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speculative review

SPECULATIVE

SPECULATIVE REVIEW, Volume 2 Number 3, appears once more to dissect some of the current crop of science-fiction and fantasy writing. This issue represents Operation Crifanac CLXXII.

Speculative Review is a magazine of review and speculation (really, now, that's reasonable, isn't it?) about science-fiction and fantasy. It's published by the Washington Science-Fiction Association, and edited by Dick Eney at 417 Ft. Hunt Rd., Alexandria, Virginia. Speculative Review is available for letters of comment, exchanges, or -- if you care to throw money -- at 3 for 25¢ (3 for 2/ in sterling areas.)

Reason I state that so prominently is that every other person who's written in has grotched about the absence of any information about how to get future issues of SpecRev. Now you know -- unless you are somebody so estimable that we'll send you copies no matter how much you protest, or you are reviewed in here; in that case, your real problem is how to avoid having SpecRev showered on you.

That is, if there are further issues of Speculative Review. With the loss of four more titles in the last few months, we'll have to move fast to get out later numbers while there's still science-fiction and fantasy around to be speculated about. Unless the trend begins to turn in the opposite direction we may have to take up Redd Boggs' suggestion and turn SpecRev into a cardzine.

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The most depressing thing about this most recent set of deaths is the nature of the victims: Doc Lowndes, whom almost everybody in the field has always praised for his accomplishments in putting out the quality he did on the budget he had; and Hans Stefan Santesson, whom we were all getting ready to start mentioning in the same breath with the aSF-F&SF-Goldsmith Amazing trinity.

I don't recall anything edited by Doc Lowndes coming out in book form, but we have to hand here -- purely by coincidence, as always -- Hans Santesson's anthology from his late lamented prozine...

REVIEW

The Fantastic Universe Omnibus (Prentice-Hall, 1960; \$3.95) Nineteen stories, almost all good and about half of them illustrating what's wrong with modern science-fiction.

With a qualification I'll mention shortly, only two of these stories are the dressed-up mundanes we so love to complain about. Both of these, oddly, are stories of robots in a future in which robots are mobile, humanoid, and self-supporting: William C Gault's "Title Fight" and Harry Harrison's "The Velvet Glove" both put these million-dollar mechanisms out on the streets in the role of a down-trodden, exploited class and let's hope the NAACP doesn't sue.

Two more are so bad they're sick and I blush for Hans' inclusion of them: Felix Boyd's "The Robot Who Wanted to Know" (about women, that is; his oil pump broke down, "so you might say he died of a broken heart") and Sam Moskowitz' "The Golden Pyramid" (which displays such curious scientific ideas as that the effect of hard radiation is mental aberration, and that the transmutation of lead into gold in an atomic pile is practical).

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One of Bob Silverberg's off days produced "Portrait in Four Tones of Black"...beg pardon, I see the actual title is "Road to Nightfall"...in which Bob takes the theme of urbanite degradation after an atomic war and runs it into the ground in ten pages. Then he goes on in the same vein for another eighteen, unfortunately.

A pair of the sort we call "feminine science fiction" don't quite make it: David C. Knight's "The Amazing Mrs. Mimms" and Dorothy S. Davis' "The Muted Horn" both have that stress on emotionalism -- like, domestic wrangling and conformity are just plain bad, and we take it from there without rationalization -- we identify with femme-pros. A cheer for Knight, though, who shows us the domestic problems in question with a hand so deft argument is not needed -- even if he did wind up with a rabbit-from-the hat so blatant it set my teeth on edge. The Davis contention that conformity is bad is something most of us accept by hypothesis; but still, a theme's always the better for illumination.

There is also a Thing by Judy Merrill, "Exile From Space", which is a perfect illustration of the answer to a question Ethel Lindsay asked me: namely, why most reviewers use "feminine science fiction" in a way that implies that the feminine viewpoint is a sort of literary equivalent of Original Sin: something that, barring a touch of Divine Grace, is equivalent to damnation.

Mrs M's work at best has a certain sticky sentimentalism that makes me feel as if the author were pouring treacle down the back of my neck every time I read it; combined (as it is here) with sloppy plotting, fuzzy thinking, and a syrupy smear of emotionalism for denouement, it fair turns my stomach.

This pure innocent young girl, you see, lands from the alien spaceship and has various encounters with nauseating aspects of Earthly existence (gambit la, arouse sympathy), then meets a "beautiful" young Earthman and falls for him...

I made a wrong guess, here, for Larry -- the Earthian in question -- was described as small (like the heroine) and without the "ugly rough skin" and "big heavy hands" that repelled her in most Earth people. Aha, thinks I, he's going to turn out to be another exile from space and that'll explain the characteristics. He didn't; the characteristics just weren't explained at all. They weren't pertinent to the plot, you see, but rather to gambit 4c: hero-is-answer-to-maiden's-prayer.

Well, we won't go at length into the mildly hilarious stages through which this romance proceeds, except to note that the heroine has, within two days, become sufficiently acclimated to Europo-American culture to be unspeakably t^h_hrⁱ_ri^l_l*e^d by her first kiss -- no doubt the fastest case of acculturation on record -- and the day after that to enjoy even more advanced types of courtship behavior. It is sufficient to tell you of its

outcome: Larry turns out to be a worker on a satellite project -- "a man who has spent almost every waking moment from the age of nine planning and preparing to fit himself for a role in humanity's first big fling into space", is the Merrill description. Our exile's innocence touching matters Earthly makes him nervous enough to contact Security; but when she panics and runs away he has a race with the Security people to find her first. ("I remembered...which roads you were familiar with, and... stuff like that", he explains, arriving several hours ahead of the Feds.) The two reconcile their differences, despite the heroine's psychologically implanted inability to explain her actions ("He believed me. # It was just that simple.") and she, as she modestly puts it, "found out why the television shows stop with the kiss". I will now tell you the decision they ultimately arrived at; no sane mortal could work it out logically. They decided that life on Earth was Best (Terra Is Better Than Anyplace, as Renfrew Pemberton might put it) and renounced forever the possibility of associating with the space people. That is, an embryo space pilot turned away from contact with people who'd mastered the craft he'd been working for "from the age of nine", and chose rather to go into hiding and try to evade the Security police here on Earth. The reason isn't given, but of course it's easy to see what it must have been. He simply decided to withdraw in order to be with the woman he loved...or has somebody already used that explanation?

It is infinitely pleasing to turn from this abomination to a small jewel of fantasy, Henry Slesar's "My Father, The Cat"; an odd, almost Cabellesque piece I can't hint about lest I spoil it, and can't criticize for lack of anything that could possibly be improved.

The other stories are all linked by what I think is a common characteristic, one I'll get to in a moment. They are Asimov's "First Law", Tenn's "She Only Goes Out At Night", ACClarke's "The Pacifist", Avram Davidson's "The Bounty Hunter", B*L*O*C*H's "A Way of Life", Harlan Ellison's "In Lonely Lands", Bertram Chandler's "Fall of Knight", Myrle Benedict's "Sit By the Fire", deCamp's "A Thing of Custom", and Larry Harris' "Mex".

Their common characteristic is that they're all, substantially, faanfiction. All of them have that most baneful feature of modern magazine science-fiction, the attitude of address to a small, intimate audience which is assumed to be not merely informed but sophisticated on matters ranging from interstellar tourism to the techniques of vampiricide. The effect of this attitude on circulation can be seen by a simple glance at the state of the field; but let's rather glance at the stories themselves.

The most patent case of faanfiction, oddly, is deCamp's "A Thing of Custom", which concerns the usual madly logical deCamp doings following the visit of assorted E-T tourists to a small town in Pennsylvania. The others add to the characteristic I've mentioned the even more specialized traits of the spoken anecdote -- jeez, I can just see Bob Bloch reeling off "A Way of Life" before a convention banquet, in that deadpan style with which he tells a story overtly interesting to the barbarians and covertly hilariously funny to faaans! "In Lonely Lands" and "Sit By the Fire" are subspecies of the sort we used to call "campfire stories" back before the art of oral storytelling became degenerate (he said, stroking his long white beard); "Mex" probably should be classed with them as a member of that vanishing type of serious anecdote. The others are humor, mostly good, and all with an air of being told in a gathering of congenial friends -- in fact, "First Law" and "The Pacifist" are presented as anecdotes told in those circumstances ("The Pacifist" is one of the "Tales from the White Hart" series). And "First Law", "She Only Goes Out At Night", "The Bounty Hunter", and "Mex" go the whole way and employ the terminal climax mechanism -- or, as the Earth People say, rely on a punch line.

And for us, that's no objection. My comments about the undesirability of this inner-circle business for the field as a whole stand; but we are the inner circle. We are the stfnally sophisticated types this is addressed to; and it's just the sort of thing we eat up in large helpings. This is one you should enjoy.

Dick hasn't passed on any comments on the last issue; in fact, he hasn't admitted that there have been comments on it. So, with no one to argue with, all I can do is pick on the poor, helpless magazines. As Bob Pavlat seems to have stopped reading Galaxy, and no one else seems to want to do ASF [Analog], I've added them to the roster. The order below is strictly accidental.

Astounding Science Fact & Fiction [Analog]. April 1960. And I certainly don't think much of the title; personally, I feel this is one of the most annoying things JWC has done in the last 20 years. [And does it make you too feel old to realize that fans voting this fall weren't even a gleam in their father's eye when the Campbell reign started? It does me, especially as I can remember when the change took place, and the first Nova story.]

Out Like a Light, part 1 of a 3 part serial by Mark Phillips. A 44 page hunk this time. I'll reserve real comment on it until the end, but I will mention that I spent the first 30 pages being bored by the introduction. I had the same feeling about his last serial - remember the telepathic Queen Elizabeth I - and the same central characters are here, too. The FBI characters, I mean. I can't put my finger on the trouble as yet; I'll see what I can do in a couple of months. But by now, it is obvious that this is a psi story. Even the cover indicates this.

The Ambulance Made Two Trips, a 19 page short by Murray Leinster. A typical Leinster minor tale. The dry cleaner who wouldn't be "protected" by the local "organization" somehow gets by. Things happen to the other guys, like objects falling on them, cars running away, etc. Of course, the fact that he has a Hieronymus machine working for him has nothing to do with the facts. Everything moves along all right; the actors move just as they should, the slapstick sequences are exactly what would be expected in an old Laurel and Hardy movie. Very easy reading; very uninspiring reading. The trouble here I feel is "tiredness;" there is no real conflict, no drama, no tension, only a mild puzzle, no nothing. The style is the usual Leinster style, very smooth and unobtrusive, but with little impact of its own. And, with nothing to hold it up, it can't carry the story. This, though, qualifies as science fiction by my definition - just.

The Misplaced Battleship.

A 25 page novelette by Harry Harrison. Space opera, for a change, with no psi. Or, at least, not by the hero. Somewhat wacky, but not too bad. Only the ending is choppy, with plenty of room for a sequel, if anyone wants one. The Special Corps, charged with keeping things running throughout the galaxy - unobtrusively, merely keeping worlds from each other's throats, super crooks under control, and such little items, all without a lens - recruits its staff partially from the best of the criminals, the con-men and lock artists, the specialists in the politer crimes, feeling that "it takes a thief to catch a thief." So, when one of the newer recruits finds that a large spaceship being built in one of the minor solar systems is almost a copy of - and can easily be converted into - the most powerful battleship of the period of imperial expansion, he is dispatched to find out what is up. He finds that only two people are responsible for the job; before he can catch up with them, they steal the ship and turn pirate. In turn, he single-handedly captures them, even though the leader escapes. So, it's space opera. So, maybe it is science fiction. The central character - and the only one worth mentioning - is a larger-than-life reformed crook - and proud of it. Telling the story in the first person, he contrives to present a picture of himself that is somewhat

different from the one he would like to represent himself. Nothing profound, of course, in this story, but it is a nice little yarn to relax with. The writing is unobtrusive - probably because the hero is so obtrusive.

The Measure of a Man. Randall Garrett with a 10 page short. Another space opera, but a grim little bit - that didn't click. Space war and a message that has to get back to earth - but can't because the only available ship is crippled and can't make speed, and the one lifeboat which could make the necessary speed is out because the pile shielding has been removed and the radiation would kill him before he got to earth. So he comes back, anyway, just alive, and delivers the message. This one was obvious from the start, almost. Really, it is a problem story, with a simple problem, plus some tear-jerking that misses fire. It reminds me of some of the stories in the old Planet.

Make Mine Homogenized. A 39 page novelette by Rick Raphael. All the time I was reading this I was wondering why - why was it in ASF and why was I reading it and why didn't the author get to the point. I'm still wondering. When the milk cow starts giving milk that makes TNT look like dishwater and the hens start laying golden eggs that detonate the milk like a non-radioactive U²³⁵, people are interested. Especially the AEC when a small batch goes off near a test site. Of course, the location was responsible in the first place for the effects. And then, when the whole space program is geared to milk, the cow goes dry.... And the rooster responsible for the golden eggs is run down by one of the AEC guards....And nothing can bring back either effect. The writing is only adequate. The characters are strictly stock - the hired hand, the farm widow, the AEC scientist, the brass, the reporters, etc. Style is non-existent. And plot likewise. And this is fantasy. It sure isn't science fiction.

Demon in a Bottle. A 16 page article by G. Harry Stine on why you shouldn't make your own rockets until you know what you are doing and can take the necessary safety precautions. Pictures, too. And may I add an "amen" to the remarks about the hazards of some of these reaction mixtures; I know what they are, and I'm scared of a lot of them. Some of them are as touchy as dry NI₃. As an article, though, this is only routine.

Future Science Fiction. April 1960. The Colocon Female. A 27 page novelette by Charles V. De Vet. Cops-and-robbers on an extra-solar world, complete with beautiful native girl and handsome hero and double-crosses and such. Reminds me of Planet Stories, except that there is a cute psychological gimmick. No science really, though; it could be laid in Mitteleuropa within the last score of years or in the Roman era or in the Japanese empire or.... Interestingly written, and all(the hero does not remain pure), but out of place in a science fiction mag. Some of the characters, though, seem to be a little alive, especially the native girl.

Do It Yourself. A 15 short by Miriam Allen de Ford. He was old -- and then the lottery had selected him for immortality. He wanted to die, but he had been conditioned against doing anything that would kill him. So, he tried to arrange an accident.... in a way that wouldn't conflict with his conditioning. And failed, of course. And, really, I didn't care. Even when he did have an accident. I'm reminded of the "had I but known" school of detective stories. The same writing style. The same automata.

Disjecta Membra. A 15 page short by Bill Wesley. The prison of the future - with scientists as the prisoners. The common people this way keeps the dangerous scientists under control - and they are happy. And only the warden/personnel directors are uncertain. The scientists are happy because they don't have to associate with the common people. I'm un-

certain, too. Maybe it would work. And maybe we are going that way. But I don't like the way the scientist is depicted in this story - the author is treading on my corns. And I don't think the plan would work. At least I think there are too many scientists who like normal things. But, then, I remember some people I know and am not so sure, again. But the people in this story are certain - the author says they are. In no uncertain terms. But in only fair writing and little plot.

Caliban. Thomas N. Scortia and Jim Harmon collaborate in 14 pages of a picture of a civilization where the scientist is an object of scorn and suspicion - somewhat of a companion to the above. The non-standard item in this civilization is wrong. Science is in a straight-jacket and anything that doesn't fit is the work of a traitor. Including parapsychological effects. Someone has attempted to draw characters in this story - and has come up with stock special characters, models 3,4,5, and 6. And the plot is only an episode - little magazine style, perhaps - with no sustaining quality of writing to carry the burden.

The Chrysalids. A 16 page "novelette" by Rosser Reeves. A nice idea, and rather well handled, although some of the points are over-elaborated. A race of immortals who are masters at manipulating their bodies to match any human within reason, come to earth for a contest lasting some 2500 years. They assume various roles, and are judged on their performances. They are characters such as Napoleon and da Vince and Frederick the Great and Luther and Mohammed and Buddha and Charlemagne. The time is 1910, Eniish has just finished a role, and wants to pick another for the last 30 years before the ship comes and the game ends. Friends and opponents have other roles, which they cannot make much of, it appears - one is named Churchill, another a Russian who failed in a revolt, Lenin. Another is stuck as an Indian peasant named Ghandi. Trying to make the most of his last chance, Eniish selects the most unlikely subject, one who seems to have no chance of doing anything - a young Austrian soldier named Hitler. Except for the obvious choice of characters, this story went over pretty well. On rereading, I found it obvious, but on first time through I liked it. Of course, though, the characters had little character - they weren't supposed to have much. And some features of the writing are annoying - the switch from first to third person and then back again, often on the same page, makes for jerky reading and loss of train of thought. But the idea really isn't too hackworn. After all, it's merely the gods of yore in modern guise.

The Case of the Baby Dinosaur, by J. S. Klimaris. A 21 page reprint from the Oct 1942 Future. A sequel to the Case of the Vanishing Cellars, reprinted in the May 1960 Double Action Detective Magazine. The Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenomena investigates the case of the baby dinosaur that appeared in the middle of Times Square and the Greek galley that won the Conn. boat race, under the command of Ulysses. Finally they trace down the inventor of the time machine, who has been playing pranks. Fortunately, the temporal dislocations are for only 24 hours, and all ends well. And at least this story doesn't depict the scientist as a person to be feared, but as an amiable nut [How times have changed]. The writing is breezy, and moves along; the characters are good grade cardboard, but are unimportant, really. And the style does have a charm to it. You know, back in that period the Futurians were doing some pretty good writing; this story stands up pretty well after all these years.

Galaxy Magazine. April 1960. Success Story. A 25 page novelette by Earl Goodale. I suspect this of being a spoof on Heinlein's Starship Soldier with all the deadly serious parts of Heinlein slightly overplayed to the point of satire. The manner in which one Ameet Ruxt, draftee in the Haldorian army that invades Earth, goes about his intrigues is amusing but rather obvious. But some of the bits that remind me of Heinlein -

"The 27th was a real fighting unit all right; they had their own neckerchief, their own war cry, and a general who was on his way up."

"Our General-on-the-way-up had outlined his plan of attack:

'Drop'm, hit'm, lift'm and drop'm again.' So I dropped, hit the defenders, was lifted to a new center of resistance, and dropped again. I understand it was a standard type of invasion; there's only one way to do simple things."

Of course, Goodale hasn't developed the background and details the way Heinlein does; but then this is only a novelette. His central character is somewhat interesting, a little cynical, and pretty much the universal little guy caught up in the System. None of the other characters are more than 1 1/2 dimensional. Nor does the writing interest me. And yet, I liked the story as a whole; it was such a relief after certain other stories. I guess it was just the ever-present Galaxy sense of spoof that helped here; you knew that everything would come out all right, except that there would be the typical Galaxy wry ending, the last paragraph that is supposed to make you feel unsatisfied. Or something. And, of course, this isn't sf - it's Planet-type adventure, without the swashbuckling.

Condition of Employment.

Clifford D. Simak with a 11 page short. I think Simak has come up with a new gimmick, or at least a relatively unused one. Cooper was marooned on Earth, without a spaceship job, and longing to return to Mars. Finally the chance came, an emergency run with a ship that needed an overhaul. But when he reached Mars.... And I can't say more without giving away the kicker. I liked this one - it isn't a typical Galaxy story. And Simak writes well; he makes his central character seem real. [And I know some of these briefs sound like the blurbs in some of the old Gernsback Wonders. I'm afraid I can't do much more without killing the story. Please bear with us.]

The Airy

Servitor. Thirteen pages by Margaret St. Clair. And this is one of the type of story I don't like. There is nothing to it. No plot, no ideas, and the characters and writing wouldn't even pass in the Ladies' Home Companion. Every character is drawn as the stereotype of that character. The utility clerk who won't budge from the rules, the standard disapproving mother-in-law, and the standard hen-pecked father-in-law, who is afraid to show how delighted he is when things don't go the way his wife want them to go. All standard, all moved along prescribed paths by the strings of the "Typewriter in the Sky." And with prose to match.

The Lady Who Sailed the

Soul. Cordwainer Smith returns with a 24 page novelette. The starships sailed between the stars - with huge sails to catch the faint sunlight and starlight pressure - under the command of the most compact computer ever developed - the human brain. The pilot, under time-reducing drugs, was awake the whole trip, conscious of the darkness and the cold and the discomfort of machine attentions to the body. And, the body aged the whole time - 40 years or more - while the mind retained knowledge of only a month or two of subjective time. This is the story of Helen America, who sailed the Soul - a starship dragging 30000 people in adiabatic capsules behind - for forty years. And why she did it. The characters are nicely developed, the action logical.

And the writing is nice - except for one thing. The introduction and postlude don't seem to fit in, to me. They distract from the central story - the introductory one is confusing, in fact. But, in spite of this, I liked this story. And found it sf, too. In fact I reread it.

Solid Solution.

James Stammers with a 15 page short. The world of tomorrow, overcrowded, no jobs for the majority of people. The Desert Institute is the only uncrowded section of America. And the Director keeps himself in the position of top scientist by kidnapping the other leading scientists, using a molecular reducer to hide them. Some of his students find out and take over. With complications, of course. I didn't like this. Probably because the writing is so jerky that I lost track of what is happening. Nor are the characters any help - they are neither logical or live. Nor is the plot developed logically; things happen that don't seem to be provided for, rabbits pop out of unlikely hats. And the science - the less said the better.

For Your

Information. By Willy Ley, of course. Herr Ley discusses money of the future (and past), food for spaceships, jobs for space psychiatrists, and the date of the Crucifixion. Interesting as always. One of the better parts of the magazine.

Don't Look Now. A 27 page novelette by Leonard Rubin.

I've read this twice and still haven't sorted it out. Characters appear and disappear, are identified but not characterized, until one can't follow the plot at all. I know there is a plot to take over America by advertisers (or someone) and that one of the chief opponents is in a hospital - and what a wacky hospital - but who is who, I'm not sure. Reminds me of the old Abbott and Costello routine "Who's on First." The writing, as you may guess, is confused, at least. I don't recommend this, unless you like puzzles.

The

Power. A three page shorty by Frederic Brown. He had the power to command his listener to do what he was told. And then he made a mistake. Obvious, logical, and fantasy. But not overlong. Which makes it nice.

The Trouble-

makers. George O. Smith with a 47 page novella. A typical GOSmith story. She was a rebel in the rigid society, and refused to marry the man chosen for her. Her parents tried everything, but finally she reaches the end and tries to escape. He was a junior spaceman, who felt that he was being shoved around and his (brilliant) ideas ignored. Relegated to a space outpost on the edge of the explored area - one man, of course - he builds an improved space drive and deserts his post to come to Earth to try to persuade the high command of his worth. They turn him down, and try to place him under arrest for deserting his post. He decides to take off for parts unknown in his improved ship. In his flight he encounters the girl [naturally] and she decided to go with him - a fact he discovers only after they are aspace. the usual follows. Smoothly written, like a TWS story of ten years or so ago. Standard GOSmith characters, with the usual 2.5 dimensional reality; they act as the author thinks they should, to fulfill the plot outline, and not as they probably really would. And of course, it isn't sf. But it made for 20 minutes of relaxation.

Amazing Science Fiction Stories. March 1960. Subterfuge. An 11 page short by Robert Silverberg. A Neopuritan missionary to the "planet of iniquity" Gamma Crucis IX finds that the laws make it illegal to "interfere with another person's pleasure unless he's acting contrary to the public good, and you'd damned well be ready to prove your charge. It's also illegal to conduct

yourself in such a fashion as to cause public unhappiness. You must remember that we have only one crime on Harmony: gloom." He decided to the only attack is from the inside; he will pretend to become as "immoral" as the natives, while retaining his inner probity. Of course, he falls from grace - but good. Smoothly written, with a little bit of tongue-in-cheek (?), and no great attempt at characterization. Sullin, the missionary, does seem real, somewhat over-drawn. I liked it, mildly.

Old Friends Are the Best. Nine page short by Jack Sharkey. A plant from the moon, brought to earth, thrives. Sending out long roots, it multiplies. And it - or they - somehow make themselves an artificial gravity field - which is intense enough to cause serious changes in local gravity. And then they cover the world, and increase the field enough to attract asteroids and finally the moon. With disastrous results. A cute little story, but not really sf. Not when there is such a selective gravitational field that it will be effective over 40 or 50 million miles before it will work at 250000 miles. Or hasn't the author heard of the inverse-square law. Anyway, the writing suffers from having everything merely told, rather than acted. The reader is merely reading a report, rather than participating in the drama. This makes for much less impact and interest. There is no dramatic tension.

Susy. Seven pages by Watson Parker. Susy was the girl at the base who talked to the men in the satellites and kept them from cracking up. She mothered, and big-sistered, and loved them night and day by radio, bringing them back safely. Then one of them returned early, before she could break with him, and wanted to marry her. Even though she was crippled. A nice little story, worked out well. The characterization seems good, although the action can be guessed at easily. Still, I liked it.

The Man Who Murdered Tomorrow. A nine page episode by Robert Bloch. A psychotic writer [could this be autobiographical?] obtains entry into the H-bomb control center. Nicely written, and with a touch of interest in the discussion of Bloch's old fiend, Jack the Ripper. No where is Bloch going next? Good on first reading, but loses punch when you know the plot. Which I'm not telling any more about.

Seven From the Stars. A novel - 100 pages! - by Marion Zimmer Bradley. And quite a good one, for the most part. Seven survivors from a wrecked spaceship land in the southwestern desert. Their problem: survival without revealing their origin. (And in today's America could you do that? No birth certificates, no school records, no social security number, no credit cards, no identification of any kind.) They have no hope of rescue, as Earth is a Closed Planet because of the presence of Rhu'ins on it. The Rhu'ins are a race of beings capable of taking over a human host, and are fighting the galactic federation. One of the survivors is a telepath, one an empath. Their only hope is to contact the resident galactic observer, who can help them get settled. But, a Rhu'in enters the picture. After much trouble, they manage to contact the observer, control the Rhu'ins, and earth is opened to the galactic federation.

The story is very good where it is laid in the southwest, where the author knows the area and the people at first hand. The characters here are developed nicely, and the action is well paced. The scenes towards the end, though, where an electronic telepathic communicator is being built, suffer from a lack of reality. The construction scene, especially, does not ring true; the people here are stock cardboard, and their actions are unconvincing. The difference between being familiar with the scenes and people, and not, is very clear. If GOSmith, for example, had written these scenes, they would be convincing, because he would be writing of work and people he knew. However, so much is good that I recommend it.

Science Fiction Stories. May 1960. The Corianis Disaster, a 50 page novelette by Murray Leinster. Another typical Leinster problem story, written in the typical cool Leinster prose, with the typical Leinster gadget. The interstellar liner Corianis was enroute from Kholar to Maninea. Something happened in mid-trip (it apparently hit a meteor, big and iron) and when she arrived at her destination, there was a Corianis already there, complete with the same passengers and crew - with two exceptions. And duplicates of these two turn out to be safe back on Kholar. Naturally such duplication creates problems, especially when the passengers include the planetary president of Maninea and important political figures of Kholar. So Jack Bedell, mathematical physicist and one of the two non-duplicated people, with the aid and encouragement of the other, naturally a young, attractive, unmarried female, finds out what caused the duplication - his ship had hit the meteor and been thrown into a parallel space-time where there already was a Corianis that had not hit the meteor. Naturally he figures out a way to get his ship back into the correct space-time and also gets the girl. And, really, I didn't care. Somehow, this time the problem didn't click and so the story fell flat. Without the tension and drive built up through the problem, the story just doesn't have anything to make it interesting. Smooth writing, yes, but no characters, no development of action, no suspense. And the writing just becomes intrusive.

Make It New, by R. W. Lowndes. A 6 page editorial on a theme taken from a fanzine [!] discussion of what is science fiction literature. Doc Lowndes is one of the two editors who write editorials worth noting.

This Year and No Other. A 10 page short by David ~~Green~~Grinnell. The prefect crime - take your victims back in the past before man appears on the scene, murder them there, and you have no problem disposing of the bodies and no witnesses. Just make sure no one sees you going off with them. Or just maroon them there; no muss, no fuss. [Just the thing for Alfred Hitchcock...] Unless they know how to make sure that the crime will out, complete with eyewitness accounts by the victims, bullet from your gun, imbedded in bone of victim, and all. A nice little story, and well presented. The difficult form chosen, an opening address to the jury, makes for little character drawing, and leaves little room for action (this is not a Perry Mason story). You never really see the characters; you see the picture the prosecutor is drawing for the jury.

The Living Urn. By Kate Wilhelm. A 9 page short. Winston knew he had to have the "living urn" that Pontasfil owned; his was a mere imitation. So, he swapped them - without permission, of course - and hopped for Earth, leaving pursuit behind. However, his actions had been expected, and when he arrived at earth - awake for years, because his deep sleep had been tampered with - the customs were waiting for him with open arms. He was the sucker, being used as an involuntary messenger. An inoffensive, but unimpressive story, with no real faults, but nothing positive, either. Writing, plot, character, all are routine.

"The Principle" Revisited. A three page discussion by A. Bertram Chandler of Finagle's Law, otherwise known as the Principle of Natural Cussedness.

Travelers Far and Wee. Donald D. Westlake. A four page short. A "fable" of the day when you won't be able to get out of your car - no place to stop - but will have to ride and ride and ride, day and night. [Even worse than the MTA or Los Angeles freeways.] I didn't like it. Not even little magazine stuff.

Parodies Tossed. Immortality, C. O. D. Bret Hooper takes off in this one. You know - or should know - what to expect. This is a good review-in-verse. Would that I could do as well.

The Alien Vibration. Hannes Bok. A 15 page reprint from the February 1942 Future. Bok with his most purple prose, showing the influence of Merritt. And yet, in spite of the copious sprinkling of adjective upon adjective, this wears well. It still has a sense of wonder, I guess. The plot is so simple (it seems); the world is only what you imagine - even you are the product of your imagination. I liked it. I liked it when I first read it and liked it now.

If. May 1960. A Tourist Named Death. Christopher Anvil. A 31 page "novel" [note Lowndes' 50 page novelette!]. Cops and robbers on a planet that lives up to its name - Truth. The super-spy from Earth is out to prevent the dastardly space line from taking over the planet; with the aid of a number of portable matter transmitters, and an equal number of rabbits-cum-hats, he succeeds. Reminds me of a standard, grade B, Planet Stories epic, without the outworld color they usually had. Character - negligible (of course things move so fast there is no time for character). Action - lots, faster paced than even John Carter of Barsoom. Writing - who can tell. Verdict - if you want action, and nothing else, including logic, you might like this. But don't expect Brackett or Anderson; if they wrote this, they should keep it quiet.

Thirty Degrees Cattywonkus. James Bell. An 11 page short. There was - or wasn't - an odd door in the hall that led nowhere - or somewhere. And after reading this "story" of parallel universes and cross-mixing or persons therefrom, I still don't know - or care. Nice cardboard figures (12 lb stock, maybe) stalking along the indistinct paths drawn by the author; many times I had the feeling he couldn't see the paths himself. It may be that he just can't write lucidly enough to make it clear to this jaded reader. A typical poor Galaxy story, with confusion piled on confusion.

When Day Is Done. Arnold Castle [This is not Day is Done, by delRey. Not by any means.]. Six page short. A very unconvincing method to relax executive tensions and reduce anxiety ulcers - just let the executive travel a couple of miles, on foot, through an artificial jungle, well stocked with artificial and deadly animals, on his way to and from work. Of course, you would have a rather high turnover of top brass each year, but the ones that remained would be healthy - it says here. I don't believe it. And I didn't like the story. It reads like a little magazine slice through one day in the life of.... The author certainly didn't make it believable. Nor is the hero, either.

A Pride of Islands. A 17page short by C. C. MacA[pp]. Survivors of a wrecked spaceship on an isolated world have degenerated to small clan-tribes, living on the backs of immense caterpillar-beasts. One day, a couple of young men from one tribe/beast decide to kidnap/elope with a couple of girls from another group. They get the girls but have to retreat into the forest, where they eventually find a robotjeep from the ship, who takes them there, and then back to their own beast. For a wonder, they don't immediately solve the problem of what and who and when and where and why, and take off for earth; they regard the robots as just a new kind of superior bird or animal. To this extent, the story is better than average, and the characters become real; they are just little guys thrust into situations beyond their real understanding. And, granted the basic setting, the action follows rather logically. The writing, though, is pedestrian. Verdict: entertaining.

Heel. Philip Jose Farmer. Fourteen pages. And such pages. The "gods" of the Iliad are merely a super movie troupe from space, filming the war, and making changes to make things more dramatic. It didn't convince me. The characterization is pure ham - and well hung at that. The action is choppy, the scene-shifting creaks. Compared to the other stories he has written, this is bad; there is none of the attention to detail that makes the other stories interesting. The writing hurts. Verdict: poor.

A Great Day for the Irish. A. M. Lightner. Twelve page short. She was an etomologist, determined to keep all harmful plants and insects away from the newly settled planet, New Eden. He was a rule-scoff Irish, determined to bring in his shamrocks - and incidentally some nematodes. She tries to prevent him, but he smuggles some in - and of course the nematodes turn out to be the cure for a mysterious plant disease. And of course, boy-gets-girl. This has a "cute" writing style that irritated me. The characters are certainly cut from the best grade cardboard, using standard patterns for the brash young hellion and the prim young female scientist, who can be expected to melt in the last pages. My reaction was ugh!

Matchmaker. Charles L. Fontenay. Twenty four pages. The Calculator said that if Lao Protik married Grida Mattin, the result would be offspring who could solve some important problem in the future. What, I don't know. So, the powers that be decided to maneuver things so that they will meet and want to marry. They do. And then they discover that Grida is sterile. But then Protik falls in love with his wife's sister, and has a child by her. He then divorces his wife to marry her sister; his wife gets custody of the child. And, lo! All is well. A cute little gimmick. And adequate writing. And reasonable characters. This one should have been in Galaxy; it would have improved the current issue. This held my attention, for a change; I was curious to see what would happen.

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. April 1960. Crazy Maro. Daniel Keys. Nineteen pages. An unusual, and well written, story of a telepath in a world that would reject him. It really isn't a story, but an episode, with no beginning or end, but I found it interesting. One of the more intelligent treatments of the problem of how to communicate with a telepath, who knows not only what you are saying, but what you are feeling, and will react to that. I'd call this more of a character sketch, and a pretty good one. Some of the writing has "modern" feelings, but not enough to ruin the effect. Part of the imagery is very vivid.

The Hairy Thunderer. An 11 page Indian story by Levi Crow. An entirely different type of story from the preceding, with a much less intense emotion. This is a story of what might be an Indian legend [I don't know] told as a storyteller might have told it. In spite of the awkward style - and in spots I felt it limped badly - I enjoyed it; it seems to me Crow has captured the feeling of the Indian. In some ways I am reminded of the stories written about the same type of Plains Indians by Schulze, many years ago. These probably gave me a feel for the style, since Crow seems to have many of the mannerisms I can remember in Schulze. And Schulze knew his Indians; he lived with them for years. Characters - as far as I can tell, these are the Indians I grew up with, through Schulze. To me, the story was a success; others will probably find it stilted or dry or slowpaced. And yet, I'll reread this before I'll reread anything else in the issue.

Ringer. G. C. Edmondson. Four pages. A little episode, with no beginning and no end. Little magazine style, but not little magazine writing. Everything is very detached; there is nothing

for the reader to get interested in. And the "plot" is so obscure, there isn't any way of knowing just what the author did intend.

The Wrens in Grampa's Whiskers. Nine page short by Edgar Pangborn. Little men or fairies or something made their home in Grampa's beard - and sallied forth to do good. Nothing is ever revealed, nothing ever resolved. Everything is written in a very low key, with no action, no climax, no suspense - except the question of what it/they actually was/were - and no plot, really. Interesting writing, though.

Through Time and Space With Ferdinand Feghoot. Grendel Briarton. Another shaggy pun story, perhaps a little better than some. At least the pun isn't too much of a stretch.

A Certain Room. Kurt Kusenberg. Five pages. I assume this is a translation from Eastern Europe, because of the copyright notice - Intercultural Publications - and because of the typical German idiom, which the translator - Therese Pol - has apparently maintained. A wry little episode about a certain front parlor in which the interactions between the various things and actions of the world cross and come to a knot. "Each time a flower vase containing artificial flowers was turned around it made the Yellow River in China overflow and caused great damage. If a finger touched the F-sharp key on the piano, there would be a sudden epidemic of smallpox in New Zealand...." Herr Payk wanted to find out what various actions in the room would cause; finally he found out one too many. Fantasy, obviously. The writing is much different and there is no attempt at characterization. Yet I enjoyed it. Perhaps the rather dry, matter-of-fact style is an effective antidote for some of the overwritten material.

Among the Dangs. George P. Elliott. Novelette of 23 pages, about an anthropologist investigating the customs, especially the magic, of a Central American tribe. He lives among them, and joins their activities. The descriptions of the native rites are at once both fascinating and irritating. The author has made them seem plausible, and yet has so mysticized them that they become mere mouthings of nonsense. I don't know how I will react on second reading; I fear I will not finish it. And yet, I wouldn't have missed it. The central character is never developed fully; no sooner do you feel you have a good idea of what he is, than some form of magic intervenes, and you start over. The writing style is slow and lucid - except in the vital part where the rituals are involved, and then it makes the illogical sense of a "reefer" dream.

A Little Human Contact. Rosel George Brown. Ten pages of family trouble of the near future, all about how to bring up baby. The only thing of worth might be the machine for changing diapers - just stick baby in and the job is done. A preview of the Ladies Mome Companion of 1999. I enjoyed the next item more. It's better written.

Memo at the Department of Agriculture. Hilbert Schenck, Jr. A four line poem, relating to the famous purple cow. Doggerel verse, but I liked it. About Time. Isaac Asimov. The good Doctor discusses time reckoning for 11 pages, and manages to insert a few bits of uncommon information.

In the House, Another. Joseph Whitehill. Three pages of tour-de-force writing, with the substitution of all the unfamiliar descriptions for the common. And yet there are some who would consider the description valid. As I read it I wondered why the author used such purplish descriptions;

the end shows why. I won't spoil it, but I will say that after one reading the episode is dead. It reminds me, in some respects, of E. E. Smith's description of the termite attack on his house, some 20 years ago.

The Game of Five. Gordon R. Dickson. Twenty eight pages. An attempt to set up a logical out-of-world, alien society, that fails primarily because the story is too short, and the author doesn't have time to set the stage properly. Mixed in are a "rescue the girl" story, with the eventual opening of the planet to trade depending upon the outcome, which is in turn dependent upon the natives' social structure. And I still don't follow the explanation at the end. And without that, it doesn't make too much sense. Some good action shots, but little in the way of believable characters. And, as the background is unconvincing, the action doesn't seem real. I'd like to have read about 20,000 more words of this; it might have made sense then.

Fantastic Science Fiction Stories. April 1960. Doomsday Army. Jack Sharkey. A 37 page novelette. Twenty five saucers come from space, land, one on top of another in Battery Park, NY. Out of the stack came one immense figure, who stated he was the advance guard of his race, who would take over the world. It remained for Harry Coyne, National Guard Captain who could "fix things," but without considering what the "fixing" would result in, to solve the problem. [Just as he solved the squeaky outside kitchen door - he just took it off the hinges....] Of course, his solution leads to something, but his solution to that seems to have been all right. And I can't say more without ruining the story - not that it matters too much. The first half of the story is not too bad, with a nice little problem being posed, but the rest of the story is strictly from hunger. Even the tone of the story changes from serious with some humorous touches, to slap-stick with no seriousness. Like going to the opera and hearing the first half of Madama Butterfly, and then the second half of The Mikado - except that the Mikado is good, too. There is too much forced cuteness in the "humor" to make for smooth reading. The attempts at depicting characters result in adding a somewhat jarring tint to the standard stereotypes - the general, the scientist, the sergeant (non-regular and unsure of himself). Maybe I should tell you that the giant is a collective organism, and save you the trouble of reading the story.

The Closest School. Zenna Henderson. A 10 page story that is one of her better ones - it would be well liked in one of the slicks. Complete with the typical - for her - purple passages: "But sometimes in the evening, when the sun is spinning every blade of grass to gold or - along the back slope - kindling it to a fine spun-glass snowiness, I listen to the wind, thin and minor, keening through the gold and glass and wonder why anyone would want to live in such a dot under such a wideness of sky with such a tawny tide of grass lapping up to such hills." Ten pages of such paragraphs. The story - how to admit the child of some alien castaways to a small-town school. And, I don't remember any of the characters in the story, now.

The Summer Visitors. Gordon R. Dickson. A 15 page short. More visitors, this time a group isolated in a big, old house on a cliff. They see no one; only their handyman arranges for supplies and such. Until one small boy climbed the cliff in an effort to escape from some bullies. They seemed to inspire him, so that he faced his problems. When he returned the last time, they were gone, and statues of the Greek/Roman gods were in their places. Question, were they the gods? Answer, I don't know. And the story doesn't make me want to know, either. I read this mainly to get the answer to my question -

and I was disappointed. I'd class this story as strictly mundane, domestic problems class, with the gods (?) substituted for the old man down the street who helped people. Like Scattergood Baines, maybe. But the people aren't as interesting as he was, though I got mad at him sometimes. But that's another story. This one is unnotable.

Five Times Four. Poul Anderson. A 36 page novelette. One man cast away with four young - mostly - girls and two aliens, with no navigational charts, and no idea of where they are or where their ship is. They manage to find a nice livable planet, and then he tries to use the "castaway" law to perpetuate the race. The only trouble is that the one girl - woman - who will agree isn't the one he wants; she is too old and unpleasing. The rest decide to have nothing to do with him; they escape with the space boat and find civilization close at hand. It was all a plot on his part. Reading the blurb on the inside cover of the April Amazing for this story, we get one idea - "He drifted through space with four lovely females! Lucky fellow, that J. J. Newhouse! Especially lucky when his wayward space-lifeboat brought him and his four beautiful companions to rest on an isolated, far-away world! For J. J. Newhouse has Law Number 298376 in his favor (popularly known as the Reproductive Act) - an act that makes it a crime NOT to reproduce the species when cast away on a deserted planet! But it seems the ladies have other ideas---as you'll find out in Poul Anderson's humorous, spicy EVE TIMES FOUR!" And I certainly found very little spicy in the story, and only three beautiful females. But I did like the story. It is typical good Anderson - not hack, but not classic, either. Planet would have loved it. Venture would have liked it, but would have insisted on more s*e*x. ASF wouldn't - no psi. The best story in the issue.

Ella Speed. Ron Goulart. A 19 page short. Paul Dodds was a successful comic strip artist, with a female Robin Hood as the central character. He takes a vacation in a backward, dictatorial country on some undefined planet, and finds Ella Speed leading a revolt, inspiring the "peasants" from hideouts in the forest. Naturally, he mixes in, is captured by one side, and then the other, rescues the girl, etc., and finally gets her - or vice versa. I'm sure I've read this before - with the exception of the comic strip coming to life - in Graustark and Mexico and China and Europe during the Middle Ages and.... And better, too. I got the feeling that the author didn't know just where or when this was supposed to be laid. And the action is about as mixed up as a van Vogt story, without being explained in the end. And the characters are all on the comic strip level - And I'm not referring to peanuts or Pogo.

Amazing Science Fiction Stories. April 1960. And I'd like to comment here that Amazing and Fantastic seem to have joined ASF in calling novelettes novelettes, instead of novels, as was and so often is done, when one 144 page issue would have three "booklength" novels, plus two "novelettes" and three short stories. It is a nice trend, and I feel Cele Goldsmith deserves a pat on the back for doing it. Doc Lowndes is usually honest in this respect, too. But on to the stories.

We're Friends, Now. Henry Hasse returns with a 55 page novelette [!] [See what I mean]. A detective story, in which the detective is pitted against the calculating machine that has taken over the solution of crime problems. This time, the problem causes the machine to blow a gasket, so the ex-chief of NY Homicide, who is now in charge of providing data to the machine, takes over. The gimmick was used, in somewhat similar form, by Agatha Christie years ago, but it is still effective. As a detective story, this isn't too good; it doesn't fol-

low the classic pattern in that some of the vital information is hidden until the end. It is a relief from the private eye, though; not one Mike Hammer or Peter Chambers or Mike Shayne or even Honey West (private eyess). My major complaint is a rather illogical personification of the computer; however, at the end it becomes logical. Some of the characters are a little too four-square and standard - the young widow, her paramour, the cheated inventor, the ruined columnist. But all in all, the story reads well and I enjoyed my dinner while reading it.

The laugh, though, is this quote from the editorial which Norman Lobsenz signed; he should do a little more checking first, I feel. "For instance, Hasse was one of the first writers ever published in Amazing. His first story appeared in the August, 1936, [my underline] issue. It was called, "He who Shrank," and it has since become one of the outstanding classics of science-fiction. It was one of the first stories to be based on the theme of the dwindling human." I wonder what happened to Wells and Verne and H.G. Smith, and John Campbell, and Leinster, and Keller and Hamilton and Jack Williamson, and Verrill and Phil "Buck Rogers" Nowlan, who all appeared much before the August 1936 issue? Maybe they didn't write anything of note for Amazing. And, don't forget Coblenz and Merritt and Burroughs and Taine..... Poor Ray Cummings must be spinning in his grave at that remark about "one of the first" stories on the dwindling theme. After all, it was only about 17 years earlier that "Girl in the Golden Atom" appeared, not to mention the various sequels. And in Amazing there was Verrill's "Green Prism" stories back in 1927 and Wertenbaker's "Man from the Atom" in the Amazing Quarterly at about the same time. Then, in 1931, S. P. Meek left Dr. Bird long enough to write "Submicroscopic" and its sequel. How specific can you get? But that doesn't detract from the story itself.

The Red Telephone. John Jakes. A 16 page detective story; this time I didn't think it good. A red spy has infiltrated the SAC command post near Omaha and photographed the super secret war plans. The president sends David Colt to investigate; he reduces it to the obvious suspect, whom the base commander has been grilling for hours, and three other officers. By a "clever psychological trick" he forces the spy to confess. And I don't believe it. After the build-up of suspense, and probable background of the spy, there would be no such breakdown. And the story would fall flat on its face - and does. As I said, the characterization, which is paramount to this type of story, is lopsided. All effort is directed against one suspect; the actual spy is very much in the background. I don't believe he says a dozen words, until the final Nyet that gives him away. Poor. This is much like some of the detective stories the American Magazine used to commission, written with exotic or unusual backgrounds.

The Issahar Artifacts. J. F. Bone. An 8 page short. In digging a canal somewhere on some planet, they uncover the wrecked remains of a spaceship, and a diary. Parts are readable, giving scenes of a solitary castaway, trying to build a rescue beacon, while something tugs at his mind. Finally, he locates a pond of one-celled algae, acting in unison. He destroys almost all of them, is left in peace to finish the beacon, and is later rescued. But the algae were not all killed, and they are the ones who find the mss, on one of their many planets, while slowly expanding against the human empire. Science-fiction, and that is all. The diary is very dry.

It Hardly Seems Fair. Gordon R. Dickson. Twelve pages. The ignorant savages - otherworld - and the human

overseers, one old and drunk, the other young and ambitious. Finally the natives revolt. Substitute Africa for the location, move back about 75 years in time, and you've got almost the same story. Only fair. The characters are just stock; the action the same. And the writing ditto.

Remembering. David R. Bunch. Four pages of drivel. More of this "culture" where metal is replacing most of the human body. Intended as a "little magazine" piece, and written even worse than most such. I didn't finish it; I couldn't stand it. Shaver was not as bad as this, except that he was longer.

You Don't Make Wine Like the Greeks Do. David L. Fisher. A 35 page novelette. The man comes to Dr. Quink for advice, explaining that he and his "wife" have come from the future for a visit, and now his "wife" won't go back, and is pretending that she can't remember she is from the future. He invites the Doctor for dinner to examine her - as a psychologist - and in turn she complains about the crazy ideas her "husband" has about coming from the future - and makes love with the doctor. Very conveniently, in the future people live forever, so they don't have to reproduce, and so the sex urge has died out, but not the means. Hers has returned, but not her "husband's", so there is no problem about the marriage, especially as no one has a record of it. Finally, of course, the man disappears, and the girl gets the doctor. It seems she was from the future, as she knew he was going to get the Nobel prize ten years before he did. But by that time I didn't care. The writing is just wretched; there are sentences lumped together, poor syntax, and just sloppy stuff in general. "He carried his hat in both hands, he was nervous, he was out of his element." Occasionally, such writing would be ok, but not repeatedly. And the characters - I think Fisher has been reading Thorne Smith recently, and liked the wacky type, without getting the Thorne Smith touch that made them human again. And we never get any Greek wine.

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction - and somewhere along the line, there seems to have been a loss of "The Magazine of", I see. May 1960. The Oldest Soldier. Fritz Leiber. A 16 page novelette that is part of the Snake war. This is laid in present day earth. Max was just one of the boys at the tavern, except that he seemed to know more about past and future wars, as if he had been there. And then one day he asked his only friend for help in repelling an attack on him from--outside. Nicely worked up little story, with some really interesting development on psychic attack. I liked this - but then I generally do like Leiber. But I'd like to see more of Gray Mouser and Fafhrd, in a serious style.

Through Space
.....Feghoot. Grendel Briarton. A bad pun, this time. I didn't like this one.

The Man From Tomorrow. Fred McMorow. Fourteen page short. The man from the future told the bartender who would win the big fight - and ruined betting for him forever. Just a little bar-side story, but nicely developed. Somewhat over-atmospheric, perhaps. But at least the bartender seemed real.

Pop! Randall Garrett with "Little Willie," no better or worse than hundreds of others.

The Tender Age. John Collier. A little - 5 page - story that is disquieting. It is written by a master writer, of course. Everything is underplayed, understated, and yet the reader can sense the implied plot. I liked it.

One On Trial. Gordon R. Dickson. Eight pages. As a trial, the General (honorary) was put into an artificial environment, and expected to save himself. His crime - he was a rugged individualist

in a regimented age. His solution - to do what wasn't expected. I don't believe in such a gadget (not the solution, the artificial environment) - and the author certainly didn't induce me to; as a character, the General reminded me of General Bullmoose in Li'l Abner. If this is characterization, than it was a good job. But I didn't like the story; it was confused.

A Specimen for the Queen. Arthur Porges. Ten pages. The collector machine inadvertently foils an invasion of earth and also saves the galaxy from domination by intelligent bees. The story is nicely written, even though you certainly don't believe it. There is no such attempt to make you believe; most of the time there is a tongue-in-cheek attitude. Which makes for immediate entertainment, but hardly for lasting value.

A Piece of Pi.

Isaac Asimov. Ike spends 11 pages talking about Pi, 3.1415926....., and then says there is more to come. Willey Ley did the same thing some time ago. Both are good.

Wockyjabber. Hilbert Schenck, Jr. One page of verse (?). I quote stanza one: "'Twas finite and the polar cusp/Orthogonal to the secant lay/The semi-tacnode operates on/The Gudermanian of A."

Ballad of the Red Giants. Joseph Hansen. Another page of verse, this time more serious. Mostly adjectives.

Open to Me, My Sister. Philip Jose' Farmer. A 46 page novelette. Rather a strange story, even for Farmer, of survival on Mars, amid odd vegetation and animal life, including and alien visitor - female, almost. Some of the details are repellant, and yet the whole is well done. The background detail is noteworthy; things are well described and yet manage to retain their sense of unusual. In one sense I am reminded of the characters in "A Martian Odyssey," in another of "Out of the Silent Planet;" both have that ssense of the unexplained. Or of some of the scenes in S. Fowler Wright's "The World Below" which have the same s trangeness. The last few pages are a little of a letdown, though. And I don't quite follow some of the biological details - I'd have to chart them out. I liked the story, though. It is certainly different.

Astounding Science /~~1/2/1/2/1/2/1/2/1/2~~ Fact & Fiction [Analog]. May 1960. Damned If You Don't. A 39 page novelette by Randall Garrett. If you think the theme is familiar, you're right. Just pick up an Amazing for Nov 1933 and turn to the s tory by the editor of ASF entitled "The Battery of Hate." The plot is the same, with only a few changes to bring it up to date. In brief, inventor develops a fuel battery that burns coal (JWC) or water (RG) and requires only a renewal of the fuel to operate for ever. Naturally the power companies are opposed to this, which would throw them out of business, and probably wreck the economy. So, they try to buy and suppress it; failing, they steal one to see what makes it tick. The endings differ, though, which is probably an indication of the changing attitude in the country - in the present case the givernment is called in to make sure it is suppressed. This is a gadget story with sociological implications that didn't quite click with me; the arguments didn't convince me that it should be suppressed. And, once the basic story line isn't accepted, not all the best writing or smooth development can save the story. The writing isn't bad; it does have certain technical double-talk I don't like. The hero, for some reason (the cover and pics, maybe) reminds me of one of the old Doc Savage cohorts, Monk the chemist. Which is unfair to Garrett, for his hero is a much better depicted character than was anyone in the Doc Savage stories. However, I never get a feel for anyone in the story; all remain as figures moved with the jerky spasms of a marionette. Science fiction, sure, but not too believable. At least to me.

Eccentric Orbit. A three page short by John Cory. And one of those pages is illustration. For its length, this is a good job. After all, we don't know what will go on in the minds of the first men to circle the earth; this provides one possible answer. And a very plausible one, too. I liked this.

Wizard. An 18 page short by Larry M. Harris. A group of psimen in the middle ages, trying to keep from being discovered by the Inquisition. And trying to keep the Inquisition from troubling others who are innocent. The writing of this makes the story hard to follow; there is a glib casualness that keeps me from accepting any of the characters as real. And if you can't accept the characters as they are presented, the action doesn't follow - and the whole story falls down. For relaxing reading, it isn't too bad, although there are a few too many characters of a minor sort to keep track of; they are strewn throughout - or maybe I'm just too conscious of them.

Revolution. Mack Reynolds has a 27 page novelette that is - or should be - thought provoking. Of course, this is science fiction, and fans no longer read that silly Buck Rogers stuff, and so we won't be able to discuss this. But, of all the stories and articles I've read in the sf magazines for the last six months, this is the one that has given me food for thought - serious thought. The story really isn't science fiction, as there are only a few minor gadgets, and may not even be fiction. But if it is fiction, it certainly is science fiction, as it is a logical extrapolation of the present situation. Briefly, it describes an underground revolutionary movement in Russia, which the USA is backing. the US agent becomes worried by the question of what will be the government after the Soviet is overthrown; it appears that it will be a super communist state, with the overlying Soviet control removed. Is so, it could be more of a danger than the present world, with a group of dedicated true communists at the head. The problem: Should the revolution be allowed to succeed? Aht answer..... This is a "Lady Or The Tiger" story. The writing and characters are convincing - it sounds as if Reynolds has spent time in the USSR - and the problem is chillingly close to home. [Between writing and stenciling this, there came the spy incident and the disruption of the summit meeting] This is a story very similar in contemporary urgency to "Solution Unsatisfactory" of some years ago. I hope this isn't another such "beat" for ASF. Anyway, read this and think of the answer and/or answers. I can't, at the present, come up with a suitable one. Recommended as a thought-provoking story. Even though it really isn't a story, but an unfinished episode.

Out Like a Light. Part 2, 48 pages long, of the serial by Mark Phillips. This time FBI agent Malone unravels enough of the plot to discover that there are a gang of teen-age teleports who have been committing impossible robberies for some time. But how do you hold one still long enough to talk with them, or to trap them, remains a problem. While trying to work out a solution to the problem he relaxes both in bars and with a girl - one he had stumbled over on the steps of the police station. Later, his old friend, Queen Elizabeth I, the "mad" telepath, contacts him to inform him his new girl is merely the sister of the leader of the telepaths. To be concluded. The story picks up steam in this episode. I still don't like the writing style; it reminds me of some one else, but I'm not sure just who. It is still a little brash for my taste, but the characters are rounding into shape nicely. If this doesn't fall flat on its face in the next part, it will improve on "Deathworld" which started off wonderfully, and then sagged more and more.

The March of the Phyla. Isaac Asimov devotes 22 pages to a discussion of why the various types of life probably evolved, and what the advantages in each stage are. Interesting, but the pictures, while pretty, really don't add anything to the article.

"You Must Agree with Me..." John Campbell's 6 page article/editorial on the conviction "If he knew what I know, he would agree with me. Since he doesn't agree with me, that proves that he doesn't know what I know." In these editorial, John is a hard man to pin down. They are interesting, stimulating, and, often, irritating. This one is a preview of the feature article next month.

Fantastic Science Fiction Stories. May 1960. Fireman. J. F. Bone with a 29 page novelette. Ballard was an undercover agent of the Bureau of Interworld Relations of the Galactic Confederation - A Fireman - on the planet Vishnu, with the job of controlling the dictator Varden. He has taken the place of a native, with a remolded body. With some "Ric Ambler" type stuff, plus the help of another operative - female, naturally - he succeeds. I enjoyed this, although towards the end the story became somewhat hectic. The characters are standard, with no attempt to bring them to real life. The writing is adequate, with some nice touches; for the most part the story is well paced. A few more pages might have made a better story of it.

Study in Horror: The Brie Life of H. P. Lovecraft. A 16 page article by Sam Moskowitz about H. P. Lovecraft. The only real fault I can find is the attempt to make Lovecraft into a science fiction writer; although Sam makes out a good case, the stories themselves will disprove much of his argument. I've always felt that Lovecraft, like Merritt, used some of the themes of science fiction as plots for an essentially weird/fantasy story. Even "The Shadow Out Of Time" which is really a time travel story, the treatment of the theme makes it into a weird fantasy. It certainly doesn't depend upon science for the suspension of belief necessary for a story. An interesting article, though.

The Challenge from Beyond. H. P. Lovecraft. Nine pages taken from the September 1935 Fantasy Magazine, one of the early fanzines. Really part of a round-robin fantasy story by Merritt, C.L. Moore, R.L. Howard, HPL, and Frank Belknap Long; although the excerpt makes interesting reading, the whole is much more interesting. It has been several years since I last read this story, but I can still remember the sections by Moore and Merritt - they were written with such atmosphere and such poetic imagery that they were memorable. Lovecraft's section is good; it shows the type of science fiction Moskowitz is citing, and also shows the treatment that keeps it fantasy. The writing is typical Lovecraft, with long sentences with rolling phrases and vivid images. There is no attempt to make the central character real; he is just the vehicle for carrying along the action and providing a story. This follows Lovecraft's ideas that phenomena, not people, were the heroes of the "marvel tale." I like this excerpt; I just wish they had reprinted all of the story. And maybe this will mean the return of Clark Ashton Smith, who has been neglected too long. Remember "The Singing Flame" and the others in Wonder Stories in 1930-33?

When the Sea-King's Away.... A 26 page Gray Mouser-Fafhrd novelette by Fritz Leiber. This, I feel, is better than the last one in this series Leiber did - the tongue-in-the-cheek attitude is almost done - but still not as good as the early stories in the series. I feel that the sense of reality which he had toward the world he was depicting has disappeared. This story is tossed off as a sort of fairy tale about a never-never land with no

pretense of being true or possible. Even Baum's Oz stories have more of a sense of reality; I feel Leiber is no longer convinced this is a real land and these real people. As for the story, Fafhrd and Gray Mouser on board ship have anchored where Fafhrd has decided the Sea-King's house is. A strange hole in the water leads from their ship down to the sea bottom and into a cavern where two masked, gilled women await them. While they are amorously involved, the Sea-King returns. They escape. And as I said, the story has a dream-like atmosphere that never encourages reality. I almost didn't finish it; it just wasn't written about the same two characters. even their characters have changed - and for the worse. I'd still like to read more stories about Gray Mouser and Fafhrd, but only if about the old pair, who stalked the pages of Unknown. The stories about them in Palmer's mags were better.

World Without Annette. A J. T. McIntosh novelette of 32 pages. When the gang leader's sweetheart was killed, he tried to replace her from a parallel universe. He almost succeeded, but things weren't exactly the same, and the replacements didn't fit. Finally, he comes up with a better solution - he marries her sister. I liked this; it made no attempt at profound science or profound character study or profound anything, but just entertainment. The language used is for the most part well in character with the narrator, who is supposed to be a standard aide to the top gangster, and semi-educated. At least, it is in the stereotype of the language that is supposedly used by the stereotype of such a character. And with a little sex thrown in. [Sex figures in all the stories except Lovecraft's in this issue; this may show the change in science fiction mores in the last 25 years.]

The Devil's Due. Donald Moffitt takes 8 pages to show how to outwit the devil. The "hero" sold his soul to the devil for the usual money and more money. But he figured out how to get his contract torn up - he just made too much work for the devil with his demands for immense sums of money; the devil figured it was cheaper to give up one soul. A good wish fulfillment story; little chance for real character development, of course, but the hero does change from a shrimp to a man-of-the-world, in very short order.

All in all, a very creditable issue.

Fantastic Science Fiction Stories. March 1960. [Which just shows I meant it when I said there was no special order to these reviews; I just pick them off the pile.] Merlin. J. T. McIntosh, again, with a 44 page novelette. This isn't a fantasy laid in the days of King Arthur; it is space opera. An exploring ship locates a humanoid culture on a planet that has been previously unknown. The culture is in the feudal age; as a joke, someone converts it into the Arthurian mold, naming the planet Camelot and the nobels after knights of the Round Table, etc. They introduce some simple gadgets - bicycles and sewing machines, for example - as samples, and leave, planning to return in about 10 years when there will be a big demand for these items. They also leave a space ship and allot about 25 close planets to the rulers, to be inspected every 5 years. On another planet they set up a matter transmitter to make return easy. Only they don't. During a periodic inspection trip 100 years later, the space ship with the Princess Guinevere (daughter of King Arthur), the Lady Vivien, Sir Bedivere, Sir Modred, Sir Geraint - all titled noblemen who would not dream of doing any work but who will "control" the ship - and Merlin, the "engineer" who keeps the lights on and such and is the most intelligent person aboard, crashes on the planet with the transmitter. Merlin saves most of them, stumbles on the transmitter, activates it, and makes contact with earth.

Natura. Merlin comes out ahead, but the girl he gets isn't the Princess or even Lady Vivien. A standard plot with a standard solution, and with standard action by standard characters. And yet, the story reads well and is enjoyable. Merlin becomes a real character part of the time, and then lapses into stock character again. Still, I liked this.

Strange Shape in the Stronghold. David R. Bunch. Six wasted pages about that future where people replace flesh with metal. Just as bad as the others. And just as mannered as the others - "modern" writing so modern it doesn't make sense. I don't think most little magazines could stand a steady diet of this. I wonder what Bunch has on the editor?

Purdy's Circus. Franklin Gregory. A 13 page short. The hen-picked little Mr Purdy bought a new lens for his enlarger. This one, though, didn't just enlarge the picture; it brought the object in the picture into the darkroom alive and full size. This wasn't so bad when it was the pretty aerialist, Lola Lark, but when the animal trainer and animals and midgets and horses and such followed, it was too much. Mrs Purdy leaves, but Purdy brings her back with a film, too, so she can take charge. She gets rid of them by burning the negatives. Later, Purdy in a bar sees a report that the circus characters had burned to death that afternoon. Slowly he draws out his wife's picture.... A typical little-tailor story plus gadget, no better and no worse than others. No development of characters - the overbearing wife, the meek little husband, the circus people are all standard characters. No exceptional writing. Just an average story.

When He Awakes. Steven S. Gray. An unusual 16 page story that is mostly character study. A man and his wife on a lonely planet where they are raising a special medicinal plant that grows only there. Something has killed their only child, and is trying to destroy the crops. Carver Jefferson tries to trap it, but it eludes him. His wife locates it and finds it is a young humanoid survivor from a wrecked space ship. All ends well. This isn't necessarily science fiction. The background is not necessary for the plot. This is an attempt to discuss a present-day problem in an atmosphere remote from the emotion-charged reality of today. And I thought it was rather well done. I don't agree with the central figure, but it is convincingly done. My disagreement has to do with other points, which are probably based on prejudices of today. The characters are all built up well and the action is reasonable. The writing is good and the story holds together. It isn't science fiction, but I liked it in spite of the lack of gadgets.

The Botticelli Horror. Lloyd Biggle, Jr. A 33 page novelette. Stock science fiction story, plot no. 10-a-DA/V or something. A smuggled thing from Venus gets loose and turns out to be an almost invisible lighter-than-air jellyfish-like hungry animal, that rapidly reproduces and takes over a good part of the midwest. Nothing the military can use - bullets, electricity, poison - works. The solution comes only by accident. Another smuggled animal - that has the power of aping things it sees (hence the cover, maybe) - also escapes from the sideshow and turns out to be the natural enemy of the first. My reaction was "So what." This story is all action - and rather poor action - with no characterization and no writing to help. And the plot creaks. The cover certainly doesn't have much relation to the story. Nor does the name, either. The "horror" is really the thing that saves the world.

Amazing Science Fiction Stories. May 1960. No Moving Parts. Nineteen pages by Murray F. Yace. This seems to be a hybrid - partially satire on regulations and governments and such, and partially story. And it isn't good either. Spaceships hadn't been built for so long - the old ones were built to last - that the plans just weren't available. So, when the door wouldn't open, no one knew what to do. And, to make matters worse, they had a most important personage on board who had to get to his planet before a certain date or t*h*i*n*g*s w*o*u*l*d h*a*p*p*e*n. And there was no way of opening the door from outside - the hull material was just too hard to be cut. Finally one of the few galactic jack-of-all-trades comes on the scene and solves all in a few minutes. Written in a brash style, the story never becomes credible, either as story or satire. I had the feeling the author was seeing how much he could get away with. Everything is distorted slightly, and this removes the whole thing from reality. Amusing, perhaps, but of little import.

The Still Small Voice. Robert Silverberg. 21 pages. Robertson bought the little box from a street peddler because it told him to. And it told him which plane not to take, what stocks to sell, etc. Until the agents from the future caught up with it, and corrected things by setting the whole thing back to before he bought the box. Thus making a branching time stream. Smoothly written, and adequately characterized; until the future appears, it is a most interesting study of a man who finds he can do nothing wrong. The ending, while obvious, was weak; too much deus-ex-machina.

Hunters Out of Space. Joseph E. Kelleam. A 91 page novel-sequel to Hunters Out of Time in the Feb 1959 Amazing. I read that story - or parts of it. The sequel is worse. It contains some of the worst writing I've read in months. It tries for epic stature and falls flat. Briefly, Jack Odin, a reincarnated Viking type, heads back underground to try to find his girl, who has been stolen from him in the underground world of Opal by Grim Hagen. On the way down, he meets one of his friends from before, Gunnar; from him he learns that the underground world has been laid waste by Hagen, who has left in a starship for worlds beyond. Odin and others follow, catch up with and then loose Hagen, finally catch him again, and have a grand fight, in which almost everybody is killed, Odin and his girl being saved only by disembodied intelligences ala Doc Smith. I don't remember such slaughter since the days of Conan and Richard Shaver. [his reminds me of Shaver, only minus the deros and worse written.] As for the science: "Just as he got it into view, the moiling space out there coalesced into one smoldering ember. Crushed by the awful weight, that single giant of flame suddenly burst into a thousand pieces. Comets streaked away. Dripping suns streamed across the mad sky. Worlds spewed out--and moons dripped tears of light as they followed after their mothers. They crashed and wheeled. They merged in gigantic splashes of fire. Pinwheels rushed across the screen. Rockets flashed. And fountains of flame spilled sun after sun into the sparkling void." All in a few moments! And with only a dust cloud several millions of miles across as the source. With this, Amazing slipped much from the level of other of its novels.

Longevity. Therese Windsor. Two pages. A tale of the days when the western continent is again being explored for the first time. With some too obvious derivatives from the past that spoil the atmosphere. But of course, this isn't a story, but a morality tale. And too obvious a one.

Sorry, this is a poor issue.

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REVIEW

CLASSIFIED CORRESPONDENCE

I. STARLIN'S WAR:

RICK SNEARY claims: "While far from the best novel of the year, Starship Soldier has certainly been the most talked of story of the year. Nearly everyone is against it, as either a poor story, or bad preaching, or both. But still ~~Heinlein~~ seems to have touched a nerve, or come very close to some mark; for most of us, it seems, feel that we must not only say that we do not like it, but why. And why Heinlein is wrong. Trimble read Sky Miller's review of the book at LASFS a month ago, and touched off the longest discussion session we have seen in a year -- with nearly everyone having something to say and/or opinion to express." (South Gate, Cal.)

MAGGIE CURTIS writes: "I disagree heartily with your verdict on Starship Soldier. It is quite possible that I became so entangled in Heinlein's 'mastery of words...ability to make his central character three-dimensional...knack of making an unfamiliar background understandable without directly describing it,' that I forgot whatever objections I may have had. At any rate, in a story like this (and Sirens of Titan, which I also liked) I accept whatever the author's trying to say and I go on from there; if the author says, "War is good," I say, "O.K., take it from there." Remember the three critical guidelines of Goethe, "WHAT IS THE ARTIST TRYING TO DO? How well does he succeed? Was it worth doing?" You seem to feel that Heinlein didn't succeed and that the whole thing wasn't worth doing in the first place. ~~Right & wrong, respectively -- RE/~~ I disagree (and this is where I came in.)" (Saegertown, Penna.)

JOHN BRUNNER snorts: "I'd have expected this kind of thing from Hubbard; Final Blackout is a paean of praise for this sort of attitude. But from the man who wrote, for instance, 'Solution Unsatisfactory'! To have moved from unhappy acceptance of the situation postulated in that story (which was a warning, not a suggestion for action), to lauding it, seems like the progression of a psychosis rather than the following of a logical train of thought." (London, England)

REDD BOGGS reports: "I haven't found anybody so far that approves of Starship Soldier -- even Bob Mills allegedly published it while disapproving of it. I disliked it myself, but I must agree with Damon Knight who in his review of the book version said that it is 'Heinlein's most serious work in many years' and therefore worthy of close attention. Evans himself mentions the novel's most characteristic element: the background built up so solidly from small but significant hints.

"It is true that the story ends inconclusively (I understand that the book version brings the war to a conclusion), but I've no criticism of the lack of plot. Other important Heinlein novels lack a plot too; Sixth Column and Beyond This Horizon come to mind immediately. Starship Soldier is merely the latest example of a particular genre, of which Beyond This Horizon is perhaps the most famous instance, in which the interest centers not on the destiny of a particular "hero" but on the depiction of the character of a civilization. Beyond This Horizon might be misread as a propaganda tract, too, but the notion that controlled genetics is a Good Thing evidently didn't shock people quite so much as the notion that war is necessary.

"I disagree with Evans that Starship Soldier isn't science fiction at all.

While I am not prepared to argue that 'if the armies of the future consist mainly of infantry riflemen it'll be the biggest reversal of technical evolution ever seen' as you (Dick) remark, I do insist that some elements in a future recognizably an extension from the world of today will inevitably remain little changed. SF must deal with these constants as well as the changes. The training of combat troops will probably remain much the same as long as there are combat troops. If Starship Soldier isn't sf, then neither is Galactic Patrol, because the Tellurian Academy in that novel is almost like West Point. I thought Heinlein's yarn was quite an original contribution to the branch of sf dealing with future warfare, and perhaps the only fictional study of the art of invading a planet from space that is worthy of attention, outside of Dean A. Grennell's short story, 'Dropper'." (Minneapolis, Minn.)

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II. CRITICISM OF CRITICISM

REDD BOGGS grumbles: "I'm not very happy about the format of Spec Rev. It would take The Sick Elephant to make a more serious blunder than the one in which you fill a whole page with solid type without one single indented paragraph. A page of solid type is real daunting.

"Considering Bill Evans' background, I always expect him to write reviews in the tradition of Jack Speer's 'Catching/Keeping up with Campbell', reviews, that is, which discuss the validity of the ideas set forth in the story. Here, instead, Evans most often attempts the William Atheling approach: the discussion of the story telling technique and its merit. He is not always very successful. Remarking that 'the writing is...poor' means little unless we know Evans' standards or else are able to establish them empirically through a study of some passages he points out as poor writing.

"I suspect that to be really successful the review involving the literary workings of a story must make use of methods and tools which Bill disregards here. Atheling would have been able to demonstrate, for example, that Sturgeon's 'The Man Who Lost the Sea' couldn't have been written in a 'crisp style' by showing the effect of style on plot or theme. But Evans merely supposes that 'the modified stream of consciousness fashion' was necessary to allow 'the central theme' to 'stand up', and leaves it at that."

NORM MITCALF enters: "Note of disturbance regarding SpecRev. Please don't follow the magazines on their listing of 'novelet!', 'novella' and 'novel'. 'Complete Book-Length Novels' have been as short as 8,000 words, GALAXY labels them according to the prestige of the author, and in general the situation is a mess. The method in Index 1951-57 was to arbitrarily set lengths for s, novelet, and novel. With more room and time to play around you could give the story lengths in terms of wordage. 'Transient' is 38.5K while 'Artery of Fire' is only 25K/10 words/." (Tyndall AFB, Florida)

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III. CROWNING THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

MARION Z BRADLEY glees: "I much enjoyed your analysis of The Once and Future King, and the analogy you offer with the Wagnerian cycle struck me as a very apt and good one, even though I would be sorry to lose some splendid scenes from Candle in the Wind...I am thinking of that sad and painful yet bright scene where Gawaine stays with Arthur at the window, waiting for Lancelot to rescue Guenevere. Much of this book infuriates me (because of the insistence on medieval realism concurrently with the silliest anachronisms) and yet as I read it, it seemed moving and tense, and I know I am not alone in feeling this way; my son took the book down out of curiosity and ended by spending almost a week reading it

compulsively, unable to put it down. Perhaps the only really annoying thing, to me (besides the visit to the Ants, which made me swear in amusement -- 1984 and all that) was the Badger sequence, because to me Badger is a character in *The Wind In The Willows*." (Rochester, Texas)

MIKE BECKER judges: "Altho I agree with you that Sword in the Stone certainly suffered from the revision, I can't agree that the two middle novels were ever, either in original or -- uh -- revised versions particularly effective, written as they were in a poor cross between the light style of Sword and the epic, almost Tolkein-like style of Candle. /The latter/ seemed to be considerably stronger than the two middle books for just that reason; i.e., I think the improvement in the writing of the last volume over that in the middle two offsets the admitted absurdities of plot. This may, tho, be a reaction on my part to the stories we are currently being forced to digest in our noble course in American literature, which seem to me, often, to be a bit strong on the plot side but very weak as far as writing goes." (Arlington, Va.)

HARRY WARNER reports: "I was particularly happy to see someone deal at length with the mess that White seems to have made with what was originally a knight to remember with pleasure. Something seems to attack the minds of many British writers after their first successes, causing them to do everything wrong from then on. Evelyn Waugh is a good example of a writer who went wrong much as White has done; the same thing has happened in a less obvious way to Huxley. However, I'm afraid that you are offkey both historically and logically in your analogy between /the Nibelungs Ring Cycle/ and The Once and Future King...As far as logic goes, ending the Nibelung saga with Siegfried would be like ending a history of modern times with Munich. Nothing is solved in Siegfried -- tthe curse remains on the gold and everyone who possesses it -- and Gotterdammerung is still essential to get the gold back to the Rhine and absolve the original crime. For full details, read the scene between Wotan and Erda at the start of the third act of Siegfried, where he drops the pretense that he has been displaying before t he other characters in this work, and tries to find from Erda some means by which he can 'brake a rolling wheel'." (Hagerstown, Md.) /Considering not just historical data but broad themes, it'd be too bitterly proper to end modern history with Munich, where the great tragic theme of modern politics -- the inability of democratic states to resist hooliganism by any means short of war -- was most clearly revealed...RE/

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IV. BILL EVANS FIT DE BATTLE

HARRY WARNER continues: "Bill Evans' definition of science fiction isn't going to be accepted any more than Sam Moskowitz' latest effort at the same problem. The whole trouble with this defining business is that science fiction is an art form, in a sense, and there's another level of abstraction to cope with when you try to define art forms; witness the awfull fusses in FAPA lately over what constitutes jazz. The words are not the objects, and it's difficult enough to define briefly and unmistakably an apple, and it's even worse to try to define something when there's no basic agreement on whether this or that example is the thing that is being talked about."

BRIAN ALDISS cavils: "Bill Evans' reviews are sound enough, but this itch to define rigidly what sf is always bores me when I run across it...what's the good of laying down hard and fast rules? You only limit your field. For my money it's as useless as trying to define what makes a Great Novel, since when Great Novels come along they generally break existing rules. On a lesser scale, new sf writers do the same thing; they can't help it -- if they have anything valuable to contribute it will be by way of a new outlook." (Oxford, England)

WALTER BREEN muses: "One may quarrel a bit with Evans' definitions of stf and fsy, particularly as there is considerable overlap between the two categories in practice -- both in themes and in treatments....I have prepared an article on this very point which will appear in a forthcoming PEALS. It will not do any harm, however, to outline part of its thesis: that one can locate a story's themes at various points on a continuous scale running from fsy at one end through stf, extrapolation, current events and history (the last two overlap mainstream fiction), and that another dimension (in the strict usage of this term) will be required to cover the treatment of the themes. Mathematical plotting of this is feasible, and a bell-shaped distribution curve results. By this treatment "Tom Swift" stories fall almost into the mainstream except for a few that may still be short-range extrapolation. One of them dealt with a gang that had discovered a way of making synthetic diamonds. This was stf when written, but became extrapolation a few years ago and is now current events. (I do not mean that the Swift story dealt with current events, only that its theme is processes currently in use.) The van Vogt null-A stories are an amazing conglomeration of fsy (the successive Gosseyn bodies), stfnal, and extrapolation themes. The Arrowsmith story (which for some reason seems to be a touchstone to would be stf definers) was clearly extrapolation when it was written, but now current events; bacteriophage bodies are now known and their use as parasites on disease germs is still being debated." (New York, NY)

One protest: you seem to contemplate fitting classification to the present time, while it's usual to assign a story its classification as of its writing and keep it in that pigeonhole. For instance, Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland still rates as stf on the basis of its treatment, though we know now that you just can't do the things with ventriloquism which his plot postulates. Similarly, Dracula is still a fantasy, even though anybody can see that Lucy Westenra didn't die from the Count's vampirism -- she died from a soundly scientific cause, namely the reaction to all those un-crossmatched transfusions van Helsing gave her. /

ARCHIE MERCER suggests: "Footwear requires a drastic re-assessment. The term 'shoes' should include slippers, low boots (no higher than the instep) and galoshes. The term 'boots' should be reserved for footwear reaching above the instep; and sandals (which are tolerated for the sake of comfort) may be considered according to their individual merits. What I like about this set-up is not so much the beautiful logic behind it as the confusion it'll cause, particularly if the system is not re-stated every issue -- er -- hey -- PUT THAT HORSESHOE DOWN!!!" (Lincoln, England)

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