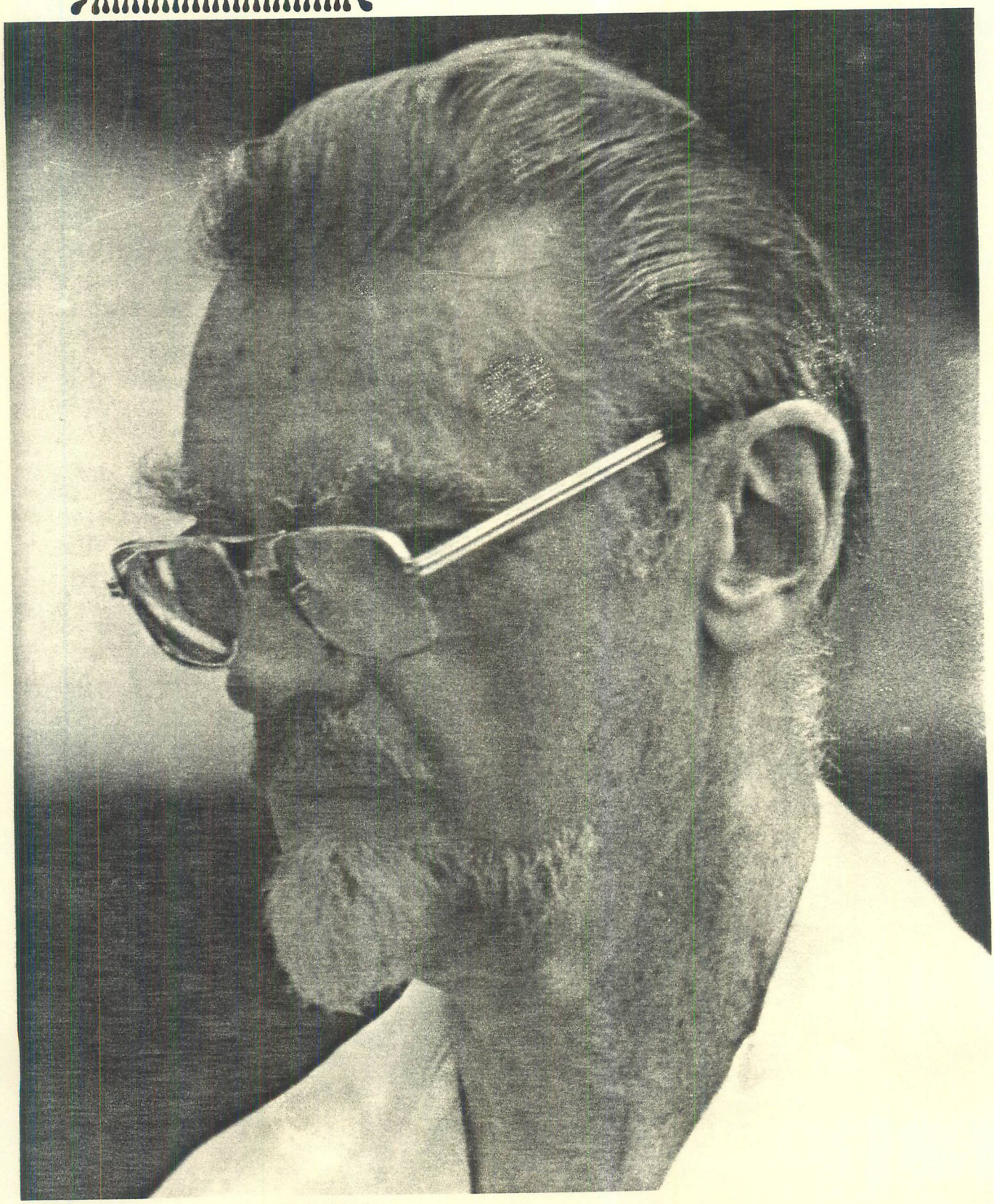
An L. Sprague de Camp Special

LAN'S LANTERN 24



An L. Sprague de Camp Special

LAN'S LANTERN 24

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DEDICATION

To Maia,
as always;

To Sprague and Fred,

May they give us another fifty years of reading pleasure.

Why You Are Receiving This

___ You have a contribution (art, article) in this issue.

___ You've sent me a contribution (to be published in a future issue).

___ Loc received (to be published next issue).

___ Trade ✓ You wanted one

___ We're in an apa together.

✓ I would like you to contribute to the next special issues (1988: on William F. Temple, Lester del Rey and Arthur C. Clarke; 1989: Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Fritz Leiber, Ted Sturgeon, A. E. Van Vogt).

___ This is your last issue unless you send me something.

Lan's Lantern #24 is published and edited by George "Lan" Laskowski, 55 Valley Way, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48013 USA. Phone: (313) 642-5670. Lan's Lantern is available for articles, art, letters (calls or postcards) of comment, even money (US$2), and the whim of the editor. The opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and may or may not be those of the editor. This is Lantern Publication #10, a division of LanShack Press Unlimited.

L. Sprague de Camp

L. Sprague de Camp.

I've seen the name on books for as long as I have been reading SF, but have never read as much of his stuff as I would have liked. In my attempts to keep up with the current output of SF and Fantasy, it seems unlikely that I'll ever find the time to read much of what I have in the collection until after I retire.

Which, unfortunately, will include the works of L. Sprague de Camp.

What writing of his I have read has been interesting and fun. Lest Darkness Fall is one of my favorite books. It did not inspire me to take Latin (I already had my MA in Latin when I read the novel), but it allowed me to see that someone else was familiar with the Romans, and didn't treat it as a dry subject (like many of my colleagues in grad school did!).

The Lancer editions of The Tritonian Ring and The Carnelian Cube were read early on; I don't recall their plots, but I do recall enjoying them.

The first book of his that I checked out of the library (soon after I was allowed into the "adult" section) was The Glory that Was. It caught my interest because of my love of mythology and my interest in ancient history.

Those were fun times in my younger days. Now we are all older, and Sprague is celebrating his 50th year as an author of SF and Fantasy. The contributors gathered here talk about his work and their personal contacts with him, his accomplishments and inspirations. One fan started a publishing company because of Sprague de Camp. Unable to find a copy of Wall of Serpents, Alex Berman obtained permission to publish it, and (with Sid Altus) started Phantasia Press. He has been publishing special edition ever since.

I've met Sprague de Camp on several occasions -- MARCON, INCONJUNCTION, at Worldcons -- and have been impressed, as most people have, with his aristocratic bearing; he is the quintessential gentleman. My personal contact with him has been almost nil, more out of embarrassment because I have read so little of his fiction than for anything else. But I have observed him. I have seen him deal firmly but gently with some of the more aggressive fans, heard him expound on a multitude of topics with various fans, and seen the care with which he treats Catherine, his wife.

Sprague de Camp is a gentleman I have gotten to know better through observation and through the writings herein. These make me want to know him on a more personal level. So at the next convention we attend together, I will not hesitate to say hello, talk to, and shake the hand of the great Aristocrat of science fiction, L. Sprague de Camp.

An Encounter with L Sprague de Camp

by Colin P. Langveld

1977 was to prove to be an interesting year for me. It was my first convention, my first Worldcon, and my first trip to the USA. In at the deep end you may say. I was lying by the side of the Fontainebleau's olympic size swimming pool. I had not long arrived; culture shock had just started doing funny things to me. By my side was a cousin I hadn't seen since I left South Africa. It had been twenty years since we had last met. The mysteries of fandom had brought us together.

We were heavily involved in a discussion on pre-christian Welsh religion when a man who was sitting nearby joined our conversation. We were by no means offended as his knowledge of the subject far exceeded ours and very soon his rich and cultured voice had us captivated.

This went on for some time, the talk moving from this to that and only reached an end when I realised that I had been sitting in the Florida sun longer than was good for me. We exchanged introductions. There is no way for me to describe my feelings when he said, "I'm Sprague de Camp and you have just shaken the hand of the man who shook the hand who shook the hand who shook the hand etc. etc. of Charles Darwin."

We stayed. I was a gentle shade of boiled lobster for the next two days.

Not only had I met my first SF author but one of my favorites. I had always been slightly nervous of how I would handle this sort of thing when it came about. There was no need to worry. How glad I am that my first introduction to the professionals was to be L. Sprague de Camp. He is an unaffected, approachable gentleman, a credit to his trade.

The book I am illustrating in The Glory That Was. Hope you like it.

The Poetry of

De Camp has had three volumes of poetry published: Demons and Dinosaurs, by Arkham House in 1970; Phantoms and Fancies, by Mirage Press in 1972; and Heroes and Hobgoblins, by Donald M. Grant in 1981. Due to small press runs, none of them are particularly available today. The rarest is the Arkham House book; it was printed in England, and due to one of the many British strikes of that period, only 500 copies were ever bound and distributed, making it one of the rarest of the Arkham House publications. The Mirage Press volume was published at least partly to rectify the scarcity of de Camp poetry, but Mirage was never a large-volume publisher. Heroes and Hobgoblins quite probably had the largest print run of the three, and as the most recent is probably the easiest to find, though I haven't seen a copy for sale in several years.

Many of the same poems occur in all of the books. Heroes and Hobgoblins includes an even 100 poems, of which 26 appeared in both previous books, 35 more from Phantoms and Fancies only, and 1 from Demons and Dinosaurs only. This is largely due to the small print runs; most buyers never saw all three volumes, and thus weren't bothered by duplications.

Original publication lists 35 different magazines, fanzines, and books, plus some poems published for the first time in each of the three poetry books. Credits include 16 from Yandro (which is one reason why I own all three of the books), 10 from Amra, 7 from the Nesfa Press book Scribblings, 5 from F&SF, 3 from IF, and others from Arkham Collector, Startling Mystery, the book Alchemy and Acamdeme, the SFWA Forum, Simba, and ERB-dom, among others. The books gradually got larger; Demons contains only 42 poems, while Phantoms has 84. Heroes and Hobgoblins is enlivened by Tim Kirk art, including a half-dozen full-color interiors.

The general tone of the poems is ironic, cynical, and frequently shows a wry appreciation of human foibles. They're more or less evenly divided between serious and humorous, but my own frivolous soul prefers the funny ones, which are also easier to quote from; the serious poems are generally a unity, and their nature can't be depicted by extracting a few lines. I'm particularly fond of "Tikal", which describes Mayans working on their ancestors' temples at the behest of white archaeologists, and concludes:

> Shall our descendents, for a stranger's coin
> Peck likewise at the ruins of Des Moines?

Which I suppose is serious enough when you think about it; possibly expresses a universal truth as well. But I like the simple irony. Another of my favorites is "Warriors", which opens with,

> Charging at gallop, divine Alexander,
> Leading his guards with audacity reckless,

L. Sprague de Camp

by Robert Coulson

works through Richard the First and Shamyl of the Avars, and concludes:

> Mr. de Camp in his stripes of gold lace,
> Studying specifications and charts,
> Ordering tests on aeroplane parts,
> Sitting a desk at a nautical base.

It echoes both Kipling and Ogden Nash. Juanita, being a more serious-minded person than I am, prefers "Nahr Al-Kalb", which she set to music. It presents the eternity of the Nahr Al-Kalb, or Dog River, flowing endlessly to the sea near Beirut, as ephemeral armies, from Ramses' spearmen to De Gaulle's riflemen, tramping along its shores on the way to a fleeting glory

There are poems, both serious and irreverent, inspired by the works of Burroughs, Lovecraft ("Shadows Over Squamous") and Howard. "Conan the Limmerian" follows the Cimmerian's career in 15 verses of limerick form.

I tend to prefer the material based on history or archaeology or some of the ones from natural history, or perhaps some of the ones about writers. De Camp tends to look at magic from his own wry viewpoint, as in "Old Heroes":

> But think of Cuchulainn assailed by arthritical
> pains,
> A Sigurd whose sword-arm by aches in the bursa
> is stayed,
> Or Sampson too gouty for frolics and fights
> sanguinary;
> A Beowulf bound to his bed to attacks coronary,
> Or Conan no longer in fettle to pleasure each
> maid,
> And speedy Achilles retarded by varicose veins!
> Would they be heroes, I wonder?

To which I can only respond with a quote from Patriot's Dream by Barbara Michaels:

> "There weren't any heroes. All those big,
> stately figures we read about -- Jefferson and
> his slaves, Morgan and his rheumatism --"
>
> "That's what a hero is, you ignoramus. A man
> with rheumatism who gets on his horse and rides
> off to battle."

As de Camp points out frequently in both his fiction and in these poems, glory has very little to do with real life, but heroism does. And cynics have more fun than optimists.

L. Sprague de Camp -

Engineer and Sorcerer

by Poul Anderson

As a student of the myriad ways of man, L. Sprague de Camp has from time to time looked upon his own society with the same objective eye he uses on peoples whose geography or history make strange to most of us. He himself does not seem to find them very alien -- and he has encountered many at first hand. Though he knows more about cultural differences than most professional anthropologists, his basic judgment appears to be that human beings everywhere and everywhen are much the same at heart: limited, fallible, tragi-comic, yet endlessly interesting. So in the civilizations of antiquity or among more recent "primitives" he sees engineers and politicians not unlike ours, while among us he discovers taboos and tribal rites not unlike ours, while among us he discovers taboos and tribal rites not unlike theirs. The insight has directly inspired at least one story and added philosophical as well as occasional piquant ironies to most of the others.

Therefore I wonder what he thinks of this curious custom we have of prefacing a collection of one writer's work with remarks of a colleague. It strikes me as especially odd when the former is senior to the latter, and senior in far more than years. That is, I was a boy when L. Sprague de Camp's first stories were published; I spent a decade being awed by his erudition and captivated by his ability to tell a story, none of which has changed since. When I began to write professionally myself, it became clear, once I was hitting my stride, that there was a considerable de Camp influence on me, though I will never match him in any of those areas he has made uniquely his own. In short, what the deuce am I doing introducing him?

The sole rationale that comes to mind is this. De Camp belongs to that generation of writers whom John Campbell inspired to create the golden age of science fiction and fantasy, beginning about 1937 when he took the helm of what was then called Astound Stories. Critics be damned, it was the golden age in all truth, when people such as Isaac Asimov, Lester de Rey, RObert A. Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, Malcolm Jameson, Henry Kuttner (especially as "Lewis Padgett"), Fritz Leiber, C. L. Moore, Ross Rocklynne, CLifford D. Simak. George O. Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, A. E. Van Vogt, Jack Williamson, and more and more either appeared for the first time or, for the first time, really showed what they could do. De Camp stood tall in this race of giants. Gifted new writers have made their considerable marks on the field throughout the years afterward, but the excitement -- the sense of utterly green pastures suddenly opened

Originally published in The Best of L. Sprague de Camp, Del Rey Books, 1978. Reprinted with permission of the author.

-- will never come again. Comparison to the Periclean and Elizabethan periods may strike you as overdrawn, but you might think of jazz in its heydey, or quantum pnysics in the 1920's and 1930's, or cosmology and molecular biology today.

The era was brief, choked off -- though not overnight -- by America's entry into World War Two. A number of key creators found that they had more urgent business on hand than writing stories. They included de Camp.

Hostilities having ended for the time being, he returned to his proper business and had much to do with pulling science fiction out of the dismal state into which it had fallen. Besdies Astounding as of yore, he was an important contributor to numerous other magazines in the field. The publication of science fiction books, not as rare one-shots but as a regular thing, was being pioneered then, and his became landmarks. Of all this, more anon.

However, he began increasingly to write other things. These included some grand historical fiction but became primarily nonfiction, with emphasis on science, technology, and the history of these. Factual material, accurately and vividly presented, was not new to him -- he had written it from the start of his career -- but soon it comprised the overwhelming bulk of his output. I don't know whether to regret this or not. On the one hand, we have doubtless lost a number of marvelous yarns; on the other hand, we do have these perfectly splendid books about elephants and ancient engineers and H. P. Lovecraft and dinosaurs and....

Luckily for us, of recent years L. Sprague de Camp has from time to time been coming back to storytelling, especially to fantasy. (He is also pleasing aficionados with light verse and familiar essays, but these are of less immediate interest to a reading public starved for honest narratives in which real things happen to person one can care about.) And thus we arrive at a justification for this foreword: the fact that many younger folk may not be acquainted with his fiction, and in any event will not know what a towering figure he has been -- and is --in the field of imaginative literature. The present book, which spans most of his career, ought to remedy that. If you haven't read a de Camp tale before now, you have a treat in store, and I am here to tell you so.

Second, since an anthology can hold but a limited part of an author's work, you might allow me to steer you onto other things, as well. What follows will not be a bibliography or a scholarly study, but just a ramble through a few of the good memories, literary and personal, that Sprague has given me. A lot will be omitted; I should not take up space which could be used for an extra story. But perhaps you will get a better idea of his achievement and of what to watch for in bookstores and libraries than you would from something more formal.

As I have remarked, he began writing nonfiction early on. Indeed his very first published work was an important book, still in print and once cited in a Supreme Court decision, whose self-explanatory title is Inventions, Patents, and Their Management. Not being an inventor of anything except occasional recipes, I must confess to never having read this. However, in my teens I was delighted and enlightened by the articles he wrote for Astounding, pieces like "The Long-Tailed Huns" (on urban wildlife), "The Sea King's Armored Division" (on Hellenistic science and engineering), and "Get Out and Get Under" (on the history of military vehicles). The subjects demonstrate the range and depth of of his interests; the titles indicate the humor with which he made the facts sparkle.

That humor became an emblem of his science fiction, doubly welcome because it has always been in short supply there, and in fantasy, where it matched the funniest things ever done in a field which has nurtured a lot of sprightliness. His humor was often called "wacky", but I think that's the wrong word. De Camp constructed his stories every bit as carefully, with the same respect for fact and logic, as he did his nonfiction. (He still does, of course.) Much of the laughter came from the meticulously detailed working out of the consequences of a bizarre assumption.

For instance, in the short novel Divide and Rule, extraterrestrial conquerors have imposed a neo-medieval culture on Earth as a way of keeping the human race from uniting to overthrow them. The story opens with Sir Howard van Slyck, second son of the Duke of Poughkeepsie, riding along in chrome-nickel armor, puffing his pipe, near the tracks of the elephant-powered New York Central. Upon his plastron he bears the family arms -- which he calls a trademark -consisting of a red maple leaf in a white circle with the motto "Give 'em the works."

In another short novel, Solomon's Stone, there is a parallel universe in which another Earth is inhabited by those people whom we daydream of ourselves as being. The mind of the shy, bookish hero is transferred to the body of the alter ego he had always supposed was purely imaginary, a French cavalier like D'Artagnan. Practically every man is big, muscular and handsome; every woman is ravishingly beautiful. New York is a wild conglomeration of ethnic types, ranging from the Siegfrieds in Yorkville to a Middle Eastern sultan complete with Harem (who in our world is really a bachelor clerk at the YMCA). With so many aggressively macho toughs around, society is pretty

chaotic, though a government of sorts does exist and even maintains a small army, which consists almost entirely of generals and is commanded by the only private it has.

In the classic Harold Shea stories, written in collaboration with the late Fletcher Pratt, we are taken to a whole series of universes where various myths or literary works are strictly true. For example, in "The Mathematics of Magic," Shea finds himself in the world of Spenser's The Faerie Queen. At one point, traveling through a forest with the virginal Belphebe, he encounters the Blatant Beast, a monster that will devour them unless it is given a poem it has not heard before -- and in such an emergency, the single poem he can think of is the luridly gross "The Ballad of Eskimo Nell." Magic works here, by strict rules of its own,

and at another point Shea seeks to conjure up a unicorn for a steed -- but he doesn't phrase the spell quite clearly enough, and gets a rhinoceros instead. I needn't go on, for happily the first three of these stories are again available, collected together as The Compleat Enchanter.

Nor does space permit me to give more examples of this particular source of de Campian humor. It isn't necessary anyway; you can find plenty for yourself in the stories gathered here, in which you will also note an equally important source of humor, character.

De Camp's people are never stereotypes. They are unique and often think and act in ways that are funny. Like Moliere or Holberg, de Camp observes them with a slightly ironic, basically sympathetic detachment, and then tells us what he has seen. We laugh, but all too often we recognize ourselves in them.

The humor, and oftimes the pathos, of character became particularly evident in the postwar "Gavagan's Bar" stories, also written in partnership with Pratt. Gavagan's Bar is a friendly kind of neighborhood place, whose steady customers all know one another, and the genial bartender, Mr. Cohan (Cohan, if you please), does his best to keep it that way. But people do come in who have the strangest tales to tell, and sometimes a breath of that strangeness blows through the establishment itself. "These little whiskey fantasies," as Groff Conklin called them, usually evoke very gentle laughter.

Indeed, offhand the postwar stories of de Camp's seem rather different from the prewar ones: more serious, frequently downright somber. However, this is not true. There has been a shift of emphasis, as might be expected of a writer who is not content to repeat himself endlessly but, instead, keeps experimenting and developing. Yet recent stories have had their wit, and early stories had their gravity.

His first major piece of fiction, the novel Genus Homo, in collaboration with the late P. Schuyler Miller, contains comic moments but is essentially a straightforward tale of a busload of travelers -- the believably ordinary kind you meet on a Greyhound -- who end up in the far future, when mankind is long extinct save for them, and apes have evolved to intelligence. Though the conclusion is hopeful, the narrative does not pretend that the opening situation is anything but catastrophic, and tragedies as well as triumphs occur.

Another early novel, Lest Darkness Fall, illustrates this combination of qualities still better. It is, in a way, de Camp's answer to Mark Twain, whose Connecticut Yankee started modern technology going in Arthurian Britain with the greatest of ease. Martin Padway is scholarly, even a little timid, but a highly knowledgeable man. This much was necessary for the author to psotulate, else his protagonist would soon have died a messy death, after being hurled back to Ostrogothic Italy of the sixth century A.D. Nevertheless, Padway has a terrible time as he struggles to intorduce a few things like printing, which may stave off the Dark Ages he knows otherwise will come. He never does manage to make gunpowder that goes Bang! instead of Fizz-zz. His most successful innovations are the simplest, like double-entry bookkeeping or an information-carrying line of semaphores. Here de Camp was at his most rigorously logical.

The book is full of hilarious scenes. For instance, when Padway catches a bad cold, his main problem is how to avoid the weird remedies that well-meaning friends try to apply to him. Yet when war breaks out, its horrors are quietly described; we are not spared.

Thus the stories of later years represent no mutation, but rather a steady evolution.

The tales of the Viagens Interplanetarias are, in fact, quite like their predecessors. These are straight science fiction -- so much so that de Camp does not permit his characters to exceed the speed of light through "hyperspace" or any similar incantation, but confines them to the laws of relativistic physics and the nearer stars. That, though, give the same scope for exotic settings and exciting adventures that Haggard found in the then unmapped parts of Africa. The humorous possibilities are fully realized; an example in the present collection is "The Inspector's Teeth." Likewise realized are the possibilities of derring-do -- and, occasionally, pain and bitterness.

The historical novels show the same meticulous care throughout and the same general line of development, from the comparatively light-hearted An Elephant for Aristotle and The Dragon of the Ishtar Gate (my personal favorite) to The Golden Wind, which holds a poignant depiction of what age can do to a man and how the spirit can rise above that.

As I have said, de Camp came more and more to specialize in nonfiction, fine stuff and highly recommended but outside the purview of this essay. It may have been Conan the Cimmerian who finally lured him back to a reasonable productivity of stories. If that is true, we have much to thank Robert E. Howard for, over and above the entertainment he gave us in his own right.

When the creator of the original Mighty Barbarian died, he left behind him a heap of unfinished manuscripts, some involving Conan and some which could be adapted to the series. Perhaps mostly for enjoyment, de Camp undertook to complete the work with collaborators Bjorn Nyberg and Lin Carter. The enthusiastic rediscovery of Conan by the reading public may have surprised him. I don't know. What I do know, and what matters, is that since then he has increasingly been writing original fantasy. You'll find a few of the shorter pieces here. The Goblin Tower and The Clocks of Iraz are two rather recent novels. Let us hope for many more.

I have already admitted that this forward is not going to be anything like a proper survey of the de Camp cannon. Still, I would like to mention anew certain of his incidental writings -- essays, reviews and criticisms, verse, aphorisms -- which have appeared over the years in such places as the magazine Amra or his anthology Scribblings, to the pleasure of smaller audiences than they deserve. Unless a major publisher has the sense to gather these together, you may never see them; but they should be mentioned as showing yet another dimension of his versatility.

In person, L. (for Lyon) Sprague de Camp is a tall, trim man of aristocratic appearance and bearing -- aristocratic in the best sense, gracious and kindly as well as impressive. More than one woman has confided to me that she tends to swoon over him, but he remains content with his lovely wife of many years, Catherine, with whom he has collaborated on books as well as children.

Born in New York in 1907, he studied at Caltech, MIT, and Stevens Institute of Technology, and held down a variety of jobs until he went into full-time writing. As a Navy reservist, he was called up in World War Two and did research and development (alongside Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein), which was a substantial contribution to the Allied cause.

His vast fund of information comes not only from omnivorous reading but from extensive traveling. This isn't just through

the tourist circuits, but into strange places hard to reach. He doesn't brag about it, but if you can get him to reminisce, it makes great reading or listening.

By the time this is in print, he will be past his seventieth birthday, but he doesn't look or act it -- and, what the hell, Goethe wrote the second part of Faust in his eighties. Long may L. Sprague de Camp go on, to the joy of us all.

-- Poul Anderson
Orinda, California
June, 1977

Art and Appreciation by David Thayer

L. Sprague de Camp's Lest Darkness Fall, published in 1939, was one of the first SF/Fantasy novels I ever read. It made a lasting impression on me. I took four years of Latin in high school and long have been a WW II buff. The novels combines both elements. My illustration depicts the allegory rather than a particular scene.

An Image of the de Camps

by Lloyd Penney

I've met the de Camps only a couple of times, and one of them was at the International Festival of Authors in Toronto in October 1985. There had been a large reception at the Spaced-Out Library on the University of Toronto campus, and the SF authors were there in force. As my wife Yvonne and I were leaving, we noticed that some of the visiting pros were getting ready to leave, and the de Camps were parked (literally) in the back of a passenger van, witting with the side doors open, waving to whoever would wave back...nice people.

Some Comments on L. Sprague de Camp

by David Palter

L. Sprague de Camp is chiefly distinguished as a fierce rationalist, and lifelong crusader against irrational belief systems. Ironically, as a writer of fiction his style is quite reminiscent of that of the late L. Ron Hubbard, who was, of course, one of the gurus against whom de Camp had fought. De Camp's "Incomplete Enchanter" series is not only an exceptionally enjoyable fantasy, but a pioneering work which has inspired generations of fantasists.

L. Sprague de Camp

An Appreciation by Frederik Pohl

When I first became a full-fledged professional editor at the age of nineteen I coveted John Campbell's talents, his self-confidence and, most of all, his authors. The year was 1939, and among the brightest and best of the Campbell authors of the Golden Age was L. Sprague de Camp, so I set myself to woo him. It wasn't easy. John had all the money in the world to hire authors away--he was paying a full penny a word for everything!--and the pathetic budget Harry Steeger had given me for Astonishing Stories and Super Science Stories allowed less than half that, on the average.

But deCamp was not an average author, and so I cozened him into coming to talk to me at my office on East 42nd Street in New York. I knew that one way to win an author's heart was to buy him a free meal. To my surprise, that didn't work with Sprague de Camp. He joined me for lunch, and was willing to talk about stories. I was on my best behavior because the man impressed me with his military bearing and precise habits of speech and, most of all, impressive age -- he had to be in his mid-twenties, at least. But he impressed me most of all when the lunch was over. When time came for the check and I reached for it he put his firm, soldierly hand on it and announced (as always, in the third person remote), "De Camp doesn't do that. We are going to go Dutch."

I did finally get some stories of his to print in my magazines--but not for my standard fractional cent a word. I had to match Campbell's lavish rate to get them.

There's one other thing that I would like to put on the public record about me and Sprague de-Camp, and it's well past the time I should have done it. When World War II was over and I took up writing again seriously, the first novel I managed to get published (in collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth) was The Space Merchants. It did pretty well. Over the years it has earned us a lot of money, it has been translated into several dozen languages and there are a lot of people who say that it launched a whole new genre of science fiction stories.

Maybe so. All the same, I want to point out that when Cyril and I were writing The Space Merchants we were not at all conscious of breaking new ground. On the contrary. We were fully aware of the light-hearted comedy L. Sprague de Camp had provided for Astounding's readers for a decade and more, and wanted very much to achieve the same sort of tone in our book. This isn't to say that we deliberately copied Sprague's style; we wrote The Space Merchants the way we did because that kind of narration was congenial to us and to what we wanted to say. But I don't think we could have written The Space Merchants in that fashion if L. Sprague de Camp hadn't pioneered the way, because it was his work that showed us how.

IMPRESSIONS OF *L. Sprague de Camp*

by Mark Blackman

If Heinlein is the Dean of SF, perhaps L. Sprague de Camp (RAH's junior by four months) is its Gentleman Squire. I have, of course, long been impressed by his intelligence and dignity on panels at conventions for years but I recall being particularly in awe as, leaving a HEXACON banquet a couple of years ago, I watched him in the simple act of putting on a 7muffler with all the elegance of tying a four-in-hand. The man could give lessons.

My impression was only confirmed a few months ago at PHILCON. Uncharacteristically, I was in costume, specifically, French cavalier garb: plumed hat, tabard, silky trousers and boots. Thus attired, I entered a party only to be immediately confronted by de Camp and asked, "Ah, etes-vous gentilhomme?" (Are you a gentleman?) "Oui," I replied (OK, stammered), "je suis gentilhomme du dix-septieme siecle. Et" (hoping for a clever save) "je ne suis pas Gascon." (Yes, 17th century, and I'm not from Gascony (as was D'Artagnan)). One may only imagine if he greets those in medieval garb in Latin.

At one point the Sunday Times ran a piece on the film Conan the Barbarian, which referred to "L. Sprague de Camp and his wife Lin Carter." The gag was milked for months among East Coast fans with lines like: "Poor Catherine, always the last to know."

Not only is this de Camp's 50th anniversary as an SF writer, but his 80th birthday as well. Happy Birthday, Sprague!

To Sprague

From Julius Schwartz

L. Sprague de Camp, you could have been the death of me! It was just that those damn Chesterfields looked so good on you.

I was in my twenties and the century was in its forties and we were both impressionable, but you were already in your splendor. I got a chance to have lunch with you and I was most taken by the seeming ease with which you moved through the world. The joie de vivre. The savoir faire. The je ne sais quoi. All that French stuff. Men like you wore their charm as easily as other men wear their hair. I wasn't good at wearing hair even then. Some guys have just got it and other guys just have something else, but the century and I were young and we hadn't caught on to that yet.

I though that what you had, Sprague, must have been something corporeal. Something one can bottle...or maybe keep in a nifty little silver case in your lapel pocket and whip out for the ladies like Maurice Chevalier did. So in my own little lame way to be just like L. Sprague de Camp I bummed a cigarette from you. I picked up the only thing from you that wasn't admirable, and it was 30 years before I woke up and the roof of my mouth didn't taste like raw hamburger.

I managed to lick it, Sprague, and in the process grow up to realize that we are all incommensurable, if not equal. For example, now I'm in my seventies and the century (and you?) are in the eighties -- and you're still splendid.

THE COMPLETE—— ——ENCHANTER

by Ben P. Indick

Fastidious in appearance, precise in language, fgelicitous in imagination, L. Sprague de Camp has graced the pages and scenes of fantasy for nearly a half century. We recall his delightful yarns for Unknown, Astounding, Fantasy and Science Fiction and so many others, always fascinating, usually humorous.

And we recall him at conventions, friendly, always ready to chat and even swap a memory. I myself am a person of less than perfect carriage and appearance -- well, let's face it, the greying hairs on my face tend to go in every direction helter-skelter -- I could not help but enmvy his immaculate appearance when I first met L. Sprague at the WFC Convention in Baltimore in 1980. Every hair of that well-shaped goatee he sported was clippped as though by a ruler, none daring to stand even slightly askew from its ranks.

Awed, when I came later to write a conreport for IBID, my fanzine, I mentioned this, adding that the man must spend at least half an hour or more each morning upon this aspect alone of his toilette. I sent a copy of the fanzine to him, and he he replied with good humor that contrary to my fear, ten minutes sufficed. I didn't think to ask then, but I wonder now, considering how he has been an inveterate traveler, archaeologist and researcher in faraway and not always easily accessible climes, does he, there in the wilderness, or in ancient, crumbling, solitary places, also spend that half-hour (or, frankly, unbelievable ten minutes) curbing any vagabond hairs? I'll bet a sesterce he does!

I have employed this somewhat exotically named coin to note that one of the pleasures of hearing a talk by Sprague, who is not a reluctant speaker at all, is the sprinkling of foreign words, particularly, it seems to me, French, which, like luscious chocolate chips in toll house cookies, adorn his language. The words, native or foreign, are as sharply and crisply delivered as tne motion of the hand that wields that razor. Mercifully, for the benefit of those of us who are hopelessly rooted to one tongue, he will allow the context to clarify such erudition -- sometimes. He has, after all, high expectations -- of himself, his audience, his readership.

He has them as well of the subjects of his biographies, and admirers of H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard have been alternately amused and aroused by them. Lovecraft, this most professionally self-conscious biographer insists, should have been more businesslike about his work, and Howard should have been a more mature young man. Sprague, however, is the first to admit

his admiration for these two giants, editing a volume of HPL essays, and, in the case of Two-Gun Bob, devoting a fair amount of his life to "Conantics". He has written them, edited them, and seen them to film. It has been a happy collaboration for him, artistically, and, one hopes, financially.

It was in this respect that, a decade ago, I was fortunate enough to see the measure of the man. Arnie Fenner, editor at that time of REH: Lone Star Fictioneer, a fine Howardian semiprozine, had asked me to contribute an article. I always enjoyed doing essays for fanzines, and, as a rule, they were commentary on the writer or his writings. I was, however, at that moment tired of arguing merits, demerits, placements of commas, uses of sorcerors and snakes, etc. Since playwriting has always been an avocation of mine, I decided to do a play on REH. To go one step further, I would make it a screenplay. Arnie had the courage to publish the result, "Incident at Cross Plains" in 1976, issue #4. Although it is eminently filmable -- to my prejudiced eyes, even, in fact, a good film -- it would be strictly for REH buffs. The first two parts use several of his characters, but in Howardian situations I created; the fourth is romanticized biography with broad artistic license and a socko climax for the tragic death of the brilliant young Texan.

The third part, however, is one wherein I had fun with the burgeoning market of Howard imitators, "collaborators", and even honest writers who sought whatever scraps poor Howard had left behind, to work them as faithfully as they could into novels. Since this this had been going on so exhaustively, the trunk of the agent for REH's estate, Glenn Lord, was down to bare wood, I postulated. And, since I believed the magazine was simply a fanzine, with no wide readership, I used actual names to enhance the fun, being sarcastic with writers, all distraught because nothing whatever by REH remained to be "collaborated." In desperation, they call in a medium to bring back the spirit of Howard and thereby have him deliver a pile of genuine new scraps, which they could subsequently market at much greater length. The scene ends in riotous pandemonium, with all the writers getting comeuppance for their presumption.

To my surprise, when I received the issue, as well as back issues, it was a very well-printed, quite professional magazine, filled with art and photography, and a full-color, full-spread cover. It also had a rather extensive circulation. Shocked, I cowered in fear of legal briefs. Happily, those who read it all seemed simply to be amused, and I heard from many of them to this effect. I guess my sentimental ending for the film saved me. Nicest of all, however, was an unexpected and unsolicited card from Sprague. I had corresponded briefly with him a year or two back, but to receive a card of praise from one of my idols -- he still and justifiably is -- I am still moved. He wrote: "Just a word of appreciation for INCIDENT AT CROSS PLAINS, which I enjoyed. In fact, it brought a lump to my throat, and you know what kind of old bastard some of your fellow Hyperboreans consider me. Kaor, (signed)"

And so, to the man who has traveled in time with Harold Shea, sailed the seas on the Golden Wind, fought the bloody battles with Conan, and has known so many glorious and often hilarious adventures, I invite him and his lovely wife Catherine to join me in a heady brew at our favorite pub, Gavagan's Bar, of course, and there to wish him many more adventures!

L. Sprague de Camp

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

by John Thiel

Does L. Sprague de Camp make it possible to write an appreciation of his work? Or is the man controversial? I would say, after following his work beginning with the first story of his that I read, a short piece in the August 1955 Astounding called "Judgment Day", that the man doesn't like prosaic, banal attitudes being maintained. If you appreciate his work, it hasn't mixed you up enough, hasn't got you to think and wonder about things. You feel too safe. I suspect you wouldn't be unless you found something to argue about in writing any evaluation of his work.

Take, for instance, the story I mentioned. "Judgment Day" is spine-chilling. I showed it around among my neighbors, considering that they had been discussing such topics and were always ready for a new discussion. I found that they reacted to it with some alarm; the story has never totally left their consciousness since that time.

The two illustrations by Kelly Freas gives you a good idea of the story: In a lively style portraying the polarities of nature, there is depicted an old misanthrope hating the world in one, and in another a circle of children with bestial expressions of glee gathered around a young intellectual the crowd bully has just knocked down. The story concerns this same child growing up and increasng his knowledge, and discovering a method of creating an intellectual chain-reaction which he feels will destroy the Earth. He wonders if he will use it, and when some young hooligans arrive showing that their persecution of him will be never-ending, he decides to do so. It is written in a particularly emotive prose that suggests the author believes that if this doesn't rouse you to anger, you haven't been there. It is especially maddening to SF readers that the main character is a scientist who bears some resemblance to an SF fan. That's the kind of controversy de Camp exults in.

Nor was he uncontroversial when he began writing adventure stories for the pulps, particularly his revivals of Robert E, Howard's unfinished pieces. I used to read these in Fantastic Universe, and elsewhere -- it was one of the magazines that began the trend back toward fantasy in 1953. A number of fanzines mentioned these works, and controversy about Howard raged high. (Interested readers might do well to find issues of Inside, whose editor Ron Smith did not ignore the matter.) One outcome that was mentioned among fans was that de Camp's fantasy writing was rediscovered (if one wants to use that term), and articles appeared in fanzines saying that whatever one made of Howard, de Camp was a splendid fantasy writer in his own right. Personally, I found nothing out of key in his Howard collaborations; I particularly enjoyed reading "Hawks over Shem".

A sprig of laurel to de Camp for promoting fantasy energetically, finding plenty of it for

readers, anthologizing it, and writing many works of it, not ignoring, as so many other writers have done, historical research -- that is not really necessary, but one finds it nice to read a fantasy which correlates with historical reality. I think de Camp is particularly good on sailing, but wonder somewhat about his occasional tallying of Nordic gods.

As for his science fiction shorts, most of them are collected in The Wheels of If, The Best of L. Sprague de Camp, and Tales from Gavagan's Bar. This last, consisting of tales written with Fletcher Pratt, was influential even when first published, coinciding so evocatively with Arthur C. Clarke's Tales from the White Hart. (Others like Spider Robinson and Larry Niven have also used the tavern setting for a series of stories.)

You aren't going to forget any of the ideas L. Sprague de Camp played around with. For one thing, he won't let you. In a recent correspondance regarding tne book review column in my fanzine, Pablo Lennis, he corrected facts with scatological accuracy and recommended a list of his books. I found the recent deluxe volume he put together with his wife, Footprints on Sand, at the library and enjoyed it tremendously. It's certainly one of the liveliest volumes of recent times. His correspondence, I might add, bore a little cartoon of him by Kelly Freas, which, although not really Freas' best work, does invoke a prodigious spirit.

Now, I have not made the cardinal error of considering de Camp's work not to have their ups and downs. But the reward was survival. I survived the experience of reading the great snouting battles of such books as The Dragons of the Ishtar Gate and The Tritonian Ring. And in coming through them, I'd been roughed up a bit, but I experienced new vistas and new horizons, encountered new miasmas of allegory and mythos, not seen in other books.

So I'm thanking de Camp for leaving me alone, and I'm also thanking him for not forgetting me and his other readers by having finished Footprints on Sand. I'm waiting for another book, and hoping to see one soon.

Let us hope this latest edition of Lan's Lantern encourages him and keeps him in the mood for writing.

Thank You,

Sprague de Camp

from Joanne Bloom

As far as science fiction goes, I'm an extremely late starter: I was a married woman of twenty-two or three with a couple of young kids. Most enthusiasts seem to discover StF at the age of ten or so, reading first the pulps and then books, and are addicts soon after the first taste. I didn't realize that, and I didn't realize how many divisions and sub-divisions are heaped under the general heading "Science Fiction".

By the time I started school I was already reading fluently and almost nonstop and had progressed so far above most of the children's literature of that era that Dick and Jane were a crashing bore.

Every time I had a question (often enough to drive my parents to distraction, no doubt), they told me to look it up. They had bought a set of The Book of Knowledge for my brother and me, and I not only found answers to most of my questions, but I read the entire set of books from start to finish.

The result was that I was outraged by the idiotically banal Dick and Jane and frequently corrected my first-grade teacher. I was an insufferable brat. There may have been talk about skipping me a grade, but that was no longer school policy. I had a sneaky suspicion that, although my first grade teacher was desperate to get rid of me, the other teachers were warned.

Anyway, while my mother saw to it that I read most of the traditional childhood classics as I grew up, I never heard of science fiction.

When I was eight or nine, I began at the A's, intending to read through the whole library of Angola, Indiana. No doubt I read some highly unsuitable stuff for a child. I don't recall learning anything new or startling, but I was an unusually ignorant kid even for those days. When I got someplace in the E's, I realized that I wasn't enjoying much of anything, so I gave it up as a waste of time. Still no science fiction. If the Angola Library had any, it was certainly not with the other books or even visible.

So anyhow, there I was, just browsing, getting to know the Warsaw Library a little, shortly after we moved there. There stood an independent rack marked "Science Fiction" along one side and "Mystery" along the other. Mysteries I had read; not many, but a few. Science Fiction was altogether new and unexplored. A title leaped out at me: Wall of Serpents by de Camp and Pratt. (I wasn't sure, then; the library got rid of the book behind my back.

The library is now a little better: They have public book auctions, some paperbacks, interlibrary loan, and a slightly larger collection. I want to reread Wall of Serpents, both for my own enjoyment and to refresh my memory. I loved that book! I guess I had never read anything that was nearly as much fun. I didn't know anything could be! I read everything by de Camp that I could get my hands on, including some of his non-fiction. Not everything -- the Warsaw Library doesn't have much, and only a relatively new interlibrary loan policy.

After exhausting the card file for de Camp and then for Pratt, I read everything else from Aldiss to Zelazny. I didn't and still don't enjoy them all equally. I wouldn't presume to say what I think is good. I do know it has been an continues to be an extremely enlightening experience. Sprague de Camp was a happy introduction to whole new worlds of wonder.

Thank you, Mr. de Camp!