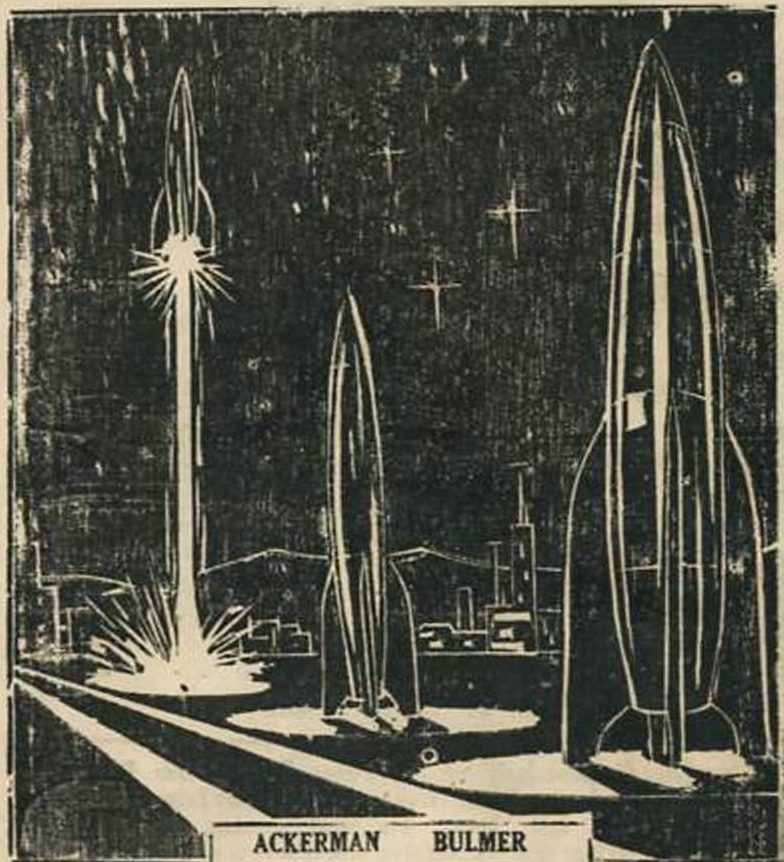


SPRING, 1950

SLANT

NO 3



ACKERMAN
EVANS

BULMER
WALKER

NO.
3



SPRING
1950

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WOODCUTS BY JAMES WHITE

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STRICTLY LOGICAL

CEDRIC WALKER

She thought: two men . . . of the same colour, probably of the same race, roughly of the same age . . . and yet how could the contrast between them be intensified? The rebels' emissary was blond, virile and handsome, like a story-book gallant. He paced the floor as he spoke, as if his boundless energies would not permit him to rest, and gesticulated grandly. Any girl would have been proud to have him glance at her a second time . . . Beside him the slim dark man at the desk seemed lifeless and impotent.

Any girl, perhaps . . . but after the first calm appraisal she paid the emissary scant attention. The only urge she felt was to go to the dark man and smooth the wrinkles from his poor, tired brow. To stroke his hair and whisper soothingly in his ear. But she did none of these things. Instead she tended to the machine that photographed and recorded the scene, watchful that not even the murmur of an indrawn breath was lost.

The blond man was nearing the end of his tirade, as, apparently, the Prof was of his patience. For he spoke suddenly, cutting the other short in mid-sentence. And in his voice was an inkling of the power that had brought him to the position of World Controller.

'I have listened to you, as I would listen to an erring dog if it could speak, and now I ask you what it is that your leader . . . Zebedee . . . desires. What are his demands?'

The girl looked up quickly. She thought amazedly: what's wrong with him? She'd never known him in quite this mood before. Just, yes. But ruthless in opposing and stamping out any real danger to his regime, any menace that might nibble at the tiniest strut of the mighty edifice he had created and maintained for long years. His mildness irritated her, and she was only partly consoled by the rising impatience in his voice, the motive for which she could not settle in her mind.

'Zebedee, in the name of the Zeds,' he held himself proudly as he spoke, and his eyes were shining. Mad, thought the girl, quite mad. 'Zebedee demands nothing less than that the whole of the Americas be placed at his disposal, that the Zeds may dwell there and expand and bring to fruition their glorious destiny.'

[continued on page 14]

ATOMIC ERROR

BY FORREST J. ACKERMAN

He woke up screaming. He felt scalded all over. So this was what radiation burns from an atomic bomb felt like!

He had feared this night since 1945, this night when a rebomb would rocket over the North Pole at supersonic speed. This night when an unknown assassin would massacre America abed. That atomic conflagration would transform the metropolises of the United States into skyscraping mushrooms, tortured molecules resembling poison toadstools.

He had hoped only that obliteration would come instantaneously and painlessly, that he would be volatilized in his dreams, either to awake in the Hereafter, where there theoretically were no A-bombs, or . . . never to awake.

But there was always the unfaceable possibility that he would be caught on the fringe of the fusion, then God knew what death would be like. Not a ripping asunder too rapid for the senses to record, but a lingering largo of death: a peeling away of the dermatic tissues in leprous patches; a brain fried in its skull, shriveled and convulsed like blind worms writhing in a fiery skillet; eyes, liquefying and spilling out of their sockets like sap from a tree.

The man knew himself: not a coward, but a cerebrotonic, super-sensitive to the thought of pain. A thousand times he had suffered premature agony, envisioning his life ending in an atomic cauldron of radiation, his body burning in waves of invisible flame. He couldn't take a torture like that. That was why he protected himself with an automatic. He always slept with it under his pillow. He sought it now.

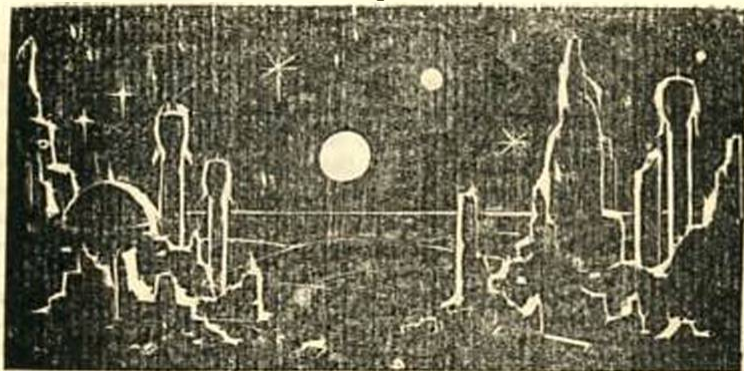
Pray God the heat had not warped it, melted the barrel or exploded the cartridges!

In the darkness he groped. He couldn't see. He couldn't hear a sound. He was conscious only of the prickling sensation needling his body.

His fingers found the gun. It was hot. In terror mixed with relief he jerked it to his temple, and in a moment it was hotter.

'Now what could have made him do that?' the fire chief puzzled. 'He wasn't in any danger. The steam didn't even really scald him to amount to anything. He looked a little dazed . . . anybody'd be shocked, sure, to have a boiler blow up underneath 'em in the middle of the night . . . but I called to him. 'You're okay, Mister,' just a second before he fished under his pillow for the pistol.'

'Poor Mr. Vance.' The apartment manager shook his head regretfully. 'Our unfortunate tenant was born deaf, and on top of that lost his sight about two years ago.'



THE SWORDSMEN OF VARNIS

BY GEOFFREY COBBE

The twin moons brooded over the red deserts of Mars and the ruined city of Khua-Loanis. The night wind sighed around the fragile spires and whispered at the fretted lattice windows of the empty temples, and the red dust made it like a city of copper.

It was close to midnight when the distant rumble of racing hooves reached the city, and soon the riders thundered in under the ancient gateway. Tharn, Warrior Lord of Loanis, leading his pursuers by a scant twenty yards, realised wearily that his lead was shortening, and raked the scaly flanks of his six-legged vorkl with cruel spurs. The faithful beast gave a low cry of despair as it tried to obey and failed.

In front of Tharn in the big double saddle sat Lehai-tal-Loanis, Royal Lady of Mars, riding the ungainly animal with easy grace, leaning forward along its arching neck to murmur swift words of encouragement into its flattened ears. Then she lay back against Tharn's mailed chest and turned her lovely face up to his, flushed and vivid with the excitement of the chase, amber eyes aflame with love for her strange hero from beyond time and space.

'We shall win this race yet, my 'Tharn,' she cried. 'Yonder through that archway lies the Temple of the Living Vapour, and once there we can defy all the hordes of Varnis!' Looking down at the unearthly beauty of her, at the subtle curve of throat and breast and thigh, revealed as the wind tore at her scanty garments, Tharn knew that even if the Swordsmen of Varnis struck him down, his strange odyssey would not have been in vain.

But the girl had judged the distance correctly and Tharn brought their snorting vorkl to a sliding, rearing halt at the great doors of the Temple, just as the Swordsmen reached the outer archway and jammed there in a struggling, cursing mass. In seconds they had sorted themselves out and came streaming across the courtyard, but the delay had given Tharn time to dismount and take his stand in one of the great doorways. He knew that if he could hold it for a few moments while Lehn-i-tal-Loanis got the door open, then the secret of the Living Vapour would be theirs, and with it mastery of all the lands of Loanis.

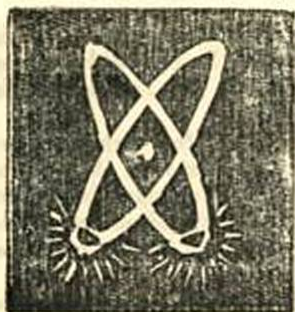
The Swordsmen tried first to ride him down, but the doorway was so narrow and deep that Tharn had only to drive his swordpoint upwards into the first vorkl's throat and leap backwards as the dying beast fell. Its rider was stunned by the fall, and Tharn boarded up onto the dead animal and bearded the unfortunate Swordsman without compunction. There were ten of his enemies left and they came at him now on foot, but the confining doorway prevented them from attacking more than four abreast, and Tharn's elevated position upon the huge carcass gave him the advantage he needed. The fire of battle was in his veins now, and he bared his teeth and laughed in their faces, and his reddened sword wave a pattern of cold death which none could pass.

Lehn-i-tal-Loanis, running quick cool fingers over the pitted bronze of the door, found the radiation lock and pressed her glowing opalescent thumb-ring into the socket, gave a little sob of relief as she heard hidden tumblers falling. With agonizing slowness the ancient mechanism began to open the door: soon Tharn heard the girl's clear voice call above the clashing steel, 'Inside, my Tharn, the secret of the Living Vapour is ours!'

But Tharn, with four of his foes dead now, and seven to go, could not retreat from his position on top of the dead vorkl without grave risk of being cut down, and Lehn-i-tal-Loanis, quickly realising this, sprang up beside him, drawing her own slim blade and crying, 'Aie, my love! I will be your left arm!'

Now the cold band of defeat gripped the hearts of the Swordsmen of Varnis: two, three, four more of them mingled their blood with the red dust of the courtyard as Tharn and his fighting princess swung their merciless blades in perfect unison. It seemed that nothing could prevent them now from winning the mysterious secret of the Living Vapour, but they reckoned without the treachery of one of the remaining Swordsmen. Leaping backwards out of the conflict he flung his sword on the ground in disgust. 'Aw, the Hell with it!' he grunted, and unclipping a proton gun from his belt he blasted Lehn-i-tal-Loanis and her Warrior Lord out of existence with a searing energy-beam.

(to be discontinued)



REVENGE

BY

E. EVERETT EVANS

Bill sits there while the minutes drag and drag as he waits for High Noon. And Bill's hate crows around in his guts like a termite in a tasty mahogany floor-beam. And his mind re-hashes things he wants to forget.

How Francie says, no, Bill, I can't marry you, she says. I like you like a brother, she smiles to take away the sting, but you know I'm so much in love with Tim I can't even think about another man, she says.

But she hopes he'll forget his silly infatuation, as she calls it, so they can keep on being good friends. You know how much Tim thinks of you, she says, and how it would spoil his happiness if anything happens.

Sure, he tells himself, sick-like. Forget beautiful Francie with the laughing eyes, the red-gold hair. Forget her wonderful body, her kiss-demanding lips. Be a good sport and stick around us, like she said. Forget heaven and live in hell, she might as well have added. Be the pal of the lucky stiff who's won me away from you. See me with him every day, but never want me, never touch me. Just see Tim doing that, and act as though you enjoy watching him.

So outwardly Bill smiles and says, sure, I'll rally 'round, and I hope you'll be very happy as long as you live, he says. And he grins and says, I must have been nuts to think you could ever fall for a mere atomic physicist when you can snag a millionaire. And then he says, Tim always said when he got married I was to be his best man, so now's the time, he says.

And she smiles and says, that's the spirit, and she is very happy about it all. And he says, well then, let me do something nice for you both, let me give you the double rings. And she says isn't the groom supposed to do that, and he says, oh maybe, but this is a special case isn't it, and I wish you'd let me. And after a little while she says, yes, and of course Tim, the dope, always agrees with anything Francie thinks is O.K.

And Bill says, well, how about one little kiss just for luck or remembrance, and she backs away as though the suggestion is improper and says, oh no, I couldn't, it wouldn't be fair to dear Tim. And when Tim hears of this he says, Bill, I wouldn't have thought it of you, and Bill says, well, hell, I'm losing her so I ought to have something.

So Bill goes back to his laboratory and only comes up for air on the wedding morning. Then he sends a messenger to Francie with the ring she's to give Tim, and he takes Tim the ring he's to give Francie. And he and Tim start getting dressed up.

My gosh I'm sick, Bill says all of a sudden just before they're to leave for the church, and he doubles up on the bed. And Tim says, oh, you'll be all right, come on, and Bill says, I can't, Tim, I'm all cramped. You'll have to get someone else, he says. So Tim sees he means it and phones another pal who agrees to help him out, and Tim leaves on the run so as not to be late.

And as soon as he's gone Bill gets up from the bed where he's been pretending he was sick and he sits down and watches the clock and gloats. Turn me down will you, he says, and want me to be a brother to you, when you know I've got other ideas, he says, and gets madder. Make out like I'm your best pal, he snarls, and all the time you're taking the girl I want, and laughing at me for losing out.

And all of a sudden the clock strikes twelve and in his mind's eye Bill sees the ceremony begin. The wedding party comes down the aisle. Francie meets Tim at the altar. The ritual. And he says I do and she says I do and they exchange rings. And then the minister says, you will now join hands.

And Bill's moment of gloating is interrupted by the door-bell and a messenger hands him an envelope. And it contains the ring he'd sent Francie and a note that says, Bill, we decided not to use these. And Bill curses and tosses the ring into a little box on the table. And just as it leaves his hand he sees Tim had left the other ring in there, and Bill screams and lunges after it.

But too late.

Critical mass.

THE AMATEUR EDITOR (1)

Some readers have asked for information on amateur printing. We use what is known as a flat-bed quarto machine. Ours was junk, but a new one costs about £6:10:0. The bed, where the type is placed, is about the size of this page. Two people can run off about 100 copies per hour.

Type consists of little rectangular sticks of metal. Size is measured in points, and there are various shapes of letters in all sizes. It is sold in "founts" containing all the letters in the proportion they are used in English. Naturally the bigger the letters the more a fount costs, but a fount of this type, which is 10 pt. Gloucester Bold Condensed, is about £2. It contains one hell of a lot of letters but you really need another half fount for a page of this size because about a third of your type is ALWAYS left over.

The type is set up in a little adjustable tray (continued on p.18)

LAST WISH

By H. KEN BULMER

Gordon Munroe was lost on the Yorkshire moors.

He did not feel particularly alarmed unless perhaps a blizzard blew up, but as his walking tour was taking place during August even Yorkshire would have to bat hard to provide that.

The left strap of his rucksack had parted three miles back and now he was making uncomfortable progress with the Bergen slung over his right shoulder, the metal frame gouging his pelvis mercilessly. The damp gorse seemed to have been unrolling beneath his feet for centuries, yet there still was no sign of welcome cottage smoke rising over the next beckoning rise.

A full sweep of translucent sky, rain washed in streaks of cloud, with the fresh earthy smell of damp green things combined to give zest to the air. Gordon took a deep breath and prodded the resilient earth with his cherry-wood thumb stick.

The Bergen slipped off his shoulder and thumped into his leg, where his shorts offered no protection. 'Damn!' he said cheerfully, and with a jerk of his arm thrust the offender back. The movement brought his head round in line with an ancient, moss-covered, weather beaten milestone, tilted tipsily on the verge of the track.

Gordon bent to decipher the archaic markings scratched on its grey sombreness and found that he would have to kneel to discover the secret contained therein. After he had brushed away a lichenous beard from its dark face and the legend 'THORNSIDE, 5 mls' had made itself apparent, he became aware of something lightly touching his bent head.

Startled, he looked up, but before his eyes had travelled halfway up the milestone he stiffened. Into his vision had swung a pair of extremely small, extremely curled brown shoes. The tips turned over to the ankle and were twice as long as the foot. Above these grew a pair of brown tights: then a frilled green jerkin; then a twisted, puckish face, ruddy and seamed, set in lines of utmost woe: crowning the midget was set a tall pointed cap of scarlet, a once jaunty feather drooping disconsolately over one eye.

All told the apparition could not have topped four foot: and, sitting as he was, hunched up with chin in fist on top of the milestone, he looked just like a gargoylish continuation of the stone.

Gordon shut his eyes.

When he opened them the gnome was still there.

'All right! All right!' snapped the little fellow, crossly. 'You needn't stare like a rude little pixie. I'm real.'

'Yes . . . er . . . ' gulped Gordon.

'That's all you silly humans seem able to do, make pop eyes and meaningless noises,' stated the gnome with conviction.

Gordon's eyes ceased from popping and his mind worked overtime. This chap obviously was playing a joke. For all his clever talk of pixies he was probably just a dwarf from a gypsy encampment nearby.

'What's your name, man?'

'Er . . . Munroe: Gordon Munroe.'

'There you are! You humans. Who'd want a name like that. Munroe Gordon Munroe? Ridiculous.'

The sky was still there. The earth was firm beneath his feet. A flutter of wings lifted faintly against the bright horizon and dipped away again.

'What's yours?' asked Gordon, a crease evident between his brows.

'Fiz-fiz-splutter-snort,' said the gnome. 'But my friends call me Wemble.'

'Oh!' said Gordon brightly. He touched his lips with the tip of his tongue and glanced tentatively at the little figure perched on the milestone.

'Are you really . . . er, where' you from?' quickly, as the gnome shot him a look from beneath bushy brows.

A further series of crackling hiccoughs was evidently Wemble's home.

Gordon became aware that his knees were aching. He pushed back onto his haunches and then stood up. His knees were red, damp and cold, with criss-cross lines indented in the skin and grass still adhering in patches. Gordon bent down to brush it off and the rucksack beat him to it, sending a wave of pain from the tender skin shooting up his legs.

'Curse that strap!' said Gordon Munroe, not so cheerfully.

The gnome looked sympathetic. 'Here, I'll mend that for you. I wish that your, what d'ye call it, rucksack was brand new.'

Gordon, tenderly nursing his knees said: 'So do I'.

'Have a look at it,' suggested Wemble.

'It's no good, she parted clean.'

'Do as I bid ye,' snapped the gnome testily.

Gordon shrugged his shoulders and looked at his rucksack.

'Well I'll be . . . ' The Borgen was exactly as it had been when he had bought it, even to the price tag. 'How on earth did you do that?'

'That! That's nothing to what I can do when I really get going,' smirked the gnome offhandedly: but he had swelled visibly at Gordon's apparent awe.

'But HOW is it done?' persisted Gordon.

'Oh well, I suppose I shall have to wash my own dirty linen in public. I have been wrongfully outcast from my own land (at any rate, how was I to know she would squawk?) with but one asset. I could have any wish I made granted.'

'Well, why not wish that you hadn't done . . . er, that is, why not wish you were all square with the folks back home?'

'That one's no use. I've tried. She'd have her old man stop that one. Anyway, I'd probably do it again.' Wemble grinned reminiscently.

Gordon was by this time feeling more at ease. Of course, the whole episode was impossible; but with some inward challenge he was thoroughly enjoying himself. At the last puckish admission of Wemble he grinned with a comradely feeling. It seemed that once the gnome was started he liked the sound of his own voice.

'I was feeling pretty lonely, here on this God forsaken moor. Glad to have a chat, even if only with a stupid human. I suppose humans are all right if you live long enough with them: take some getting used to, I reckon.'

'I say!' said Gordon, eyes suddenly shining. 'How about wishing for a big house, car, money, er . . . er something.' He finished lamely as he saw the patent derision of Wemble's wrinkled face.

'Of what use would such baubles be to me?'

'Yes, I see your point. Anyway, thanks for mending my Bergen.'

'Bergen? Bergen. Oh yes, I have relations there. Haven't heard from them for about nine years now though.'

Wemble looked keenly at Gordon, then pondered a moment. He puckered his lips.

'Pity, really.'

'Yes, and I don't suppose you will hear from . . . '

'No! No! Not that. Still, it's rather a shame.'

'What is?'

'Why, I rather took a fancy to you. Strange that I should ever say that to a human. Especially now I've got to live among them: have to find a quiet out of the way spot to retire to and forget about the world. But there you are, you'd only give me away to the rest of them and if there's one thing I can't stand it is crowds of humans spying on me. No, I'm sorry, but you'll have to be destroyed.'

Gordon blinked. 'Now look here, destroy? D'you mean: kill me?'

Wemble sighed. 'Yes. I can't trust you, a human, no matter what you promise.'

Somehow, Gordon did not feel frightened. He could not rid himself of the fantastic notion that this was all a nebulous phantasm more suited to a nursery dream land. And yet the sky was still there. The ground was firm beneath his feet, and over there birds were singing.

Wemble looked real enough, sitting there on the old millstone: but he was probably just a solid seeming facet of this optical and mental illusion.

'Do you not want to say your prayers?' asked Wemble sympathetically. 'They usually do.'

Munroe looked at his new Bergen and sudden, flooding, overwhelming

panic beat down the floodgates of his reason. He fought for control against it, like a chip in a millrace.

He straightened and brushed his hair out of his eyes.

'Those . . . your . . . ' he stumbled for the right words. Wemble lifted one eyebrow. 'Those relations of yours in Bergen you haven't heard from. Well, you won't. The Nazis over-ran it. They were death to mystery cults. There's been the biggest, most bloody war in history. And to-day the world's in a terrible mess.'

Gordon stopped, breathless, watching the game for reactions.

'Oh?' said Wemble, faintly interested.

'Yes, and that's not all,' rushed on Gordon. 'You plan to come out of hiding and find some nice quiet place to retire in, where man does not pry. What a hope! Everybody has a card with their name on it and a number allotted to them. Can't produce one and into the clink you go. Food, why, books must be produced for that, and if you acquire food without a book the police are on your track so fast you haven't time to eat it. Petrol, tobacco, sweets, nearly all the luxuries of life and many of the necessities are rationed down to a fine hairsbreadth of livability. And wars! Why the last one, which killed and maimed and made homeless countless millions of people, will be child's play to the next. Atom age! Blackout and disease. Bombs which can destroy a whole city in one flash, render the place unfit to live in for over fifty years. And you want a nice quiet place to live in! Rocket ships that can travel round the world so fast, sowing a radioactive dust, that the people at one end are still choking and gasping out their lives when the ships come round again with a fresh issue of bacteriological germs to finish off those stupid enough to want to go on living.'

'And the income tax!'

Wemble was plainly lapping all this up, and Gordon piled on the agony, desperately hoping his plan would succeed. If it didn't . . .

He went on to tell Wemble all the things he could remember that were wrong with the world, which were, under the impetus of death, legion. Without giving the gnome time to think back or ask questions he cried violently: 'There's wars and rumours of wars. No one is safe. The atom age is here. And as for your nice quiet place to sleep, why, you're just as likely to have a bomb blow you up that was dropped hundreds of miles away. There's no place to hide. I feel right sorry for you, pal. You can't go back to your own people and man is all set to blow himself to blazes. You're in the red up to your neck.'

'Don't you wish you had never been born?'

Wemble's puckish face had lost all sign of mirth. Consternation was written large in every creased line. He slumped down

dejectedly.

'Yes I do!' he groaned.

There was no cosmical outpouring of titanic energies, no stupendous play of inconceivable powers.

Just a gentle rush of wind filling a vacuum, and Gordon was staring at a dry patch crowning the wet milestone top.

Thoughts flitted through his mind like wild birds, captive in a room, finding an open window.

'Of course, memory too.'

Gordon Munroe felt his rucksack thump into his side, the broken strap dangling infuriatingly across the curious dry patch of stone on the top of an old weatherbeaten milestone.



LESSER KNOWN FANTASY [1]

The year is 720 A.H., in the probability world of Nazi conquest. All knowledge not essential to the upkeep of industry has been destroyed. Women and the defeated peoples have been degraded to the level of beasts. Ignorant of the past, only a very few question the natural supremacy of the Masters: but into the hands of one of them comes *The Book*. This, the only book in the world, was written by a German aristocrat after the Great Burning, and contains everything he could remember of human science, history, and culture. What happened after the finding of *The Book* you can read in 'Swastika Night', by Murray Constantine.

[continued from page 3]

The impertinence of it! The girl started to smile, but her face froze as she looked at the Prof. His face was a dark screen across which phantoms of thought fled. Hesitation, doubt, anger. She raised a hand to her lips to stifle a cry of bewilderment.

An interminable pause, then the dark face cleared. 'And if I refuse these demands?' the Prof said evenly, and she could have wept in relief at the return of the old bite in his voice.

'Then as an earnest of our intentions we shall first take over the power plant at New Paris. Thence to others in Europe. Until finally we shall have not only the Americas but the entire world. And you will do nothing to oppose us.' He paused and smiled at the World Controller. His teeth were very white and very even.

The Prof stared stonily at him. 'You will return to your leader and tell him that the World Controller rejects his demands and orders him to disband his forces. The penalty for disobedience is death. Ga.'

There was silence after the emissary had gone, bowing grandly to the girl, and smiling oddly at the World Controller. The click as the girl turned off the recorder seemed like the beat of a drum. At the sound the Prof turned. His shoulders had drooped as if half the life had been drained out of him. The movement seemed to brush aside the restraint from the girl's lips and a torrent of angry words spilled out.

'Why did you let him go? You could have held him as hostage; forced out of him all the information you needed to stamp out this latest outbreak of madness. Why? Why?'

Like all absolutely sane people in those days she had a horror of madness and an entirely ruthless attitude towards anyone so afflicted. Small wonder in a world in which, due to the strain of the ever increasing artificiality of industrial civilisation, with each succeeding generation the number of mentally unstable people had risen until there had come a time when the very existence of the normal citizens had been threatened by the gathering host of neurotics. It had been touch and go until the Prof and his associates had appeared, ousted the fumbling, ranting politicians and ruthlessly taken over the reins. Civilisation trembled for a moment, then settled back with a sigh. It had been called the beginning of the Age of Reason by certain writers. The Prof and his colleagues didn't mind. Others, less favourably inclined, called it dictatorship. The Prof didn't mind that either. What were names? You could call a spade an orange: it didn't alter the fact that you could still dig with the spade under its new cloak.

The origins of the Prof were obscure. From the beginning he had been reticent about himself. It was hinted that he had been a professor in some odd corner of the world, but where and of

what no one could tell. Even his name was unknown. He was merely the Controller. Though most people preferred his nickname, and he didn't mind. He had restored the world and many of its people to sanity. The incurables had been exterminated. Logically. The milder cases had been segregated into vast colonies to undergo treatment. The successful returned; the others were not allowed for long to draw sustenance from the earth nor breath from the air.

The revolts were a slight irritation, not a thorn, to the Prof. Now and again outbreaks of instability would occur among the assumed sane. The faces of the people would turn as if by clockwork to the Centre of Scientific Government. Not being a sorcerer the Prof could not foresee such revolts, but he could, and did, put them down when they occurred.

Or had, until the present trouble began. The girl was at a loss to explain his leniency.

He spoke at last. His voice was dull, flat. 'There would have been no point in detaining him. He would have told us nothing. You know how I'm opposed to coercion.'

She sighed. It was one point on which they could never agree. 'Is there an end to this madness?' he said hoarsely. He pressed his hands to his face and gave a low cry.

She was by his side instantly, folding his head in her arms. He seized her and pulled her roughly onto his knee, stifling her mild protests with his lips.

After a while she disengaged herself gently. She smiled at him as she patted her hair back into place.

'Same time tonight?' he said.

She nodded. 'Tonight I'm Pat, out for a dinner date; but now I'm Private Secretary Smith, and we have the problem of the Zeds.'

Then she wished she had kept silent when she saw the tortured look return to his face.

A buzzer sounded. The visi came on with a faint click. A calm face peered from the screen. 'New Paris, Sir. The Zeds are converging on the power plant. Your instructions?'

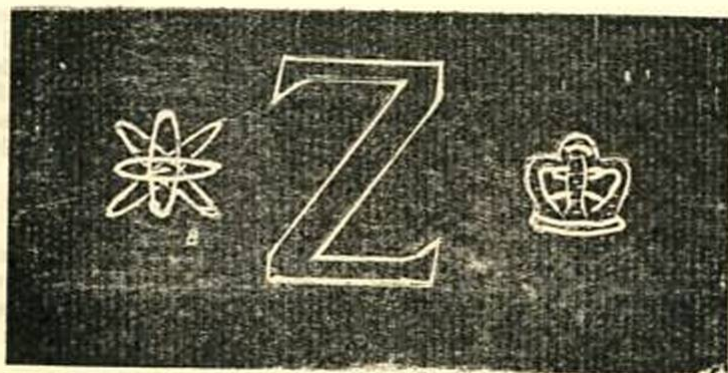
'They didn't lose much time,' murmured Pat. She thought: now we'll see how long the Zeds will last! A word from the Prof and the advancing rebels would be blasted with radiations that would tear away their madness with a vengeance! She waited but the Prof made no sound.

She turned in amazement and gasped. His features were working in horrible indecision.

The operator began to look perplexed. 'Only a few seconds remain, Sir,' he ventured.

With a savage jerk the World Controller snapped off the visi. He rose, and without a word strode from the room.

[continued overleaf]



The first part of their meal that night was eaten in an atmosphere of strained silence. There were a thousand questions the girl wanted to ask, but the mood of her escort swamped her customary frankness. Indeed, she was barely recovered from the surprise of seeing him at all after the events of the afternoon. Yet she knew he had something to tell her: he wouldn't have come otherwise. And, patiently, she waited, meanwhile enjoying the soft cadences of the hidden orchestra, and the excellent food and fine Italian Moscato, for she never allowed any mental stresses to impair the smooth efficiency of her physical self. But she watched him keenly, noting the turmoil in the depths of his eyes. The rest of his face was hidden by a fleshmask, far handsomer than his own features, yet she hated it, while conceding the validity of the discretionary impulse which caused him to don it.

Presently he looked up. 'Tell me, Pat, what do you really think of this business of the Zeds?'

It was unexpected. Mentally she tottered on one leg for a time. Then, gathering her faculties, after a moment's pause she said: 'Well, what is one supposed to think? I mean, is there any doubt about it? Can they be anything but quite mad? What sane person would think for a moment . . .'

'Sane . . . ' he echoed. His eyes showed a sudden upsurge of feeling. He half-lifted a hand wearily then let it fall. 'What is sanity? Who is to know? Once it was easy to distinguish the mad from the sane: the majority were right and sane, the few who differed were wrong and insane. But now the insane almost outnumber the sane. The old rule doesn't apply any more. How are we to know? How can we be sure?'

Pat felt herself floundering. Never before had the Prof spoken like this. He had always been so sure, so calm. Terror beat at her heart. Once let the Prof relax his grip and the world would

soon sink into one vast asylum. But another thought arose, thrusting her terror aside. She looked at him anxiously. He was still speaking. 'I must look at their side of the arguments, too. Not to do so would be a direct contradiction of our most rigid tenets. Most unscientific.'

'But you wouldn't argue with a mad dog. You can't postulate while he's tearing your throat out. Remember some years ago the Party who imagined they were destined to rule because they all had in common the fact that they lisped, and claimed that this impediment in their speech was a sure sign of royal blood! You disposed of them quickly enough! Now we have the latest revolt. And what is it? No less than a Party whose members hold the theory that happiness should be confined to those whose first name begins with 'Z'! And one of the obstacles on their road to happiness is apparently you, and your entire regime! Is there any possible argument?'

'That's just it,' said the Prof. 'There is a very valid argument in their favour, or should I put it this way: there is no logical, scientific argument against them.'

The girl's hand flew to her mouth. The Prof watched her internal struggle in silence for a moment, then, just as she was about to speak he took hold of her hand and gently lowered it to the table. 'No, wait! Let me try and explain. Let's look at these revolts from the point of view of their propaganda, since that is the basic factor of all such affairs, and, indeed, of most human aspirations. Now propaganda as such may be concerned with values, or with general propositions, or with matters of fact. The propaganda of the revolts in question is concerned with the first, that is with values. Or to be more precise, ultimate values. But, ultimate values are not matters as to which argument is possible. If a man maintains that misery is desirable, and that it would be a good thing if everybody always had violent toothache, we may disagree with him, and we may laugh at him when we catch him going to the dentist, but we cannot prove that he is mistaken, as we could if he said that iron is lighter than water.

'Similarly, the Zeds. They claim that they are best fitted to rule because their names begin with 'Z'. If we exterminate them it would be merely a pragmatic refutation of their belief. It would be due to the strong right arms of the solid legions of Johns and Georges, but it would not be scientific proof that they were wrong and we were right. Their thesis would remain logically as valid as its antithesis. Don't you see?' There was almost a plea in his last words.

The girl gazed dumbly at the figure before her. There was a dampness on her fingers from his palm. She saw

COMPETITION

"The Western world awakes to find bewildered groups of swarthy strangers near all the large cities. They are soon identified as natives of Central Asia. Statements from prominent scientists regarding certain other inexplicable phenomena, solar and otherwise, are ignored in the flood of speculation, and later in the hysteria caused by the announcement that the U.S. Government has accused the U.S.S.R. of planting an invading force in their territory. The Soviet Government in turn accuses the U.S.A. of having caused six atomic explosions in Central Asia. War tension rises, and is relieved only by nightfall. Two moons rise, and a multitude of stars in unfamiliar constellations appear in the strange sky."

There are five ways to write an S-F story.

1. Dream up some apparently impossible situation and concoct a complicated series of events to explain it. If you do this in a really big way your name is probably van Vogt.

2. Dig up some lesser-known scientific principle to get your hero out of a spot. This is the usual ASF pot-boiler.

3. Unearth some unexplained event, like the Marie Celeste or Martian 'canals' or Fortean phenomena, and invent your own theory.

4. Speculate on the repercussions of some invention or development. This is another ASF type.

5. Take some trustworthy plot, possibly one you have already used in Western, and decorate it. Most bad stories are like this.

Our competition this issue is based on No. 1. Above is a situation we arrived at in developing a fairly simple idea. We thought it would be interesting to see what YOU get, working from the other end. So write a short synopsis of a plot in which this situation develops. (A well-written story would be welcome, of course, but we thought the idea a little too Fearny.) The prize will be 3 proxines, to be chosen from 6 offered by the editor. The closing date is 30th April, 1950. Marks will be given primarily for ingenuity and originality. The best entries will of course be printed.

THE AMATEUR EDITOR (1), *ctd.*

called a 'composing stick', and tightened up by adjusting the spaces, which come in 5 sizes. This is known as 'justifying' the line. When several lines have been set up you grasp the unstable mass firmly and lift it into the bed. (This is a nerve-wracking operation.) You can set up type about as fast as one-finger type-writing.

As for illustrations, I can only tell you what we do, which we're sure is all wrong. James does the woodcuts with a razor blade on plywood. You can use lino but James would rather have plywood. That's all I can tell you so far but we hope to develop as we learn. Photo-engraving for example.

In SLANT 4 I hope to discuss some of the more general problems of the fan editor.



'THESE THINGS SHALL BE'

the conflict aflame in his eyes, and a cold wind from some far-off place caressed her forehead. She wanted to speak but the words would not come. In her mind's eye she saw the first crumbling of the mighty edifice. Mad. Mod. . . that it should come to him of all people! How could he believe such stuff? Madness . . . or was it something she couldn't understand? Could it be that she? . . . Her brain went over it again feverishly, and she . . . understood. How logical it all was in truth! It was the ultimate madness, logical madness, scientific reasoning carried to its ultimate, ridiculous extreme! Long, long ago a man named Huxley had written a satire on the same theme. But even he hadn't anticipated the fantastic stupidity of the end!

She started to speak but instead took a long drink from the glass at her elbow. How tight her throat was!

As she replaced the glass, as if it were a signal, the lights dimmed, went out, then returned. There was a low murmur in the distance. Shots. Cries. Then suddenly the place was a tumult of sound. Hastily-barked orders, screaming women. The orchestra had wailed dismally into silence at the flickering of the lights. The room was suddenly filled with armed men, men with their eyes shining with fanaticism. 'The Zeds!' someone was shouting over and over again.

With panic rising within her, Pat thought: This is it! Who'd have thought that they would follow up their initial success so rapidly? She wanted to run, but curiosity overcame her panic. What would the Prof. do now? She turned.

He had risen to his feet and stripped off his fleshmask. He stood, gazing stonily at the rebels. The girl's heart leapt. He could beat them yet! Oh, he could! he could!

'The Prof.' A dark form came leaping towards the World Controller, weapon upraised, eyes gleaming with hate. The scene hazed before Pat, and she cried out in terror. She was dimly aware of a harsh command and a leaping figure. Then the mist lifted and she saw the blond form of the rebel emissary standing near, smiling. The would-be assassin had slunk away. She looked at the newcomer. Zebedee! Zebedee himself, she thought in amazement.

He gave her a quick bow, then paid her no more attention. His smiling gaze was turned upon the Prof. 'I said you would do nothing to oppose us, did I not?' The white teeth flashed, then he turned peremptorily on his heel. 'Come, Zakariah!' he said.

The World Controller followed him like a whipped dog.

The girl screamed, then she began to laugh. She laughed as if she would never stop.

THE END

ON THE LEVEL

We hadn't quite decided what to call our letter section (we also thought of 'The Reader Vibrates' or 'Brash Cracks') but we felt we just had to start one after receiving this weighty missive, or missile.

Dear Sir,

Although you have not previously included a correspondence column in your excellent magazine, I hope you will consider the following to be worthy of a little of your precious space, inasmuch as it is directed against a most serious menace, a ghastly spectre that is now brooding over British fandom! That it is the spectre of a dead horse does not render it any the less obnoxious, for certain of our brethren, who shall be nameless, have so far taken leave of their senses as to attempt to revive the hideous carcass by flogging it in the pages of otherwise worthy fanzines.

I refer of course to the consensual fantasies of RICHARD S. SHAVER, which have against all probability succeeded in lowering the status of certain prozines. Now no one enjoys nonsensical fantasies, as such, more than I; but when they are puerile and ill-written, and interspersed with absurd 'proofs', ludicrous attempts at sex-interest, and hysterical ravings against 'the authorities', resembling the last stages of persecution mania, then I confess my patience becomes somewhat strained.

We are told that we should reserve judgment on the 'mystery', that we should study the 'proofs' offered by Mr. Shaver. Well, where are they? Usually in the 'next issue!' Is there, in the whole dreary waste of Mr. Shaver's works, even one little oasis of evidence that would justify the consideration of an hypothesis a thousand times less ridiculous than his own?

I have not been so foolish as to retain the relevant magazines but I do recall that importance was attached to the alleged key of a basic language from which all present languages are said to have degenerated. Have any of Mr. Shaver's followers shown this 'key' to a philologist? He could have told them, first, that the 'key' being founded on our own alphabet, was irrelevant not only to European-type languages based on other alphabets but to that great group of tongues which, like Chinese, are not based on an alphabet at all, but on ideographical pictures. And secondly, that the derivations suggested by Mr. Shaver are quite absurd. For example, Mr. Shaver picks the word 'derogatory' to illustrate that 'dero' represents the principle of evil. But the word in reality derives from the Latin 'regere', meaning to z:k, or in the case of a law, to propose. Hence 'de-ro-gare', to repeal or reject a law, and, by

extension, to condemn it. The word's association with evil is purely coincidental.

So much for the evidence which convinced Mr. Palmer. The only 'evidence' offered by the British disciples so far is Mr. Deacon's assertion that fish never die of old age. This is more easily disproved of. It is simply not true.

An open mind is a good thing, but it is not the same as gullibility. Let us remember that in America organised Fandom, to its eternal credit, flatly rejected Shaver and all his works: and make it known to his would-be resurrectors, by means of letters, articles in fanzines and general weight of opinion, that their attempt is nothing but an insult to the intelligence of every serious-minded lover of sciencefiction in Europe. I urge this from a sincere belief that such moronic rubbish only lowers further the status of science fiction in the minds of the public, who already because of certain magazines and their covers associate it with dirty back-street shops and cheap pornography.

G. C. BANKS

Tankerton, Kent.

This seems an appropriate point for us to say that opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the editor. **SLANT** is open to anyone who has something worth saying and says it succinctly.

First spokesman of the "big wheels (that was a good one, was it not?) to write to me was **FORREST J. ACKERMAN**, who says:

'I set the brand new TWS aside to glance through **SLANT 2**, got interested in reading the contents. 'The Still Small Voice' IS Ray, markedly Bradburyesque, and I'm sure my friend Ray would be amused to have a copy.'

Well, we did as suggested with that gem of purest Ray serene, but we haven't heard the Martian misanthrope laughing yet; and that's one thing we would like to hear. Maybe we'll have better luck with Miss Brackett. She might even send us a photograph. I saw one once and if she's not the best s-f author she's certainly the best-looking.

Mr. Ackerman goes on to refer to Clive Jackson as 'solid' (an American expression indicating, I believe, that he is in the groove) and offers to try and place both his and Walker's stories on the professional market. He also sent us his own 'Atomic Error' and asked his client E.E. Evans to send us a contribution. (Evans, as you know, is a contributor to several proxines, including **STARTLING STORIES** and **WEIRD TALES**.) That explains the presence of the two guest contributors in this issue. The letter finishes:

'Haha: The Prying Fan: That's a funny twist. Congrats.

Think I'll steal it: make everybody in America think I'm awful clever instead of just awful.'

Help yourself, Forrest, and welcome. We got a million of them. And thanks again.

Turning now to another famous name we are delighted to tell you that although he may have stopped working for TWS, RICK SNEARY has started writing to SLANT. The Great Illiterateur says (and we have not made any misprints):

'Have shipped a prozine to you. Was a bit surprised the postage was so low. Of course it is no doubt going by fast tertales . . . Let's see what I think of SLANT 2. Despite the fact that I'm becoming a (wisper the word) critic, and find fault with nearly everyone. Something that shouldn't happen to a dog, or even Shaver. [Not again!] . . . Your woodcuts are wonderful. They litterly improve your magazine a good 20 per cent all by themself. . . .

We're sorry we haven't the space in this issue to quote more fully from flattering letters like this, but anyhow you probably wouldn't find them as interesting as we did.

Of course, not all the comment was favourable . . .

'Why don't you say which side of the page the illustrations are supposed to be on?'

'A most striking demonstration of osmosis. I congratulate you.'

'The cover woodcut has already oozed its way like a hideous beast as far as page 17. I am standing by with a gun in case it gets out the back.'

'The most absorbing magazine I have ever read.'

Well, we're sorry, and we admit we were over-generous with the ink, but we like our pictures nice and black, and our story is it would never have happened in an ordinary summer. We'll try to be more careful in future, but I'm afraid you may get as tired of our pleading the thermo-plasticity of printers' ink as you are of Campbell's harping on the inelasticity of type metal.

Possibly this steepage was what Merwin had in mind in referring to our illustrations as 'spotty'. Another rash statement was that they were 'pseudo woodcuts'. Well, I don't know what pseudo wood is, but I can assure you we don't use it. And while we're on the subject of this review in SS, I would have Mr. Merwin remember that SLANT was the first not only in NORTHERN Ireland. This is a Gael warning. But the most damaging inaccuracy in that slightly slipshod review was the statement that our subscription was one prozine per issue. A flattering evaluation, perhaps, but it should have been plain to the most pulp-

headed reader . . . Looking back I can see my notice WAS ambiguous, and that anyway I was rude and ungrateful to Mr. Merwin. It's too late to change it now, but I apologise. His review was fair, even generous.

Having already had to reset part of this page, perhaps I had better just say that one prozine will entitle you to no fewer than FOUR issues of SLANT. (Any s-f fantasy or weird mag, but we already get ASF TWS & SS.)

I had meant to give here a selection of your letters, but there's room for only a brief summary. Jackson's 'Still Small Voice' was 'worthy of a premag' thought NORMAN ASHFIELD, and EVA FIRESTONE said: 'I nearly burst into tears and that is the way all of Ray Bradbury's affect me.' H KEN BULMER thought it TOO like the real Bradbury! 'All Dogs Are Equal' was voted first by many, others praised it with faint damns . . .

'Walker wields a likely pen, though on sober consideration I rather think hereditry is too firmly established to be dismissed quite so ruthlessly.' (CLIVE JACKSON)

'A good idea, but presented in the style marked 'British' and that somehow seems so juvenile, a fault of NEW WORLDS, at least I think so.' (TED TUBB)

'Badly put together, disjointed, lacking cohesion' were some of the criticisms of my own Outcast. Well deserved, for the complicated plot was cut to the bare bones of narrative. However, other readers, more discriminating or kind hearted, praised it highly . . .

'Best in the issue, why not pad it up and try for ASF?' (TED TUBB) (!)

'Great yarn, highly original.' (PETE PENNINGTON)

But no one offered to place MY story in the prozines . . .

As for my other two efforts, they were generally passed over in pained silence. But not by CEDRIC WALKER . . .

'The aptly-titled Corn Exchange could be quietly forgotten without any great loss. I'm dead against deliberate attempts at humour like this.'

So in spite of a kind word from North Dakota . . .

'For some odd reason (me perhaps) The Solution was my favourite bit.

Can't be because of a shameful liking for puns.' (WRAI BALLARD)

I have done a Don Stuart in this issue. It's about time I dropped out for a bit after writing the entire first issue and half the second. (But I could have SWORN that fans liked puns, and there were 18 in The Solution. Ah well.)

In the present issue we have added a further 2 pages and some technical improvements, but we hope next time to make a much greater advance. We cannot give you the detailed contents (not having heard from Mr. Horn) but we hope that SLANT 4 will be quite an event. [continued on p.26]

THE CASE
FOR
SHAVERISM



THE PRYING FAN

DUMB-BELLS & DUMB BELLES

The golf-ball on the December 1949 ASF is the first spherical spaceship on an ASF cover since February 1944, according to my encyclopaedic partner James White. (The two rugby balls seem to be quite without precedent). I think it is very nice indeed (atta Zboyan!) but James says it is all spheroids and very hard to draw. He hopes it doesn't represent a Trend. The next development, he fears, is a Clarke type dumb-bell spaceship, but I tell him he's lucky I don't ask him for BEMs or Beautiful Unrled Maidens. Incidentally, the Ladies' Home Journal in an article on Sex Education carried a photo of a sexy bookstall where, among all the 'dirty books', was the Avon Fantasy Reader. Oh, the shame of it!

HAS BEACHCOMBER BEEN READING VAN VOGT?

'She is embarrassed, and only wishes the floor would open and swallow her. It does.' [By The Way, 28.10.49]

ODE TO MR. CAMPBELL

Thanks for letting Dr. Winter rest.
He didn't rorse our interest.
Though we do admit he's usually
Better than Ole Doc Methuselah.
Let them practice in private and some happy morn your
Medical men may discover a corn cure.

BREAK FOR ASIMOV

'While taking his oral in chemistry recently, a professor posed a final question. 'Mr. Asimov, will you please tell us something about the thermo-dynamics of thictimoline?' [Saturday Review of Literature]

OFF THE CUFF

Bradbury series currently running in British ARGOSY . . . Merwin seems to have fallen under Suenry's spell, or else his compositors are slipping . . . Shouldn't Lafayette's series be called 'The Waste of Space?' You'd must be served, of course, but surely not with BAD corn . . . Nice to see a compatriot (Dr. Armattoe of Londonderry) mentioned in ASF . . . Let's hope Literaturnaya Gazeta never gets to hear about the second part of 'Gulf' . . . And Lang Syne is all very well but if Zamba and Finirbed are the best he can do I'd be quite happy to see Sprague decamp. The title of his last story was only too appropriate . . . Nicest subscription yet received by SLANT is The Magazine of FANTASY, beautiful outside and excellent inside, the most elegant production we have ever seen . . . Wish we could say the same of OTHER WORLDS but at least it's the first magazine we've seen with the guts to admit that one of its stories had been rejected by a rival, and it has good ideas. Good luck to it.

OFF THE OTHER CUFF

'Derives from a more popular vein of fantasy and science fiction' says New Statesman reviewer Angus Wilson (himself showing a welcome familiarity with s-f) of new author Nigel Kneale, whose 'Tomato Cain' seems a 'must' for fans - - Same mag carries obvious contact ad. for secret group of supermen: 'Mensa is a society for people who are very bright, extremely clever, highly intelligent' - - Welcome to Ken Bulmer's unusual NIRVANA, a fanmag with a future - - Russian scientist Tikhov reported to be studying frost resisting plants on Mars for adaptation to USSR. The red planet? - - Our thanks to Reg Phillips for giving us the 'position of honour' in AMAZING review - - News item says Germans and Japs turning to 'visionary stories of interplanetary travel' - - Merwin's editorial on future of s-f in Jan 50 SS best be h-e-r-e-v-e-r done - - A World Convention would fit in with the FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN - - Congratulations to Asf on its 20th anniversary - - According to pollsters U.S. fandom is 60% atheist. Interesting. Belfast fandom has in common only unusual height and an intense admiration for Doris Day . . . Latest companion to dynamic Arthur (Roscoe) Rapp's fascinating SPACE WARP is a letterzine called POSTWARP. (Query: was there a PREWARP?) What about WARPWARP for the next one? . . . Recent arrivals: superior new fanzine THE TALISMAN (Roy W. Lonn Jr.): Ken Slater's elegant OF 3, now with illustrations up to the standard of its contents: Bob Tucker's altruistic and indispensable BLOOMINGTON NEWSLETTER.

EXCHANGE (2 mags or 1 book for any item on Want List) All Hallowes Eve, Williams (new, wdc.) Experiment with Time, Doone. Mariners of Spruce, Collins. Liners of Time, Fearn. Tales of Mystery, Poe. Swastika Night, Constantine. Can Such Things Be, Bierce. Intelligence Gigantic, Fearn. In The Days of the Comet, Wells. She, Haggard. Girl with Hungry Eyes, (anth.) ASF 1933 Nov, Dec 34 May (no covers) 35 Jan. 37 Jan, Feb, Mar, Aug. 38 May. 42 Aug. 45 May Oct Nov. 46 Jan., Mar, June, Aug, Sep. 47 July, Oct, Nov Dec. AMAZ 32 Aug. WEIRD 38 June, July, Sept. 39 July, Aug. New Worlds 1 & 5. Various Burroughs pocket books. Doomsday Men, Priestley.

EXCHANGE (for any 2 items on Want List) Fantastic Summer, Dorothy McArdle. World of A. Van Vogt (both new, wdc.) A Century of Horror
WANT LIST We offer 4 to 5 shillings or above exchanges for any of these:
ASF 1940 Apr, May, July, Sept, Nov, Dec. 41 Mar, Apr, May, Aug. 42 Jan, Feb, Mar, May, June, Sept, Nov, Dec. 43 Mar, Apr, Aug, Sept. 44 July
Correspondence on above to W.A. Willis, 170 Upper Jewtownards Rd., Belfast
Mrs. Eva Firestone, Upton, Wyoming wants 'The Coming of the Fairies', by Doyle and 'Asmodeus at Large,' by Bulwer Lytton.

ON THE LEVEL (continued) But it will be a large issue and we still badly need contributors. In spite of what I said in NO. 2 we don't care if they're extra-European as long as they're extra good. But if you can't manage a story or article please give us your encouragement and help by telling us what you liked or disliked in this issue. SLAINTE!

WATCH FOR SLANT 4!