

speculative review



SPECULATIVE:

SPECULATIVE REVIEW is a production of the Washington Science Fiction Association, devoted to review and criticism of science - fiction and fantasy publications. This is Volume 3, Number 2, for May 1961 -- just barely for May, I grant you, but 24 hours is as good as a mile. It is edited and published by Dick Eney as Operation Crifanac CXCII, and is available variously for trade, letter of comment, or dirty old money; exchange rate for the latter is 3/25¢ to the editor at 417 Ft. Hunt Rd., Alexandria, Va., or 3 for 2/ to Archie Mercer, 434/4 Newark Rd., North Hykeham, Linc., England.

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Bill Evans has the prozine review column this time, while I'm doing comments on a set of paperbacks (well, the Journal of the IES is bound in paper, isn't it?), and Marion Z Bradley wants to know why. That is, in a recent issue of Ted Pauls' KIPPIE, she wondered why, if we grotched so intensely at all the SF being produced today, we bothered reviewing it.

Perhaps Bill will enlarge on his own motives; my own is similar to the one Bob Pavlat brought forward in suggesting that WSFA start pubbing SPEC REVIEW. I got a great kick out of reading this Buck Rogers stuff when I first discovered it; there were a lot of good stories to be read at one time, and I'd like to read more. Ignoring the prozines won't help, so...

REVIEW

Despite my answer to Marion up there, I have an uneasy feeling that reviewers develop a sort of taste for blood -- or at least a fondness for using pungent put-downs. I was shocked, in fact, when I found out that I'd praised three of these...

four in paper

I. Algis Budrys: Rogue Moon

I debated momentarily with myself whether Rogue Moon shouldn't be removed from its self-classification of science-fiction and placed gently-but-firmly in the category of fantasy. That was before I got to the end and found I had to go back and read it over; while I was still feeling picky enough about it to feel grotched at the science gimmick involved, a matter transmitter which records its signal output on tape in order to create two identical human beings -- one here, one on the moon-- who thanks to their identity are telepathically linked. (Hi, Gilbert Gosseyn!) Will the information theory man who just sprang to his feet with a protest about the bit-capacity of tape kindly take his seat? I got a copyright on the emotional shrieks around here, bud.

The second time through, as suggested, I hardly bothered with finical points. Rogue Moon is a carefully-timed series of jabs at the emotions whose cumulative effect is rather like that of a wrestling match with a dinosaur, except that the bruises and scars don't show afterward -- and you hope for a repetition in future.

I'll specify here, by the way, that the Rogue Moon I'm talking about is the Gold Medal pb of that name, not the mysterious thing which Jim Blish reviewed in the June F&SF. (Sorry, I don't know just what Blish was reviewing, though I'm sure it wasn't this.)

At least Blish perceived that the characters weren't quite as you and I, even if he did hold that they were a collection of human lunatics. Most reviewers have made a wildly egregious error: that of assuming Budrys' splendid effectiveness to spring from masterly realism. I suppose they meant well, since "realism" is an OK-word this year; but really, gang, It Just Won't Do. Doctor Hawks, the operator of the matter-transmitter, Al Barker, its passenger, and the rest of this fascinating crew are not "realistic" characters, as would have been evident immediately had their spark-showering collisions taken place on a physical rather than a verbal plane. If they'd fought a violent duel with sabres for twenty minutes without once pausing for breath or breaking the pace of their engagement, nobody would have thought of calling it "realism"; evidently it seems less odd for an assortment of characters to engage in the most nerve-wrenching kind of emotional slugfest for hours on end, and come back for more the next day.

But no, brethren, the actors in Rogue Moon are not masterpieces of characterization; they are masterpieces of craftsmanship, but their purpose is to play on other people's nerves. Your nerves. Because Rogue Moon isn't a novel, fergawd-sake; it's a particularly fine specimen of the good old-fashioned melodrama... the story designed not to get to the depths of its characters' emotions, but to push the buttons on yours.

The fact that Budrys is using his instruments rather than his sketch-pad excuses his hammering on the emotional loadings of his scenes; the justification for his doing so can be found in the effect he produces. And I'll be very surprised indeed if the justification isn't attested, come Labor Day, with a more significant example of fannish praise than this.

II. Fritz Lieber: The Big Time / The Wind Spider & Others

If the comically dreadful results obtained by many reviewers who Speculate On Psychological Motivations didn't warn me off, I'd chance a guess that Fritz Lieber's theatrical background accounted for an odd theme in his stories: action-packed, tightly-written adventures in which the situation-scene doesn't really change. Consider Gather, Darkness!, in which splendid Underground plottings and adventurings undercut the conservative ruling class (which conceals advanced science behind a façade of superstition), replacing it with a revolutionary ruling class (which conceals advanced science behind a façade of superstition). Consider Destiny Times Three, in which a universe of multiple time-lines is threatened with inter-probability warfare, and in which after a tense, dramatic series of events in three different worlds we wind up with a universe of multiple time-lines threatened with inter-probability warfare. Consider The Big Time, in which a desperately unoriented band, participating in a mad and meaningless Time War, wind up as a desperately un-oriented band of participants in a mad and meaningless Time War.

But Lieber's round trips are of the sort in which getting there is all the fun any reasonable person could desire. This fantasy of a schizoid break under the strain of a lunatic war (between the Snakes and the Spiders, yes; one guess at what other war in which the opponents share the same initial...?) is as full of dazzlement as a trip by scenic railway through a burning fireworks factory. Our actors have as much characterization used on them individually as most writers use for the whole cast of characters; Lieber-people parade their psychic quirks with as much aplomb as the rest of us walk dogs, and almost as regularly. Neither is this done for mere sport; Lieber blushes not to account for psychological turmoil by arranging plot-situations disturbing enough to cause people to get badly shaken. (It is true that he usually doesn't make them quite as disturbing as in this case, in which two groups of soldiery, escaping one jump ahead of the enemy, are first cut off entirely from the space-time universe and then trapped in a superlatively locked room with a live, ticking atom-bomb; but one is relieved to find somebody who digs the fact that people need an excuse before plunging into the depths of emotion.) Well, as the blurb will tell you, it got a Hugo the year it appeared; maybe Redd Boggs is wrong about the worthlessness of those awards.

The other half of this Ace doublebook is pretty spotty: two excellent shorts about the same Time War TBT deals with, "The Oldest Soldier" and "Damnation Morning"; one poor story, same theme, "Try and Change the Past"; one telling how the search for Security is going to give us all nervous breakdowns, "The Haunted Future", which would be good if it hadn't already been done rather past death by less capable writers; one negligible pseudo-detective story, "The Number of the Beast"; and the title story, which incredibly throws away a darb of an idea — telepathy as a genetically inherited trait — on an uninspired bit of cops-and-robbers with an alien invader. Why did he trouble to set this last in the future? Don't ask me; I don't know why he bothered with it at all.

III. Don Wollheim, editor: Adventures on Other Planets

Why is it that composers and suchlike mundane fellows are distinguished as having first, second, and sometimes even third or fourth veins, depending on the mood they were in when they finished their breakfast coffee on the morning composition started, while authors and editors aren't? Here's Don Wollheim, with at least three distinct avatars, and it's a shame they shouldn't be distinguished.

First, of course, is the vein in which he worked in devising The Pocket Book of Science Fiction and Viking's Portable Novels of Science — two of the dozen best sf anthologies ever put together. On the other hand, and go wash it with carbolic

soap right away, we have the perpetrator of OUT OF THIS WORLD ADVENTURES (with Color Fantasy Section!), about whose virtues least said is soonest mended.

As Ace Books' sf editor, Wollheim is working largely in his third vein, the same vein in which he edited Avon's FANTASY READER: not indeed a golden vein, but not one of lead either. This current collection, Adventures on Other Planets, has one excellent story (Cliff Simak's "Ogre"); one confusingly cut van Vogt ("The Rull") -- if you can imagine a van Vogt plot editorially scrambled, you've a hardy imagination indeed, but that's what's happened; one machine-ruled and highly polished Leinster, ("Assignment on Pasik"); a Roger Dee encounter between humans and aliens ("The Obligation"); and a Robert Moore Williams trifle ("The Sound of Bugles") explaining how much better it is for us not to have psi powers. All in all, it'd be a satisfactory issue of a monthly prozine.

Say, you know when you consider the stuff that's appearing at 40¢ and 50¢, all Wollheim would need to do would be to chuck in a few line cuts and...

IV. Hans Stefan Santesson, editor: JOURNAL OF THE INTERPLANETARY EXPLORATION SOCIETY

I haven't heard anything further from the I.E.S. since their first issue of the Journal Of, which may be a good omen -- depending on whether it means the group has given up, or (ghod forbid!) is trying to scrape up more resources to continue it.

I'm not going to enlarge here on the folly of trying to create "prestige" by using print and charging \$1.25 for a 32-page mag -- people have already done so and really, you can prob'ly figure it out for yourself. More censorable, I think, is the basic idea behind the publication and the society.

After all, what is the basic proposition? That these people can speculate profitably on matters ordinary scientists can't or won't touch, and that this can be done by them in a way that'll raise the prestige of the I.E.S.

Well, we've seen a bit of that speculation here; its unimpressiveness is awe-inspiring. Poul Anderson is the only contributor who seems to be doing anything properly describable as scientific speculation -- Lester del Rey's is merely fiery polemic -- and he is, in addition, the only one who includes experimental layout-diagrams; if you can imagine that being a point worthy of praise, you can imagine the level of the other "speculations". Here's a speculation: what happens to the Life Forces when lower organisms are dessicated and then revived by moisture? Here's another: what sort of disposition could God have made for the Eternal Destiny of the souls of extraterrestrials, consistent with Catholic theology? And a third: what kind of firearms are we going to need when we start shooting it out with the Russkies on the Moon?

I wish I knew a little more German; that's the only language whose oaths are sufficiently mouth-filling to do justice to the case.

As for prestige, that's a future development, so let's consider the JOURNAL as if it had a future. (As I said, I don't at the moment know whether it's folded already or not.) The mag is committed to a mass market -- something that will justify all the expense of the bid for prestige -- and so can be dismissed as a medium for those daydreams the pros write for fanzines because they're professionally unsaleable. Will the JOURNAL then compete with publications like the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN? That is, will pure thoughtspinning by amateurs who don't even have their own laboratories compete with the work of practicing professionals? Forgive me for insulting your intelligence with a question like that. And what other niche is there for a speculative magazine? That in which it will compete with the leprous ilk of FLYING SAUCERS FROM OTHER WORLDS, I fear much.

Rather than come to that, the whole idea of the JOURNAL, of the Interplanetary Exploration Society, and of the Gentlemen Amateurs should be buried for thirteen years and then dug up and burnt. I predict no future at all for this publication; and I only hope the people connected with it -- who are worthy souls if Hans Santesson and Alma Hill are typical specimens -- get out from under without going broke..

by the dim & blazing lamps

This month is the 35th anniversary of the first science-fiction magazine, AMAZING STORIES; the publishers have recognized this with a special issue and I feel it only fitting that this column be devoted to AMAZING and its sister magazine, FANTASTIC. Thirty five years, after all, is a long time in the life of a magazine; the number of fans who can remember the first AMAZING when it appeared on the newsstands in March 1926 is certainly rather small.

At that time, fiction magazines of all types were at the height of their popularity. The pulps were riding high, with 144-page issues twice a month or even weekly. Detective, Western, Love, and above all General Adventure were booming. Air-War was still several years away as a specialized type. In the semi-slicks there were the True Detective and True Confession and Movie (but not Radio) Star mags. Still to come was the great boom of the early 30s, with the character magazines -- the Shadow, Doc Savage, Bill Barnes, Dusty Ayres, The Phantom Detective, The Spider, and a host of others. Still to come was the great bust of the post-WWII period. Just the names of some of the better magazines of that period will bring back memories for the old pulpsters: Argosy, All-Story, Blue Book, Detective Story, Flynn's, Wild West Weekly, Love Stories, Weird Tales, Popular, Adventure, Complete Stories, Sea Stories. All are gone, or so changed that their former editors would have trouble recognizing them. And yet AMAZING is still around; somewhat mutated, it is true, but still recognizable as a descendant of that first issue.

There was a period, I will admit, when I would have questioned that last statement; but recently, under the editorship of Cele Goldsmith and Norman Lobsenz, AMAZING and FANTASTIC have recovered much of the lost ground, and I now find them (especially AMAZING) almost as much worth reading as the "Big Three" (or "Two") -- and often more entertaining. Therefore, I've decided to devote most of the few pages Dick Eney allows me to a discussion of the stories -- or at least some of the stories -- published in the last six months by the Ziff-Davis Twins.

When one considers the utter tripe that was published several years ago in the pulp-size and digest-size issues -- the sex-and-sadism, the westerns hastily and carelessly rewritten onto Mars, the downright sleazy writing around nonexistent plots -- the change in the magazines is ~~very~~ astonishing. I feel the present editorial staff deserve a bouquet for a very respectable job of bootstrap-lifting. Things are not perfect, of course, but the change is refreshing; and some of the stories offer a breath of fresh air in a field stuffed with psi- and incident-stories and beautifully written nothings.

The revitalized AMAZING produced one of the most interesting stories this period. The Last Vial, by Sam McClatchie, MD, a three-part serial (Nov-Dec 60, Jan 61) is one of the stories of the last few months I have reread. And yet the plot is a very simple one, with no spaceships or blasters or super gadgets.

It is a story of the cold war -- a cold war secretly very hot, but with biological weapons instead of guns. The Russians turn loose on the rest of the world two artificial plagues, against which they have immunized most of their peoples. In China a rapidly-spreading cross between smallpox and measles decimates the densely-populated areas, spreads to India, and eventually overruns most of Asia and Africa. In North America and Western Europe a variety of influenza -- very contagious, but usually mild and of short duration -- appears. Only one after-effect is finally noticed: all men who catch it become sterile. This discovery, and the story of the battle to obtain a vaccine against the plagues, is narrated

by Dr. John Macdonald, a pathologist in the Research Laboratory of the Civic Hospital of Vancouver, B.C., where the artificial nature of the virus is first detected. (A nice touch, this, of laying the scene in Canada, and the West Coast at that.) After the virus is tamed, variations are developed that will cause sterility in women. Weather control is used (unannounced) to cause crop failures in Russia; relief from the US surplus stocks is doped with the feminine sterility virus and sent to Russia in a counterattack. As a last-ditch measure, Russia, in laboratories on the Chinese mainland, develops new menaces, including a fatal hemorrhagic fever, to be used in a last effort to prevent revolt at home. A raid on these labs, led by Macdonald, destroys the installation and obtains a counterserum. In the end, the Russian army revolts, and all ends well, with an earth temporarily uncrowded.

Trite story, you say? The development makes the difference. This is no melodrama, no frenzied chase-and-spy story. It is slow-paced, even, with little dramatic suspense. In the crises the pace remains even, with no feeling of tension. This may be due to the fact that the story is told in the first person past, removing our worries about the fate of the central character; yet this weakness is not fatal -- I have enjoyed dipping into the story again while writing this.

More fatal to suspense, the story is actually at least two stories in one: the story of the sterility virus, its discovery, and its defeat -- which takes the first two installments -- and the story of the raid on China, which is the third. The division makes this no cliff-hanger.

To offset the placid mood there is the detailed, realistic background. Even without the MD tacked on his name, I would suspect the author of being a research laboratory worker in biochemistry, biology, pathology, or a similar field...or of having the story well vetted by someone with this background. The difference between a background developed by someone who has lived in it and one by a writer who draws on second or third hand sources -- or, worse, on the TV or Hollywood -- is not easily pinned down. It is the casual use of the correct word in the correct place, the sure use of a semi-technical term without apologetics, simply because it should be used in such-and-such a place. It is the little details of action -- the receptionist moving the sign on the arrival and departure board to show the doctor was in the building; the passing references to equipment and procedures, not for namedropping, but as the natural and proper things to have or be doing. This story is one of the very few I have read that give me a feeling of a real research laboratory (George O Smith, in spite of exaggerations, has done it for the electronics lab) with real research workers in it; most such stories remind me too vividly of Hollywood and the TV "Independent Research Laboratory". This attention to background -- never too technical, but convincing -- is one of the positive points of the story.

Characterization is another. The central characters, although we see "inside" only the narrator, are unusually well-developed for SF. They move with their own feelings and motivations. Of course, we can judge this only from what Dr Macdonald reports; he interprets what he sees, and reports that as fact. (Not very scientific, no, but it does give the feeling of a narrative being told by a person who has experienced the events.) Even here, we have no heroic figures, no wildly eccentric characters, no glamorous females. (The heroine is a divorced research worker, about 30, slim, with small breasts, and wears glasses.) These are individuals; doing their jobs, trying to live their own lives, in spite of everything.

There is one section that rings less than true, though this may be done on purpose. The description of the joint meeting between the Canadian cabinet and the US President, cabinet, and congressional leaders, to decide policy against Russia, is somewhat burlesqued. It doesn't detract from the believable background when we remember that the Canadian describing this is likely poling fun at the "American love for conferences", complete with nametags, microphones, and so forth.

Finally, a note about sex. This is one of those stories in which sex is an integral part of the plot. The problem of sterility in man and woman is one of the basic plot elements; the development requires the two chief characters to

engage in sex relations several times. This is done very naturally but frankly; I feel that it is also well handled. Remembering some of the horrible sex-stuff that appeared in the pages of AMAZING in past years, I feel that this is a sign the mag has achieved some maturity...or that Cele Goldsmith is to be commended for some restrained editing. The sex is not that found in the lower class paperbacks (though there are places which could be sexed up to the GALAXY NOVEL level); neither is it the vivid variations offered by Farmer nor the explorations of the unusual a la Sturgeon. It is simple, wholesome, ~~100% / 100%~~ heterosexual love.

In spite of its calmness, this is a disturbing story; it brings back into the open a subject that has been ignored by most people in the furor over the more spectacular atom-bomb. Yet a little thinking, after reading this, will make you worry more about biological warfare than all the Bombs. I have little inside knowledge of such matters, but the reading in general scientific journals has convinced me that the future of all humanity is more closely involved in this than in the bomb. Radiation or no radiation. In some ways, this story reminds me of "Final Blackout" and "The Final War"; unfortunately, it's too long to have the punch-impact of "Thunder and Roses" or "Solution Unsatisfactory".

The second item to warrant mention is the start of the Classic Reprints, selected and with an introduction by Sam Moskowitz. Starting in December, one appeared each month. Naturally, they have varied in quality, but none has been an out-and-out stinker. The first, "The Lost Machine", by John Beynon Harris (better known now as John Wyndam), copped the April 1932 cover. It was a good story then, and still is, though I certainly don't think it had the impact on the field Sam implies. A simple story of a lost robot on Earth -- but back in the days when the robot was a new thing, and certainly not supposed to have feelings. January presented a typical David H. Keller story, "Unto Us a Child Is Born", which illustrates the faults and virtues of Keller's style and plots. At the time his simple, direct, and sentimental style was very popular; today I feel writing has improved so much that his stories seem very old-fashioned. His plots are not complicated; one idea is the basis of the whole. This time he uses the reactions of a couple in a highly urbanized and socialized world, where having a child is an event determined by the state rather than the desires of the parents. Simple, yes; yet it's a relief to read such a nicely elementalized little story, all black and white, with no shading of character. It makes life seem so easy...

"The Man Who Saw the Future", by Edmond Hamilton (February) is a change from his usual world-saving; nothing great, and indeed -- deriving as it does from a Poe tale -- a rather disappointing choice. In March "The Last Evolution" by one John W. Campbell jr. is a different case. In the best JWC tradition, he has no real character drawing -- the two humans in the story are no more "human" than the various robots, including the one who tells the story -- and lots of super science. The whole human race is wiped out by invaders from outer space, but not before they have developed robots capable of independent thought and action, who take over and become the end product of evolution -- the final form being not of metal or material, but of energy and force. Yet this is a mood piece too; a prelude to the Don A. Stuart stories such as "Twilight", "Night", and "The Machine". I enjoyed re-reading it, although a little proof-reading might have tidied up a few original errors.

I should mention that the original illustrations, somewhat reduced (and also somewhat more blurred), are used. The Morey for the Campbell story is one of his most grotesque. In spite of this, these illustrations certainly bring back memories for me; memories of the first time I read these stories, drinking in every word. A real sense of wonder...

In addition to the serial and a reasonable selection of short stories, a couple of rather good long stories appeared in AMAZING. First, in January, came A Bertram

Chandler with a long space opera -- laid in his favorite section of space, The Rim -- which tells of a ship and her crew who land on a world of machines, run by machines and for machines. The controlling brain creates artificial women for them, women who eventually take on a life of their own. Common items, capably combined. "When The Dream Dies" is a story that wouldn't have appeared in ANALOG (no psi, too much mood, and too little science) but could easily have been in PLANET. It is better than all but the best that appeared in PLANET; less thud and blunder, more mood.

The March issue has a short novellette by James Blish, "A Dusk of Idols", which I haven't made up my mind about. It is a philosophical discussion rather than a story; an allegory using a non-solar planet as a convenient locale for a setting which demands non-human values. I found it somewhat incoherent; what I haven't made up my mind about is the question whether that's my fault or Blish's. I'll recommend this, with reservations, as a think-piece. The same issue has Isaac Asimov's "Playboy and the Slime God", which is the obvious spoof of sex in science fiction. Ike, who is still having trouble with his name (see Feb, pg 5) seems to be having fun. The sex is much different, to say the least, from that in "The Last Vial".

The April issue is a special one -- the 35th Anniversary issue, featuring all reprints from past AMAZING STORIES. They range from only fair to very good. My favorite is the novellette -- labelled a "complete novel" here, but only a novellette back in 1928 -- by Phillip Francis Nowlan, which introduced Buck Rogers to the world. Those of you who know Buck Rogers only by the recent comic strip have a surprise in store. The story is familiar, of course: a man from today sleeps 500 years, and awakens to a world at war, which he saves -- or doesn't, in some cases. This version is better than most; the science (except for the jumping belts) is good, and the story is simple and direct. I remember the impact it had when I first read it -- I like it as well as, or better than, Doc Smith's Skylark of Space which started in the same issue. I'd say that "Armageddon 2419 AD" was well worth reprinting. The other very good item is one of the better Eando Binder efforts, "I, Robot". This is a fine personification of the robot as a thinking, self-conscious artificial man. Burroughs is represented by "John Carter and the Giant of Mars", which is the only Barsoom story of less than novel length that isn't part of a novel. And one of the poorest, probably because this one is told in the third person instead of the first. Burroughs, in his Mars stories, is at his best when the central character is doing the narration; here we are spectators, watching the action, and a part of the Burroughs magic is lost -- the part that makes us overlook his clumsiness. Then we have Ray Bradbury with "I, Rocket" (!!) trying to write something that approaches science-fiction. It's better than most of his efforts along that line; likeable, in fact. The rest of the stories are unimportant; they won't make anyone long for the Good Old Days.

But I am glad to reread Buck Rogers.

FANTASTIC, with its varying sub-title, is an imitation of AMAZING, I feel; and I suspect the better stories go to the older brother for some reason. Perhaps it's the tradition, established by Palmer back when he began FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, of putting the fantasy and generally less probable stories in FA and the "scientific" ones in AMAZING. In any case, FANTASTIC, though improving, has some poor stuff. Like the one in the October issue, "The Seats of Hell", by Gordon R. Dickson, a thoroughly dreadful thing about a lost race of big brains and idiot servants under the islands, etc.; developed in idiot fashion by idiot characters. The shorts are better; "A Bone to Pick" by Phyllis Gottlieb and "Status Quaint" by Jack Sharkey at least have some merit. In November, Poul Anderson has "A World to Choose", all

about transposition of minds into parallel worlds, with one rather primitive -- affording lots of room for Tenth-Century style strategy and combat, rather like L. Sprague de Camp but with even more gusto. Fritz Lieber disappointed me with "Deadly Moon"; I expected something more than an alien race blowing pieces of the moon onto Earth.

December finds Poul Anderson again, with a two part serial, "A Plague of Masters", which gives him time and space to weave a reasonably complicated plot of intrigue and revolt on a world where a plague is held in check only by monthly pills. The conservative priesthood controls the pills and can you take it from there? No, because Dominic Flandry is the central figure in this and we have a hardboiled detective story with outworld scenery. Well done, naturally, until the last few pages, when things begin to get away from the author. Otherwise, the issue has "Remember Me, Peter Shepley", by Charles W. Runyon, another on the general theme that we are not under our own control. Remember "Typewriter in the Sky"? ("God? In a dirty bathrobe?") Here the hero is being written out of things. Fair.

January features "The Reality Paradox", by Daniel F. Galouye. I found this a sort of watered-down "Transient"; well-done, but likewise well-disordered. February starts a three-part serial, Worlds of the Imperium, by Keith Laumer; another mixing of worlds from parallel time-streams. Brion Bayard, of this time line, is kidnapped by agents from another, which has developed the device for moving through parallel time, and which also has never had a First and Second World War or an atom bomb -- indeed, is still living in the society of the Victorian era, Graustark up to date. Bayard is the counterpart of the dictator of the third time line, where the world has been almost ruined by an atomic war and the survivors are descending into a feudal society. Unfortunately, they too have discovered the secret of parallel time travel, and are raiding various alternate worlds -- poaching on the second time-line's exclusive domain. Bayard is to be substituted for the dictator of World Three...from here on you can plot it yourself; a compound of Oppenheim, Graustark, and standard intrigue.

In resume, this group of issues of FANTASTIC has nothing as good as The Last Vial. There are several stories that are entertaining, a number that are readable, and a few -- short ones, thank goodness -- that I didn't like. And very little science fiction; the emphasis is on action and fantasy. I'd recommend both the Z-D Twins as worth keeping an eye on, especially if you haven't read them for a couple of years.

--- Bill Evans

(ROTHMAN c't'd from pg. 12:) ever, there is always room for doubt...Has the theorist made the proper assumptions?

"To answer this question, two things are necessary. First the scientist...plugs numbers into the equations. He...comes up with a set of numbers, or curves on a graph, which express the results of the equations in a concrete form. If the equations, for example, describe the motion of rockets in general, the numbers describe the motion of one particular rocket which we have calculated. #Now, second: we have calculated how a theoretical rocket will travel. How does a real rocket travel? We cannot know, until we compare theory with experiment. We must build a working model if we are to know how good the theory is.

"When I first read Campbell's article about the Dean machine, my heart bled in sympathy...the nasty scientists controlling our laboratories would not even look at the machine. I wrote to Campbell offering to look at the machine, since I blushingly admit to being a working scientist, albeit neither an important nor influential one. Campbell must have detected a certain amount of skepticism...I offered to bring my own bathroom scale. He never took me up on my offer...at this I felt crushed. # However, I've gotten over it." (Trenton, N.J.)

classified correspondence

I. SCIENCE FICTION IS GOING TO HELL (A SERIAL IN N PARTS)

HARRY WARNER feels we "can hardly complain about a lack of continuity if science fiction should become popular on television. In fact, I suspect that a really smash hit series with science fiction background on television would cause fandom to expand tremendously and change radically. Remember, the television people look much more kindly on fandoms of all sorts than the magazine people do, and the television bosses frequently go out and try to create fandoms where none exists, to increase interest in some performer or theme that is becoming all the rage. Most of these fandoms have been idiotic because of the quality of the subject matter, like the clubs for crooners. But Civil War fandom is certainly responsible in large part for the increased attention given that fuss on television these days. And the existence of the early morning college courses proves that it's possible to get some kind of action by major stations for comparatively small groups." (Hagerstown, Md.)

KEN HEDBERG sourly quotes "an ill-fated prophecy which I found in a ten year old mag which I was going thru recently. Dick Smith of Delaware said, in the lettercolumn of the Sept 1950 STARTLING STORIES-

"This new generation is going to be the s-f reading generation. They're being raised in a time of looking fowards to the impossible becoming possible. Kids of today are hearing of flying saucers, space-ships, other worlds, and things that aren't there. In short, the next generation will be ready for s-f movies. They will be the imaginative generation -- the generation that won't be afraid to think about the fantastic -- will accept unbelievable or impossible backgrounds in a fictional story."

"Prophecies have a way of getting fouled up but this one really went wrong..." (Florin, Cal.) :

JULIUS UNGER dissents: "Who says stf is dead? I think the new stf now being written is so much superior in every respect to the old (Sam Moskowitz notwithstanding) that the old thrill of reading and rereading something good is still with me." (Brooklyn, NY)

II. CRITICISM OF CRITICISM

TED COGSWELL comments on Bill Evans' "comment on my F&SF story, 'The Burning'; I knew when I wrote it that many readers would object to matters of treatment that seemed to me to be essential. One of these was a deliberate failure to expand background detail. What I wanted to do was to challenge the reader's imagination enough to force him to recreate the unsupplied details in his own terms. Whether I succeeded or failed is quite another question -- as a general rule those who have approached it as a literary attempt have liked it while those who read it as a standard science fiction story didn't. This is not to imply that one sort of effort is automatically superior to the other. I am equally fond of Kafka and Kipling. One is a serious writer, the other is a popular writer. Much of Kafka's magic lies in his failure to explain. Note for example the extent to which The Trial would be destroyed if the exact nature of the secret government had been pinned down. On the other hand, note how Kim would

suffer if Kipling had not described his general and specific background in detail. It might be equally interesting to ask if the impact of 'The Lottery' would have suffered if Shirley Jackson had presented her odd little society with Heinlein-like exactness. To summarize: Evans' criticism may be perfectly valid — but before it can become meaningful he must supply his critical frame of reference. This he fails to do and as a result I am left with an uneasy feeling since I don't know whether he is criticising Kafka in terms of Kipling or Kafka in terms of Kafka." (Muncie, Ind.)

IAN McAULAY feels "Bill Evans' reviews are getting better now that he has decided to concentrate on fewer stories in more detail. I still don't agree with him in quite a lot of cases, though...I did enjoy 'World in a Bottle' in GALAXY in spite of its admittedly gushy writing. Bill seems to consider this sufficient reason for panning it since he doesn't go into any detail on the logical shortcomings. Perhaps I liked it because it seemed to have some attempt at a new plot idea. I have reached the stage of being pathetically grateful for any story which even attempts to avoid the hackneyed approach which seems to pervade most magazine sf for the past few years. Only Cele Goldsmith and her magazines seem to be making any attempt to get out of the rut created by Campbell, Gold, and Mills. If she keeps on as she has been going, AMAZING and ASTOUNDING are going to exchange the positions they held in the estimation of sf readers during the 'fabulous forties'." (Belfast, N. Ireland)

TOM PURDOM his "main objection to ~~Bill Evans'~~ previous type of reviews — and I think this was the objection of most of his critics — was that he used a lot of space and his own energies summarizing plots at the expense of more interesting and extended comment. I had the feeling there was a very good reviewer getting lost in that thicket of plot outlines and I wanted to read more opinion by Evans and less description of run of the mill SF.

"After reading some reviews in the current issue where he didn't mention what the story was about, I have to admit I over stated my case. Even when I had read the story, I often couldn't remember the subject matter and therefore the comment didn't make sense. I guess some description of the story is necessary. Probably a line or two to jog the reader's memory, followed by his comments, is the ideal. But that's a hard ideal to achieve and no one should complain if he doesn't manage it all the time...The reviews at the top of page seven, dealing with the remainder of an F&SF issue, are perfect. He runs through most of an issue in one paragraph, making some pithy and interesting remarks, and still has plenty of space to deal with 'Russkies Go Home!'

"Anyway, if he keeps up the present format, I think all readers of Speculative Review should stop writing letters about the type of reviews; we should start writing letters arguing with his critical judgements. That will be much more fun and much more fruitful." (Ft Benning, Ga.)

III. CAMPBELL AND HIS INFERNAL MACHINE

POUL ANDERSON takes "Some slight umbrage at your ~~Eney's~~ amateur psychoanalysis of John Campbell. Not that I ever took dianetics, dowsing, or Dean Drives very seriously (even when that damn pipe locator did work for me — admittedly under uncontrolled conditions). But even if Campbell's motivations were what you claim, they are his own private affair. All we're entitled to discuss is what he does, in his magazine. ~~Yes —~~ like acting on his motivations. — R.E."

"Happen your analysis is false anyway. Campbell is, no doubt, a bit evangelistic, but this arises not from an overcompensated inferiority complex (my God, can anyone who's seen him in action think that?) but simply from an enviable capacity for enthusiasm. Which he uses, quite consciously, in an attempt to generate ideas in others that he hopes will lead to stories. A large number of his outrageous statements are made precisely in order to touch off some fireworks.

"Unfortunately, the level of ideation in science fiction is so low these days that his attempts rarely succeed. Most writers say 'Duh' and grind out another Big Business Takes Over manuscript. No editor, least of all Campbell, likes this situation. But what can he do? He's got a magazine to get out every month. Anyone who will send him a story with even a spark of originality can sell it to him, except on the occasions when he, like any editor, makes his normal human share of misjudgements. The idea does not have to be one he has promoted himself, or one he agrees with. Mack Reynolds is an obvious case in point.

"Rather than castigate Campbell, Mills, and Co. for putting out such sad magazines, stand in awe of them for doing as well as they have. Which, by the way, I do not say in hopes of getting in good with any of them. I write little science fiction these days. The effort to revive the corpse has gotten boring." (Las Palomas, Cal.)

IAN McAULAY wonders "if you're right when you say that JWC has finally hit rock bottom. I thought he'd done that when he started on Dianetics; I thought it again when we had psionics; and again when we were treated to long and incomprehensible discussions of the Dean Drive. I can't imagine what he could go on to that would be worse, but..."

ROY TACKETT points out that "he must still be good enough to keep the magazine on a paying basis. Publishers are not the type to keep a fading magazine for sentimental reasons. ANALOG continues its regular schedule with no evidence of shakiness. Presumably JWC continues to do his job to the satisfaction of the publisher if not to the satisfaction of the fans.

"I, for one, would like to see the man get off this psi kick and back to good science fiction. # I wonder, if the magazine really got into trouble circulationwise would the publisher replace Campbell or fold the book?" (Iwakuni, Japan)

HARRY WARNER deposeth: "Converstaion Piece even achieved the miracle and caused me to think a little. This thinking was about a possible future in which psi powers, the Hieronymus machine, and the Dean drive were all functioning in full scale, dependably and throughout the entire world, whose inhabitants had all been immensely benefited by dianetics. What I was wondering was, would this world of the future with its freedom from energy problems and neuroses and the restrictions of natural laws that cause poverty and want and fear, would this world's delights be adequate compensation for the drawback that we'd have to admit that Campbell was right after all? # However, I am probably the only active fan who likes the change in title from Astounding to Analog. It wasn't too many years back that we were all making fun of the magazines that used such lurid adjectives in their titles, you know."

MILT ROTHMAN observes: "Concerning the Dean Machine, George Scithers hits the nail on the head when he says that 'recourse to theory is unnecessary -- a direct test is all we need.' # I would go further and say that recourse to theory is useless -- the Dean machine can be proven valid only by a direct test. Dean must make a working model before anybody can believe that what he says is true. This is because the laws of nature which we take to be valid insist that Dean's machine does not work. In particular, the law of conservation of momentum has never been contradicted since Newton first stated it. I do not for one moment believe that a simple contraption of wheels, levers, and magnets is going to contradict it at this late date. It's up to Dean and Campbell to put up or shut up.

"Later in Sciethers' letter there is a remark which is not clear: 'Theories aren't tested on "large electronic computers"; they are tested by mathematicians with paper and pencils...' I agree that theories are not tested by computers -- on the other hand, neither are theories tested by mathematicians with paper and pencil. In fact, paper and pencil can do no more than a computing machine. # Theories can be rested only by experiment. # A theory is first created by a mathematician...the equations which he writes down presumably describe the motion of things in nature. How-

(Continued on page 12)

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SPECULATIVE
Review

FROM

DICK ENEY
417 FT. HUNT RD.
ALEXANDRIA, VA.

TO:

FORM 3547 REQUESTED