

An A.E. Van Vocht Special



Lan's Lantern 37

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Dedication

To Maia, as usual,
and
To that creative and
inventive author,
A.E. Van Vogt.

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A. E. Van Vogt: One of My Favorite Writers

by Lan

"I would like to present to you, A. E. E. Van Vogt, one of my favorite authors."

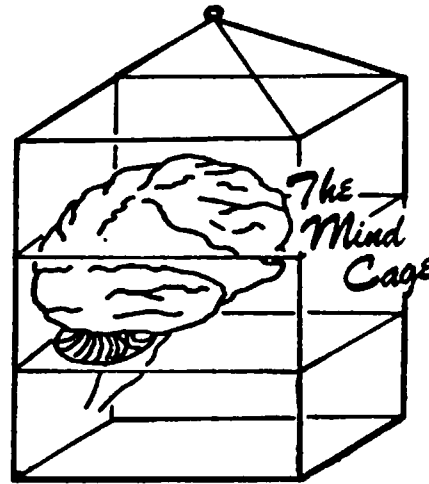
That was how I introduced Van Vogt at the banquet when he was the Guest of Honor at CONCLAVE IV. I had talked about the influence he had on me with his writing, the pleasure he gave me with his intricate plots, trying to figure things out before the inevitable explanation near the end of the story. In one particular instance, to relax a little before plunging once again into my studies in preparation for my Masters Degree exams, I picked up his novel One Against Eternity (also known as The Weapon Makers). I was three-fourths of the way through it before I realized it, and the time was well past midnight. I stayed up to finish it, and had a good 5 hours sleep before resuming my studies. I did not begrudge the time I spent reading the novel; it had given me a break I needed, and I remembered thinking that I would have to read more of this author's books AFTER the exams were over.

I kept my introduction of Van Vogt short, since people were there to hear him, not me. But I had many other memories of his stories, and of conversations about his work with other readers.

One of the first discussions I had was with my friend Ken Adams. We were both in seventh or eighth grade at the time. The short story was "Defense", and I was not as adept a reader then as I later became. Ken was good. I was confused by that two page short-short. We went over it in detail--the machinery triggered into motion and initiating defensive action against... what?

"Here," Ken pointed out, "earthmen going to the moon, and Earth being blown up behind them." I then nodded in understanding, and thanked him. I remembered that, as I read the other stories in Destination: Universe, and began to see that I could not just speed-read through the stories. There were too many clues placed along the way that clarified the story, and, if I didn't pay attention, I would end up hopelessly confused.

I fell in love with Slan the first time I read it, and The Weapon Shops of Isher, the confusing World of Null-A, The Mind



Cage, The Voyage of the Space Beagle, and others. In high school, I had my second interesting conversation about Van Vogt's writing, with Tim Nowinski (which he relates in his article on page 6). The next one was with Tim again after he finished The Empire of the Atom, and we looked at it in terms of Roman and Medieval history, the mutation Clane representing Claudius with all the civil unrest after the death of Augustus in Rome, and the wonderful court intrigues of the Italian Renaissance (as indicated by the jacket blurb).

In college, I met Marek who also read SF, and asked me how I liked The Voyage of the Space Beagle. I started to comment about the Nexialist holistic philosophy and holistic learning, and we bantered the ideas back and forth between us, much to the consternation of those around us, who had no idea what we were talking about. I commented on how well Van vogt connected the individual stories that made up The Voyage of the Space Beagle, making changes within the stories to make a more cohesive whole, including the overriding character, Elliot Grovsnor, the only Nexialist on board the ship. Marek noted that in spite of the re-write and introduction of the new material, the novel was still episodic, unlike the finer integration of short stories in The Weapon Shops of Isher. Unfortunately, I was too swamped with my school work to read the novel so we could discuss it effectively. (I did read it later--see below.)

Soon after I started teaching at Cranbrook Kingswood, I found out that one of the graduates enjoyed SF, and was still in touch with the physics teacher Frank Norton. The next time Brian Forbes dropped by to visit, Frank made sure we made contact. Brian talked about his first meeting with various authors like Harlan Ellison, Forrey Ackerman, and others, but he was particularly pleased to meet Van Vogt.

Van was his favorite author, and we talked about his writing, his dream technique for acquiring ideas (waking up every ninety minutes to record his dreams), and his method of plotting scenes in 800 word segments. "You know about that?" Brian asked me.

"Yes," I answered. "I read all the articles I have about him, and his autobiography. His ideas and creativity are amazing." We both agreed on that.

On another visit, shortly after Alien had come out, Brian related Van's reaction.

"We were invited to a screening of the movie, just prior to its release to the theatres. When he came out of the theatre he was livid. I had never seen him so angry. He talked to Forrey, his agent, and they got a lawyer. Scenes had been lifted directly out of one of his short stories, "Discord in Scarlet," and put into Alien, and no one had contacted him or Forrey about it."

Dan O'Bannon was very apologetic about what had happened, but the apparent truth was that the idea for the film came from him and Ron Sushett, though he might have been inspired by the story which he read years earlier and had forgotten. I believe the case was settled out of court, or if it had gone to court, the charge was not contested.

At a MINICON, when I first started to attend that convention, I met Donald Wandrei through my friend John Benson and his friend Don Herronn. We went to Wandrei's house in St. Paul, and had a very long and pleasant chat about SF and writing. Don said that there were a few stories that were written which he considered "universal" stories, timeless stories that touched deep inside a person. "The Enchanted Village" by A. E. Van Vogt was one of those stories. I had to agree. "The Enchanted Village" was a story of survival, where sacrifices had to be made for both the human and the village to survive. The solu-

tion may not have been to the human's full advantage, it was the only satisfactory one. "The Enchanted Village" remains one of my most favorite stories to date.

After Van's GoH appearance at CONCLAVE, I read little of his stuff, more because so much else was coming out than lack of interest. Most recently, since I was putting this Special Issue together, I decided to follow up on something that had been nagging at me since my discussion about Van Vogt's fix-up novels with Marek back in college so many years ago. The actual incident which precipitated this happened when I read Quest for the Future, after reading "Far Centaurus," "Film Library" and "The Search." The three short stories had been incorporated into the fix-up novel with a lot of new material in such a way that it was difficult to see where the details of the rewrite differed from the originals. I mean there were obvious differences--name changes, a few devices were different, and so on--but there was a better and very cohesive story.

Spurred on by this revelation, and Marek's observation in the past, I read a novelette and a novella: "The Great Engine" and "The Changeling." Both of these were incorporated into The Beast as a fix-up novel, which also included the title short story. To see how Van Vogt put such a novel together, I carefully read the novel, The Beast.

The study was fascinating. As with Quest for the Future, Van Vogt did more than just change names and smooth transitions among the three pieces. Because of his 800-word-scene method of writing, it was easy for him to intertwine the storylines, something he could not do with the stories of The Voyage of the Space Beagle because of the nature of the monsters attacking the ship, or in natural sequence of events in the stories comprising Empire of the Atom. Van Vogt also changed a few scenes of the original stories of The Beast to make them flow more smoothly, and changed motives to be more realistic in terms of the story.

For example, Lesley Craig of "The Changeling" became Jim Pendrake of "The Great Engine." The leg that Pendrake lost in a plane accident in China during World War II in "Changeling" instead was an arm, to fit in with the happenings of "Engine." The motivation for separation between Eleanor and Jim Pendrake was originally

that he was not a whole man (missing the arm), and Eleanor could not bear living with and loving a man who was not whole. That was changed--Eleanor felt betrayed that he did not write to tell her first, that he was afraid to tell her what had happened, and it was his perception she couldn't love a cripple. The underlying reason was that he couldn't accept himself as a cripple, let alone think that a woman could still love him even though he was not a whole person. With these and other changes, Van Vogt put together a story greater than its parts.

I read The Beast in amazement, noting how well Van Vogt had integrated the storylines, motivations, complex plots and characters.

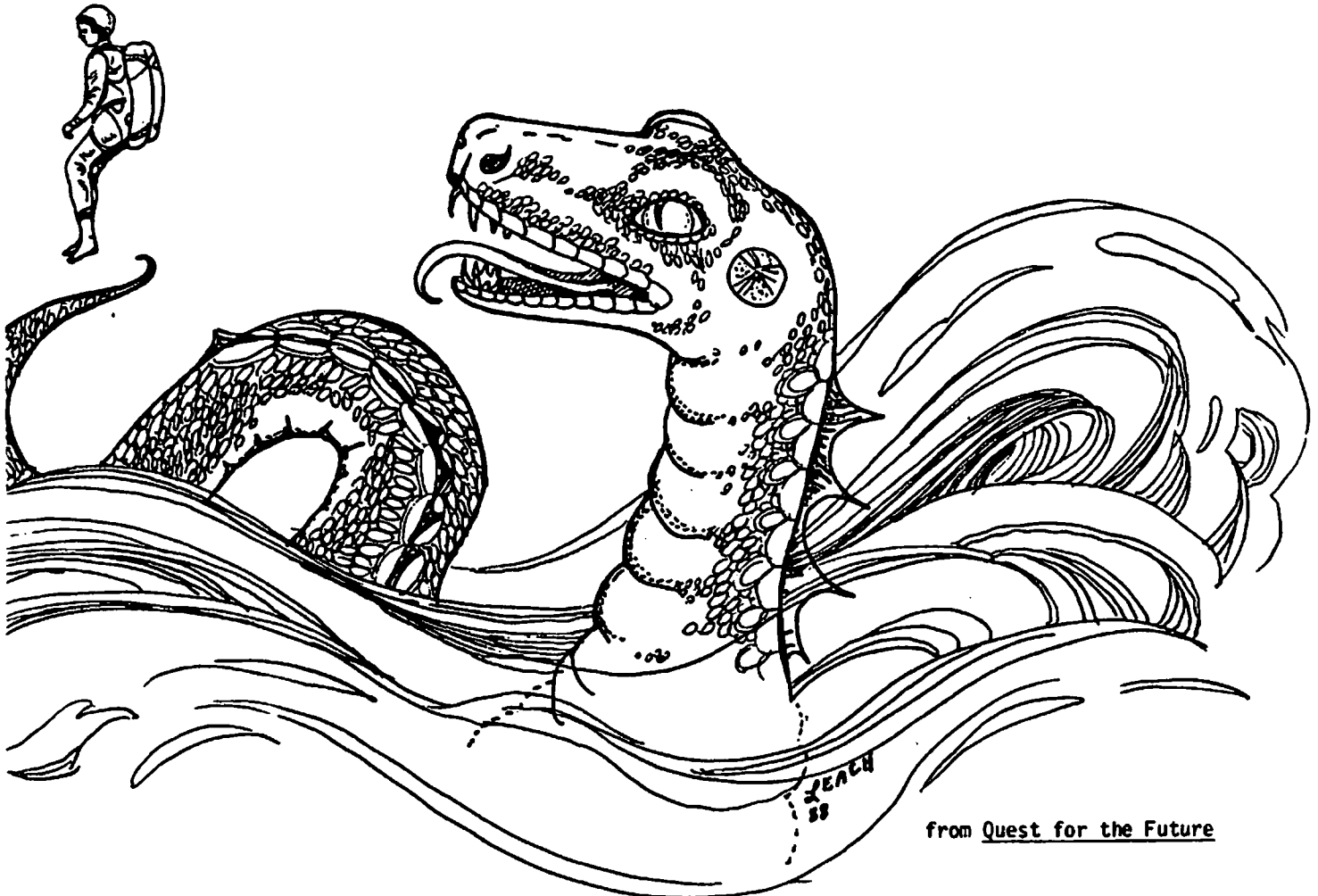
He did similar things with "The Seesaw" and "The Weapon Shop," adding new material to integrate with the two storylines, and intertwining the plots to make a seamless whole, justifying Marek's assessment of the novel so many years previously. When I read it recently, I found myself pulled along through the story at a breathless pace, marveling at the wonders unfolding.

And I realized once again why I considered Van Vogt one of my favorite authors: his ideas are mind-expanding, he's fun to read, and he has been one of the few writers who continually excites my sense of wonder!

In This Issue

Several people sent reminiscences and thank yous for this issue. Many remember the first Van Vogt story they read and how much they enjoyed it. I did a lot of reading myself to put together the biography and bibliography of Van Vogt, and I prevailed upon my good friends Larry and Tim Nowinski to write something. They borrowed books from my extensive collection of his works, and I was extremely pleased with the results. I think they were too.

Enjoy this one, and look forward to the upcoming issues: a Special Issue on Fritz Leiber, and in LL #39, articles about writing, doing research, my conreports and ramblings, and another Africa trip report from Mike Resnick, among other things. [*]



from Quest for the Future

A. E. Van Vogt

by Poul Anderson

It is a great loss to the whole science fiction community that A. E. Van Vogt has written so little to so many years. We old-timers would dearly love to be taken away again on one of his wild, wonderful, magical voyages toward the infinite. At least we still have those stories to re-read. As far as I know, younger generations seldom or never do. That is a sad deprivation for them, and something ought to be done about it.

Those few early years after John Campbell hit his editorial stride really were the Golden Age. The field has much expanded since then, and many fine writers have worked in it, but we will never see another such concentration of brilliance. In part, no doubt, this was simply the effect of newness, green pastures. For the first

time, great themes were being thoroughly explored or being brought into existence ab initio. However, the fact remains that this was done by certain giants who flourished in the pages of Astounding, people such as Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, Lester del Rey, Henry Kuttner, Fritz Leiber--and A.E. Van Vogt.

In color, atmosphere, originality, and sheer storytelling suspense, his work was never surpassed and hardly ever equalled. Slan, The Weapon Makers, World of Null-A, "Black Destroyer," "Asylum," the Beagle stories, the Rull-Ezwal stories--the list is long, and each title evokes memories of marvels that were uniquely his own.

Please com back, Van!

Poul Anderson|*|

Far Ago Long Away

by J. E. Oestreicher

I went out to look for a piece of the past
Far ago was so good, I remember it was.
A fairy story, an amateur tale:
Reality filtered by Time's filmy veil.

If I did get back to that place and when
It would not be the time where I'd already been
I abandon this dream, but too late for me:
I've been flung into chronosymmetry.

Bereft in old time's promised chasms
I stretch for the long away star
But ago is all lie and phantasms
Shadows of then, passed too far.

Lost in time like Van Vogt pandulums
I'm trapped in the swim swam swum
Always did doing will do, until
The creatures of Chaos had have their fill.

O anyhow all that I wanted
Was too far ago too long away.
The vision was shattered and haunted:
So far ago
so long away.

J.E. Oestreicher|*|

Slan and Van and Lan and I

by Timothy Nowinski

"Give me something else interesting to read," I had asked George, whom you all know as Lan. I trusted his judgement; he had never loaned me a book that didn't grab me, that I lost interest in after a few pages. Since I had exhausted his (and various libraries') supplies of Heinlein and Asimov, he thought for a minute and said that he would have something for me the next day.

He gave me Slan.

It was a used paperback, a dog-eared copy of the novel by A. E. Van Vogt, an author I had only heard about. My branch of the Warren Public Library had a few things by him (The Wizard of Linn, The World of Null-A, The Weapon Shops of Isher), but I was reluctant to try his work without some sort of recommendation. George/Lan said with a smile that I might not get my homework done that night if I started reading it. I laughed, and dug in.

He was right. I was glad that I didn't have to prepare for a test.

He had a couple more novels by Van Vogt for me the next day, figuring that I would have indeed finished the novel. We talked about the book, and he asked if I could see any literary allusions in it. I was a little puzzled, since I was not used to thinking critically, like a student of English literature, and I heard the word differently.

"Illusions?" I asked.

He clarified his question, and pointed out that Jommy Cross, the central character of Slan, was a Christ figure. He even had the same initials: J.C., Jesus Christ, Jommy Cross. His father was a scientist, an inventor, as was Joseph a carpenter. Jommy's mother was a good woman who had borne the savior of the slans. He spent his years growing up in solitude, developing his powers. And the "council" had how many members?

I looked blankly, and he opened the book to the pages where the number was listed: "Seven present and five missing: 12. "Just like the 12 Apostles, who were going to help him forge an alliance be-

tween the slans and tendrilless slans."

He added, "You can't take it too far. The parallels break down after that, but Van Vogt did a good job with the references and all."

I thought for a minute. "Jommy is also isolated and goes through sufferings before finding his true role. Just Jesus did. He even went through a 'baptism' with his plunges into the various rivers. And he was persecuted, suffered at the hands of his enemy,..."

Lan smiled and nodded. "But he wasn't crucified. And Kathleen Layton was the slan who was killed, and rose from the dead."

This was exciting, since I had never looked into a book quite that way before. I wondered if the next few I was going to read would have the same depth. Lan said that they did, but I might not see the allusions until after I had read some other literature first.

"But I think you will find, as I did, that little things about Van Vogt's writing will nag at you when you are reading something else, and you'll go back and re-read one of his stories, and see the parallels."

I looked at the books in my hands, the new ones Lan had given me: The Voyage of the Space Beagle, Away and Beyond, Destination: Universe, The Weapon Shops of Isher, One Against Eternity. That night I started the short stories in Destination: Universe, while my brother read Slan.

I managed to get some homework done; Larry didn't. But he finished the book. And he barely passed his math test the next day.

We both thanked Lan, and now thank Van Vogt, for the reading. I think I will take this opportunity once again to reacquaint myself with the ideas, adventures, and intrigue that had made Van Vogt so interesting to read.

I'll start again with Slan. And hope that I won't be late for work tomorrow.

Timothy Nowinski
December, 1990 |*|

A Bibliography of A. E. Van Vogt

Compiled by Lan

The listings in this bibliography are alphabetical by title, and alternate titles (of the ones I know) are included. I have tried to find and give the copyright and first publication for each story, and for the shorter works the collection(s) of Van Vogt in which they appear. The stories comprising the "fix-up" novels are cited, and for this I am indebted to A. E. Van Vogt's autobiography, Reflections of A. E. Van Vogt (Fictioneer Books, Ltd. Lakemont, Georgia: 1975). Much of this comes from our card file, for which Maia is responsible for bringing up to date several years ago. (We both work to maintain it now.)

- "All the Loving Androids" More Than Superhuman 1971.
- "All We Have on This Planet" 1976, The Best of A. E. Van Vogt.
- Anarchistic Colossus, The. 1977, Ace.
- "Assassins de la Terre, Les" in Après, Nuetzel, ed. 1970.
- "Asylum" Astounding May 1942; Away and Beyond.
- "Automaton" Other Worlds Sept 1950, The Far Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, and The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.
- Away and Beyond. Pellegrini & Cudahy 1952; Berkeley 1963.
- "Barbarian, The" Astounding Dec 1947; The Book of Van Vogt.
- Battle of Forever, The. 1971, Ace, Author's Co-op 1978.
- Beast, The. Astounding Nov 1943; Doubleday/SFBC 1963, MacFadden 1968. (Fix-up novel: "The Great Engine," "The Changeling," the magazine version of "The Beast" and new material.)
- "Being an Examination of Ponsian and Holmesian Secret Deductive Systems" The Best of A.E. Van Vogt, 1976.
- Best of A.E. Van Vogt, The. 1976, Pocketbooks.
- Best of A.E. Van Vogt, The. 1974, Sphere.
- "Black Destroyer" Astounding July 1939.
- Blal, The. 1976, Zebra
- Book of Ptath, The. (aka Two Hundred Million AD), Unknown Worlds Oct 1943, Fantasy Press 1947, Paperback Library 1971.
- Book of Van Vogt, The. 1972, DAW.
- "Can of Paint, A" Astounding Sep 1944; Destination: Universe.
- "Cataaaaa, The" Fantasy Book #1 1947; The Far Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.
- "Centaurus II" Astounding July 1947.
- Changeling, The. Astounding Apr 1944; MacFadden 1969.
- "Chevrolet, I Love You" Spectrum 1970.
- "Child of the Gods" Astounding Aug 1946.
- Children of Tomorrow. 1970, Ace
- "Chronicler, The" (aka "Siege of the Unseen"), Astounding Oct-Nov 1946; M33 in Andromeda.
- COMPUTERWORLD. 1983, DAW.
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- "Confession, The" The Book of Van Vogt 1972.
- "Cooperate--Or Else" Astounding Apr 1942.
- Cosmic Encounter. 1980, Doubleday.
- Darkness on Diamondia, The. 1972, Ace.
- "Dear Pen Pal" Arkham Sampler Winter 1949; Destination: Universe.
- "Defense" Avon Fantasy Reader #4 1947, Destination: Universe.
- Destination: Universe. Pelligrini & Cudahy 1952; Berkeley, 1952.
- "Discord in Scarlet" Astounding Dec 1939; M33 in Andromeda.
- "Don't Hold Your Breath" Savingworlds 1973, The Best of A.E. Van Vogt.
- "Dormant" Startling Stories Nov 1948; Destination: Universe.
- "Dream of the Sorceress, The" Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn (Bob Asprin, ed.), 1980.
- Earth Factor X. (aka The Secret Galactics), 1974, DAW.
- "Earth Killers, The" Super Science Stories Apr 1949; The Far Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, The Twisted Men.
- Earth's Last Fortress (aka Recruiting Station 1942, and Masters of Time 1967). Astounding, March 1942 (as Recruiting Station); Ace 1960.
- Empire of the Atom. Shasta/SFBC 1956, MacFadden 1966. (A fix-up novel: "A Son Is Born," "Child



of the Gods," "Hand of the Gods," "Home of the Gods," "The Barbarian" and new material.)
 "Enchanted Village" Other Worlds July 1950.
Science Fiction Monsters, Destination: Universe, The Blal.
 "Enemy of the Silkies" If Oct 1967.
 "Ersatz Eternal" The Book of Van Vogt 1972.
 "Expendables, The" If Sept 1963; M33 in Andromeda, The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.
 "Far Centaurus" Astounding Jan 1944; Destination: Universe.
Far-Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, The. Ace, 1968.
 "Femworld" 1977, Galaxy.
 "Film Library" Astounding July 1946; Away and Beyond.
 "Final Command" Astounding Nov 1949, Science Fiction Monsters, The Blal.
 "Final Comment" The Best of A.E. Van Vogt 1976.
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 "First Rull, The" 1978, Pendulum.
 "Footprint Farm" 1978, Pendulum
 "Fulfillment" New Tales of Space and Time 1951, The Far-Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.
Future Glitter. 1973, Ace
 "Future Perfect" Vertex Magazine Aug 1973; The Best of A.E. Van Vogt.
 "Ghost, The" Unknown Worlds Aug 1943; Out of the Unknown.
 "Great Engine, The" Astounding July 1943; Away and Beyond.
 "Great Judge, The" Fantasy Book #3 1948, Away and Beyond.
 "Green Forest, The" Astounding June 1949.
Gryb, The. 1976, Zebra.
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 "Harmonizer, The" Astounding Nov 1944; Away and Beyond.
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 "Heir Unapparent" Astounding June 1945; M33 in Andromeda.
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 "Humans, Go Home" Galaxy Sept 1969, More Than Superhuman, The Gryb.
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 "Laugh, Clone, Laugh" (with Forrest J. Ackerman). The Science Fiction Worlds of Forrest Ackerman 1969, More Than Superhuman.
 "Launch of Apollo XVII, The" 1978, Pendulum.
 "Letter from the Stars" (aka "Dear Pen Pal") 1949, Wollheim: The Earth in Peril 1957.
 "Living with Jane" 1978, Pendulum.
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 "M33 in Andromeda" Astounding 1943, M33 in Andromeda.
 "Male Condition, The" 1978, Pendulum.
Man With a Thousand Names, The. 1974, DAW.
Masters of Time. Fantasy Press 1950; (aka Recruiting Station 1942, and Earth's Last Fortress 1960), MacFadden 1967. (A fix-up novel consisting of "Recruiting Station" and "The Changeling").
Mind Cage, The. 1957, Simon & Schuster.
Mission: Interplanetary. (aka The Voyage of the Space Beagle 1950). Signet 1952.
Mission to the Stars. (aka The Mixed Men 1952). Berkeley 1977.
 "Mixed Men, The" Astounding Jan 1945; The Mixed Men.
Mixed Men, The. Gnome/SFBC 1952. (A fix-up novel: "Concealment," "The Storm," the magazine version of "The Mixed Men" and new material which later separately was titled "Lost: Fifty Suns").
 "Monster, The" (aka "Resurrection") Astounding Aug 1948 (as "Resurrection"), Destination: Universe. More Than Superhuman. Dell 1971.
 "Non-Aristotelian Detective, The" 1978, Pendulum.
 "Not Only Dead Men" Astounding Nov 1942; Science Fiction Monsters, and The Blal.
 "Not the First" Astounding Apr 1941; The Far-Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, and The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.
Null A Three. DAW 1985.
Null-A Worlds of A.E. van Vogt, The. by H. L. Drake; Chris Drumm Booklet #32, 1989. (Chris Drumm Books, PO Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226)
One Against Eternity. (aka The Weapon Maker). 1952, Ace 1955.
Out of the Unknown. with E. Mayne Hull. Fantasy Publishing 1948. Powell 1969.
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by E. Mayne Hull: "Competition," "The Debt," "The Contract," "Bankruptcy Proceedings," and "Enter the Professor.")

Players of Null-A, The. (revised as The World of Null A) Astounding Oct 1948-Jan 1949; Berkeley 1974.

"Problem Professor, The" (aka "Project Spaceship" 1949), The Proxy Intelligence and Other Mind Benders, and The Gryb.

"Process" F&SF Dec 1950; The Far-Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.

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"Prologue to Freedom" Worlds of IF Fall 1986.

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"Proxy Intelligence, The" If Oct 1968; The Proxy Intelligence and Other Mind Benders, and The Best of A.E. Van Vogt.

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"Purpose, The" Astounding May 1945; The Far-Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt, and The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.

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"Reflected Men, The" Galaxy Feb 1971; More Than Superhuman and The Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt.

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A. E. Van Vogt: A Chronology

by Robert Sabella

- 1912 Alfred Elton Van Vogt is born April 26 in Winnipeg, Canada
- 1939 First science fiction story "Black Destroyer" appears in July Astounding
- 1940 Slan serialized in September-December Astounding
- 1942 "The Weapon Shop" appears in December Astounding
- 1945 World of Null-A begins serialization in August Astounding
- 1946 Guest of Honor at Los Angeles World Science Fiction Convention (PACIFICON)
- 1947 A.E. Van Vogt voted "Most Popular Science Fiction Writer" in Beowulf Poll
- 1951 The Weapon Shops of Isher published
- 1969 The Silkie published

Robert Sabella[*]

Slan

by Nancy Hayes

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A. E. Van Vogt's 50-year career in science fiction commenced with the publication of "Black Destroyed" in John W. Campbell's Astounding Stories magazine. Between 1939 and 1947 Campbell published 35 of his stories, many of which were expanded into novels.

Van Vogt's work is intricate, the plots complicated and narrated with conviction. The nature of reality is interpreted through protagonists of strong intentionality, usually a person with superior mental and physical powers, inherent or the result of metaphysical training. The action proceeds against some futuristic, hard-science backdrop.

His first novel, a classic of SF literature, is Slan, published in 1940.

Jommy Cross is a Slan, member of a mutant race that emerged from homo sapiens, nature's reaction to the stresses of human civilization. The Slans have superior intelligence, physical strength, and telepathic ability that estranges them from their forebears. The Slans were ruthlessly driven into hiding or destroyed by the jealousy of humans, who also believed them responsible for the many abnormal births that occurred during the period of accelerated evolution. The Slans were accused of creating themselves.

In Cross' time, the Slans have apparently disappeared from the scene, but the totalitarian world government anticipates their reappearance with trepidation, the general population with hysteria. Individual Slans are shot on sight. Cross' deceased father had discovered the secret of harnessing energy, changing it in aspect, in form, with a device the size of a handgun. Jommy holds the invention in trust in a world fraught with intrigue.

When a boy, Jommy Cross' mother is exposed as a Slan and murdered; he grows up with an antagonistic human woman in the slums. He learns of the broad-based organization of modified, non-telepathic Slans headquartered on Mars, in a time when humans have not yet developed interplanetary space travel. These Slans hate the original Slans. Cross continues to search for his people, encountering a Slan girl, a prisoner who escaped from the seat of government. Cross resolves to confront the

world dictator, and is successful in that quest (!), only to find that the dictator is a true Slan, aware of his natural origin, that the non-telepathic Slans were created to evade human detection (but denied knowledge of their origin), and that the Slans rule the human race. He is reunited with the Slan girl, who, it is disclosed, is the dictator's daughter.

The Slans, then, now face a tumultuous future, during which the modified Slans will become true Slans after a few generations, as the human race approaches extinction.

This, and many of Van Vogt's later works, mix super-science, metaphysics, and political intrigue. He is one of the writers who recovered the genre from that era in which technology was portrayed as a panacea, in which politics, the individual, and characterization were de-emphasized: pulp SF.

In Van Vogt's worlds, life is complex, with persons of different and probably conflicting purposes convening in a politically-defined high-tech arena that is governed by rules that may or may not be inimical to their plans. Mystery pervades the scene, human and cosmic. A superbeing enters....

The stories are painted in broad strokes--we don't often get too much detail on exactly what the philosophies are that motivate the participants (but would we if we were in the situation?). The protagonist stays afloat in crisis after crisis. Actions are based on logic, and via logic the players attempt to control events. A reader who expects episodic cohesion might logically decide that the series of experiences Jommy Cross (for example) has is impossible.

Perhaps the appeal of Slan (and Van Vogt's other works) is that, although the characters grapple with events of colossal import, the tale can be moved from macrocosm to microcosm; the reader might see the manipulation pervasive in everyday life, recognize the possibility of individual enhancement, the acquisition of personal power/control, and acknowledge the mystery (to some frightening, to others wondrous) that new science, and new society, carries.

Nancy Hayes|*|

Plot Complications and Intrigue in Selected Novels of A. E. Van Vogt

by Timothy Nowinski

[Van Vogt] is much given to convoluted and tangled story lines--his natural imaginative fertility is supplemented by the technique of binding several distinct short pieces into what he calls "fix-up" novels--and these usually require resolutions which are the literary analogues of Alexander's cutting of the Gordian knot. Critics of his work charge him with failing to make sense in deploying his complex and disparate materials, but enthusiasts love the grandiosity of his schemes and the panache of his imaginative flourishes.

Brian Stableford
Gunn: The New Encyclopedia of
Science Fiction, p.486

A. E. Van Vogt read mysteries as a boy, which had a profound influence on his writing. Many of his novels are problem-solving gambits wherein the protagonist is pitted against superior forces and overwhelming odds. The hero is often hampered by being physically weak, lacking in knowledge, or having amnesia. When Van Vogt throws in time travel, the plot twists are even more confusing. Additional complications result when he intertwines the stories of several short stories to make a "fix-up" novel.

Still, most of the time Van Vogt succeeds in bringing the novel to a satisfying close. There may be a few loose ends here and there, but think how often happenings in real life are fully resolved.

I want to examine a few of Van Vogt's novels in terms of their plots, complications, twists and intrigues, and finally the success of the resolutions.

Medron is Lord Leader of the Linn Empire. His wife Lydia wants her son Tews to succeed him. He favors his son Creg by his first marriage. Creg and Tania have several children, but Jerrin shows the most promise. The son Clane is a mutation who

should have been killed at birth, but is allowed to live and is taught to be a scholar, and priest of the atom gods.

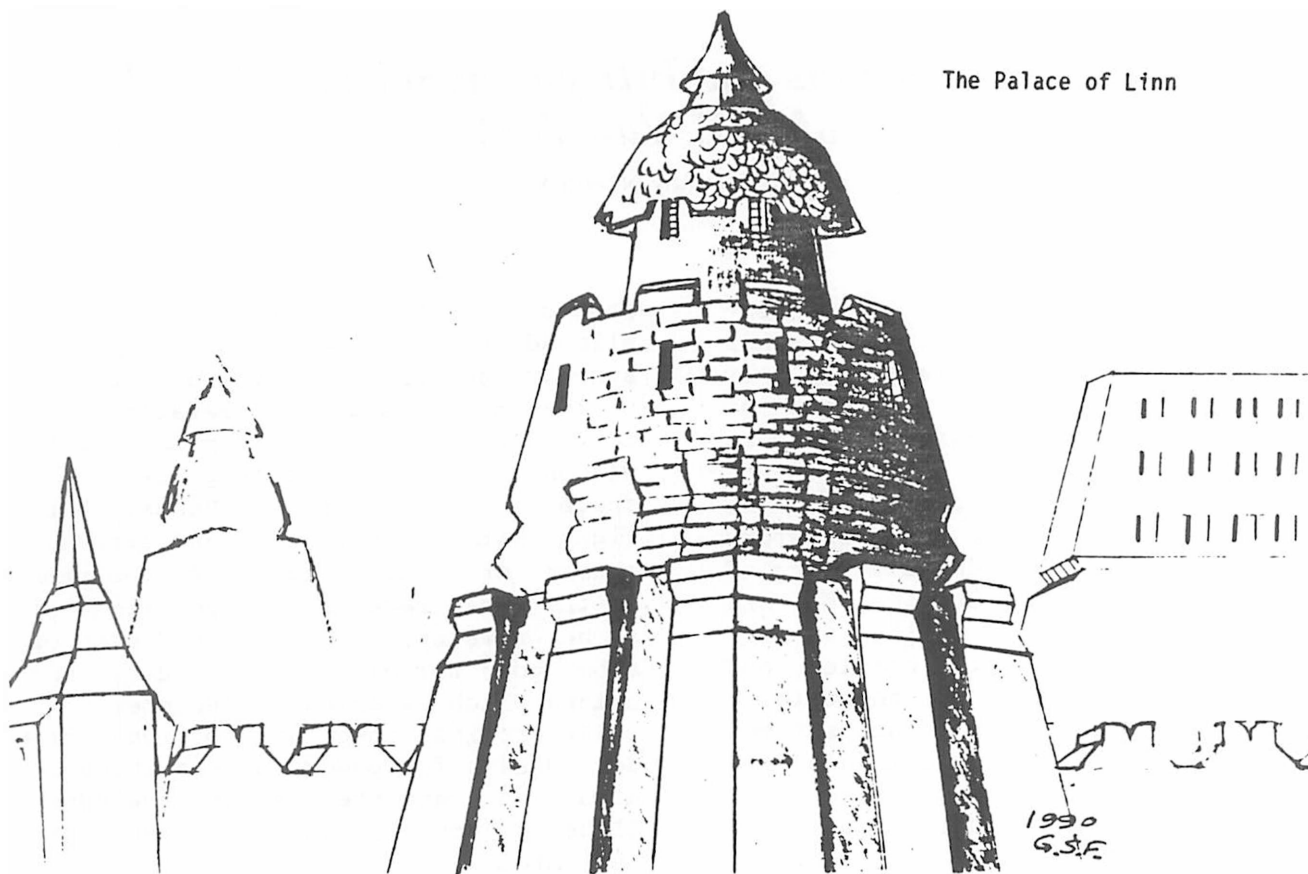
The Empire is a conglomeration of atomic powered machines and primitive battle weaponry. Men are transported by large space ships to Mars and Venus, but they fight with swords, bows and arrows. The attack of an alien race left the remnants of the human race in this position. Clane, as he grows up, searches the ruins of the atom gods for clues, knowledge, and machines which he tries to decipher.

Intertwine these with motives for murder, desire for power, superstition of the atom gods, and the unknown knowledge that Clane discovers, and you have Empire of the Atom.

The dustjacket on Empire of the Atom describes the history of the Dynasty of Linn as being patterned after the Italian Renaissance. From another point of view, one could make an argument for the pattern to follow the period of Roman history at the end of the Golden Age of Augustus and the warring factions that vied for power afterwards to the time of Claudius. Surely one can see in either case that Lydia, the wife of the Great Medron, Lord Leader of Linn, plotted, poisoned and arranged assassinations behind the back of her husband just like the wives of the leaders in those periods of history.

However, I do see Clane the mutation, as the crippled and stuttering Claudius, whose mother Octavia schemed to put her beloved son Caligula into power. Lydia plotted to put her son Tews in the Lord Leader position, but Creg, her stepson, stood in the way. She arranged for him to be defeated on Mars during the wars there, but a brilliant strategy by Clane saved him. Still, Creg was assassinated by a poisoned arrow. In other ways she is opposed by Clane who, despite his hunchback deformity and paralysis when confronted with strangers, manages to show his brilliance as a strategist. Eventually, he is able to overcome many of his shortcomings.

The Palace of Linn



Clane, in his thirst for knowledge, uncovers much of the science that brought about the destruction of the former, powerful civilization on Earth. From all parts of the Empire of Linn, from Venus and Mars, he collects the artifacts of the gods, gathering them either at his estate, or at the temple of Raheinl (a little dig at Heinlein there, I believe), actually an atomic power plant. Thus he complicates his life by learning too much, and hoping to be able to use his knowledge wisely.

So, a mutation who should have been killed at birth, survives assassination attempts and political upheaval, and lives to acquire power. Although he stays in the background, he manages to help Cleg win on Mars, Tews on Venus, and balance the forces of power that his grandmother Lydia tries to wield with her machinations.

All this is upset with the coming of Czinczar, the barbarian from Europa. He takes over the citadel of Linn, and manages to defeat most of the Linnan army in two weeks. However, Clane manages to defeat Czinczar when he shows how fruitless attacks would be against his sphere of power (a remnant from the old order). He then becomes his second in command.

A further complication arises here, which also explains Czinczar's readiness

to surrender to Clane. His men found an alien body frozen on Europa. A few months before Czinczar and his barbarian horde invaded Linn, they found another, dead in a spacesuit on an asteroid. Czinczar wanted to become the Protector of the Solar System, but gave the title to Clane, who was his obvious intellectual superior.

The plot line dangling from The Empire of the Atom is picked up in the sequel, The Wizard of Linn. Clane's brother Jerrin is Lord Leader, and the Riss attack. The Riss were the aliens who destroyed human civilization before. Clane's plans to defeat the Riss and take over their ship are successful, even though he has lost the sphere of power which helped him defeat Czinczar. He is sure that Czinczar and his men stole it, but Czinczar denies it.

Jerrin is dead, poisoned by his wife, so that her teenage son Calaj, whom she could control, would become Lord Leader. Clane visits Calaj, and has him sign some documents, which actually insure the survival of the Linnan people and human race. Clane expects a full attack from the Riss, but Calaj, his mother Lilidel, and the court think everything is fine. Along with Czinczar and his barbarians, Clane's personal guard, and the Riss ship, Clane departs into space to find out where the

Riss are, and try to come to terms with them. While he is gone, the Riss attack.

Before they leave Earth, and on the journey, Clane manages to decipher the purposes of most of the machines on the Riss ship. They encounter human settlements, one which has telepathic and teleportative powers. Clane then realizes that the Riss communicate telepathically. Once he finds this out, he manages to arrange an uneasy peace with the Riss on their home planet.

The situation is bad on earth when he arrives, but Clane manages to convince the Riss to leave, with a heavy-handed solution--stomping their population centers flat...literally. The ending is satisfying in that there is peace in the realm among previously warring factions, and with the Riss.

These two novels show complications that were mostly court- and politically-induced. More were introduced because of the knowledge that Clane had and others didn't. As the mutation underdog, he is cheered on by the reader, and the anticipation of what he is going to pull out of the hat-from-the-past adds to the tension and enjoyment of the story.

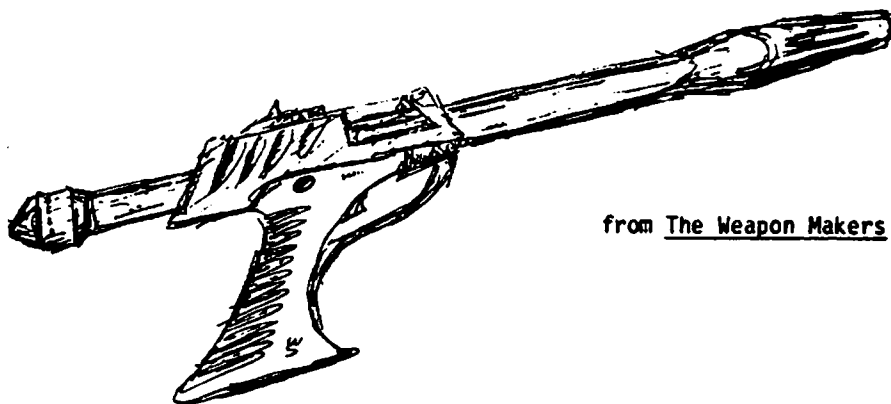
In the two novels of the Weapon Shops series, the first is the more interesting, since Van Vogt took two stories and combined them with original material to produce The Weapon Shops of Isher. The main character in "The Seesaw," Chris McAllister, and the story is used as the frame for the novel. McAllister is a reporter from 1951 who steps into a Weapon Shop which appears from the future. He becomes the focus of time energy, and the balance of the Weapon Shop as it undulates through time. Thus McAllister sweeps through ever-widening passages in the past and future so his mass can balance the time shifts the weapon shop goes through. Eventually his destruction aids the formation of the universe.

The other story used here is "The Weapon Shop," whose main character, Fara Clark is used throughout the novel as a symbol of the common man. He loses his atomic motor repair shop because of his son's reckless spending. He takes out a loan against his business, and the opposition forecloses on the loan. Thus, Fara, a supporter of the Empress Innelda and her government, finds no recourse for the injustice that happened, and appeals to the Weapon Shop people to help him. They do, since the loan and the foreclosure on his repair business happened illegally.

Van Vogt also took Cayle Clark, Fara's son, and expands on his story. Cayle first dates Lucy Rall, the woman who works in the Weapon Shop that appeared in the village of Glay, setting up a conflict with his father. He travels to the Imperial City to get away from the "small town" boredom, and is monitored, unknown to him, by Lucy because he has a potential in luck that could be used by the Weapon Makers. Cayle loses most of his money playing cards with professional gamblers on the ship to Imperial City, even though his luck has always been good. He does meet with a drunk Colonel Medlon, who promises him a ranking position.

Cayle wins a lot on the Avenue of Luck, too much: he is taken out of the games and sent to the House of Pleasure. Lucy tries to follow, but loses him, and Cayle winds up on Mars, signs for a loan to get him back to Earth, which precipitates the loan problem with his father Fara.

To make things more complicated, Lucy who has become emotionally involved with Cayle, marries him on Earth when he gets his commission as a officer in Her Majesty's Army. Meanwhile he's also on Mars. And when he returns he meets himself as Lucy's husband. Confused? You should be. This is one of the time-twists Van Vogt sets up.



from The Weapon Makers

More characters are added. One is Robert Hedrock, who is a Weapon Maker, and, we find out, the person who started the Weapon Shops centuries in the past; he is Earth's only immortal. Another is the Empress Innelda Isher, who is trying to be her own person, but since she ascended the throne at a young age, she has had trouble convincing her advisors that she has grown up. Innelda is also trying to stamp out a lot of the corruption in her government, particularly among the military commanders who are selling commissions.

Innelda also wants to rid her empire of the Weapon Shops. She is waging a silent war against the Shops in Imperial City with a time-displacer, which seemingly is successful, but which Hedrock and the other Weapon Makers are trying to stop. There seems to be no point of bargaining. But Hedrock finds one, thanks to Lucy Rall and Cayle Clark.

Cayle, as Captain and under the direction of Empress Innelda, helped out in the experiment of the time-displacer. He volunteered to go into the building used to test the displacer, and go back in time. He did not return with the building, but for almost four months lived simultaneously with himself, helped to get back the money taken from his first self on the Avenue of Luck, invested it to make billions while his first self went to the House of Pleasure and to Mars, and finally marrying Lucy.

Hedrock confronts Empress Innelda Isher with this fact of paradox, and indicates that more of her officers/men could do the same thing. Cease operations now, or the Empire's future could be destroyed. Innelda agrees with the assessment, and stops the attack.

The plot and time twists here are mind-bending, but everything seems quite logical in the story itself. The only loser is the government of Isher and those aligned with it. Robert Hedrock, Cayle Clark, Lucy Rall, Fara Clark and his wife, all win, thanks to the Weapon Shops.

The sequel, The Weapon Makers, has many twists as well. When Hedrock becomes part of her staff as a representative of the Weapon Makers, he amuses the Empress Innelda by telling her that he has also come to marry her. Because he is a Weapon Maker, that sets up tension between them. Additional tension arises between Hedrock and the other Weapon Makers because he

seems to know a lot of things they don't, and have become distrustful of him.

Hedrock has little trouble accepting their distrust, since he does know a lot more about weapons and the Weapon Shops that they do, since he started the whole thing. Research he directed in centuries past was determined a dead end, after he had reaped the fruits of the research.

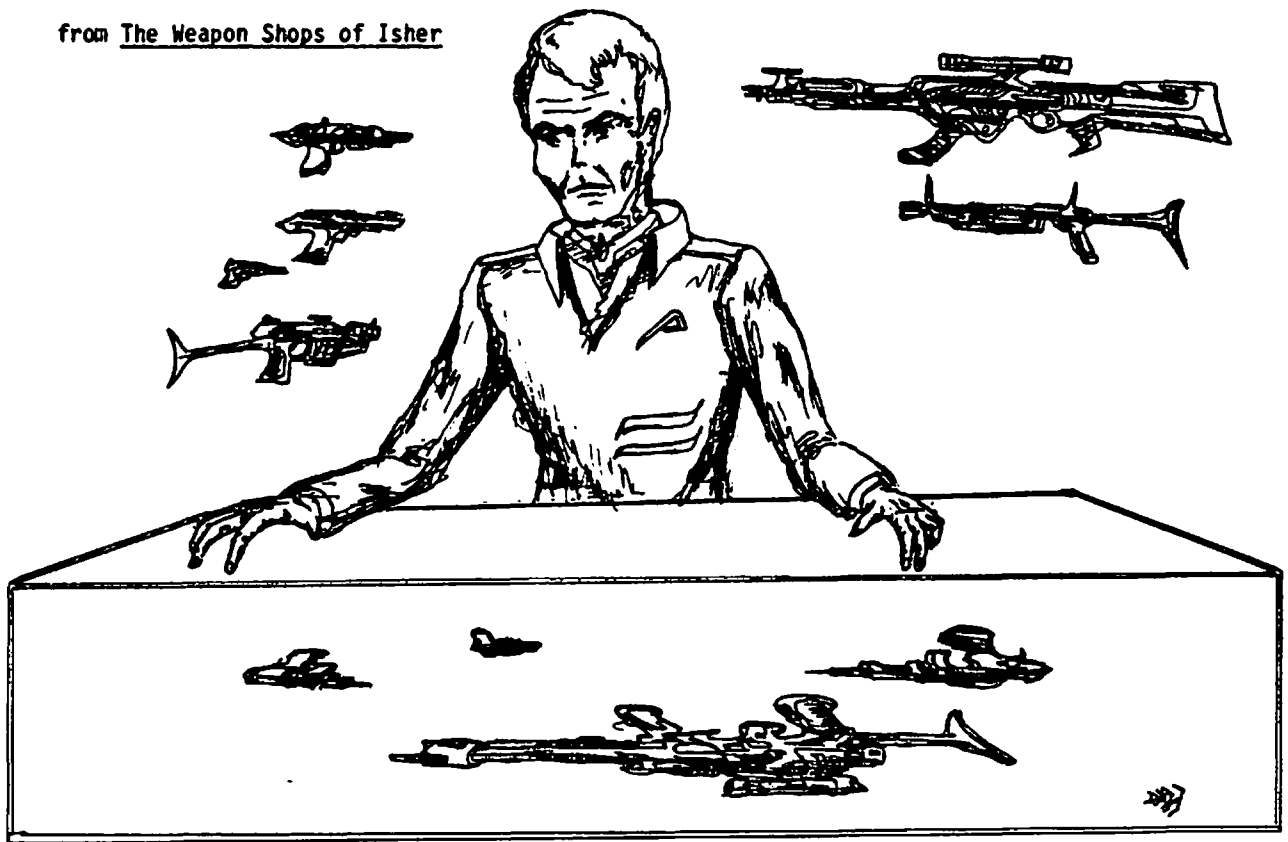
As before, the Empress has another scheme being carried out in secret. This time, she has two researchers, Derd Kershaw and Gil Neelan, invent the Infinity Drive, a faster-than-light method of transportation which would open up the galaxy. Gil's brother Dan has come to Earth from asteroid mining to find out what happened to his twin brother. The telepathic link had been severed, and Dan is convinced Gil is dead. With Dan's help Hedrock manages to found out where the ship is hidden, and takes control of one of its lifeboats from under the noses of Innelda's Imperial Guards.

And out in space he discovers an alien race which puts him through different tests before executing him. Since the aliens have no emotions, they are interested learning more about them, and the telepathic communication link among humans. They knew something had happened when Gil Neelan and Kershaw "died."

As part of the experiment, the spider-like aliens send Hedrock back to Earth to take care of things there. He begins to "clean house" in his business holdings, which he has had for centuries. He sees Innelda who realizes that Hedrock is indeed the one for her, marries him, and gets pregnant knowing that she will die in childbirth.

Against all Weapon Shop regulations, the Weapon Makers attack Isher Palace and kidnap Hedrock. He, of course, is prepared for the final confrontation between himself and the Weapon Makers. Hedrock berates them for not adhering to their philosophy of non-interference in governmental matters. As if by magic, all their weapons disappear, and the Weapon Makers Council members find themselves shackled to their chairs. Hedrock says he speaks for a secret organization, called The Watchers, which was set up when the Weapon Shops were organized, specifically to guard against what they had just done. He advises them all to resign, and have new elections for the council.

from The Weapon Shops of Isher



Then he disappears.

Hedrock is alone "The Watchers." He had set up his escape earlier using a technique by which he could travel through time and interface with a point of time by stopping it.

As soon as these things are finished, the aliens bring Hedrock back for other tests, and plan to kill him. He finds Kershaw and Gil Neelan near death but alive on the planet the spiders place him, in orbit around Alpha Centauri. Hedrock also finds out why he must die: he knows too much about the spiders--they are the last of their race, which is immortal. He insures his safety, and that of the human race with a simple trick: he imprints the story of the aliens on thousands of wooden disks and scattered them everywhere around the planet. Short of actually destroying the planet there is no way to prevent the information from being dispensed. The aliens admit defeat, and leave that part of space.

The wrap-up is somewhat disturbing, since Innelda dies. However, she does find out that Hedrock is immortal and also started the Isher line around the same time he established the Weapon Shops. Peter Cardon, former head of the Weapon Makers

Council, tells Hedrock of an alliance between the Isher government and the Weapon Makers, which Hedrock says not to accept. The two must remain separate.

Morton Cargill, the protagonist of The Universe Maker, is scheduled to die because he killed the female passenger in the car he was driving while intoxicated. The verdict for death, however, is not because of Marie Chanette's death, but that her descendants were traumatized from the accident, and the Intertime Society for Psychological Adjustments brought Cargill forward in time to be executed.

However, Cargill is "rescued" by Ann Reece, but escapes from her because she is withholding information from him. He is then captured by the Planiacs, a segment of the future society which arose from the wandering workforce of the 20th century who live in floating homes, who think he is a Tweener. A Tweener is the segment of the population who still live in cities on the ground. Cargill also meets a Shadow, a human who has the ability to travel through time. Grannis seems to be the one who has arranged his rescue, but he sees Grannis making plans with the Planiacs, and begins to wonder whose side he is on.

On one hand, the Shadows want to insure their own future, as do the Tweeners and the Planiacs. Since Cargill is among the Planiacs, he wants to help them, particularly Lela, who helped him. He starts making broadcasts encouraging a revolution to insure the Planic future, and he is visited by a Shadow and taken back in time to the same room, awaiting his execution, and to be rescued again by Ann Reece. This time he sticks with her and finds out why they, the Tweeners, want him.

The Tweeners are planning an attack on Shadow City so to destroy them, which in turn would, in time, mean the end of the Planiacs, since only the Shadows can fix the Planiacs' floaters. Cargill is needed to plan strategy for the Twener volers (fighter planes), and is programmed to enter Shadow City, which he will be able to do since he has the potential to be a Shadow, and lower their shields.

In Shadow City Cargill becomes a Shadow, and soon discovers that he is Grannis, who has been making extensive plans that cancel each other out, but inevitably allow Shadow City to remain in existence. He has to rescue himself, and in the travels to the past, he finds that he actually had nothing to do with Marie Channette's death. But if that is made known, the entire future is altered, so he must allow that to happen.

The plot is complex, almost too much so. This 1953 novel, also known as The Shadow Men, was very confusing, particularly the ending. I had to read the last two chapters twice to understand what was going on. Careful reading brought a better understanding, but only barely.

Take three stories that are disconnected: "Flin Library", which is about a set of films that find their way from the future to the past, depicting things that have not happened, like an ocean monster on Venus, alien landscapes, "how to repair" engines and devices that don't (yet) exist; "The Search", which is about a salesman who loses two weeks of his life from amnesia, and when he searches for that lost time he finds people from the future who are rummaging in the past to insure that their Palace of Immortality will exist; and "Far Centaurus", in which four explorers set out on a 500 year journey to our nearest neighboring star and find when they get there that technology

has superceded their journey and humans are waiting for them.

All of these deal with time in one way or another, and Van Vogt uses that fact to tie them together with some original material in the fix-up novel Quest for the Future.

The Arlay Film Library discovers that it has a set of films from the future. The switch happened at Tichenor College, though Peter Caxton denies having anything to do with it. As a result of the changing films however, the physicist loses his job, gets divorced, and tries to track down where the films were coming from. The Film Library has no idea. He then checks out the projector, and applies to work for the maker of the film projector, Quik-Photo Supply Corporation.

The next thing Caxton remembers is waking up in a hospital bed, two weeks of his memory missing. His boss allows him to retrace his sales route in hopes of regaining his memory. He finds several people who fill in a few gaps. He was on a train when Selanie boarded to sell some curious things (like a photograph of the ocean view of Venus which showed a moving sequence when activated); he chases after her when she leaves the train suddenly. It becomes even more puzzling, when one lad tells Caxton that he sees him disappear in a trailer home: one moment it's there, the next it's gone, him with it.

While puzzling over that, he spies a gentleman with whom, he was told before, he had an encounter during those two weeks, and when Caxton confronts the man, he is taken to a car where he passes out.

This time he awakes in the Palace of Immortality which is totally empty. He leaves the Palace briefly, and explores a future city, but panics when he realizes that he is spotted as an outsider, and heads back to the Palace. Hungry and exhausted, he finds an apartment in the Palace, eats and falls asleep. He awakes next to an older Selanie, who claims to be his wife.

Eventually he gets a short explanation, that he was tested for flexibility in becoming part of those who can use the Palace in working through time probabilities. He definitely did not have the aptitude to be a Possessor, one who could travel through time without have to go through the Palace. He has failed, and is returned to the hotel on his sales route.



from Quest for the Future

But he remembers, and tries to find the entrance to the Palace again. The future time he visited was more than a hundred years in the future, but there was no way he could get there. He then sees an article in the paper about scientists making a 500 year trip to Alpha Centauri in suspended animation. They were looking for a PhD in physics to go with them, but none wanted to go. Caxton sells himself, and is made part of the team. And for the first time in many weeks, he feels in control of the situation, the manipulator, rather than being manipulated.

His plan fails. He was the first to awaken on the long trip, fifty years after its start. He was going to turn the ship around, but there was a safeguard against it. He sleeps again and wakes twice more before finally arriving at Alpha Centauri, and finding humans already there. His depression finally gets to his companions, and they all make a trip to Earth, a three hour journey. Once there, he searches the city of Lakeside (where he had traveled to from the Palace of Immortality), for an entrance to the Palace. He can't find it.

The millionaire who had been helpful in taking the three travelers around takes Caxton on a special journey; he is Bustaman, a Possessor, and lets Caxton off in time to board the trailer of Selanie and her father. He is used again however, to strand them all in the past. Since Claudan Johns and Selanie had never been that far back, they could not use their powers to return to a viable probability timeline. All seemed hopeless. When Caxton finally tells his whole story, Claudan and Selanie know they can return, and set up a cryogenic chamber for Caxton. He arrives at his hotel in Lakeside soon after Bustaman took him to the Palace and into the past.

His companions once again take him on a special journey, out to the stars where they do a time jump, to the twentieth century, just after the expedition left. He finds the Palace, and travels in time again, to the future where he battles Bustaman at the end of the Palace's existence, to the past where he is once again in the trailer with Clauden and Selanie, and then to a time where all probabilities seem to stabilize, and he lives happily with Selanie as his wife.

Once again, like many stories, it is easier to go with the reading than the summary. The back and forth time shifts,

whether through the Palace or with Bustaman, get confusing, but the plot lines tend to straighten themselves out. The mind is whirling a bit at the end, but it is a rather satisfying conclusion.

The World of Null-A seems to be a confusing book for many people, although it seems that the plot is more straightforward than The Universe Maker or Quest for the Future. Machinations are under way for a galactic army to take over Venus from the humans living there, and Gosseyn is supposed to stop them.

Gilbert Gosseyn arrives to play the Null-A games, the non-Aristotelian logic games. Those who reach a certain level of the games will be placed in special governmental position, and the ones at the top are transported to the Null-A colony on Venus. The mystery starts immediately for Gosseyn when he is eliminated by his hotel group--he is not who he says he is, even though a lie detector says that he is convinced of that fact. The hotel discharges him and he is forced to stay on the street that first night.

Gosseyn befriends a woman who aids in his capture. President Hardie of the Earth government is very interested in Gosseyn. He is examined and found to have an extra brain. He is also supposed to be instrumental in preventing the invasion of Venus, something he knows nothing about, although the president and his men, Jim Thorson, Eldred Crang, and a grotesque imitation of a human called X, are sure he does.

Patricia Hardie, the woman who helps Gosseyn get captured, frees him from his cell, and tells him to hide in her apartment. He does so, but overhears that her rooms are to be searched. He flees out the window, and during his attempted escape he is killed.

And wakes up on Venus in another body.

He wanders on the surface until he discovers himself in the residence of John and Amelia Prescott. The name had been mentioned to Patricia Hardie by Crang before Gosseyn escaped and was killed. They don't trust him anymore in whatever machinations are going on. After subduing the pair, Gosseyn makes his escape, winds up in Crang's Venusian home, and eventually recaptured and taken to Earth. His turning up alive has disturbed a lot of people and disrupted a lot of plans. The invasion of

Venus is postponed.

On Earth, Prescott arranges to kill X, the President, and several guards while helping Gosseyn escape. In the process, Amelia Prescott is killed. The two men seek out a psychiatrist to examine Gosseyn. Although helpful, Gosseyn finds it a trap. And takes steps to escape.

He knows that the Games Machine is his friend, but a galactic weapon called a distorter is preventing the Games Machine from acting. Gosseyn finds it in Patricia Hardy's apartment in the presidential palace, removes it, and sends it to the Games Machine. Several times someone suggests that Gosseyn be killed, or he arrange to be killed so that he could be transferred to his third body, which others are convinced exist. While arranging to break through his Null-A training and commit suicide, the Machine warns him not to do so; his third body had been destroyed.

The machine is attacked, and so is Venus. The Games Machine dies, but the Venusians repel the attack. Gosseyn rescues the distorter, and in trying to render it harmless, is transported back to Venus. He is captured there and trained to use his extra brain for teleportation by a process called "similarization"--if two things can be made similar to twenty decimal places, they become the same--the distance between then is bridged as if there were no distance.

Taken back to Earth, Gosseyn is ordered by Crang through Patricia Hardie to go to the Semantics building and seek out a bearded man. In doing so, Gosseyn's guards are killed by Lavoisseur, the head of the General Semantics Institute, whose alter-ego was X. But Lavoisseur is also fatally

injured. He charges Gosseyn with his task, to prevent a galactic takeover of the human race. After Lavoisseur dies, Gosseyn removes his beard and finds his own face.

Yes, a confusing story, and I left out a lot of other detail. There is more at stake in the galactic scheme of things, and Crang has to be dealt with too, as the commander of the galactic forces on Venus. But, he is also a Null-A detective, which gives some hope to the human race.

The ending is not totally satisfying, but sufficiently so for the novel. Gosseyn finds out that, as a pawn in this galactic chess game, he has just been made a queen. There are lots of loose ends, which made it possible for Van Vogt to write a sequel (which I will not discuss, as I have not read it).

There are hints of null-A training throughout the novel, ways of intergrating the intellectual and animal selves, ways of looking at things as they are, without prejudice. The actions of the null-A humans on Venus to defeat the galactic army were amazing. There is no government. People with null-A training know what has to be done, and they do it for the good of the whole. If the galactic civilization could utilize such a training and philosophy, the wars hinted at would be stopped.

I have endeavored to show the complexity of Van Vogt's plotting, and the complications he throws in to make the intricate stories he writes so interesting. Maybe this will be attractive to you and spark your interest in reading some of his work, maybe not. As for me, I can't wait to read another of his novels. |*|

An Encounter with A. E. Van Vogt

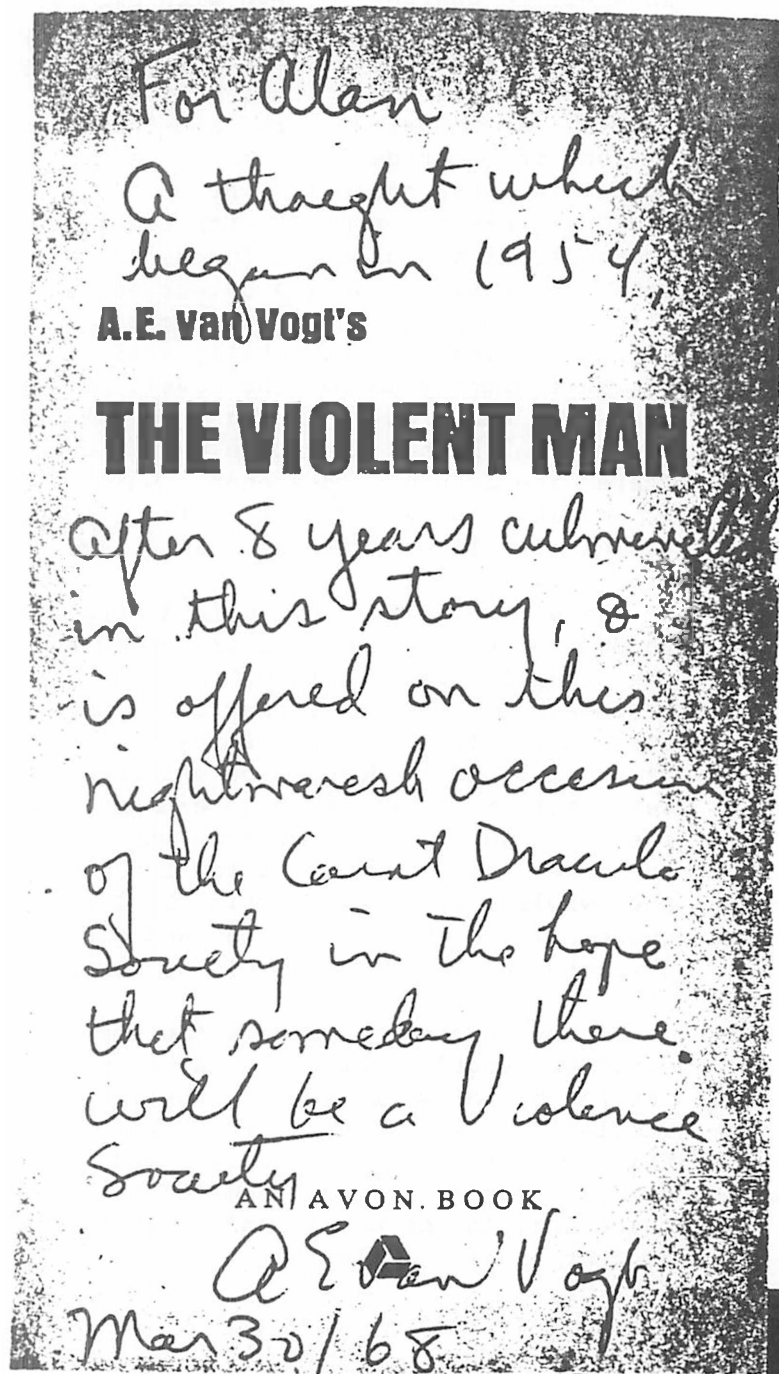
by Gil Gaier

It was a warm day, as it usually is in Los Angeles, and I was taking a pleasant walk. Coming at me was a familiar figure, dressed in a jogging outfit and wearing a Walkman's. Van Vogt stopped to chat, turning off the tape recorder. He said that he needed to work out, something that was mindless and boring, "But," he added, tapping the cassette player, "this keeps my mind occupied."

It turned out that Van was learning a foreign language while running. That got me to thinking. Here was a man in his 70s, who was still physically fit, and whose mind is still active and sharp enough to learn a new language.

What an inspiration of a man. I wish that I could be as fit and acute of mind when I reach 70 as he is!

Gil Gaier |*|



An Autograph

and a Photograph

A. E. Van Vogt and his second wife.

from Alan White



A. E. Van Vogt: A Biography

by Lan

Alfred Elton Van Vogt was born on April 26, 1912 in rural Saskatchewan, Canada. As a child he enjoyed the freedom of a farm, but his father moved several times before he finished high school, and that had some affect on his life.

When he was three, he fell from a two-story window onto a wooden sidewalk. He awoke after a three day coma, with apparently little damage to his brain, though throughout his life he would be plagued by blurring vision, which possibly could be traced to the accident.

His father was a point of instability in his life. He was not content to be a farmer, or to work in the general store that he and his three brothers owned in the small town of Neville, Saskatchewan. His father studied and earned a law degree through mail correspondence from the University of Indiana, and set up a practice in Morden, Manitoba. Unfortunately, although moderately successful as a solicitor, his father also liked to gamble with oil deals, and lost money at it. The result was that Van Vogt and his siblings were in the curious position of having the largest house in town, and being on the verge of poverty to the extent of having barely enough money for school books.

While in Morden, Van Vogt discovered fairy tale books, and would spend recess time reading them until forced outside by his teacher. Another time, to avenge his younger brother who had been beaten up by a bully, Van himself was walloped, even though justice was on his side. However, he did discover science fiction stories in a British boy's magazine called Chum, loaned to him for the price of ten cents by his friend Norman Everson.

When Van Vogt was 14, his father got a job in Winnipeg as the representative of the Holland-America Steamship line. There were big deals afoot with Dutch immigrants moving to North America, and his father was involved with them.

For Van, this was a depressing time. He was behind so much in his studies when they moved that he had to repeat the tenth grade. While doing so, he became more introspective and isolated, and read two books a day for several months. While he

acquired an informal education, his formal one was barely tolerable. He was third from the bottom of his class, the two below him having moved from rural Canada to Winnipeg like he. Van Vogt was just the brightest of them.

When he found the November 1926 issue of Amazing Stories, he knew he had a gold mine, and something that could keep him occupied during this friendless period. He stopped reading the magazine when it changed editors and the stories became boring. It would be several years before he would pick up any SF magazine again. Van Vogt also read lots of mystery books which he checked out of the library. One book which he read in this period, which would have a great impact on him, was Alfred North Whitehead's Science in the Modern World.

At one time or another, this pioneering work of post-materialistic philosophy passed through the hands of most of the youngsters who would grow up to become the science fiction writers of Campbell's Golden Age. But it was Van Vogt alone amongst them who would be able to take insights derived from this difficult little book and make them the basis for his SF writing.

Panshin: The World Beyond the Hill, p. 450

After high school the depression hit. The Holland-America shipping line closed its Winnipeg office and Van Vogt's father went back to being a solicitor. But times were very rough, and the Van Vogt family was even worse off because of the father's speculation in the Grain Markets.

In 1931, Van took a civil service examination and passed. He was hired to work for the Census Bureau that year, and moved to Ottawa to compile the census for Canada. He shared a room with a student from Scotland in a boarding house run by a family who needed the extra income to help make ends meet. From this Scottish friend he learned about secret governments. The friend claimed that Canada was not run by the English any more, but by the Scots who

were the ones really in power. This planted the seed of an idea which would blossom when Van would start writing a year later.

While in Ottawa, Van took an English course: "English and Self-Expression," wherein he learned about using words effectively, and writing more in the semblance of truth. He became excited when he was able to construct a sentence which conveyed the feeling of "verisimilitude," of a person who is actually in a place they had never been before.

Also, while working for the census bureau, he had to shuffle facts around and look at the census statistics from different viewpoints. From this he began to see how one can shuffle facts and come up with different perspectives. Eventually, he would leapfrog over his contemporaries in his understanding of computers:

...when a Doc Smith was still describing a thinking machine of tomorrow as no more than a gigantic card sorter, and a Robert Heinlein had gotten no further than to conceive of a ponderous and unreliable "ballistic calculator" used for the single specialized purpose of working out spaceship rocket burn requirements, A. E. Van Vogt would be envisioning the computer as an information machine capable of containing a quadrillion facts all cross-referenced by names, dates, and key words, and available to an inquirer at the touch of a button.

Panshin: The World Beyond the Hill, p. 453

When he returned home to Winnipeg, Van decided that he would write. It was a dream of his since he was age 14. With Thomas Uzzell's Narrative Technique, John Gallishaw's two books The Only Two Ways to Write a Story and Twenty Problems of the Short Story Writer (which were the two books that Jack Williamson used) at his side, and his experiences from the course, he sat down to write. His first efforts were for True Confessions and magazines of that sort. His ability to use words effectively and convey emotion stood him well: he sold his first story immediately. He was hoping to win the prize money in the magazine's monthly story contest, but he didn't. Still, the story sold.

Van continued to try for the prize mon-

ey, something that would get him through the hard times of the depression. Eventually a 7,000 word short story won the \$1000 prize. He was initially paid \$165 for the story, and when it won the contest, the remaining \$835 came in the mail. That money was equivalent to a year's salary based on his pay from the census job. He was quite happy.

Van also wrote other stories, which he sold to papers around the country, and radio plays. Two plays, about Christmas and New Years, were bought immediately and used that year. The manager of the radio station sought Van out to do more. Van met the fellow and found out he had been an actor on Broadway, but found religion, a Fundamentalist sect, to which he tried to convert Van...without success.

We writers are full of buttons you can push, and we won't--or can't--play if you push the wrong button. That man pushed me a little bit wrong and I was no good for him.

Van Vogt: Reflections of A.E. Van Vogt, p.45

In 1938, Van Vogt picked up an issue of Astounding and read Don A. Stuart's short story, "Who Goes There?". He was so impressed by the power of the story, the idea of men cooperating together to defeat a monster that could have defeated any one of them individually, that he wrote the editor, John Campbell. (He was unaware at the time that Stuart and Campbell were the same person.) Van had an idea for a story along similar lines. Had John Campbell not replied to the letter as he did, Van Vogt may not have written any science fiction. However, Campbell said that he liked the idea, and suggested that Van Vogt emphasize mood and atmosphere. That was the correct thing to say to Van, and he wrote "Vault of the Beast."

As soon as Van Vogt finished the story and mailed it, he began "Black Destroyer" and completed it before "Vault" came back for some fine-tuning. But he was already working on more and didn't get to "Vault" for several months. As it turned out, his first SF story written became the fifth one published.

These first two stories, particularly "Vault of the Beast", broke the slim rules that had been established for pulp SF. He used multiple science fictional themes,

told the story from the alien's point of view, asked the readers to empathize with the alien, and wrote with such compelling mood and action that the reader was drawn over the implausibilities of the plot. The unifying effect of Uzzell's method fell short in Van's first effort for "Vault" which he corrected rather easily. But he had found his stride in "Black Destroyer" and Campbell made it the cover story of the July, 1939, issue of Astounding.

After these first two sales, Van Vogt married a woman he met through a Writers group in Winnipeg, Edna Mayne Hull.

World War II broke out, and Ottawa, the seat of the Canadian government, got in touch with Van Vogt to work there as part of the war effort. He was refused for military service because of his eyesight, but he could help out as a clerk. When he arrived in Ottawa, there were only fourteen vacant apartments in the entire city. He took the cheapest, which was \$75 per month. His take-home pay was \$81.

Mayne had stayed behind in Winnipeg to sell their house and furniture before joining her husband. The money was handy for keeping them in food and other necessities. Mayne could not find a job in the city. It was a government town, and women were not allowed to take government jobs. The only way for them to remain solvent was for Van to write.

It took him six months to finish Slan. He wrote when he wasn't working or sleeping: every evening, half-days on Saturday and every Sunday. Mayne would take his hand-written copies and type them during the day. He would come home from work, eat and read the story, nap, then write until 11.

In 1941, the government increased his workload to six days a week, four evenings, and every other Sunday. That was too much for Van. He wanted to write; it was almost an obsession with him. He quit his job--none too soon. His former workers got locked into their positions soon after he left.

Van Vogt and Mayne did not need to live in the expensive city for him to write. They sublet their apartment and moved to Farm Point, a small town north of Ottawa on the Gatineau River. He informed John Campbell that he would be able to write more for him, now that he would be working on his stories full time, and Campbell came back with an irresistible offer.

Heinlein and Asimov had been steady writers for him until the U.S. entered the war. Could Van Vogt write enough to fill the magazine slots they vacated in Astounding? And could he write something for his new magazine, Unknown?

Like a dream come true, Van agreed to produce stories for John Campbell, and did so like no one else.

As autumn and winter closed in, Van and Mayne moved to Toronto and bought a house there. Years later, they moved to the Los Angeles area. At a party one afternoon there, he met someone who wrote more than he did, but had lots of time to do other things. When he inquired how the man did it, Van Vogt found out that the person typed his own stories, leaving out the step from a hand-written copy to the copy typed by someone else. Van Vogt realized that if he wanted time to pursue his other interests, he would have to learn how to type, which he did.

Meanwhile, Mayne had not been idle. She became interested in writing science fiction while typing up Van's stories, and had a few ideas of her own. She hesitated to write them, because she was not a scientist and could not work through the scientific ideas in the story. Van showed her how to get around that block, and she became known under her own name in Unknown.

Van's stories were among the most popular in Astounding. At times, people wondered why this was so, even John Campbell. The basic story of "The Weapon Shop" is simple: a man loses his repair shop because of a swindle pulled by a bank, and the Weapon Shop organization helps him get it back. Yet the power of the story was there in the telling. Using Fara Clark as the underdog fighting for his rights, and establishing the Weapon Shop as the means, struck the readers with something deeper: the basic idea of justice and doing something right. The injustice done to Van Vogt by the bully while he was growing up came probably inspired the basic premise of the story.

The implausibilities of many of Van Vogt's writings were overshadowed by his use of words, powerful imagery, and plain sense of wonder. His plotting was erratic much of the time, but taken as dream sequences, they fall into place.

...his nearly invincible alien beasts, the long time spans of his

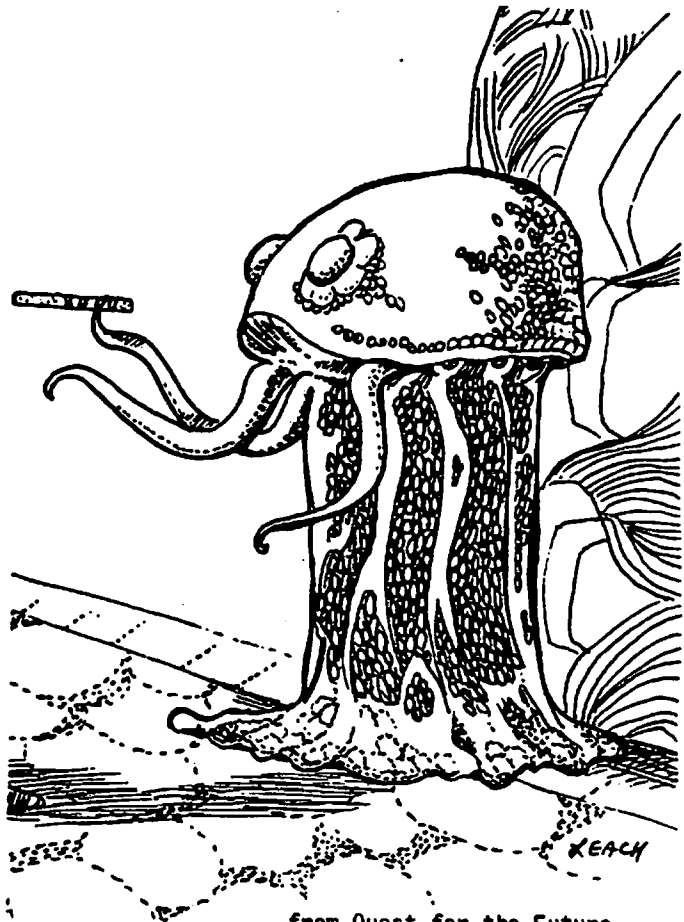
tales, the time paradoxes they were filled with, the quasi-messianic supermen who came into their own as their stories progressed, the empires they tended to rule, all were presented in a prose that used crude, dark colours but whose striking sense of wonder was conveyed with a dream-like conviction. The complications of plot for which he became so well known, and which have been so scathingly mocked for their illogic and preposterousness (within narratives that claim to be presenting higher forms of logic to the reader), are best analysed, and their effects best understood, it has been argued, when their sudden shifts of perspective and rationale and scale are seen as analogous to the movements of a dream. It is these "hard-SF dreams", so gripingly void of constraints, or of the usual surrealistic appurtenances of dream literature, that have so haunted generations of children and adolescents.

John Clute,
Nicholls: The Science Fiction Encyclopedia, p. 626

Whenever Van Vogt had a problem in plotting, he would let his subconscious work on it. His dream technique--waking himself up every 90 minutes and writing down what he was dreaming--came through often enough with successful resolutions to these problems that he eventually promoted it as a writing technique.

"Van Vogt's power lies in conjuring up striking and powerful images," says Brian Stableford (Gunn: The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction). Add to that the complex plots with such twists and turns that the reader is left breathless, and you have a masterful story imbued with sense of wonder.

Van Vogt's basic themes are quite simple: "Science fiction, as I personally try to write it, glorifies man and his future." (Panshin: The World Beyond the Hill.) In his writing, Van Vogt offers a new moral order, different from his contemporaries in the 1930s, '40s and '50s. An underlying philosophy, which few authors have in their works, is that of cooperation among men, among men and women, and among species. Lack of cooperation leads to conflict, to wars, to destruc-



from Quest for the Future

tion. Many of his stories stress communication, or lack thereof, which leads to lack of cooperation and thus to conflict.

In many stories, "the central character has latent superhuman powers that explode with awesome potency under the pressure of harassment and threat." (Brian Stableford, Gunn: The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction) The protagonist often is suffering from some sort of amnesia as well, which can only be recovered with the cooperation of others who know what happened. In the discovery of self and his latent powers comes the knowledge of working together and harmony. Although a man may work alone and can make a difference, more is accomplished through a cooperative effort. Still, there are the examples of Jommy Cross in Slan, and Robert Hedrock in the Weapon Shops stories, who are able to accomplish so much alone, but for a further development in carrying the human race forward, cooperation is necessary. Individuals need to take the initiative; others must follow to make it all work.

One of the most impressive abilities that Van Vogt exhibited was to take somewhat disparate short stories and rearrange

them into a cohesive "fix-up" novel. A fix-up novel such as Empire of the Atom, The Voyage of the Space Beagle, The Silkie, The War Against the Rull, or The Weapon Shops of Isher, were fairly easy to structure, owing to the nature of the stories involved. Yet even in The Weapons Shops of Isher, there was a hint of the complexity that became evident in his later fix-up novels. Quest for the Future, The Beast, The Mixed Men, and Rogue Ship, showed how inventive he could be in intertwining plots and structuring the story in such a way that the component stories made sense.

Edna Mayne Hull died in 1975. Little is known how Van Vogt reacted to her death, though it must have had some effect, since they had been married for 36 years. He continued to write and publish, and pursue the interests he had developed.

Van Vogt's studies in later years revolved around the ideas of cooperation and integration. Using the techniques of General Semantics, he gathered information about women, about violent males, and about language. After his second spurt of creative writing (1969-1984), he became more interested in working out methods of learning languages and promoting cooperation between peoples and sexes.

There is a rumor, however, that Van Vogt is writing a third Weapon Shops book. If true, this will make a number of his faithful readers very happy.

* * * * *

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Better Sines Ahead

by John Thiel

"Life begins with Aristotle; --
Easy, Jommy, on the throttle--
We assault the usual reign,
But without Gilbert Go-Sane,
(In a parallel dimension
There's some names one shouldn't mention,
But they all are coming through,
A.E.'s works are overdue;
Cut down to the overdrive
And with luck we'll both survive).
From Weapon Shops to the Space Beagle,
Null-A's there, viewed as primaevael,
Speak up now and answer right,
Wasn't Aristotle tight?"
But Jommy's in another book.
Everywhere he daren't look,

Chessboards spread upon the ground,
General Semantics flying 'round.
"Everything is very new;
Should the master give a clue?"
Jommy hunts, he seeks, he finds,
Van Vogt's back behind the blinds.
Unlike his heros, on the double's
His response to social troubles.
"Make for LAN's, they're finding out
How I treat unrest and doubt."
The Lantern guides them to the place
As also does the author's face.
Problems solve and dreams come true
When an author gets his due.

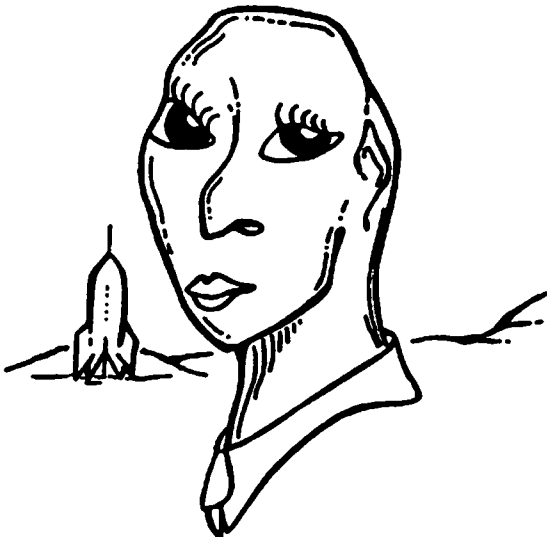
John Thiel |*|

Memorable Short Fiction of A. E. Van Vogt: A Limited Selection

by Larry Nowinski

I have always enjoyed the novels of A. E. Van Vogt, but I was definitely impressed by the number and variety of short stories this author wrote. His imagination was fertile and, although there might be some similarity in theme and presentaion, no two were exactly alike. Here, I would like to present some of my favorite Van Vogt short stories, novelettes and novel-las with a brief description of the plot, characters, and maybe why I liked them. This is a limited selection, as I have not had time to read Van Vogt's entire output, even though I'm sure Lan has a copy of every SF story this man has written. I won't cite where these stories can be found, since Lan has included a bibliography in this issue where you can look them up.

One of the first stories I remember as being written by Van Vogt is "The Enchanted Village." A human crash-lands on Mars and tries to survive alone (his fellow explorers are dead) as he makes his way toward the mountains and, hopefully, water. Jenner stumbles upon a Martian village which automatically dispenses food and drink, but which is totally unfit for human consumption. The village tries to adapt to Jenner, but in the process is destroying itself. In the end, the village changes the human to a Martian so that both can survive.



from "The Enchanted Village"

The twist at the end is wonderful. The solution is inevitable, but the reader does not see it until it's placed before his eyes. The feelings and emotions of a thirsty and starving man are brought out well, and I think it is one of Van Vogt's best stories.

I had read "The First Martian" fairly early in High School (sophomore year as I recall--Lan had already graduated, though we kept in touch, and I still borrowed books from him), and it seemed rather contemporary at the time. An Andean Indian is able to survive the rare atmosphere of Mars without a pressure suit, and is the pivotal character in a future change for the population of the red planet. There is prejudice against this possibility, which is the crux of the story.

When I tried to find it and reread it, I didn't know it was by Van Vogt, and I looked in several "Best of the Year" books around 1968. I couldn't find it. It wasn't until I borrowed The Far-Out Worlds of A. E. Van Vogt from Lan that I discovered who had written it. And to my amazement the original copyright was 1939! I was astounded at the insight of prejudice that Van Vogt had so many years earlier, before it became a real issue.

What else was memorable about the story was that the sympathetic main character, Bill Hecton, decides to produce an American version of Martians by settling in the higher elevations of the Rocky Mountains, and having children whose lungs adapt to the rarified atmosphere of Earth, similar to the Martian air. We now know this is not possible, since there is too much carbon dioxide in the Martian air, but the idea was sound back then.

The first story of that same collection was also one I remember, but specifically recall as being written by Van Vogt. Steve Maltin, the protagonist of "The Replicators", kills an alien on sight, which becomes mentally linked to him. It replicates itself, his gun, truck, stolen helicopter, and even the mini-atomic bomb he tries to use to destroy the alien. After

Maltin is re-inducted into the Marines and is under military control, the mental link is broken, and he and the alien come to an agreement, and the alien departs. The last line is chilling:

"On a planet many light years away, the real That stirred, awakened and sat up."

As I reread "The Purpose," I recalled the one scene that stuck in my memory: the young man who pulled power switches who did not sleep. The other parts of the story came back as I read it: a secret group has control of the leaders of the world because without this group those people are dead. All their internal organs are kept elsewhere, performing their functions as usual, but linked to the bodies via some form of continual and instantaneous matter transmitter. By "powering up" they can also teleport to any known location. In the end, Virginia Mention and her husband find the location where the organs are kept, and the Doctor who performed the operations who is the only other person who knows this location. He smashes most of the organ containers and thus breaks the power of the secret organization.

Another story whose details escaped me, but whose idea remained with me for years was "The Earth Killers." A test pilot for a rocket plane sees an atomic missile heading for Chicago, and can't do anything about it. He refuses to implicate any nation on Earth in the destruction of the industrial cities in the Northern half of the U.S., since he saw the missile coming straight down, not at an angle. His refusal is seen as a courtmartial offense, and he is imprisoned. Morlake escapes and searches for the real attackers. The scene I remember is at the end. The first atomic war on Earth was a Civil War. The South had secretly put bases on the moon, and attacked the North. It was a pleasure to reread this.

Again, there was a vague reminiscence of a scene in my mind as I read "The Ultra Man." On the flight from the Earth to the moon, those people with latent psi abilities see them manifested in strange ways. A psychologist realizes that he can read people's faces, and discovers that aliens have infiltrated the moon base. One of the base psychologists has been studying the phenomenon and knows the cycle that Rich-

ard Carr will be going through. After a few hours, he loses this ability, then a few hours later it returns in a twisted form. A few hours after that the psi ability disappears altogether.

In the investigation of these aliens we find out that they are advanced scouts for a race which will attack and take over the solar system. However, in the twisted form of his psi ability, Carr sees everyone as a bundle of signals, which he can connect and disconnect. He disconnects all signals to and from the Earth-moon system and the aliens in space. Thus he saved the human race.

"The Monster" (also known as "Resurrection") was an unusual story in that it was the Earthman who was the monster. The aliens find Earth without physical life. The plant life is there, but no animals or insects. They have a method of reviving intelligent life from their bones, which they do, and they start with ancient humans found in a museum. They gain little information until they revive the most recently killed humans, who immediately teleports away. Immediately the aliens order all reconstructors destroyed, and eventually their precious planet locator. The humans have died out because there were no planets within a 90 light-year radius for them to expand to.

The aliens are expanding at an exponential rate and refuse to allow other races to impede their progress. The human decides differently, and forces the aliens to retreat and get help to destroy him. When they find him aboard their ship, they take steps to destroy him, and themselves in the process. They head for a star, damage the controls beyond repair, and plunge to their death. The human, however, had gotten what he wanted: the reconstructor and planet locator (in the first disappearance after he was revived), and their death so they couldn't warn their race that the Humans were coming!

I didn't remember reading "Dormant" before, but it has an interesting alien. It was a huge piece of rock with a radioactive core. It was barely alive when uncovered in the twentieth century, having been buried for millions of years. Its perception of its surroundings is what made it so interesting. Water was invisible to it, so the island on which it found itself was

merely another mountain, and the ships at anchor in the harbor were floating in air. It lacked sufficient atomic energy to come fully awake, and the efforts of the humans to analyze it were fruitless. Seeing the harbor ships as possible intelligent creatures, it tries to communicate with radiation levels deadly to humans. The humans react as if attacked, and try to destroy it. Eventually a drone with an atomic bomb is dispatched, and the energy from the detonation brings the being to full life. It realizes its purpose, and the robot atomic bomb explodes driving the Earth toward the sun, which will make it nova, and thus secure the safety of the system for a race long dead for ten million years.

I laughed at the poetic justice that happened in "Dear Pen Pal" when I first read it. Through a series of letters exchanged between a human and an alien, we find that the alien is a convict and is trying to escape from its prison by exchanging places with the human. In the end, the mind exchange happens, but the human is totally confined to a bed, paralyzed. Meanwhile, the human in the alien body at least will be released from its prison in a short while, and will have freedom of movement, while the alien convict is trapped inside a useless body. The human considers this a more-than-fair exchange!

"Far Centaurus" is, I think, a fairly unique story in the annals of written science fiction. A group of scientists, using an Eternity Drug which allows suspended animation, travel for 500 years to the Centauri system. While they have been "asleep", technology has caught up and a faster-than-light drive has been invented. Thus, humans are waiting for them when they arrive. Through the genius of one of their number, a return trip through time is arranged so they arrive back at earth soon after they had left, and are present when the first communication comes from the starship fifty years later.

Just thinking about the progress of science while such a long journey is taking place seems commonplace now. But for 1944, when the story was published, it was a unique idea.

"Humans, Go Home" presented a different type of story. The two immortal humans on



Jana were to guide the alien race along a certain path of development toward freedom of thought and government. The race was a rather pale imitation of the human race, with the males dominating the females in ways similar to Victorian times all the way to the turn of this century. The two humans had their own problems, since they thought they were the last ones alive, the rest of the immortals having decided to kill themselves. A disappointment in this story was that Van Vogt did not follow through on the secret admission of the Jana Rocquel to the human female Miliss that he had spent a year aboard a human spaceship. She and Dav were not the last humans in the universe.

Most memorable were the series of monsters that Van Vogt created to attack and imperil the intergalactic ship *The Space Beagle*. The Coerl in his first published story "Black Destroyer", the Xtl in "Discord in Scarlet", the bird-like female Riim in "War of Nerves", all had a fascinating attraction in the ingenuity of their abilities and attempts to overcome the crew of the *Beagle*. The introduction



from "War of Nerves"

of Elliot Growsner in "War of Nerves" and his Nexialist philosophy gave me more insight into pursuing and broadening my education beyond the specific courses I needed for my degree in college. Seeing Growsner again in "M33 in Andromeda", and finally as the hero in the novel, The Voyage of the Space Beagle, made me feel good; I learned more about what Van Vogt was getting at with the Nexialist philosophy, and a good character was not "wasted" on just a couple of short stories.

"All the Loving Androids" was a good, complex novelette which almost became confusing. A man has not one, not two, but three androids constructed: two of himself to keep his wife from bothering him too much, and one of his wife so he could have the woman he wanted, not the one he had. When the original Anita (non-android) tries to kill herself, Peter Copeland II calls for help and the complex story unfolds. Anita's brother, Dan Thaler, is, of course, concerned, but more than a loving brother should be. He is also a federal investigator of android affairs, and is troubled by the perfect copy of the Peter android. His investigations reveal the third Peter android, and the "other woman" who turns out to be the android Anita II.

Underlying this is what Dan was looking into as part of his job: an underground conspiracy of the public group GALS: Give Androids Life Society, a group working for android liberation. The plot unfolds with Peter I and Anita I and Dan playing key roles. Some hint of the laws of robotics is also there, but not overt. I found the story fun to read, especially trying to keep straight the androids and the humans, especially since Anita I and Anita II switch places.

Van Vogt has few memorable women as characters, let alone protagonists. Aside from Innelda Isher in the Weapon Shop stories, I usually think of Barbara Ellington from "Research Alpha", written in collaboration with James H. Schmitz. Barbara works as a secretary at Research Alpha, and is unknowingly chosen as a experimental subject by Dr. Cloge for his Point Omega Stimulation serum. The serum is supposed to advance a creature toward its ultimate point of evolution. Barbara's boy friend Vince Strather is also chosen, but the path along which he is advanced is not a beneficial one. Barbara is a success, but events turn out not quite as Cloge had anticipated.

The head of Research Alpha and his assistant are aliens who are monitoring the evolutionary development of the human race. Finding out that Barbara is advancing causes then slight concern. When they find out the extent to which Cloge has carried his experiment, and the rate at which Barbara is advancing, they panic and try to halt the process. Barbara is aware of their efforts, and is aware of far more, since her expanded mind reached out into space and was welcomed by something far more advanced. In the end, this ultra-female, homo galacticus, supercedes all expectations. She readjusts things as they were, without her presence, returns Vince to his former self, and the aliens are none the wiser, except for a vague feeling that they missed something.

The evolutionary process that Barbara goes through is the fascinating study. Van Vogt and Schmidt describe the steps very well as Barbara learns and uses her new abilities.

While considering evolutionary advancements of the human race, I can't help but think of "Asylum," which is also a vampire story. The Dreegh are a group of aliens, I.Q. 400, who were travelers caught in a sunstorm. The radiation gave them a disease which then demanded they take daily transfusions of blood and a "charge" of "life force." The Galactic government at first helped them, but later branded them as outlaws.

Merla and Jeel happen upon Earth, notify their companions about the "rich pickings" guarded only by a Galactic Observer, and land to await their freinds (who were due in about three months). Bill Leigh (I.

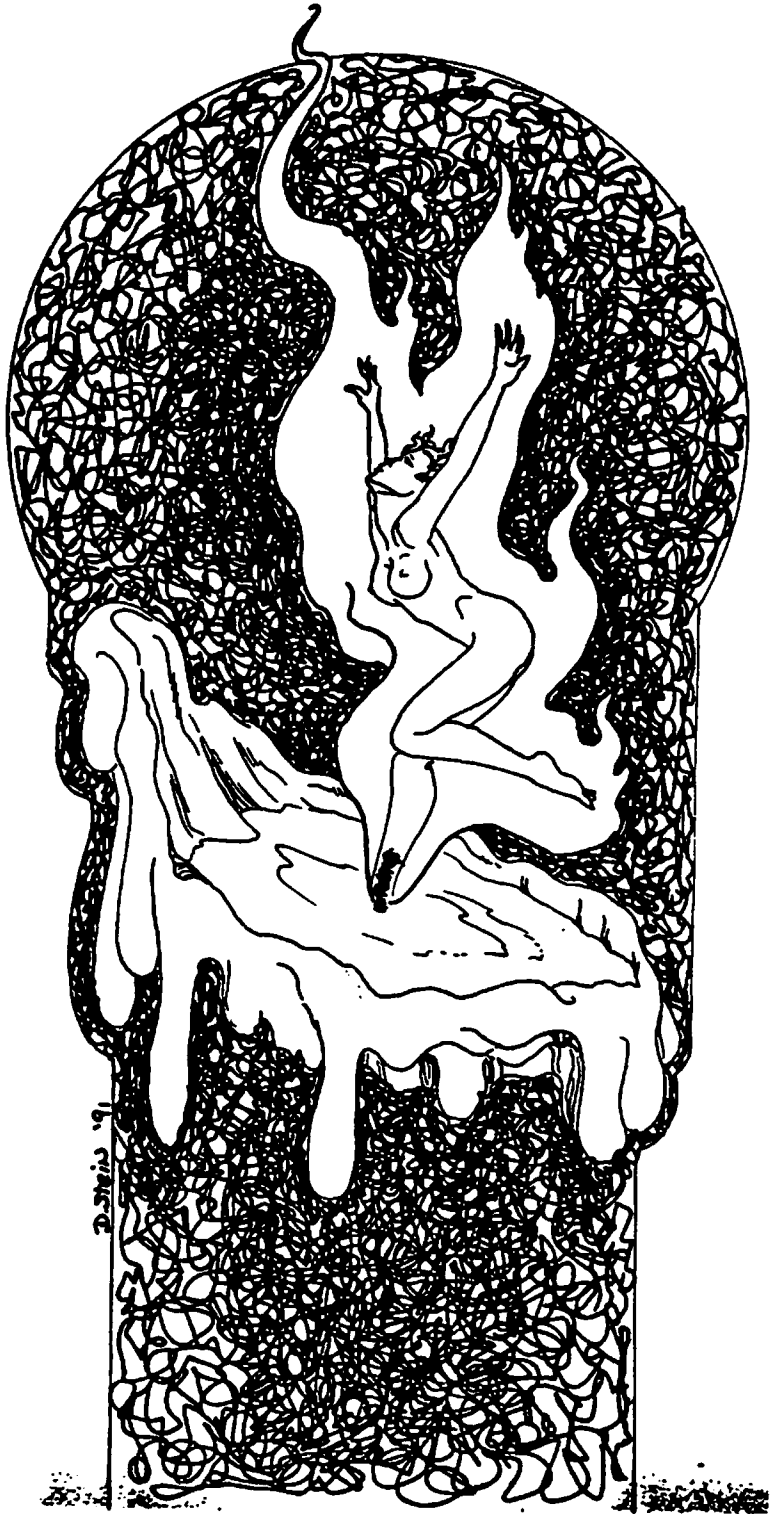
Q. 112), Earth reporter, and Patricia Ungarn (I.Q. 243), daughter of the Galactic Observer, are captured and released by Merla and Jeel. As Pat flees home to her father's meteor base near Jupiter, Bill is recaptured and under hypnotic suggestion flies to Europa, gets a ride out to the meteor with Steve Hanardy (I.Q. 104, although he sometimes acts like he has an I.Q. of 60, and who delivers supplies to the Ungarns), and Leigh eventually lowers their defenses so that the two Dreegh can land.

When the majority of the Dreegh arrive, Bill Leigh is transformed into a Great Galactic with an I.Q. of 1200, who defeats the Dreegh and transports them elsewhere. It was all part of a larger plan to remove most of the Dreegh from the galaxy.

In "The Proxy Intelligence," the sequel to "Asylum", the action picks up where the first left off. Steve Hanardy frees Pat and her father, and they make ready to welcome Pat's fiancée, though for some reason Steve knows it's a trap. Thadled Madro arrives, and immediately Steve sees that he's really a Dreegh, not a Kluug as Pat and Professor Ungarn are. Yet he is unable to tell them in time before Madro captures them all, lowers the shields, destroys all weapons and controls, and cuts off all escape. The remaining eight Dreegh arrive, help themselves to some of Hanardy's blood, and then travel with their prisoners to Europa base.

There, Steve manifests the power of a Great Galactic. Leigh had left that ability with him when he took the other Dreegh away. With his increased intelligence, he sees why Leigh gave him the ability: his blood, in each of the last remaining nine Dreegh of their race, was curing them of the radiation sickness, and they would eventually become a race of immortals. He casts them off into interstellar space thousands of lightyears from the nearest star to think about their future. Eventually they would make their way back to Galactic space.

The two stories dealt with intelligence as the determination of where a race stood in the galactic scheme of things. A Great Galactic was made/found when necessary to accomplish a particularly important task. The description of the evolution from an average I.Q. to super intelligence was not easy, but I think Van Vogt pulled it off.



from "Research Alpha"

"The Silkie" is another variation of the evolution of the human race, this time primarily physical. A Silkie is a shape changer who can appear as a normal human being, as a water-breathing amphibian, and as a space-faring "silkie". Just the concept of a human being able to survive in space without external life support is a fascinating idea. Van Vogt extends this in the novelette "The Silkie" to another alien life form, the Kibmadine Di-isarill, who can control its shape to survive in almost any environment. Nat Cemp, the silkie, is due for his "change", a forced return to his human shape during which he loses his silkie powers. At this critical time, Cemp is also forced to battle Di-isarell.

He uses "levels of logic". He initiates a sequence of thoughts which the Kibmadine has to follow through to their end before beginning another sequence. Cemp follows through with one logic level after another, concentrating on the pleasure of securing food and eating, and forces Di-isarell into a feeding frenzy during which it eats itself. In spite of the revolting and

gory idea presented here, the description is "tastefully" done.

In addition to the idea of a silkie, the psychological idea of needing to follow through a sequence of thought patterns to the end is in itself an interesting idea. I believe that psychological testing has shown this to be true. People who are asked to pick out something from a long list they have memorized hesitate before answering because they presumably go through the entire list mentally before being able to answer. Lots of food for thought, here.

There are many other stories that were written by Van Vogt, which have memorable storyline and characters. I probably have missed some of your favorites. I look longingly at the pile of Van Vogt short story collections that I have not had time to read yet. I wish I could have read more in preparation for this article, but I know that they are there, waiting to be discovered, and re-discovered.

Maybe I can read another one tonight after my daughters go to bed. .*

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