

REMEMBRANCE

OF

THINGS PAST

V.

A selection from the pages of Fantascience Digest

An occasional delving into the writings
surviving from the elder fandom

A Weltschmerz Publication

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February 1958

FAPA

Introduction

Fantascience Digest first appeared in November 1937 as a small (5 1/2 x 8) hectographed magazine of 32 pages. The editor was Robert Madle, who continued as editor for the life of the magazine. The Art editor, Jack Agnew, contributed some colorful hectograph illustrations. John V Baltadonis was "Associate." With the second issue it became large size, with 22 pages; a contributing editor, Willis C. Conover, was added. The first anniversary issue was the last of the hectographed issues; with the next issue it became a mimeographed magazine. At the same time Baltadonis is replaced by George R. Hahn as associate editor. The next two issues have only Madle and Agnew at the helm; Fred W. Fischer is added with the July 1939 issue. With the 12th issue, Jan 1940, Agnew becomes co-editor, but is demoted back to assistant editor with No. 13. The Nov 1941 issue, appearing after a long hiatus, had as "Editorial Directors" Robert A. Madle, Rust W. Barron, and Jack Agnew; Fred W. Fischer and Jack Baltadonis were "Associates." A Jan-Feb issue was promised (the fourth anniversary issue) for about January 15th; it is 16 years overdue.

Material in [] has been inserted by the present editor; parenthetical statements are as transcribed. Only the most obvious spelling and punctuation errors have been corrected.

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Bill Evans

Box 86
Mt. Rainier
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USA

THE MALIGNANT PEEZLE

by

Henry Kuttner

I'd cleaned my typewriter. Consequently, it was with a considerable shock that I noticed a tiny bald head protruding from the innards of the machine, and I thought for a moment it was a bug of some sort. It wasn't, though. I stopped typing my yarn, "The Inside Out-Galaxy," which was to tell about the desperate attempt of Professor Peezle to save the earth from the attack of marauding vacuum-men -- and I stared at the bald head. It rose higher and a tiny, white-bearded face was peering at me from the keys.

"Hello, fathead," it said in a squeaky voice. "I'm Professor Peezle."

I had always expected something like this -- ever since the night, after ten hours of typing, I had seen my typewriter abruptly recede into the fourth dimension. I leaned back in the chair and shut my eyes, breathing deeply. When I opened them the bald head was as large as my fist, and it was perched on top of a scrawny body which sat on the edge of the desk. The little man was fumbling with a drawer, trying to open it.

"You might offer me a drink," he said reproachfully.

Dazedly I opened the drawer and handed the little man a flat brown bottle. He fumbled with the cork, cursed, and suddenly shot up until he was nearly six feet tall. That done, he extracted the cork and shrank again to his former size. "Handy trick, this atomic compression," he said absently. "Makes the liquor last longer." But at the rate he was drinking, the flat bottle would soon be empty.

I took it away from him. "Listen," I said. "Are you real?"

"Yeah," he said, eying the bottle. "Why not? You've been writing about me long enough. Lousy writing, too. I could do better myself."

That stung. "I may not be a Wells," I told him hotly. "But just the same if it hadn't been for me you'd never have existed."

He sneered. "Existed? Do you call that existence? I was bored stiff. Nothing to do but save the earth, save the earth, save...."

"What's dull about that?"

He expanded to six feet again, snatched the bottle, and drank greedily. "Plenty! I haven't had a drink in years, except when I was on the opposite page from a bottle. No fun. Nothing. The only thing a scientist is good for is to save the world. I can do it with my hands tied."

"But you're supposed to be a serious old scientist...."

He leered at me wickedly. "Say, mug, just try putting me in a love story. I'd...."

I broke in hurriedly. "Never mind. What would the readers say?"

He let out a strain of oaths. "I hate their insides. I hate yours, too. A character never has any fun. Why, I've spent whole days looking through my laboratory, thinking you may have put a bottle of whiskey on the shelf by mistake, but no -- not you. Never a taste. You're just a stingy, fat-headed...." He made several uncomplimentary remarks.

"The hero never kicks," I told him.

"Why should he? He gets the girl. I help him out, do all the work, save the earth — and I'm supposed to be satisfied with my laboratory. In a dozen of your stories about me the hero gets the girl, and I get a test-tube. Scallions to that." He watched me furtively and then said, "Lousy style you've got anyway."

"Why, you sawed-off little shrimp," I said hotly. "What do you mean, lousy style? I'd like to see you try your hand at my job — in fact, I'd like to change places with you just to watch you squirm!"

His face lit up with a malicious smile. "I was waiting for that," he chuckled. "You've done it now, sucker. And Lord help you, for I won't. You just bet we'll trade places!"

With that he began bounding from key to key of my typewriter. As a line of type began to grow on the paper an amazing phenomenon took place. I felt myself grow hazy, unreal. Like a cloud of smoke I was sucked into the typewriter!

Blackness took me. When I recovered I found myself in the story I'd been writing, "The Inside-Out Galaxy." It was an utterly amazing experience. There I was, a character in the yarn — and at the typewriter, pounding away busily, occasionally swigging a drink from the bottle — was Professor Peezle.

It was diabolically clever. Halfway through the story Peezle mysteriously vanished, and a stranger appeared from the fourth dimension. That was me. I could only squirm and curse as Peezle typed the story.

I wasn't even the hero. Just a scientist, and I commenced to understand what Peezle had suffered. Test-tubes, machines, gadgets — what did I know about this. I had to stay in the story, watching impotently, as Peezle raised the dickens, drinking my liquor, flirting with the maid, and, worst of all, writing nasty letters to the editors.

But that isn't why I'm sending out this appeal for help — this desperate S O S. I can't get out of the story — Peezle tricked me too cleverly for that. The worst of it is that those vacuum-men are descending upon the earth, and I don't know how to stop them. Peezle knew; he always saved the earth. But I'm no scientist, and I can only sit and suffer as the vacuum-men pour down in ever-increasing hordes. Earth is doomed....

Or it will be, unless somebody does something about that guy Peezle.

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Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec 1937 (1,1)

Stanley G. Weinbaum

by

Robert W. Lowndes

The late Stanley G. Weinbaum will, we think, have had as much influence in the shaping of future science fiction, as well as today's science fiction, as the great poet Charles Baudelaire had upon the entire panorama of continental and much of American poetry. Just as Baudelaire brought new blood, perspective, and consciousness, to a new movement in literature, decadence, which had already been set in motion by Edgar Allan Poe in this country, Weinbaum brought to perfection a different, refreshed type of fiction which had been set in motion by

a few scattered writers like Dr. Edward Elmer Smith. And again, like Baudelaire, Weinbaum was infinitely greater, broader in scope than his predecessors.

What are some of the qualities that set Weinbaum apart from his fellow science fiction writers? One was humanism. His people were alive, vivid, real — the problems he set them against were understandable, human problems. One editor said that Weinbaum's stories were just good adventure tales on a fantastic stage; we disagree — they were a great deal more than that. A very great quality in Weinbaum was one of scientific appreciation. He approached science without blindfolds, without sentimentality; he did not fall into the error, as so many others, of thinking science either a god or a demon, looking upon science as something which would save humanity or doom it. He realized that science, in itself, was incapable of being either benevolent or malignant, that knowledge was neither partial to human beings nor adverse to them, that science was no panacea. Science could merely show a multiplicity of courses man was able to follow; it could not choose among them. Not science, but man is responsible for the machine age. Science showed man how to build metal monsters, but man chose the building thereof; science showed man how to construct horrific engines of wholesale demolition, but science did not choose man's use of them or decree that they should be used for the benefit of a few at the cost of billions.

Weinbaum had, again, imaginative appreciation. He did not invest Mars, for example, with lovely humans, gorgeous heroines for earthmen to conquer; he used appreciation of Mars' alienage and evolved thereon a logical form of life and a logical psychology for that life to follow. Whether or not his basic factors were absolutely sound is irrelevant. Science fiction is imaginative, creative literature of escape. It is based, true, upon what we believe to be exact science, but if an author takes a few liberties, that is permissible. Because we know very little and of what we know, much is indubitably false. It is very doubtful that if any of the science fictionists can ever give an accurate picture on what man will find on Mars if he ever gets there, what his reactions and the reactions of the Martian phenomena to man will be.

Another quality in Weinbaum was his ready and keen sense of humor. He did not let his discoveries overawe him; he never took himself seriously. Because of that, he was able to dive deeper, stay there longer, and come up dryer than any of his contemporaries. He was acute, philosophical, and prying, almost to the point of mediaevalists, who were like young birds, opening their mouths wide and gulping down every bit of intellectual nourishment their gullets could hold. That they necessarily had to swallow a good deal of sand, debris, and refuse didn't discourage them a bit.

It is still early to judge properly Weinbaum's effect upon science fiction. We can see a few results, and, with optimism as our guide, make a few prophecies; we can feel reasonably certain that science fiction has gained immensely from Weinbaum's influence and that it has, now, greater possibilities than ever before. But to be worthy of him, we must not ignore his example and fall into the errors he brought to light; we must not deceive ourselves into thinking, we who love and believe in science fiction, that science fiction is, in itself, a panacea for the world's literary illness, that it will succeed by itself and, by the magic of its own voice, become the superrevolved creative literature that we desire it to become. Better to face facts and say science fiction will NOT rise to great heights, will NOT be the literature of tomorrow unless we make it so.

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Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec, 1937.

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FOURTH DIMENSIONAL DIFFICULTIES

by

Milton A. Rothman

Many science fiction stories have brought us a fascinating subject which is slightly difficult to comprehend at first, but which is one of the most interesting phases of the Einstein Theory. This is the matter of the shape of the universe.

One of the statements which scientists use to buffalo the layman is the one about the universe being infinite and at the same time bounded. This statement, as with too many others, is open to interpretation in various ways.

The best way to look at it is to consider the universe as being the surface of a sphere. But the universe is three dimensional -- how can it be a surface? A sphere, which is a three dimensional solid, has a two dimensional surface which is curved in the third dimension. Just imagine a flat piece of paper wrapped around a sphere and you can see what I mean by a two dimensional surface curved in the third dimension.

Now expand everything one dimension. Imagine a four dimensional sphere covered by a three dimensional surface which is curved around in the fourth dimension. Or rather don't try to imagine it. Just consider it. Now, the universe is this three dimensional surface. It is not the sphere itself, but the surface, and everything on it has the geometrical properties of lines on a surface of a sphere, just expanded one dimension further.

On the surface of a sphere there are no such things as straight lines. You have, instead, great circles, which are the circumferences of sections which go through the center of the sphere. Just like "parallels" of longitude on the earth. And incidentally, the term "parallel" is not so bad, because although the lines meet at the poles, spherical geometry is different from plane geometry, and on the surface of a sphere these lines actually are parallel.

It is obvious that on a surface of a sphere a point which moves in a straight line (along a great circle) will come back to its starting point. No matter in what direction it moves, it will come back to the place it started from.

The same is true of the universe. Since it is to be considered the surface of a sphere, all straight lines on it are sections of great circles, and an object which sets out in any direction at all will return to the starting point. It will seem to have traveled in a straight line, according to all the tests you can impose upon it, but lo and behold, it is back from where it started.

An objection can be raised here. When an object travels around the world its curve can be measured. Why not in space? This is because although we occupy a two dimensional surface, we are really three dimensional and thus can see the curve which is in the direction of the third dimension. If we were two dimensional beings we could not conceive of the third dimension and thus could perceive no curve.

It is that way with us. We are three dimensional and can conceive of no curve in the direction of the fourth. Thus, the universe seems to us unbounded in every direction, although really, when you go far enough you curve right back to the starting point. And that is what is meant by infinite and bounded. The universe possesses definite volume, just as the surface of the earth has a

definite area, but travel as far as you want, you cannot reach the end of it.

The cry is raised: What is beyond the universe? If it has a limited volume, there must be something else occupying the rest of the Cosmos. But there really is no beyond. The universe is total, complete. There is no continuance of the plane of the earth. It curves back upon itself and leaves no place to hook another plane on.

But there are other planets/ Yes. However, in order to reach them you must travel in a direction perpendicular to the plane of the earth's surface. A flatlander could not conceive of this.

There may be other universes in the Cosmos. But in order to reach them one must travel in a direction perpendicular to all three axes of our surface. This direction is called the fourth dimension, and it is this motion which authors speak about when mentioning "travel into the fourth dimension." This quotation itself has no meaning, as a dimension is not a space into which one can travel, but by moving in the direction of the fourth dimension one can, according to the above theories, reach other universes.

Before closing, and allowing you to enjoy your headaches in peace, here is another idea to toy with. First, let us recapitulate: We have two dimensional surfaces curved in the third dimension and separated by the third dimension. Secondly, we have three dimensional surfaces curved in the fourth dimension and separated by the fourth dimension. Can we have a third step? The four dimensional cosmos curved in the fifth dimension and separated from other cosmos by the fifth dimension! And can we go yet higher? . . .

Notice, however, that all of this does not take any consideration of people with a four dimensional existence. It merely regards universes and higher universes separated by further dimensions, and dividing and subdividing by themselves.

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Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec 1937 (1,1)

LOOKING AROUND

with Willis Conover, Jr

What happens to magazines when popular writers edit them. Personally, I don't know, but none of us will have long to find out, for F. Orlin Tremaine has vacated the Astounding Stories offices, and the new editor is none other than John W. Campbell, Jr! This may not be news by the time it breaks into print, for news in the fantasy world has a speedy metabolism, but it is offered here in hopes that the as yet unenlightened may learn of the transition taking place in Astounding's editorial elements.

Will popular Campbell continue publishing his own stories in Astounding? And, if so, will they appear under his own name, or will "Don A. Stuart" break forth in sudden fruitfulness? How about the Penton-Blake series in Thrilling Wonder Stories? Would the editor of a science-fiction magazine contribute regularly to his competitor's publication?

At any rate it is certain that Campbell, who has seen science-fiction rise swiftly and fall hard since Amazing Stories first peeked grotesquely from the newsstands, will make Astounding Stories truly outstanding in one way if not in another. He may even change the title to Popular-Super-Science, featuring one piece of fiction and a dozen fact articles in each issue. Who knows?

It is supposed that Campbell is negotiating with Virgil Finlay, leaning-post of *Weird Tales*, to illustrate the revamped magazine — though the information is, at the most, uncertain

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Mention of Virgil Finlay renews pleasant thoughts of the enjoyable week your correspondent recently spent with the Finlays in Rochester, New York.

It was fascinating to watch Virgil at work, for he is a most painstaking limner — carefully placing each tiny dot in the desired position, not jerking the pen all over the paper, as young imitators often do. Time means little to Virgil. He spends as much as three days on a single drawing, usually working all night and all day to meet a fast-approaching deadline.

A semi-biographical personality sketch of his life and interests appears in the reader's department of the December [1937] *Weird Tales*, on the stands tomorrow. You'll recognize the issue by the nude on the cover, which Virgil has painted to illustrate Nietzsche's first story in four years, "The Sea Witch."

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Esquire, which in the past year has featured stuff by Donald Wandrei, Richard Vaughan, Frank K. Kelly, Mark Scherer, and Fletcher Pratt, has in its November [1937] issue (now on sale) a fantasy by Howard Wandrei, Don's artist brother, who writes under the name "H. W. Guernsey" and an article by Thomas Calvert "Rebirth" McClary. The contributors' page presents a photo of Wandrei and a brief outline of the lives of both him and McClary.

If the regular fantasy magazines ever go under, *Esquire* may be our salvation! Yeah — at fifty cents per! [And then there was *Playboy*...]

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Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec, 1937
(1,1)

SPAWN

A silence deep o'er all impending
Through all space as quiet reigns.
Space without beginning, ending;
Nothing, nothing in infinite planes.

Then with a burst of flame of torn
Matter from the dim beginning.
Fires join; a universe is born.
Nebulae through space go winging.

Fragments flung fly far and wide;
A star is born; a sun is made.
A sun whose spawn burst from his side
To take their place in orbits laid.

—J. Chapman Miske

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Fantascience Digest, Jan-Feb, 1938 (1, 2)

by

Don A. Wollheim

I walked through the golden streets of Paradise on my way to the Palace of the One True God. All about me crowds of angels were passing, their sweet faces glowing in vacantly idyllic smiles, their blue eyes vapid and devoid of sense, their mouths voicing swelling paeons of glory and praise, mainly happily out of tune and usually not the same song. I had to shoulder my way through mobs of these creatures, often getting a wing tip in my eye, or my toes stepped on, or having the hard-jewelled tip of a harp thrust into the small of my back.

I finally found my way to a street corner and stood against a radium lamp-post while I wiped my brow. The eternally shining sun, reflected from the gold sidewalks (which were heated in the process) and from the diamond windows, made such a dreadful glare that I wished I had not taken this mission. I would like to have gone back for my green sun-goggles but I dared not. President Lemke had sent me to Heaven to ask aid in restoring prosperity, as he had finally given up hope of humanly doing it. I could not let the party down, so I set off again.

All streets led uphill in Heaven as the Lord is All-Highest and His house is above all. This made it hard walking. Yet, eventually I arrived at the gates of God's House. Two radiant creatures (I wished again I had my sun-glasses) with fiery swords that made me perspire profusely barred the way. I explained what I wanted and they let me pass.

Inside it was drafty. It always is in God's Houses. The ceiling was about a mile high, and gloomy grey stone Gothic walls towered about me. I trudged along the hall for nigh half a mile, and then came to a desk and telephone switchboard where sat a sneezing Archangel. I questioned him, and he directed me to God's Bed-Room where he said I would find Him whom I sought.

After much devious ways, and after acquiring a promising cold in the head from the drafty, damp corridors, I arrived before the door. It was narrow but high. I knocked.

There was no answer, but from within came a sound of motion, and noise as of things being tossed about, and a deep breathing. Gathering up courage, I pushed the door open and entered.

It was a bed-room, all right. But what a mess! Things were topsy-turvy, pillows and drawers scattered about, all manner of things strewn on the floor. And on His Knees on the floor, His Head under the bed, was GOD! I stopped short wondering what He was looking for. I gathered breath to ask Him how we humans might find Recovery.

But just then I heard Him mutter angrily. I listened and fled. For our cause was hopeless. For it would do no good asking Him to find Recovery for us, until He'd solved His own greater problem. And, from experience, I knew not even He could do that. For I had heard Him mutter:-

"Where in Heaven did I leave that Collar Button?"

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Fantascience Digest, Jan-Feb 1938 (1,2)

ALL THE SAME

by

Sam Moskowitz

The science-fiction fan field is a curious development. What with its countless little publications, endless parade of petty quarrels and lightning changes it forms a fertile field for the searching psychologist to analyze.

Everything moves fast in the field of science fiction. Perhaps not fast as far as days and months are concerned, but no two years pass successively and find the scheme of action even remotely resembling its position in preceding years.

Probably the most unstable things in the field of fantasy are the versatile amateur publications. Every page of every issue is radically different from the one preceding it. The magazines themselves are published at the whims and fancies of a group of perhaps over enthusiastic fantasy fans. Yet it is significant to hear some fan of two years duration in the fan field say disgustingly "It's all the same, it never changes. I'm getting fed up on the whole business." Quite strange for a fan to state all things the field in which he is interested are all the same. In a sense the speaker is right, but still he doesn't actually know what to say in order to cover up his lack of interest.

He doesn't actually mean that the field is changeless when he says all the same, rather, he is inferring that the whole situation is hopeless. He has tried unsuccessfully to keep up with the trend for say, about two years, and then finding the pace a bit too fast attempted to corner his activities to one niche and confine them there. That, fans, is our greatest danger. Hundreds of examples of that fact cast the designs of many cases on the unwritten pattern of fan philosophy.

Take for example the advocates of the old Fantasy Magazine. They stayed with the magazine from its infant days, many of them having changed the roster of Cosmology for a berth on The Time Traveller and The Science Fiction Digest. They were a great bunch of fans. Probably they were among the most enthusiastic and worthwhile fans ever produced by science fiction. They found it comparatively simple to absorb such later accomplishments as Science Fiction, many of FM's supplement booklets, Marvel Tales, and what not. Then came the inception of Charles D. Hornig as managing editor of Wonder Stories. This provided the possibilities for a much wider group of fans. Starting in dribblets, new fan magazines and new fan activities commenced to seep into the field. Publications of every size, shape, and description flooded the field. Some printed, most of them mimeographed, a number hectographed, and even a few carbon copied and hand written. For a time the old guard (of fans, that is) strove heroically to absorb these new comers and to mold them into their viewpoint. Their success on this point was only partial and as the fan journals commenced to pop up all over, most of the older fans made what they believed to be a very wise decision. Since most of these new comers were quite weak and ineffectual as compared with magazines like Fantasy, Marvel, etc., they would confine the hugest majority of their activities to the older members of the field and the newcomers shift for themselves, either to die a natural death thru negligence and their own incapacity, or to build themselves up to the point where they might be accepted among all circles. This plan of action was perfectly all right at the beginning. The

tried and true fans were still predominate. However, they reckoned without circumstance. Some died, others dropped out due to lack of interest, financial troubles and numerous other reasons. Here and there one of the earlier fan magazines faded out of existence; and so it went. Perfectly natural most might say. New fans would take the place of the old and the thing would continue that way. But — although fans were willing to purchase and read magazines like Fantasy, they were not friendly toward the magazine. A constant jealousy knawed [sic] in their brains. The old timers, in their opinion, were virtual gods who held the key to all scientificfictional secrets; who had the circumstances, initiative, and intelligence to turn out something worth while, and the new fans were sadly lacking in many of these essentials. Eventually the entire struggle narrowed down to two sectors. Fantasy, backed by many famous fans, editors and authors of many years activities and understanding, against almost every other fan scientificfictional group. Fantasy bucked them and outclassed them all up to its very last issue. Indirectly the end of that fine magazine was brought about by a fan magazine published by newcomers that seriously threatened to rival if not surpass the leader. That magazine was the Science-Fantasy Correspondent. Sick of years of fan inconsistencies, Fantasy Magazine conceded the leadership to the new magazine and bowed out of the field in grand style. A fine illustration of the result of that plan of action is a house suddenly lifted and carried off by a cyclone, leaving its bewildered inhabitants to shift for themselves, penniless, in an entirely hostile world. This is the very same situation encountered by the old time fans who had confined their activities to but one sector of the fan field. They looked around, finally to find that for them there was practically to do but go out. On every side of them bristled strange, hostile, peculiar types of scientificfictional activities, almost totally alien to what they had formerly experienced. It was a large group in which they could not find one familiar spot to congregate and carry on the activities they loved. A few attempted to string along with the new magazine, only to have their hopes rudely blasted by the sudden change to Amateur Correspondent. Others dazed at the activities about them, shuddered and retreated gracefully. Quite a number were offered friendly invitations to join various prominent groups, which merely offered them the comparison of what their former groups were compared to the newer ones. They scornfully declined the invitation. A few weak attempts to establish a new base of operations, and then the field belonged to the newcomers entirely. A typical example of narrowing your choice.

What to do? How can one prevent this thing? Admittedly, it is next to impossible to encompass the entire field individually, and truly, from many aspects, the situation stands well nigh hopeless. The chances of becoming utterly disgusted by the peculiar meanderings of numerous fans is predominant. If I knew the answer to the riddle, I might be wise indeed, but I have a suggestion. First of all, get in strongly, not necessarily blingingly, with one of the prominent groups of fans. Next, branch out and establish yourself in entirely different groups. A good mixture for continued interest might be a base of New York, Pennsylvania fans, add a dash of Futile Press, thro in a slice of slaughtered English (only one man's opinion), and top it off with a bit of "cheerio," "pip-pip," and possibly just the slightest trace of "down under" Wigginsiana or slaughterhouse beef, to complete the dish. You will then have activity of a different nature, one may die down, another intensify, and by all means do not disregard newcomers or members of the old guard breaking in again. Everything in moderation, you understand, and when you finally do drop out, you will know that it was not through your own disgust, the death of any particular organization, or the scheming efforts of an opposing brother, but rather because you have grown intellectually beyond the stage, and have advanced to greater things.

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FUN WITH ATOMS

by

Henry Kuttner

A New York publishing firm is bringing out a magazine devoted to slightly spicy science-fiction. [Marvel Tales] Intrigued by the news, I made a quick trip in my time machine to 1999 A.D. and selected at random a half-dozen magazines from a newsstand there. It is my purpose to lay before the reader a startling and significant revelation of the future specialization of s-f.

We might have expected it. There has been Scientific Detective Stories and Air Wonder Stories, and now a magazine dealing with the lascivious aspects of science. Naturally the process will continue. Nevertheless I was surprised, on scanning the various magazines I had brought back from 1999 A.D., to see one called Astounding Real Confessions. The cover shows a slightly disheveled blonde cowering before the advance of a robot with a neutron-gun in one hand and something that looks suspiciously like a bottle of gin in the other. The feature story is called "I Married a Hopped-Up Robot," and begins thus:

"My pre-childhood was a happy one, and I have fond memories of the days when, as an embryo, I gamboled innocently in my test-tube. But one day, about two months before I was born, a handsome robot with soulful blue photo-electric cells bought me, took me to his home, and immediately aged me in his evolutionary chamber. I emerged as a sweet young thing of sixteen. When I rushed up to my husband and threw my arms around his neck, I got my first taste of his wickedness. Instead of responding to my kiss, he ground his gears in my face, and before I could stir, I felt his avid clutch. . ."

Well, that just shows you. The next magazine I picked up was called Western Wonder, featured a story called "Atom-Blasters of the Rio Grande," and started off thus:

"For months the western prairies had been terrorized by the mysterious bandit known only as 'The Quanta.' Lefty Hardy, reining his pinto horse to a halt, smiled grimly as he looked down at a herd of fat termites grazing in the valley beneath. 'Wal, leetle boss,' he said, 'I plumb reckon they'd shore be hell a-poppin' if the ranchers knew I wuz The Quanta.'

'You said a mouthful, pard,' the horse replied. . ."

I put down that magazine and picked up another, called Scientific Love Thrills. the feature story was titled, " H_2SO_4 Means Passion." Here's how it started:

"Bitsy Miggs, staring into the mirror, ruffled her golden curls and sobbed. Nobody loved her. And only yesterday she had found out why. She was radioactive. Her best friend had told her so, and then gone off to the Eclipse Club with Marvin Undergunk, the only man Bitsy had ever loved. Even now Bitsy could remember the ecstatic night a week ago when she and Marvin had parked in the moonlight and he had said, his voice tense with passion, 'How are your genes?' Bitsy sobbed again, and picking up from her bureau her x-ray photograph of Marvin, she smothered it with radioactive kisses."

The next publication was called Amazing Tiny Tots. I shall quote from the story called, "How Slapsie Rabbit Split the Atom."

"What a nice day, Slapsie Rabbit thought. Solar radiation, filtering through the Heaviside layer, made him feel hot in his fuzzy little fur coat. But Slapsie was hungry. He had refused to eat the nice bowl of Wheaties his bunny mother had placed before him that morning, and now Slapsie's tummy was empty as a vacuum. A vacuum has one atom to every cubic centimeter. Remember that, kiddies."

Somehow I feel there is little purpose in continuing. Especially as the newsdealer from 1999 A.D. has just arrived in his time machine and is wanting to know why I didn't pay him for the magazines. I offered him a dollar, but he says currency is deflated and demands payment in tcheeze, which seems to be some form of money current in 1999 A.D., Naturally I have no tcheeze.

I had intended to keep these future magazines on file, lending them to any readers who might be interested, but the newsdealer has just snatched them up and returned to 1999 A.D. I realize that without proof my statements may be open to doubt. But I am not the man to take such an accusation lying down. If any Doubting Thomas among my readers will send me some tcheeze, I shall be very glad to return to 1999 A.D., and purchase the magazines in question, and mail them to him. If this isn't a fair arrangement, I don't know what is. Moreover, if any man calls me a liar, I have given the editor of this magazine permission to fight him on my behalf.

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Fantascience Digest, May-June, 1938 (1, 4)

LOOKING AROUND

with

Willis Conover

Although Walter H. Gillings doesn't know it, he came so close to acquiring Virgil Finlay as illustrator for his Tales of Wonder that it isn't even funny. And for the fact that Virgil isn't illustrating his magazine, Gillings has none other than A. Merritt to thank.

Gillings has no doubt fainted by now.

While we were staying with Virgil Finlay in Rochester, we made it known that a new fantasy magazine — to wit, Tales of Wonder — was being published in England. Virgil became highly interested, obtaining from us Gillings' address, and obviously being quite ready to sit right down and send him samples of his work (haw!) just as soon as he finished placing the dot he was laboring with.

It seems Virgil was eager to branch out into other magazines (in addition to, not besides, Weird Tales). Appreciative of the start Weird Tales' editor Wright had given him, however, Virgil didn't care to produce for magazines which in any way competed with Wright's publication — as he believed the science fiction mags do. Working for a British magazine, though, would be an entirely different matter. European publications couldn't interfere with the circulation of a magazine distributed largely on this continent. So Tales of Wonder was to hear from Virgil Finlay very soon.

Meanwhile, A. Merritt invited him to New York and had a little talk with him....

And now Virgil's drawings may be observed each Sunday in the American Weekly — editor, A. Merritt.

We feel there should be a moral to this story, but we can't think of one just at the moment.

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Fantascience Digest, May-June, 1938 (1,4)

WHITHER WOLLHEIM?

by
Richard Wilson, Jr.

Here was the store I was looking for. A large banner strung across the front proclaimed: "The House of a Million Items. We sell everything."

I went in and banged on a counter until a clerk appeared. "Yessir?" he said.

"I want a space ship," I told him.

"Right you are. What color?"

"Any color. Preferably pink."

"Will you step this way, please? We keep them in the rear of the store."

"Do you have much call for this sort of thing?" I queried.

"We used to. People would pop in around Christmas time and confide in me. They tell be all about their little bra--ah, children -- and how they are simply daffy about Buck Rogers. Then they demand a space ship. Such people annoy me beyond measure. I know they mean a toy ship, but I always show them the real ones. If they ask for a demonstration, so much the better. Otherwiwe I sneak up behind them and drop andirons on their heads."

"Doesn't it hurt them?"

"I suppose so, sir," he shrugged.

"You wouldn't do anything like that to me, would you?"

"Why, how could you think such a thing? You do me a great wrong." But he smiled oddly. "When these -- do you mind if I call them pest, sir? I like to speak freely. Thank you -- when these pests are inside the ship, we roll back the roof and shoot them off into space."

"Just good, clean fun, eh?"

"You're jolly well right. Well, here we are. All colors, shapes and sizes they are, sir. We call this one the Skylark."

"After Smith?" I asked.

"Not particularly. Anytime at all. Morning, afternoon, after lunch -- anytime."

"You don't understand. E. E. Smith wrote some stories in which several very super ships were called The Skylark. I thought perhaps you knew."

"Wasn't he the one? E. E. Smith, I mean. Didn't he chop off Pocahontas' head?"

"No, no. You're thinking of John."

"John? Oh, no. John is here with us." He called, and a sawed-off fellow with pants appeared. They, the pants, stretched from his shoes to his chest, doing away with the necessity for a vest. John carried a pail, full of metallic objects.

The clerk inspected them and selected one. He polished it up a bit on his sleeve, then aquinted along the barrel. He waved it at me.

"Stand away from those outains, will you?" he asked. "I don't want to damage them."

"Hey!" I protested. "You're not going to shoot me with that thing, are you?"

"Why, no," he said in a hurt voice. "How could you think such a thing? Just a bit more to the left, Thaaaaa's it."

He squeezed the trigger. There was a roar and a flash and I felt a ringing in my ears.

The clerk peered in my direction, craning his neck in a comical manner. "What ever became of you?" he asked, speaking to a point several feet from where I was standing.

"You might have warned me you were going to make such a racket," I said. "I should have held my ears. And what do you mean 'What ever became of me'?" Did the explosion injure your eyesight? I'm right here."

"Where?"

"Here!" I said testily.

"You were, maybe, but not now. Look in the mirror."

I looked.

"I don't see anything."

"That's just the point."

"What's 'just the point?'"

"That is. There's nothing to see. Not even you. You're gone. See?"

I saw. Or, rather, I didn't see. I wasn't there.

"H'm," I said, passing my hand before my eyes and not seeing it. "I'm invisible, am I not?"

"That's what you are," He chuckled.

"Convenient, isn't it?"

"Convenient? How?"

"I mean I could murder you two thugs with my bare hands. And when people came to see what all the rumpus was about, I'd just walk out, and no one would be able to see me."

"Oh, but you wouldn't do that, sir, would you?"

"Certainly not," I said. They felt happier immediately, not being able to see me smile.

"What you doin'?" asked John, as I was silent for a time. "Where you now?"

"Over here," I said, "by the door. And I'm going to lock it — so! Now," I said, suiting the action to the word, "I'm going to enter one of these space ships and zoom around the room. It's quite a large chamber and I don't think there's much chance of my colliding with anything. Tho you may have to run about a bit so that I don't bump into you. You'll have to be rather speedy, too; I hear space ships — even the slowest of them — do seven miles a second."

So I settled into the controlling-chair of the ship and shut the automatic doors. Soon I was whizzing around the space ship storeroom, missing chandeliers and chaise-longues by inches and scaring my invisible-ray-wielders out of what wits they had.

After a bit I pushed a button above the windshield that had intrigued me for some time. (That sentence is not muddled; both the button and the windshield — which I affectionately called Walter — had held my attention.) Immediately a blue beam leapt out, searing a bit of the upholstery. This was wonderful! I turned it on the miscreants below, demolishing them instantly.

I then tore thru the wall and looped thru the rest of the store, scaring floorwalkers and knocking down pedestrians.

Then I came home and wrote this. It's not such an easy task, tho. I can't see the keyboard and my fingers keep missing the keys entirely.

Since none of this makes sense, it won't matter whether I end it or not. So I'll just leave it where it is and go out and have a soda.

Have you ever drunk a soda while invisible? Lots of fun. Causes people no end of consternation.

FINIS

Fantascience Digest, July-Aug, 1938 (1,5)

YSTA~

J. Chapman Miske

Ebon towers upward rise
Unto the lurid flaming skies;
Minarets of golden jade,
And limpid stone of moonbeams made.

Lambent fires softly shimmer
Waning ever, ever dimmer.
Dimly as within a dream,
I see their latent lustres gleam.

Murmuring, whispering echoes yet
Surround the towering rampart's jet.
The gibbous moon throws ethereal light
Upon the city of eternal night.

There Death incarnate dropped his pall,
Over Ysta, over all.
There portals softly thrown back
Admit the monarch sable-black.

'Tis there the sentient demon dwells,
Keeper of a thousand hells.
Far within the pristine deep,
The shadow doth his vigil keep.

Fallen from her high estate;
Shorn of glory, desolate.
Phantoms flitting overhead;
Fallen is Ysta, Ysta is dead.

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Fantascience Digest, July-Aug, 1938.
(1,5)

SKYLARK vs THOUGHT

by

Milton A. Rothman

Sequel to Skylark, by Smith, & Invaders from the Infinite, by Campbell

Heat, moist and soggy, coiled and swam in engulfing waves and dripping streams of sweat. The day was a sweltering segment of the fourth dimension sandwiched between the darker, but only slightly cooler pieces of night.

Burton J. Cherney sat morbidly and methodically twisting a discouraged lump of tallow between his fingers, brooding over the fiendish devices nature used to torture her children. In time the former candle looked like nothing conceived on earth, or on any of the infra- and super-universes.

"If each one of these figures represents an equation on a three dimensional graph," he thought, "I'd hate to have to figure them out. This reminds me of those two stories, 'Arithmetica' and 'Living Mathematics.'¹ ['Mathematica,' Fearn, Asst Feb 36 & 'The Living Equation,' Schachner, Asst Sept 34.] They both had living equations in them, and although I couldn't understand them, perhaps some of the equations I'm making now might come to life. This silly thing, for instance."

He had taken the piece of tallow, bent it around into a spiral, squeezed the ends, and had tied the whole thing into a knot, pulling it out again, and then twisting around once more.

He was smoothing away a roughness in the figure when he noticed a small ball of radiation overhead. It was a shimmering globe of red and yellow luminescence fading away at the edges into sparkles of green flame. Through his shocked mind flashed one tremendous thought: "I did it! I made a living equation!"

The ball grew until it was two feet in diameter, and the space around it was curiously distorted. A corona of pearly haze swirled about, and lengthened into a misty tentacle which reached out to Cherney's head. He tried to dodge, but it caught him, and at once he felt a wave of great intelligence beat against his mind.

"From one chance out of incalculable numbers you have made me. The laws of chance say that there is one out of nine to the ninth to the ninth to the ninth power of you turning to the right combination of planes and solids which would cause my creation, but, unbelievably, you did it.

"My intelligence is such that I have already read the minds of everyone on this planet, and with this little knowledge I shall go out into the universe to discover the basic secrets of nature.

"But before I go, is there anything you would like me to do for you?"

Burton's dazed mind raced. A veritable Aladdin's lamp! Should he ask for money, great knowledge, strange and mighty powers? Or for the one thing which he otherwise would have no chance at all of seeing?

"I would like to see a battle between the Skylark [or Valeron] and the Thought. I've always wondered what would happen if they met."

"The Skylark and the Thought. The two mightiest space ships in the universe, each with infinite power, but with different weapons. What would happen if the two met?"

In a flash Burton Cherney was transported out into the depths of interstellar space. Everything which occurred was revealed to his all-seeing eyes.

* * * * *

Hurling through space with the incalculable velocity produced by the sixth order system of propulsion was a tremendous sphere, as large as a small planet. On a broad, grassy plain, below many shells of inoson, stood three houses. Two of these were replicas of houses in Washington, D.C., United States of Terrestrial America. Between them was a modest gray structure. This was the room from which was controlled the vast cosmic forces handled by the tremendous sixth order projector which composed most of this prodigious ship.

"I say, Crane, do you pick up anything strange out there?" Richard Seaton's gray eyes peered out inquisitively from beneath the massive control helmet he wore.

"Yeah, about a hundred light years away and coming closer fast. Looks like some awful funny fields."

"Uh huh. And if it's what I think it is, our rotating into the fourth dimension was elementary. They, whatever it is, have got something, and I'm going to see what it is."

He rapidly gave some mental orders to the titanic mechanical brain which was, next to Seaton's own mind, the controlling power of the ship.

"That's the quickest way. The brain will analyze whatever fields are there and drag the thing here. Ah, finished. It's a space-distortion field designed to create a new space with arbitrarily fixed properties, and we're using an intense gravity beam — 2980th band of the third order — to pull that ship out of the other space.

"Wow! What a jolt that was! We must've pulled the wrong tooth that time. The brain took a millionth of a second to put up the screens and in that time something sliced off a half mile of our armor. Did you get it, Crane?"

"Yes. There was the most intense and solid beam of second order vibrations I have ever seen. Cosmic rays we used to call them. It heated half our surface to a temperature of 200,000 degrees. And then there was a curious beam of vibrations between the infra-red and radio which caused all the inoson molecules to move in one direction, which made quite a mess of the outside."

* * * * *

Arcot and Morey looked through the visiplates of the Thought at the familiar view of two "ghost" ships flying beside the real ship in the constricted space. Their artificial universe was so small that light from the ship went around it easily, coming back to them from the other side.

Suddenly the black space went gray, forces strained and snapped, sparks flew within the ships as terrific energy rushed from the storage coils to the space-distortion coil. Some terrific force was draining the big coil, and as fast as it was drained, the storage coils struggled to keep it charged.

"Lord, Morey, what a gravity field that must be! Our coils are enough to take us past any conceivable star. We wouldn't even notice that dead giant we were caught by before. It must be a space ship using an attractor ray on us. I'm going to take us out of this space and look around for that ship. As soon as I see it I'll give it a touch of the molecular, cosmic, and magnetic, about a tenth of a sol [the energy given off by the sun per second] each. Each of the first two will do plenty if it's ordinary matter, and the three combined will wreck relax plenty quick."

As Arcot thought his orders into the headpiece, the space in the ship became surcharged with an electrical tension. Sparks snapped and metal points were surrounded by a blue corona as the mighty power flowed from the space coil to the storage cells. In a moment the strain was gone, and they were back among the stars.

Three needles flickered in their dials, and then the mighty ship reeled to a titanic blow. Meter needles swung crazily as Arcot tried everything in his armory, but the unknown forces still struck the Thought, throwing it about wildly, and eating stubbornly through the tough armor. Then all went quiet.

"Whew!" Arcot mopped his brow. "They sure have something there. I gave them a bit of a nudge with my combination before their screens went up in about a millionth of a second. I wonder what kind of relays they have. And they sure have power. Maybe the same as we have.

"And they sent out something my latest researches had just begun to suggest. A ray far below the cosmic in frequency. It didn't even affect our screens, and I thought we could handle any vibration carried by the ether. That's it! They use sub-ether vibrations. It went right through artificial matter and the protonic screens. The only way I kept our cosmium up as long as I did was by continually rebuilding it as soon as it was disintegrated.

"I couldn't run away from them by the space distortion, so I pulled us up to their own height by a time advancement. I used enough so that their high frequencies are about in our visible spectrum, and our cosmics are down to their level.

"Let's see what we can do now. Their big size indicates that they use matter to handle their power instead of having space do it, as we do. I wonder what their limits are, and whether we can blow a couple of their fuses."

The space between the two giant ships was a seething area of energy. For light years around terrific radiations blasted and swirled. A stray sun wandered into the dangerous area and was lashed instantly into a shrieking ball of disintegration. A torrent of energy poured from the tormented sun upon the two ships which stubbornly resisted its onslaught, while at the same time absorbing this energy to re-discharge it in the form of lethal rays.

"Arcot! Our time field is failing!"

"Uh-huh. they've got a reverse field on us, and we've got to fight it. I'm going to send us up to a faster rate."

"But we can't go much faster. If we do, we won't be able to get enough power from the suns. They'll be sending us energy so slowly we won't be able to light our lamps."

"That's an idea! Suppose we take a sun along with us in the advanced field. A couple of suns! And disintegrate them so fast that the other ship won't be able to get power fast enough to resist."

* * * * *

"What happened, Dick?" Crane asked. "It happened so fast I got lost after the first second."

"After we got our screens up I socked them with a mixture of sixth order rays. They're not made of ordinary matter, because they lasted longer than I would have thought possible, and they kept rebuilding as fast as they disintegrated. Then they did something. I think they speeded up their time rate, because I'm sure they didn't have anything less than second order, and we received plenty of low sixth order. In the advanced time rate, their low frequencies would come to us as high frequencies.

"I sent a time statis after them, which was supposed to nullify their advanced field, but they fought, and now we're at a deadlock."

"Wow! — what was that?" His eyes opened in amazement as the heretofore noiseless machines whined and roared in their efforts to resist the unbelievable blast of energy that struck them.

"Say! We can play that way, too. They took a sun into the advanced time field and released all its energy on us in one second. I'm gonna do more than that. Here's a nice big star."

Seaton mentally directed forces which hurled the huge sun directly at the Thought and exploded it in an instantaneous gush of intolerable radiance. But the comparatively tiny ship held. In fact, it absorbed energy and used it for its own protection so fast that the space around it was dark and strained.

"Oh, I see," Seaton gasped. "Anything started at him is absorbed as a change in field density. It doesn't get to first base. We're stalemated."

* * * * *

Arcot compressed his lips grimly. "All right. If we can't get anywhere by using clean energy, we can try something else. Remember what we did to the Thessians by using psychology?"

Out in space, in the racked and torn area between the two ships, a weird drama was enacted. A mistiness appeared. It hardened, and solidified into an amorphous shape which, strangely, radiated tangible repulsiveness. Hate, horror, Arcot's projected emotions amplified a million times, were embodied in this creature.

The shape whipped out a noisome, slimy tentacle towards the Skylark. A solid beam of energy cut it off, and the shape recoiled. It rapidly changed form, and now appeared as a colossal, hairy spider which leaped across millions of miles of space to the Skylark. Straddling it with elongated legs, it attempted to bite through the inoson with its cavernous, repulsive beak. It bit into a concentrated beam of sixth order radiations, and jumped convulsively.

Now, appearing from the Skylark, was the giant figure of a man. As large as a sun it was, a distorted, hunchbacked monstrosity with arms a million miles long. In a great bag on its back was a mass of round objects — planets!

Peering around, it beheld a still more monstrous figure striding over from the Thought, holding a small sun in each hand. The first monster picked a choice planet out of its bag and hurled it at the other. It struck directly in the stomach, and the Terror gave a gasp, but strode purposefully on, pelleted by flying planets.

The suns in its hands began to radiate faster and faster, illuminating the scene with a devilish purple glow. The two monsters were close together now, and the one with the hot suns raised his arms and smacked them on the face of the other, one on each cheek. They exploded in a blaze of blinding, lashing fire. The monster roared with anguish.

The two figures grappled. Tumbling over suns through distances measured in parsecs, they wrestled back and forth, making a shambles of that corner of the universe. Laughing, roaring, and howling with unholy glee, they swung stars at each other, demolishing clusters, growing in size and ferocity each second.

A galaxy in the hand of one of them was hurled like a bunch of pebbles. Suddenly there was an instant of utterly intolerable radiance, swirling colors, and chaotic forces. The cosmos disappeared.

* * * * *

Burton Cherney was back in his room shivering. "What happened?" he gasped.

The being he had created answered calmly. "Seaton and Arcot both went crazy. Anyway, I happened to remember that it was impossible for both of them to exist in the same universe."

"You see, the Thought recognized the Einstein theory, and goes to all sorts of trouble to go faster than light without violating the theory, while the Skylark merely disregards the theory and just goes faster than light. So, if one is possible, the other is impossible.

"Anyway, it was an interesting experiment while it lasted."

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[Skylark of Space, Amazing Stories, Aug, Sept, Oct, 1928; Skylark Three, Amazing Stories, Aug, Sept, Oct, 1930; Skylark of Valeron, Astounding Stories, Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov, Dec, 1934, Jan, Feb, 1935. Piracy Preferred, Amazing Stories, June, 1930; Solarite, Amazing Stories, Nov, 1930; The Black Star Passes, Amazing Stories Quarterly, Fall, 1930; Islands of Space, Amazing Stories Quarterly, Spring, 1931; Invaders from the Infinite, Amazing Stories Quarterly, Spring-Summer, 1932.]

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Fantascience Digest, Sep-Oct, 1938 (1, 6)

LOOKING AROUND

by Willis Conover, Jr

If I could project myself into the past, by no matter what means, do you know what I'd do (after depositing huge sums -- haw! -- of money in the bank, to collect the interest when I return to the present)?

I'd buy early copies of the science fiction magazines and write letters to certain persons whose names appeared in the reader's columns.

Here, in a 1928 Amazing, is a letter from a John S. Williamson, a young fan living in New Mexico. I'll write him like this:

Dear Jack:

This may seem too personal, my addressing you as 'Jack'; but after all, you've written me as 'Willis'. . . You've never heard of me? Well, a good many people don't know me, but you aren't one of them. Perhaps you haven't heard of my name before now, but you will.

Jack, you read science fiction quite extensively. And a favorite science fiction theme concerns the mastery of time. As ardent a fan as you are, surely you can believe me when I tell you I come from your future, from the year 1938.

. . . and that, in 1938, you are considered to be an old-timer in the field of science fiction writing. Jack Williamson will have been a favorite for years.

Hard to believe? Well, certainly you believe you will someday sell a story -- you've been trying to market your efforts, haven't you? Here's me telling you that you won't stop with one story. Just keep plugging away, my boy. Someday your "Legion of Space" will pull down all kinds of applause. It will appear serially in a magazine you haven't heard of -- yet. Astounding Stories. And have you been reading Weird Tales? You should, if you expect to sell them "Golden Blood".

Crazy? Sure, crazy as hell. . . But when, around the last of 1936, you receive a letter from me -- the first one I ever wrote you (the one you're reading is the latest) -- be nice and friendly. Remember that,

while I won't know it at the time, I'll be the one who gave you this early encouragement.

All I can say is, I wish someone would come from my future and tell me all these nice things!

Your old friend,

W. C., Jr.

And here's a letter from a Mortimer Weisinger in an issue of Astounding dated 1931. I think I'll drop young Mr. Weisinger a line:

Dear Mort:

I've just sent off a letter to Jack Williamson three years ago. And you're going to think me as nuts as he did.

Suppose I told you I'd read published stories of yours? -- which is just what I'm saying. No, you haven't received checks for them yet; and you probably never will if you continue to have your stuff accepted by Gernsback.

And incidentally, from now on you'd better be wise not to praise Astounding Stories so highly as you did in your recent letter, because someday -- hold tight, now -- you'll be editor of Wonder Stories, or what is practically an equivalent. And your worst competitor will be the Astounding Stories on which you're hoaping all the praise!

Your old friend,

Willie.

Then I'd make out similar copies and mail them to Johnny Campbell and Ray Palmer.

It would be fun reading the replies.

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Fantascience Digest, Sept-Oct, 1938 (1, 6)

THE ROAD BACK

by

Sam Moskowitz

Vacation! Ah, vacation! Two whole months of it? A year? A furlough? After all those years of sweating at his swivel-chaired desk at his office, they were going to give him a vacation. Not one of those two week affairs, but what they turned a "Temporary furlough" -- with pay. And boy, he certainly deserved it. Why after those last two contracts he'd landed with those foreign firms, the company could afford to give him a ten year vacation with pay and still call it a bargain. Now all that remained to be done was to find something of interest to keep his mind occupied. "Gosh! that should be simple;" good old science fiction. He'd dropped out a number of years back; hadn't much time to read any because of the overwhelming amount of work, but now he could make up for lost time. "Why," he chuckled, "I know what I'll do. I'll publish a fan magazine. A real ritzy affair. I'll contact those fans I used to know. Gosh! They'll certainly get a kick out this sort of thing now that I've got money, plenty of money to put into the venture." Many people gazed askance as the usually dependable Bill Adams let out a miniature war-whoop, and galloped down the street to the nearest news-stand.

For a solid week Bill read his fill of all the science-fiction he could obtain. Bleary-eyed, but immensely happy now that he was back in his old element, he felt an intense urge to contact those spunky little fan magazines, that had, as he remembered, battled as heroically against all the obstacles

that a civilized world could devise, and yet, emerged better than ever to gain their end by their overwhelming numbers, if not individual influence. That old trunk up in the attic still contained hundreds of these amateur attempts that he had dabbled with years back, and he might make a Roman Holiday of it by subscribing to all of them. He wouldn't send just a subscription; he would send a long letter to each of the fan editors announcing his return to science fiction, and his desire to turn out a new fan mag deluxe. They'd eat it up.

No sooner said than done, With tremendous four-steps-at-a-stride leaps, Bill reached the attic in one-quarter of a minute flat. Without waiting to regain his breath he leaped at the old trunk, almost ripping off the cover in his enthusiasm. Various keep-sakes, antiques flew like wind-scattered snow as frantically digging, he uncovered the top fan magazine. He almost tore it in two as he ripped it enthusiastically out of the trunk. Just a glance at the title, The Comet, and he placed it aside to pull up a batch of Fantasy Fans. In immediate order followed complete sets of Fantasy Magazine, Scientifiction and Tomorrow, Marvel Tales, and then his wild joy was choked momentarily in his throat by a brief, nostalgic feeling, as he, almost tenderly, drew up his own inimitable Science-Fantasy Fandom. It had run 18 issues, starting with a twelve-paged hektographed format and ending in a monthly, twenty-four paged mimeographed periodical. Gosh, even if he admitted it himself, it was one darned good fan magazine!

That night, after he had read about fifty of the yellowed publications from cover to cover, he retired to his study, and working till the clock bonged 2 A.M., emerged finally with a full twenty-five evenly thick letters, all suspiciously suggesting enclosed, round, metallic objects. Upon each of the letters was pasted and air mail - special delivery stamp; and standing before the letter box, Bill, by the light of a street lamp, pawed through the neat packages half a dozen times, then with a sort of sigh, placed them reluctantly into the letter slot. With a brisk thoughtful stride, that suggested a state of mind created by Satan for a sleepless night, he blended with the shadows of the silent tree-lined walk.

Two weeks of his projected vacation had passed and Bill was certainly not very happy. Of the one score five epistles dropped into the mail-box that night, fifteen had not been replied to at all, seven were stamped "No such party at this address," and the two replies stated briefly that they were returning his subscription inasmuch as that particular fan magazine was no longer being published. One fellow, however, half-heartedly suggested that he subscribe to Infinity[sic] which was the title of a publication taking the fan world by storm.

For a fortnight Bill figured the best thing to do was to give up this sentimental idea of his and find relaxation in the more common things of life: golf, travel, the theatre, etc. But finally that firm, handsome face which masked the keen brain that had emerged on top in a score or more of fan arguments, set itself in a stubborn, stiff mold. Rationally, his brain divined the facts that it was only natural for new fans to have cropped up in the intervening space of years, and still more natural for new, unknown (to him) personalities to take on where the others left off. Yes, he'd work on. It was just a matter of contacting the right people. Now, that magazine Infinity, that one fellow suggested, sounded like a pretty good fan magazine. He'd just drop a note to that fellow asking for the address, and, from the various ads in this magazine, he would be able to contact the rest of the fan world. "But gosh," he thought to himself, "it wouldn't be the same without the old guard."

Having been quite a fan writer in his time, Bill figured the best thing to do to get on the good side of this new editor would be to send him an article with the subscription. So that night he sat himself in his favorite niche, dusted off the top of his fifteen-year-old typewriter, and then, with the fervor of a true artist, got to work. He wrote with a vitality and originality he didn't know he possessed. His, coupled with his mature out-look and polished style, slowly resolved

the essay into one of the finest fan articles ever conceived, even if he had to admit it himself. Surely, an essay like this would have any mere editor bowing down in reverence to a writer of such marvelous ability. No lingering over the letter-box that night. The quicker the letter got through, the better.

Four days passed, and finally one morning a hauntingly familiar tingle of the bell aroused him to a fever pitch rarely experienced before. He was into the hall and out to the letter-box in a twinkling of an eye. With trembling fingers he jaggedly tore the envelope from Infinity and, hardly glancing at the cover, digested the actual contents. For a moment his features registered bewilderment, then his lips grimaced tightly and he hissed softly between his teeth. Not a page in the magazine carried a familiar item. Funny, he never realized himself to what extent the fan mags had grown independent of the professional publications before. True, what he had in his hand was a "real" fan magazine. In fact, it was too much of a fan magazine. None of the contents were understandable, or in the least bit interesting or entertaining. For they dealt, almost without exception, with items concerning new fans that he had never even heard of before. It was quite funny what a difference it made to read such a fan item as: "John S. McGee and Robert Boguskis, avid Pittsburgh enthusiasts, plan to visit James S. Corrup, editor of Colossal, in New York this summer." It seemed so uninteresting compared to items he had read years back, such as "Robert A. Madle and John V. Baltadonis plan to pay a visit to New York." It was terribly disappointing, but to be expected. Anyhow, the format of the magazine was nice and neat. Fifteen large-sized mimeographed pages with neat illustrations spaced at intervals throughout the magazine. Oh yes, the letter. Undoubtedly he would receive a dozen paragraphs from the editor commenting upon the superior style of his article....He'd eat it up now. Hastily he unfolded the letter and gazed disappointingly at a short, cryptic note:

Dear Sir:

Your subscription received and thank you for it.

The article you sent will be used in my next issue as I am quite hard-up for material.

Yours,

James S. Corrup.

What was he driving at, Bill wondered, in the evidently disguised sarcasm of the last few lines? Why the short paragraphs? The strictly formal business-like tone? Oh well, why bother about the mystery? He'd send a subscription to each of those magazines advertised in the back of the magazine.

With a loud ejaculation of disgust, Bill threw the magazine down upon the table. What confounded nerve, he thought. What abysmal ignorance....What — what was the use? These blasted idiots had the crust in writing, to say that his article was the worst, outdated, driest, utterly senseless drivel they had ever had the misery of reading. Why, the blasted hypocrites knew darn well that "It's Great to be a Science Fiction Reader" was better than any of the junk they had read in the trashridden Infinity, such as that putrid article on "What Went on in McGee's Mind When He Wrote 'Are Fans Human?'" and similar rot. How could supposedly sane, intelligent readers of science fiction interest themselves in such drivel. Bah, it was disgusting. Had to get a quiet place and think this out.....now.....

"Watch for the greatest fan science fiction has ever known!" "Are fans human? You won't think so when you discover the terrific activities of ?——The greatest fan science fiction has ever known!" These and similar notices appeared in all the leading fan magazines in the latter part of 1960. The fan world was agog over the identity of "the greatest fan science fiction has ever known." John S. McGee, ace fan writer of the time, wrote a series of articles on the possible identity of this mysterious fan. The leading news-snoopers frantically attempted

to discover the identity of the placer of those advertisements. One science fiction fan magazine offered a year subscription free to the reader who discovered the identity of "the greatest fan science fiction has ever known."

One day John S. Corrup happened to notice that this mysterious personality had sent in his usual ad with handwritten addenda. That night Corrup spent eight hours going through his files of letters and comparing handwriting. Hair disarrayed, eyes bleary, and his room, once the paragon of neatness, now an unholy litter of letters, Corrup leaped jubilantly into the air and screeched most unbefittingly for a fan of his conservative tastes. The neighbors didn't mind the "nut" next door. They were used to his eccentricities, but they wondered slightly why the light in his room did not blink out at any time in the night, staying on even after the next dawn had arrived. More than one individual lifted a silent curse to the fiend who could type all day and all night without rest, and keep honest folk from their hard-earned sleep.

Peculiarly enough, Bill Adams did not seem very surprised to receive an issue of Infinity only one week after the preceding issue. He opened the "Extra" marked pages interestedly, but with an assured air. Three inch letters said: "The IDENTITY OF THE GREATEST FAN EVER CREATED IS NOW KNOWN! Your favorite editor, the one and only Corrup, has unimpeachable evidence of the identity of 'The greatest fan ever known.' It is none other than Bill Adams, famous ten years ago for his mad-cap activities. He may be remembered by the older fans as the editor of that publication of somewhat ancient vintage, titled Science-Fantasy Fandom. From the letter addressed to me he plans a fan mag deluxe that will easily be the greatest fandom has ever known...."

Bill read no further. His eyes gleamed with happy tears, and the hand he drew over his thinning hair magically seemed to bestow the fresh eagerness of youth upon it once again. For again Bill Adams was "One of the gang," and he gloried in this new-found joy.

—The End—

Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec, 1938
(2, 1)

Atmosphere In Fan Mags

—+—
Robert Bahr

Everyone has heard the term "atmosphere" used in connection with some subject or another. It is an indefinable something that separates the thing that possesses it from the common, the ordinary, or in some cases its imitations.

Everything possesses a more or less pronounced atmosphere, but usually it is present in varying stages of intensity. This is only natural when one takes into consideration the countless objects present upon mother earth which can boast such a term as "atmosphere."

Atmosphere does not necessarily mean popularity. Few people have the faculties to perceive as ethereal a thing as "atmosphere."

More than in almost any other fiction, tales of the unusual, imaginative, and weird possess a very pronounced atmosphere. Who can deny the magnetic quality of, for instance, the old Amazing Stories? A quality so likeable that it held its advocates long after the magazine itself had nothing worthwhile to offer.

All science fiction readers of three years or more vintage [before 1935] will never forget the atmosphere of the old Wonder Stories. A magazine that shifted size, content, price countless times and never lost that indefinite

"something" that set it apart from other magazines of the type. Here also we have contributing features such as Paul's typical, oh so fitting illustrations. True, none of them were art, but they belonged in a science fiction magazine. However, that is a subject in itself, so let us turn once again toward the real object of this article.

Fan magazines possess a true scientificational "atmosphere". It seems a little too much to expect of such a variable group, many of which never go more than a few pointless numbers. Nevertheless, I find in this fertile field as easy a pick of publications with atmosphere as could be found in any professional publication of any size.

FANTASY MAGAZINE—I know the very mention of the name practically carried through my point without any real necessity for enlightenment. FANTASY MAGAZINE was a publication that possessed as much, or more, atmosphere than the professional publications themselves. I feel safe in stating that no fan will ever recapture that height of inexpressible joy that he found when he read, with full understanding, his first copy of FANTASY MAGAZINE. A new field lay open before him. more than he had ever dared to hope for, and the knowledge was his as fast as he could read and digest it. Therein one comparative small pamphlet, he had the key that unlocked every puzzling factor that the professional science fiction magazines could present. Sadly enough, FANTASY MAGAZINE never gained the circulation that it deserved. Those who could understand and appreciate the marvelous inside interviews with such well-known scientificionists as Edgar Rice Burroughs, A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, Stanley G. Weinbaum; who could understand the ingenuity of a few fans in obtaining for them original works of A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Stanley G. Weinbaum, C. L. Moore, Robert E. Howard; who could chortle with delight over some magazine or shake their heads in admiration of Clay Ferguson, Jr.'s astoundingly well done artistry, were few and far between.

Then there was the FANTASY FAN, which, after eighteen fruitless months, worked up a pitiable circulation of sixty. Notwithstanding its numerous well-printed pages, the hidden muskiness of the weird and fantastic that haunted every word of every one of its pages. Pages that proudly presented original works of professional authors as fine as most appearing in any professional magazine. Dozens of masterful hitherto unpublished works of H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, August W. Derleth, and many other celebrities. Eighteen crammed issues of that and other intensely interesting material. Result — sixty subscribers.

Perhaps I have gone too far afield for the newer fans who have never experienced anything quite as painstakingly elaborate as these old timers. For their sake I shall drop down to times closer to the present, and what do we find? For the most part, a definite drop in standard. The writing is not as good, in many places it is actually poor. Artistry among the fans has become a colorful, less purposeful, and infinitely poorer subject. In place of the printed magazines of the past era, we find hectographed sheets, bearing along under pitiful odds, negligible circulation, and appreciation. However, they have not lost their atmosphere. It is still there, even in some of the tiniest hectographed sheets and bulletins it rears as the only redeeming feature. COSMIC TALES, with all its faults, has built up a surprisingly high quota of "atmosphere". Compared with such preceding attempts as MARVEL TALES, FANCIFUL TALES, etc., it is nothing. But its inherent charm remains as great or greater, than those aforementioned publications.

The SCIENCE FICTION FAN, surrounded by a group of remaining true-blue fans, presents dimly the ghost of the old FANTASY MAGAZINE, flickering bravely regardless of its humbler hectographed garb.

he SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTOR, even under Dollens, possesses that "something," even though the contents were usually of little worth. The COLLECTOR, under its new editorship, has increased that quality so that it glimmers hopefully from each of the interesting pages.

And there are other present-day fan magazines that have captured some sort of "atmosphere." Possibly not as pronounced as those mentioned, but certainly not to be disregarded. The SCIENCE FICTION CRITIC, for example, has some of that illusive quality, but it is not quite as penetrating as some of the other magazines. Perhaps extreme conservatism has something to do with this. Then there are some of the English publications that attempt, intentionally, or unintentionally, to have the trace of "different" about them. They, however, are so decidedly lacking in interest that atmosphere can do them little good.

Then there are a few magazines which seem to possess no individuality of their own. They are just another attempt in a numerous cluster. Usually, they don't last, and if they do, are not remembered with any degree of clarity. Perhaps a good definition of them would be: "a magazine without a personality."

How to create "atmosphere"? That's a sticker. Like personality, it is not created. It just is. Quality and quantity of the product have nothing to do with it. Morris Dollens' early issues of the SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTOR possessed atmosphere, and yet there was not a scrap of worthwhile information contained in them.

As to recognizing "atmosphere" when it is present; that is a somewhat simpler task. The symptoms are usually a desire to obtain a copy of the magazine before it has appeared. To glance through its pages though you know there may be little to interest you when you do receive it.

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Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec, 1938 [2,1]

STF IN THE COMICS

by

Harry Warner Jr

For the past several years there has been a growing tendency to bemoan the "degeneration" of science fiction into merely another form of action and sex stories. But during that time another tendency has been almost completely overlooked - the constant growing of the comic strips featuring, in one form or another, fantasy - and the almost universal poorness of these.

As far as I know, "Buck Rogers" was the first comic strip devoted to stf. exclusively. When this strip was but a few years old it had already become the most popular of all comic strips - it even branched out into a radio program of the same general type, the radio program later being banned because of its effect on children. At any rate, the popularity of this strip soon caused a flood of imitations to follow; chief among which was "Flash Gordon," which is now among the worst of them all. "Mandrake the Magician" was another to feature stf. shortly, and in the meantime many other comics, already established, were beginning to use stf. plots; for example: "Connie," "Brick Bradford," and others, too numerous to mention. Most of these, however, soon returned to the "legitimate" comic strip situations of dapper detectives and gun-toting gangsters.

"Flash Gordon" is typical of those that started on the heels of "Buck Rogers" - unfortunately - so let us see just what happened to our friend Gordon. The first installment, as I remember it, showed the people of earth tremendously excited over a new planet which had been discovered and was about to hit earth, destroying, of course, both worlds. Then, after some rather muddled intrigue, a Dr. Zarnov captured the hero, Flash, and his beautiful sweetie, Dale, and shot his newly-invented rocket-ship straight for the new planet, which it was to hit and veer from its orbit, thus saving earth and destroying the occupants of the rocket. But the rocket makes a safe landing on the planet, which misses earth and takes up an orbit around the sun (apparently, as nothing was mentioned of this) and after Dr. Z has become, in some way/I do not remember, a friend of Dale and Flash, they set out to explore the planet - and there ends all semblance of sanity to the cartoon. For the last four or five years now, ever since then, they have been battling ferocious monsters and even more ferocious men (who miraculously speak English) - in fact, all that has been done is change any other run-of-the-mine cartoon to a locale on another planet, and instead of the customary Chinese villains and lions and tigers, substitute other-world men and dinosaurs.

This is, of course, merely a sample - all the others run along the same line, and the majority of these are not recommended for human consumption. Up until a few months ago "Buck Rogers" seemed to be the only one that preserved some semblance of sanity; but now that too has become only silly, the latest bright idea of the author's being to turn the world cockeyed on its axis, thus causing a dreadful war with Venus to end peaceably, and somehow getting the world turned around so nicely that, outside of a few hurricanes, no damage at all is caused. So now that "Buck Rogers" has gone the way of all the others, there is not a decent stf. cartoon left - in fact the silliness of the cartoons is one of the reasons why the general public does not hold a very good opinion of stf. What can be done to remedy the situations? One thing, and one thing only - let a truly great stf. artist, preferably Paul, collaborate with a truly great stf. author on a comic strip that, while retaining the necessary qualities of action, villains, suspense, will nevertheless have a sane and well-worked-out plot - or else have an artist do a strip from one of the great stf. yarns of the past - the "Skylark" stories would be admirable for this purpose. Perhaps Dr. Smith might be persuaded to do the dialogue, and when all the material has been exhausted, which would not be for many years, write further adventures of the "Skylarks." In this way, and this way alone, can a truly great stf. strip be created, and become popular with all.

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Fantascience Digest, Nov-Dec, 1938 [2, 1]

SIMILARITY WITH DIFFERENCES

by

Milton A. Rothman

The names of Smith [E.E.] and Campbell [J..., Jr.] go together in the minds of every science fiction reader as being the two authors who joined together cold science and tremendous fantasy better than any others have done. I use the word "tremendous" advisedly, for that is the only word to describe the scope of the stories of these two authors, and that is what they are mainly noted for.

Their stories run the gamut of the universe, are filled with energies and velocities running into astronomical figures, and yet at the same time are always bound down to earth by the thread of science that does not go beyond present-day knowledge.

The "Skylark" series and the "Arcot-Wade-Morey" series are without a doubt the greatest group of interplanetary stories that have ever been conceived. [Pre "Lensman"] In some ways the latter series is better than the former, although the name of "Skylark" has had much more notoriety than the other. It is difficult to judge, though, because they are both such marvelous pieces of imaginative work.

Both series start with fundamental principles, and gradually, by an accumulation of knowledge, work up to a point where all the energy of the universe is at the command of the characters, and any operation can be performed by the mere process of thinking about it.

Aside from this basic resemblance, there is a piece of coincidence to be seen that is really startling. Perhaps the word coincidence is incorrectly used, for what it really represents is the fact that: starting with a given setting, character, and conditions, two different authors working absolutely independently can evolve plots for stories that are identical down to almost minor details. It is as though the two authors said, "Here is a plot; let us see how each of us would write the story." For that is exactly how the result appears. The plots are the same, but the development, the treatment of the science, even the scientific systems follow the separate inclinations of the authors.

The stories I refer to are "Skylark Three," and "Invaders from the Infinite."

The plots are, broadly: Invasion, accumulation of sufficient knowledge to repel the invaders, and then a smash climax in which the invaders are repelled. The reason for the basic similarity of plot is obvious. In the stories preceding these in the respective series, powers of huge magnitude, and velocities faster than light have been used. This means, then, that the present stories must be of interstellar scope. For the sake of plot, there must be a conflict. There are no equal forces within known systems, therefore the conflict must be with outsiders. The obvious motive is invasion and repulsion. At the beginning of the stories the invaders have the edge on the power; this is to make the obstacles higher, according to all laws of plotting. During the story knowledge is accumulated until the protagonist has the edge over the antagonist, and then: Wham!

All of this follows by logical sequence, but now notice how the plots are worked out in both stories. The earth is not the first place attacked, but some other place is, and the inhabitants come running to earth for help. The heroes sally forth, meet a solitary ship of the enemy, and by the use of a recently acquired weapon, vanquish this enemy ship. They go on and explore various planets looking for people who are sufficiently advanced to give them aid.

Now here differences occur in the treatment of the stories. Campbell has his heroes merely take hints for weapons from various sources and develop them themselves by the use of much calculations. He also has the heroes devise their own power source, giving them enough time to do so by the trick of shooting them back in time and having them age up to the present. Smith goes about it the easier way. He finds a race that is so advanced that all that is necessary is for them to educate Richard Seaton to know all the science there is to know, whereupon he is ready to build himself a super-colossal space ship and go out and lick the pants off the enemy.

And that is what happens in both stories. After they are good and ready, the super-ships are built, the minor bases of the enemy destroyed, and finally, the entire planet of the enemy finished up. In Campbell's story that is the final play, but Smith makes that merely incidental, in fact, done merely by pushing a button. The big fight comes when Seaton has to go out and chase the ship that is fleeing to the distant universe. Notice, though, despite the fact that the heroes have almost everything there is to have, at the end the enemy almost gets them with an ace up the sleeve. That, of course, merely follows logically from plot construction.

Another source of similarities is the activities of the enemy. In both stories the enemy is bent upon conquering the universe for the usual reasons. In both stories the enemy comes from a huge planet, are strong and stocky like regular heavy-planet men, and have ultra-vicious psychologies. In both cases, when a message comes home telling about the resistance of the earth people, intrigue rears its ugly head: the ruler of the planet is murdered, and someone else takes his place.

Following all of this up is an interesting lesson in the logic of plot construction, but more interesting is the opportunity to compare the individual styles of two authors who are both considered the top of the same field, and yet who can, with the same plot, evolved individually, use such different treatment, and create such different atmosphere. For the treatment of these two stories is different.

Smith, although writing in a more rounded style, is lazier than Campbell. Smith does not take the trouble to explain away the Einstein theory, but merely disregards it. Campbell, through and through, is seen to have more mechanical ingenuity, for he does get away with going faster than light, even taking Einstein into consideration, and in his many different kinds of rays he shows more versatility than Smith, who merely uses one system of vibrations and gives them all sorts of properties. Campbell, at the end of his story, finishes up with two devices which Smith did not get up to in "Skylark Three," but saw fit to use in the next story, "Skylark of Valeron." These are: cosmic energy, and mental control. Campbell, in being the first to use mental control, shows, at the same time more laziness and more ingenuity. You see, it takes quite a bit of imagination to figure out a decent control for such a lot of operations, which Smith gets around weakly, by using an organ-like keyboard. The keyboard is more complex, and more trouble, which is why I consider Campbell more lazy in this respect. He avoided trouble, Campbell, tho, goes to more trouble to have the hero work everything out by himself, while Smith's hero has everything handed to him on a silver platter. Incidentally, that is a habit of Smith's which he also used in "Galactic Patrol."

On the whole, Campbell's science is easier to believe, for his explanations are more matter of fact and closer to reality. Smith's, on the other hand, are easier to understand, but are more mystical and less down to earth. However, his richer style makes up for that.

The opportunity to take two stories like these, written by two master authors, and comparing the manner in which the authors handle the same theme is, I believe, unique. Of course, there are many instances of different authors working on similar ideas, but not in such an obvious direct relationship. It would be interesting to try to find other examples like this. Let us hear what other readers have to say about it.

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SOMETHING DIFFERENT

by
Willis Conover, Jr.

I've got a swell plot for a science-fiction story I'm going to write. Something different, something really unique and unusual. I'll give you a rough idea of what it's like, and I'll bet it floors you. Boy, get a load of this!

The City Editor of the Daily Dozen tells his star reporter, Flush Warden, to interview the well-known Russian scientist, Professor Ivan Togohomovitch, at his home laboratories out in the country. Flush - who, incidentally, is very handsome - drives to the scientist's dark, gloomy residence and lifts the huge knocker on the door a couple of times.

The door opens slowly, and Flush is confronted by a seven-foot, powerful-looking, white-coated Russian. Flush knows he's a scientist because he has a Marchioni [Wonder Stories illustrator] beard.

"Professor Ivan Togohomovitch?" Flush asks.

"I am he," the scientist growls. (Boy, ain't that "I am he" classy stuff?) "I am a pizzy man. Vat do you vant?"

Flush explains that he's from the Daily Dozen, and he's come to interview the scientist. Togohomovitch admits his somewhat reluctantly and leads him down a long, dark hall into his laboratory, which is full of test-tubes and microscopes and all that stuff you read about.

Now, here's where the story gets good. The door opens, and in walks a beautiful dark-haired girl whose raven tresses reflect the glow of neon tubes with a glossy sheen. She looks at Flush and says, "Oh, excuse me, Poppa. I didn't know you had company," and starts to withdraw from the laboratory.

The scientist says, "That's O.K., Nadya. Come in," and explains to Flush that this is his daughter Nadya. Flush acknowledges the introduction, and is suddenly aware of her breath-taking beauty. So breath-taking, in fact, that he can say nothing.

Well, the scientist leaves the room for a moment. I don't know why, but I can guess. Anyway, it's necessary that he leave the room so Nadya and Flush can be alone together. So I just have him leave to make the story go all right. He doesn't need a reason; and besides, I'm the author, ain't I?

Well, Nadya rushes up to Flush and yells, "Oh, you must go immediately! Quick, before he returns! He is a fiend, an inhuman monster. He is going to do something horrible to you, unless you go now. Others have come, but none have ever left - in recognizable form. Why, only yesterday he sent out a barrel marked 'Synthetic Hamburger'."

Just then the door opens and the scientist comes in. He looks sternly at Nadya; then he says in a nasty tone of voice, "Nadya, leave us at once." She goes to the door; and then she turns and makes One Last Silent Appeal of Flush as she closes the door behind her.

But our hero hasn't even been listening to her all along. He's been looking horrifiedly at a terrible misshapen Thing which jumps up and down in a huge glass bowl. The scientist chuckled sardonically, "You like my leetle pet?" he asks; then he breaks forth into a peal of insane laughter.

Isn't this exciting?

Suddenly he becomes sober again and tells Flush that this shocking obscenity was once - can I bring myself to tell you? - was once a tree, which he changed into an animal! Gosh!

He adds that he has also changed smaller animals into plants. Then, lowering his voice ominously, he says, "But I haff neffer changed a man into a plant!" Being very intolligent, Flush gets what the scientist is leading up to, and runs for the door. But the Russian, rushing, catches the reporter and brings him back into the room.

Now, this's what makes the story different. The scientist doesn't experiment on Flush or change him into a plant; he allows the reporter to interview him, like Flush wanted in the first place. And he doesn't keep him captive in a cell beneath the house; he shakes hands with him and says to give his regards to the City Editor, who's an old schoolmate of his. And the scientist isn't crazy after all. It's the daughter that's nuts.

Fooled you, didn't I?

Fantascience Digest, Jan-Feb, 1939 [2, 2]

"AN ARISTOCRAT ABDICATES"

by

Harry Warner, Jr.

There have been in the past, and are at present, something like a dozen magazines, here and abroad, devoted to science fiction and fantasy in its various shapes and forms. Only a few of these, at the present writing, can be said to have any history or tradition or past at all, as most are relatively new publications. In fact, of all the magazines of a fantastic nature today, only THRILLING WONDER STORIES, AMAZING STORIES, and ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION (nee STORIES) ~~can~~ be said to possess any kind of pedigree. (I am purposely not counting weird fiction magazines in this article.) Of the history of those three magazines, that of AMAZING STORIES is by far the most interesting - and in ways, the most woeful.

AMAZING STORIES was the first magazine to appear, devoted entirely to science fiction. Under the guiding hand of Hugo Gernsback, it was not long before it became one of the finest - the finest? - magazine ever published. But in two or three years trouble developed; AMAZING was sold, and, after a few months' reign of some obscure gentleman as editor, whose name is now almost forgotten, the magazine came under the wing of T. O'Conor Sloane.

Mr. Sloane was, in many ways, the most interesting editor to ever be on the staff of a stf. magazine. To begin with, he was very old when he took over the job - in his late seventies - and as he held the job for almost ten years, he was a very old man when he finally lost control. Stf. is generally recognized to be a field for very young men; no editor today is even middle-aged. Therefore, it is all the more remarkable that Sloane could edit the magazine with the success he did. He had his critics - and plenty of them - but despite this, he was editor longer than any other editor in stf's history. [Until Campbell, at ASF] Not a bad record.

But the years told on Mr. Sloane. "specially during 1936, '37, and the first months of '38. AMAZING began a slow and steady degradation. Not that there was anything utterly wrong with the magazine. No, not that. To all appearance it was almost precisely the same as years back, with the exception of its size and rate of appearance. But one thing was lacking: progress. The magazine stood still. During these two and one-half years not one single change of any kind

was made in the magazine. Morey had absolute control over the art (or what passed for art). The price, format, and departments remained the same. Even the letters in "Discussions" began to take on a uniform appearance! There was only one change at all noticeable; and that only to the experienced fan: the stories published were becoming out of date. We know why this was, to a great extent. Editor Sloane would delay acceptance of a story for months, often as long as a year, and then again delay publication of the stories for years longer. Remember, 200 accepted stories were in the files of AMAZING when Ziff-Davis took over. Unfortunately for the writers, not paid for.

Detail of the sale of the magazine are well enough known to all fans; there is no need of repetition. But there is one angle not well-known - if at all. Namely, that there was another issue under Teck Publications all ready, or very nearly ready, to hit the newsstands when the magazine was sold! Stories had been chosen for that issue, and actually printed! I know this to be a fact, because I know of at least one writer who has possession of copies of this never-to-appear issue's pages, numbered, and with illustrations! I wonder if there are any complete copies in existence, however???? (You can well imagine this writer's chagrin on having a story accepted, illustrated, and printed, even receiving proofs of it, and then learning that the yarn would not appear; that it was 'unavailable' - and that no check would be forthcoming!) [I doubt if the issue went any further than page proofs; probably none of the pages ever went to press.]

At any rate, under its new management, AMAZING apparently prospers; at least from the financial end. However, the literary quality is extremely doubtful. At first it appeared that the new editor, a former fan himself, would follow the fine tradition which had been set for him; but he has not. Rather, he has accepted many stories not fit to see print; changed half the titles for the worse; said some ridiculous things in editorials; and has been rather stubborn in doing, for the most part, exactly opposite from what the readers request. However, perhaps he will become less exasperating as time goes on [!]; he has a fine opportunity, and certain signs seem to point toward better things to come. (For example, the \$50 prize to the writer of the best story each month.) Oddly enough, among the best stories AMAZING has published under the new ownership have been two of the editor's own.

AMAZING has a fine future ahead of it if Mr. Palmer does the kind of job we fans believe him capable of doing. Let's hope that AMAZING once more, in the near future, will become the "Aristocrat" it formerly was.

Fantascience Digest, March-April, 1939
[2, 3]

MY FAVORITE SCIENCE FICTION STORY

by J. Michael Rosenblum

My favorite science fiction story, if it can be so-called, is undoubtedly that grand epic, "Starmaker," by my fellow countryman, Olaf Stapledon. I read fantasy primarily for the ideas contained therein, and apart from capability of craftsmanship, all I ask of an author is to produce or work out some idea. "Starmaker" is a glorious reservoir of human ingenuity and provides food for innumerable intellectual feasts of digestion.

In magazine science fiction, I believe that my favorite story is "The Blue Barbarians," by Stanton A. Coblentz. It is a grand piece of satire and enthusiastically lampoons most of the foibles of humanity. By placing the action on

another planet at another time, delicacy is avoided. There's something about the writing, too, that attracts one. The continuity of the story is very good, and the story has characters, which is unusual [Amazing Stories Quarterly, Summer, 1931.]

Fantascience Digest, March-April, 1939
[2, 3]

WHAT'S A BANQUET TO YOU MIGHT BE GARBAGE TO THE UNDERSIGNED

- or -

Vice Versa

By Fred W. Fischer

It has always been my assertion that one man's appetizer is another man's allergy, a deduction that I made after watching a group of son's of the soil as they listened delightedly to a very nasal rendition of "Red River Valley" coming in over the radio. At the conclusion of the atrocity they twitched and squirmed and did everything to show appreciation of the world's finer music, even giving voice to a few exultant cries. For my part I twitched and squirmed because my eardrums had been assaulted, and if I cried out at all it was in anguish.

What, I wondered, could sound worse than two asthmatic fiddles and a decrepit "GIT-tar" sobbing and groaning such a maudlin ballad? I soon found out. The announcer in a bit of linguistic acrobatics compounded of five parts city talk and five parts backwoods vernacular, informed those listening that the next number which the "Mounting Minstrels" would favor us with would be called "The Death of Jesse James." There was lifting joy in his tones, as if a great day was dawning, and I took heart.

Well, I listened to the story of how Bob Ford the coward shot Mr. Howard and laid pore Jesse in his grave, o-le-o-lea-hoo - and then I left that mountain store, convinced that men are created freely and equally as different as day and night - in their tastes.

All of which leads up to the point. I am about to present free-gratis - and for nothing those ten scientific stories which I consider to be the best so far written, in the order of my preference. It is not anticipated that more than six people will be in even close accord with my opinion. Five of these people are dead and the sixth lives so far back in the woods that you can't get an alienist to prove he's insane. I have already been alienated.

So without further attempting to delay the inevitable:

1. INTO THE INFINITE, by Austin Hall
2. THE MIND SPOT, by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint
3. THE PHANTOM IN THE RAINBOW, by Slater LaMaster
4. WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE and sequel, by Balmer and McHarg
5. DARKNESS AND DAWN, by George Allen England
6. THE MOON POOL, by A. Merritt
7. THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM, by Ray Cummings
8. TRIPLANETARY, by E. E. Smith
9. THE RETURN OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, by George F. Worts
10. THE SECOND DELUGE, by G. P. Serviss.

This list has been in the making for fully eighteen years, so don't just figure offhand that instead of having been alienated I should have been eliminated. I've got reasons to support my choices.

I'm omniverous, if the term might be applied to reading. I lap up anything and everything in print, if you'll excuse me mixing a metaphor. If you'll have patience I'll mix you one, too, and we'll all get cock-eyed. Out of my twenty favorite stories, ten were those listed above. A couple or three of the others on my "20" list were THE SAPPHIRE DEATH, by Loring Brent (who is, of course, George F. Worts), THE SHIP OF ISHTAR, and GREY-FACE, a story by Sax Rohmer.

INTO THE INFINITE is my favorite of favorites because of the weird atmosphere which gives the reader such a sense of unreality (as in the BLIND SPOT), and because of the careful character delineation employed in making of the hero a dual personality - a man you both admire and despise at the same time. The plot is involved yet concise, and leads up to one of the smashing denouncements ever written. [Reprinted, FFM, 4 pts, starting Oct 1942.]

THE BLIND SPOT is astraddle the border line between weird and science fiction, being unrivaled in either field. The uncertainty of the reader is increased by the knowledge he possesses of not knowing what it's all about. The whole book tantalizes one into finishing it, and then a person still can't summarize it. The sequel THE SPOT OF LIFE [Argosy, 6 pts, starting Aug 13, 1932] didn't explain much either, but with the death of Homer Eon Flint the rambling style disappeared. (Flint died, by the way, in a mysterious fashion. He was found in a wrecked automobile at the bottom of a declivity. His last words to Hall had been "So long. I'll see you in the Blind Spot." At least, such is the story.) [Reprinted, Fantastic Novels, July 1940. SPOT OF LIFE reprinted, FFM, Feb 1941.]

I class the PHANTOM IN THE RAINBOW as scientifiction because abnormal psychology is as scientific as atom-splitting, and the villain of LaMaster's tale is nothing if not abnormal. His telepathic powers, his hypnotic influence over the hero, his insane indulgences and sadistic plottings, keep the reader in an agony of suspense up until the last page. "Even then, you expect to turn the blank leaf and have Sigmund Von Mortimer jump out and smack you in the puss with a loud "Boo!" [Argosy-All-Story Weekly, 6 pts, starting Dec 29, 1928.]

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE and its sequel [AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE] I consider to be just about the best written of any scientifiction novels. The style is grammatical and literate, and while the plot may be regarded as hackneyed and drawn-out by all the fans who've read stories just like it a thousand times before and since, it yet approaches more of a literary standard of excellence. Character delineation and natural human emotions are given due consideration - as much so as the description of the space ship and its mechanical aspects. This pair of books deserves recognition primarily because normal, natural reactions are present. WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE describes accurately what the public reaction would be to an imminent catastrophe - the hopes, the fears, the dread of disaster are all presented with almost photographic exactitude. AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE, while more necessarily imaginative, is almost as vital and real as the book to which it is the sequel. [Blue Book Magazine, 6 pts, starting Sept, 1932, and 6 pts, starting Nov, 1933.]

I've never understood how the world can be menaced with annihilation, how a scientist can dish up a space-ship and flee with the flower of the human race, and how sanctuary and civilization can be established on another planet - all in ten or fifteen short pages. It takes eight hundred or more to make it seem like actual history.

People are interested in people. How would you feel if you knew positively that ten days from now a comet would utterly destroy the earth? Would you think an historian of the event supplied very good coverage if he left out your emotional disturbances from his account and contented himself with merely a paragraph or so stating that the population was in an uproar but some few escaped in a space-ship?

DARKNESS AND DAWN [DARKNESS AND DAWN, FFM, Aug, 1940; BEYOND THE GREAT OBLIVION, FFM, June, 1941; THE AFTERGLOW, FFM, Dec, 1941], THE MOON POOL [FFM, Sep-Oct, 1939; Fantastic Novels, May, 1948; THE CONQUEST OF THE MOON POOL, 6 pts, FFM, starting Nov, 1939; Fantastic Novels, Sept, 1948], THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM [FFM, Sept-Oct, 1939; PEOPLE OF THE GOLDEN ATOM, Fantastic Novels, Sept, 1940], and TRIPLANETARY [Amazing Stories, 4 pts, starting Jan, 1934] are generally too familiar to scientification fans to summarize or explain. I liked them all, just because. THE RETURN OF GEORGE WASHINGTON [Argosy-All-Story Weekly, 6 pts, starting Oct 15, 1927], by George F. Worts, may not be so well known to fans. It was published in book form under the title of NO MORE A CORPSE, by Loring Brent. The story deals with a plot from which GIANTS FROM ETERNITY, by Manly Wade Wellman, [Startling Stories, July, 1939] must have derived its inspiration.

The world finds that an inventor can bring back from the dead a single famous personage, and a poll is conducted to determine whom the immortal will be. John L. Sullivan, Abe Lincoln, and numerous others are considered, but the Father of Our Country leads the list. He is revived and tours the United States, seeing the modern marvels and dipping his fingers into various political pies - and falls in love with a modern girl. The story entertains, amuses, and lingers in the memory of the reader.

That it all turns out to be a gigantic hoax is no deterrent to my claim that it is excellent scientification. It is more scientific, for instance, than all those putrid stories which end when the hero wakes up at home in bed. I've read about a hundred since 1920 which were labeled scientification and in the last ones proved to be just bad *dreams* induced from too much gastronomic activity.

THE SECOND DELUGE [Fantastic Novels, July, 1948] is a famous and familiar story, also. I think my arguments in regard to WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE apply here. It is real, vivid, and NATURAL!

Every time a fellow fan reads this article my ears will burn. But thank heavens - this is the United States and I can have my opinions - you - you RED RIVER VALLEY admirers, you!

Fantascience Digest, May-June, 1939 [2, 4]

HOW DOES BLOCH DO IT?

by
Ralph Milne Farley

In search of an answer to this question, I interviewed the mighty mite, who wrote an 35,000 word complete novel, including revisions and retypings, in 8 hours in New Orleans earlier this winter.

Robert A. Bloch, public author No. 1, occupies a whole block on Knapp Street, Milwaukee. In fact he is a syndicate, most of his work being done by robots, built for him in the laboratories of Prof. Schmidt of Marquette where I also am a Lecturer in Physics. That's very singular, isn't it?

The leader of these robots is named, after its creator, Robot A. Bloch. The next is Robot B. Bloch, etc. They do all the real work for him. In fact, "Henry Kuttner" is merely the pen-name of robots H to K.

The secret of Bloch's success lies in his innate laziness - he makes others do the work. Thus, for example, in the Bloch-Kuttner collaboration, "The Body and the Brain," Kuttner did the body of the work and Bloch merely furnished the brains.

The foregoing is strictly secret and confidential - that's why I'm offering it for publication.

If I knew half of what I've told, I'd be sued for libel.

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Fantascience Digest, May-June, 1939 [2, 4]

THRILLING---AWK!!

by Harry Warner, Jr.

That was the wail which went up on that horrific day a few short years ago when THRILLING WONDER STORIES was born, and WONDER STORIES became a fond memory. Fans far and wide became horrified at the mere mention of the name - defiling a great sf. magazine with such a title! Yet, that was what happened, and there was nothing that could be done about it.

WONDER always had been something of a problem child, though. True, it had printed great stories; a capable editor had been present, and its policies, on the whole, had been approved of by the fans. But our good friend, Hugo Gernsback, was continually experimenting. I've lost track of the number of times the magazine changed format in the half-dozen odd years he had it under his wing, even after it had become WONDER from the original SCIENCE WONDER and AIR WONDER.

Charles D. Hornig was, in fact, just about the first fan to become connected with a sf. magazine. That alone was something, and there's no denying that he was a fine "managing editor." My own humble notion is that the WONDER of 1934 and 1935 vintage was about the greatest set of issues (over an extended period) of any sf. magazine before or since.

But then that fatal little phrase crept into the proceedings. Not so bad appearing on the surface; there have been worse ones (such as "Fantastic Adventures") but this one was certainly the beginning of the end. That phrase? "NOW 15 CENTS!"

The magazine began to degenerate a little. Not so badly, but at the same time it lacked something that it had a year or so previous. Finally came the day when the notice appeared in a 1936 issue [April] that there would be no more newsstand distribution of WONDER STORIES. Instead, fans would be able to obtain it via subscription only - but bighearted Gernsback would even trust you for the money for it. When you received each issue, you sent him the dough. (No dough - no more magazines. Simple, eh?)

I glued together my card, and sent it blithely on its way. A month passed - two - three. And no WONDER STORIES via mail or newsstand. At long last came a postcard: "This is to announce the first issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES" or something like that. (I have the announcement but am too lazy to drag it out.) Now what? Immediately I rushed to a newsstand. There it was. Though hardly recognizable in that cover. Oh well, you can't have everything, were my innocent thoughts. The stories looked pretty good - and strangely enough, they weren't too bad, either. A little bloodthirsty, but there had been much worse issues.

And then things began to happen. The magazine got worse and worse. In that first year, despite the fact that the yarns in the first issue weren't so bad, only one story deserved the ranking of good. That story was "The Circle of Zero" by Weinbaum. Others were merely fair, poor, or awful. If I may venture yet another opinion, those six issues were about the lowest standard s-f has hit over any period, before or since. Even the present plethora of mags usually contain one good story each, which makes up for the sins of the rest of the issue.

Finally, the magazine slowly, but surely, began to improve. Campbell started his very good Penton and Blake series, and the "Via" trilogy popped up. Other yarns every now and then weren't too bad, and it appeared as though there was hope for the magazine after all. True, it has never reached the level of the other top-flight magazines, but at the same time it isn't too terrible, as some fans would lead you to believe. And I will say this for the magazine: right now it's about 300% better than two years ago, and at least 50% improved over a year back. Let's hope the improvement keeps up at the current rate.

One more thing: something that seems to have been overlooked by the fans. Do you realize that THRILLING WONDER STORIES has been responsible for every, or nearly every, new feature the fantasy magazines have adopted in the past few years? It's a fact, viz.: "The Story Behind the Story" (which is merely biographies of the authors in many cases, and certainly their forerunner), the science quizzes (not to be confused, of course, with the older science questions based on stories in the magazines); "Scientifacts" started the new string of science fillers; and in numerous other ways THRILLING WONDER STORIES has led the field.

Now don't get me wrong. I don't say that TWS is the finest fantasy magazine today, or anything else equally as ridiculous. However, I believe that if you'll think it over a little you'll find the mag to be much better than it appears on the surface. (If you think that the new bunch of mags is a good sign, you can even thank TWS for starting it.) Its editors appear to be more sincere than many today. They've helped struggling young authors, and assembled the greatest collection of names in the fantasy world into one issue of TWS - the tenth anniversary issue. They've brought the finest artist in fantasy to stf. - Virgil Finlay - and are mainly responsible for arousing interest in the Weinbaum trilogy. At least, don't condemn the magazine too much. Of course, it has its faults - and plenty of them - but it may surprise us all in a few more years. Just wait and see....

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Fantascience Digest, May-June, 1939 [2, 4]

PLAUSIBILITY OR SUPER — SCIENCE?

by

John F. Burke

It is not a new question by any means, but it was revived at the London Convention of the Science Fiction Association, and since every speaker had something to say about it, perhaps the old question needs resuscitating.

Do we want plausibility, or super-science?

The days of thought-variants are, praise be, behind us - as far as the designation of "thought-variant" is concerned. But, despite the "human interest" trends of Campbell and the "sex and slaughter" of Palmer, we still dabble in supers and hypers. A glance at the magazines of a few years ago will show just how we have come to this stage when space warps and galaxy-bending are things rather to be scorned as trivial than marvelled at. From the simplicity, and human, natural development of such stories as "The Wreck of the Asteroid" [Wonder Stories, Dec, 1932] and "The Moon Era" [ibid., Feb, 1932], we have progressed (?) to a stage where a voyage through space is taken as an accomplished thing, and anything less than the speed of light is a positive danger in the space traffic lanes.

Every one of the speakers at that London Convention asked for more plausibility in modern science fiction, and all were unanimous in declaring that American science fiction was in a disgraceful state today. While not totally agreeing with all their views, I think some of the things they said were all too true.

Professor A. M. Low, the SFA president, pointed out that the extravagance of American science fiction repelled the British public, a fact which none can deny. The American fans will doubtless claim that this is because they have not yet been brought to the stage where they can appreciate the "advanced" ideas of the thought-variant writers, and will learn in time. I think, however, that they are wrong. That good science fiction is popular in this country is quite definite - H. G. Wells is as well-known as any writer in the country - better known than most, and his fantasies are always sure of a good reception, though he writes so few nowadays. To go one step further, Olaf Stapledon's books sell well, though his ideas are far more advanced than Wells'. They are titanic in their concepts - but they are logical, and developed from present-day knowledge, with a flavoring of what we may reasonably expect to happen in the future in the way of scientific discovery. The ideas are imaginative - but not fantastic.

Human beings will always be more interested in human beings than in cold machines, particularly when they are asked to believe that those machines will warp time and everything else known to their senses.

I personally do not think authors should be tied down too much in their efforts to write science fiction, and some license should be taken - it stimulates the imagination. But there is no need to take the thing to excess; any stimulants, taken in overdoses, become drugs.

It is absurd to suppose that, because we today can look at the Moon through a telescope, we know all about it. It is the fault of every generation of mankind to imagine that it represents the pinnacle of human achievement, an attitude which science fiction fans are often inclined to decry. This is where science fiction serves its purpose - it can, by a slight exaggeration, knock some of the cocksureness out of many people, and persuade them, however gradually, that they are NOT the apotheosis of human endeavor, that there's plenty left to be discovered yet. But science fiction must not take the thing to absurd lengths, and insist on men from Earth conquering every galaxy, and going out to the edge of space to stop it from bursting, or something like that.

One of the thousands of voices that cry in the wilderness, I say - "more plausibility." But don't make it too plausible - leave a little room for us to dream.

"World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams;
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems."

Right! Let's be dreamers, and visualise things we know to be impossible - for it's the dreamers who really achieve things, whatever big business men and hack writers may say. But let our dreams be pleasant once, then we'll shake the world, because we'll prove the reality that is the foundation of those dreams. Nightmares of super-science, space-warps, and such-like, won't convince the public that we have anything worth looking at. The simplicity of "The First Men in the Moon" won more adherents for science fiction than all the nonsense we were treated to in the "Skylark" trilogy.

Plausibility, please.



RETELLING THE OLD-TIMERS

---Reviews of the Classics---

DARKNESS AND DAWN, By George Allan England.

This long and satisfying novel was originally published serially in the old CAVALIER, a Munsey publication. It appeared as a trilogy of tales from 1912 to 1913, the separate sections being published serially under the titles "Darkness and Dawn" [4 pts, Jan, 1912 THE CAVALIER; Jan 6, 13, 20, 1912, THE CAVALIER WEEKLY], "Beyond the Great Oblivion" [6 pts, Jan 4, 11, 18, 25, Feb 1, 8, 1913], and "The Afterglow" [4pts, June 14, 21, 28, July 5, 1913]; in the book presented by Small, Maynard and Company in 1914 - a rather bulky volume of 672 pages, with illustrations by P. Monahan and G. W. Gage - the first section had the title "The Vacant World."

The story itself represented the first of what might be termed "modern" science fiction stories to present a plot concerning itself with the end of the world, and a subsequent rehabilitation.

In the modern survival stories, a group of scientists are enabled to preserve their lives because they have predicted a cataclysm and have taken adequate precautions to insure their own safety. When the time has arrived to rebuild civilization they usually confront the task fully equipped with marvelous mechanical devices, and by the pooling of their super-intelligences are able in a remarkably short time to bring order out of chaos and restore the world to what is generally an improved and rather Utopian state.

"DARKNESS AND DAWN," however, gives to two ordinary people, an engineer and his secretary, the vast task of survival and reconstruction. Allan Stern and the inevitable heroine, Beatrice Kendrick, are not gifted with foresight, and do not therefore escape a mephitic gas which envelopes the earth in the wake of a tremendous explosion which tears from its very vitals a huge area which is hurled into the heavens to become a second satellite. They survive the wholesale annihilation besetting the majority of the human race, and after a sleep of several thousand years they recover consciousness not through their own cleverness, but rather because kind providence had found them busily at work on the top floor of the highest building in the world at a time when the entire atmosphere was being instantaneously and efficiently polluted. The altitude permitted their survival because the gas was deadliest and densest close to the ground.

Thus, unequipped with any modern devices and surrounded by the ruins of a former metropolis (New York) now overgrown with rank vegetation, these two people are revived. Stern establishes a temporary shelter at the site of the resurrection and from here ventures forth on exploratory trips from which he returns bearing metallic implements which have resisted the ravaging verdigris of time. He makes a home for himself and Beatrice - a precarious home constantly threatened by a pack of menacing atavistic monstrosities inhabiting the vicinity - things once human but now reverted back almost to unreasoning brutes. Life is a constant and exciting battle with these terrible creatures until Stern builds a skiff in which he and his companion escape to a new home far down [?] the Hudson.

With the coming of winter Stern and Beatrice start southward to find a more suitable home through the cold months. Their boat is wrecked in an exciting scene in which they plunge over a cataract into the vortex of a maelstrom, but they escape with their lives, and, equipped with nothing but their bare hands, fight through the wilderness until they reach a city large enough to contain

weapons and supplies. Upon finding an airplane there, Stern is sent into a rhapsody of joy. He repairs the plane and they fly westward toward Chicago.

They find themselves eventually upon the lip of the terrific abyss from whence the world's second satellite has been torn, and not knowing the width of the chasm are dubious about crossing it, but finally decide to try and fly it. They meet with disaster and due to engine failure are forced to bank down, down, down into a seemingly bottomless pit. Alighting on the bosom of an inner ocean they are rescued by a race descended from humans who had fled into caves in the long ago to escape the cataclysm. This weakened and ensnared race takes them in as prisoners, and Stern is able by his giant strength and ingenious science to make himself chief of the dark world - only, however, after battling to the death with a monstrous wrestler who returns from a long journey to claim leadership.

In his ascension to power he incurs the enmity of one H'yemba, the only actual villain in the whole trilogy.

Stern repairs the airplane and he and Eve [?], together with an old, old man who has remembered English speech and history, fly to the top of the chasm, alighting upon the opposite side from which they had first attempted the journey. The old man sees the sunlight for the first time and dies in rapture at the sight.

"THE AFTERGLOW" tells of the rebuilding of a world. Stern makes flight after flight into the chasm, returning each time with a full complement of underworld dwellers. After the whole tribe has reached the surface via airplane and by way of a crevasse which has fortunately been found to reach to the very surface, civilization resumes its upward climb. A town is built, railroads are constructed, and farming is undertaken.

But not without struggle, terror and privation. Eve is once kidnapped by a giant gorilla which Stern tracks down and kills. Upon another occasion H'yemba leads an almost successful revolt but Stern kills him and throttles the rebellion. Again the tribe is menaced by the Pack met back in New York, which has trailed Stern even to this place. The dwellers wipe out these inimical entities in a holocaust of flame which also destroys hundreds of miles of surrounding countryside.

From this point on, everything progresses happily for all. More children come to Eve and her Engineer, the first one having been born during one of Stern's trips into the Abyss, and intermarry with the innerdwellers. In time, when Stern has reached the age of sixty as he computes it, or actually 2060 as history might, the dwellers have spread over the face of the former United States and the golden age has been ushered in. We find Stern and Eve in the twilight of their lives, joyfully turning the task of reconstruction over to their eldest son, and sitting in their beautiful garden relaxing from the rigors of their strenuous lives.

For a refreshing and novel story of the ending of the world and the beginning of a new civilization, read this book. It is so old, it is brand new, and although it has inspired and fostered a thousand similar plots it is better and more unique than all which have followed in its proud wake. It was written zestfully and with an evident desire to entertain not only the reader but also the author. Since the writer quite obviously enjoyed writing it, you will also enjoy reading it. It is to modern survival stories what Robinson Crusoe is to all subsequent tales of castaway life. —Fred W. Fischer

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Fantascience Digest, Jul-Aug-Sept, 1939

[2, 5]

WHY GHOULS LEAVE HOME

Ray Bradbury

A few years ago, after getting in from an all night clambake, Brother Robert Bloch scrunched down before his tripe-writer and pumped out an article on witches, ghosts, ghouls, etc. I now feel that the real truth should come out. Altogether too much has been written on the subject that is untrue. Kuttner, CASmith, and all the rest are guilty of this heinous offense. When I told Hank Kuttner I was writing this story he sent over Oliver, his pet ghoul who sat atop my library table for three nights murmuring, looking at me with his large blue eyes, his mouth scarletly agape, fondling the corpse laid so tenderly in his arms. Such a gentle little creature he was that I grew sorry and threw him a leg or two I had lying about the house. But he just kept murmuring and looking at me and licking his chops. (I guess I'd better start dieting. He's not the only one that's done that lately.) Of course, not all ghouls are like Oliver.

Now take Moses, my own ghoul. He has a taste for little babies. He has some rather awful habits that I have tried in vain to cure, such as dangling in clothes closets and scaring guests who come to visit me. He also has a nasty habit of clambering into bed with every young thing that takes the guest room. (Ghouls are quite human, you see.) He's about ten feet tall and I keep him around mostly to kill moths in the alcoves or to quiet little brats who wander into the house with their mothers. Sometimes I even throw him a mother or two. (Gad! but I'm mean!) Moses' last name is one that a movie star stole from him. His real name is Moses Gable. He has large, pendulous head appendages and remarkable hearing. He can hear the lowest whisper that was ever hissed between "Anthony Adverse" and "Burn, Witch, Burn!" Moses usually sings an archaic rhyme while he tends to his vittles - it goes like this: "I CAN HAVE ARCHAIC AND EAT IT TOO!" When he finishes his meal, he picks his upper plate with a coffin nail. And an accomplished musician he is too. Last year he won first prize for his bass-fiddle concerto on a pair of suspenders. He has a flair for reporting, too. Last night, on a dark street, when passing a fat man, he turned to me and cried: "I'LL BE BACK IN A FLASH WITH SOLLE FLESH!" As one Spaniard said to another Spaniard about a third Spaniard, "REVOLTING, ISN'T HE?"

But lately he's been playing with matches and I'm afraid he'll make an ash of himself. Ghouls, you see, are made of cotton bunting, velva-sheen tape, three or four old window shades, a vacuum cleaner, and a little Patience. Moses and Oliver are both collapsible ghouls, the kind that fits into a cigarette case comfortably. They are very susceptible to indigestion....all bodies must be reasonably aged before they'll dine.

Out at the graveyard one ghoul, just imagine, walks up to the tombstone, checks his shroud, and takes a table in the swankiest tomb in the place. Seating himself before an empty coffin, Mr. Ghoul then looks over the menu printed on the marble marker: "Special today - one well rotted female - or two kids - pickled Yankee feet - ptomaine toes - gangrene girls - skull lust - freshly picked bones, by the vultures - and dead man cocktails, vintage 1898 - SPLEND* A*NIGHT CEMETARY. No coffin cover charge. Entertainment given by Jay Jeepers and his Creepers."

The ghoul then points to one luscious coffin over in the corner and it is brought to him post-humous-haste! "Will you have light or dark meat?" asks the waiter.

"I'll take a wing," retorts Ghoulie, sharpening his teeth on his elbow. "Give me some dressing, too, and the liver. Aren't humans just the best things ever?" Or he may say, "Just wrap it up and I'll nibble on it goin' home."

This sort of depravity has been going on now for many centuries.

SCIENCE FICTION HISTORY

—the first article ever written by SAM MOSKOWITZ—

Everything is changing but it seems to me that the swiftest changing of them all is science fiction. Contrary to usual opinion, it was established and organized as a unit long before the event of definite sf magazines. Hugo Gernsback had it running regularly both in story and science-theory form in the old ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER. His "Magnetio Storm," reprinted in the July, 1926, AMAZING STORIES, was originally published in the ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER. Gernsback's famous novel, "Ralph 124C41+," and many of Ray Cummings' better-known stories were first published in the ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER.

In 1921 when Gernsback changed the ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER into two magazines, PRACTICAL ELECTRICS and SCIENCE AND INVENTION, he continued his science fiction actively in the latter. Probably among the first was the series, "Dr. Hackensaw's Secrets" by Clement Pezandie. This series started in the January, 1922, issue of SCIENCE AND INVENTION and ran for almost thirty consecutive issues. About the same time/ had his six-part serial "Around the Universe" published. Howard V. Brown, cover artist of present-day s-f magazines, was doing the covers and a swell job he made of them!

To come back to the subject, H. G. Wells' reprints were running fairly regularly. Then Gernsback got a new idea. He created an imaginary article with faked photographs of a trip through space. It was represented on the cover of one of the issues and called "The Stellar Missile." April, 1923, found the appearance of George Allan England's "The Thing From Outside." Then Uncle Hugo pulled the greatest surprise of all. He published a special Scientifiction issue of SCIENCE AND INVENTION, dated August, 1923. The announcement of the special nature of this issue was printed on the cover in 1 1/2 inch type. The cover itself illustrated one of the stories. Here's how the scientific fiction section of the contents page was printed:

COVER

"THE MAN FROM THE ATOM"

"DR. HACKENSAW'S SECRETS"

"AROUND THE UNIVERSE"

"THE ELECTRIC DUEL"

"ADVANCED CHEMISTRY"

"VANISHING MOVIES"

—cover story—

—"Super Telescope"—

—part two—

HOWARD V. BROWN

G. PEYTON WERTENBAKER

CLEMENT PEZANDIE

RAY CUMMINGS

HUGO GERNSBACK

JACK RUEKELS

TEL J. HOLMAN

Notice the number of stories later reprinted in AMAZING STORIES. That issue was the peak of sf interest in S&I. After that the usual "Dr. Hackensaw's Secrets" and regular serials made up most of the sf contents. There was one other production along the line of "The Stellar Missile." It was a faked, humorous, group of photographs on the life and habits of the Martians. To mention all the other stories that appeared in S&I would consume too much space. Included among them were; "Tarrano the Conqueror," "Into the Fourth Dimension," [both Cummings] and of course, "The Metal Emperor" by A. Merritt. "Into the Fourth Dimension" was later reprinted in a Japanese magazine, illustrations and all, which, by the way, were always by Paul.

You will probably say, "What of PRACTICAL ELECTRICS?" This magazine continued its wayward course and eventually changed its name to THE EXPERIMENTER. The stories published in THE EXPERIMENTER were not very important, with the exception of a new series of "Dr. Hackensaw's Secrets" and the marvelous "Ark of the Covenant" by Victor MacClure, which was published in EIGHTEEN parts, and later reprinted in the first few issues of AIR WONDER STORIES. All this and more, believe it or not, was carried out before 1926, and by one publisher.

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SCIENTIFICTIONAL REPTILES

By R. R. Winterbotham

There are, broadly speaking, a number of distinct species of the class scientifictus fanaticus, which I have collected over a number of years. Not all are pests, and only a few are poisonous. Many serve a very good purpose. They are distinguished by reading habits, structure, and cerebral make-up which I have endeavored to list in a few of the outstanding types.

Order I, Crocodilla. Omnivorous reading habits, usually feeding lying on their dorsal surface, or propped on pillows. Their hind limbs are adapted only for walking to the nearest neighbor and borrowing his books, and are almost useless for returning books. The order gets its name from its habit of grinning broadly and snapping its jaws at the sight of someone else's books. Sub-order - Alligator - reads in the bathtub, getting books all wet and soapy.

Order II, Squamata. This type is a snake because he publicly assails your favorite author and avidly reads with great gusto of that same author's works in private. He has been known to run down two or three good magazines, simply because his one and only effort at fiction, entitled, "The Ether Boys on the Moon," was turned down by the editors. Sub-orders include such lizards, skines and chameleons that change color, shed tails, ears, etc., in the presence of notables at fan meetings to attract attention.

Order III, Chelonia. This reptile is enclosed in a shell of bony plates, which are impossible to penetrate with any argument. A typical example is our very good friend Isaac Asimov, whom we hope is listening, because he doesn't like our efforts to bring the women - God bless 'em - into our stories. Sub-order includes the Tortoise, editors who do not buy our stuff. (We hope this class becomes extinct.)

Order IV, Thermorpha. This class, including myself, is known only in fossils which have appeared in the public prints. Has been discovered several times and immediately forgotten. Sometimes slow on the scent of a story, but like the mud turtle, likes his environment.

Order V, Pterosauria. Really beautiful creatures on the surface. They have indiscriminate tastes, ranging from Ignatius Donnelly to "Superman," but are unable to distinguish scientific accuracy from pure fantasy and who believe in everything they read in that book about Atlantis. In their brain the optic lobes are widely separated from the cerebellum, indicating that what they read is rarely understood. Sub-order, The Spoofers, who read avidly and refuse to believe it.

Order VI, Ophida. Many members of this class are poisonous. When they read a story they like, they immediately write one like it and when it is turned down, accuse you of having pull with the editor. More or less parasitic, when not poisonous.

Order VII, Dinosauria. Not as extinct as many people imagine. Quite harmless. Often cry: "Wow - Gee - what a pip of a story!" May be distinguished from the crocodilla because he buys his own. Probably the greatest of all scientifictus fanaticus reptiles. Their chief criticism is: "You killed the villain twice, try not to do it again." This very prevalent order should be protected by law.

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Fantascience Digest, Jan-Feb, 1940 [3, 1]

UNCROWNED MASTERS

Sam Moskowitz

Science fiction is full of authors -- authors in every sense of the word -- men who have written pieces which fans fondly call "classics" of science fiction -- of fantasy, but their names are seldom referred to when one discusses the masters of science fiction. A. Merritt, Edward E. Smith, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Murray Leinster, Homer Eon Flint, George Allan England, John W. Campbell, Jr. (Don A. Stuart). These and many others -- fans will freely confess are entirely worthy of the title of "master" of science fiction. And I do not aim to blast any such claim.

But still, there have been stories written which are classics, but the fans never rave over them. Stories, some of which overshadowed the best that Merritt, Smith, Weinbaum, etc., have been able to produce. Yet the authors who created them are not termed "great," not called "masters," in fact, they are barely referred to at all. They simply blend with the mass of fantasy producers; good, bad, and indifferent.

Why is this? What quality have the so-called "masters" that their contemporaries did not possess? What is it that has raised their works, or if not their works, at least their names above those of men who are, in many cases, equal in craftsmanship to most of those above-mentioned?

As I see it, this is the answer. Or I should say selection of answers. First, the acknowledged masters might have caused a sensation with his first story. Their first story was of such amazing excellence that one could no more ignore a red light if he were driving a car. This is certainly truthful in the case of Stanley G. Weinbaum ("A Martian Odyssey") and Edward E. Smith ("The Skylark of Space"), and a great many others.

Secondly, the author may have popular appeal. His style of writing suited the largest possible percentage of the science fiction reading audience. Weinbaum, Campbell, etc., are certainly in this class.

Thirdly, the author may have a unique style of writing, or an exquisite command of prose, that made anything he wrote enjoyable, if only for the composition. That would be another factor that would tend to elevate him to a position of prominence. David H. Keller, M.D., is a good example of this.

Some authors there are that fill all three of my requirements; Stanley G. Weinbaum, A. Merritt, and John W. Campbell, to name a few. There's no doubt about it. As authors these fellows are tops. They hit the top because they had everything.

But Edward E. Smith, Homer Eon Flint, Murray Leinster, George Allan England, Austin Hall, Garrett Smith, and numerous others, are certainly not the proud owners of all three of these traits. Most of them have but one, a few two, but none can say that they possess all three.

Edward E. Smith's popularity is little more than good luck. I do not mean to criticise his writing ability when I say this. He is a damned good writer, but he would never have achieved his vaunted position of prominence if his "Skylark of Space" had appeared in 1933 instead of 1928. Smith's "Skylark of Space" was the first science fiction of the super-super type. Smith wasn't afraid to let his imagination wander; he really let himself go and produced the first story of super-fleets [?] and cosmic tremendousness. He reached out, far beyond the stifling confines of our solar system, out past the milky way [?], accomplishing incredible feats of science. "The Skylark of Space" is not the

best of its type. "Skylark Three" was a superior story, and, although Dr. Smith may not know it, "Spacehounds of the IPC" is considered the best of his stories by many. Personally, I consider it so myself. However, this is slightly irrelevant to the article

Now that the introduction and various explanations are done away with, I'll continue with the subject of my article, "Uncrowned Masters."

These authors I am about to present, for some reason or another, have never attained the recognition as Weinbaum, Merritt, etc., have. Some because they haven't written enough. Others because they are not versatile enough. Most because they fulfill only one of the three requirements listed at the beginning of this article.

First of all, there is W. K. Sonneman. From the day I read his first story, "Masterminds of Venus," [Amazing Stories, Sept 1934] I knew that here was a writer among writers. A 'master' of science fiction. I actually believe that Sonneman is every bit as good a writer as Weinbaum, with possibilities of becoming even better. One cannot express the delight at reading a story like "Greta, Queen of Queens" [Amazing Stories, Feb 1938] in a day when fans believe that no more great stories are to be had. Sonneman, to my knowledge, has written but three stories. The other was titled "The Council of Drones," [Amazing Stories, Oct 1936] and all three appeared in the Sloane-edited Amazing Stories. Weinbaum had everything and so has Sonneman. Sonneman has popular appeal, a beautiful - almost poetic - style, and his first story did cause a minor sensation when it appeared in Amazing in 1934. Had Teck Publications continued publishing Amazing, Sonneman would have undoubtedly been recognized as the master-writer that he is. Sloane, in his blurb for the last Sonneman story that appeared, admitted that he could find no adjectives to describe the story other than that he was "deeply impressed." If you understand Sloane you must know that this remark was the greatest compliment he could pay. Sloane was noted for letting exceptional stories stand on their merits. Sloane was the type of editor who would conservatively announce a new H. G. Wells' novel, especially written for Amazing Stories, if such a thing did happen, in eight point type in reply to a letter in discussions. Where is Sonneman today? Is it possible that he is still writing and his work does not fit the policies of the various magazines - the policies of editors two or three years in the editorial game? Not impossible, but I doubt it. I can't imagine any editor being that hide-bound. ((I can - RAM)) Still, I sound a clarion call for Sonneman. I know a great writer when I read him, and this writer is great.

John Beynon Harris [John Wyndham] is really an author of the top-most rung. He can give any science fiction writer a run for talent. His "Venus Adventure" [Wonder Stories, May 1932] is the best story of the colonization of other planets ever written, with the possible exception of Edmond Hamilton's inspired "War of Two Worlds"[sic] ["A Conquest of Two Worlds" Wonder Stories, Feb 1932; Startling Stories, Jan 1948]. But certainly the latter does not excel it. If this were the only good story that Harris has ever written, we might dismiss him with a shrug and mutter, "Once to every hack." However, such is definitely not the case. Who can forget the superb poignancy of "The Man From Beyond" [Wonder Stories, Sept 1934; Fantastic Story Quarterly, Summer 1950]? Of the reactions of a space adventurer asleep for millions of years on Venus and awakening to find the earth dead, barren, pitted - and his reaction? A story among stories is this one! You read an endless number of "human" robot stories today, but the very first of the type was "The Lost Machine," written by Harris, which appeared in the April, 1932, issue of Amazing Stories. It can

still serve as an example to writers of similar stories. And it was Harris who introduced one of the first of the people from different ages meeting and battling future type of story, which Hamilton has been rehashing so monotonously recently. "Wanderers of Time" [Wonder Stories, Mar 1933] is certainly the best of this type of yarn thus far. Look it up and see if you don't agree with me. John Beynon, as he calls himself now, has written a few others; some duds, none actually poor, but these four exceptional yarns he has had published in the USA brand him as a writer far superior to the run-of-the-mill.

Stephen G. Hale is another. He wrote two of the most human, appealing, science fiction yarns I have ever read, then apparently retired from the writing game. I know he is still alive, for he is an art instructor in Philadelphia, but he doesn't write for publication any longer - and he should. "The Laughing Death" [Amazing Stories, Apr 1931] and "Worlds Adrift" [ibid., May 1932] -- how can I ever forget them? Whenever I think of great science fiction stories, I think of Hale's last man on earth combing the sky in desperation, searching, searching for a sign of life; a communication from the other half of what was once earth. A story of a planet severed in two by the misuse of an invention. There is writing, vivid writing - and another uncrowned master.

The name K. F. Ziska can't mean very much to you. He's only written two stories that have appeared in science fiction magazines. They both appeared in Astounding under Tremaine and were titled "Succubus" [May, 1934] and "Man of Ages" [Oct 1934]. Both short stories - both great stories. The plots of both were unusual and different, but they were certainly not original. One can easily see where Ziska had obtained his inspiration, but as Campbell might say, "Does the plot really matter when the writing is so damned good, and the characterization all that could be desired?" If they're done like Ziska's two short stories, then Campbell is as right as a man can be. "Succubus", a tale of a plant cultivated by the genius of a biologist that took partially human form and lured the man to his death. Not so original? No, but you haven't read the story Ziska wrote and the manner in which he wrote it. "Man of Ages", a direct take-off of Wylie's superb "Gladiator," but incomparably done. The tale of a super-man whom nothing could destroy and his battle for death. If you want to know where Siegel and Shuster got the inspiration for their sensational "Superman" comic strip, read this story!

I deliberated long before including the about-to-be-mentioned author in my list. I considered him a remarkable author when I first read an immortal tale of an immortal person, "The Eternal Man." Was this story good? Well, it was first choice for reprinting in Startling Stories "Hall of Fame" department. [Science Wonder Stories, Aug 1929; Startling Stories, Jan 1939; Wonder Story Annual, 1950]. Can you imagine the story of a man made immortal by an elixer he invented - immortal and paralyzed! And he has as a companion an immortal rat he experimented with. The story of how the Eternal Man is placed in a museum and how the rat visits him, until it is finally mangled underfoot is a little gem. There was a sequel to this story called "The Eternal Man Revives" [Wonder Stories Quarterly, Summer 1930], and in many ways it was as good as the original, containing many sensational ideas. In a few places the story was handled a little clumsily, for the emotional reactions would have taxed a far greater writer than D. D. Sharp, but he came through all right. And to prove that this was not the last great story in him, D. D. Sharp has appeared with "Faster than Light" in a recent [Feb 1939] issue of Marvel Science Stories. This is without a doubt one of the most beautiful love stories I have ever read. It is a tale of an old man chasing the kidnapper of his betrothed, and the kidnapper twenty light years away! And always light, too slow in these cosmic distances, bears back a vision of a girl, still beautiful - but twenty light years away. The pathetic chase and the

realization that he would always be twenty years too late make this a great story. And the words: "It would be senseless, I knew, chasing on and on after yesterdays..." - those words are real. That's great fiction, the kind we like to read, but seldom do. That was the story that clinched me on Sharp.

There is one man who is an acknowledged master in the field of weird fiction, but who goes unheralded in the science fiction field. That man is Clark Ashton Smith. Always recognized as a "master" through his works in Weird Tales, he has not been directly associated with science fiction despite the fact that almost half of his published works show a definite leaning in the direction of science-fantasy. Smith is a master of words. He knows many and knows how to use them properly. Probably you would not be impressed if I simply recounted to you many of the masterful science-fantasies he has had printed in Weird Tales. I'll give examples of the ones he has had published in the science fiction magazines and I'll prove to you that Smith is one of the greatest creators of original science fiction of them all.

"The Master of the Asteroid" [Wonder Stories, Oct 1932]. Who that has read it can forget it? The man in the space-ship stranded on a tiny asteroid... no hope of escape...the tiny, fragile inhabitants of the asteroid that came daily to proffer themselves and offer obeisance to their imprisoned God...how they lay fruits before the space ship, and the fruits disappeared nightly, devoured by some strange beast - and finally the strange thing pierces the hull of the ship and comes for him.....Beautiful, tragic, soul-shaking, and written only as the near-genius of Smith could write it. Then there is "The Visitors from Mlok" [Wonder Stories, May 1933], and how they transport an earthman from this planet to their world...how they change his sensory reactions so that their world, abominably disgusting to him in his natural state, is a world of unparalleled beauty to him now. He returns to earth and his once dependable sense organs carry back the once familiar and desirable scenes as hideous, nauseating horrors...Do I need to recount the qualities of "The Singing Flame," ["City of the Singing Flame" Wonder Stories, July 1931] which Smith claimed to be his best work, and its sequel, "Beyond the Singing Flame" [ibid., Nov 1931]?.....Then there is "Flight into Super-Time," [ibid., Aug 1932] a story of a man afloat in the fourth dimension, time. He drifts from world to world, trusting to the vagaries of fate. The strange experiences he encounters, never knowing whether next time there will be another world for him, but death in the embrace of a raging sun, all combine to make this a classic short.

W. K. Sonneman, John Beynon Harris, D. D. Sharp, Stephen G. Hale, K. F. Ziska, and Clark Ashton Smith - a list of deserving, but uncrowned, greats. All of them possessors of fine ability of portrayal of human emotions; the most essential factor in fiction. Story upon immortal story they have written. Are they all destined to oblivion? I think not. If not now, perhaps some day in the future, scientifictionists and mayhaps even the world will awake to the brilliance of their writings. And these are not all. Laurence Manning, Thomas S. Gardner, Chester D. Cuthbert, Clare Winger Harris, Francis Flagg, W. Alexander, Will H. Grey, Phillip Jacques Artel, and many, many others have left a trail of brilliance, cleverness, and entertainment value. They should not be left to obscurity. Arise and demand their return. If they are no longer as fine as of old, let us be shown so that we can believe and understand. But while a string of semi-classics paves their path, they cannot be denied or cast aside. They will return!

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DREAM'S END

—AA Tale of Pure Fantasy—

Alexander II. Phillips

They tell strange tales in Sarnac. In the garden of an outlander, one Sphyrapicus, I heard of The Dreamer, and how his dream ended.

The night was soft about us; we had eaten and supped. I was drowsy, having traveled far that day. The benediction of the tobacco leaf lay sweetly in the still air about us. I fear I slept.

Wild laughter beyond the garden wall aroused me. The Angvars were down from the Hills of Salpic. There would be dark doings in Sarnac this night. My host was speaking, and I listened.

"And this man (Sphyrapicus was saying) was unaware of Life and knew it not, but gathered his dreams and placed one upon another, and fitted them together, with here a dream of sunshine and there a dream of soaring towers, and again, of supernal music sweeping up to unimaginable ecstasy.

"But Life tapped him upon the shoulder, saying, 'Forget these things, for they are nothing, and you must labor.'

"And the man turned and said, 'Wherefore must I forget my dreams? And why are they less than thou? Go, and disturb me not, for thou art lean, and cruel, and grey with dust.'

"And forgetting Life, he dreamed of the sea, with its white gulls, and its singing winds, and the blues of it at mid-day, and its mystery under the moon. And he fitted his dream of the sea into another he had dreamed of a fair land canopied with a blue sky wherein sailed tall, proud clouds, clouds that were pearl in the morning sun and golden and heavy as they sailed home at sunset, like towering, carven galleons laden with treasure.

"And he walked upon a yellow beach at the shore of his sea where he had fitted it to the land of which he had dreamed.

"But Life came again, saying, 'These things are nothing, Labor, for it is the law.'

"And the man was wrought and said, 'Get thee from my land, for it is beautiful and thou art unclean, and it is serene and thou bringeth confusion and alarms, and my land is kindly and smiling, and whispers gently of leisure and dignity, and thou art cruel and savage, and art convoyed by a host of horrible thoughts, and maggots of meanesses, and know nothing of leisure or dignity, but only squalor and haste and sordidness. Go! I will not labor; I know no law.'

"And again he turned to his dreams and it seemed to him that he stood on a dizzy, wind-swept height, and far away, beyond and between the hills of the lowlands, lay the blue sea with its ships and its salt currents of wind. And beneath him the crags broke, and plunged down vast places to the foot-hills where the cities nestled, sparkling and gleaming where the sunlight struck their golden roofs and threadlike towers. And he sat upon his rock as the sun went down in splendor; and from the cities, clear through the miles of empty air, came to him the hymns raised by the people in glory of the sun; and the sea sang a faint benediction, and slowly darkened under the soft feet of night.

"Then came Life a third time and beckoned him, and said, 'Come, Come, thou fool. Long enough hast thou toyed with these worthless trifles. Thy labor awaits thee.'

"Wherefore dost thou trouble me?" asked the man. "And why must I labor?"

"Because," replied Life, "thou must eat."

"And all his land of dreams collapsed and came crashing down about the man."

Then Sphyrapius ceased speaking, closing his lips about the stem of his long pipe and letting the dusky fumes escape piecemeal, to curl upwards with fitful slowness; and I, filled with a strange and delicate sadness, stared mistily through the dreaming trees to where the moon sank in quiet brilliance behind an unknowable horizon.

They tell strange tales in Sarnac.

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Fantascience Digest, Issue No 2, 1940
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THE ART OF PURLOINING A LIBRARY BOOK

-as she is done by--Hoy Ping Pong

(Author's note: In the January-February issue of this magazine, Fred W. Fischer in an article entitled, "Trials and Tribulations of a Science Fiction Collector," recounts how he was so concerned with owning a certain public library book that he has laid un-honest plans to remove same by theft; the book being a rare collector's item that's value justified the means. Herein, H. P. Pong, who has run up against many a similar situation, tells you confidentially just how he obtained his prizes, without hurting either the pocketbook or the conscious.)

Let me say in the beginning that our local library is shot through and through with books to tempt the fantasy collector. From my first visit to the place (I was six years old and walked off with a copy of "The Wizard of Oz," to later tell Pop "a kid gave it to me") my hands have fairly itched in envy; the temptation was too much to withstand. I suspect the former librarian had a fantasy streak in her makeup.

There were -- I say "were" -- scores of fantastic books there; all of H. G. Wells' fantasies, "Horne Smith's, Jack London's, Earle Cox's, and several others writers with just one fantastic book to their credit. Strangely enough, all of these books have disappeared, with the possible exception of the Wells book, "Blupington of Blup." I was never able to figure out why that one didn't move. Alas! Most are gone.

And I, like Fischer, am slightly angry; somebody beat me to a classic; "Out of the Silence," by Earle Cox. If all the modern stories dealing with civilizations rediscovered under the earth's crust measured up to that one, you'd be praising the Binders and Hamiltons who write them, to the stars! I had my eye on that one for many moons, yea! So did someone else, it seems. Oh, I protested. I protested most angrily to the counter-girl. I let her know I was a taxpayer, and dammit, we taxpayers were entitled to read those books! They should be protected from thieves! But I gave it up, and concentrated on other things; the art of getting books past the eagle-eyes behind the counter.

The old methods of sticking them in your belt, under your coat, in your felt hat, and under your sweater must be tossed out. School kids have run these methods into the ground, and the librarians know all these tricks. The man with the newest idea gets the bird — and the book.

These long bobs the girls are wearing are so handy, but first it is necessary to get a feminine accomplice. You must select a small book, tape it to the girl's neck, and drop her long curls down over it. Caution her not to swish, nod, shake or turn her head, and the book is as good as yours. You can always tell the counter-girl "My sister has a boil on her neck."

Another tape method that can be used is this: first determine if a male or female attendant is on duty, and if male, use the girl; if female, you can smuggle it out. Let us assume a man is behind the desk.

Select your book, tape it to the small of the girl's back (you must be well acquainted with her) and pull her waist or sweater down over it. Now have her put on a coat. The result is, the coat so fills out her figure, that the book shows up only as a small bulge about the size of a courtplaster. Jauntily confide in the man: "Sis hasta wear a belladonna on account she's got a sprained back."

I used to toss books out the window to be picked up later until I discovered the janitor stood outside the window catching them.

This method works if the innocent party isn't suspicious: when he is not looking, slip the book you want into his overcoat pocket. Choose a man well-known and upstanding in the community. The attendant will never question him concerning a book in his pocket. Once outside the building, dash up to him in well-feigned indignation, and demand he give you your overcoat. He will naturally deny the charge, saying that it is his overcoat and he can prove it.

You come right back with the charge that it is your overcoat, and you can prove it; there is your book in the pocket. He will hastily pull out the book, realize it isn't his, and hand it over. Then let him slowly convince you that the overcoat belongs to him, and depart. Lo! you have a book!

I used to toss books down the waste-shute to be recaptured later, until I discovered the assistant janitor kept a basket at the bottom of the shute to catch books.

Here is a method that never fails, if your library has a mailbox in the lobby: when you walk into the library, have a package in your hands all wrapped and stamped, ready to mail. Go browse among the shelves. Once alone, amidst the towers of books, select the one you want, unwrap the package and place the book in it on the shelves and put the one you want in the wrapper. Carefully tie it, and some minutes later, saunter out, mailing the book to yourself as you saunter through the library. It never fails.

A second phase altogether of the art of book purloining hasn't yet been touched on; card juggling. To handle this rightly, you must know your library and its workings perfectly. A knowledge of how book-cards are filed, due-dates kept, and so on, are needed. Also, the book-cards must be kept in the open, near the counter, to accomodate quick chagging. A professional pick-pocket, because of his light fingers, has the best chance here.

Select a book, walk up to the counter, and have the librarian check it out to you. Out of the book he will take a big card and on that card he will note down the number of your card (or your name) and the date the book is due. The card is then filed accordingly. As soon as his back is turned, or he walks away, reach over the counter and retrieve the card. Several things can be done with it:

- a) You can put it in the file labeled, "Lost books."
- b) You can place it in the file for "Books no longer in stock."
- c) You can take the card home with you.

At any rate, the book is yours, the library has no other record of it.

Sometimes this method works: If your library uses these pencils with little rubber stamps on one end of them giving the date, thusly: 9-1-40, simply change the date to some date already past, but don't let anyone see you do it, naturally. When the girl stamps this date in your book, and on the master-card, she places the card on file in what she fondly believes is the box carrying the date it is due. Let us say it is two weeks.

Very well; two weeks roll by. On the last day, when your book is due, the girl goes through the card-box dated for that day and notes all the books that still haven't been returned. On one of them, yours, she notes that someone slipped up somewhere; here is a card dated for way last year that got in by mistake. She will place the card where she thinks it rightfully belongs: "Books now in Stock" where it will lay until the place burns down.

Speaking of places burning down, I used to have a swell racket: I would take out a book, keep it until a house burned down, and rush right back to the library exclaiming that the book burned when the house did; that I had loaned it to a friend of mine in that house, and it was now ashes. This worked fine until one day I was informed that the house that had just burned down was the Librarian's, and I most certainly hadn't lent any books to her.

This idea will work just once: Get very well acquainted with the counter-girl. Run errands for her. Pretty soon she will be sending you out for milk-shakes and hamburgers. One evening, just as she asks you to go for a hamburger, be engrossed in a book. Yes, you'll go, but you'll take the book along to read while the hamburger is being cooked. Take the girl's quarter, and the book, and run down the next block to the hamburger-joint. Keep running.

Here's a nifty way: Select two or three books you want and stack them on a chair near the door. Then go to the back end of the room, push over a mountain of books, scream, and run to the desk, shouting: "Hey! A woman just fainted back there!" Everyone will rush back to see the spectacle. You grab your books and rush out the door. This, too, can be worked only once.

The most spectacular, the most ingenious, and the greatest pilfrey ever perpetrated on the local library was, I must modestly admit, executed by an accomplice and myself. Stacked near the back door were hundreds of volumes to be transported to a WPA bookbinding project in town. The library got the books rebound free, Uncle Sam paid the girls who rebound books, and everybody was happy.

Previously, I had inserted in this pile of work books, two dozen or so I wanted. One morning this accomplice and I backed a small truck up to the back door, walked in with the resigned air of a WPA worker, our faces assuming the looks of good little Democrats who voted for Roosevelt five times every election, and piled the books on our truck.

Unger and Korshak bought their collections from this truck-load.

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INITIAL INTRODUCTIONS

by
Harry Warner, Jr.

"Everything, including one's entrance into the fantasy world, must have a beginning. Possibly a few reminiscences of some of my own "firsts" might be of interest.

The first fantasy story I ever remember reading - outside, of course, of Peter Rabbit and Aesop's Fables - was a condensed version of Jules Verne's "From the Earth to the Moon," in about 10,000 words. I remember thinking how slow the story seemed to move, and how much useless detail there seemed to be. I wonder, now, what I would have thought had I read the original version first! Probably I'd have been disgusted with the first fifty pages. (Later, I did read the original, of course, at the age of about twelve. Even then it seemed to drag horribly, but I managed to plow through it, and felt rather good about the whole thing in the end.

My first science fiction magazine I cannot remember for certain. It was either an Amazing or a Wonder, in the early part of 1933, but I am not sure which - because soon after buying the one, I purchased the other. Neither can I remember the first story in them I read: the first one I can remember is "The Radio War," another slow-moving thing translated from the French, but it seems to me that I tackled several of the shorter stories before that. Those particular two issues were dull ones, I see now, and right now it seems a wonder to me that I managed to stay interested. It wasn't until the last month in 1933 that I really was converted, though - the January, 1934, Astounding did it, with "Colossus."

Well I remember my first copy of Weird Tales - because it was only two years ago. For a long while, the magazine wasn't obtainable in town at all, and inquiries brought forth only replies that it had gone out of business. I knew that to be wrong, of course, but try to convince a magazine dealer of something! Then that particular morning I had been to the library, I believe - it was in the summer and a hot day - and on the way home, something caused me to stop in at a little store which sells novelties, hobbies' supplies, and as a sideline has a rental library and small magazine rack. And there was a copy of Weird Tales! I shelled out my two bits, made a new record in the twelve blocks cutting home, and read the first yarn that caught my attention in it. It was Dr. Keller's "Dust in the House," and that yarn is still one of my favorites. Second came Bloch's "Return to the Sabbath" - which I still think is one of the most gruesome yarns written - and in another day I had finished the magazine.

My first fantasy book is again hazy, but I think it was one from the library about a cave-man - or maybe a cave-boy - named "Ab." Quite a mystery surrounds this yarn for me. Despite heroic efforts, I have never been able to remember the title of it, and I can't recall the concrete incidents in it, nor the author's name. At the time - seven or eight years ago - I was permitted only in the children's section of the library, and there is always a large turn-over of books in that department - due to loss, quick wearing out, and so forth. I borrowed the book and read it for the first time; six months later I wanted it again and tried to find it. But I couldn't. I couldn't remember the title for certain, the librarian couldn't help me, it wasn't to be found on the shelves, and I still know next to nothing about it. Does any fan? [Story of Ab, by Waterloo.]

My first back issues of stf magazines came two at once. They were 1931 Amazings, which I found in an old store that sold back number magazines on the side. At that time, they were only three or four years old, and so I got them for a dime each, in virtually perfect condition. Inside of three days, I think, they were read from cover to cover, and I was after more. But though I searched

that store's stock for months after that, once a week or more often, the only other fantasy magazine I was able to uncover was a 1931 Amazing Quarterly for a quarter. Then the old proprietor of it died, and it went out of business.

My first fan magazine was the issue of the old Tesseract (November, 1936) containing the first installment of J. Harvey Haggard's "Planet of No Return" and Madle's "Devolution." It was sent me because my name had appeared in the letter section of Astounding, as a sample copy, and I didn't, to my eternal regret, subscribe. My emotions on getting it were mixed: I thought there were a lot of things that could be done to make it better, and that it was a swell idea just the same and that I'd have to immediately join the SFAA, subscribe to the magazine, and also buy up most of the back issues of the pros that were offered so enticingly low-priced. I didn't do any of those mentioned things.

The first fantasy movie I ever saw was seen over a period of twelve weeks, and I described it in detail in an article several months ago; the picture was a serial entitled "The Vanishing Shadows" and I have yet to find another fan who can remember a great deal about it. That was quite a while ago, though I have no means of finding out just when; I believe, though, it must have been sometime between 1934 and 1936, for I was living in a different section of town at the time -- as I did until 1936 -- and I'm almost positive it was after I began reading science fiction magazines. ("The Vanishing shadow" was an Universal serial, issued in early 1934, the featured player being Onslow Stevens. It was an Invisible Man story, in fact I've heard that it was composed of many of the rejected scenes of "The Invisible Man." -- Ed.)

Finally, my first fan contact, technically, was probably Ted Carnell, though he doesn't remember it. It was in the shape of a pencilled notation on a sample copy of Novae Terrae, "U.S. Stamps OK." That one doesn't count, though; my first contact with the real science fiction world came after Jim Avery and I had determined to publish Spaceways and I mailed out a bunch of letters asking for material. Previously, our names were completely unknown, and neither of us had ever been in contact with a fan or professional author. Ten letters went out at the same time from me; the first two responses came in the mail a few days later at the same time -- from Amelia Reynolds Long and E. E. Smith. If memory serves, I opened first the one from Skylark, and thus made my entrance into the fan world.

THE END

Fantascience Digest, Issue No 2, 1940
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EXCERPTING AND BINDING

by

Langley Searles

The appearance of Famous Fantastic Mysteries and the five issues of Fantastic Novels has not by any means made excerpt-binding obsolete; not only has the supply of available reprints been scarcely touched, but, at the present rate of use -- 60,000 words bi-monthly -- it won't be for years. Moreover, with the exception of Merritt's novels, very little stuff of pre-1930 vintage is seeing the light of printer's ink. And besides, much Munsey s-f will probably never be reprinted at all -- no Burroughs, for example, and few if any of the lesser-known and not as well-done yarns of England, Smith, and Flint. (Have you noticed that outside of "The Blind Spot" and sequel, only one Flint story has been reprinted? It's no accident; the reception that "The Lord of Death" met with has discouraged the early appearance of the remainder of his stories. In fact, you may never see them reprinted at all.) Plenty of those old-timers are pretty tame reading nowa-

days; of course, if you read 'em back in 1918 or so, memory can still play the hypnotist with you when you see them again, but if you read them for the first time in 1941 and your hindsight is not 25 years but only five --

All of which shows that excerpting and binding is in no sense out of date in 1941, any more than it was in 1931, or will be in 1951. And hence a few pointers on the subject would be timely to note, for it is far more of an art than is generally supposed. Once a serial is excerpted and bound, it can seldom -- if mistakes are made and a sloppy job has resulted -- be done over neatly; the task should be done properly the first time.

Suppose, for example, that we have a six-part serial on our hands, and let us follow through the various steps in the making of the final product. Materials needed: scissors, rubber paper-cement, ruler, pencil, heavy pins, (or very slender nails), a small hammer, heavy magazine staples (paper clips, cut and bent to the proper size with pinchers, may be used if staples are lacking), brown gummed tape (one inch wide), blank pulp-type paper, a few sheets of bond or typewriter paper. The work is most conveniently carried out on a knee-hole desk or a table of suitable height.

First, remove the staples from the magazine, bending them back where they clamp over the last page of the magazine, and pulling them out in front -- best accomplished by slipping the ends of a closed scissors under the wires and twisting them free. Now view the magazine along the top edge near the backstrip, and note that it is composed of five or ~~six~~ sections, still held together by glue. By consulting the table of contents, the section or sections containing the desired serial can be located by the page numbers. Break the binding on both sides of these sections and carefully remove them intact. Separate them carefully, and then chip off the dried glue. Next, tear the sections apart in the middle (where the fold is) -- or better still, cut them apart with a scissors. Discard the pages not containing the desired story, and then repeat the entire process for all the other parts of the serial story, setting aside each installment in the proper order.

Tear or cut out about a dozen sheets of pulp paper to the standard magazine size ($9 \frac{3}{4} \times 6 \frac{3}{4}$), and put two of them before the first page of the story. Now take the first page and, if the story itself begins on an even-numbered page, cement to its back a blank sheet of pulp paper, using rubber cement (I use "Best-Test" brand myself), and following the directions given for permanent binding. Be sure to apply a thin, even coat of the cement both to the back of the first story-page and the blank sheet of the paper; get a 25¢ can with a brush for easy application, or for even better results spread the stuff on with your index finger (it is easily rubbed off when dry). This rubber cement has the great advantage of not wrinkling the paper it is used on, and also rubbing off any excess that may have been inadvertently applied on the wrong area.

Now turn to the last page of part one. If it is odd-numbered, it has on the back some advertising or the beginning of some other story, or some similar unwanted material. If the first page of part two of the serial is also odd-numbered, the columns of print from the last page of part one may be carefully cut out and transferred (cement them on in the usual way) to this first page of part two. Although the illustration (if any) should not be covered in this way, the synopsis may be, as it is of no value if the entire story is present. If there is any of these columns left over, simply cement them to a blank page, and place the latter between the two installments. If there is not enough to cover the synopsis, simply use a bit of blank pulp paper, cut to the proper size, to do it. On the other hand, if the first page of part two is even-numbered, insert a blank page between the two serial parts, and on the first side of it cement the last columns of part one and on the second side the beginning of part two. Combined with a few variations to suit specific conditions, this method will usually succeed beautifully in eliminating unwanted printed matter from the pages of the

serial. Apply this method to the juncture of parts two and three, three and four, etc., until the last page of the story is reached. Treat this like the first page if necessary, and then after it put a couple of blank sheets of pulp paper.

Now take two sheets of bond paper (cut to magazine size) and along one side of each stick down a strip of the brown gummed-tape. Use one of these pages (tape side in) for a title-page, typing or writing on it the name of the story, the author, and any other information you wish to record permanently, and placing it in the position of page one. Use the other page (likewise tape-side in) for the last page of the serial.

This completed, all is ready for stapling. Gather the pages together, shaking and tapping them until the left-hand and upper edges are even. Keeping them in this position, place them down flat, the first page uppermost and the left-hand edge toward you. Leaving an inch or so space free along this edge, weight down the pages with some heavy objects, such as books, to keep them in place. Next, using heavy pins or slender nails, drive holes for three staples along the edge; one set of holes should be in the middle, and the others about an inch and a quarter from either end. Never attempt to drive in the staples without first preparing holes for them, as this is one of the surest ways to botch the job completely. But, on the other hand, the holes should not be so large as to allow the pages to shift. After the staples have been driven through their holes, turn them down at the back in the usual way.

Then take a piece of gummed tape and fasten it lengthwise around the stapled edges to act as a backstrip. After this, take another piece of similar length, and fold it in half lengthwise, gummed side out. Moisten one-half of it and affix along the left-hand (stapled) edge, folded side to the left. Wet the other edge and press down a 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of bond paper over it, leaving about an inch and a half projecting over the left-hand edge. Now cement this projecting edge around the back of the magazine - that is, the backstrip - to the back side. Then trim off any paper extending beyond the edges of the pages of the story. If the serial had a cover illustration, it can be cemented to the front cover of the bound story; and if desired, a small strip of paper bearing the typed title of the story may be cemented to the backstrip. Finally, stack a pile of books on top of the bound story, and allow it to remain under pressure at least overnight, preferably longer.

The chief objection to binding a serial in this manner will probably be that it is time-consuming operation. Granted, it is. But the result will usually be found to be worth the trouble expended. And if it is absolutely necessary to cut down on time, simply eliminate the cementing operations described in paragraph six above.

If you're an entirely new hand at this business, here's a few more tips for you. First, don't try to hurry the process; there are simply no short cuts to a neatly-bound excerpt, unless you want to buy it already made. Second, don't make your first binding jobs on your best stories; practice on the worst ones first, then tackle the good ones. And here's a tip, not only for beginners, but for everybody. Always be on the lookout for new tricks and ideas that you can incorporate into your work, and don't hesitate to try them, for that's the only way to prove their worth.

Lastly, don't take it for granted that, because the average story runs to magazine length - 128 pages or so - you must limit or build up the stories you bind to approximately that length. By using heavier - cardboard - covers, and heavier staples, you can build up your bound excerpts to 400-500 pages safely; if necessary for added strength, reinforce the backstrips and cover hinges with cheese-cloth. Thus you can collect the works of your favorite author in one

"book." For example, in my own excerpt collection, I have William Gray Beyer's series of stories bound up in this fashion; it runs to about 300 pages. Likewise, the Argosy fantastics of Murray Leinster (there are about thirteen yarns in all, by the way) I have bound up in one volume; they run to about 450 pages.

In closing, I would ~~not~~ advise bothering with serials that have appeared in book form if you can get the book instead. Having a novel in a professionally-bound volume is better, of course, than doing it yourself; but often - as with some of Merritt's works - the book is far harder to get. So bind the story up yourself if you have to - and be assured that if you take time and patience enough on the job to do it right, it will compare favorably in appearance with the professional version. And good luck to you in your work.

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THE DECADENT AGE IN MAGAZINE SCIENCE FICTION

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Robert W. Lowndes

(Note: The writer makes no pretense, in this article, of speaking for any save himself. He would be interested in knowing how many, if any, of the "oldtime fans" agree with him. "Oldtime fan" in this case is to be taken as descriptive of an enthusiast in magazine science-fiction of not less than ten years standing. . . . The term "decadent" is among the many abused expressions in our language; it has come to mean, for many people, sheer contempt and a brand of inferiority. Not so is it used here. When the writer says "decadent" he is employing an analytic adjective in denoting a type; no comment upon desirability or goodness is to be connoted therewith.)

When one speaks of a period of decadence in the arts, in music, or in literature, it is usually assumed that this period follows a classical or "golden age" era. The particular art heretofore has been flowing onward, keeping pace with the flow of progress in the world without, gaining in strength and agility, increasing steadily both as to quantity and quality. When the hiatus occurs, this flow is blocked, but not abrogated; sheer inertia causes it to spread out, to flow back upon itself, to create eddies and whirlpools. For a time, this spreading out creates great brilliance, and not until the flow has finally halted and the stream become stagnate does "decadence" become death.

In magazine science fiction, we saw a classical period, although whether or not there really was anything resembling a "golden age" is very questionable. Had the world not been plunged into chaos by economic crisis of unprecedented order, had the flow of science not been halted thus, then magazine science fiction could correspondingly have reached the peak of its development. But with the breakdown of scientific progress, the forcible retrogression of progress in many parts of the world, and the mad divergence of all aims to military objectives, science fiction, which was so vitally connected with the free and unhampered flow of scientific thought, progress, and experiment along constructive lines, struck an impassable barrier. So far had it gone; no further could it go. It could, true, look into the immediate future, build upon what knowledge there was and extrapolate upon such building blocks of the future as the scientists had made or described, but no longer was there an ever-progressing base for it. For five years there have been little or no new bases for science fiction; there have only been modifications and improvements upon such bases as had been and rejection of a few which had seemed sound at that time. The proof of this is indicated in that outstanding science fiction stories of five years ago are hardly distinguishable, from the scientific basis thereof, from outstanding science fiction tales of today. Yet, compare the best sf tales of five years ago with the best of ten years ago. It will become painfully apparent, then, how complete the hiatus has been.

It is not enough to shrug the matter off by suggesting commercialism on the part of editors and publishers. Not that this has no effect, but that it cannot be accepted as the prime factor. Editors and publishers have always been commercial. The Argosy fantastic tales would not have been continued if from the first, they had not proven drawing cards, immensely popular with the readers.

As a matter of fact, when we speak of "bases" for stf tales, the rejection of this principle by so many authors and editors, and the widespread doubt as to whether or not such exists can be taken as a symptom of decadence. Science fiction has long ceased to be explorative; it is now decorative. At its best it is smooth entertainment, brilliant fantasy with an undertone pleasing to "stream-lined" moderns. It aids in the mythology that scientists have invented for themselves; it shows every sign of becoming the mythology of the Neurotic Age (with thanks to Stanton A. Coblentz for a very apt non-political definition of our times).

When did the decadent age in magazine science fiction begin? It seems to have started markedly with Weinbaum, the great decorative romanticist. Ironically enough, he brought into stf something it needed after it was too late for any innovation to be of any use to it. The river had already been damned. Weinbaum brought the realist-romantic touch, the light realism which, during the classical period could well have resulted in remarkable progress in stf. But, further progress being impossible, it remained only for the stf writers to make of this valuable instrument in stf expression a thing-in-itself.

And with what brilliance has the stream of science-fiction flowed back upon its own current, made eddies and whirlpools, expanded and increased enormously. The fact that, despite economic conditions, there are a dozen stf magazines going shows that it is not dead - yet.

A number of enthusiasts, no doubt, wish it were dead. But the decadent age in magazine science-fiction is not yet over, and it goes on, brilliantly and meaninglessly. Out of this whirlpool has come and will come many tales excellent in themselves, some tales which are literature. It will serve one purpose; to show the inhabitants of some distant future how mighty were the writhings of the creative, imaginative soul of the 20th century in the dark age of economic disruption.

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