

# SCIENCE - FICTION GOO

Vol. 1, No. 1

An SFS Publication

July 23, 1942

-----  
This thing is the product of one Samuel D. Russell, 3236 Clinton Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and came about in this wise: I am thinking of inflicting a fan magazine upon the world but have never before cut a stencil and consequently don't know what grade of stencil is best adapted to the perversities of my typewriter, an ancient model with well-worn type. So I am creating this abortive publication to try out two stencils which P. Bronson, Esq., has kindly loaned me (he shall have them back as soon as I am done with them). This page is being typed on a comparatively expensive Victor stencil, while the one on the other side of the sheet will be done on a cheap thing from Montgomery Ward. I sincerely hope the latter works better. Anyway, this will be, as far as I know, the only issue of Science-Fiction Goo and is therefore, of course, priceless. My only problem now is to fill up these two pages with wordage --a task that is not made easier by my phobia against blank white space in fanzines.  
-----

First of all, let's talk about science-fiction, just for fun. I find myself unable to sympathize much with those fans who wail constantly that Astounding is going to the dogs, that its stories are getting more and more stereotyped and poorly written, and that Campbell has outlived his usefulness as an editor. Although I have not read all the Astoundings for this year, I cannot see that the latest (August) issue displays any marked decrepitude. Apart from an unfortunate lapse into wackiness by Norman L. Knight, all the stories are intelligent and interesting, and the novel, "Waldo", which takes up nearly half the magazine, is excellent from start to finish. Moreover the cover painting is really good, for a change. Now of course the stories are not perfect, and "Waldo" probably will not become a classic, but you can hardly expect miracles every month. Certainly no other science-fiction magazine has approached Astounding's preeminence during Campbell's reign, although Stirring made a fair try at it. The Futurian-edited mags have indeed done their best to introduce new and fresh ideas and treatments into their fiction, but such things cannot equal in effectiveness the intellectual subtlety and fine writing that Campbell can get because of his higher rate of payment. I greatly fear that much of the recent carping against Astounding has been due to the mental laziness and the falling-off in imaginative vigor that seem to creep up on many fans who have been reading science-fiction for so long that it has become old stuff to them.

But part of it is due, I think, to another factor, more justifiable from the point of view of fandom and less so from Campbell's. In a nutshell, it is the fact that Astounding's stories for a long time now have been stressing the intellectual angle at the expense of the emotional. Now nobody likes intellectual finish and soundness in a story more than I do, and I am one of the first to complain when it is absent. But it is not, or should not be, paramount, even in science-fiction, for stf is after all a branch of imaginative literature, and the purpose of imaginative literature is primarily to produce an emotional effect on the reader. The effects produced in Astounding are generally intellectual in tone--e.g., irony, or admiration for the author's clever working out of some scientific puzzle. Such effects can, of course, be quite strong and satisfying, as in "By His Bootstraps", but they pall when dished out in such large numbers as Campbell has been using. There are frequent exceptions, 'tis true--perhaps one or two emotional stories in each issue, usually including the feature novel or novelette--but the solid bulk of the short stories, which set the tone of the magazine, are cold and sterile despite their technical brilliance. Under Tremaine we used to get fiction of a very different type--warm, human stories like those of Stuart and Gallun, conveying a sense of the pathos and tragedy, devotion and sacrifice, that imperfect man will experience as much in the future as he does today. Probably Campbell does not deliberately eschew emotional



fiction; he just emphasizes scientific plausibility in order to appeal to his audience of technicians who are seeking a slightly higher form of mental relaxation than crossword puzzles, and forgets that he is neglecting the true function of a story--to make the reader feel. The latter is accomplished most easily, I think, by paying enough attention to characterization so as to make the characters seem like living human beings rather than mechanistic puppets with set idiosyncrasies. This business of creating human characters (in which European writers are usually much more proficient than American--nowadays, at least) is too big a subject for me to go into here --I must write an article on it someday. But Campbell should think about it.

Well, that takes care of Astounding for a while. Now what'll I talk about? Bronson keeps suggesting that I talk about light bulbs or getting up in the morning or wallpaper, but he is only the publisher of this rag, so his opinions are of no account. Ah, there's a copy of Weird Tales. "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground And tell sad stories of the death of kings." When Miss McIlwraith took over the editorship, she frankly admitted that she knew nothing about the weird field; but she seems not to have learned much during her two years' incumbency. Or perhaps an ardent feminism accounts for her consistently buying the products of those ghastly female hacks, Evoril Worrell, Groyo La Spina, Dorothy Quick, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, et al. And she has acquired an unaccountable love for "humorous", modernistic ghost stories that are about as funny as a cripple falling downstairs. Many of her authors, too, are obsessed with the mawkish, nauseating dogma that Good must always conquer Evil--a perversion that doubtless keeps Lovecraft and Howard spinning in their graves like turbines. In view of these editorial ineptitudes it is truly astonishing that Miss McIlwraith has sense enough to continue to publish the stories of Clark Ashton Smith, Lovecraft, Leiber, Dorloth, Wellman, Oron, Quinn, and Keller --men who are always competent and almost always artistic. Anyway, as long as their names keep on appearing on the contents page, I cannot agree with Bronson that Weird is no longer worth buying. And I suppose it is not easy for a person with no genuine interest in supernatural fiction to acquire a deep, sympathetic understanding of so subtle a subject as the weird field. But an old lover of Gothic literature like me cannot help bemoaning the encroachments of alien asininities into the oldest fantasy mag on the market.

Now I'm stuck again. I've gotta fill this page somehow. I never thought I'd ever have occasion to wish I resembled Gilbert and Jenkins in any respect, but there comes a time in every man's life, I guess.... Let's see if I can find inspiration among my bookshelves. Trouble is, I haven't read most of my tomes. I wonder what I would do if I ever acquired the library of my dreams--one as big as Doc Barrett's. Probably go mad from ecstasy and sit gibbering and drooling and pawing over the precious pages..... (Nice space-filling things, dots....I must use them oftener.....) Here's a book that I'll bet the average fan would hardly connect with science-fiction --The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction by Philip B. Gove, published last year by the Columbia University Press. It's an unusually rarified example of literary criticism, for instead of writing about his particular subsegment of English literature the author writes about what other men have written about the subject, by way of preparation for the book he himself intends to write about it some day. Anyway, "imaginary voyages", like "utopias" and "imaginary wars and battles", is one of the subject-headings under which the unenlightened scholastic world includes some of that stuff we call science-fiction, particularly the older examples of it. Probably you are not interested in antique stuff, but I am, for a very particular reason, viz., that I intend to write a book about science-fiction eventually and shall have to discuss its growth through the ages, for, believe it or not, it did not start with Gernsback. The imaginary voyage was a favorite subject-matter of eighteenth-century novelists, and many of their works are sufficiently fantastic to be obvious ancestors of modern science-fiction. Don't expect this book to come out next month or next year; I've been gathering material for it since 1938 and may take twice as long to complete the job, for I want the thing to be a really thorough and discriminating work of analysis and criticism--one that will bring science-fiction serious recognition in the world of letters. I also want to do a book on weird fiction, but that is not so pressing a job, since the subject has already been given a moderate amount of critical attention. None of the present books on it are adequate, though.