

# MASQUE







THE . . . ASHLEY . . . EDITION

# MASQUE


F A P A



# AL ASHLEY, GALACTIC OBSERVER

by


## CHARLES BURBEE



**a**l Ashley sped through interstellar space. He did not glance casually at the viewplate for signs of enemy craft. There was no viewplate. His keen, alert eyes did not scan the instrument panel with its blinking tiny lights. There was no instrument panel. His swift, sure fingers did not toy idly but expertly with the controls of the space ship. There were no controls. There wasn't even a space ship.

Alone, clad in street clothes, without so much as an oxygen tank, Al Ashley sped through interstellar blackness.

"I knew I could do it if I put my mind to it," he said.





He skimmed past star clusters without slowing. Galaxies appeared ahead, loomed closer, and whirled past, and still Al Ashley sped on.

Any watchers who might have noted this lone figure fleeing through intergalactic space would have said: "Here is an intelligent being---with a purpose.

On both counts they would have been wrong.

On he sped, for perhaps half a cycle, and then he paused, hanging motionless in space ( with respect to the dead sun Glomor. )

He paused there in the midst of nothingness. It was silent there. In fact it was so quiet he could hear his blood pumping through his arteries. He listened to it with the cold detachment of the superior being. He noticed and checked the fact that the blood rumbled through the arteries, while through the veins it swished.

It sure was quiet. It was so quiet he could hear himself think. This marvelous phenomenon lasted him for a number of years of vast amusement and pleasure, during which time he had at least fifteen ideas.

To hear himself thinking! Had it ever happened to anyone before? He took pleasure in listening to his thoughts. His brain, he noticed, had a special rhythm to it. A slow rhythm of one thought every 72 days.

"That's not very fast," said Al Ashley. "Well---of course it isn't fast. It's majestic and solemn and good showmanship."

Time passed while he hung there in space and thought his thunderous thoughts. Then, little half-ideas began to drift in to him. He began to remember Earth. Rotten place, with all sorts of unnatural people running about. And now that he's left, there wasn't a single sane soul in the whole place.

But the grubbing bipeds did have one wonderful product---coffee. Ah, coffee....coffee....coffee....heavenly drug. It made a man feel like a king. It made him want a ten-cent cigar and a pink-eyed bulldog.

He evoked the picture of a cup of the celestial brew, laced well with chicory, pale with cream and the cup rimmed with yesterday's sugar---it was like a glimpse of the Paradise of the Prophet.

He quivered.

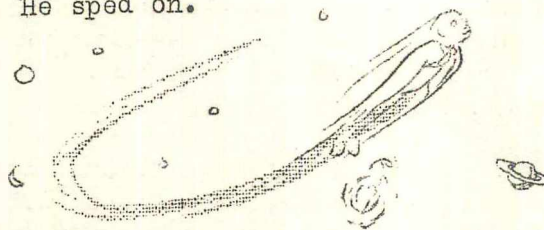
"Oh hell!" he moaned. "I'm going back! I'm going back!"

But he did not know in which direction lay Earth. If he turned directly back on his trail---a 180 degree turn, he could probably have gotten fairly close, but he scorned this expedient as being too direct and therefore not to be considered.

For a moment he regretted that he hadn't brought along his Genuine Scout Knife, Commando Type, which he had gotten at the special bargain rate of 98¢ during a Gigantic Three Day Sale at Thrifty Drug Stores. With that knife he could have blazed his trail by hacking out chunks of vagrant planets and thus would have been able to retrace his course.

"Ah well," he sighed. There was nothing to do about it. "It isn't that I need coffee," he said. "I don't have to have it. It isn't necessary to my existence. It's---it's just I can't do without it."

He sped on.



After another cycle had gone by, he looked at his watch. It said half-past four. "That must mean something," he said. But he couldn't decide what it did mean. At last he decided that it meant nothing. He was right.

By and by he saw a nice-looking little planet. He braked and landed on it. He saw approaching him a party of four people, two men and two girls.

"Hello," they said.

"Hello," wriggled Al.

"Who are you?" they asked.

"I am Al Ashley. I have come to civilize you and make you normal, the way I am."

"Ah, and how will you do it?"

"Simple," Al shrugged. "I will give you the use of fire, which you will call Friend. I will teach you to make and use the bow and arrow with which you may kill enemies from a distance. And when your technology is advanced enough, I will invent and pass on to you a mechanical device known as the wheel."

They looked at each other in what he took for astonishment and awe.

"Come with us," they said. "You must see our city."

He went with them a short distance. They entered a little oval vehicle. It rose silently and sped to a city of spired buildings. Aircraft filled the air. "Atomic power," said his hosts. "Everything is run by atomic power, and most services are automatic and foolproof, but of course we are not perfect."

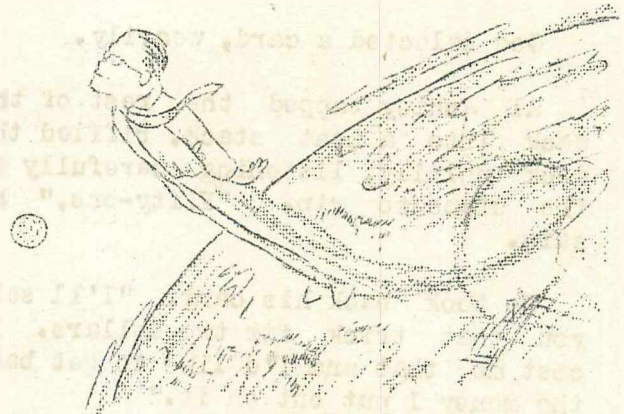
"Of course not," agreed Al.

"Will you teach us the marvels you say you know of?" they asked, with broad grins. "We are very humble and wish to know all."

"No," said Al Ashley. "You're too far behind technologically to ever catch up. You're not ready for the scientific know-how I wanted to give you. You're all so weighed down with complexes, phobias and fixations that you think you're well-integrated. I don't want to have anything to do with such unnatural people."

He shot off into space and left them, all four bellowing with laughter. Yes, he shot off and left them, and now they would never know the use of fire, the mechanical device known as the wheel and how to kill enemies from a distance.

Strangely, their laughter seemed to ring in his ears for parsecs. He shook his head. "Surface - thinkers, that's all they are," he said. Strictly the emotional type."



By and by he met a shining Being in space, Al Ashley stopped his headlong pace (one almost could believe he was trying to flee from something---silly thought) and said, ingratiatingly, "You look like some sort of godlike personality, too." He wriggled in affability. "Well, I guess the universe is big enough for two of us."

The Being turned its gaze on him. "Some creatures call Me God," It answered.

"Yeah?" said Al. "What's your IQ?"

The Being looked at Al.

"Plain enough," said Al. "You've got a psychosis against intellectuality." He sighed. "Why is everybody abnormal except me?"

He sped away from the Being. He'd gotten but a parsec or two away when his majestically operating brain began to grind out a thought. Al listened to it carefully. "That's right!" he said. "If that thing really is God, he can make me a cup of coffee." He sped back.



"Busy?" asked Al as he came up to the Being again.

"Just resting," answered God. "This is a Seventh Day and I am resting from my labors."

Al Ashley brought out a deck of cards. Fumbling in his eagerness to appear expert, he fanned the cards out before God.

"Take a card," he said. "Any card."

God selected a card, wearily.

Al Ashley tapped the rest of the deck into a neat stack, riffled the deck noisily, listening carefully to the staccato rip. "Fifty-one," he said.

He took back his card. "I'll sell you that trick for two dollars. It cost me that and I'd like to get back the money I put out on it."

"Ah, no," said God. "Please go away. I'm resting."

"Is creating things a tiring job?" Al asked. "I don't see why it should be, if you approach it from the intellectual point of view."

God just looked at him.

"Why, I created my own private dream world, the one I've lived in most of my life. It's so secure and tight that nobody can bother me in it no matter what. That didn't make me tired."

"My rest period must be over now," said God, and flashed away. Al tried to follow after but quickly lost the Being in a maze of galaxies.

"I wonder why he didn't make me a cup of coffee," mused Al. "I certainly was indirect enough."

He went on.

"Where am I, I wonder?" Al mumbled. "Oh well," he said after a time. "It isn't fitting for an entity like me to

worry about where he is. Let the rest of the Universe worry about where it is---in relation to me."



He landed on another planet. It was a pleasant place, populated by little furry creatures the size and shape of cats. No intelligent race lived there.

Al Ashley looked about him. "Shall I be a Creator?" he murmured.

"Let there be light!" he commanded, pointing to where the sun was coming up.

He found a stream and on the banks of it fashioned two humanoid forms from mud. He stood back and gazed at his handiwork and found it good.

"Go, my children, and people the earth. Grow and multiply." He leaned forward and breathed into them the breath of life, turned and flew away into space without looking back. No need to look back. He knew what he was doing. They couldn't help but come to life---hadn't he breathed the breath of life into them?

On he sped--and then, "My God!" he said. "I made both of those figures men! How are they going to reproduce? How can they obey my injunction to multiply?"

But he couldn't remember the way back, so he just kept on. He shrugged and said "What the hell. I never had it easy. The world's always been against me."



After a cycle, he said, "I created them in my own image. They should be smart enough to solve the problem of reproduction in two or three generations."

Serenely he shot on; his incisive logic had again come to the rescue of this feckless little man.

After an interminable time, he said "What am I doing out here? Where am I going?" For trackless eons these questions assailed him but at last he had the answer. "I must be the Galactic Observer," said Al Ashley.

"Of course," he said. "I've got the highest I.Q. of anybody I've ever met. This could mean but one thing; I'm the Galactic Observer."

At this moment he felt a strong pull. He lost his power to steer. He was completely the victim of this new force. Swiftly he was pulled to a huge planet. He found himself in a giant plasticene office lined with wall-speakers. A force-beam pushed him up to a white line.

A powerful-looking six-footer sat at a desk labeled "Sector Chief." He said, "Well?"

"Al Ashley, reporting in from Sol III."

"Who is this?" blatted a wall speaker. "No record of him."

"Strange," said Sector Chief. "No record of Sol III. Scan him."

The scanners went into action without the use of moving parts. They explored Al's brain electronically, building up a complete case history in sixteen seconds.

The auto-printer flipped out a thin pamphlet containing a complete analysis. Oh, it was cruel, cruel. The things that impersonal machine said about Al Ashley. How cruel, and how true.



Sector Chief read idly from the booklet. "I.Q. 65....vocabulary consisting mainly of high-sounding terms not comprehended by user....memory completely unreliable....I loved to associate with intelligent people in the hope that some of their brilliance would rub off on him....so busy trying to act intelligent he never had time to say anything intelligent....came on stray force beam and seems completely convinced that he was the source of the beam...." Sector Chief broke off.

"Enough," he said. "We've caught flotsam like you before---take him away."

"Can use in Spore Lab," said a wall speaker. "His clothes may have picked up rare specimens."

"Can use in primate lab," said another strident voice.

"I'm the Galactic Observer!" said Al Ashley a bit testily.

"Take him away," said Sector Chief. "Argue about him later."

"But I'm the Galactic Observer," Al said, beginning to lose his pose of saintly patience. "I don't want to work in your laboratories."

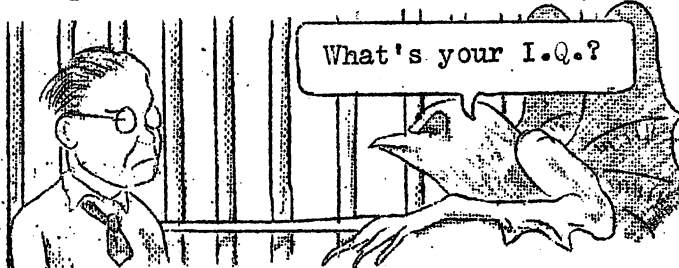
Sector Chief looked up sharply. "Work? You're a specimen, nothing more."

"But I'm---" Ashley began wailing.

Force-beams took him out. He tried to fly away but there was no response.

So Al Ashley became a specimen in the Primate Lab in Galactic Central.

He shared his cage space with a winged batman from some nameless place.



But Al.

Have you no rugged individuality? Have you no soul? Have you no intellectual curiosity? Doesn't it do something to you to think how queer all these people are?

Oh Al! I'm sick of hearing you yap about this all the time. You are getting obsessed with the subject.

It is a subject we cannot cover enough.

Think about something else for once Al. Think about math. Think about science. Think about the unemployment problem. Think about Burbee...

Now that's just what I mean, he said animatedly. I've been studying what Burbee says---you know I'm a rather profound word analyst---and I have definite evidence that Burgee is as queer as they come.

Al! You are mad!

Everything he says; everything he does. Yessiree. That boy is definitely queer.

But...

Look, Laney. No man would let himself in for the bother of having a wife and three children except to try to hide his homosexuality from himself and the world. But here is the real clincher--Al leaned confidentially toward me and fingered my lapel as he spoke--every time I talk to him about homosexuality he gets fidgetty, restless as hell. He gets a strange enchanted look in his eyes and wriggles around in his chair as though he had ants in his pants. Doesn't that mean something, even to you?

Yeah. He's probably bored, like I am. Now about FAPA....

Bored? Bored? With homosexuality? That is an utter impossibility. Now another interesting case is that of ----; I know for a positive fact she is a lesbian.

Oh nuts!

Certainly she is lesbian. She hates men. That's why she has so many of them--to make them die the little death and revenge herself. Yessir, a murdering lesbian.

That's a pretty cheap way to talk, Al, saying a thing like that about a girl just because you can't make her.

Can't make her? I could make her any time I wanted to.

Well, then, why don't you--instead of talking like an idiot?

Why should I bother? There is no point in my going to a lot of trouble to make all these women anyway. I wouldn't want to make her anyway, because she's queer as hell, a lesbian from way back.

But she doesn't have anything to do with other lesbians.

So what? Just because I never built a house doesn't keep me from being the damdest house builder you ever set eyes on. Yessir, ---- is the worst lesbian I ever heard of.

Oh to hell with it. Now about FAPA and....

And that fellow ----, I have definite information about him. He is the biggest queer of them all. When he...

Realising that there was no hope of separating this monomaniac from his prime subject, I allowed Al's quietly droning voice to lull me into a doze.

An hour or so later I awoke, cramped and stiff, just in time to hear Al Ashley's punchline.

Laney, he said, all this proves conclusively that 90% of all fans are queer.

Al, I said yawning, I realize that there have been a few queers in fandom but not any amount like that. I doubt



if more than a third of all fans are genuine, overt homosexuals.

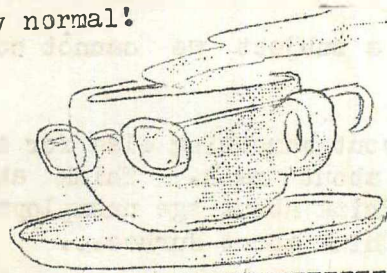
Al Ashley underwent a sudden transformation. He was no longer the urbane, suave, mild, timid, quiet feckless fellow I had known. Here was a new Ashley, a maddened slaving beast of an Ashley. His sensitive fannish eyes rolled madly at me, and I cowered back into my chair, fearing for a moment that he would leap upon me bodily such was his frenzy.

Laney, he bellowed, this proves what I've always suspected. By God, Laney, you're queer. No, no, don't say a word. You are obsessed with the subject of homosexuality. You've spoken of nothing else all evening.

Could I have an evening of stimulating, intellectual conversation with you? No. You are a monomaniac. All you can talk about is queers, queers, queers.

He pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his brow, and a pair of falsies fell to the floor.

Thank God, Laney, I'm not like you, said Al Ashley. Thank God, I'm perfectly normal!



I'm sick of the name Al Ashley! I'm sick of the name Al Ashley! Hope I never hear of it again! I'm sick of

# WALPI!

As Burbee would say, I really don't need these things but I have to have them. They aren't necessary to my existence but I must have them. I will pay fabulous prices using money!!!

Big Little Books:

Flash Gordon:

on the Planet Mongo (c. 1934)  
and the Monsters of Mongo (c. 1935)  
and the Tournaments of Mongo ('35)

Flash Gordon Comics: Any number but the "story" edition and those numbered 10 and 173 and the latest on the newstands.

Plus any of the ancient Prince Valiant comics that appeared in the comic bks.

## NEOPHYTE

Containing Burbee, Ackerman, Condra, Boggs, Rotsler (dat's me) and H. Kloy. 15¢ per copy and the small sum of 2/25






# AL ASHLEY and the



BY

CYRUS B. CONDR A

 he Ashley-Burbee conversations, the most significant literary movement of today, have so far been chronicled only by Mr. Burbee. Posterity will be grateful but posterity is also entitled to another objective survey contemporaneously taken.

I wish to establish for the existence of Mr. Ashley who even in his own lifetime is rapidly acquiring the status of a myth.

"Al Ashley," says a rumor, "is merely a figment of Burbee's imagination, created to amuse Mr. Burbee's readers.

This false belief is injurious to Mr. Ashley, who lives here in Los Angeles and is a very real person, although you'd never believe it even if you met him. Truthfully, if not tactfully, I must state that the effort to accept his fan-

tastic attributes as reality has led to the wreck of several fine minds and a number of broad mental horizons.

"Can such things be?" asked Charles Burbee, looking at Al Ashley. "Ashley can not possibly exist. He is simply a creature of someone's imagination (probably not mine) created in compensation for the harshness of natural laws."

Having thus restored the shaken foundations of his private dream world with Null-Logic, Burbee unhesitatingly passed the word along to other local characters, and so the story got started. Except for the damage to Mr. Ashley's character, it has been a good thing. Today, both of Al's friends are no more unbalanced than they were before they met him....Cyrus B. (I think I think; therefore I think I am) Condra.



ON A NIGHT IN DECEMBER, 1947, FIVE startling characters were convened in Alhambra, California, for the purpose of writing and publishing a one-shot fanzine entitled Wild Hair. For the entire evening, they were distributed as follows: Ashley and Burbee sat playing chess; Laney and Condra were writing all the articles for the mag & Rotsler was sketching away like mad at the art work when he wasn't writing editorials.

"It's your move, Al," said Burbee. Carefully he finished rolling a cigarette, distributing tobacco crumbs evenly upon the rug about him, and fished in his pocket for a match.

"I know it," said Al Ashley.

Laney came over, lit Burbee's cigarette and handed a couple of stencils to Al Ashley.

"Here's the first one, Mr. Ashley. Will you sign your name to it, as usual?"

"Mmmm--let's check it first," said Al Ashley. "What d'you call it?"

"Ghastly Gossip," said Laney, proudly. "Clever title, isn't it?"

"It'll do," said Al, scanning it. "It isn't really up to my usual standards...it's a little too clever for you...hmmm." He stared off into space for a moment. "Tell you what--we won't put any name on this one, Laney. Just call it Ghastly Gossip by the Spectral Scribe."

"Haw!" guffawed Laney. "That's a good one!" Exuberantly he delivered the stencil to Bill Rotsler for title lettering and, still chuckling, returned to his typewriter and started composing on a new stencil.

"It's your move, Al," said Burbee.

"I know it," said Al Ashley, staring off into space. Reluctantly, he moved one of his knights.

For a time the room was silent, except for the clicking of two typers & the faint scratchings of Bill Rotsler's stylus, which of course could not be heard in all that clatter. Burbee moved a pawn and removed Al's knight.

"It's your move, Al," he said.

"Subspace," said Al Ashley.

"Subspace?" said Burbee.

"Subspace," said Al. His usually unemotional features assumed a mystic expression, as though indescribable visions had suddenly unfolded before him. "I remember. I remember!"

"Sure you do," said Burbee. To Condra he said, "What happened? Did you let him run out of coffee? You know that would wreck his mind!"

"But his cup is half full," said Condra. "Look for yourself..."

"My cup runneth over," said Ashlry. "I was sitting here, staring off into space--as I often do--and I suddenly found myself staring into subspace. And now I remember, Burbee. Burbee, I can remember everything!"

"Oh," said Burbee. "It's your move, Al."

"I know it," said Al Ashley, staring off into subspace...Later..."I remember," sighed Al Ashley, "Ah, Babylon, Babylon."

"Babylon?" said Burbee. "Babylon? 'When I was a king in Babylon and you were a Christian slave,'" he quoted. "Al, do you remember when I was a king in Babylon?"

Al sat gazing off into subspace, remembering. One could almost feel him searching out the entire vista of the past. "You have never been a king, Burbee, in all the millions of years I have known you."

"Not a king?" said Burbee.

"No."

"I've been cheated," said Burbee. "I guess only big fans like you get to be kings."

Al shifted his gaze slightly. "Cheer up," he said. "Your time is coming. In your next incarnation but one, you will be chieftain of a small band of ragged savages; survivors of the Atomic Bomb, Mi."



"I'm happy to learn that I'll survive," said Burbee, "but where do you get your information?"

Al drank some more coffee.

"I remember it," said Al Ashley. "I've just discovered that by gazing off into hyperspace, I can remember the future. Right now I am looking right to the end of time. Oh, yes, I thought so!"

Condra interrupted.

"Here's another one, Burbee. I call it The Variable Existence of Hyperfan."

"Well! Well, let's see how it is," said Charles, rapidly reading Condra's article while Ashley applied himself to coffee.

"I love it," he shouted suddenly. "It's good! I love it! I love it!"

"It's perfect," he said calming down. "Wonderful! Good job, Condra. Sign my name to it and turn it over to Rotsler for the artwork."

"No one but Charles Burbee can write like that," said Charles Burbee as he rolled a cigarette.

"I can," said Al Ashley. "I've done it."

"Al, you've never written like me."

"Well, I could if I wanted to, so why bother to prove it," said Al. "After all, I seldom actually write down the things I write, and it would be too much trouble to repeat the article from memory. You can take my word for it. I once not only imitated your style of writing, but improved upon it."

"All right, all right. But what about this king business, or chieftainship, or what ever? Where were you, when you saw me in my royal facet?"

"I will be a scientist in the incarnation," said Al, "effecting the rebirth of destiny. Forseeing the great destruction even before I remembered it, I have already planned the construction of a fortress of refuge for 700 of the cream of humanity, who will be preserved as the seed of the new genus."

"Homo?" asked Burbee.

"...er, no, not more than 80%," said Al.

"Hmmm. I suppose you'll gather up all the top scientists and technical men, as is usually done in science fiction?"

"No," said Al. "Those guys have the wrong idea."

"No? What kind of men will you choose?"

"I won't have any men," said Al.

Burbee's cigarette died and grew cold while he stared at Al Ashley.

"You won't choose any men," said Burbee, "There will be 700 people in the contemplated slant colony, consisting of 699 lovely women--and Al Ashley?"



"Sure" said Al, absorbing another cup of coffee.

Burbee moved a pawn and removed one of Al's bishops.

"It's your move---Big Man."

"I know it," said Al staring off into hyperspace. For quite a long time, he sat silent.

"It's remarkable, this being able to remember both the past and future," he said.

"It must be," agreed Burbee; "but somehow it leaves me. I have no confidence in any thing that vouches for your superior talents and abilities."

"I don't see why not," said Al. "After all, with an IQ of 194--determined by myself from a test in a magazine--don't ask to see the magazine--I've lost it--you can certainly expect me to be remarkable."

"But when I tested you, you only registered an IQ of 65," said Burbee. "Or was that your temperature? Anyway, how about that?"

"Had you ever tested anyone else?"

"No."

"There's your answer," said Al. "Being ignorant of procedure, you couldn't possibly get a true reading--but you'd never admit it. What makes you so conceited, Burbee? Why don't you admit your mistakes--as I do--and profit by experience?"

"No egoboo in that," said Burbee. "Al, were you a king in Babylon while I was a Christian slave? Are you serious?"

"Have you ever known me to be otherwise?" asked Ashley.

"No," said Burbee, "You're never funny deliberately. You'll probably never be funny until the day you die, and probably not then."

"I shall never die. I intend to live forever," said Al.

"You must have died after being a king in Babylon."

"Well, you might say I moved to another facet of existence."

"You were a king in Babylon heh?" said Burbee. "and I was a Christian slave. What kind of a king were you, Al?"

"I was a beneficent despot," said Al Ashley, "beloved by all."

"Sure you were, Al. What sort of a slave was I?"

"To be frank," said Al, "you were rather difficult and--much as I hate to say it--disappointing." He drank his coffee.

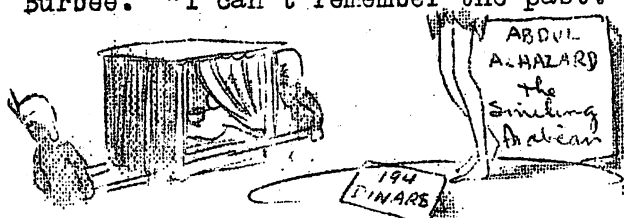
"I was being carried in triumphal procession after achieving a military victory of incredible brilliance," he resumed, "and saw you displayed in the used slave lot of Abdul Alhazard, the Smiling Arabian. Something about you attracted me and I ordered you placed in my harem. Later I regretted it. You were most disappointing, Burbee."

Burbee retrieved his cigarette from the floor, to which it had suddenly fallen.

"I was?" he gulped. "Why--that's hardly flattering, lover boy, to a man of my undoubted vigor and handsome appearance!"

"What do you mean?" said Al, "Why--you were a slave girl, Burbee! Do you think for a minute that I'd put a man in my harem? What do you take me for," complained Al Ashley, "a queer?"

"How was I to know?" answered Burbee. "I can't remember the past."



"So I was a member of your harem?" he said at last. "Al, was I beautiful? Did you love me? Were we happily married, Al? Al, tell me that you loved me..."

"Three years later I traded you to Honest Djinn for a newer model with less mileage," said Al.

"Oh--no!" said Burbee. "Al--after all we meant to each other? Al--tell me that you loved me. Al. Why did you buy me?"

Ashley chuckled.

"I thought you were a slant," he said, "I intended to create a new race (with you as the collaborator)--but your children were barely human. I wrote the experiment off as a failure."

"I was a mother?" asked Burbee reverently.

"Of ten children," said Al.

"In three years?"

"They were born three and one-thord to a litter."

"No wonder I was born tired in this life," said Burbee. Were they cute kids, Al?"

"Sure, they resembled me, the dominant parent, but they had your unfortunate mental characteristics. It was an unhappy blending."

"Yes, I should think so," Burbee said. He moved a pawn, removed Al's other bishop and accepted Rotsler's proffered light.

"It's your move, Al."

"I know it," said Al, staring off into some sort of space.

By this time Condra and Laney were back with more material and the two great intellects cjecked it.

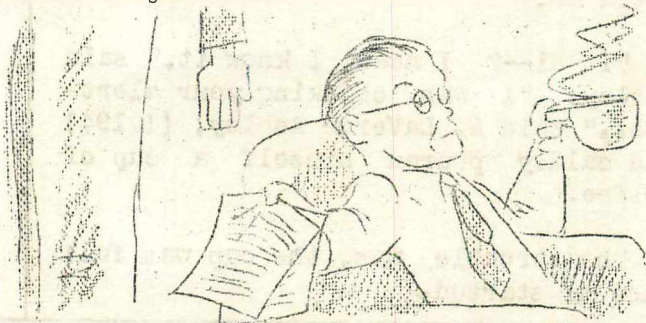
"The Rise and Fall of the Fannish Empire is all right, I suppose," said

Burbee, "and you can sign my name to it, Condra, but this other piece stinks. You may sign your own name to it."

"Yes, ma'am er sir."

"Al, will you OK F.I.A.?" asked Laney.

"I'm not an egotist," said Al. "If you want egoboo you can claim that you wrote it yourself."



"Oh, boy!" bellowed Laney. Glee-fully he strode across to where Bill Rotsler was finishing up the Ashley & Burbee editorials and fillers, and engaged him in boisterous conversation, punctuated by occasional r o a r s of mirth as he pointed to certain of the more suggestive passages.

"You amaze me, Al." said Burbee.

"I even amaze myself," said Al. "Did I mention that you and I are physically descended from one of those ten children of mine?"

"I don't think so," said Burbee.

"Well, ponder this amazing fact, together with all my other remarkable attributes. Charles, if I am descended from my own offspring, I was my own ancestor!"

"It's not remarkable for a man to be his own grandpaw anymore," said Charles Burbee. "It's been done in song and story. It's commonplace."

Burbee rolled himself a cigarette. "Look at my own case. By your own set of facts, I - a healthy and vigorous man - am my own grandmaw! Beat that!"





Al Ashley reached for the coffee pot (but whether to @ o n c e a l his chagrin, no one will ever know.) "I see nothing so remarkable about that," he said calmly, and calmly prepared to pour himself a cup of coffee.

"It's your move, Burbee," he said.

"Why, lover boy," said Burbee in surprised tones, "Didn't you notice? I can't move. Your last move checkmated me."

"It di--? I mean, I know it," said Ashley. "I was checking your alertness," said A. LaVerne Ashley, (IQ194) and calmly poured himself a cup of coffee.

The trouble was, the cup was full when he started.

NOT THAT  
ANYONE WILL  
HEED THIS

but it makes a  
good filler



SUPPORT THE

**TORSON**

## THE MAN BEHIND THE MASQUE by ye ed

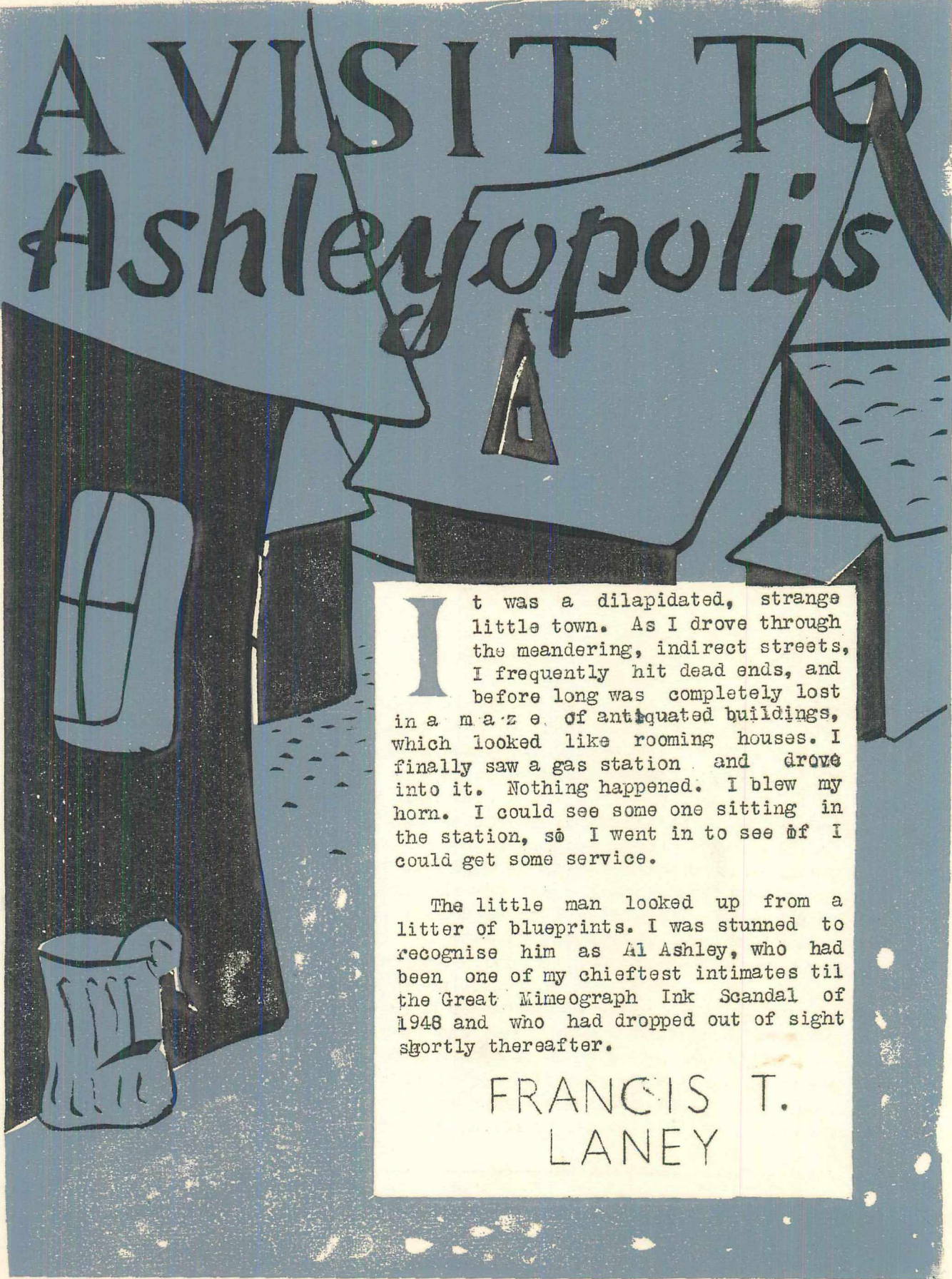
It always seems to me that I write one or two versions of my editorials, then lose them, ending up ad libbing an editorial on the stencil or leaving one out entirely. This is Volume One, Number Two, Whole Number Two of that Unforgettable Fanzine, MASQUE. I wish to extend the greatest of thanks to Charles Edward Burbee, Jr and to his better half for the hours they have put up with me while I wrote, drew and stenciled this issue in their home. And the hours on the macho fine mimeograf Burb possesses. And thanks goes to F. Towner Laney and his wife, who gave me food and drink and let me use the fine former Half-World printing press for the two blockprints in this issue. Thanks too to Sydney Stibbard, a Lart schoolchum, for the great deal of time he spent on this issue and to his patents for the storage of my silk screen in their garage. Thanks goes to Condra and the other contributors for their work. As you might guess, this fanzine has no policy, no ideals. Just what appeals to me will appear so you never know. Thanks should also go to MASQUE's editor and publisher (dat's me) who is doing such a fine job of dummying this editorial as he goes. A biography of Syd Stibbard was crowded out this issue but will appear in the next I think. Good thing I'm what U might call an artist...it will be so easy to ad lib something onto the bottom of this stencil to fill it out. Question: Are you sick of the name of that little man, Al Ashley?

...Ye Ed





# A VISIT TO Ashleyopolis



**I**t was a dilapidated, strange little town. As I drove through the meandering, indirect streets, I frequently hit dead ends, and before long was completely lost in a m a z e of antiquated buildings, which looked like rooming houses. I finally saw a gas station and drove into it. Nothing happened. I blew my horn. I could see some one sitting in the station, sô I went in to see if I could get some service.

The little man looked up from a litter of blueprints. I was stunned to recognise him as Al Ashley, who had been one of my chieftest intimates til the Great Mimeograph Ink Scandal of 1948 and who had dropped out of sight sgortly thereafter.

FRANCIS T.  
LANEY



"Al!" I exclaimed. "How are you? Where have you been?"

He shrugged.

"How about some gas?"

"I've just finished perfecting a scheme of automobile propulsion which eliminates petroleum and all its by-products," he said, waving a languid hand at the pile of drawings.

"But I need some gas now, Al."

He set down his cup of coffee. "That's the trouble with you, Laney. You have no vision. You are reactionary. You lack in imagination. You have a terror of intellectuality just like Burbee's. You aren't practical. What the hell do you want with gasoline when I have just perfected this revolutionary new propellant?"

"But Al, I have a gasoline auto."

"To hell with it," said Al Ashley. "This is a modern age; why mess around with horse and buggy makeshifts and expedients?"

I couldn't resist it. "Al," I said, did you ever learn touch typing?"

"You bastard," said Al Ashley.

I gave up and started off in search of another station. Shortly I was more lost than ever, so I pulled up at a corner where several people were standing talking.

"Can you tell me....EEYAHHHHHHHH!" Six faces had turned to me as I started to speak. Each of the faces was borne on 5'2" of stocky, minuscule man. Each of the faces was that of Al Ashley.

I wasn't the least bit frightened. I'm not afraid of anything, least of all Al Ashley. The reason I ran was twofold. First, I reasoned calmly, Al Ashley had just invented this new propellant; he won't know where I can find a service station. And secondly, my legs were cramped from driving all

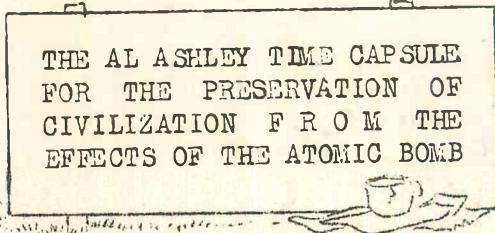
day in the car; it was plain I should get out and move around a little.

When I came to after my head-on collision with the brick wall that blocked one of the dead end streets, I realised that there was something peculiar about this town. As I lay there on the sidewalk, bloody but unbowed - just resting, I could hear a breeze whispering along. I looked up at a tree; not a leaf moved. I wet a finger and held it up. No breeze. Intrigued, I listened more closely.

"Everett...buzz...did you hear buzz about the time he bzzz...Everett...bzz in the Navy...bzzz Everett...bzzzzz...bzzzzzz...Everett...bzzz....and at the Slan Shack he tried to...bzzz...bzzz."

It was too much for me. I trudged aimlessly for hours through the deserted streets. Now and then I met Al Ashley, walking along lost in deep, deep thought. I wanted no part of him, not right then. I wanted to think, to, to...golly, was I going insane?

I realised suddenly that I had for some time been staring without comprehension at a sign: ASHLEYOPOLIS CIVIC CENTER. I was in an area of vacant lots and partially completed buildings. One vacant lot bore a huge sign:



THE AL ASHLEY TIME CAPSULE  
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF  
CIVILIZATION FROM THE  
EFFECTS OF THE ATOMIC BOMB

There was nothing else on the lot but a broken coffee cup weighting down some weather-tattered blue prints.

There were a number of small buildings something like realtor's offices, one or two with roofs but most in various stages of incomplection. To my astonishment each bore a sign: AL ASHLEY, HYPNOTIC CONSULTANT. I went and peered in the windows of several. In each one, Al Ashley sat staring into sub-space with a cup of cold coffee conveniently to his right hand.

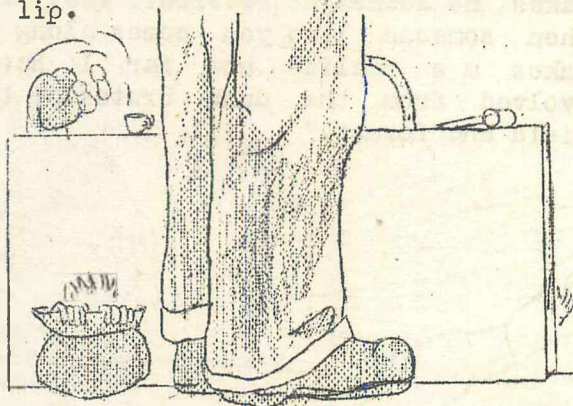


Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. "You're under arrest for wearing stilts."

I spun and looked into the eyes of two Al Ashleys, each wearing a policeman's uniform.

They thrust me through a door labeled ASHLEYOPOLIS MUNICIPAL COURT. PRESIDING JUDGE, AL ASHLEY.

Al Ashley looked up from behind the judge's bench where he was sitting drinking coffee. "Let me put on my robes of office, and the court can come into session at once." Another Al Ashley came out and handed Judge Ashley a pair of falsies which he donned, and the judge reached into his pocket, pulled out a grey moustache and pasted it, slightly askew, on his lip.



He pounded the gavel. "Jurymen, take your seats!" (12 Al Ashleys filed into the jury box and sat down) "Prosecuting attorney? Counsel for the defense?" (Two more Al Ashleys stepped into the room.) "What is the charge?"

"Stilts, your honor," intoned the policemen in unison.

"Wearing of artificial devices to increase the height is punishable by death in Ashleyopolis," droned the judge. "It has a bad effect on our national Napoleonic psychosis. Pull off his pants!"

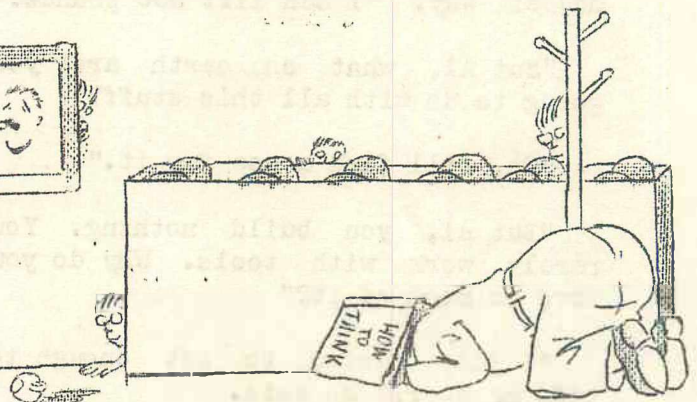
I struggled, but to no avail. "This man doesn't have stilts! His height is natural!" shouted all the Al Ashleys in unison.

"Lock him up for observation for one month. If he doesn't grow a grey moustache, take him out and shoot him." The judicial Ashley banged his coffee mug and signed to the cops to take me away.

"I'll....I'll tell Everett on you," I shouted.

A veritable whirlwind swirled about me as, with pattering paws, all the Al Ashleys darted about the courtroom, hiding under chairs, behind the jury box, and in the spittoon. The judge craned his neck out of the bowl in the chandelier and said, "Don't ever mention that man's name! He terrifies us!"

"But what shall I do?" I asked. "How can I serve my sentence if you don't show me where the jail is?"



"Sentence suspended," said the judge, drawing his head back inside the chandelier in a fresh ecstasy of terror. "Go find the archtypical Al Ashley. He will tell you about..... Everett." As Judge Ashley whispered the dread name, the courtroom rang with little shrieks of terror, and Foreman of the Jury Al Ashley who, braver than his fellows, had ventured out from behind the hat-tree, slumped to the floor in a swoon.

I left the little men to their frights and fancies, and, like a rugged individualist, strode out into the pure sunlight of Ashleyopolis, a free man.

I walked down the main street aimlessly, looking at the unfinished bui-



ldings, the spotted and misspelled signs, and shaking my head at the sight of all the hypnotic consultants sitting l i k e somnolent siders in their lairs. One, I noticed, was so festooned wuth cobwebs t h a t it is doubtful if he could have moved.

Suddenly my feet went out from under me, and I was floundering ina morass of washers and other small bits of bakelite and fibre. It was like a quicksand; the harder I struggled the deeper I sank into the pile. Just as I commended my soul to God, a thumb and finger closed on the nape of my neck and, kicking and squalling like a kitten, I was lifted out of the pile by Al Ashley.

"It's nothing," he s a i d in his modest way. "I can lift 500 pounds."

"But Al, what on earth are you going to do with all this stuff?"

"Oh, I'll find a use for it."

"But Al, you build nothing. You rarely work with tools. Why do you have so much of it?"

"I just wanted to get enough to tide me over," he said.

"Tide you over what?"

"Uh, you know, tide me over."

"But Al, under the circumstances, that statement is meaningless. You've taken home more stuff in four weeks than I have in four years - and I have a home workshop in which I actually make stuff all the time. 'Tide you over', indeed. Al, that statement is a semantic blank."

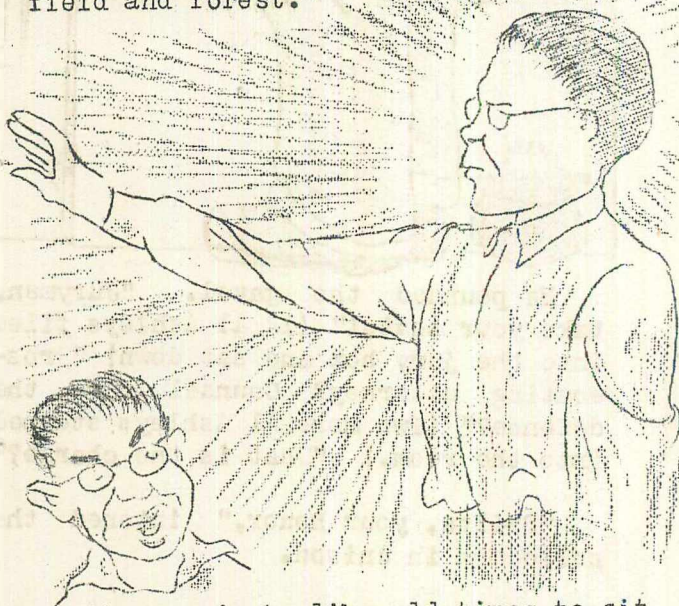
"Laney," said Al Ashley solemnly, "do you quarrel with the established usages of the English language?"

I blinked my eyes and hope that soon it would be time to get up and go to work.

"Come, Laney. Aren't you going to compliment me on the utopia which I have established here as an ever-living monument to my acumen, practicality, and all-round ability? Doesn't the whole conception of Ashleyopolis stir your soul to the very depths?"

"Well," I admitted, "I've never seen a place like this. Why are there so many of you?"

"Oh," said Al Ashley with his characteristic shrug. There was an awkward pause. "I'll tell you what, Laney, come up to my Bixel Street executive mansion, and I'll tell you all about it. It is good for me to talk once in a while with someone like you. When I try to make the secrets of the universe clear to your finite mind it makes me downright reverent. Yes, sir, when someone like you comes along it makes me realize how far I have evolved from the dumb brutes of the field and forest."



It was just like old times to sit at the ricketty kitchen table in 643 and drink coffee with Al Ashley. Surr-eptitiously, I dabbed at my eyes as I realized how much I had enjoyed the hours with this little man, how deeply I had been wounded w h e n Al Ashley started trading his friends for mimeograph ink at the rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound per friend. I realized that Al had been talking for some time.



"And so when I realized that I could never get the world to get into step with me, I knew that my only solution was to get away from it all and create a private world of my own. And here it is. Ashleyopolis. The grandeur that was Rome and the glory that was Greece all rolled together into this great teeming utopia.

"You may have noticed that all the inhabitants are me, infinitely multiplied and self-sufficient. There are a few flaws of course. The worst trouble is our economic situation."

"How is that, Al?"

"Well, our economy needs a catalyst. Each of the Al Ashleys is secretary-treasurer of some organization, and theoretically he should be able to embezzle enough money to stay self-sufficient always. But we can't get any money in any of the treasuries for us to embezzle. All the members of all the organizations are Al Ashleys, and since no Ashley ever pays his dues we are stuck at the moment on dead center."

"Oh."

"And our part-time work as hypnotic analysts does not seem to pay off very well either, since none of the population has any psychoses or other mental ills to analyse. How could they? They are all me."

"Just a minute, Al," I said. "That leads into something that has been bothering me. How is it that all of you arexalike?"

"Ah, Laney, that is the crowning beauty of Ashleyopolis. When I first came out here and got started I was faced with two very difficult problems. The first one was that I absolutely had to have peers with whom to associate. Much of my previous difficulties came from my contacts with people who didn't understand me. And secondly, to a rugged individualist such as myself it was unutterably galling to be dependent on women to reproduce my kind. So with one great transcendental

triumph I solved these two great problems."

"How did you do it, Al?"

"A great living triumph of mind over matter. I thought it over from all angles and decided to reproduce by fission. It was not easy at first, but I've now gotten this fine biological problem down to a point where I go fission every six hours."

Involuntarily I glanced at my watch, and with a thrill of pure horror realized that I had been sitting there talking with Al Ashley for five hours and fifty-nine minutes.

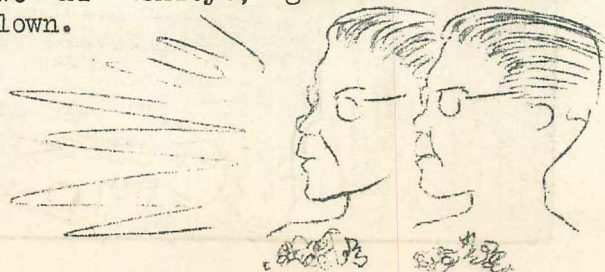
I looked at him.

A strange expression flitted over his face. "My time is upon me, Laney," he gasped. "Go forth and leave me to my travail."

I wanted to leave - oh, how I wanted to leave - but I was paralysed with fear and awe. As I looked at Al Ashley he seemed to swell, his features became nebulous and hazy. There was a ripping of cloth, and modestly I averted my eyes as Al's hairy chest, seething and bubbling in some outre chemistry, burst into sight.

Then, above a horrible rending of flesh and splitting of bones, rose like the peal of a giant organ the high clear notes of a man's voice. There was love in this voice, and fulfillment, an awesome Bach-like blend of agony and rapture, of life and of death. "Everett! Everett!", he shouted.

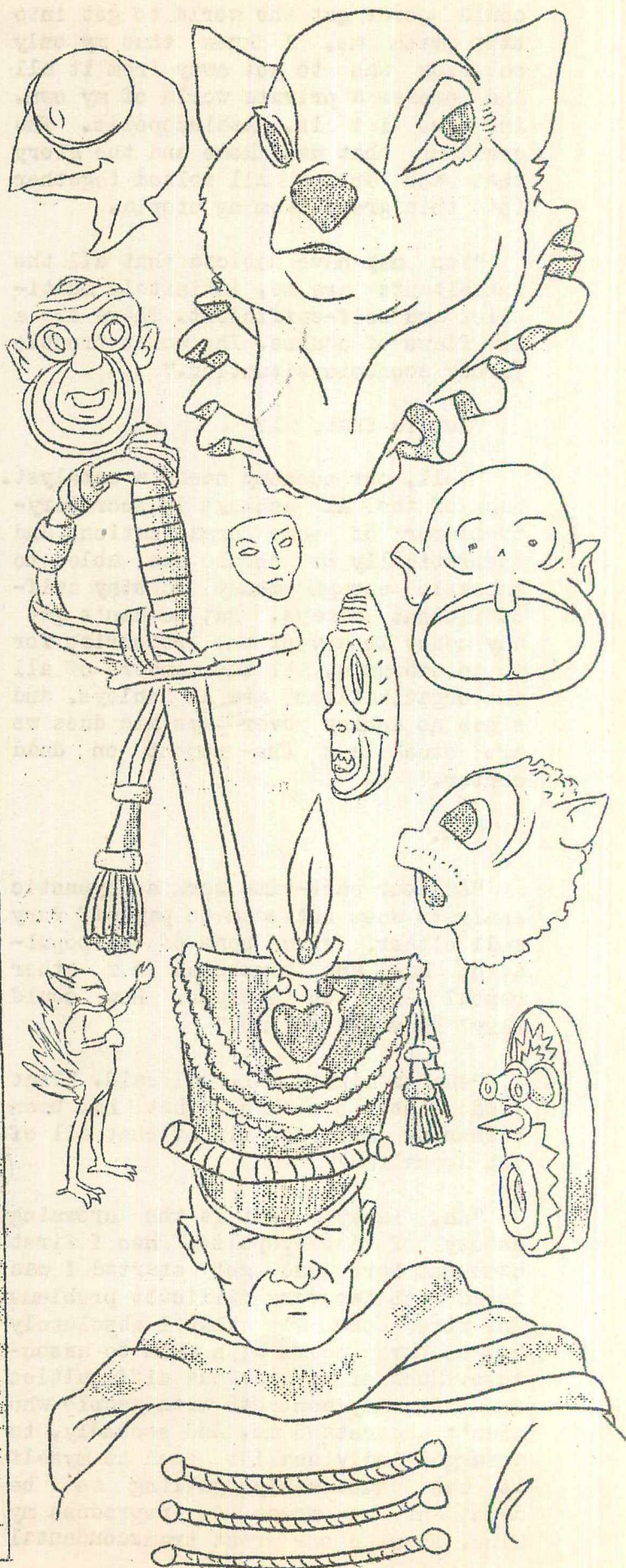
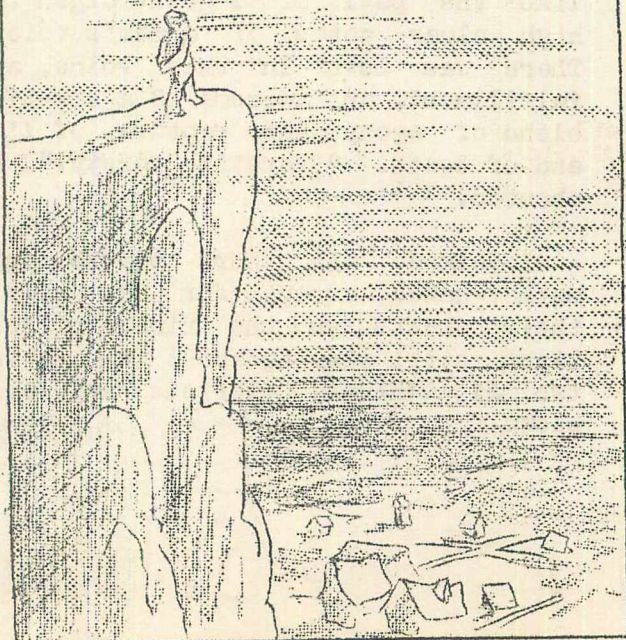
I looked, and there before me, mother-naked except for the hair on their chests and the nimbus of holy light still playing about them, stood two Al Ashleys, glorious and full-blown.



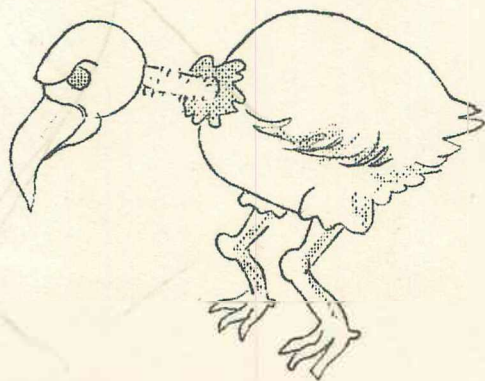
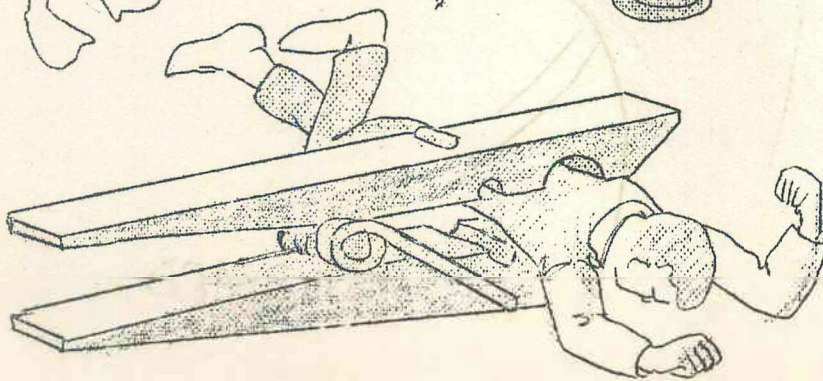
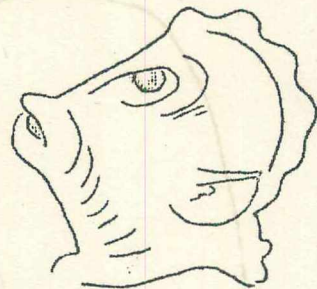
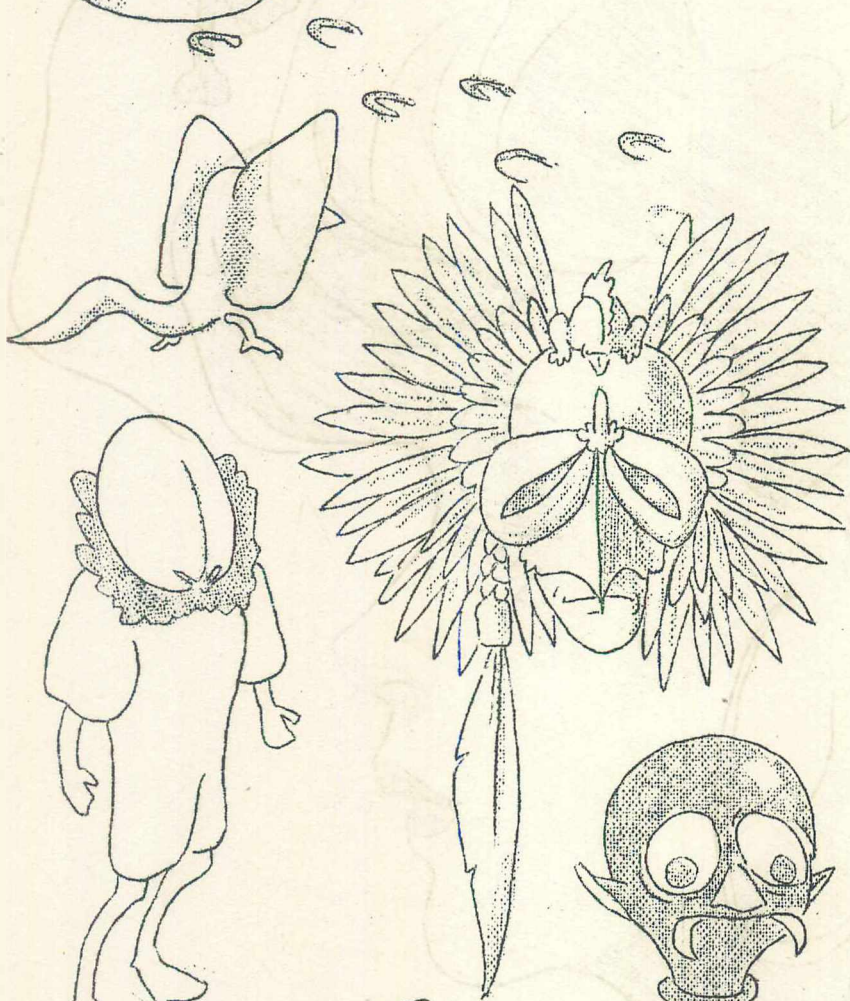
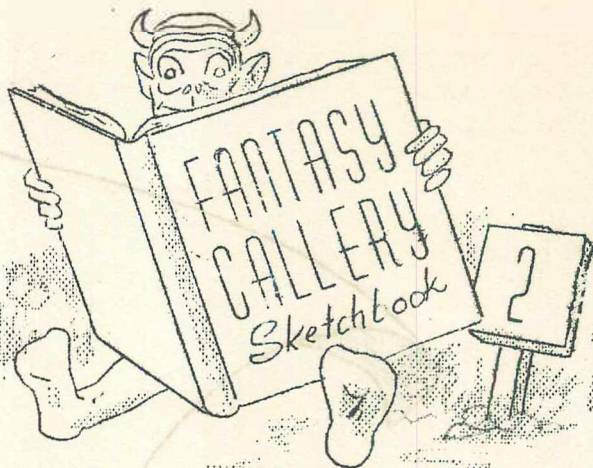


"You see, Laney," said Al Ashloy in unison, "we bright-eyes can do lots of things you dull-eyes wouldn't even think about."

And then I remembered that the Holy Grail was, in the last analysis, a grey moustache.





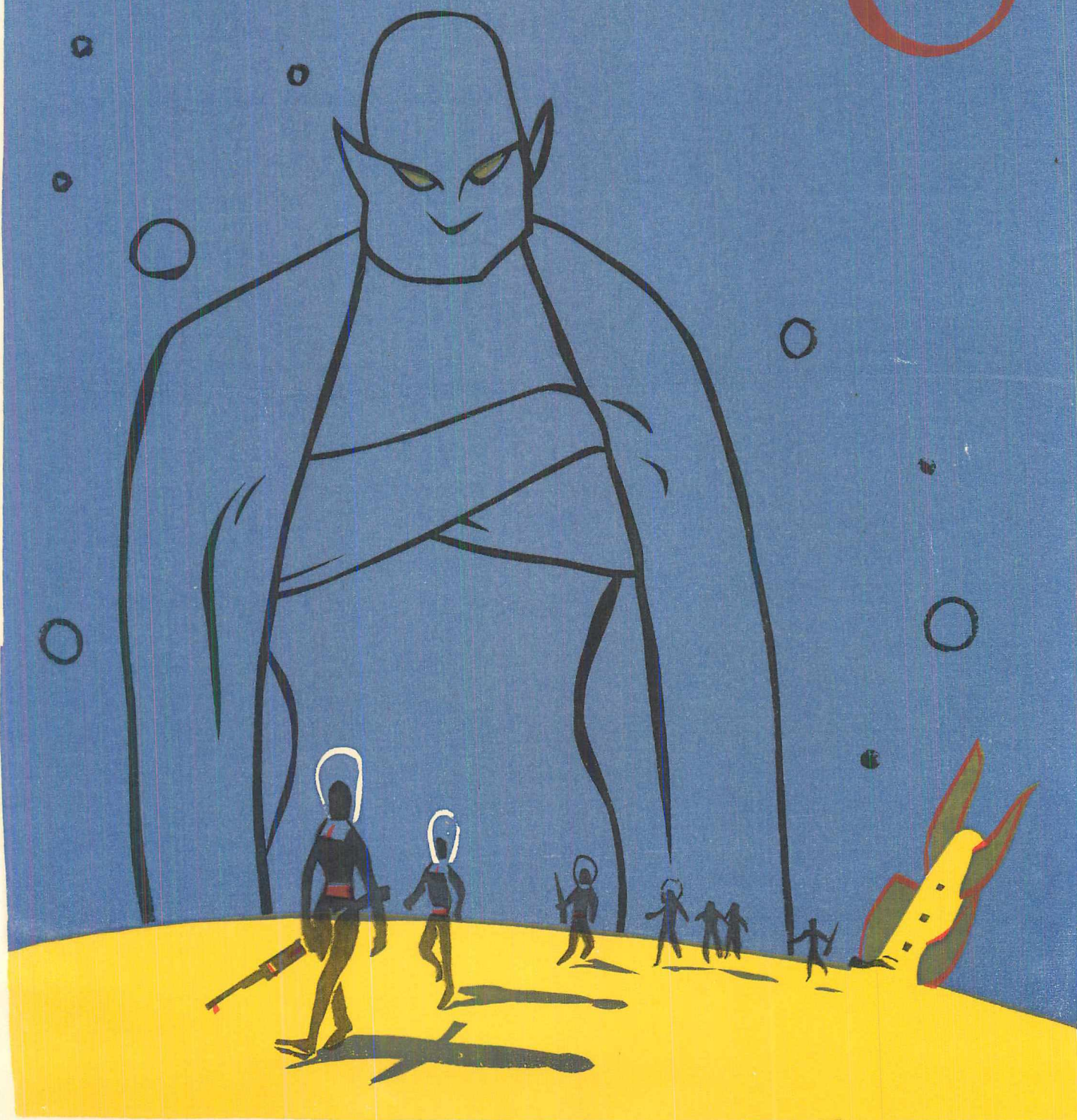






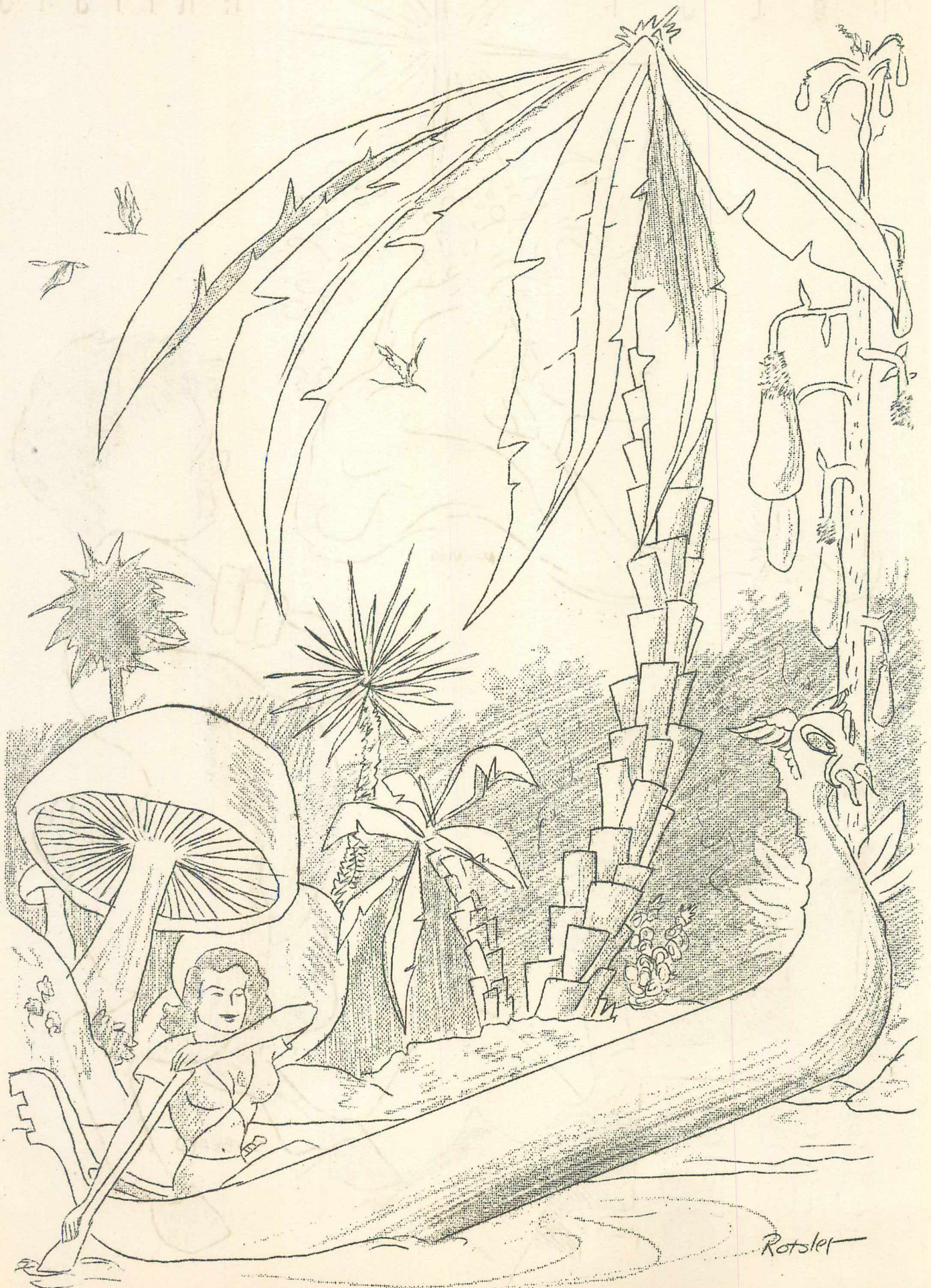


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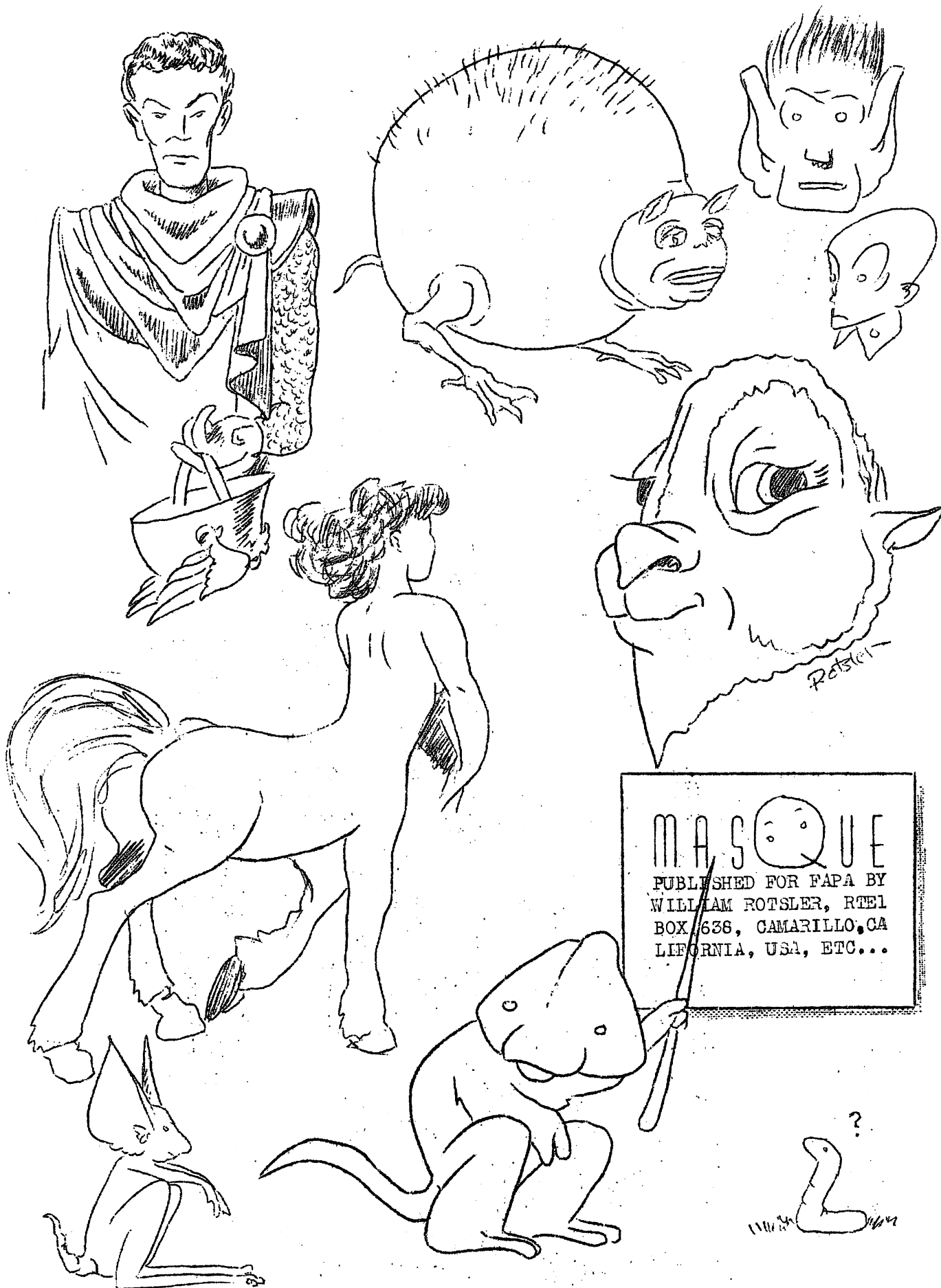
GUEST

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