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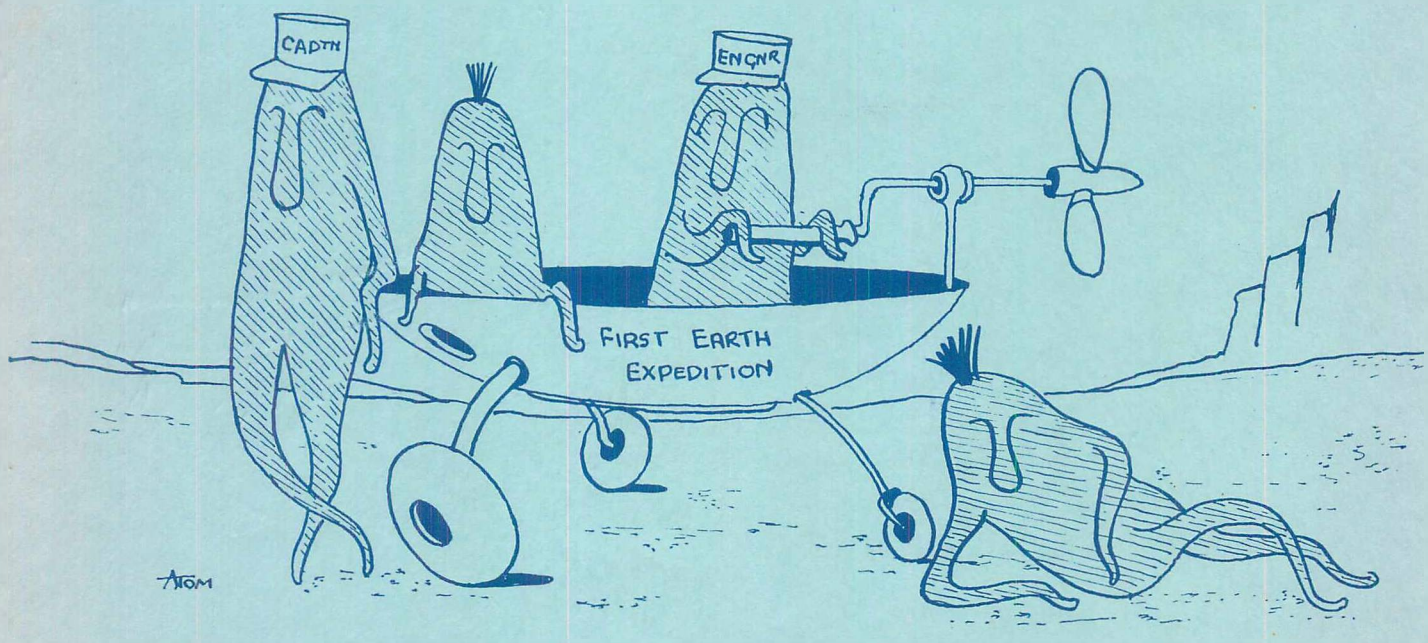
speculative review



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 3, for June 1961 -- short notice since the last one, I grant you, but we gotta get back to some semblance of schedule (try saying that three times, fast!) this year. It is edited and published by Dick Eney as Operation Crifanac CXCIV and is available for such things as trade, letter of comment, contribution, 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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Speaking of which brought me to a startled realization: SPEC REVIEW has actually lasted long enough for subscriptions to be expiring. Those suffering from this melancholy distinction may be identified by the red-bordered address label on which their name appears. (I've got to use up those prescription labels SOME way, after all.) Other people in the red are folk of distinction who have been receiving the magazine steadily without even a glow of life to suggest that they're reacting; since SPEC REVIEW need not turn a profit we can afford a fair number of complimentary copies, but let us at least know that we've been sending them to the correct address.

REVIEW

Due to pressures of work (the people who sound off about do-nothing Government employees never saw the Bureau of Standards) Bill Evans' prozine reviews are not with us this month; SPEC REVIEW goes all hardcover (goshwow!) and we lead off with Martin Levine's views on...

SPECULATIVE
Review

TWO FROM OUTSIDE

Russian science fiction may be the object of intensive production campaigns at home, but it is rare stuff abroad. No other country's work would be of more interest to Americans, perhaps, yet none is more difficult to obtain. Two examples of the foreign product currently available in translation are Stories and Andromeda: A Space-Age Tale, both by Ivan A. Yefremov.* Their author is a 53-year-old professor of palaeontology, said to be "a great favorite with Soviet readers".

Stories, an anthology for young people, includes three distinct genres: fiction, fiction about science, and science fiction.

The first type is represented by a single story, "A Meeting Over The Tuscarora", a curiously effective tale of a bittersweet affair between a young sailor and a cabaret entertainer.

Several stories, especially those set on exploring expeditions, give the Western reader the impression of being more fiction about science than science fiction. Unusual prominence is given to their backgrounds, creating something of a "setting as hero" situation, to paraphrase Kingsley Amis. Any dramatic action here occurs late in the narrative, as in the story of the discovery of a prehistoric cave, or of a fatal brush with strange desert creatures.

Even the nominal science fiction is likely to seem strange to U.S. fans, either for the extreme simplicity of the plots or the dubiousness of the science (for example, natural rock "photographs" of dinosaurs). One story deals with a lethal mercury lake high in the mountains; a novelet, with alien visitors to Earth before the appearance of man. Typically, neither has enough action or characterization to create much excitement.

Yefremov's descriptive prose is generally pedestrian, which may be due of course to the translator rather than the author. Yet his writing occasionally comes startlingly alive, as in this excerpt of extraordinary vividness, from "Shadow of the Past":

Once they passed the long rows of hills covered with grey slate they felt the wild and desolate nature of the desert more strongly than ever. After their endless turnings, detours, and descents, the world seemed lost to them as their three grey vans drove down from the hills on to the lifeless, boundless plain covered with a fine layer of thin sand. A haze of hot air shimmered over the desert; its quivering streams tried in vain to curtain and soften the harsh scenery.

The members of the expedition saw visions of beautiful blue lakes, wonderful groves, glittering peaks of snow-capped mountains. Sometimes they would see just before the blunt-nosed vans a merrily splashing sea with its ghostlike, misty waves

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*They may be ordered thru the Russia Today Book Club, which offers hard-cover English books, printed in Moscow, for 43¢ each plus a membership fee of 36¢ a year. Write 36 Spencer St., London, E.C. 1, for information.

sending up white froth.... Then, in a few minutes, they saw rows of white cottages smothered in dense foliage, which looked very much like the town they had left far to the south beyond the sands. And the vans themselves, so real and tangible, would at times grow astonishingly long or would swell to elephantine proportions.

The day was drawing to a close. In the blood-red glow of the setting sun they caught their last glimpse of one more ghostly castle, complete with tall blue and green turrets.

The "Thunderbolt", throwing the powerful beams of its headlights far into the night, was leading the other vans; it was still possible to travel by night. The front van left pillars of dust behind it, and the "Dinosaur" and the "Fighter" had to keep back, as is usual in travelling along dusty roads.

The engine was humming with a drowsy rhythm. Nikitin fell asleep sitting beside the driver, but was soon awakened by the sharp honking of the "Dinosaur". The "Thunderbolt" stopped, the two vans behind drove slowly up.

"What's gone wrong?" Nikitin demanded.

"Can't keep it up, Chief", mumbled the driver of the "Dinosaur".

"Why not?"

"The Boy's right, Sergei Pavlovich", Martin Martinovick corroborated. "In the day-time you see those damned mirages at a distance, but now they're right under your nose. They make my flesh creep!"

"Why can't you drive, if I can?" the senior driver asked sharply.

"Your 'Thunderbolt' is in the lead," said the driver of the "Fighter", "while we have to follow in a trail of dust. Our headlights light up your dust and we see all kinds of queer things. No, we can't go on."

"What rot!" the senior driver flared up. "You see things in the dust sometimes, but to say that you can't go on because of them...!"

"Try it, then! And I'll take the lead", the driver of the "Dinosaur" said in an injured voice.

"All right!" said the senior driver glumly.

The men scattered to the vans, the engines began to hum. The "Dinosaur", its tall hump wobbling, drove past the "Thunderbolt" and, picking up speed, vanished in a cloud of dust. The "Thunderbolt" waited until the dust settled down and only solitary grains twinkled like golden sparks in the beams of its head-lights. Then it drove off in the wake of the "Dinosaur".

Nikitin, his curiosity aroused, rubbed the wind-screen and peered at the road ahead. They went on for a few miles and, seeing nothing out of the ordinary, the driver began to murmur scornfully. The van was taking the road with ease and their attention flagged. Suddenly the driver wrenched at the wheel and the van swerved aside — they could clearly see a huge pit ahead, its edges laid with white tiles. Nikitin rubbed his eyes in astonishment — in the lighted corridor of the head-lights, behind the swirling sand, he saw blocks of tall buildings. The visions seemed so vivid that the paleontologist started back in his seat. The driver swore under his breath.

The buildings vanished, the desert broke up into a fantastic pattern of black and yellow stripes, and the earth yawned apart to reveal a black cleft. Gritting his teeth, the driver held on to the wheel with all his strength, trying to shake off the illusion. The next instant an incredibly steep arched bridge loomed ahead. It was so real that Nikitin turned anxiously to the driver, who was already putting on the brakes.

The "Fighter" honked behind with mocking impatience. Nikitin's driver stopped the van, smoked a cigarette, washed his eyes, opened the window, and setting his teeth started off again. And again the dusty ghosts began their dance in the van's lights. The nerv ous tension was mounting rapidly. The "Thunderbolt's" brakes screamed as it tried to dodge fancied dangers. At last the driver groaned, spat, and stopped the van, signalling his surrender to the "Dinosaur". When the dust settled, they were joined by the "Fighter", which had stopped behind a long time ago.

Andromeda is a long and complex novel of the far future, marred by several flaws. For one thing, there are too many characters (indeed, two pages are needed at the beginning of the book to keep track of them), with awkward and confusing names. Their dialogue, which forms most of the book, is unnatural and endlessly expository. And the author repeatedly examines purely technical details to the detriment of the plot. What is intended as a panoramic picture of the time becomes a series of cluttered snapshots.

Moreover, many sections are limp with "man-against-the-cosmos" sentimentality or Communist propaganda, although there is not as much of the latter in either book as one might expect -- presumably because they were written originally for internal consumption.

But with all its faults, Andromeda is a hauntingly powerful book. One sequence of some 80 pages, in which a space ship is trapped on a sinister "black star", is superior to anything of the sort I have come across. It ought to read well by itself, too, because of the episodic nature of the novel. And the same might be said of other passages, such as the disastrous attempt to communicate with another world.

Yet, in the final accounting, Andromeda must be reckoned overly jerky, Stories too static. Yefremov is clearly an outstanding Soviet writer, to be published as he has been for export, but neither of his books is entirely satisfactory. They may hold a wry consolation for the West, however: at least we have no science-fiction gap.

- - - Martin Levine.

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Naturally. Who ever heard of tailfins on a stfyarn??

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Popular authors do not and apparently cannot appreciate the fact that true art is obtainable only by rejecting normality and conventionality in toto, and approaching a theme purged utterly of any usual or preconceived point of view. Wild and "different" as they may consider their quasi-weird byproducts, it remains a fact that the bizarrerie is on the surface alone; and that basically they reiterate the same old conventional values and motives and perspectives. Good and evil, teleological illusion, sugary sentiment, anthropocentric psychology — the usual superficial stock in trade, and all shot through with the eternal and inescapable commonplace. Take a werewolf story, for instance — who ever wrote one from the point of view of the wolf, and sympathizing strongly with the devil to whom he has sold himself? Who ever wrote a story from the point of view that man is a blemish on the cosmos, who ought to be eradicated? As an example — a young man I know lately told me that he means to write a story about a scientist who wishes to dominate the earth, and who to accomplish this end trains and over develops germs (a la Anthony Rudd's "Ooze") and leads on armies of them in the manner of the Egyptian plagues. I told him that although this theme has promise, is is made utterly commonplace by assigning the scientist a normal motive. There is nothing outré about wanting to conquer the world; Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, and Wilhelm II wanted to do that. Instead, I told my friend, he should conceive a man with a morbid, frantic, shuddering hatred of the life-principle itself, who wishes to extirpate from the planet every trace of biological organisms, animal and vegetable alike, including himself. That would be tolerably original. But after all, originality lies within the author. One can't write a weird story of real power without perfect psychological detachment from the human scene, and a magic prism of imagination which suffuses theme and style alike with that grotesquerie and disquieting distortion characteristic of morbid vision. Only a cynic can create a horror — for behind every masterpiece of the sort must reside a driving, daemonic force that despises the human race and illusions, and longs to pull them to pieces and mock them.

- - - H.P. Lovecraft, about 1926.

PEAKE'S FIRST...

James Branch Cabell states that the true artist writes only to express beautiful thoughts and, when doing this, has only one idea, the personal satisfaction obtained from his labors. This dictum is well illustrated in The Worm Ouroboros. It took Eddison thirty years to write this remarkable fantasy. Obviously it was a labor of love, written only to obtain a final peace of mind. There could have been no idea of recompence from a monetary viewpoint. He must have realized while dreaming it and placing those dreams on paper that only a relative few would buy it, or, buying it, appreciate its transcendental loveliness. The first American edition sold poorly. Its charm has been appreciated only by those exceptional personalities who silently watch a sunset fade or hear the music of waves beating on a rockbound coast.

Mervyn Peake is preëminently an artist. He has also won some slight fame as a minor poet. Twenty-two years ago he started to dream of an unknown world* and after seven years finished his first novel. He worked as an illustrator during these years, partly because he enjoyed art and no doubt because there were obligations to meet and bills to pay; but as an avocation he wrote Titus Groan. In thus doing he followed the pattern of Cabell, Eddison, Dunsany and all writers of the beautiful. His primary object must have been writing for his own pleasure; for had he spent an equal time working as a plasterer or plumber his work would have been less time consuming and far more remunerative. The book he wrote in these seven lean years has not been appreciated by the average reader, who does not understand it and is unwilling to make the effort to do so.

The subtitle, A Gothic Novel, is in itself deceptive, though there is a shadow of reason for its use. Elizabeth Bowen, in the Tatler, comes far closer to actual analysis when she writes, "Let us call it a sport of literature". Her use of the word sport is a fine example of the incorporation of biology into literary criticism; for a sport is something unusual in nature, a white blackbird for instance. It occurs as rarely in literature as in actual life.

The narrative centers around the Castle of Gormenghast, which, since it is located in never-never land, cannot be found in either old or modern atlases. The persons living in and around the Castle are the descendants of seventy-six generations of nobility and peasant, and during all that time they have been completely out of touch with the world. For over two thousand years thay have simply lived in the Castle or around it, in a weird isolation. During these centuries the Castle grew slowly, each Lord making additions which were neglected by succeeding Lords who had their own ideas of architecture. Thus, when the last of the line, Titus, is born, the Castle is so vast that few, if any, had visited all the rooms, or, going into one unentered for centureis, knew who had built it or why.

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*It is worth remembering that J.R.R. Tolkein was just beginning to tinker with his Lord of the Rings series, and T.H. White with what became The Once and Future King, at about this same time. -- R.E.

As this family built Gormenghast they fabricated a code of behavior, written in massive books, which in its details completely enslaved and dominated the living family. This enforced servitude to ritualism was specially onerous to the head of the family, the Lord of the Castle who had to perform the ceremonies of every day in exactly the same manner that all the previous Lords had followed on that special day. This ritual was only known in its entire complexity by the Librarian, Sourdust, who had devoted most of his ninety years to its study. Every morning he met the Lord at breakfast and dictated to him the day's program. From this there could never be, and never was, any deviation.

Lord Sepulchrave was returning to his room after performing the bi-annual ritual of opening the iron cupboard in the armory, and, with the traditional dagger which Sourdust had brought for the occasion, of scratching on the metal back of the cupboard another half moon, which, added to the long line of similar half moons, made the seven hundred and thirty-seventh to be scored into the iron. —— It was not certain what significance the ceremony held, for unfortunately the records were lost, but the formality was no less sacred for being unintelligible.

Living in the shadow of the Castle a number of common people continued for many centuries an existence that was in its way as bound by routine convention as was that of the Groan nobility. The less fortunate of these served as menials in the Castle but those with artistic talent became wood carvers. Each year these artists in wood carved what they hoped would be a masterpiece. These were judged by the current Lord of Gormenghast on the first morning of June. He selected the three best. That evening the discarded carvings were burnt but to the three winners was thrown the traditional scroll of vellum, which permitted them to walk the battlements above their mud huts on the night of the full moon of every second month. The three prizewinning carvings were then housed with their predecessors of hundreds of years in the Room of the Bright Carvings. There they were dusted daily by the curator, Rottcodd, who never left the room and for years at a time had no visitors, for no one cared to look at the carvings. A book was provided for visitors to write their names, but no one came to look and write.

If this novel contained nothing but the story of the woodcarvers and the dual fate of their carvings it would suffice to show that the author has a keen sense of the values of life. For this is life, not only in Gormenghast but all over the world. Man, striving for greatness, enters into competition with his fellow. Those who fail have their efforts destroyed; those who succeed walk in glory during every second full moon, proud that their work is honored by being placed in some Hall of Fame, not realizing that no one visits that hall and lingers over the beauty of their masterpiece. The novel ends in the Room of the Bright Carvings, where it began, thus, as in The Worm Ouroboros, completing the circle, the symbol of eternity.

All the characters are prisoners in the web of fate woven by the Spider Destiny. Lord Sepulchrave, fettered by tradition and finding happiness only in his beautiful library; the Countess with her hundreds of birds and many white cats; Fushia, the seventeen year old daughter who lives in a world of dreams; Flay, the valet; Sourdust, the keeper of the archives; his one-legged son Barquentine, who waits for fifty-four years till he can become, through his father's death, the Librarian; the Ladies Cora and Clarice, twin sisters of Lord Sepulchrave, congenital hemiplegics; the chef, Swelter, who commands a small army of assistant cooks, forty apprentices, and eighteen Gray Scrubbers; Dr. Prunesquallor and

his virginal sister Irma; the nurse, Mrs. Slagg, tiny and fluttering like a wren; Keda, the wet nurse; the unnamed Poet, slightly psychotic, as all true poets are.

All these are so clearly drawn that they stand out, not as characters in a book, but as living persons; not so far removed from those of our world, if only we would take the trouble to find them, or, finding them, recognize them. Once we have met them in the book it is most difficult to forget them. This is another reason for recognizing the greatness of the novel. Peake has not only created a world which has more than a semblance of reality, but he has peopled it with men and women who in spite of their peculiarities seem very much alive. There is a biological correctness in the symbiosis of their existence; though they may not acutely realize it, they are all mutually interdependent irrespective of the sharp difference in the strata of their social order. The greatest could not continue the sacred daily program unless aided by the lowest. How would Lord Sepulchrave spend the first day in June if there were, by the refusal of the carvers to compete, no carvings to judge? The very existence of all depended on each one doing his work as he always had done it, and provide for some one to carry on that work when he died.

For every key position in the Castle there was the apprentice, either the son or the student, bound to secrecy. Centuries of experience had seen to it that there should be no gap in the steady stream of immemorial behavior.

Into this community of perfectly adjusted persons comes an iconoclast, Steerpike, a seventeen year old boy, one of the Chef's apprentices, who rebels against convention and dreams of becoming the vicarious ruler of the Castle. He proceeds in unconventional ways, including arson, to secure power. As his program is entirely new to the nobiliby they have no way to protect themselves and thus fall victim to his attack. At last the sonless Barquentine, realizing that someday he will die, selects him as the future Librarian and begins his training. Thus the ambitious lad starts toward becoming the actual ruler of the castle and the future dictator of the daily life of the new Lord, Titus Groan. Here again we see pictured, not a realm of fantasy, but an accurate portrayal of actual monarchies, which -- growing old and bound by tradition -- are unable to face new conditions. They either die, like the royal families of France and Russia, or, if living on, find the actual rulers of the land a Prime Minister istead of a king.

Peake has shown that he is preëminently an artist by illustrating the novel with beautiful pictures, drawn with words instead of a brush. His descriptions of various rooms in the Castle, the Library, the Room of the Roots, the Hall of the Spiders, the Hall of the Bright Carvings, the Attic where Fushia fled for solitude and dreams and painted pictures on the wall; all these are so vividly described that it is evident the writer simply wrote of pictures the artist had first seen in his dreams. Back of these pictures lie allegories and it is easy to translate them into personalities; none pleasant, but all capable of finding counterparts in the human cosmos.

All is decaying. The roofs of the Castle leak, the windows are broken, the armor rusts. Mould and dust creep insidiously; ivy clings to the massive walls and some day will tear them to pieces. The rulers share in the slow dissolution of all things that cease to grow.

Meantime there is an undercurrent of revolt in the subconscious of the Dwellers in the Mud Village. The Bright Carvers will, for a while,

continue to compete for the yearly prize, but the young men resent the pitifully inadequate charity of the Castle. Mrs. Slagg, when she informs them of the birth of Titus, says:

"We are all very proud. All of us. The Castle is very very satisfied and when I tell you what has happened, you'll be happy as well; oh yes, I am sure you will. Because I know you are dependant on the Castle. You have some food thrown down to you from the battlements every morning, don't you?"

A young man lifted his thick black eyebrows and spat.

Just that, and nothing more.

Other young men will join him. They will cease to carve wood and, instead, will swarm over the battlements and carve the Groans, believing that their lives will be happier if they can live in the Castle instead of the Mud Huts. In this they will find nothing but disappointment and disillusion; the Castle, a decaying empty shell, holds only traditions they cannot share and remnants of the past they can never understand.

Titus Groan simply retells the story of the futility of life. It follows the historic motif of men's efforts to build new ladders to enable them to reach the stars. Too late they realize the shortness of the ladders and the distance of the stars. Wiser men would have teken the wood and built better arbors for grapevines, but men have never been wise and even philosophers fail to understand the true values of life.

The tale ends with an implication of disaster to the House of Groan. The new Lord, Titus, when vested with authority, throws the ancient emblems of his sovereignity into the water and looks appealingly toward his foster-sister across the lake. Steerpike bivalently dreams of the equality of men and looks forward to the time when he will become the sole autocrat of the Castle. Fushia, dimly resentful of the chains which may force her to drift into a life of senile verginity, confusedly trie to make the Doctor realize that she is in love with him. The Countess continues to love her birds and cats, broods over her vengeance, and longs for the complete domination of her son. The Poet writes more poems, the Gardners polish more apples, the new Chef prepares meals, the Grey Scrubbers continue to wash the kitchen walls and Rottcodd daily dusts the Bright Carvings; but they all move like phantasmagoria in a dream, without joy or life, without the stimulation tha comes from the desire to attain new objectives.

Titus Groan achieves greatness because, within the confines of the Castle and the Mud Huts, it poises many of the important problems of all time. It is more than a narrative of the Groan family; it is a resume of all human behavior. To this allegory is added a weird beauty, a literary style that could be used only by an artist and presents a combination of values that is unusual in present day writing. Few will appreciate it; the masses will ignore it; but those who understand it will read and reread it, pleasuring at new found beauty and thrilling at discovering a hitherto unseen lovely picture, or a philosophical truth far older than the Castle.

--- David H. Keller

SPECULATIVE
Review

...AND DOYLE'S LAST

In 1929 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stopped his international lecture tour long enough to publish a book. It was far from a "classic"; but it was of such a quality that the public enjoyed it, and the critics were favorable.

Things would be at a pretty pass if Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could not wrangle a swift and thrilling fantasy out of the doings of three hardy adventurers in the Lost Continent of Atlantis.

The key word in Will Cuppy's review[1], I think, is "hardy". This one word sets the book off from all of Doyle's others. This is a book of scientific romanticism. It does not contain an abundance of clear, logical thinking. Gone are the calculations, planning, and deductions of Holmes or Challenger. In their stead are physical action and lurking death.

"The Maracot Deep is an ingenious and amusing tale", said the critic of the New Statesman, touching another basic quality of the book[2]. When he uses the term "amusing" he is not speaking of comic or even light superficial character-attitudes, because the book is wholly in a serious vein. Having a deeper understanding of the book than did the general public, he recognized that it had two levels. Not that the hidden level is meant to be humorous (it is even more serious than the obvious plot); the amusement of the critic sprang from the writer's choice of covert topic and the manner in which it was presented.

This topic was spiritualism, concerning which Doyle had deep convictions. During the last eleven years of his life he was a preacher of his own brand of spiritualism, using his money, his writing and his voice to further the cause. This book was one of his sermons; it was veiled because four years previously he had been soundly rebuked by the critics for preaching in his The Land of the Mist, and he feared a recurrence. Yet, although he made this concession and buried his real story under a barrage of words (which made it unrecognizable as anything but a piece of fanciful imagination to anyone not acquainted with his life and philosophy) it is evident that he meant it to arouse thoughtful consideration on the part of at least a few. This was shown by his very style; he built the entire story around its purpose to the point of sacrificing his plot. It became nothing more than a series of Lovecraft-like monsters who somehow never managed to do the heroes any harm.

He had also to gloss over certain scientific inconsistencies. This was completely foreign to his usually meticulous composition and suggests that he was either carried away by religious zeal, or that his longtime belief that his Sherlock Holmes stories were second rate caused him to experiment in this, the last book he ever wrote. Just one of many glaring mistakes may be mentioned: the people of Atlantis are reviewing their ancient past through memory projections of reincarnated thoughts.

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1. Cleveland Open Shelf by Will Cuppy (november 1929) p. 149
2. New Statesman, 33:532, (3 August 1929) 300 w.

The scenes described included the sinking of the continent, the death of everyone who was not in a special air-tight windowless building, the ocean closing over everything, and last the sun baking the wreckage on the surface. All of the people of Atlantis were dead or locked in a sealed room with no view outside. It is clearly impossible that reincarnation could have transferred "thought pictures" which no-one saw; Doyle here and elsewhere is using the catchphrases of spiritualism to cover the category of magic.

I remarked above that this was Doyle's last book before his death. I think that one of the things which influenced his writing of it was his fear of approaching decease. Not only is the book morbid and deadly enough with an assortment of monsters plus an angel and a devil; it also contains, point for point, all seven basic factors of the religion which Doyle hoped would save him.

The first one was the least stressed. It was the Fatherhood of God, and was shown only by the religious nature of most of those present. The second, the Brotherhood of Man, was demonstrated by the way the people of Atlantis saved the three voyagers from the surface world, and the way the two races worked together in harmony thereafter. The third factor, the Survival of Personality, was shown by the reincarnation of thoughts. The power of Communion with the Dead is expressed by the eventual defeat of the evil Baal-Seepa through the force of another being on the astral plain; Compensation and Retribution are also shown by this victory of good over bad. The last point -- a near-Buddhist belief -- was the Eternal Progression, by spiritual development in the astral world, through a series of spheres or cycles to that highest sphere wherein dwelt the Christ. It was a creature from such a higher plane who gave Dr. Maracot the power to defeat the evil being who had ruled Atlantis before it sank and who now wanted to destroy those Atlanteans who had defied his will and escaped death in the rising water. The devil was actually a being who had risen -- though in the direction of ultimate evil -- to a position on the astral plane a little lower that that of the spirit representing good[1].

One other review is worthy of attention here:

> The creator of Sherlock Holmes has lost none of the inventive gift, the resourcefulness of imagination, and the facility for turning scientific facts and possibilities to the uses of romance which he has shown in delectable measure in many a tale during his long life as a man of letters. The Maracot Deep, a story of novellette length which fills two-thirds of this volume, must rank high among his fiction of mingled science and romance and does not suffer, at least in most of its phases, by comparison with Jules Verne's imaginary trip beneath the sea.[2]

This critic differs with me radically on a few points I'd like to explain, while agreeing on others that are worthy of mention.

Such phrases as "inventive gift" and "resourcefulness of imagination" were wholly or partically precipitated by a shallow interpretation of Doyle's spiritualistic second-level plot. The comment that it "must rank high among his fiction of mingled science and romance" I agree with wholeheartedly; Doyle wrote so few books of this kind that it couldn't rank lower than fourth or fifth. (It couldn't, however, be better than second to anyone who has read The Doings of Raffles Haw.) I must also agree that

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1. John Dickson Carr, The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (New York; Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 274.
2. New York Times, 20 October 1929, p.7

in most of its phases it compares well with Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea. Characterization is adequate, style is good, and the unexpected event is used very skilfully to create excitement or relieve suspense. Of course, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea has fewer monsters, but this defect in Doyle's creation is minimized by the fact that it was first written in serial form (as evidenced by the review and repetition of ideas at the beginning of each chapter) and he probably felt that plenty of close scrapes with death were needed to keep the public interested. The fact that the book was written in this form also suggests that there were mercenary reasons for veiling the real plot: making it palatable to the public. Doyle hated writing serials because they seemed to him a low form of literature (all the more foul because it paid more than writing a book); in earlier years he wouldn't even consider writing such pulp material. He wrote The Maracot Deep simply because he needed more money to enable him to continue fighting for the spiritualist cause; during the previous eleven years he had spent a fortune of over £200,000 for that purpose, while his writing income steadily decreased due to the lack of popularity of his new topic. The logical answer to the money problem would have been to add a new book to the Holmes or Challenger series, but Doyle's fanatical motivation was too strong. He himself said to the public, "My life is devoted to one end and at present I can't see any literature which would be of use to you above the horizon. I can only write what comes to me." This was proved true by The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes, which was written halfheartedly and poorly received by the critics. So his next book, The Maracot Deep, was a compromise: he enjoyed writing it and the public enjoyed reading it.

Though The Maracot Deep is a hard book to become absorbed in (one reason being that Doyle had to leave for Scandinavia to Spread the Word before rewriting it) and time has left it by the wayside, it is nonetheless a story that can be enjoyed on either of its levels.

-- Tom Haughey

III. CRIT OF CRIT: C&t'd from pg. 12.

CLAUDE SAXON finds: "In V2N3 of SPEC REVIEW your reviewer, while covering the story 'Damned If You Don't', in the May ANALOG, made the following statement: 'The Hero, for some reason, 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'. After I read this, I dug out the story in question and one of the Doc Savage novels in my collection and read them both. Perhaps I have a tin ear where characterization is concerned, but the two characters seem equally 'real' to me. What I want to know is, how does one guage the 'reality' of a character? How does your reviewer differentiate between a character that is well depicted and one that is not?" (Paris, Tenn.)

W.P. MEYER suggests: "With the background...plus the collection of your fellow members it would be an interesting occupation to see who could identify plots, authors, and titles. ## A letter in the current ANALOG ...from Ursula Gerhart makes me wonder if there isn't a possibility of SPECULATIVE REVIEW offering the service of identifying old s/f stories with a complete bibliographical citation. For example Ursula is after the story called, I believe, "MYOB" which stands for "Mind Your Own Business". (Baltimore, Md.) ## Eric Frank Russell's "...And Then There Were None", ASF 1950. But our collections aren't that readily available for browsing thru, alas.)

CLASSIFIED CORRESPONDENCE

I. OVERSIGHT BY THE BALLOT COMMITTEE DEPT.

DAVE RIKE postals: "Here I am, in the middle of the United States, reading my favorite science fiction writer, Herman Kahn, and his most recent book, On Thermonuclear War. It should get a Hugo!" (Berkeley, Cal.)

II. SCIENCE FICTION IS GOING TO HELL: (VI)

SID BIRCHBY analyzes the situation: "Regarding your imaginary conversation about Campbell, you make too much of the matter. Certainly I am aware of JWC's fads and fancies and I regret them; but the fact remains that SF and its revival, for which, in the imaginary conversation at least, you faunch, does not depend on him, and — I will go further — does not need him. The revival will come about when better stories are written and published, and that won't be for the magazine market.

"What would help more than anything is a strong infusion of money into the field, and I can't see that happening in either the U.S.A. or England just yet. Maybe in another ten years. But on the other hand maybe never. Sometimes I consider that the whole of our century's upsurge of SF was part of the preamble to space flight, and is dying away as the latter approaches reality. This is very sad, but has historical parallels, e.g. the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century religious visionary writers, and the growth or nonconformist sects; but that is another story." (Manchester, Engl.)

HARRY WARNER found that "The magazine reviews are just about right for my reading pleasure this time; as much emphasis on trends and general situation as on thumbnail accounts of individual stories, and not too many pages of either. It would have helped if Bill had been just a bit more specific in some spots. In his fourth paragraph, I'm not sure whether he refers to the Palmer era or the post-Palmer AMAZING in his description of the "utter tripe". I don't think any review of that 35th anniversary issue is complete without scolding the publishers or editors or whoever jacked up the price for an issue in which they had to pay normal word rates for none of the fiction." (Hagerstown, Maryland)

III. CRITICISM OF CRITICISM

JAMES R. SIEGER chuckles: "How come your reviewer /Bill Evans/ thinks the science in 'Armageddon 2419 A.D.' is good except for jumping belts? Hasn't he read any newspapers lately?" (Waukesha, Wisc.) ## Sure enough, I looked thru the news section and there was a picture of a chap gaily floating over the top of a deuce'n a half, supported by jets from an unmistakeable Buck Rogers Special. O, if only he'd been wearing a helicopter beanie instead of a steel helmet! The thing, if you didn't see the pic, works by steam jets catalytically produced from hydrogen peroxide. — R.E.

B. EZRINE remarks: "I doubt Campbell's fall from grace is as important as you seem to think; if the stf field was healthy it wouldn't be important at all. We're unhappy because we've lost a hero, but it's unhappier to need a hero." (Berln W)

(Continued on page 11)

TRANSATLANTIC FAN FUND (TAFF) VOTING FORM

Candidates:

RON ELLIK

DICK ENEY

All candidates have signed statements that if elected they will go to the British Convention to be held in 1962, probably at Easter time. In addition they have posted bond and their platforms are listed on the back of this ballot form.

Should the winner be unable to make the trip, the second place winner will be offered the opportunity.

Details of voting will be kept secret.

Reproductions of this form are authorized (in fact, encouraged) provided exact copies are made.

Votes must reach DON FORD, Box 19-T, RR #2 Loveland, Ohio, USA, before Sept. 30, 1961

I vote for: .....

(Note: since there are only 2 candidates, we have modified the voting system slightly.)

Write-in votes are permitted.

No proxy votes are allowed. Each voter must sign his/her own ballot.

To be eligible to vote you must contribute a minimum of 50¢ (2/6d) to the FUND and have been active in any phase of Science Fiction Fandom prior to January 1960. Contributions in excess of 50¢ or 2/6 are not only gratefully accepted, but encouraged. If you are not a known fan, give here the name and address of a fan or Science fiction club as reference:. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Overseas fans may send money and ballots to: ERIC BENTCLIFFE, 47 Alldis Street, Great Moor, Stockport, Cheshire, ENGLAND

I enclose the sum of . . . . . as a contribution to the Transatlantic Fan Fund. (Make checks and Money Orders payable to either Don Ford or to Eric Bentcliffe; NOT to TAFF.)

PLATFORMS

RON ELLIK We'd like to nominate Ron Ellik for TAFF because we like him. His history with FANAC, which during his co-editorship was awarded the fanzine Hugo in 1959, and his long service as an officer of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association prove him a capable publishing fan. He's a convention fan because we've seen him travel cross-country to attend world conventions and Midwestcons. He reads science-fiction because we questioned him to be sure he did; he even collects a little bit. He can associate with young fans and with old guard fand equally well. We would be proud to have Ron Ellik as a representative to England in 1962; however, the best reason for nominating and sending him is that the English fans will like him as well as we do.

Nominated by: BJo Trimble; C.L. Barrett, MD; Larry T Shaw; Arthur Thomson; and Ron Bennett.

DICK ENEY Monumental: that's the word for Richard H. Eney, whose praises I sing. Monumental: that's the word for his latest, greatest work, Fancyclopedia II. This alone is reason enough to nominate him; this alone is reason enough to elect him! Dick Eney: valued member of FAPA, OMPA, SAPS. Dick Eney: collector (and reader!), publisher, convention-goer, the fan's fan, complete with beard but minus guitar. London will be mad about him! (True, he has some faults, but we're keeping that quiet.) Vital statistics: male, single, age 27, height 6'3", beady of eye and ready to travel. Back your FANCY for TAFF!

Nominated by: Howard DeVore, Dean Grennell, Lynn Hickman, John Berry and Archie Mercer.

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As of December 1, 1960, TAFF has $355.60; raised from the following sources:

"Auction Bloch" at Pittsburgh	$ 99.00
Donation from Wally Weber	30.00
Registration fees from the candidates	20.00
Donation from the PittCon Committee	200.00

Our goal is to make this campaign so successful, financially, that we can bring the British delegate over to the 1962 U.S. convention as well.

Three TAFF trip write ups may be ordered from either Don Ford or Eric Bentcliffe, when sending in your ballot and contribution to TAFF. They are: TAFF BAEDECKER by Don Ford ($1.25), EPITAFF by Eric Bentcliffe ($1.00), and A FAKE FAN IN LONDON by Bob Madle ($1.50). Copies will be mailed upon publication. Ford's and Madle's reports are First Fandom projects and the profits will be donated to TAFF. A fourth report, COLONIAL EXCURSION by Ron Bennett, may be ordered from either Bob Pavlat or Ron Bennett. Pre-publication price 75¢

— Don Ford & Eric Bentcliffe.

SPECULATIVE
Review

FROM

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

Richard Bergeron
110 Bank St,
New York 14, NY

TO:

FORM 3547 REQUESTED