waspish girlfriend. But after a few chapters of this our young man finds himself thrown into an Amblerish international intrigue situation which forces him to be much more than merely competent. The contrast is striking and extremely effective, and Davidson makes a fine book out of it.

THE HUNTER by Richard Stark. Permabook M-4272, 155 pages, 35¢.
THE MAN WITH THE GETAWAY FACE by Richard Stark. Pocket Book 6180, 151 pages, 35¢.

The first two books of a series about Parker, a hard-as-nails criminal who's about as cold and despicable as they come -- in fact, a bit moreso. The third book, THE OUTFIT, is now out (I have it, and will read it soon), and three more have been written and bought, with no end to the series in sight.

It wasn't planned as a series. THE HUNTER was originally written as a one-shot book about a tough guy who gets double-crossed in a robbery and spends the book coldly and deliberately killing off everyone standing in the way of his getting back his share of the loot. It's a beautiful idea, in that the lead has absolutely no admirable qualities: he was planning to double-cross the other guy himself, for instance, so his revenge doesn't even have the eye-for-an-eye justification of previous books along these lines. And once he's found and killed the guy who crossed him, he finds the guy has paid off a debt to the Syndicate with his money, so he goes after the Syndicate -- and wins. End of book. It's not the sort of thing you expect.

The original version of the book had Parker killed at the end, but the editor who bought it liked the character so much he wanted a series, hence the change in the ending.

Unfortunately, the second book presents a greatly modified Parker. Rather than vicious, as in the first, in the second he's merely bad-tempered. He kills only two people in the second book, both of them for good, or at least practical, reasons, whereas in the first book he kills close to a dozen, several for marvellously petty reasons. My disappointment about the second book may sound like bloodthirstiness, but the point is that as the complete bastard Parker had character and individuality. In THE MAN WITH THE GETAWAY FACE he's just another smalltime tough hood going through his paces in a rather routine plot.

I hope the rest of the series will be better.

NON-FICTION

THE SCHOLAR ADVENTURERS by Richard D. Altick. Macmillan Paperbacks, 1960, $1.45.

A well-written, anecdotal and consistently interesting book about literary researchers, their problems and methods, with many stories of their investigations and the results. Literary frauds, both deliberate forgeries of "original manuscripts" by great writers to be sold for profit and such side-effect frauds as have been effected by the bowdlerization of writers' letters when collected for publication, get good coverage. Literary detective work to piece together such historical enigmas as the life of Sir Thomas Malory and the death of Christopher Marlowe also provide fascinating chapters. And there's much more like this -- a good deal of variety and interesting stuff. An excellent book.

THE YEAR THE WORLD WENT MAD by Allen Churchill. Hillman f199, 256 pages, 50¢.

Churchill is the man who wrote THE IMPROPER BOHEMIANS, that fine anecdotal history of Greenwich Village. This book is nowhere near as good, though. It's a gee-them-were-the-days book about the events of 1927, and its style is perhaps best (worst) characterized by the last few lines: "Slowly at 22:59:50 the illuminated ball atop the Times Tower began its slow descent, and a happy cheer rose from the jampacked throng. Horns and whistles blew. Off with the old, On with the new! Nineteen-twenty-seven -- the Year the World Went Mad -- was gone. It would never come again!"

I find these books particularly irritating when they speak

of "prosperity" and somehow go on for 75,000 words without mentioning the small proportion of the people who enjoyed this prosperity. Sure, there wasn't much of an unemployment problem then: everybody was working...at 50¢ an hour. (And prices weren't that much lower then.) Churchill mentions these conditions offhandedly only in dealing with the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

Most of the book is taken up with following Lindbergh and other transAtlantic fliers, all of which is reasonably interesting. The book also contains innumerable typoes in this edition, one of which is worth quoting:

"By far the most remarkable special writer appointed to cover the event (the Snyder-Gray trial) was Peggy Hopkins Joyce, the much-married glamour girl of the Twenties. In all, Miss Joyce married some five or six times, a record surpassed by numerous other members of her sex. Yet she squeezed so much publicity from each that she became a living symbol of the rising divorce rate currently agitating right-thinking people. The much-married Peggy was a perennial news source, though reporters had trouble deciding whether she was an intelligent girl or a Lorelei Lee straight out of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. There was evidence on both sides. At a dinner party Miss Joyce had been surveyed through a lorgnette by a haughty dowager who inquired, 'Young lady, why do you get married so much?' To this Peggy answered brightly, 'I owe it to my pubic.'"

THE LOST PHARAOHS by Leonard Cottrell. Grosset's Universal Library, 0157, $1.95.

Cottrell is one of the best of the popular writers on archaeology and ancient history, and in devoting a book to the subject of ancient Egypt, probably the most sense-of-wonderish single nation of the ancient world, you'd expect him to produce a really first-rate book. The result, though, is disappointing: it lacks unity and balance, and gives the impression of having been written hastily.

The subjects about which he writes -- The Valley of the Kings, the Amarna Age, the Great Pyramids, the records of tomb-robbing in ancient days, etc. -- are good ones, but they're overly familiar even for a strictly popular book, it seems to me. And in concentrating so much on the period of The New Kingdom, with only a few brief chapters about earlier and later times, Cottrell gives a badly warped picture of the three-thousand-year history of ancient Egypt.

This lopsidedness would be understandable if there just weren't records of interesting things from other periods on which to report, but that's not the case. There's nothing here about the civil disorders following the breakup of The Middle Kingdom, for instance, the Hyksos domination, the emergence of the Theban prince Ahmose and his founding of The New Kingdom, or of such interesting products of this period as the Tale of Sinuhe, which has been called the world's first novel. (The Mesopotamian saga of Gilgamesh antedates it, however.) There's nothing about Queen Hatshepsut, one of the most interesting figures in Egyptian history. There's nothing about the Ptolemaic period, which had its own fascination, nor about Cleopatra, who also had hers.

The book is just a hodgepodge of interesting things about ancient Egypt, and while that's fine as far as it goes I'd hoped for something better.

LOST LANGUAGES by E. D. Cleator. Mentor MD427, 177 pages, 75¢.

A survey of how the written languages of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Crete were discovered and painstakingly deciphered, with a final chapter on such so far uncracked languages as those of the Indus Valley and Easter Island. The book is written as clearly as possible, with occasional flashes of wit and irony. Archaeology isn't Cleator's specific field -- he was chief founder of the British Interplanetary Society -- but he has a good knowledge of it and does a fine job of presenting this aspect.

Actually, the details of such decipherment are impossible to understand unless you happen to know a great deal about Near Eastern languages, because so much of it is done by educated guesswork and the process of elimination of possibilities for parallels with still-extant languages, so Cleator, writing for a general audience, can give only a broad outline of the methods used. Even in this much there's a good deal of fascination, though, and the book is a fine one.

(Apropos of nothing much, I'm reminded that when I took a course at Cal in ancient history, the official designation of the course was Near Eastern Languages 13. Since we were given very little material on Near Eastern languages, either ancient or modern, I've never been able to figure this out, but I suppose there's a reason for it.)

HOLLYWOOD R.I.P. by I. G. Edmonds. Regency RB 320, 158 pages, 50¢.

A book that was originally titled by the author HOLLYWOOD SCANDALS, and that tells the whole content. It's reasonably well written, hits the usual highspots (Fatty Arbuckle, the Pantages case, Errol Flynn, Marilyn Monroe, etc.), and is an interesting survey of The Mess In Hollywood for anyone in the mood for this sort of thing.

THE BLUE NILE by Alan Moorehead. Dell 0636, 302 pages, 60¢.

A fascinating book, a companion to Moorehead's earlier THE WHITE NILE. The previous book dealt with the exploration of the source of the Nile, and as such had a strong theme running throughout; this one has to search a bit for a continuing theme, but Moorehead finds it in the general topic of the emergence of Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia from the Middle Ages as a result of foreign conquests. Three military campaigns make up most of the book: Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, Ismail's conquest of the Sudan, and the British expedition against Theodore, King of Ethiopia. (And by the way, I think Theodore is one of the most incredible characters in history: an absolute madman who still had some remarkably lucid moments when he understood perfectly the dynamics of the entire situation.)

The material is interesting in itself, but Moorehead's writing is the factor which makes the book a must. He has an unerring eye for what's interesting, and the ability to bring people and places to life on the page.

THE YEARS WITH ROSS by James Thurber. Signet T2020, 285 pages, 75¢.

Thurber's last book, and one which shows just about all his many virtues as a writer and humorist, prime among them his warmth as a human being and his always simultaneous awareness

of the ridiculousness of people and the human condition.

It is, of course, the definitive biography of Harold Ross, founder and long-time editor of The New Yorker. Ross emerges from its pages seeming very much like the typical Thurber character: distrustful of and beset by women and details of life he'd rather not have to bother with, showing moments and sometimes hours of amazing naivete and confusion. The question which plagues me about this characterization is whether Thurber describes Ross in this manner because this is how Thurber sees people, or whether indeed Ross may have been a great deal of the inspiration for Thurber's writings about the American male.

DIGGING UP THE PAST by Sir Leonard Woolley. Pelican A4, 2/-. 120 pages plus 32 plates.

A brief and quite interesting introduction to the techniques and purposes of archaeology, based on a series of broadcasts over the BBC. Woolley gives examples and anecdotes to illustrate his points throughout. The book doesn't set out to be a very extensive study of the field, but for its purposes it's quite good.

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a rather brief installment of
the far-famed saps serial

AN INDEX OF MY WORKS:

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251.	HOBGOBLIN #11	October 1963	10
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			84 pp
		previous total:	3023
		TOTAL:	3107 pp

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This has been HOBGOBLIN #12, January 1964, published for SAPS and Redd Boggs by Terry Carr, 41 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn, New York, 11201. Illustrations by William Rotsler, fandom's answer to Albert Schweitzer (who never asked). Superb mimeography by Ted White and QWERTYUIOPress. This Is Not A Rameses II Project. Arthur Thomson for TAFF! A bas les Coventranians. Remember the Alamo, the Maine, and the Rooster That Wore Red Pants.

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