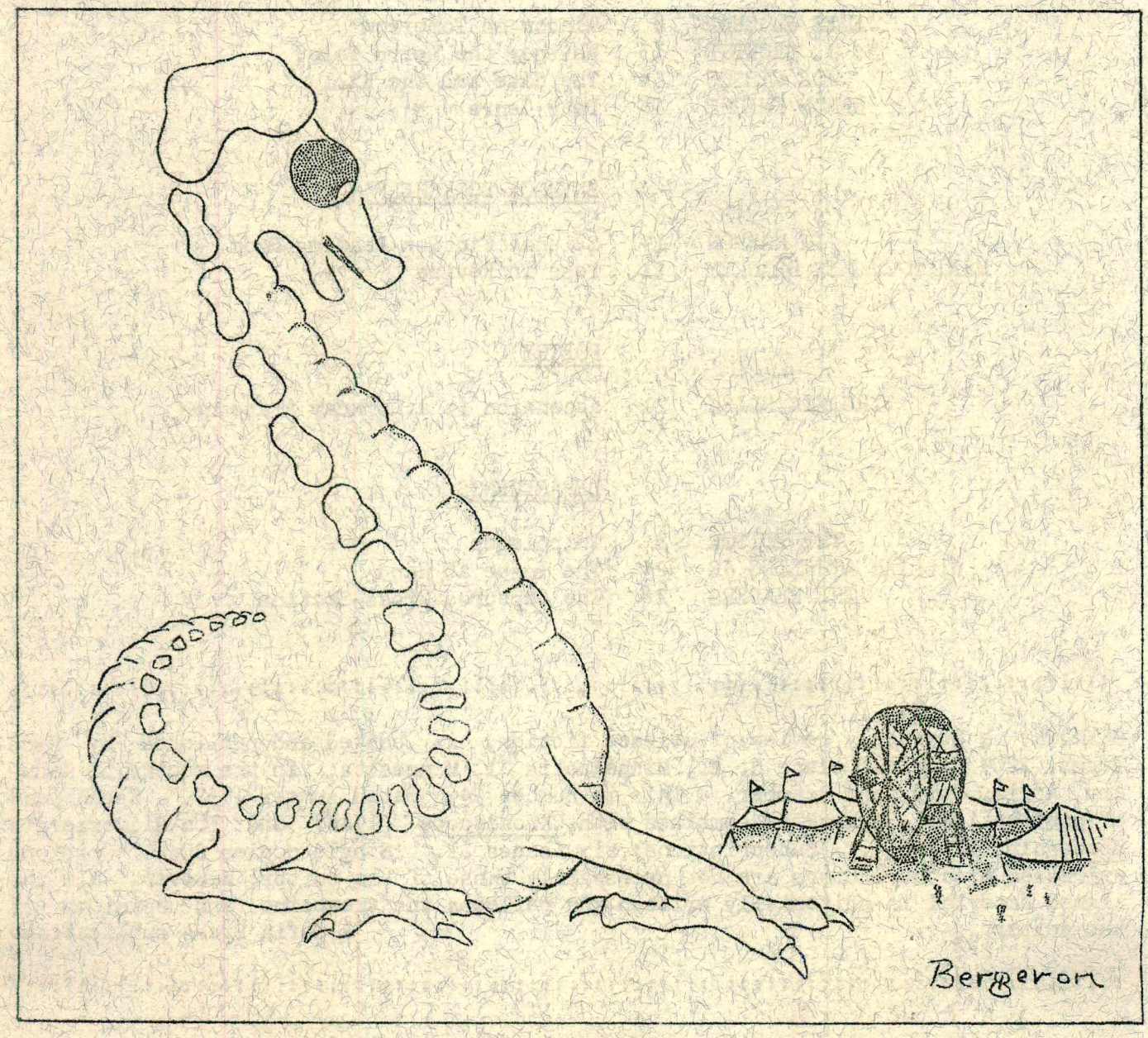
SKYHOOK 24

Summer 1957



SKYHOOK — CONTENTS OF NO. 24

Editor: Redd Boggs

Associate editor: Marion Z. Bradley

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TWIPPLEDOP

"THAT YOU ARE STILL ALIVE...!"

A recital of the tribulations that have beset this journal since last issue would make a thrilling and largely fictitious story. An impulse of candor might make the tale terribly dull.

Suffice it to say that the troubles were overcome, and Skyhook never quite perished into FooFoo and sank away to reality — for it is a bright and clamorous dream yet, and will be.

Unfortunately, dreams are fragile, and Skyhook may yet perish like the lost chord (but less grandly). However, I have purchased a Gestetner 120, more than $200 worth of trim grey machine, for the purpose of giving these pages wings and a voice, an investment which may attest the strength of my faith in Skyhook's future.

This issue was put together and largely stencilled late in 1955. In restencilling the issue on Gestencils I have added some new material and, where possible, updated the old. I hope none of the items included here is completely outdated, but I extend my abject apologies to most of the contributors for holding their MSS so long before publishing them.

Skyhook is no longer circulated through FAPA, and the space formerly devoted to FAPA reviews is devoted to a new book review section. "Pass in Review" will be enlarged next issue to cover all the important new books in the field. Next issue will also carry full data on each book reviewed, data which I fecklessly omitted in Marion Zimmer Bradley's review of The Frozen Year (p. 21). Ballantine published the Blish book at $2.75 and 35¢.

Editing the letter department was a problem. While I think the contributors to issue #23 are deserving of their egoboo, however belated, I did not wish to print opinions by readers which the readers themselves may no longer hold. Some gratuitous remarks by various persons are therefore omitted, and I beg you to remember that the printed statements are many months old and do not necessarily represent the present viewpoint of the correspondent who wrote them.

What of the future? Manuscripts are on hand from Arthur Jean Cox, Dean A. Grennell, Jim Harmon, Fred Chappell, Jean Young, and others, and most of them will be assembled into issue #25, in October.

DAUGHTER OF FLECKNOE

Warren L. Boggs of South Hayward, California -- according to a clipping from Labor sent by Eva Firestone by way of Art Rapp and Dick Eney -- is bent on tracking down "every possible Boggs, past and present." In his efforts to trace the Boggs family tree he has compiled a 25-foot scroll of various Boggses dating as far back as 1735, including a former governor and "even a convicted murderer."

Warren L. Boggs is evidently proud of the Boggs clan. I too used to take a tear-wet pride in the Boggses who were senators, congressmen, and governors, and even in the former Henriette Boggs of Birmingham, Alabama, who became the bride of President Jose Figueres of Costa Rica. But no more.

It's all the fault of J. Caleb Boggs who is or was governor of Delaware. At a governors' conference in Washington he named Virginia Knight, wife of California governor Goodwin J. Knight, as an honorary poet laureate of Delaware.

I have nothing against Mrs Knight, except her poetry. I have read the poem for which Governor Boggs bestowed the honor, and I refuse to have anything more to do with anybody, up to and including his name, who awards a laureateship on the basis of patriotism "botch'd in rhyme."

Mrs Knight's "poem" was called "When the President Smiled at Me." Here's an excerpt:

> The President smiled at me
> And every fiber of emotion swelled
> within my soul...
> So deep was my humility...
> When the President smiled at me.

Warren L. Boggs can have the Boggs clan. Just call me G. Watt Fangs.

QUINN'S TRIUMPH AND DISASTER

James L. Quinn has done almost as much with If as Rudyard Kipling did.

His If partakes, I think, of the same middlebrow earnestness as Kipling's: in editing the magazine Quinn evidently strives to "fill the unforgiving minute / With sixty seconds' worth of distance run." He doesn't seem to have any sideline hobbies, literary interests, or neuroses to distract him, and he attacks the job of editing like a solid businessman operating a solid business.

The result is a solid product with little nonsense about it. If it is a lesser magazine and a less interesting magazine than a mere three or four others in the field, that merely proves that neurotic people are the most interesting people and the product of neurotic vision is usually the most fascinating.

If has a cool personality, both in the bop sense and the conventional sense of the word. This doesn't prevent it from having a delightfulness of its own, as well as a quiet sparkle.

Physically it is the most attractive American sf magazine; its print job is superlative, and the format and artwork are excellent. Editor Quinn often outdoes Gold at the game of presenting cover paintings that do not illustrate a story in the issue but tell a story themselves. The most famous of these was Kelly Freas' "Heavyweight Champion of the World" on the December 1955 If, visualized, apparently, out of the world of Leiber's "Coming Attraction."

Another cover (May 1955) illustrated -- according to the contents page notation -- "Technocracy Versus the Humanities." After a doubletake the reader is reassured of the cover's complete lack of political implications: it shows a huge hand placing a man in academic robes amid a group of other people (a ballerina, a musician, a nun, businessmen) on the pan of a balance. On the other pan are spaceships, an artillery piece, a tank, a futuristic train, etc.

It is immediately obvious that the cover actually represents "Technology Versus the Humanities" -- and, after reading Quinn's editorial about the cover, one realizes that, despite the presence of academicians and artists in the picture, the proper title should be, simply, "Technology Versus Humanity."

The error is significant: it indicates the reason for the curious mixture of brilliance and bosh that is If. Quinn permits himself to dream sometimes, for even businessmen dream (it's all right, if you don't "make dreams your master"); sometimes he seeks sublimities and Big Topics such as John W. Campbell considers.

Dreaming big isn't necessarily a handicap in editing a sf magazine. Hidebound caution is, as the twilight career of TWS proves. The vast implications of this age of technology inspire Mr Quinn to make noises like an intellectual, but he is evidently no egghead, though he brings home the bacon regularly. The gap

between these wayward visions and the achievements within his powers gives If an uneven quality and an unpredicability that makes finding a new If in the mailbox a small adventure.

If hasn't the personality or the personality behind it to reach either the highs or the lows we find in Galaxy, but Quinn's odd aspirations make him reach out in many directions, and there's no typical If story. First-rate authors may contribute second-rate stories to If, but few of them are slanted, nearly all of them are fresh, and they cover the whole spectrum of science fiction subjects.

Recently Quinn's quest for Significance has led him to publish -- and what is more, to feature -- a number of "fact articles." The most important were the two-part "Satellite" article by James M. Nuding and Paul J. Vanous in If for June and August 1956, and "Why Guided Missiles Can Not Be Controlled" by "Y," an "authority of long experience on his subject," in the current August 1957 issue.

The apotheosis of fact over fiction in science fiction magazines is of course a long term phenomenon in ASF and, in recent times, in Galaxy, where Willy Ley's article is always blazoned on the cover.

One could dismiss the phenomenon in ASF and Galaxy with the expressive remark "That's Campbell!" or "That's Gold!" But it is time to look with alarm at the possibility that science fiction will be supplanted by science fact when a sober businessman like Mr Quinn finds it necessary to use the stairs rather than his wings to transport us to the stars.

CONFESSIONS OF A SCIENCE FICTION FAN

Whenever I browse through a newsstand, I always rearrange the stacks so that science fiction books and magazines are prominently displayed.

Whenever I see a demonstration typewriter on display, I always vary the unimaginative attempts of other customers who have tried the typewriter ("NOw is the tmie f9r all god mento come to the asd ogthe pzrty"; "The quikk borwn fox u&j)#e the lzay god") with "Who sawed Courtney's boat?" or "Yngvi is a louse!"

WASN'T IT TOO BAD ABOUT ADAM AND EVE?

Should science fiction be pessimistic? I leave the question of "ought" to others; in this article I want to deal with the more basic questions of "is" and "can":

Is science fiction pessimistic?
Can it be otherwise?

The second question might seem to answer the first, but for the mundane book reviewers who have gathered at the fence and stared into our field in recent years, the first question hardly needed an answer. They are appalled to find that the prophets of our age aren't very hopeful about the future.

The reviewers thereupon point back to H. G. Wells (the Wells of A World Set Free, of course, and not The Holy Terror) as a man who had the right attitude toward the future and science fiction. If they've read any magazine science fiction they also point to the glorious optimism of Gernsback days.

Anybody who mentally compares In the Days of the Comet with Nineteen Eighty Four, or "Beyond Pluto" with "Beyond Bedlam" will be forced to agree, at first impulse, with the thesis that sf has gotten awfully pessimistic in modern times.

This isn't the whole picture. Despite the optimism toward the future which was embodied in his later novels, Wells' first sf novel, The Time Machine, ended, if not pessimistically, at least downbeat -- an attitude which Wells later disavowed.

Terror stalked through most sf yarns in Gernsback's day. The earth was menaced by all sorts of unpleasantness, and I can scarcely call Hamilton's or Williamson's shapes of things to come at all optimistic. World catastrophes came in bunches in those days: often two or three to a story.

Why do we talk, then, of the optimism of Gernsback science fiction? First and perhaps foremost, because the blight that came on the world was not man-caused and seemingly was not interpreted either by the author or his characters as an act visited upon mankind as a punishment for his sins.

Second, because the menace from below or above always besets a world we can recognize, not only as sane, prosperous, and happy, but as an idealized version of our own society, America of the twentieth century. That we can solve our problems without altering our present way of life is implicit in such a vision.

The societies envisioned by many of our modern sf writers are another matter. A species of doggedness, if not Horatius-at-the-bridge courage, seems the most admirable characteristic of men in worlds of tomorrow postulated by Kornbluth, for example. Though sf writers often pay lip service to the old ideals of progress and the perfectibility of man when they speak before convention audiences, they depict another tomorrow in their fiction. There are few utopias in science fiction, and those that we find aren't really utopias, though their inhabitants think they are.

Happy endings may wrap up the story -- after all, this is commercial fiction -- but sheer horror fills the rest of the tale: The Space Merchants, Gladiator-at-Law, Planet of No Return. Who would want to live in the world of Player Piano or of Hunt Collins' Tomorrow and Tomorrow?

Yet optimism is not lacking in modern science fiction, even in the very stories which depict the most depraved worlds of the future. Most such stories can be interpreted as warnings: "if this goes on -- !" or as satire. Such fiction tries to "mend the World" (says Swift) by exposing or ridiculing evil, and is thus actually optimistic at bottom. If men are irredeemable, such efforts would be useless. In seeing the possibility for improvement -- though he may profess to see no such hope for purposes of his story -- the writer is obviously an optimist and a believer in progress, trying to persuade us of our folly and goad us down a new path toward better things.

There is another philosophy, preached rather than practiced (especially in the army), that man can be led better than pushed. In literature, idealism can perform this function, and critics like Lilith Lorraine have declared that science fiction should be optimistic (i.e., idealistic) as a means of shaping a better future. Here again, of course, we return to 14kt optimism.

A more drastic view, apparently embodied in Harper's review of Star Science Fiction Stories #3 (Ballantine, 1954) -- I haven't read the review, only a resume of it -- is that science fiction, because it is science fiction, must be (a) pro-scientific, and (b) optimistic.

Presumably the rationale, if there is one, behind this attitude is that science fiction is a reflection of science itself and thus can indicate only the optimistic view of tomorrow because science is bringing about a Better Tomorrow.

Perhaps too, such critics are unable to impute anything but idealism to a sort of fiction which is obviously fantasy; or else they would reserve idealism to fantasy in order that there is a reservoir of idealism to put up against the pervading realism and pessimism that exists in modern mainstream fiction.

Yet if science fiction must follow the march of science, surely it must be full of foreboding, for one can hardly overlook the hard fact that "progress" is running in a direction that is scarcely reassuring. And even writers of fantasy live in this world and can hardly remain untouched by the fears that beset all of civilized man in these times.

It was George Orwell, I believe, who pointed out that pro-science H. G. Wells once chose to symbolize progress in the form of a modern battleship. Diehards in the science-is-god tradition might find the Enola Gay an even fitter symbol.

In any case, Wellsian science fiction seems gone forever or at least until a new Age of Enlightenment. In a world that has lost faith in the perfectibility of man and his capacity for good, there can be little science fiction that shows man attaining Neva City or Diaspar.

Influential editors like Gold, Campbell, and Lowndes may shape sf to some extent and even prevent pessimism from entering their magazines, but if the tendency of the age is toward pessimism, it is obvious that pessimism will pervade the literature despite all theories and

preconceived policies as to what makes good science fiction.

Those who lament the death of optimism (which is perhaps another name for "the sense of wonder" which some profess to find in Gernsback sf) are lucky that science fiction is as optimistic as it is today. It is probably optimism of a high order to prophesy that there will even be a Man and an Earth in the future.

THIS CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE

The French magazine Fiction, which published her "Centaurus Changeling" as "La Rhu'ad," is serializing Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1955 F&SF novelet "The Climbing Wave" in three parts. The title: "Marée Montante"....

Clifford D. Simak, who will appear in the October 1957 Infinity with "Death Scene," also has three stories coming up in Galaxy. Author's titles: "The Cytha," "Carbon Copy," and "Shadow World." Leo Margulies' Satellite is publishing "Nine Lives." Simak is concentrating on shorts and novelets and doesn't contemplate writing a booklengther in the near future. He has a yarn in production right now....

Charles V. De Vet, who appears in the current Infinity with "Survival Factor," has a collaboration with Katherine MacLean upcoming in ASF. It's a 16,000-worder titled "Second Game." He doesn't plan much more writing till cool weather returns....

General Mills' Sugar Jets commercial plugs on TV's "Mickey Mouse Club" now offer "an adult approach to space, free from the wildly fictitious accounts of Buck Rogers and Space Patrol." Over half of each plug is devoted to "space education" with no mention of the product. Willy Ley and Chesley Bonestell are among the experts hired to help, and Ley is also writing four special books on space to be given away for boxtops.

Professor John E. Arnold, the "creative-thinking" man from MIT, asked a perplexing question in a lecture given in Minneapolis: "If a mirror reverses the image left to right, how come it doesn't also reverse it top to bottom?" Well?...

Particularly recommended: "The Triumph of the Fact," by Dwight MacDonald in The Anchor Review #2 (Doubleday, 1957). The article mentions "the notoriously irresponsible Senator Langer of Minnesota." A triumphant Fact: Langer is senior senator of North Dakota....

My nomination as the best magazine story for the first half of 1957: "Omnilingual" by H. Beam Piper (ASF, February). Close behind it: "Vengeance for Nikolai" by Walter M. Miller Jr (Venture March), and "The Night of Light" by Philip Jose Farmer (F&SF, June)....

Galaxy has come up with two extraordinary novelets: "Help! I Am Dr Morris Goldpepper" by Avram Davidson (July) and "Time Waits for Winthrop" by William Tenn (August). The advent of artist Bowman is the best thing that happened to Galaxy, art-wise, since Emsh appeared. Bowman could become this era's answer to Charles Schneeman....

Looking over the contents page of The Galaxy Reader of Science Fiction, listed in recent GSF ads, convinces me that there are at least two stories in it Horace wouldn't dare publish today: Wyman Guin's "Beyond Bedlam" and Fritz Leiber's "Coming Attraction"....

Supermarket notes: There's a brand of frozen strawberries called Cedargreen strawberries. ... I always wonder: for what reason does the cash register ring? ... The sign on a glass door of a supermarket I know reads "TUO." Translate....

Shakespeare Department Store sale! Special in the grocery department: Fancy bread. Special in the ladies apparel department: Fortin bras....

Can you pass the SFBC's Lunar Quiz?

What's the raisin d'etre of The Currants of Space?

ARTWORK CREDITS. Cover by Richard Bergeron. Interior artwork: page 19 by Richard Bergeron; page 21 by William Rotsler; page 23 by Jack Wiedenbeck; page 26 by Terry Carr. "Skyhook" insignia on page 3 by Howard Miller. Lettering of "Weird" on page 13 by John Grossman. Thanks to Bob Tucker for the Wiedenbeck drawing.

WINDOW ON TOMORROW

by JAMES E. GUNN

THERE MAY BE an alternate universe in which the science fiction boom did not collapse, in which science fiction went on to become the principal reading matter of Earth's billions. (Perhaps Fred Brown's What Mad Universe was a sidelong glance into that world.)

There may be such a universe, I repeat, but this obviously isn't it.

As little as four years ago the future of science fiction seemed clear. If it were not actually going to supplant the mystery novel as America's favorite leisure fiction or the western as the staple of the movie houses, as many critics predicted (most of them, to be sure, not science fiction authorities), at least it would have a continuing readership numbered in millions for the three or four dozen magazines and the hundred or so annual movies and anthologies.

Today even this extrapolation is uncertain. The crystal ball is cloudy; the predictor is broken. It is by no means sure that science fiction will not return to what it was before 1945: an interesting but small-scale publishing phenomenon with an appeal for a very limited audience -- stout-hearted fellows with serious faces and high IQs and all that, but limited nevertheless.

A few of these stout-hearted fellows would not be sorry if that should happen. A few of them would like to keep this lovely thing to themselves and felt more than a little jealous when they had to share her with strangers -- strangers who, certainly, would not love her with such singleminded devotion nor could be trusted not to desert her when she needed them most.

Well, the going has been rough lately and those fans were right: many of the casual strangers have deserted our love. The opportunists who hopped into the field -- deceived, perhaps, by their own predictions -- have hopped back out again, a little shabbier than before. The magazines that were numbered in the thirties or the forties -- I don't know; I never could keep track -- have dwindled to a dozen or so at the last counting. The old-line publishers are taking a second look at their sales records to see if the science fiction novel and anthology field is really what they were led to believe -- and drawing back the toe they stuck into the surf. There have been a rash of science fiction movies (a few good ones and a lot of stinkers) but it doesn't seem as if the western movie is in much danger from anything except hardening of the arteries.

But there is a brighter side. It may be that science fiction needed a shaking-down so that it could rebuild on sounder foundations. If we are going to rebuild

again, however -- and I hope we are -- we had better take a look at our foundations and see just what it is we are building on. And perhaps we should plan a more enduring and esthetic structure to go on it.

If science fiction has something unique to offer this possibility line of ours -- in which the science fiction bubble burst -- then it is important that science fiction reach as many readers as possible. If science fiction has nothing really important to say, then it doesn't really matter whether it continues to exist or not.

Here is an interesting paradox: those who are reaching the widest possible audiences in science fiction are the ones who have the least to say to them. And as a consequence, their audiences aren't coming back.

Reasons for the bursting of the boom are easy enough to find: opportunistic publishers jumping into a field they knew nothing and cared less about; the resulting newsstand glut that satiated many readers without giving them the solid satisfaction that sent them back for more; and the basic fact of life that there just weren't enough science fiction readers to support that many magazines or to buy that many books (just as, possibly, there weren't enough good stories to fill them).

But, as Villiers Gerson noted in Amazing Stories, there is a further fact that many pessimists overlook: over the past decade science fiction has gained a surprising number of new readers. Hundreds of hard-cover novels, anthologies, and short story collections have been published since the detonation of the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima -- and bought and read. There have been almost as many paperback reprints. In spite of the decline, there are still more magazines being published today than there were in 1945. Add 'em, multiply 'em, divide 'em -- any way you figure it, there are a lot more readers. And a lot more potential readers.

The hard, inescapable fact is: science fiction had 'em but it didn't keep 'em. Why?

Publishers, editors, writers, fans: I think we have only ourselves to blame. We had help, but basically we were our own worst enemies. We blundered ahead, extrapolating instead of interpolating, not knowing where we were going, not understanding the real basis for science fiction's popularity, not really conscious of what science fiction is. And maybe some of us got delusions of grandeur, substituting a phony maturity for solid entertainment.

To understand what a literary medium is you must understand what it does. You must understand what it is supposed to do, what its function is. The primary function of all fiction is entertainment. That's basic, and part of science fiction's trouble may be that this was sometimes forgotten. Maturity, for instance, is a fine thing, but it should not be dragged in at the expense of excitement, suspense, drama -- or any of the other essential ingredients of a popular medium. If science fiction is to be popular, it must retain the elements that make it popular. Maturity should be in addition to these elements, not a substitute for them. It's not impossible. Every really great writer did it: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere, Racine.

But entertainment is just a bottle; there must be something in it. That something -- that additional function -- is what dictates the readership for a particular kind of fiction.

One function of fiction is orientation. Given an equal dramatic excitement, orientation is the ingredient that makes a reader pick up a western, say, instead of a detective story, or a detective story instead of a science fiction magazine. Explicit in all fiction is certain information, implicit are attitudes, which mold and orient the reader's viewpoint and opinions. In a very real sense, all fiction is sociological; in it are the judgments, values, and attitudes which are accepted in our society -- which, indeed, form the basis for our society.

Why does a reader prefer to be entertained by a particular kind of fiction -- or, to ask the question another way, by a fiction that deals with a particular kind of material? Why does he want gin instead of bourbon or Scotch instead of champagne?

Why does Sam Wistful read westerns? Because he has a desire -- perhaps a psychological need -- for orientation backward, to a simpler, more straightforward past -- even though it is a past without reality, a history of a time that never was. Sam is drawn toward the simpler values and simpler decisions in this fictional past.

In fiction dealing with the present -- romantic fiction, slick fiction, women's magazine fiction -- the orientation is toward our own society, or, at least, a small part of it. Bernard De Voto suggests that this type of fiction teaches readers how to act in our society, teaches them a code of etiquette and ethics and beliefs that is essential to their finding a suitable place in this social and economic system. They learn how to act in a nightclub, even though they may never have entered one except through the pages of some book or story. They learn how to order a meal, how to look for a mate -- even, I'm afraid, how to court and make love.

The mystery story's orientation is primarily ethical, although there is probably an element of social rebellion which gets vicarious satisfaction from the breaking of laws, in particular the ancient and basic law about the taking of life.

These are all never-never lands. There was never a west like the old west of the western novels; or a social environment as phony-glamorous or as phony-sentimental or as phony-pretty as the women's magazines describe; or situations as stripped of extraneous emotional conflict as the taut, suspenseful world of the mystery novels.

What we look for in these works of fiction is a <u>truth</u> about life, about ourselves or our society -- a truth which transcends the phoniness of the setting in which we find it.

What has this to do with science fiction?

One of the basic sociological comments that can be made about our civilization is that it has almost ceased to be tradition-directed, as social-scientist David Riesman describes it. It is not directed toward the past. Even the readers of historical novels and westerns are not interested in absorbing the value judgments of the past -- and if they were, they would not find them there -- but in enjoying the contrasts of our attitudes and judgments superimposed upon the era at hand.

If our society has any consistent orientation, that orientation is toward the future. Perhaps David Riesman might be interested in the term <u>future-directed</u>. We are concerned, it is true, with our present society and what is happening to it right now. But we are even more concerned with what will happen tomorrow when today's problems will be resolved. The trend in government toward what some call socialism and others a planned economy is a prime example.

ASCENSION IS A WORKDAY ARABESQUE

Cliff-climber, Jupiter Tonans, Jesus -- the lineman!

To the naked eye he looms in courage
Bare as breasts, and as accustomed,
Slung high from the heart of a tree: Christ,
Who walked, simian, up on his clever toes from concrete,
Black as the pole that bears him two-dimensioned
On the abstract sky, intimate and distinguished with
The crosspiece; Jove, holding lightning-wires in gauntleted
Contempt, he is yet wholly dependent of a foot of webbing,
Clumsy-booted toes, and a basic valor: cliff-man
Discovering the cavity of walls, getting a toehold
On heaven; the minute closer when he must no longer worship,
But become, his vulnerable god.

— VIRGINIA BLISH

Many factors contributed to the overthrow of the Victorian concept that the world was well set in the groove it would travel to eternity and that nothing much more remained to be discovered that would change the Victorian's world or his attitude toward it. One scientist remarked that the only job remaining for future generations was the determination of a few more places after the decimal point. Then came the culmination of the industrial revolution, two world wars, blossoming technology, the fantastic geometric advances of science, and men like Planck, Einstein, and Heisenberg.... Fifty years have changed the world beyond the understanding of those Americans who lived at the turn of the century -- not just physically, but socially, philosophically, even ethically. Our attitudes have changed with the world around us. Fifty years more -- barring cataclysm -- will see changes even more revolutionary that may extend millions of miles farther than Victorian man even dreamed.

This, then, is science fiction's function: to orient the reader toward tomorrow -- toward the mercurial future. That's why science fiction as we know it is a peculiar outgrowth of our society. It could only have become what it is in an evolving culture among future-directed people. The belief in progress is built into our society. Remove it and our civilization would explode from its own social and economic pressures.

This is our philosophy: the world is a constantly changing, evolving organism, and the change is basically good. Next year's car will be better than this year's. Next year's washer, dryer, food mixer, furniture, dresses -- everything -- will be finer and more efficient. Our economy is geared to replacing these products before they wear out. And if everybody everywhere suddenly became convinced that what they had was good enough, there would be a depression that would make the last one look like a boom.

David Riesman has described three social types: tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed. The other-directed man he considers to be typical of our society; this man, Riesman says, has no steadfast guide to conduct and belief but only a shifting, uncertain radar beam on other equally uncertain contemporaries. Science fiction's function is to give this other-directed person something more solid for him to get a bead on and to convert him, if possible, into an inner-directed person.

Science fiction's function, if you like, is to write the myth of the future, and myth, as we have come to realize, contains the philosophy and wisdom of a race. It is an important function. I can't think of any function more important. And that is why writing science fiction is rewarding -- and, at the same time, frustrating, because the function can never be fulfilled well enough.

The great pity is that the function isn't fulfilled better than it is. One reason may be that the function isn't widely recognized. Early in science fiction's boom era, many claims were made for science fiction as prophecy -- again not often by people within the field. When reaction set in, such wild claims were minimized. Unfortunately, this also served to diminish the writers' and editors' recognition of science fiction's meaningful function.

Part of this orientation toward the future that science fiction can supply includes a consideration of scientific developments and technological discoveries now in the laboratories and the mathematical and scientific journals. But more significantly it includes a consideration of social, psychological, and philosophical problems implicit in our society.

I have described our society as future-directed, but a society is always Janus-headed. An important, possibly growing body of opinion in this country is reluctant to continue our risky, uncertain trek into the future, would like to return, somehow, to more stable values and more certain conditions. For every movement there is counter-movement, for every thesis, antithesis. A mood of anti-science, or anti-intellectualism, continues to grow in this country. Scientists, confused themselves, are being asked searching questions about their real loyalties, and egghead becomes a new epiphet.

Surprisingly enough, some of this anti-intellectualism even manages to seep into science fiction -- osmotically, perhaps. Or maybe it isn't so surprising after all: the stereotype of the Mad Scientist has been around for a long time now, and he is still an inevitable part of every science fiction movie and television play. Here is a force to be recognized and reckoned with -- one among many -- and we must dramatize its significance and its possibilities in our fiction. That is science fiction's function and our duty.

But never let us forget that our first function and our first duty is to entertain. Unless we can fulfill that function, we'll never get a chance at any other. It makes no difference how great a message you have if you can't get an audience -- and keep it.

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(This article is a transcript of a speech given at the Cleveland world science fiction convention. Thanks to damon knight for supplying it to Skyhook. -- Editor.)

"It is lovely to watch the colored shadows on the planets of eternal light."

WHITHER THE WEIRD TALE?

by S. J. SACKETT

DEFINITIONS AND THE FITTING OF THINGS into compartments and categories are hardly the occupation of a grown man. On the other hand, I feel some need to identify and explain just what it is I am talking about. A weird tale, it seems to me, is one in which the strange and unusual events of the story are explained by assuming the truth of some religious or mystical -- non-materialistic -- belief. A weird tale differs from the "humorous fantasy" in being seriously intended, designed to arouse the emotions of wonder or terror rather than risibility.

Whether this definition appeals to the reader or not is of no particular moment; what is important is that it gives him an idea of what I have in mind. At present there are no magazines chiefly devoted to the weird tale, and only one -- Dream World -- devoted to the humorous fantasy. A few other magazines publish weird tales occasionally. I have found them in Fantastic, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, and Fantastic Universe.

But most of the periodicals in what is called "the field" emphasize science fiction, in which there is a materialistic explanation for the events. Moreover, weird tale magazines have had hard sledding. Weird Tales, the only periodical ever devoted entirely to this genre, folded in its thirty-first year, and a few years ago Fantasy Fiction, which published a few weird tales along with a preponderance of humorous fantasies, was forced to suspend after only a few issues. The comparative figures show, I believe, that the weird tale is nowhere so important or vital today as is the science fiction story.

Why? I think the answer to that question lies in the nature of the weird tale and in the society in which it finds itself. It appeals to a sense of religious belief in an age in which there is no religious belief.

Pick up a copy of Weird Tales, for an example. In what frameworks of belief are the stories laid? There are two rough categories of religious systems which were employed when the magazine bit the dust: one of actual systems, which is by far the larger, and the other of invented systems. Writers used, for instance, the mythologies of Egypt, of Greece, or of Scandinavia. Recently, in resonance with the romantic interest our age has shown in Mexico -- a less technological country which we admire because it lacks our complex problems, forgetting that we lack its primitive ones -- some use has been made of Aztec mythology. Occasionally other types of primitive mythologies have been used in stories. Yet none of these systems can present a really satisfactory story to the modern reader, because he can have no real belief in them.

One of the chief mythological systems employed by the writers of the weird tale is that which comes ultimately from the Caucasus, with its tales of vampires and werewolves. Not even this Balkan folklore can excite conviction in a modern educated reader.

Christianity, it is unfortunate to report, fares no better as a mythological framework for these stories. My reading in the weird tale and humorous fantasy (where it is used more frequently) has led me to the conclusion that the story based on Christianity is editorially unacceptable unless, within the meaning of the libel act, the religion is held up to "hatred, ridicule, or contempt." Unfortunately, Christianity has been so dealt with by its own theologians that it is hard to blame fantasy writers for treating it as it has been treated. And truly it is an intractable religion for an author to have to use. Many of the Christian weird tales depend upon Satan, in whom few people today believe, and with whom Christianity has little to do.

The weird tale by its nature is concerned only with misfortune, which is precisely what does not bother Christ in the least. The essence of the teachings of Christ, it seems to me, is their promise of eternal life, and it would be difficult to write a commercial weird tale based on divine mercy without sounding as syrupy as a can of Log Cabin. It would not be impossible for a writer who had a real belief in Christianity to turn the religion to the purposes of commercial fantasy, but there is little reason to believe that such a writer would be interested in doing so or that the predominantly impious and infidel American reading public would support him.

If no actual religion can serve the turn of the fantasy author who would write commercial weird tales of lasting or significant literary value, can he turn, as did H. P. Lovecraft, to the creation of his own mythology? Without detracting, or seeking to detract, from the very evident merits of that writer, I think it is plain that the least satisfactory element in his stories, from a serious standpoint, was the whole elaborate Cthulhu mythos, with Nyarlathotep and the rest. It did not demand less credence than the established religious systems — but that is because there can be nothing less than nil. Lovecraft's creation of his own mythology is, I think, evidence that actual mythologies are unsatisfactory for the purpose of the weird tale; the rejection of Cthulhu in all save a few stories by such men as Robert Bloch, August Derleth, and Clark Ashton Smith is evidence that other writers found Lovecraft's invented religion equally unsuccessful.

Where, then, can the writer who is seriously interested in the weird tale look for a religious framework? If he cannot use Christianity -- and unless he believes in it and takes it seriously I should advise him to turn to the commercially valuable humorous fantasies based on it -- then I think he would be better off with no religious or mythological explanation at all. Let the event occur without an attempted explanation, without fitting it into a religious system. It will still, within my definition, constitute a weird tale, for the basis will still be mystical and non-materialistic.

It is this device which was used in the stories which I consider the two most successful weird tales of recent years: "How They Chose the Dead," by Hollis Summers in New World Writing III, and "Listen, Children...Listen," by Wallace West, in Fantastic Universe for October-November 1953. In both stories the approach was realistic and factual, and the strange misfortune was not explained. In the first a young couple took their two-year-old son to an amusement park and lost him; when they discovered, on the way home, that the boy was no longer with them, they were unable to find the park again, for it had disappeared. In the second a woman became so convinced of the reality of the world she saw in a mirror that she stepped through the glass and vanished. In neither story was there any effort at all to fit the occurrences into a mythological system. The stories of Ray Bradbury, who was in

his younger days an eminently successful writer of weird tales, also fit this pattern. Bradbury invented no framework to explain the strange occurrences in his stories, and they were the more terrifying for this. And it may be that the weird tale will find in this technique a way out of its current cul-de-sac.

The fact that we live in a society which does not believe in religious systems may go far to explain the current vogue of science fiction. The race has always enjoyed the feeling of wonder and has sought that emotion in stories of strange events. During the nineteenth century it had exercised this enjoyment in the weird tales of a number of Romantic writers. Much of the Romantic movement, as seen in Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe, was a movement of fantasy; and there was considerable fantasy later in the works of Stevenson, Kipling, James, and Le Fanu. At about the time of the latter writers, however, Darwinism rocked religious faith, so that the weird tale suddenly found itself in a vacuum of disbelief. Instead of shifting its ground then, the weird tale continued to operate in its traditional patterns, basing its premises on outworn religious ideas and turning for novelty to new and different mythological systems in a vain attempt to find one that would carry conviction. Looked at in this light, it is little surprise to find that the weird tale as a popular vehicle of wonder was replaced by the science fiction story, in which events bore an explanation resting upon rationalism and materialism rather than religion.

Nor can we be certain that the weird tale will ever come back into its own, despite its long literary tradition. In all the specialized magazines it is being supplanted not only by science fiction but by the "humorous fantasy." And the quality of writing in Weird Tales at the time of its demise was, by and large, the lowest of any magazine in "the field," showing that the weird tale today is attracting only the poorest and most intellectually sterile of authors. The progress of writing in this genre, indeed, has been steadily downward, notwithstanding the work of some few men of powers sufficient to withstand any tendency and except themselves from any generalization -- men of whose number I shall single out for particular recognition H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Ray Bradbury. I suppose that the form will eventually die on the vine unless authors are willing to cast off mythology and write good stories without it.

And there is a reason why it is important to keep the weird tale; there is a function that it has to perform. Ray Bradbury, certainly one of the great writers of the weird tale in our century, has pointed out that fantasy takes us for a moment into another world, so that we can come back to our own with fresher eyes -- eyes that can see the wonder of things we take for granted and eyes that can see the foolishnesses to which we have become inured. The weird tale, besides its esthetic potentialities, is an important device in the performance of this function.

THE FABULOUS WORLD OF THE FUTURE DEPARTMENT

(from "Ceramic Incident," ASF, October 1956)

The exploration proceeded with the swift sureness born of long and successful teamwork....In ten hours the team was back aboard the Beagle with an excellent resume of one hundred thousand years of history.

"Queer Beer; or, Whither the Weird Ale?"

The GAME and the KILL

BY JOE GIBSON

AFTER THE DISCUSSION it's caused, you've undoubtedly read Philip Jose Farmer's article and Tim Howller's rebuttal in Skyhook #23. Assuming you might've skipped over them, at first, as I did.

Or if you're new here, by all means try to get that back-issue from Redd Boggs. You'll not want to miss such things as Howller's admonition to John W. Campbell: "Should western culture -- eventually world culture -- arrive at peace and understanding and abundance, it may do so because of the influence of your magazine." I nearly fell off my stool when I read that one!

To me, the whole thing had a humorous glow that its instigators never intended. Phil Farmer says of sf writers: "But there are a few who have the insight and energy to create new social institutions -- or rather, models of them -- and who will display in their fiction how these may be arrived at." You might assume Phil had just finished reading The Weapon Makers or some such epic -- which merely proves I'm quoting him out of context. The context is five pages long, single-spaced. Phil writes a lousy article, not unusual for a good fiction man.

He wastes five whole pages trying to convince you that science/fantasy fiction can have the stature of great and important literature when, actually, this should have been his concluding statement. If this were done, if that were done, we should have but one result: great literature. And where he left off is exactly where he should have begun. One of the major features of most really good science-fantasy is that the author envisions new social institutions and how they may arise in human society. This can influence responsible persons — "the engineers, technicians, anthropologists, psychologists, educators, intelligent laymen" — and through them, influence our current history and civilization. A comprehensive study of how science-fantasy might thus affect human history is certainly worth five pages, single-spaced. But I doubt if Phil Farmer could do it. I'm positive Tim Howller couldn't.

Howller's chief points of rebuttal seem to be where Farmer's views don't coincide with what his, Howller's, own personal opinions are. Tim quibbles about one thing being science-fantasy, another thing not science-fantasy; about what is a good example of great literature. His biggest fault, however, was in accepting Farmer's main thesis -- not giving it the axe.

There is a notable taint of dogmatic Authority, with the capital A, in both Farmer's and Howller's remarks. It suggests both these men will accept something as Great Literature, capitals again, if its literary style and scope excites their particular fancy and if enough book reviews and intellectual personages say they think it's Great Literature. It suggests both these men would hesitate to call a book Great Literature merely if it happened to be a best seller. Even if a story were reprinted and read by millions a century after it first appeared, they might hesitate. Of course, if it were reprinted a century later to be read by intellectual personages, VIPs, and the like, they would readily concede its greatness.

Snobs. Intellectual snobs. You could think of pieces of great literature -- great in that it is centuries old, or merely generations old, yet is still reprinted and avidly read and enjoyed by millions -- which would not occur to these two men. The Three Little Pigs, say.

And here is the one garish omission in Phil Farmer's whole scheme of things: he doesn't perceive the influence of great literature upon mass humanity. If he did, he wouldn't waste words on this matter of literature influencing "the engineers, technicians, anthropologists, psychologists, educators," and so forth. It does, but this is small potatoes. The most important result of a great piece of literature is that it influences other writers. Once the greatness of any piece of literature is recognized, perhaps not so much by its snob appeal as by its mass appeal, it almost invariably starts a trend. Where the original piece by itself influences a few, the trend influences mankind. The irony of this is that bad literature can sometimes serve human perspective as well as good literature, particularly where the mass market is concerned; thus we have cycles, swinging from exceptionally good popular fiction to incredibly bad popular fiction. God help the great author born at the wrong time -- but his great-grandchildren will be rich.

And while we're merely tinkering around with this subject, sufficiently enough to discredit Farmer's views, there is one not-inconsiderable aspect of science-fantasy fiction we shouldn't overlook: fandom. Where else in the history of human society is there anything comparable to it? I've only been able to conclude that fandom is a completely new factor in human society -- one which, for lack of several sociological advances, simply couldn't exist earlier in human history. Fandom is small, now -- insignificantly small. But Buddha was only one man.

Ah, the thing I love about Farmer is his wife. But I must reject the views expressed in his article as being decidedly narrow in scope. This business of new social institutions is but one mere facet of good science-fantasy fiction. He touched the true key to the matter, but let it slip through his fingers, when he remarked that the role of the sf writer is not to prophesy, but to invent.

This goes deep into the structure of human intelligence. Man is not, never was, and can't be as long as he is man, a seeker of creature-comforts and security. Man is a hunter. I know this so well, from a parentage of frontiersmen and resigned women, from a war, from experience in hardship and killing and (I wish it were all) reading, that I am merely bemused at anyone's plea for a human utopia of peace, understanding, and abundance.

What a world this would be if only we were all international smugglers! O joy, o fun! Gads. But such is not to be -- at least, not quite yet. And about the best (and anyway, the safest) substitute we might settle for is science-fantasy and fandom. Kick that around as you will, but I strongly suspect there's the true basis of the matter. You'll read it in the epitaph on Tucker's tombstone.

The real merit of science-fantasy, as a genre of literature, is its inherent frontier quality. It is primarily a tool for the blazing of new trails. Most such trails will lead nowhere, inevitably; and most stories will inevitably have varying degrees of odor. But it's like finding the needle in the haystack -- you merely have to pick up a stalk of hay that happens to be bright steel. The camel's back sags, the dam bursts, and you're plunged smack into a beautiful, virgin wilderness for the human mind to explore. This is why Phil Farmer must write science-fantasy. And Isaac Asimov. And Robert Heinlein. And you, and you, and you. It's why Ray Bradbury had to write Bradburyarns; his was more an individual *quest*, however. strongly influenced by his own personality. As was the case with H. P. Lovecraft.

DEAR GENRE by DAMON KNIGHT

genre (zhäN'r), n. 1. A kind, sort, or description of anything; a species; category; -- applied esp. to works of literature or art as falling into distinctive groups with respect to style, form, purpose...

WILL EVERYBODY OBLIGE ME, just once, and stop making this foul foreign noise about science fiction?

It's a snob's word, unpronounceable in an English sentence except by an acrobatic contortion of the mouth. It's offensive, because it suggests that the speaker thinks of science fiction as only a "genre" — that is, merely an overspecialized, rigid, rather feeble and precious prose form.

It is probably unassimilable. If it should follow the obvious course of similar words (spectre, theatre), it would become "jenner," a sound which would get in the way of the much better established "gender." The only alternative that suggests itself is "jenree" -- awkward and ugly, and mentioned only to be disposed of.

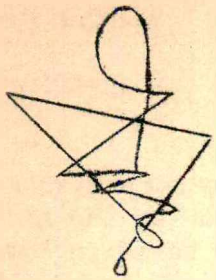
Except for the special meaning noted above, the only meaning that applies is the primary one: "A kind, sort or description of anything; a species; category." In this sense, it is needed in the English and American tongues about as urgently as the French "espèce," which means the same thing and is at least as pronounceable.

What's wrong with: field (fēld), n. A sphere or range of activity ?

But this makes one important feature clear: we can never settle for one trail, one trend, one wilderness to explore. Social institutions are but one string of beckoning stars; the esper field is another string, off there; and off this way are still-new developments in physical science which are currently being ignored by today's science fiction, with its stereotyped Campbellian orthodoxy. Gentlemen, and ladies, we are not the sheep to follow some fool goat to whatever pasture of his choosing.

Actually, science/fantasy fiction offers us a mental exercise in human tolerance. *Like judo,* tolerance requires constant practice to remain in good form lest your mental muscles deteriorate. Because of this, we are not quite so mentally weak that some new technological advance can knock the props from beneath our smug, self-satisfied little world -- an aspect which is becoming a rather important requirement for survival, as well as sanity, in modern civilization.

This, by itself, may be a greater contribution to mankind than all the gimmicks and doodads science fiction authors can dream up for their epics. In which case, it doesn't matter a damn what Farmer and all the other sf writers put into their stories -- so long as it's good.



skyhook bookshelf

SKYHOOK BOOKSHELF consists of two sections: "Science Fiction Reading Room" by Jim Harmon, and "Pass in Review" by various contributors. Harmon's column will report on sf books, past and present, which he chooses to discuss, while "Pass in Review" will analyze current books in the sf field. Readers are invited to contribute material for "Pass in Review," but it is best to query before submitting a review.

IT WOULD SEEM that, at long last, all those writers whom damon knight has shown up as dopes and hacks can seek out their revenge. I was going to write one hell of a review of damon knight's novel, Hell's Pavement (Lion Books, 1955), on behalf of the dopes and hacks who (naturally) are good friends of mine, but damon -- damn the man! -- doesn't shred easily or well. Hell's Pavement is a good book.

It has its faults. It is quite obviously three stories, obvious even to somebody like me who didn't read the two original magazine tales. The seams show. Moreover, the first chapter and first story is conspicuously better written than the rest of the book, smoother, more polished -- if somewhat more glib for the effort. Some of knight's phraseology is irritating. "Credits," "world legislature," etc., have become such cliches of modern science fiction that I think there needs to be considerable justification for using them. Like Howard Browne, I believe money will still be called "money" and not "credits" a hundred years from now. That is, a translation of Futurespeak would render the word as "money" if it were left in context.

There is a conscious or an unconscious symbolism in the story, although I'm not sure whether it is supposed to be a parable. The theme of the book is enforced virginity. Arthur Bass is a male virgin; his girl is a virgin; the heroine, Anne Silver, is a virgin; practically everyone in sight is a virgin even where the Analogues don't enforce the situation. Anne Silver is twice kept prisoner for long periods, once in a sealed room, again in the confines of a mathematical abstraction. These are symbols of virginity as old as the princess in the tower waiting to be rescued by her White Knight -- on a charger, with a lance, and a sword. Perhaps the sealed room signifies physical frustration. The question is, is knight consciously pointing out the frustrations of our society -- or is he unconsciously revealing his own frustrations? The reviewer cannot psychoanalyze an author, but the

SCIENCE FICTION READING ROOM

BY JIM HARMON

author cannot laugh off such symbolism by saying the book is merely an adventure story. The symbols are real and valid and extant in the work.

Superficially Hell's Pavement is the story of Arthur Bass who, by some strange mutant genes in his makeup that make him "different," is not affected by the Analogue machines. I don't understand these machines. Perhaps they are based on some psychiatric or cybernetic principle I am not aware of. Or perhaps knight is merely saying, Wouldn't it be interesting if there were some gadgets that had the power to cloud men's minds so that they could not do things? In either case, I would like a little background and explanation. There are worse things in a story than George O. Smith's "near blueprint" of the late lamented 1940s. They gave a story (even some bad stories) an air of plausibility and integrity that you can't hardly get no more in contemporary science fiction.

At any rate, these machines give the un-star-begotten an hallucination of full sensual range of an Angel who enforces the morals of a neurotic spinster on Bass' culture. It is hard to see how such a culture could be self-sustaining, i.e., procreative. It is, nevertheless, out of the work of Theodore Sturgeon, complete with dressing sack or privacy funnels as you prefer, even as many of knight's other themes spring from Pohl-Kornbluth and Aldous Huxley.

Sex is a dominant theme in the book, as it seems to be in any book today that is expected to sell. But I thought there was not enough sex involved in the deflloration of Arthur Bass. It is casually mentioned that he is taking a course in Mattress I from a "Mother" Somebody with whom he falls in love briefly. A man's first sexual experience is an important thing in his life, even if it is with a lovable amateur prostitute.

Damon will have to talk a long while before he can convince me that scenes such as the ten-year-old matriarch lifting her skirt and telling Arthur to lie down are anything more than humorous pornography -- which I like in its place, but this book hardly seems the place. True, the sex was more important to the plot (even if inconsistent with the theme) than the sessions with Mother Whoever, but since the novel was something of a biography of Arthur Bass, the casually mentioned episode was more important -- and importantly missing.

Knight has the happy faculty of creating believable characters -- although the importance of this is frequently exaggerated: I've been held more securely by some frankly unbelievable ones. Hell's Pavement has at least one stock figure -- so stock that I can't even remember his name. He is the Old Man, the Ruthless but Lovable Boss. Jack Williamson called him Giles Habibula in his Legion of Space epics, and I called him Commissioner Holtz in a few space operas. Others have called him by different names and knight won't be the last to employ him. He goes back to Sir John Falstaff, of course, and Shakespeare probably drew his likeness from some contemporary whose name an historian could reveal to me.

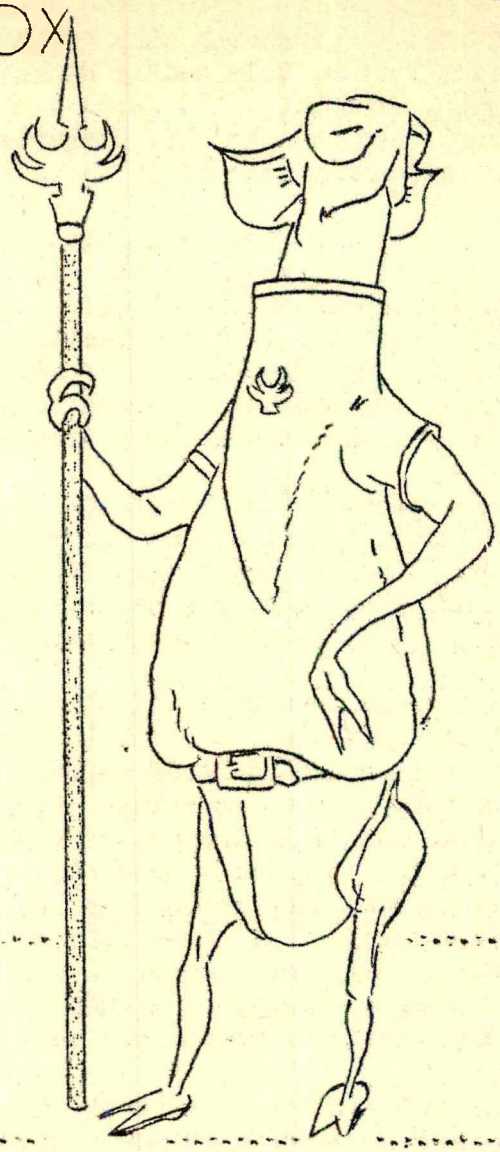
But knight's is a good book. You can find many mistakes in it. This is impossible to do with many science fiction novels: they simply are a mistake. I'm going to buy knight's second novel, and particularly his third.

"'Bully for you!' cried the Very Young Man."

TRIPLE THREAT PARADOX

a review of *THE FROZEN YEAR*

by MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY



EVERY NOW AND THEN a novel comes along that can't be classified. Usually, when that happens, the reviewers call it science fiction and forget about it.

It would be a pity if this happened to James Blish's The Frozen Year. As a matter of fact, the Blish novel comes closer to being genuine science fiction than many of that unclassifiable category. It isn't really too far away from that workable rule-of-thumb definition, not yet superceded, that "science fiction is fiction based on the extrapolation of present day science, which could not exist without the inclusion of said science."

It is not my intention to argue about definitions, but there are those who would quarrel with

PASS IN REVIEW

an attempt to call The Frozen Year science fiction at all. To begin with, it is laid only a year in the future, and the plot, unlikely as it is, runs along no lines which could not be integrated into our present-day framework of science and culture, with no more out-of-the-way episodes than James Ramsey Ullman's The Sands of Karakorum (which The Frozen Year superficially resembles) or one of the adventure novels of Talbot Mundy.

In describing The Frozen Year, then, it is necessary to fall back on negative description, and a cliche at that: it is not just science fiction. This is the first paradox.

Having defined what it is not, it may be somewhat easier to define what it is. And here more paradoxes crop up — but before we get into that, a brief resume of the plot may be helpful. Written in the first person, the story of The Frozen Year is supposedly told by Julian Cole, a writer of the popular-science sort. During the International Geophysical Year, he meets Geoffrey Farnsworth, a notorious scientific dilettante, explorer, and egomaniac, who has gathered together a Polar expedition, sponsored by the IGY to collect soil samples, track the Earth satellite, and so

forth. Farnsworth hires Cole as the expedition's historian, but before the expedition leaves, Cole nearly backs out because (a) Farnsworth appears to be a thoroughgoing crackpot, (b) Jayne Wynn, Farnsworth's wife, is a nympho with an eye for Julian, and (c) the IGY, disgusted with the cheap publicity of Farnsworth's commercial commitments, repeatedly threatens to withdraw their sponsorship.

However, the expedition finally gets onto Polar ice -- and from there on, everything proceeds with gathering misfortune, trouble, and tragedy. Toward the end the gathering storm of difficulties culminates with the discovery that the expedition contains either a maniac or a Martian, who is willing to go to any lengths to prevent the dredging up of meteorites supposedly fallen from a "protoplanet" which exploded into the asteroid belt. This episode, of course, gives a handy excuse for calling the book science fiction.

On the outer level, the book is just that: a vaguely scientific adventure story of great appeal to the noncritical addict of this variety of escape literature. On this level it is an unqualified success. Better written than most novels of this kind, it is cleverly contrived, plausible, and reads quite slickly. Most reviewers would dismiss it right there, with praise, as being very good of its kind.

On a deeper level, the book has some significant things to say about the world in general and Jim Blish in particular -- or Julian Cole: it hardly matters much. In this sense the book suffers from the vast defect of being written in the first person. In an adventure story, this method is usually a virtue; it adds an extra dimension of imminence and reality to the narrative, an I-was-there sense to the reading. But for a book that contains so many satirical, critical, or social observations as The Frozen Year, this particular device leads inexorably to an unpalatable conclusion: that Julian Cole's articulate and opinionated viewpoint (and Julian has a viewpoint on every subject under the sun, whether relevant to the book or not) is only a disguise, "if not under the rose, at least duly under the roseleaf," for the personal observations and opinions of J. Blish, esquire.

In places, these small side-issues are apt and germane, almost touching universality. In one passage, for instance, where Julian describes why he loves his wife Midge, he makes some very revealing remarks about women in general, remarks which will touch a response in almost every man, and every woman who wants to understand men:

> ....it springs from the fact that Midge never looks the same to me two days running.... This mutability, I am convinced, is something that only a happily married man ever sees. Under other circumstances, women don't differ much from your first impression of them. When I was a little boy just becoming aware of my sex, I used to wonder why little girls didn't stand looking at themselves in a mirror all day long, enjoying how different they were. I knew why I didn't; after all, I was no mystery to myself.

However, this ability to make skilful observations adeptly phrased often deteriorates into an objectionable cleverness, of which about the most glaring example is this: "....I groped for a chair, caromed off the piano with a noise like a Reader's Digest condensation of a Roger Sessions symphony...."

Now, this is a clever way of saying simply, "a dissonant noise." It is almost too clever, approaching the stage of being contrived and insincere, and on top of all that, it is a ludicrous and inept comparison, since not by any stretch of the

imagination could a magazine, set in type, condense even an experimentalist piece of modern music. This distorted simile, then, leaves one with the unpleasant persistent suspicion that Mr Blish is extremely obsessed with (or very satisfied with) his own superior cultural level, and just can't resist sneaking in a few little allusions to indicate that he is really a member of the Intelligentsia. An alternate theory, of course, is that such obscurities are so deeply ingrained in the Blish personality (or that he wishes us to believe they are so ingrained) that they will sneak out of his subconscious at the drop of a paragraph.

This intensely personal viewpoint -- which at times comes right out of any pretense at fictional narrative and points a vicious finger at some real or fancied imperfection of present-day social structure -- has, occasionally, the vitriolic acerbity of Cyril M. Kornbluth's Takeoff or Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451. When he starts assailing the public intelligence with his bludgeon, he barely escapes the writing of a propaganda leaflet.

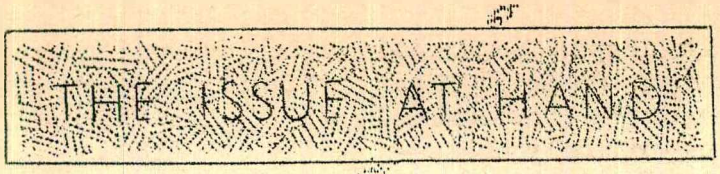
At times Blish's invective achieves a meaningful point; at other times it degenerates into mere carping against anything and everything of which Blish disapproves -- tranquilizers and bioflavenoids-for-colds, for instance -- which carping, justified as it may be, attracts an undue amount of unpleasant attention because of its utter irrelevance to the structure of the story. Blish reserves a special inexhaustible vat of vitriol for those who watch with interest any scientific venture of questionable character -- a distinction he makes extremely arbitrary, including just about everything not included in the syllabus of the "approved" consensus of present scientific thought -- and, it seems to me, he dumps the science fiction fan in after them. He makes one salient point: what would happen if a truly worthwhile scientific discovery was made by a notorious crackpot? But most of the time he simply bats hell out of the interested and not-too-well-educated layman who may fail to distinguish between the one "right" opinion of science and the unapproved research of anyone else.

If Ray Bradbury can be accused of writing anti-science fiction at times, it is probably true to say that James Blish was writing, during most of The Frozen Year, a form of anti-science-fiction fiction. This is the second paradox.

Most science fiction can be evaluated only on its entertainment value, the writing judged only on its readability, with the intent and personal philosophy of the writer rarely taken into account. By and large, this omission in criticism is a good thing, because (always excepting Bradbury, Sturgeon, and one or two notable others) there is usually a great lack of intent or of any personal philosophy in science fiction. The Frozen Year probes a little deeper than most, and it achieves some value as a personal document.

But still another level exists on which to read and criticize The Frozen Year: as a novel. Evaluated as a piece of creative literature the book seems to me a qualified failure. It is a good story, but not a good novel. Part of the fault may

(Concluded on page 25)



BY WILLIAM ATHELING JR.

THE EDITOR OF THIS JOURNAL has asked me to tell him why he doesn't like the stories of Everett Cole. I presume that he already knows, and is just Testing Me. This worries me, since I don't know what he plans to do if I fail. Luckily, the question is not hard to answer, and we can use "Millennium" in the May 1955 ASF as a typical example. The story, though it is well written in many respects, shares the basic defects of Cole's entire "Philosophical Corps" series as fiction, plus a number of minor ones.

First of all, there is the matter of suspense. Not every story is required to have this quality, but stories with utterly predictable endings must score so high in other departments to be satisfying that they almost never come off in magazine fiction. Cole's work does not go deep enough to overcome the fact that his basic situation is -- and by its nature has to be -- devoid of suspense. In each of his stories, as in this one, the main part of the plot is played out against a comparatively primitive culture. Nevertheless, the plot is almost always resolved by one of the observers (or "Philosophers") from the paternal interstellar culture -- that is, by a god in a car. Since the reader can be in no doubt about this outcome from the beginning, waiting for the deus ex machina to arrive invariably becomes a little tedious. The longer the story, the greater the tedium, since there is seldom any reason why the Philosopher-god could not have short-circuited matters at once, and when there are such reasons, they are usually contrived.

Also as in "Millennium," the plot solution is almost invariably unsatisfying because Cole seldom allows us to feel that the Philosopher-god's share of the story's problem is anything but technical or academic. The people with whom we feel any human involvement are usually in the more primitive culture, and those people are not allowed to work out their own destinies.

It is a frustrating sort of situation for any writer to work with, and I am surprised that Cole -- obviously a man who likes writing -- should have remained patient with it so long. As he has set it up, there is really only one good story to be told, that being the one in which the central problem belongs to the Philosopher-god cut off from his high culture on a backward planet, and faced with the problem of getting back in contact. Cole has told that story -- even though he did not make the problem seem very urgent -- and the result was the only Philosophical Corps story likely to be remembered by most readers.

I think that H. Beam Piper's Paratime stories suffer from the same essentially anti-fictional situation. When the problems are all of a far lower level of ingenuity than the techniques available to solve them, their solution doesn't seem to involve enough difficulty to be worth the work of chronicling it: they are, in short, only technological, like the work of a well-equipped police laboratory on a rather routine crime.

To return to Cole, it seems evident that he has tried to give his Philosophical Corps stories some overall shape, by setting up the various aspects of the problems of culture-control that the Corps might be likely to encounter. This is probably a noble endeavor, but I would be happier with it if I could feel that Cole had really faced it and seen it whole, as a problem in the writing of fiction, rather than as a problem in exhausting the subject.

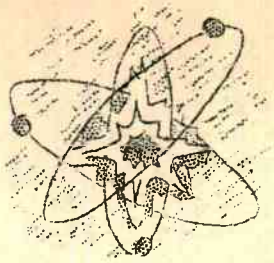
The essence of his failure in this department is that the stories do not fall in any natural order; while we are given our looks at various facets of the subject, there is no visible reason why we should have seen them in this particular succession, nor any other succession we might like to suggest instead. Neither the problem nor the people working with it undergo any growth or change, and in the long run nobody is going to care -- thus wasting the considerable amount of thought which Cole has put into baser aspects of the series. To pick up two useful terms used by James Blish in Skyhook some years ago [Skyhook #15], Cole is here writing a template series, but I think his intention was to write an evolutionary one. He has simply failed to recognize that it is the fiction that must evolve in such an enterprise, not the background. Had he been writing a "mundane" series of stories, he would have recognized at once the foolishness of changing little but his setting; but in science fiction the temptation to feel that the job is done when the background is well-imagined (as it usually is in Cole's work) is both greater and harder to recognize for what it is.

PASS IN REVIEW (concluded from page 23)

be structural. On the other hand, it may be the fault of the blurb on the cover of the paperback edition, which caused me to read with the preconceived notion that the main conflict in the story would arise, not between Julian Cole and his environment, but between Julian Cole and Jayne Wynn. Admittedly the paperback edition must angle, none too subtly, for the audience which will not buy a book unless it promises a little bedsport. Nevertheless, the lines of this conflict are actually drawn in the early pages of the story, and in spite of several erotic episodes, the conflict simply fails to materialize. She makes a play for him; he refuses; they wind up in bed together not once but twice; and yet, in the end, the feeling between them rambles off into an indefinite and entirely unorganic anticlimax.

The book tends to ramble in other respects. Characters are introduced, then forgotten; people simply wander in and out of the story. Now this, of course, happens all the time in real life. It's realistic. The person you think will change your life, because of his astonishing impact on your surroundings, may settle down and grow roses next door and never achieve any real significance in your life after all, or, instead of continuing to play a part in your world, may pull up stakes, go off to another state and never be heard of again. But the conventions of the novel have removed these dangling participants by laying down the precept that every character who is introduced should be vitally integrated into the structure of the plot. And so, while the rambling and desultory character of the book adds to the feel of a "documentary," the same structural looseness detracts from the artistry of the polished product.

And this is the third paradox. The Frozen Year is more than "just science fiction" -- but it falls far short of being much more. Oddly enough, though James Blish has written other books and countless magazine stories, it reads almost like a first novel. If it were, it could be considered "promising." Thus The Frozen Year is a sort of novel of which science fiction has all too few: the significant failure. Most science fiction by competent writers is a professional package of a mediocre product, which has given all of its limited possibilities. The Frozen Year is a curiously imperfect and therefore promising package of a very good one.

THE CAPTURED  CROSS-SECTION

PHIL FARMER

Redd, your last issue was wonderful, superb. I thought the cover clever, your remarks on the Oz books pertinent and amusing, the "Fiction Fantasy" hilarious (especially the Winter and Willis books), and your criticism of Steinbeck's grievance against literates, alas, only too true. That is the main reason that I can't bring myself to read him any more, though I may really be missing something, there being other wonderful things in his books. But I can't stand his sentimentalizing about whores and bums, any more than I could James Jones' sentimentalizing about whores in From Here to Eternity. Not that whores and bums aren't human, and some have great potentialities, and all are worth rehabilitating. It's the grossly unrealistic attitude towards them in novels that are supposed to be realistic that I can't endure. Actually, the majority of whores are frigid, which means they are sexually neurotic, anesthetized, as much to be pitied and avoided as a goodly percentage of so-called respectable housewives and spinsters, unstable, rationalizing, rigid in their behavior, overly codified, afflicted with shame, etc. Hell, I'd better stop, or I'll be launching into a lecture again! # Robert Lowndes' article was excellent, mainly because he knows what he's talking about. All of us may read it with profit, writers, editors, and readers alike. His statement that encouragement for would-be writers from fans is a very delusory thing at best is true. Only a few fans have the perceptiveness to know what they're talking about, yet those few are very good. Problem: find a good critic. Actually, it's no problem. The genuine artist strives only to please himself. If he happens to please many others, too, so much the better, for him and them. This is a non-professional attitude, but the true artist is non-professional, as he is non-most-other-things. This does not keep him from being interested in money or in appreciation from others. But basically his attitude is go-to-hell. # It is too bad that after such a superb job you should have slipped up on proofreading my poem "Black Squirrel on Cottonwood Limb's Tip." The error would not have mattered much in prose, but in poetry it meant a great deal. In the final stanza, first line, "we two" is printed "we too." It can't be helped, and I suppose it doesn't matter too much, as it is an unfortunate fact that almost nobody will puzzle over the meaning of the printed phrase but will proceed blithely on -- if indeed he has bothered to read it. Anyway, I'm not mad. I was upset for ten minutes, then laughed, and let it go. Which is why, probably, I shall never be a true poet. (New York)

JAMES BLISH

Lowndes' article has a good deal to say that's pertinent, but I wonder just how much of it could have been unknown to most of your readers before. The types of critics he lists are known to most people, I should imagine, and didn't need such lengthy defining. What first struck me about Asimov's remark in Skhk #21 /which Lowndes quoted/ was that almost any critic is "small beer" compared to the editor who might or might not buy the story; most of us would not count the editors as critics at all for precisely this reason. They intervene during the composition of a work (and how often we wish that they wouldn't, sometimes with good reason!) and influence its final form. No

critic can do that, the critic being more usually thought of as the man who passes judgment on the final form, as printed. # I suppose Lowndes' first category, the professional sales critic, includes editors, as well as agents -- it is the only important one, in any event, which admits people who operate on the manuscript rather than the printed version. # The real meat of Isaac's comment seemed to me paraphrasable this way: "Since I have to deal with people who criticize my work-in-progress, any remarks that are made about the finished work must be small beer, because no critic of the finished work can so drastically affect my income." I note that Isaac specifically contradicts this in his letter in the current Skhk -- that is, he wishes damon knight would criticize one of his finished works at length and says he would profit by the instruction. In other words, faced with a critic whose work he likes (and who can influence his income on a given work only slightly more than William Atheling Jr -- that is, hardly at all as opposed to not at all), Isaac's more general dismissal of critics-of-finished work gets scrapped. # Of course Isaac's "out-of-context snippet" doesn't really deserve so microscopic a dissection anyhow. It wasn't really a statement of principle at all -- that was just its formal content -- but a ploy. Its sole intent, I would guess, was to wound, since Isaac wrote it in reaction to a personal attack by Atheling. # Farmer's article: Science fiction stories are seldom parables as far as I can see. There are a few deliberate exceptions, mostly in Bradbury's work, but for the most part sf deals with its ethical problems by more usual, and less obvious, fictional devices. Farmer's notion that all sf writers who do not create "models" of "new social institutions" are hacks -- is nobody in the audience old enough to remember Michelism? -- seems to me to break down almost instantly in the face of two facts: (a) Most well-known sf writers, in the course of their writing careers, have created many such "models" no one of which could survive side by side with the others, even inside the canon of a single author's work; (b) Some well-known sf writers have founded careers on re-creating old social institutions, Heinlein being the prime example. The society of "The Man Who Sold the Moon" is a society based on Heinlein's intimate knowledge of late nineteenth century economic royalism. Heinlein's assumption that such a period may come around again is a legitimate one to make for a story (though I don't think it's a very likely one), but Farmer's definition would make the yarn either a piece of hackwork or a piece of historical fiction with all the names changed. (New York)

ROBERT BLOCH

Looking over your list of contributors for Skyhook #23 I can only marvel. Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Lionel Trilling, Jim Harmon, Henry David Thoreau -- plus some of the best and most stimulating criticism I've yet read. I don't know how you do it, but I'm glad you do. # I was much impressed by the categorizations of criticism in Lowndes' "And How Much An Opinion?": called it to the attention of Vernon McCain, with whom I've been discussing sf criticism. # It occurs to me that writers are generally looked down upon as being "unduly sensitive" to adverse criticism. At least, this seems to be the reaction on the part of the "tough-minded." But I'm afraid the "tough-minded" are just people who have never had to undergo the same experience themselves to any great extent. I wonder how the average man or woman would react to the necessity of performing their daily tasks under constant critical scrutiny. On second thought, there is no need to wonder: I've seen the reactions: the "tough-minded" who go into a sulk if the boss bawls them out once or twice a month, or if hubby doesn't enjoy his meal, or if somebody snickers over their choice of clothing. Even if the boss was right, or the meal was poor, or the clothing-choice was atrocious, the reaction is generally strong and frequently profane. # Yet a writer must live -- and make a living -- in a constant atmosphere of criticism. And it doesn't necessarily emanate from his "boss" or his intimates or even acquaintances, but frequently comes

from strangers totally unfamiliar with the very nature of his work. # It often amuses me to note just how serious and vituperative are the charges levelled at performance in the innocuous field of "art" or "entertainment" -- how apt critics are to suspect "motive" or "purpose" and how quick they are to condemn the "shallow" or the "artificial" or the "commonplace" or the "mercenary" effort. It amuses me because one can so easily contrast these blasts of righteous indignation with the calm acceptance of shallowness, artificiality, commonplace, and mercenary effort in the so-called "important" endeavors. And I find it rather odd that writers, musicians, painters, sculptors, actors, and entertainers are expected to hold still for intemperate critical outbrays on the part of individuals who themselves won't hold still a moment if their handiwork be questioned even remotely. # Let a so-called social critic like Philip Wylie come along and level a blast at a Business Man or a Scientist or a Divine or a Professional Man, and listen to the injured outcries. Let somebody "attack" the NAM and you'll hear a roar of protest which can be drowned out only by the equally loud howls which pour from the throats of the AFL if similarly criticized. And nobody thinks it odd. "But" -- protest these "tough-minded" individuals --"that's entirely different. When we're criticized, it threatens our livelihoods." As if similar criticism didn't affect the livelihoods of so-called creative individuals! # No, while I recognize the need for criticism and in many cases admire the work of critics, I must at the same time plead a case for the sensitive recipient of such criticism. His reaction usually is quite mild compared to that of a person whose political or economic or social activity is criticized in other forms of endeavor. And he has no lobby, pressure group, or organized propaganda medium with which to fight back or defend himself. The only artist who got a break in this way was Margaret Truman, when Little Old Harry sat down and wrote That Letter to the Nasty Reviewer. # So put me down as being both in favor of criticism as Lowndes would have it, and in favor of spirited defense a la Asimov-Moskowitz-Derleth. Besides, it makes for interesting reading. (Wisconsin)

DAMON KNIGHT

Farmer and Howller (who he?) irritate me about equally. Farmer's essay reads as if he'd written it in a hurry on a sentimental beer drunk; the soupy language and thinking get in the way of the true and beautiful things he was trying to say. Howller, after contributing his mite of confusion to the what-is-science-fiction controversy, winds up with the year's least helpful suggestion -- that everybody who's any good in the field should get out of it. # Atheling reminds me again that I don't always read as much of F&SF before it gets buried as I think I do. Will have to dig that issue up and recoup. I liked "The Darfstellar" too -- Walter M. Miller being one of the half-dozen unprostituted talents we have left -- and it really seems to me that in his hands this theme is something altogether different from the displaced-craftsman cliche I complained of. There's nothing wrong with historical parallels, I hope; they're what we all build on -- it's when the parallel turns up effectively unchanged (as in Bat Durston) that I object, and certainly that isn't the case here. # Lowndes very good and compact -- he used to be able to go on indefinitely in muffled Teutonic paragraphs -- but that Asimov quote is all to hell out of context, and probably Isaac will get the blame. (Pennsylvania)

ANTHONY BOUCHER

My copy of Skyhook #23 lacks two sheets (pp 21/22 and 25/26), so I'm not sure whom I'm about to argue with, the byline being on a missing sheet. But I guess it's Atheling as usual. # Prime motto for authors and editors: Never argue with a reviewer unless to dispute a factual statement. # Your reviewer decries "the incestuous science fiction story -- that is, a yarn which depends for its effect on overt cross references to science fiction itself," and adds, "Anthony Boucher is addicted to this kind of story -- as

a matter of fact he has written several." So far as I can trace (and I'll readily admit a writer is always weak on his own bibliography) I've written exactly one sf-story-about-sf, "Transfer Point" — which was not published by me but by Horace Gold (and reprinted by Ken Crossen and Fred Pohl). In nigh on six years of F&SF (50 issues, somewhere between 500 and 600 stories) I've published, at the most generous estimate, eight such stories. This on a fast survey -- all right, so maybe it might be as many as ten. # The reason that I trouble to correct this sweeping statement is that I strongly dislike "the incestuous sf story" and agree that "it is dangerous to the field both artistically and financially....In short, a form of fandom." (The equation of danger and fandom is your reviewer's, not mine.) But an incestuous story is one which the reader cannot enjoy without an intimate and intensive acquaintance with the field (and I have reluctantly turned down some wonderfully funny stories of this type.) There's a marked difference between such private jokes and a story which demands no more knowledge than the mere awareness that the field exists. # The novel about a novelist, the play about the theater, the poem about the writing of poetry -- these are all common enough, and each form has produced masterpieces. Films about Hollywood are not infrequent (nor unsuccessful), and I can even think of two operas about the composition of operas. There's nothing wrong with an occasional non-incestuous sf-story-about-sf; but even so, I think the facts show something less than addiction on my part. # To another subject: I query both Derleth's nomination of Worlds Beyond and knight's of Galaxy as the proportionately most anthologized magazine. No, I am not going to nominate F&SF, though we easily hold our own with anything contemporary (excluding, as one should, both F&SF's and GSF's copious self-anthologization). But has anyone paralleled the record of ASF's Golden Age in the early 1940s, when whole issues consisted of nothing but Permanent Classics? # Enough carping. (I know better than to attempt any exegesis on the Gospel According to Samuel of how Editor's Choice in Science Fiction came into being.) As you can gather, Skyhook is one fanzine which I read detailedly and with great interest. Keep 'em coming! (2643 Dana street, Berkeley 4, California)

Yes, you were arguing with William Atheling Jr, who will be pleased to know that I sent you another copy of Skhk #23, with his column complete.

ROBERT LOWNDES The evasive, elusive, and irregular Skyhook is even more welcome when it finally arrives; I managed to shove everything aside to get right to reading it, but writing letters is something else -- although this one is being done in record time for me. # The Phil Farmer-Tim Howller controversy was most interesting, but Howller has stated my general opinion so well in his side of it that there's no need to comment. And while I am not unwilling to be converted by the Farmer approach, I must report that this particular article did not convince me of anything except the apparent intensity of the author's viewpoint. Better luck next time! # Damon Knight and Sam Moskowitz have one fault in common: they're both inclined to be so carried away by a sense of rightness about their own position that they sometimes flaw an essentially sound -- or at least well-thought-out and reasoned -- analysis with foolish statements, the folly of which is pretty apparent. This does not necessarily invalidate the main thesis, but it does give an opponent something which he can very easily latch onto, expand to disproportionate extent, and then dismiss the whole critique on the falsus in unum, falsus in omnes proposition. # This is a very handy, and often effective manner of drawing attention away from a critic's main points. Consider: even assuming that Damon Knight was mistaken in his denial that Binder's "I, Robot" started a trend, and allowing that his use of stories other than "Helen O'Loy" to prove the Binder story was not the first of its kind might not have been as scrupulous as it should have been; and granting further — for the sake of argument -- that Knight remembered (as I did not) that "I, Robot" actually appeared on the newsstands a

short time before "Helen O'Loy" -- even assuming all this does not constitute a refutation to Knight's contention that "I, Robot" was not a story worth perpetuating in an anthology with pretensions to high quality. Nor does it refute his statements that most of the stories in Editor's Choice in Science Fiction either exclude data known to science or are based upon data excluded by science, and are thus dubious, at best, as representative examples of science fiction. (Moskowitz did his best to give the reader fair warning in his introduction, but this does not make the title of the volume any less misleading.) # Sam's reply to the minor issue of whether "I, Robot" was the first story of its kind and whether it can be said to have started a trend was marred by the flat assertion of dishonesty on the critic's part. If Knight used "Helen O'Loy" dishonestly, then that means he knew at the time he wrote the review that "Helen O'Loy" appeared later than "I, Robot" but made it appear the other way around with the intent to deceive. (Has Sam any proof of this? If not, then his statement is one which weakens his reply.) # The persecuted tone of such replies to criticism also does not assist in convincing readers that the critic is wrong. # Jim Harmon has a point, I think, in the value of a critic's being able to judge a book in relation to its intentions, as well as by higher or more "absolute" standards. (By the latter, I'd judge that 99 per cent of what most of us read is more or less worthless.) With respect to changing opinions, though, one should look to see whether the later opinion represents a more seasoned -- or at least what the writer considers a more seasoned -- judgment, or whether it is just a case of not caring about consistency. Most of us like to imagine that we're somewhat wiser than we were a few years back, and many of us cannot agree with ourselves in such case where we wrote at length and with conviction then. Was it Mark Twain who remarked once that he said whatever he was saying now with the reservation that he could contradict any and all of it tomorrow? # However, I do wish that Moskowitz would get over the feeling that every time anyone criticizes him, or takes exception to some work he's done, that they have it in for him. Now. Sure, Damon and I, for example, were enthusiastic opponents of Moskowitz -- almost in toto -- years ago, as The Immortal Storm truly attests; but I doubt if I'd agree with everything I said then, now. In fact, I know quite well that my viewpoint has been reversed and otherwise altered on so many subjects of which I was so positive then, that I gulp at the very thought of picking up real old fan magazines. (I did, a few years back, and was appalled at how prolific Lowndes was back then -- and how silly. Now, of course, my folly is on a much higher plane...?) (New York)

RICHARD H. ENEY Some rather delicate ciminisection is involved in Tim Howller's denial of fantasy status to certain events in Moby Dick, etc. "Exaggerations of what do occur in life," indeed! What else is fantasy, where you will rarely find a theme not thus explainable; what else, indeed, is fiction? To point out that the fantasy aspects of such works admit of rational explanation is not to explain away a natural question but to raise one: Why was the fantasy rather than the rational, mundane presentation employed? Assuming the author's ability to work in either field, the consideration which determines whether a story (or an episode) should convey its meaning in mainstream or stfnal form is surely which form is best adapted to the communication involved. And fantasy's value here is not in an ability to hop over barriers which defy direct mundane matter; it is, rather, its ability to strike directly to the points mundane writing must outline in an arabesque of symbolism. Loading a story with symbolism may be an achievement (especially if the symbolism is well enough hidden for the tale to be readable), but why bother when you can simply point to what you're indicating? (417 Fort Hunt road, Alexandria, Virginia)

A preposition is a word nobody can end a sentence with.

"Yes. I remember Adlestrop --
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.
The steam hissed. Some one cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop -- only the name
And willow, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
Not whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.
And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloustershire."

-- Edward Thomas,
"Adlestrop"

"Of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best -- I'm sure it is the most religious -- for I begin with writing the first sentence -- and trusting to Almighty God for the second."

-- Laurence Sterne,
Tristram Shandy

"It is easy to forget that the man who writes a good love sonnet needs not only to be enamoured of a woman, but also to be enamoured of the Sonnet."

-- C. S. Lewis,
A Preface to Paradise Lost

"It was Christian Gauss's great advantage over the school of Babbitt and More that he understood the artist's morality as something that expressed itself in different terms than the churchgoer's or the citizen's morality; the fidelity to a kind of truth that is rendered by the discipline of aesthetic form, as distinct from that of the professional morality: the explicit communication of a 'message.' How fundamental to his point of view, how much a thing to be taken for granted, this attitude had become was shown clearly in a conversation I had with him, on some occasion when I had come back after college, when, in reply to some antinomian attitude of mine, or one that he imputed to me, he said, 'But you were saying just now that you would have to rewrite something before it could be published. That implies a moral obligation.'"

-- Edmund Wilson,
"Christian Gauss"

"JOHNSON. 'My dear friend, clear your mind of cant. You may talk as other people do: You may say to a man, "Sir, I am your most humble servant." You are not his most humble servant. You may say, "These are bad times; it is a melancholy thing to be reserved to such times." You don't mind the times. You tell a man, "I am sorry you had such bad weather the last day of your journey, and were so much wet." You don't care six-pence whether he is wet or dry. You may talk in this manner; it is a mode of talking in Society: but don't think foolishly.'"

-- James Boswell,
Life of Johnson