

WHAT SIT

183





this is WHATSIT 18  
from  
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for the 60th Off Trails Magazine Publishers Association. Jan.1971

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Herein;-

The end and the beginning.....fantasy world. KC.  
Readers cramp. ....prozine and book reviews....Mercer.  
Advent Calender.....pome.....Jean Cheslin.  
Assorted HWAET! s.....bad,bad, pome things....KC.

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the other day a child came up to a teacher and said, "Please Miss  
how do you spell 'gn-mu'?"  
This mystified the teacher...the child was too young to be asking  
how to spell 'Gmu' the beast.  
"Er...what do you want to say with it?" she enquired.  
"My dads gn-mu get me a bike for Christmas".....

Another one...one of my children this time. "Is this how you  
spell 'avter' sir?. a-f-t-e-r."  
Suspicious I made further enquiry. 'Avter, what?'  
"Tonight I after have my bath".....

Jean has this class of eight-year-olds. Bright eight-year-olds  
they were. And on the last day of the summer term one of them  
asked her who their next teacher would be. To which she replied,  
Miss G.....y, a young lady in her first year of imposing...er..  
pulchri....pulltrich...BEAUTY. One of the boys, overhearing  
this, bawled out, at the top of his voice. "Oh good! I'll sit  
at the front so I can look at her legs!"

On school practice once Jean was playing this record, and they  
weren't listening and she eventually took the record off and said  
crossly, "I'm not bothered if you're not listening, I don't mind  
standing here with nothing on".....

Oh, before I forget, I'm now a daddy. On November the 28th at  
5-30pm Jean was delivered of a baby (What else?)(The mind boggles)  
boy..weight 8lb 13oz. To be called Matthew Richard Oliver...Cheslin.

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Some years ago, as I've mentioned in an earlier WHATSIT or ENVOY, I corresponded with John Martin Baxter fairly regularly, and one of the things we wrote about was the setting up of a new world somewhat along the lines of Coventry, although there was to be opportunity

for sword and sorcery plots. When I have come to write things about this world I have found myself invariably writing in a more, shall we say, Historical vein. Now this is a pity because if one writes in what I think of as an historical way one cuts out such a lot of good plot material. For instance, insisting on the factual-logical form of writing one would have to avoid anything like THE LORD OF THE RINGS, and anything else with unexplained magic in it. This has caused me much hair pulling because I did want to include magic etc., in the stories. I had thought of getting round it in several ways. For instance one of my earliest ideas was to have a group of travellers making some journey or other on our planet tell each other tales every evening around the camp fire, a la Chaucer. Another idea was to make all the plots entirely imaginary, merely intricate dreams which some long-sleep star travellers had, this would allow logical use of seemingly magical effects. Then again we could have used an old idea where the planet is under Outside control, for some plausible reason or other, the Outsiders interference being responsible for the magical effects.

One of my main difficulties has been in what might be called motivation. For example if I'd gotten my people onto a planet where they were to suffer outside manipulation, I'd have to have some reason, if only for my own satisfaction, for the interference. If on the other hand they were set down on a planet and all had no knowledge of their origin, yet they were to have, shall we say, magical talents, then how could I explain them? I wished also to have some sort of diversity of species, eg; Orcs, or Green Martians, etc., and I also wished to have a number of Terrestrial animals and flora present. I also wished to have some sort of a universal or 'trade' language so that my wandering heroes would be able to wend their way through various plots without having to spend months learning a language.

I finally reached a compromise. It's not the best solution, but at least it may prove to be workable.

This is it.

Before the events - stories - adventures or what have you happen on the new planet, (which we will refer to as 'the world' or some such believable generalisation) things had been happening back here in our Sol-ar system.

For the purposes of the plot let us imagine a time some thousand years from now. We have had interplanetary travel, well since Sputnik 1. From the year 2000 there has been an imperceptible increase in what are called psionic powers. Nothing very startling, except in the one in a million cases. From the year 2597 we have had a spacedrive which produces speeds up to within



a fraction of the speed of light and with this we start to explore the nearer star systems. On one of these in the year 2877 is discovered the remains of an extinct civilisation, which had a faster than light drive. There is also found a considerable body of evidence that the said civilisation had died overnight as a result of a visitation from (a stolen idea I'm afraid) from a power disturbed during the voyages of these people. The drive is adopted and used, several new civilisations are discovered along the rim of the Galaxy, between Earth and The Deeps but only one nearer the centre. What comes next is obvious enough. In 2905 an exploring fleet is almost destroyed by something they disturb a hundred or so light years away towards the centre of the galaxy. It follows the survivors wake, but fortunately at a speed just under light speed. Nevertheless it is certain in a hundred odd years to get to the planet Earth. Two things are done at once. Vast programmes of research are started in every part of the known galaxy away from the approaching doom; secondly fleets of refugees are sent out. Now it is known that the THING can follow wakes, and that the previously explored part of the galaxy must be full of their remains. Therefore the only way to prevent the THING from following is to leave no wake. This is done by "towing" refugee and research ships out and setting them free in planned directions with shut off drives. Some inside the galaxy and some, as a precaution, to the outer galaxies. One such ship...they all contain representatives of all the 9 intelligent races, plus the various seeds, animals etc.,...is to be the foundation for further plots. The fate of Earth etc., will be left untold..perhaps to be brought in at a later date. Our ship is loaded with its sleeping complement and shoved off at light minus a bit. After a few thousand years..say 5004 Christian Era, it automatically shifts into FTL drive and continues its journey. Arriving at a new galaxy it searches for an earth-type world, finds one, circles it, finds it suitable, seeds it with earth etc organisms and waits. After a few hundred years and many a thousand test earth (etc) animals are sent down. More waiting, then starts wakeing and landing the various people...of the nine races...the ship has to hurry somewhat towards the end because two thousands years of wear and tear are at last beginning to tell on it. It has landed all its passengers and about half of the light equipment, mainly food and clothing, when its meteor shield fails, it gets caught by a stroke of cosmic ill-luck by a meteor swarm, is disabled and is forced to land on one of the planets two moons. There it comes down too heavily, (only its boats were meant to land on a planet) and breaks up.

Thus we have nine groups of beings from the nine civilisations, stranded on a world without power and with only the minimum of a technology. They, being more or less all ordinary refugees, find it impossible to start a technology from scrap, and turn to agriculture, etc., and in a few hundred years there are nine areas of settlement on the planet, each a few thousand miles in area, with a range of cultures from desert nomads and jungle dwellers up to agricultural villages, fishers, and the beginnings of a city state or two.

The next thing to do is to draw a map or two. The planet is to be 30,000 miles in diameter, gravity  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Earth, day 27hrs, distance from its Sun about 100million miles (varies with seasons) the Sun is a bit brighter than Sol, looks much the same from the planets surface. It has two moons, One slightly smaller than THE Moon, at about 260,000 miles, the other only a couple of hundred miles diameter and about 90,000 miles up. the big one revolves on its axis every 3 days, circles the planet in about 32 days. (got to figure those out yet) has a slight atmosphere

the land masses of the planet are in one big ring round the equator, except for a gap of 20 miles at the narrowest. Plenty of islands fringe the great continent. (Open seas at the poles) and running like a monster spine mountains run almost continuously along the said equator, some of them up to 30,000 feet. Travel from north to south or vice versa is impossible nearly everywhere.

There are these nine races to be sorted out too. (they may be too many, but we shall see). At present I have envisaged two. One is to be Earth-human averaging about 5-10" and being a sort of a Scandinavian --Polynesian mix. The other fits very well the Martians described in the Old Growler series. (eight tentacles, spidery-octopoid.) These of course would be able to use platery air, as they are, in this story, of another star sysem but a similar planet to Earth. Hmmm..they might just as well keep their passion for chess, etc.,

Any suggestions for others welcomed. Possibly, Tars Tar..zak(?) types, dwarves, elves types.

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That was a pause while I drew a map on stencil. (of which more in a minute.)

I've further decided that the planet will have an axial tilt of  $25^{\circ}$  thus giving it seasons, and that the moons will orbit at right angles to the axis...thus producing some interesting tides. Expert advice on resultant effects would be very very welcome.

The map. This consists of an outline, representations of some mountains and a North sign.

The mountains thus shown are of course only vaguely defined, and are all massive ranges. For instance if I were to draw the earth on that scale you would ONLY see the Rockies, the Andes, the Himalayas, and possibly the Alps.

Anyone with any knowledge of how tides and winds would operate please feel free to make suggestions.

Note the narrow...20 miles at the narrowest, between the Far East and the Far West. Suggestions regarding this sea passage also welcomed. In fact I'm inviting any member of OMPA who wants to to have a go.....with two ends in view:-

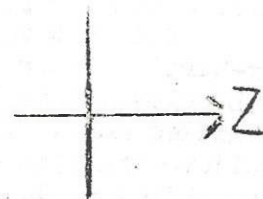
1. to make the planetary conditions reasonable.
2. to write stories set on the planet.

When I have duped the map I will mark in the initial landing sites of the Nine Races. One of them, which I will indicate, will be my old mates the Scand-esians. I have an outline history for these people but anyone is welcome to write stories about them. I would like to point out that should anyone wish to use this setting he should at least make sure that his ...geographical etc., details jell with anything else that has been written.

As a rough rule we can say that the first person to draw the map of an area or write details of its people, customs etc., has of right defined that area and other writers must conform to his background.

In this respect the use of a common time scale should be used... dating from the landing of the refugees...called after landing 1. for instance. AL1, AL234 etc., This does not cut out local time measurements...so long as Thug the Barbarian is not shown demolishing the Temple of GruGray a generation before it is built..etc.,

planetary  
circumference  
approx;  
30,000 miles.



# The begining of the Nine Citities.

When the shuttle craft had not been for ten days, it had come at least twice a day before that, nine men sat in the shade of a bong tree a short walk from the landing place.

"I do not think we will see the shuttle again" said Thror K'ney, ex-Martian water engineer. Rolf Grissom, late fourth engineer on a STL (slower than light) trader in the Fifty Worlds system inclined his grizzled head. "I'm constrained to agree with you, Thror", he said, "I believe that the meteor shower we saw may have something to do with it, the ship was old and the screen may have gone down". The others listened in silent agreement. What in another man would have been taken for a vague guess was, with Rolf Grissom given the the acceptance of eyewitness accuracy; for this was Grissoms Talent, that he could recognise with almost unerring accuracy which one of a tangled web of possibilities was the true one, after the event had taken place.

They all had some Talent; it was this that had drawn them to each other on Landing Day. Thror K'ney was a Navigator; that is he could never lose his way, he knew, night or day the direction and distance of any place he had been in for a few hours; then there was O'dowd the Truther, who could tell if a man lied or not, and Grima Snorrison who was a Dream Maker, Kanaka Rautere the Doctor, Olaf Ragnarsson the Beast Friend, Aub Norris the Dowser, Tasiumi Yamiri the Plant Knower, and Pele Fan the Rememberer.

When their Talents worked, they worked almost one hundred percent; but being more or less ordinary refugees, with no great contribution to make to the work against the THING, they were not the best gifted or trained of their sort. Their Talents operated for short, unpredictable periods, otherwise they were much as other men.

Kanaka Rautere spoke. "There is not enough food here to supply all four thousand of us; there is game, that is true, but most of it has been frightened out of the area by now. We must move away from here soon, or we will all starve together". "What is the stores situation?" asked Brian O'dowd, looking at Grima Snorrison, who was one of the Ration Officers. "For all of us, on full rations, there is perhaps another eleven days food. This could have been sufficient to last us until the shuttle brought down the vegetation converters, but now", he shrugged. "What about other supplies?" asked Aub Norris. "The bulk of the stores consist of food. There are the shelters of course, but they will not last for ever; the clothes we stand up in, a few chests of tools of a primitive kind, hammers, saws and the like; the only real bit of technology we have is the stasis fence and its generator, and they will be useless in a week or two unless the shuttle returns with some more iron-wire fuel.". "And what is the settlement Council going to do about this? demanded Aub. "They still think the shuttle will return". "Well, can we not go to them and tell them what Rolf has said" asked Olaf Ragnarsson, "won't that make them get a move on towards making the best of our situation?". "I do not think that will make any difference" replied Brian O'dowd, "none of them are from the Old Worlds, they are frightened by Talents and are quite likely to do just the opposite". They mulled this over for a while, talking amongst themselves. Before they broke up they agreed to sound out as many of the other Refugees as possible with a view to gauging their attitude to the situation, and meet again on the morrow,



When they met again the next day they found that each one had a similar report to make. Most of the settlers preferred to wait and see what happened, having no doubts that the shuttle was absent only temporarily. "I can only count on my immediate family" reported Thrór K'ney, "and perhaps another five or six couples". It turned out that this was the most optimistic report, no-one else had the support of more than three other families. The discussion that followed was grim rather than gloomy, there was not so much a debate as to what to do next, as they were all in unspoken agreement on that point, but they examined the possible courses of action and what provision they could make for survival.

"Once we get away from the immediate area of the Landing" said Snorri. "we should be able to trap or hunt game" "Without weapons" asked Aub Norris "how can we do that?" "We make 'em," replied Tasumi Yamiri, "there are bound to be trees of wood suitable for the making of bows..." "Bows!" exclaimed Aub. "They served our ancestors very well for thousands of years" murmured Kanaka Rautere, "and we can make flint tipped spears, axes..." The discussion went on in an even more sober vein.

The same day the Nine collected their families and the other people who were of a like mind and explained the situation more fully to them all. There was little talk apart from when they had to decide where to go after they left the camp. In answer to this Thrór K'ney asked Pele Fan to come forward. "As most of you know", he said, "I am a somewhat erratic Rememberer. I can recall in perfect clarity and detail periods of time varying from a few seconds to a few minutes" he waited until the puzzled buzz had died down. "The significance of this in our present situation is that I had a Remembering period in the shuttle on the way down, and as a result I have in my mind a picture, one could say a map, of all the territory around here for several hundred miles. To the north-east of here I spotted something which Thrór thinks may be useful; a peninsula joined to the continent by only a narrow strip of land" He sat down and Thrór got to his feet. "The significance of this is that once we are away from the camp we will want to find some place we can make our own, clear of forest and inimical wild life..." there was an uneasy stirr..."and it seems to me that if we make our home in this place Pele has seen we will have the use of the sea for a fence, which will make things easier for us" he paused. "of course, first we have to get there". One of the younger men stood up. "What are we waiting for" he said. "the food stocks will not last for ever, let's go to the council and ask for our share, and be off!"

Another of the younger men; they were all on their feet, spoke. "Wait a minute. Let's not go off half-cooked. There is one more thing to be decided". the group paused uncertainly; then listened. "I was an infantryman" said the young man, "before they decided that they wouldn't be needing my kind of soldier any more because of the THING, and I've had my share of new planets. There is one thing I've learned and that is in this kind of lark we must have some sort of an organisation. It's all very well having these democratic meetings when we're here in the safety of the camp. But once we're outside the stasis barrier there's no telling what we'll be coming up against, with no time to waste chatting things over." He looked around, they were listening. "I suggest we get things settled now; we get ourselves sorted out with some sort of a leader, and make arrangements for

such things as scouts, fire keeping, hunting duties and so on. Also we should try to get as many of the tools as possible, either by taking less than our ration or by stealing them". There were uncertain looks at this, but before anyone could voice an opinion he went on, "and another thing too, has anyone given a thought to such simple things as lighting a fire?" Thror spoke up; "What you say is true. Some of these things we," indicating the others of the nine, "have thought of. We have most of the contents of the tool chests concealed at the edge of the camp", gasps, "and when our lighters run out we have burning glasses, and eventually we will have to use a fire-bow or flint and steel." All of them felt the urgency of the situation, with only eight or nine days food left in camp things might get ugly. It was agreed that the sooner a start was made the better, even if things were not properly organized it would be wise to get away from the camp as soon as possible.

The nine family heads were elected as a matter of course as the officers, with Thror K'ney as the leader, and the party was then arranged in nine groups. As they had all been in Deep Sleep the people who had planned the voyage had had opportunity to take precautions, with the parents consent where possible, to see that the refugees were not burdened in their first years awake with babies or young children, this had been done by the simple method of keeping the children awake until they had reached the age of fifteen, and then freezing them with their parents. Of course this resulted in some strangeness; for instance when twenty year old parents were confronted by fifteen year old children they had never ...seemingly...seen. One result of this was that the children often had a more practical outlook than their elders, besides having some survival training while waiting to be frozen.

The next day Thror and the other eight went to see the camp council, and asked that they should be given their share of the rations. When asked why Thror told them bluntly enough that they were leaving the camp because they didn't believe that the shuttle would be back. There followed a long and angry harangue by the council, who refused to give them any extra supplies on the grounds that their leaving might cause a panic in the camp. They thought that Thror and the group would have to stay in the camp without extra supplies. What actually happened was that Thror and his people drew their rations as usual the same morning and then, pausing only to pick up the hidden tools, made their way to a meeting place out of sight of the camp, beyond the barrier.

"It is my belief that we will be pretty safe from predators for the moment" said Olaf Ragnarsson, "because we are a fair sized group, and because most of their natural game will have been frightened away from the near vicinity of the camp. However that also means that there will be little chance of us supplementing our rations". Thror signaled to eight of the young men who had been carrying long bundles wrapped in plasticated fabric. They came forward and put their burdens on the ground where the tools had been stacked, and unwrapped them. Thror picked up a length of plastic, a strut from a camp shelter and, calmly bending it notched a nylon cord into a ready rubbed groove, he held this up, and a yard long length of thin plastic rod. "Bows and arrows", he announced. There was a murmur. Two of the women pushed to the front and untied their bundles. Thror and the others looking on in surprise. The tall girl pointed, "Knives, various, from the camp kitchen, and javelins and bows&arrows we liberated from the still packed recreation stores. We couldn't carry any more without arousing suspicion". The other girl spoke, "We only found out about

these this morning, and we had not been out of the store shelter for more than a minute when some of the council and some of the young men arrived". "Yes," said the other girl, "it seemed to us that they were putting guards on this material". "The sooner we make a start the better" said Aub Norris, "they may discover that these tools and the other things are missing. If we stay too near they might have a go at bringing us back". "Quite right" said Grima Snorrison, "let's get into marching order and get away". "We will", answered Thrór, "as soon as we have distributed these weapons".

The weapons, and tools, were allocated simply by making nine heaps, each as near identical as possible and giving them to the nine groups to be allocated according to any particular need or ability. There was not a lot to carry. The days rations, they would eat as little as possible, various containers for water, a metal or ceramic pot or two, personal possessions of some of the women, the tools and the weapons.

Thrór had made a list of the people in their groups, and another list of the tools; he now added to this the javelins, sporting bows, and the made up bows. This worked out like this.

People. Thrór's group.  
5 couples  
+ 1 boy & 2 girls (15)

Tools etc Thrór's group.  
big axe, 1 small axe, 2 hammers, 1 sporting bow & 15 arrows, 1 javelin, 6 made bows & 60 arrows, 2 small knives.

Rolf Grissom,  
5 couples plus  
1 boy and 2 girls

1 big & 1 small axe, a hammer, a saw, 1 sporting bow & 15 arrows, 1 javelin  
6 made bows and 60 arrows, 2 small knives

Brian O'dowd  
5 couples plus  
2 boys & 2 girls.

1 big, 1 small axe, hammer, saw, 1 sporti  
bow & 15 arrows, 1 javelin, 6 made bows &  
60 arrows, 2 small knives.

and so on, In all there were 45 couples, 4 boys and 19 girls,  
4 big axes, 7 small axes, 10 hammers, 8 saws, 4 sporting bows &  
60 arrows, 12 javelins, the screw-together metal ones, 60  
made mows, 600 "arrows" of plastic rod, 6 long knives and  
14 small ones....plus the oddments like lenses, lighters, and the  
contents of their pockets...which Thrór intended to investigate as soon  
as possible.

The made about 20 miles that day, across rolling grassy land with a sprinkling of trees. The climate was warm as this was early summer, although they were quite high up, the parkland being some two thousand feet above sea level. Thrór compared notes with Pele Fan that night as they camped in a hollow round a clump of trees.

"This semi-steppe country covers a wide area of this peninsular" said Pele Fan, "as I recall, in time it should make good wheat country. At the moment it supports various terrestrial animals from mouse to deer and cattal...probably horses too, and also a fair number of native life forms. The steppe-veldt country slopes down to the sea over ten miles or so to the east and north, but where we're heading it rises in some lowish mountains before it descends to the sea, the isthmus that joins our peninsula to this mainland lies over the mountains to the north west..another," he paused to calculate, "another three hundred miles".

"Maybe 30 days, if we keep up the present rate of travel!" remarked Aub Norris as he joined them. The other leaders; the fires having been lit, sentries and fire watchers organised; came to join them. "What sort of country can we expect on this peninsula we're heading for" asked Rolf Grisson, "Yes, and what sort of dangerous animals might we find" interjected his daughter Ingar, who had come up with the other off-duty people. "Well", replied Pele Fan, "I saw that it seemed to be a fair mixture of mountain forest and perhaps meadow; a long and quite narrow peninsula on the west fronted by the open sea, on the east enclosing a small sea, and more sea north and south. But your best man to ask about the conditions there would be Tasiumi here, or Olaf,". he looked towards the two people mentioned. Tasiumi replied, with a shake of his head, "I can't tell you much you don't know already. The vegetation will probably range from subtropical in the south to temperate in the north. There will probably be a mixture of terrestrial and native vegetation and only when I've had a chance to inspect them will I be able to say whether they are dangerous, or beneficial, useful, useless, and so on."

"It's much the same with me", said Olaf, "I can tell you what sort of animals inhabit that type of country on earth, and one or two other planets. But I can't tell you about the native animals until I've seen them. Most of the animals we've seen so far have been terrestrial herbivores, and the native animals I've seen are similar. There are very probably wolves, or their equivalent out there", he pointed beyond the fire glow, "and lesser carnivores; perhaps even something as big as lions" several people looked uneasy. "This place we are going to may be sparse in animals, it depends how they migrated after the ship set them down, and which ones have survived. On the other hand we may encounter bears, cougars, various snakes, almost certainly some largish carnivore, probably more herbivores of differing types, more adapted to mountains and woodland than the ones we've seen so far". he looked thoughtful, "then of course...there are the native life forms". "What about natives; I mean intelligent beings" asked Sean, O'dowd's son. Thrór answered that. "Very unlikely. These ships are programmed to look for a planet without intelligent life; partly for our own safety, partly to protect the natives from us. If the ship saw no sign of native life, intelligent life, in the hundreds of years it was up there in orbit I think we are pretty sure that there is none. No, I don't think we will find any life here brighter than say, a dog or cat.". From a girl standing by Brian O'dowd, "From all this I gather that the climate and vegetation will rather resemble that of New Zealand, on old Earth, and the animals will be some sort of ecological balance with predators, scavengers and prey suitable to such a climate; plus any native forms which fit into the appropriate niches?" "That is essentially correct" replied Olaf. "Our main danger, or should I say problem" put in Tasiumi, "will be in providing ourselves with food. Until we have planted and harvested for a year or two we dare not eat any of the seed we have brought with us.". "Well", said Thrór, we will have to live the best we can by hunting, fishing and gathering wild plants. Which brings us to another point. The rations will not last beyond another day, not if we keep up our present pace, and we must do to put as much distance between ourselves and the camp before things come to a head there. Tomorrow at first light we'll send out a hunting party". "In that case", said Olaf, "I'm the logical choice to lead it. I'd like to take the four people with the proper bows, and half-a-dozen



people with javelins" he looked to Thrór, "is that OK?". "Yes, I was thinking of you myself. Pick the people you want now and get some sleep, when you go out tomorrow we should be only two or three miles behind you, we might as well keep to our line of march and go hunting in any other direction". "Ok," said Olaf, "but give us a bigger start than that, let us get about 5 miles in front, we may have to slow down to stalk something and we don't want the rest of you overrunning us and disturbing our quarry". After some demurring this was agreed on and Olaf chose his people and went off to rest. The sentries woke the hunting party when the first light of the sun stained the highest clouds and after the rest had eaten the main group set off set off in their track.

In the late afternoon they saw a thin wisp of smoke up ahead, and breasting a rise of ground saw a figure waving near a stand of trees. It took another three-quarters of an hour to get to the grove. The smell of roasting meat perfumed the air and the successful hunters came to greet them.

"We had no luck for hours," reported Olaf as they sat round the fires tearing at roast meat, "then about an hour before we saw you one of the boys saw a little herd of these animals slipping into these trees. They must have come in for a drink, the day is hot at this time of the year, and there is a trickle of water here. It's only a few yards long then it goes underground again. We were lucky really, we crept round the grove, as you see there are only about fifty of these great trees, hoping to get one as it ran. As luck would have it I got a touch of Talent as we moved into the trees and stopped the men. I managed to get close enough to them to feel their presence and after that I could just walk forward and slaughter them!" Olaf didn't look too happy, in spite of the callousness of his phraseology. "They would have fallen to a predator sooner or later, Olaf", comforted Thrór, "and our people must eat to live". In the silence a sound felt its way through the air. "Sounds like thunder" said one of the girls, rising to her feet. They looked to the sky, they looked east. A gasp; over the crest of the bowl, a mile away a brown wave broke. It stretched from horizon to horizon. "Odin's false teeth" exclaimed a restrained young lady, "A bloody stampede" yelled Brian O'dowd.

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dum diddi dum diddi dum....etc., here endeth the first part.

Hwaet!	Man is born, Weirðs move him
	to tread the shield road,
	to swim the swan path,
	the world he wanders
	with his kinsfolk
	or amongst strangers
	gathers he bright gold
	won in warplay
	ring-gifted by Scyldings
	it buys not heart ease
	when thoughts of earthmould grips
	he has no comfort

# READER'S

# GRAMP

AMAZING, September 1969. "Harlan Ellison's Outstanding New Story : 'Dogfight on 101.'" It isn't outstanding, it's more of a horror story than sf, and it's just one more episode in the saga of the motorised future. This one deals with official duels on the freeways, between motorists who use their cars as weapons. The cars have such things as rip-saws, inductor beams, and lasers, as 'optional extras', for greater killing power ... An unsavoury bit of fiction - and, in view of the report in today's paper that California intends to ban the internal combustion engine by 1975, it could be a totally erroneous extrapolation! And the baddie's name is Billy Bonney ... !

The Edge of the Rose, by Joe Hensley. I don't get the significance of the title, (if any), and the plot is the somewhat time-worn one of "Cast thy broad upon the waters ..." - but after the Ellison nastiness, this story was like a breath of fresh air.

Lost Treasure of Mars, by Edmond Hamilton. Copyright 1940, it says, and heavens to Murg, this one reads like it! In fact, I'd guess that it was probably corny even then. Pathetic offerings like this should not be resuscitated - I'm sure the authors would deem it a kindness if their early efforts were left in decent obscurity!

The Shortcut, by the late Rog Phillips. Here's another one, copyright 1949, but not quite as creaking as the Hamilton effort. The writing is much smoother, slicker, and the ending is of the type which one ought to be able to see coming, yet somehow one doesn't - at least, I didn't. (Didn't really understand it, either - oh, I know what the author meant, but not why ... if you see what I ... no? oh well, scrub round it ...)

Up the Line, by Robert Silverberg (conclusion). This lived up to the promise of its first part, and it wouldn't surprise me if this novel was nominated for a Hugo some time. The early history of Byzantium has been most thoroughly and painstakingly researched, the characters are three-dimensional (some more so than others), and the ending is entirely unexpected. So you'll get no advance telegraphy on it from this quarter!

Charly, reviewed by Laurence Janifer - the only unfavourable review of this film that I've seen. A 'Science of Man' article entitled Wanted - A New Myth for Technology, by Leon E. Stover, which I skimmed and found entirely uninteresting - possibly my loss, but ... The Future in Books - an interesting and somewhat startling commentary by James Blish on John Brunner's Stand on Zanzibar and The Jagged Orbit. I say commentary rather than review,

because Blish doesn't deal only with these two books, but with the trends they follow and the effects they may have. He doesn't like cyber books; I quote: "I could not finish Stand on Zanzibar, since I disliked everybody in it and I was constantly impeded by the suspicion that Brunner was writing not from himself but for a prize. I did finish The Jagged Orbit, but only because it was mercifully shorter. I recommend against it, and all others of its ilk ...."

Norman Spinrad, on the other hand, considers S.O.Z. "a great book", and says: "Stand on Zanzibar is a brilliant and dangerous book. Brilliant because with it Brunner has invented a whole new way of writing book-length sf. Dangerous because what he has done looks so damned easy ...."

Also in this issue: The Club House - fanzine reviews by John D. Berry; and an interesting lettercol.

THE RING, by Elora Anthony & Robert E. Margroff. Macdonald Science Fiction, 25/- Here we go again - echoes of The Reefs of Space - if that was the book in which criminals wore a sort of iron collar which would blow their heads off if they transgressed again? Only in this case, as the title announces, it's a ring instead of a collar, worn on a male finger or a female toe, and acting as an "ultra-conscience." But it operates on two-valued logic only, and is therefore something of an injustice; a "ringer" is not even allowed to strike a fellow-human in self-defence, thus rendering him prey to sadistic gangs who search out "ringers" simply in order to beat them up without resistance. Here, too, are reminders of Demolished Man; the hero's tortured relationship with the villain, George McKissic, being very reminiscent of Van Vech's involvement with Craye D'Courtney. In fact, extrapolating from the plot-resemblance, I made a guess at the ending halfway through the book. I checked, I was right, and I read no further. In my opinion, not a particularly good sf read.

IF, June 1968. First episode of Rogue Star by Fred Pohl & Jack Williamson.

I've read this story before somewhere, but I can't remember where - can anybody tell me? All I know is that I wasn't sufficiently impressed to want to read it again.

The Guerrilla Trees by H.H. Hollis. Thinly disguised Vietnam protest, transferred to an alien planet. This disguise is not well enough done to make the story good sf.

Cage of Brass by Samuel R. Delany. Shades of Monte Cristo on Chateau d'If ... lacklustre echoes of Gully Foyle talking to Jiz McQueen in Gouffre Martel ... I wasn't impressed with this story.

The Mother Ship by James Tiptree jr. Extremely well written, excellent dialogue, plenty of wry humour. Pity the plot wasn't more worthy of the author's writing skill - even though the visiting alien 'Amazons' aren't 'I think, quite like any other aliens you've ever met.'

House of Ancestors, by Gene Wolfe. A tale of sophisticated robotics with a dash of cybernetics thrown in, and all set in "Expo 91." Quite neat, and readable.

Publish and Perish, by John Thomas. A rather silly story about the lengths to which academicians of the future must go in order to achieve promotion.

The Bird-Brained Navigator by A. Bertram Chandler. As you might expect from a maritime man, this story concerns a sea-voyage -

on another planet. On board the vessel concerned is a prisoner, married and on parole, having given his word not to attempt to seize the ship, not to signal to aircraft or to other surface vessels, and not to interfere in any way with the ship's own signalling equipment. He keeps his word - but manages to turn the tables in his own favour none the less. Ingenious and enjoyable. Also in this issue: Fred Pohl's editorial (on the Vietnam war); SF Calendar; and a letter column.

IF, July 1968. Second episode of Pohl & Williamson's Rogue Star.

The Sleeper with Still Hands by Harlan Ellison. I still maintain that Ellison's best efforts are his memorable titles! This is a rather downbeat story about a world which has grown desperately bored with 600 years of peace, enforced by a strange creature called The Sleeper, who operates under the Sargasso Sea. But now there are a few men whose minds are immune to The Sleeper's probings - and they are deadly rivals in the race to find The Sleeper and 'turn him off.'

We Fused Ones by Perry A. Chapdelaine sr. Another 'reminder'-type story, this one reminiscent of Wolfbane, though not nearly so good. Unnecessarily repetitive in places, and more than somewhat wincefully in others. Wasn't at all keen on this one.

If - And When, by Lester del Rey. Short but interesting article on factual subjects which might be used as sf themes.

Gone to Graveyards Everyone, by Paul M. Moffett (an IF first.) Yet another variation on how the next war (or some war in the future) will be fought. I guess it's no worse than a general atomic holocaust ...

The Muschine, by Burt K. Miller. Interesting yarn about sea travel and marine commerce on a watery world which has very little metal.

"Muschine" is an abbreviation of "muscle machine" - which is what powers the boats on this world. But even mindless muscle can, under favourable circumstances, mutate and develop a kind of intelligence. And if that intelligence should prove to be malign ...

The Soft Shells, by Basil Wells. The sea cetaures of Turm resist the encroachments of Torrans - with the aid of the one Torran whom they know and trust. A rather mediocre story.

The Hides of Marroch, by C.C. MacApp. Is it the cruelty involved in the creation of a real mink coat which makes many women prefer it to the most expensive synthetic fur? Apparently MacApp thinks it is, hence this rather clever yarn about alien skins for which Earth-women will pay all that their husbands have got - and their sadistic pleasure in hearing details of how the skins are obtained. (H'mmm ... doesn't say much for MacApp's opinion of women on mass, does it ??)

The Curo-All, by - oh sorry, forgot to take a note of the author's name - anybody know, please? It's a humorous-cum-basically-tragic yarn about the strange effects of snoozes, extra-terrestrially induced.

In The Oligocene, by John Thomas. Dreadful little story on mad-scientist-and-beautiful-kidnapped-girl lines.

Also in this issue: Fred Pohl's editorial on the ratio of humanity to the remainder of the world's biota; SF Calendar; and the letter column.



ADVENT CALENDAR.

Hurrying footsteps down the hill  
And the chime of a distant clock.  
The air is clear and cold.  
The garden wall with ice crust  
Stretches protective stones round the sloping white lawn  
The fruit trees in the border stretch their shadowy fingers  
Across the expanse of untrodden snow,  
Stretch but never grasp.

There are squares of golden light in the valley  
Open one, it is nearly Advent.  
What do you see?

I see a woman making pastry  
A child kneels in adoration before the Sheriff  
Flames dance in the grate  
The pastry smells good  
Close that window  
You are not needed here  
Advent is tomorrow.  
This window opens uninvited  
The little fir tree stands in all his glory  
Glitter and glare of baubles  
And the children sing in the firelight  
The cake and wine are on the hearth  
The stockings hang motionless and expectant  
Nestnuts leap like Dervishes in the hearth  
Close the window  
You are not needed here

This narrow window is tightly curtained  
Peep through the crack  
A miserable fire flickers in the grate  
An old lady sits stiffly on a wooden chair  
She is shabbily dressed and resigned  
A silent figure in a silent room  
There is bread and margarine upon the table  
Nobody looks in here at Advent  
Rather open the uncurtained window  
Where the noise and light stream out and embrace you  
The party is in full swing  
Wine flows, like water down a dying man's throat  
Smoke curls lazily  
There is plenty of time. The party  
Does not finish until three  
There is plenty of time for the skirts to whirl,  
The heels to stab the linolium  
The singing goes on and on, and on --  
Close the window  
You are not needed here

advent calendar...continued.

The smallest window sticks as if long unopened  
And gives out no fire - flame to the world  
The lantern light is feeble. Wind whistles under the door  
This room is cold and bare  
Straw in the cracks and crannies  
Straw for a carpet, straw  
Round the feet of two kneeling figures  
Straw in the manger

Leave open the window  
You are welcome here.

Jean Cheslin.

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HWAET'.

A stillness torn in the cleft  
Twist twixt mountains dark and grim  
Stirs with the shadow of a stark gust  
And returns to stillness.  
So makes a man his mark upon the world  
Come, and passed, unnoticed, unkeened  
Great kings are but pebble rings  
Cold earth holds them fast,  
They rot.  
Constancy there is in nothing  
All passes  
The stars are gnawed by stark Time  
To black dust  
They flicker and fade and flush and die  
As snuffed torches eddy black smoke  
And what mere man,  
Even in the greatness of fame and name  
Even in children,  
Outface the very stars?.

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HWAET'.

Stormbirds mutter masthigh fleeing  
Sails dark and stained with sea  
Hoist themselves from the horizon  
The moonglow moonpath keelplowed swells  
Silence drowns the dusk of land  
Soon to meet another drownding.  
Ragnar and Ivar Angle seeking, vengeance seeking,  
Come.

etc.,