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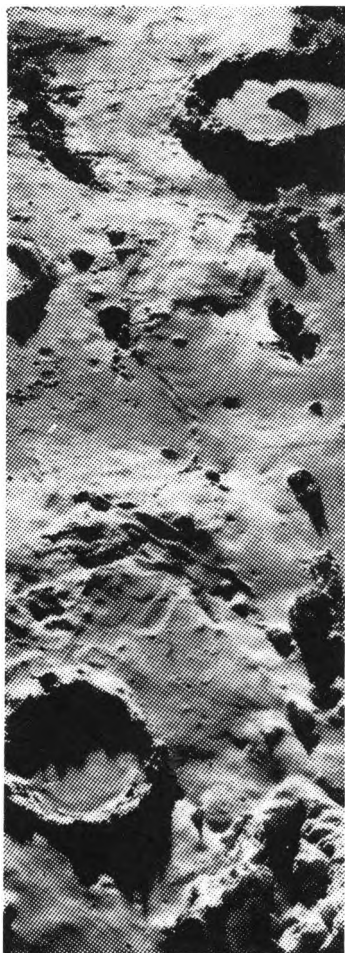
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Science Fiction Advertiser

is published at

1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif.

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On Taking Science Fiction Seriously

by Reginald Bretnor

There are many people who insist that science fiction must not be taken seriously. Some of them tell us flatly that science fiction can have no pretensions to seriousness as literature or speculation. Others aver that, to be any good at all, it must purge itself of its serious speculative content.

Opinions such as these can usually be ignored when they originate outside the science fiction field. The Age of Space has caught many professional prophets with their breeches down; we can expect them, like the staff of Time, to sneer at the literary form which anticipated and defined that Age. We can expect a similar reaction from dwellers in that intellectual Niflheim which lies between the Partisan Review and a Ph.D. in "Creative Writing". We can expect if from middle-brow literary critics whose livelihood depends on making the superficial and the meaningless appear worth buying. It is a survival reaction as instinctive as the lifting of a polecat's tail, and no more worth arguing with.

When, however, such criticisms come from the field itself -- when men established in the field state that the science should be taken out of science fiction, or declare that science fiction can have no higher aim than to be "good entertainment", or speak of science fiction and serious literature as though the two were mutually exclusive-- then argument becomes, not only necessary, but imperative.

The argument to be presented here will first concern itself with the serious speculative element in science fiction, for it is my opinion that the potentialities of science fiction as serious literature are directly dependent on it, and that its role should be examined before they are discussed.

The fear of seriousness is a salient characteristic of the epoch in which we live, and the belief that anything serious must be painful, ponderous, and a bore is one of our main

popular superstitions. This is perhaps best illustrated by the statistically demonstrable decline in the average man's ability or willingness to concentrate attention on ideas and presentations of ideas requiring effort for their comprehension-- a decline very acutely analyzed a few years ago by Mr. Clifton Fadiman.¹ In his essay, Mr. Fadiman noted, among other evidences, the drop in the number of serious "quality" magazines, the decreasing length of stories and articles in the "slicks", the trend toward "digest" and picture magazines, and the compulsion to simplify concepts and vocabularies.

These are tremendously important points-- because they show the difference between the average reader and the reader of science fiction. In the science fiction field there is no sign of a decline of attention. Its better magazines have increased in number. They have increased their circulations. Their editors accept good stories of any length. Within the limits of clarity and of good story-telling, concepts may be as complex as the writer pleases; and he is not forced to limit his vocabulary to words which the meanest intellect is sure to understand. In short, the science fiction reader not only is willing to make an effort to comprehend, but actually derives part of his pleasure from making that effort. In so doing, he shares the writer's pleasure in an act of the creative imagination, of creative analysis-and-synthesis, of serious speculation. And I would venture to suggest that such an act is quite as high a function of the human mind as the passive absorption of the average TV program, of the contents of a comic-book, or of milk from a nipple.

The individual human brain is presumably designed, not to accept the ready-made opinions of "authority", but to formulate its own. It should be able to accept or reject data, to compare and correlate, to state the problems of which it becomes aware, and to synthesize its own solutions to these problems. In other words, it should be able to think freely for itself. And this thinking, like the performance of any other natural function, should be at least moderately pleasurable.

Regrettably, in our epoch-- the epoch which has produced modern science fiction-- the cards are stacked against independent thinking. The main factors responsible are: first, the swift development and generally legitimate specialization of the physical sciences, where the prestige of theory is upheld by workable technologies; and, secondly, the defensive and illegitimate copying of this development and specialization in the non-scientific, pseudo-scientific, and semi-scientific fields in order to maintain the undeserved prestige of their practitioners.

Consequently, "experts" swarm like locusts through the land; and every subject, no matter how picayunish or how obvious, has specialists uniquely qualified to explain its mysteries.²

1. Clifton Fadiman, "The Decline of Attention," The Saturday Review, August 6, 1949.
2. For an excellent discussion of the academic aspects of this, see: Arthur E. Bester, Jr., "Liberal Education and a Liberal Nation," The American Scholar, Spring 1952.

The editor or publisher seldom needs to concern himself with judging the intrinsic merit of his non-fiction as reasoned argument. His average reader, a member of that great illit-
erati for which we can blame the pseudo-science of "progres-
sive" education, needs only to look for the "expert" label on the package.

The degree to which editors and publishers have abdicated the right to think for themselves can be measured by the frequency with which this label now appears, especially in connection with material not based on the exact sciences. The degree to which the average reader has surrendered it can be measured by the constantly increasing number of articles with catchy little titles beginning, The Truth About... or, Follow These Three Simple Rules And You Foo Can... And the degree to which the ability to think independently has survived can be measured by counting, first the magazines which still print the free, speculative essay, and then the science fiction magazines.

For all practical purposes, Harper's and The Atlantic are today the sole surviving serious general magazines-- out of a field which, as late as the nineteen-twenties, numbered more than a dozen, and included such well-known names as The Bookman, Scribner's, and Mencken's American Mercury. (The combined circulation of the university quarterlies and the special-viewpoint reviews is so small that they can be left out of consideration.) Harper's and The Atlantic still print the free, speculative essay on occasion, but almost always on subjects of no conceivable importance; even they appear to be relying more and more on "experts".³

At first glance, this would seem to indicate that readers who can think independently have all but vanished. Such a conclusion is, however, largely unwarranted. Even if a man believes that his own good judgment cannot be trusted, he still may have good judgment. Even if he has formed the habit of having "experts" do his thinking for him, he still may be quite capable, and indeed desirous, of thinking for himself. And if he is intelligent enough to understand that the opinions of the average non-scientific "expert" are frequently a marked-up brand of common balderdash, then he may actually insist on doing his own thinking independently.

Where, in our world, will this man turn for stimulation and encouragement? Opinions and ideas presented with a claim to special wisdom or authority tend to become quite as unpleasantly insistent as an enema, and no more welcome. Our man will seek opinions and ideas presented as politely as they should be in converse between intellectual equals-- opinions and ideas which he is fully free to accept, reject, modify to suit himself, or extend to the best of his ability. He will seek opinions and ideas not limited by current semi-scientific and pseudo-scientific dogma.

3. It may be argued that the newspaper columnist performs the functions of the speculative essayist. Generally, this is not so. The columnist is published for his name; he is an "expert by virtue of notoriety". The true speculative essay would be published on its intrinsic merit.

Where will he find them? Well, if he is free to do so, as he now is in the United States, he will read science fiction.

In my opinion, science fiction is primarily a modern equivalent of the speculative essay, and one of the main reasons for its success is that it fills the gap left by the speculative essay's virtual disappearance. The subjects dealt with in science fiction are not, of course, identical with those treated by the speculative essay in its heyday. They are, however, subjects which would naturally have fallen within the province of the speculative essay had it persisted and developed-- subjects for speculation newly made apparent by the advance of science and the generally widening application of the scientific method. Like the speculative essay, science fiction asks the question, "What if--?" and tries to answer it. The fact that it avails itself of all the established techniques of fiction, and that consequently its resources for the dramatic illumination of ideas are much richer and more flexible than the essay's, does not alter this fundamental similarity of purpose. Science fiction, then, can be considered as the wedding of traditional fiction and the speculative essay, a wedding which robs neither and enriches both.

If we accept this premise, it follows that to be good science fiction a story or a novel must contain some element of serious speculation without which the sequence of its happenings would be impossible. This does not mean that the speculative content must be completely new. It does not mean that the speculative content must be presented with all the solemnity of a proletarian novelist writing about the Great Unwashed. It does not mean that no element of fantasy can sometimes be used effectively to implement a science fiction theme. But it does mean that the "What if--?" question must be asked and answered, and that in the asking and the answering some account must be taken of the scientific method-- for the science fiction story, like the speculative essay, is an experiment performed in the imagination.

The question now arises of how we can evaluate the element of serious speculation in a story. Personally, I would suggest the following criteria:

1. The story problem and its answer must seem completely probable in the light of scientific knowledge or accepted theory; or,

2. They must proceed logically from a plausible assumption regarding an area not fully covered by knowledge or theory; or,

3. If they directly violate this knowledge or theory, an otherwise plausible basis for the violation must be established; and,

4. Abstracting the story problem and its answer, one should be able to imagine them as the theme for a plausible and rather interesting speculative essay (if speculative essays were still fashionable, and if the subject-matter of science

fiction were not labelled "Improbable-- Not To Be Considered Seriously".)

Two stories by Gerald Kersh may be used in illustration. The first, "Note on Danger B," is based on the assumption that, at supersonic speeds, the human organism will get rapidly younger. The second, "The Monster," transports a Japanese from Hiroshima-1945 to the Eighteenth Century, complete with radiation burns. Obviously, "Note on Danger B" is as indefensible scientifically as a trip on muleback to the moon. It is bad speculation and very bad science fiction indeed. "The Monster," on the other hand, deals with a phenomenon involving much more fundamental levels of structure. Because the spacio-temporal effects of a nuclear explosion are not fully understood, "The Monster" is believable. Far-fetched as it may seem, it is still good speculation and good science fiction.

To contain the necessary element of serious speculation, incidentally, a story does not need to be a sober story. Thus, in my opinion, Lewis Radgett's "The Proud Robot", Fred-eric Brown's "The Star Mouse", and Bill Brown's "The Star Ducks" all contain it, and are good science fiction in consequence. (The reader is, of course, at liberty to disagree!)

This brings us to the value of science fiction as serious literature, and the dependence of that value on the speculative element. It is quite as stupid to say that science fiction cannot be serious literature or great literature as it is to say the same thing about the epic poem, the comedy of manners, or the historical novel. And it is nothing less than sheer idiocy to say that science fiction, in order to become serious literature, must strip itself of its serious speculative content-- of the element which makes it science fiction-- and start to copy other literary forms which happen, at the moment, to be taken seriously. A sentimental anti-scientific bias, a sick nostalgia for a vanished childhood, a morbid overemphasis of the psychopathological, a deliberate obscurantism on the one hand and a pandering to the reading habits of the feeble-minded on the other-- all these, in recent years, have characterized the "serious" short story and the "serious" novel. At times, any or all of them may have a place in a specific work of science fiction, when they are necessary to the individual story and when they do not alter its essential character as science fiction. They should not, however, be permitted to contaminate the form in general, for if they do they will destroy it.

Regardless of its treatment, style, and artistic worth-- which may be infinite in their variety-- a work of science fiction must first be science fiction, and this it cannot be if its serious speculative content is deleted. The writer's problem, in attempting to write good science fiction or great science fiction, will be to preserve this element, to keep it fresh and vigorous, and simultaneously to weave his patterns of style and story so that it will combine naturally and harmoniously with all the other elements determining literary merit. He will have to be at once a first-rate speculative

essayist and a first-rate fiction writer. He will have to be philosopher and scientist and artist, as universal as a Leonardo and as far ahead of his time. He will at least have to try to be all these, simply because his problems are more complex and his opportunities much greater than those of any of his predecessors.

A great deal of excellent science fiction has been written. Personally, I am inclined to think that it is still too early in the game to declare definitely that any of it is great. And that should discourage no one, because it just leaves more to be done, and more to look forward to. We have had great literatures concerned almost entirely with adventure of the past. We have had others concerned exclusively with the adventure of a narrow span of years, the "present". Science fiction is the first to be devoted to the future, to the adventure of man's becoming.

If it is to be a great literature, it will be written by men and women who enjoy it whole-heartedly enough to take it seriously.

A CORRECTION. . .

Jean (Arthur J.) Cox has pointed out two errors made by the compositor in his essay, "Fantastic Fiction", in the Fall '53 Advertiser. On its fourth page the article reads: "Several of the psychological and sociological theories and systems which situate the origin of personality in impersonal factors have inspired science fiction stories but they have only formed the dramatic bases of the stories..." It should read: "...they have seldom formed the dramatic bases of the stories..." And on the fifth page we read: "Usually, the story revolves about some physical incident or object which is initially irrelevant to the political and social scene; I believe that this is an additional characteristic making the story unacceptable to magazine readers. It should read: "...making the story acceptable to magazine readers."

My apologies are extended to the author and to any readers who were confused because of my carelessness. The editor.

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Part of this material first appeared as a much-discussed symposium in *Collier's*.

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Books

Science-Fiction and S-F Non-Fiction

CHILDHOOD'S END by Arthur C. Clarke. Ballantine, 35¢ & \$2

Here is a novel in which the author gives himself away before the story even starts; for in the traditional place of the "any resemblance to living persons...etc." statement, Arthur C. Clarke writes: "The opinions expressed in this book are not those of the author." This is not nearly so cryptic as it seems; for the philosophic content of CHILDHOOD'S END is almost a complete refutation of the spirit of the same author's fine novels of spaceflight. What Clarke is saying, simply, is that here is a story about a conceivable future, a conceivable outcome of life, which I don't particularly believe in but which I herein explore.

What Clarke explores is the soul of mankind, on the brink of spaceflight, being taken under guardianship by unseen but all-powerful, benevolent tyrants who arrive from outer space and hover over all the cities of earth in their huge spacecraft--constant reminders of their presence. These "Overlords" put a stop to warfare and subtly reorient civilization so that it moves into a golden age of peace and happiness. (Nice touch: the elimination of bullfighting by the simple device of making the spectators *feel* the bull's pain.) But there is a price for this benevolent guidance: man must give up forever his dreams of space travel.

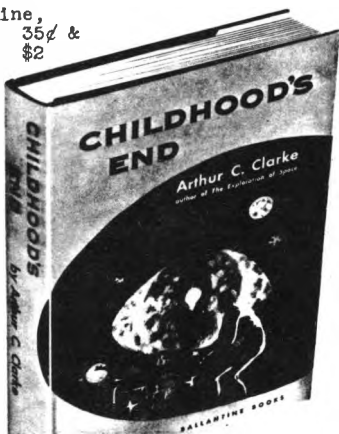
The why of this one restraint imposed upon mankind by the Overlords is the story of the novel. It is a conclusion that many will find unpalatable, which certainly a scientist such as Clarke himself must find thoroughly distasteful, if only because it involves the loss of personal individuality. It is, however, a big concept, and a truly science fictional one, and in its direction marks a point beyond which no writer can possibly go.

As a whole, CHILDHOOD'S END is highly reminiscent of the Olaf Stapledon of *Last and First Men et seq.* Clarke, however, rather than stretching his narrative out over vast eons as did Stapledon, through the agency of the Overlords' guiding presence is able to condense the story of the end of mankind into a century. As a result Clarke maintains, rather than strains, the credibility of his reader. Equally because of the more believable period of time involved, with the resultant available space for

character development, Clarke has a story-- albeit not a smooth one-- whereas Stapledon never had anything more than a mock-history.

The novel very nearly falls apart at several spots, however. Episodic in the extreme, it consists of several sequences, each with different sets of characters (except for some overlapping), tied together only by the fact of the Overlords' existence. The reader is frustrated every time he begins to get his teeth into a character; Clarke drops him and moves on to the next set. The actual link, the character common to every sequence of the novel, is the Overlord Karellian, and it is here that Clarke most seriously stumbled. Karellian is simply not developed enough, nor given enough play, to carry the story. Clarke is forced to resort to author prescience in creating the suspense necessary to tie together the disconnected elements of the novel.

Clarke writes with directness and simplicity, hence with great conviction. He characterizes well, if spotily in the present work. He has already shown (*Against the Fall of Night*) that he can write interestingly about other themes than space travel. Though he lacks in CHILDHOOD'S END the brilliant logic which adorns his earlier novels, and though the novel is a thoroughly uneven work it is entirely readable and belongs alongside the other novels of one of the greatest living practitioners of science fiction.



CHILDHOOD'S END was reviewed by Anthony More. Others by Clyde Beck, John Harrington, Jack Kelsey, George D. Martindale, and the editor-- much the same crew who did the job for the Fall issue.

The Other Novels

THE SYNDIC by C. M. Kornbluth. Doubleday, 223 pp, \$2.95.

Chalk up another fascinating and highly novel future-story for Kornbluth. The North America he has dreamed up for this one is split longitudinally into two areas where the prevailing powers are the descendants of rival racketeering gangs: The Syndic has the east, The Mob the west. The North American government has been driven into the sea. It still exists on island outposts and has a navy, but is without a foothold on the continent.

Syndic "rule" is pretty close to absolute anarchy. Bankers have been relegated to the role-of-convenience of the non-playing banker in a card game. In the words of an old-timer in The Syndic, "You won't believe it, but people used to beg them (the bankers) to take over their property, tie up their incomes, virtually enslave them. People demanded it. The same way they demanded inexpensive liquor, tobacco and consumer goods, clean women and a chance to win a fortune; and our ancestors obliged them. Our ancestors were sneered at in their day, you know. They were called criminals when they distributed goods and services at a price people could afford to pay."

At the time of the story, lacking government, taxes, laws, and enforced moral codes, people never had it so good. The Syndic makes their wants available, and extracts tribute from the retail sources. But the west, Mob Territory, has gone totalitarian. The Mob began as The Syndic did, but degenerated into a police state. The rest of the world has reverted to various states of barbarism.

Threatened by both The Mob and the overthrown government, a Syndic man turns spy. He penetrates the North American government (in Ireland); is discovered, flees, and is taken captive by barbarians who practice witchcraft; and makes his escape and way home via Mob Territory.

Kornbluth has skilfully constructed a possible future that is "different", even for science fiction, and has written an entertaining story that makes effective use of it.

Kay Bradbury's 1950 Galaxy story, "The Fireman", has been greatly expanded and published as FAHRENHEIT 451 (Ballantine, 199 pp, 35¢ and \$2.50). Included in the volume are the shorts, "And the Rock Cried Out" and "The Playground".

From Ballantine also is an expanded BRING THE JUBILEE by Ward Moore (194 pp, 35¢). The original appeared in Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction last year.

Sometime science fiction writer L. Sprague de Camp has a "world of magic" novel and three associated shorts published as THE TRITONIAN RING (Twayne, 262 pp, \$2.95). These are tales of fanciful ancient lands-- sorcery, swordplay, and strange peoples. The title story appeared in a 1951 issue of Two Complete Science Adventure Books.

Two new books by Sam Merwin this time: *KILLER TO COME* (Abelard, 251 pp, \$2.75) and *THE WHITE WIDOWS* (Doubleday, 224 pp, \$2.95). Both are rather intricate in plot, a bit bloody, and concern the efforts of a few individuals to combat unusual threats to humanity at large. In *KILLER*, people from the future try to arrange present happenings to the benefit of their future world. The *WIDOWS* are an undercover deviant breed of women who intend to eliminate male type people from the world. Both are good of their type: the blend of mystery with elements usually associated with science fiction-- although at the moment I can't think what the s.f.-type element in *WIDOWS* might be . . .

When is a story about witches better science fiction than one about time travel? Easy. When the witch tale is *CONJURE WIFE* (Fritz Leiber; Twayne, 154 pp, \$2.75) and the other is any but one of the four or five best.

Leiber says that witches exist in modern America, and with admirable logic and a high order of literacy proceeds to develop an intellectually satisfying story of suspense that has been considered a classic since its original publication in *Unknown Worlds* in 1943. With a prosaic background, a quite ordinary college campus, supernatural elements are blended in a manner convincingly consonant with science fiction's "What if-- ?" tradition.

THE GREEN MILLENIUM by Fritz Leiber (Abelard, 256 pp, \$2.75) is another novel that is, in large part, a mystery. But this one takes place at some time in the next century and includes extra-terrestrials in its cast, which I suppose make it more nearly science fiction than either of the Merwin titles. A rather grim future society (no novelty for Leiber) is presented. The story is of a chase, by many bizarre characters representing a diversity of interests, for a green cat which has seemingly magical qualities.

The Anthologies and Collections

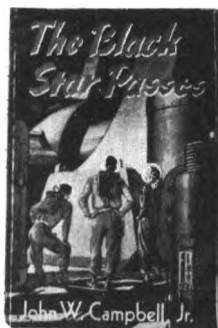
E. FLURIBUS UNICORN is a Theodore Sturgeon sampler of high order (Abelard, 271 pp, \$2.75). The thirteen included tales range in original publication dates from 1947 through 1953; from *Weird Tales*, *Galaxy*, *Magazine of Fantasy and S.F.*, and others; only one has been between hard covers before. Probably the best single author collection in many months.

THE BLACK STAR PASSES by John W. Campbell, Jr. (Fantasy Press, 254 pp, \$3) includes the first three (of five) stories of the once famous "Arcot, Wade, Morey, and Fuller series". The three, "Piracy Preferred", "Solarite", and the title story are from 1930 issues of *Amazing Stories*. (1931 and 32 completed the series with the novels "Islands of Space" and "Invaders From the Infinite".) Those in this book have been revised somewhat to conform to modern developments.

This series (sharing honors with E. E. Smith's "Skylark" stories) were the best of a type that virtually disappeared almost twenty years ago. This four man team of engineering

and scientific masterminds, with large industrial resources, is placed in situations requiring their maximum abilities, and with great and joyful effort they come up with that which is necessary.

Campbell once said of such stories, "One of the heavy-science type is reasonably easy to write, really. You start off with a vague general idea of what it's all about, and a starting situation. From that, each step of a decent yarn should proceed logically. Swell-- then why sweat over what's going to happen next? If it follows logically, just write along, and tell what logically, almost inevitably follows. No figuring and planning, really, and the conversation etc. is just about what the writer would say himself."



In some ways Campbell's evaluation gives a true picture of what his earlier stories were like. The plotting is casual and the characters indistinguishable. But the scientific double-talk is some of the best in all science fiction, and though undoubtedly fun to write (and fun to read) probably wasn't so easily done as Campbell implies. Campbell's theories always make enough sense to be good reading. Although you will find errors in them, you will never be outraged by slovenly or uninformed thinking. The author knew what he was doing, and why.

Incidentally, in "The Black Star Passes" you will find the earliest examples of the minor key writing that was later to characterize the stories JWC wrote under the Don A. Stuart pseudonym.

TALES FROM GAVAGAN'S BAR by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt (Twayne, 228 pp, \$3) collects from The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Weird Tales, and unpublished files twenty-three tales of the bar owned by Gavagan and tended by Cohan (gentlemen whom one suspects would specialize in Mick's drinks).

What happens at Gavagan's could happen no place else, and vice versa. Some of the tales make delightful use of the sort of ridiculously literal logic that readers of THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER and THE UNDESIRE PRINCESS will (no doubt fondly) remember. But all are quite, quite mad. A pleasant aroma of alcohol pervades the book, which should serve as a warning that the stories,



Fletcher Pratt

L. Sprague de Camp

too, had best not be partaken of all at one sitting. Inga, who is Mrs. Pratt, contributes 23 line drawings to the book. (When you come to one that looks like a half-tone, you've had enough for the evening.) The publishers have refused to confirm or deny the rumor that the next tale of Gavagan's (a touching story of what happened to a young girl who had too many) will be titled "From Beer to Maternity". The photo is of the authors (de Camp is the one whose zipper is properly fastened).

Four stories by Robert A. Heinlein have been collected under the title **ASSIGNMENT IN ETERNITY** (Fantasy Press, 256 pp, \$3).

Included are "Gulf" (from Astounding, Nov.-- the famous written-to-order issue -- and Dec. '49); "Elsewhen" (printed as "Elsewhere" by Caleb Saunders in a 1941 ASF); "Lost Legacy" ("Lost Legion" by Lyle Monroe, I'm told, in a 1941 Super Science Stories); and "Jerry Was a Man" (Thrilling Wonder, '47). In order: "supermen" defeat a conspiracy that threatens to destroy Earth; parallel worlds; "supermen" conspire to benefit the world; and the legal rights of a non-human are investigated. Neither Heinlein's best nor his worst. In passing, Fantasy Press is to be commended for the physical quality of their books. In these days of disappearing cloth-bound fiction, FP continues producing books fully as well made as their "The Comet-eers" which W. H. Auden, acting for the Trade Book Clinic, adjudged the best printed novel of December 1950.



Drawing principally from 1952 issues of his magazine, editor Sam Mines has compiled a **BEST FROM STARTLING STORIES** (Holt, 301 pp, \$3.50) anthology that ranks with Bleiler and Dikty's **BEST** from everything.

It contains: Sturgeon, "The Wages of Synergy"; McGregor, "The Perfect Gentleman"; Rogers, "Moment Without Time"; Bradbury, "The Naming of Names"; Springer, "No Land of Nod"; Lewis, "Who's Cribbing?"; Clarke, "Thirty Seconds-- Thirty Days"; Vance, "Noise"; Hamilton, "What's It Like Out There?"; van Vogt, "Dormant"; Locke, "Dark Nuptial"; and interesting introductory remarks by Mines and Heinlein.

Mines says that s.f. has gone through four main developments: the "popular mechanics ideal", the "space opera", the "modernization of the fairy tale-- imagination unbridled", and the "cerebral story, the intellectual puzzle, with overtones of psychology, Einsteinian mathematics, semantics, philosophy, sociology, or what-have-you?" Whither s.f.? he asks. "Inexorably the science fiction of today will become the ordinary fiction of tomorrow."

He's right, of course; that trend to Development 5 is well established, and has turned up some remarkably good yarns. But to this reviewer, who is a strong Development 4 man, they have, oftener than not, been remarkably inadequate science fiction.

Please pardon the editorializing. As Heinlein says in his introduction, the scope of this collection is broader than science fiction.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1953, edited by Bleiler & Dikty (Fell, 279 pp, \$3.50) chooses: Porges, "The Fly"; Henderson, "Ararat"; Temple, "Counter-Transference"; Clifton, "The Conqueror"; Jakes, "Machine"; Leinster, "The Middle of the Week After Next"; Coppel, "The Dreamer"; Leiber, "The Moon Is Green"; Russell, "I Am Nothing"; Miller, "Command Performance"; Wyndham, "Survival"; MacDonald, "Game For Blondes"; Robinson, "The Girls From Earth"; Matheson, "Lover, When You're Near Me"; Russell, "Fast Falls the Eventide"; and an introduction, "The Trematode", by Alfred Bester.

In their publicity release, the publishers state that, with the publication of this, the fifth in an annual series, s.f. has begun to come of age (they call it the series' fifth anniversary, which leads me to suspect that the ad writer is not too strong in arithmetic). In support of the claim, mention is made of Robinson's story, which puts its characters "in a situation that could happen and, in fact, did happen when women traveled around the Cape to find husbands in the West." Just so. Take the elements of science, speculation, original thinking out of science fiction, transfer to another planet a situation out of our history, tie up with a plot that has been done to death in the slicks so that everyone will recognize it, and behold! "science fiction" has grown up.

Bester, in his Guest Introduction, gives his reasons for favoring this evolution in science fiction, and has a great deal to say in disparagement of science fiction as it is and has been. There is truth in every charge he makes, but he is grossly guilty of deriving generalities from minority manifestations, of making statements about science fiction that apply equally to all fiction, and of branding as weaknesses the very things that make science fiction distinct from other fiction.

Example: ⁴science fiction is escapist (what fiction isn't?). The youthful reader comes to feel superior to the challenges of reality; his school work and social life suffer, says Bester. I submit that (a) s.f. is not alone here; (b) that no degree of success in one field diminishes one's desire to "escape" via fiction to another; and (c) that I protest the inclusion of science fiction in the growing list of entertainment media that are inhibited by consideration of their effect on the immature and the subnormal.

Example: science fiction is terrified by life. In a world faced by wars, overpopulation, and technological unemployment overwhelmingly more severe than any of them have been in the past, Bester, one gathers, would like to see only stories of rosy futures. Who's escapist and who realist now?

Example; science fiction is afflicted with Let's Pretendism. This, says Bester, only occurs in science fiction and children's games. Need one defend the pleasure he gains in setting up and solving imaginary problems? Is reading s.f. nec-

essarily more juvenile than, say, playing chess?

Bester amplifies his charges and gives examples, of course. If some of my distaste for his viewpoints has induced a like one in you, you should in fairness read his introduction to the book. It's my guess you'll want to argue with every paragraph of it. But Bester was hired only to write the Guest Introduction. Meanwhile Bleiler and Dikty, although tending to Besterism, have included some very good stories that are assets to the accumulating science fiction literature. . . along with some very good stories that bear the same relation to science fiction that the so-called "suspense novel" does to the story of detection.

The Juveniles

Milton Lesser's *THE STAR SEEKERS* (Winston, 212 pp, \$2) is the only novel I know of to employ the Heinlein "Universe" situation: the space ship, a sufficient world in itself, many generations out of port, whose inhabitants have forgotten their origin. The ship in this one is a twenty-mile diameter asteroid, hollowed out to form four concentric spheres, the inner surface of each inhabited by a separate, isolated society. . . an interesting arrangement with which, unfortunately, the author has taken some impossible liberties. The societies depicted on the four spheres, Astrosphere, The Jungle, The Place of the Revelers, and Far Labry have been imaginatively created. The young protagonists' attempts at re-educating their ignorant contemporaries follow the usual pattern. The book ends with a successful planetfall.

In his second novel, *MISSING MEN OF SATURN*, Philip Latham tells of the second expedition to Saturn-- the first had been mysteriously lost. Speaking as an astronomer (which he is) in an epilogue, Latham briefly discusses the planet, and quite candidly tells of his difficulties in writing the story to conform to editorial dictate. Younger readers should enjoy both this and the Lesser book.

Some Non - Fiction

THE MARS PROJECT by Wernher von Braun (University of Illinois Press, 91 pp, \$3.95) is without question the supreme contribution to the literature of space flight available today in hard covers. Other books on the subject, including the excellent titles by Clarke and Ley, have set themselves the task of convincing the uninformed reader of the possibility and desirability of space flight, and have restricted their entire expositions to the level of understanding of such readers. Until now, the "intermediate" space enthusiast has had only engineering and rocket society journals to provide for him (and this book is based on material published in 1952 by the German "Society For Space Research" in their journal, *Weltraumfahrt*).

This book presents specifications for a realistic Mars expeditionary force of 70 men, 10 space ships, and 3 landing boats. Hydrazine and nitric acid are assumed to be the propellants for all operations. Loaded with tables of data, the

book's 91 pages contain a great amount of tightly-packed information.

Built in a circum-Earth orbit, the ten ships proceed to a circum-Martian orbit, from which one wing- and ski-equipped landing boat descends to the ice-capped polar region. Because of the impossibility of ascending from polar latitudes to an orbit in the plane of the ecliptic, this first landing boat is abandoned and its crew proceeds by ground vehicle to the equator to select a landing area safe for craft with wheeled gear. For the return to the orbiting ships, the wings are removed from the landing boats.

Although no reader of science fiction should expect its authors to plan their interplanetary flights nearly so thoroughly as this book does, yet an author who were to construct a narrative on the foundation here provided could be expected to write nothing less than the most realistic of all space stories. Let us hope that it will be done.

FLYING SAUCERS HAVE LANDED by Desmond Leslie and George Adamski. (London: Werner Laurie; New York: British Book Centre. 232 pp, \$3.50.)

If you liked Velikovsky's "Worlds in Collision" this book is for you. If you are a firm believer in the Little Men from Venus theory of flying saucers, perhaps your faith may survive the reading of it. Anyone who fits in neither of these categories will be rather less inclined after reading the book to believe that flying saucers have landed than he was before.

Mr. Leslie, author of Book One, is described in part by the publishers as having "devoted several years to studying ancient Egypt, Poseidonis and Atlantis." It shows in his work. He has assembled a long catalogue of sightings of curious objects in the sky, and then proved that they were all explained in the Sanskrit epics. He bolsters his argument with citations from Besant, Blavatsky, and Churchward. Here is a random sample of his manner of discourse (p 70):

"To suggest that matter exists in higher states than the gaseous was high heresy until radio waves were discovered. And, today, to suggest that matter exists in states even less tangible than the known radiations, is to risk a round drubbing from the pulpit of physics . . ."

In Book Two, Mr. Adamski tells of how he observed many flying saucers, made photographs of them with the aid of an astronomical telescope, and finally was present when one of them landed, and talked with the man who was piloting it. The conversation was by telepathy.

He sounds quite sincere.

Several very remarkable photographs are reproduced. I don't know what they are pictures of. Mr. Adamski says they are of space ships from Venus. It is all very depressing.

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Following 50¢ each 3 for 1.00

Mac Cardle The Unforeseen	Crawford-The Witch of Frague
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Jones-Deadbody's Mermaid	Rohmer-Dope
Friend-Kid from Mars	Forbes-Mirror for Witches
Smith-Nite Life of the Gods	Henson-The Inheritor
Marcelin-Beast of the Hatan Hills	White-Mistress Masham's Repose
Bain-Digit of the Moon	Blackwood-Jimbo
Smith-Bishop's Jaegers	Iratt-Lr. Limpet Werfel-Star of the Unborn
Carroll-These Restless Heads	Lawson-Mr. Wilmer
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 1949-July-Aug-Oct-Nov Jan-Feb-June
 1950- Jan-Feb-April-Mar-May

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1933-2.00 each Jan-Feb-April-May-July-Aug-Oct-Nov-Dec

1934-1.50 each Dec 1935-1.50 each Aug. 1937-1.50 each-Jan

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'8 m.m. or 16 m.m. Science Fiction Movies

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Weird Tale Magazines, Strange Tales, Strange Stories, Oriental St.

Timlin-The Ship that Sailed to Mars

Niel De Jack- 1010 31st St. -South Bend 15, Indiana

Science fiction fans in the

LOS ANGELES - GLENDALE AREA

have been enjoying some very pleasant evenings at the book shop of John Valentine, the second Friday of each month. There are always refreshments, lots of good bookly conversation on all sides-- and an interesting stock of books of many varieties to browse through. Just to make it all more interesting, each "s.f. night" there are lots of old magazines for sale at record low prices. For example, last time there were stacks of war-time Astoundings at 20 and 25¢ each, Unknowns at 60¢, early '30s Amazing at \$2 to \$4 for complete years, and Astoundings and others from 1947 on at 10¢ each. Next time (December 11th) there'll be more of the same, some old Wonders, and whatever else we can dig up to sell at similar prices. We hope you can join us then-- we have a lot of fun. (Sorry-- no mail orders for magazines.)

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Ice World	Clement	Oct-Dec	1951
Needle	Clement	May-June	1949
The Players Of A	van Vogt	Oct-Jan	1948-9
Dreadful Sanctuary	Russel	June-Aug	1948
...And Searching Mind	Williamson	Mar-May	1948
Children of The Lens	E. E. Smith	Nov-Feb	1947-8
The End is Not Yet	Hubbard	Aug-Oct	1947
With Folded Hands...	Williamson	July	1947
Tomorrow and Tomorrow	Padgett	Jan-Feb	1947
Pattern For Conquest	George O. Smith	Mar-May	1946
The Fairy Chessmen	Padgett	Jan-Feb	1946
World Of A	van Vogt	Aug-Oct	1945
Destiny Times Three	Leiber	Mar-Apr	1945
Nomad	Long	Dec-Feb	1944-5
Renaissance	Jones	July-Sept	1944
Judgement Night	Moore	Aug-Sept	1943
Gather Darkness	Leiber	May-July	1943
The Weapon Makers	van Vogt	Feb-Apr	1943
Beyond This Horizon	MacDonald	Apr-May	1942
Second Stage Lensman	E. E. Smith	Nov-Feb	1941-2
Methuselah's Children	Heinlein	July-Sept	1941
Sixth Column	MacDonald	Jan-Mar	1941
Slan	van Vogt	Sept-Dec	1940
Final Blackout	Hubbard	Apr-June	1940
If This Goes On	Heinlein	Feb-Mar	1940
Gray Lensman	E. E. Smith	Oct-Jan	1939-40
The Tramp	Hubbard	Sept-Nov	1938
The Legion Of Time	Williamson	May-July	1938
Galactic Patrol	E. E. Smith	Sept-Feb	1937-8
The Cometeers	Williamson	May-Aug	1938
At The Mountains Of Madness	Lovecraft	Feb-Apr	1936
I Am Not God	Schachner	Oct-Nov	1935
The Skylark Of Valeron	E. E. Smith	Aug-Feb	1934-5
The Legion Of Space	Williamson	May-Sept	1934

(May issue missing)

Also remember the Don A. Stuart series, the Foundation series, etc., and many, many hundreds of other shorter novels and stories.

Unknown- I have fourteen different issues plus the anthology issue.

Price- \$175 for all the Astoundings and Unknowns. I will pay shipping.

Write

Harry Charles
314 A Fowler
China Lake, California

Notes From the Editor

Last issue I announced "The Spec. (for speculation) Dept.", to begin with this issue. Well, I can't say it was squeezed out this time, for it would've taken a good-sized Spec. Dept. to bring this issue up to average thickness. But for other reasons, I repeat the announcement: beginning with the next issue, SFA will inaugurate a department which will investigate, for the sheer fun of thinking about them, all manner of speculative ideas of the sort that make good science fiction: elaboration of ideas that have appeared in stories, suggestion of ideas that could make good stories, and perhaps even some that, for one reason or another, wouldn't make stories. Have you given "The Spec. Dept." any thought yet? Contributions needn't be exhaustive analyses, y'know. Just a statement outlining a situation of high potential should be enough to initiate an entertaining discussion.

I'm not real sure that SFA has an agent for subscriptions to sterling countries. I wonder if there's any reason why paper money couldn't be sent directly to me? Inasmuch as it would eventually be spent in the country it came from, I feel that it wouldn't violate the spirit of the laws against sending money out of Britain, etc. Anyway, unless/until a superseding statement is made, subscription payments are acceptable in English and Australian currency at 7/- and 9/- resp., for six issues. And can some obliging Britisher give me the address of a good pipe shop for me to send the shillings to?

WANTED! Latest issues of any American science-fiction magazines, pulp or digest. I will exchange one-for-one with British ditto. Also wanted: Copies of Terror Tales, Horror Stories, Oriental Stories, Spicy Detective and similar. Any comic books. I can get any magazine or book of science-fiction published in England. Please write to: Michael R. Birrell, 10 North Street, Hastings, ENGLAND.

ATTENTION FANTASY ARTISTS

A special section in the gala forth anniversary issue of DESTINY - Tales of Science & Fantasy is being devoted to full page lithoed reproductions of YOUR artwork. This section is intended to be a representative picture of the type and quality of artwork being produced in fandom today.

1. Illustrate a scene from your favorite SF novel or short story.
2. Do this in anything except pencil or paints on a 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ X 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ sheet of paper.
3. List author & book, your name & address, and send to DESTINY, "Fan Art Section", 2018 17th, Forest Grove, Oregon, before Dec. 25, 1953. *Thank you!*

Advertising in this section is at the regular rates: 50¢ for one column inch, etc. Micro Ad copy must be submitted fully prepared. It may be typed (with a reasonably new ribbon, please) or written, printed, and/or drawn in

black ink. Copy should be exactly twice the size in each dimension of the magazine's space it is to occupy, e.g., a column inch would be 4½ x 2 inches. Eleven lines of 43 picas or 52 elite characters are absolute maximums.

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All Must Go -- Offer Closes Dec. 1, 53

Name and Dates	Number of Issues
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Fantastic Adventures - May 39 to Oct 41	12
Argosy - July 25 to June 40	151
Top Notch - Sept 30 to Feb 37	16
Short Stories - April 38 to May 47	28
Blue Book - April 19 to June 47	47
Amazing - June 38 to Sp. Q. 41	25
Startling - Jan 39 to Sept 47	9
Famous Fant. Mysteries - Vol 1 #1, Vol 3 #1, Vol 9 #1	3
Over the Top - Sept 29 to June 30	7
Thrilling Adventure - Vol 1 #1 to Dec 36	10
Adventure - March 20 to July 41	68
Popular Magazine - June 14 to Feb 23	15

Write to: Paul R. Miller
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