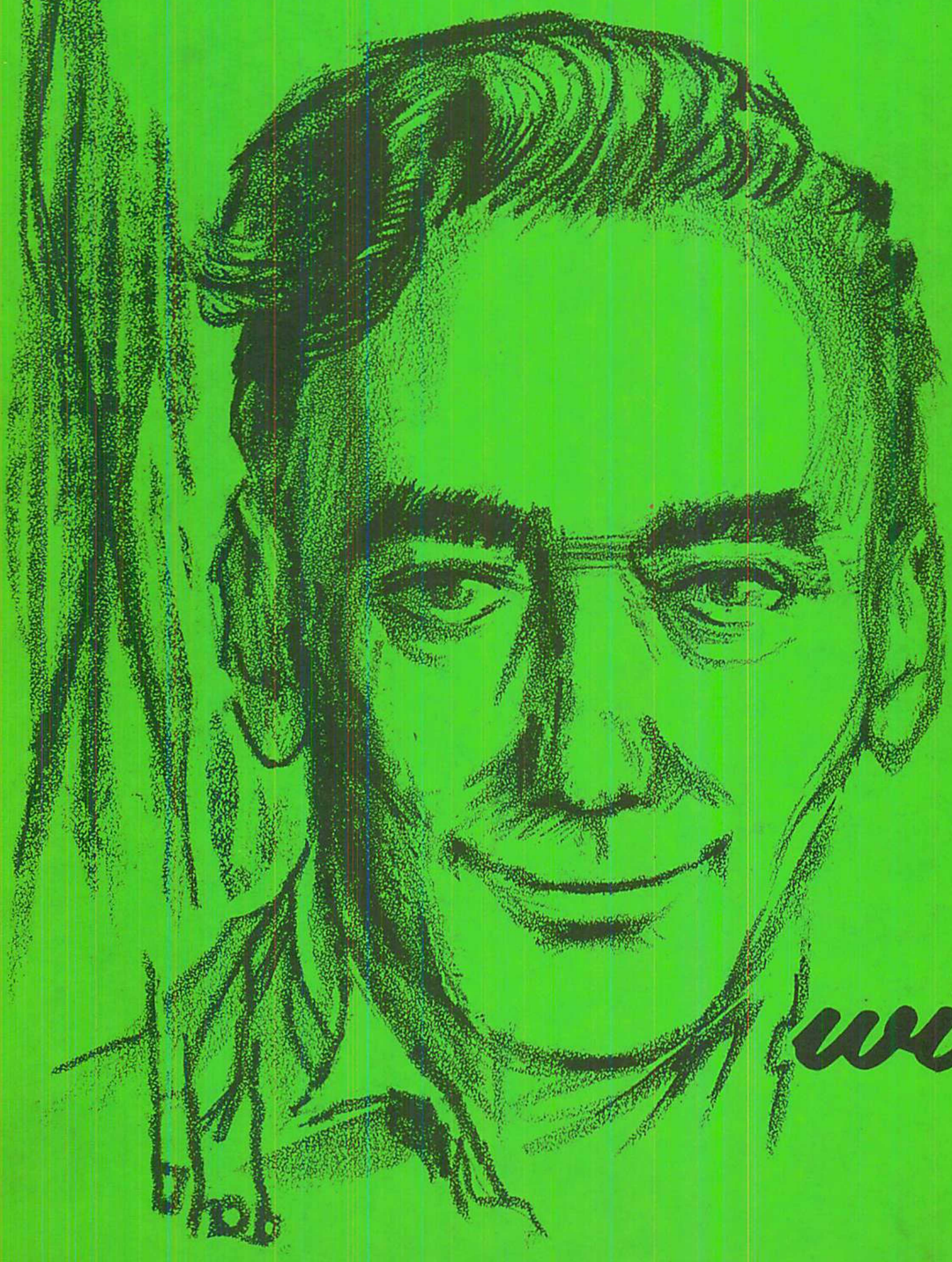
XERO 6

The Fanzine of Relativistic Dadaism



willish

XERO 6

SEPTEMBER 1961

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Xero comes to you from Pat and Dick Lupoff, 215 E. 73 St, New York 21, NY. Bhob Stewart is art editor and did most of the layouts. This issue costs $1, all proceeds going to the Tenth Anniversay Willis Fund. Future issues will be available for contribution, limited trades, printed letters of comment, or 35¢ per copy or three for a dollar. Ain't that a shock!

Absolute Xero:

In Which I Give (or maybe get) a Course in Home Decorating...

One cupon a time, back in the days before Xero (which was only a year ago, has anyone noticed?), Dick and I and of course Snoopy (there never was a time before Snoopy) lived in a huge three room penthouse-mansion. Surrounded by conventional pieces of furniture: beds, bookcases, chairs, tables...yet we were lonely. There seemed to be something missing. The empty nooks and crannies of our spacious mansion seemed spooky and gloomy.

For almost a year we had lived in the penthouse, for all that time this dreadful state of affairs had continued. We were beside ourselves. We tried everything to dispell the gloom: charcoal cookouts and moonbathing on the terrace in the summer, crackling fires in the fireplace accompanied by fine stereo music in the winter...nothing seemed to work.

Until one day a voice was heard echoing loudly through the mists of gloom: "O, YE MOST SILLY ONES, WHY DON'T YOU PULL YOURSELFS TOGETHER AND PUBLISH A FANZINE?" Just like that. Not even "yourselves." "Why don't you pull yourselfs together and publish a fanzine?"

Why not indeed? We told the voice why not. It was dirty, messy, exasperating and expensive to publish a fanzine. It consumed every spare sent, erg, and moment of money, energy, and time available. It would fill every cubic inch of space alloted to it and to a dozen other activities. It would cut us off from our numerous mundane friends, drain our enthusiasm for a hundred varied interests. Wrck our lives. Yes, wrck them.

We made a foraging party, briefly, through our palace to collect all the equipment needed in fanzine publishing. After a thorough search we finally emerged with one item of equipment: a typer (formerly known as typewriter). Of course we had all the mundane equipment, such as pens, pencils, and erasers, but obviously this would not do. First we needed a symbol of inspiration. This we acquired at the Pittcon after a heated battle with the formidable Fritz Lang Frau in Mond, Chris Moskowitz. A lovely work by Frank R. Paul, a peaceful pastoral scene of a spaceman surrounded by some graceful grey bems rather resembling sorely overstuffed bats, dancing around inside an iron-mongery on Mercury or Iapetus or maybe on Vulcan.

Dick wanted this masterpiece in our bedroom; I was not so sure, so we deferred decision until after returning home, via TWAirliner. However, we had no way of wrapping the Paul, and with its bare glass face handing out, we feared to check it through with our backage. The stewardess and the other passengers on the plane kept glancing out of the corners of their eyes at us and our burden as we rose into the atmosphere and headed east. After a few furtive glances they began to look more frequently, more directly, more incredulously. Fortunately it was a short flight, or we might have had to skyjack the plane in order to get home. The painting now does hang over the bar. It has frightened one or two imbibers out of overdoing the drinks.

Next, we realized that more practical things were in order. I decided to surprise Dick on our anniversary, even if it meant a gift not of romance and beauty, with a mimeoscope.

It cost as much as a fine pair of cufflinks, several good shirts, or three Bronzini ties, but the gift seemed to fill Dick with a heavenly inspiration. Each night for a month or more thereafter, Dick would arrive home a little late, with a mysterious, albeit somewhat dazed, smile on his face, and a stylus, shading plate, or lettering guide in his hand. No money for dinner, but happy nonetheless. "Look," he would say, "it's an A.B. Dick 468 and it writes like this ...."

Or, "Darling, it's a 1629 medium splatter."

Or, "It's a Gestetner 144 half-inch EGYPTIAN."

Eventually we became practical again and procured stencils and lots of correction fluid. After we bacme proficient in the use of all these foreign objects we dragged a bridge table from a closet and set it up as a temporary desk. It is still standing in the same spot, a full year later.

At last the great moment had arrived. We set out to produce the first issue of Xero. Dick sat down to write an article about Captain Marvel. To bolster his recollections (and also because it might provide a few hours of nostalgic fun) he bought a few old Captain Marvel comics in a back-issue shop downtown. I sat gloomily in the corner. "What's the matter?" Dick asked me. "Captain Marvel is just a big red cheese," I replied, "Now Captain Marvel JR and Mickey Mouse, they had brains." While not fully agreeing with me, Dick set out and brought home some Captain Marvel Jr, Mary Marvel, and Walt Disney comics. Comic books multiply like hopped-up rabbits.

From a neat pile completely concealed behind a chair in a corner of our bedroom, we now have what resembles three side-by-side Leaning Towers of Pisa.

Finally the unltimate moment in publishing arrived. After paying for four issues of Xero produced on the Q'Press, and one on an ancient ABDick 90, we decided that we needed a mimeo all our own. So Dick put a few dollars on a ~~BOTSE~~ stock he knew of, and lo! -- a mimeo. No kidding, actually and literally, all you have to do to make money in the market is buy cheap and sell dear; I don't see why people think it's complicated.

Now we looked around our somewhat fuller mansion...where would we put our proudest possession? But alas, all the once empty nooks and crannies in our home were bare and gloomy no more. They were filled, even bursting with cheerful objects. A stack of comics here, of pulps there. A huge mound of fanzines. Several boxes of prozines. Books. Shading plates. Lettering guides, stencils, styli, bottles of corflu and stencil cement. The mimeo went to the basement of Larry and Noreen Shaw.

So we now spend each Sunday carefully reading the classified ads for larger apartments. Our few remaining mundane friends simply assume that we need an extra room for the baby whom we expect in a matter of days. But fans know better. Any well-adjusted mimeo needs a room of its own in order to perform to perfection. Wish us luck.

Pat

THE SLANT STORY

By WALTER A. WILLIS

PART ONE

"Thirty shillings a page," I said disgustedly one evening in 1948, "I could nearly get it printed for that." At the time I was sitting in the Cafe de la Victoire with a couple of fellow members of the intelligentsia. Well, actually to be quite frank it was a fried fish shop in Ballymacarett called the Victory Supper Saloon, with a decor of checked linoleum and fly-papers, but it was the best we could do. Belfast is short in open-air Montmartre-type cafes and we were short of money, so we had determined to inaugurate all on our own a tradition of left-bank avant-garde fish and chips shops and had started by rechristening this one without the knowledge of the proprietor. The next step, we felt, would be to supply him with a pile of old copies of transition to wrap his take-out orders of chips in, and soon the place would become the Mecca of international Bohemia with us as doyens. At the moment however we were talking about this science fiction fan magazine I was thinking of starting and about the high prices of professional duplicating.

"I know where you can get a printing press," said Alan Seaton, toying idly with a bottle of fine old vintage vinegar. (Yes, these are the people who invented the sauce bottle fandom I wrote about elsewhere.) Seaton was our artist: he

painted an average of four pictures a week, using both side of the canvas, but never signed any of them lest the market be debased when he became Recognised. He went on to explain that his employer, a pharmaceutical chemist, had bought this press about twenty years ago to print his own letterheads but the technicalities had defeated him and he had relegated it to the lumber room. He had certainly forgotten all about it. So next afternoon I went to Seaton's shop and lurked about like a customer, ready to buy a bottle of aspirins at the drop of a hat if it became necessary to disarm suspicion, until I could be smuggled upstairs.

Arriving finally in the attic, breathless with anticipation and three flights of stairs, I was a little disappointed at my first sight of the Printing Press. The only printing presses I had ever seen before were the great whirring machines which the hero always stopped in the last reel of movies about journalists, and though I really wasn't expecting one of those, I at least thought it would be something that went round. Not a little iron box with a handle. However there was no time to think about that. We dumped it into a cardboard box along with everything that seemed to belong to it and I was smuggled out of the shop again successfully, all aspirations and no aspirins.

At home, I examined the prize more carefully. As well as the press, there was what I learned later is termed a composing stick and a vast quantity of type. The press itself seemed pathetically simple. There was a tray in which you presumably placed the type and the lid had a couple of clips on it to hold a sheet of paper. If you inked the lid and closed the box and leaned on the handle the paper would be pressed against the type and bingo. Privately I thought Gutenberg was a bit stupid not to have thought of it sooner. There was nothing broken...in fact there was nothing to break...and the tray for the type was a big as the page of a small book. We were in business, and I told as much to James White when he came up later that evening.

"A printed fanzine!" said James, awed. We had only seen one printed fanzine so far, Walter Gillings' Fantasy Review, and that was so far above our lowly neofan level that we regarded it as an august professional publication, similar in statue to The Proceedings of the Royal Society. Its reviewers breathed such a rarified atmosphere of the higher learning that we had never even heard of any of them. It wasn't until much later we found that they were all house names disguising the identity of scruffy London fans like ourselves.

So, diffident but undaunted, we set out to topple Fantasy Review off its pedestal. I grasped the composing stick and started setting up the editorial. Now in case you know as little about letterpress printing as I did until that moment, perhaps I had better explain that the letters come individually on the ends of little metal sticks, and there are shorter metal sticks of different sizes for the spacing between words, and by juggling about with these you can get all the lines exactly the same width. You arrange them in the composing stick, which is a little threesided tray with one side which can be moved back and forth, and when you've got from two to eight or so lines set up, the number depending on your optimism or confidence, you release the screw holding the adjustable third side and holding your breath and the type in a desperate vicelike grip you lift up the whole mass of letters and spaced unsupported from beneath and transfer them to the printing tray you hope....phew! Nothing in mimeography, even the sound of a ripping stencil wrapping itself round the self-feed, compares with the stark horror of that moment when you feel the type disintegrating between your fingers and hear it starting to spatter on the floor. And even when you've become expert at it, disaster can still strike. I remember one evening much later we were setting up type and talking and Bob Shaw made an impassioned gesture, forgetting he was holding a composing stick, and two hours work went hurtling over

his left shoulder like salt. We spent the rest of the evening picking the letters off the floor and putting them back in their compartments again, which is a very slow job when you have to look at each letter, reversed, and decide which it is. (Hence the expression, mind your p's and q's, and they could have added b's and d's and I's and l's.)

But we ran into yet another problem first. The vast store of type we had acauired with the machine ran out after three lines. However we managed to manoeuvre those three lines into the press and I rubbed them with a rubber stamp pad I had with great forethought brought home from the office and we clipped a piece of paper to the lid and closed it and levered it down and opened it up again. Impressions of several of the letters were clearly to be seen on the paper. We had printed something! Drunk with power, we gazed in admiration at the spotty purple hieroglyphs as if they were the Book of the Kells. What few imperfections there might be in the printing should, we agreed, be ascribed to worn type and wrong ink. We were suffering alfeady from the occupational disease of new fan editors, Delusions of Legibility.

Next day I went down town bringing an example of our existing type to have it matched. An old man, probably Gutenberg himself, pored through an immense catalogue of typefaces and told me it was Gloucester Bold Condensed, so I bought a font of that. It cost about two pounds. I brought it home all silvery and shining in a neat little cardboard box, starting with an impressive two full rows of 'A's and ending with all sorts of quaint punctuation marks and diphthongs, and that evening I spent happily soring them all out into a dirty old woodem type-tray the old man had thrown in for another five shillings, having first labelled all the compartments with bits of sticky paper. In my ignorance I just labelled them A B C D E and so on, not knowing there was a special arrangement for printers' typetrays like QWERTYUIOP, and for the same very good reasons. By the time we knew better we figured it was too late to change.

By the end of the following evening we had finished setting the editorial and had somehow got it into the press. I had also bought a pound tin of printer's ink, for about half a dollar. It lasted the whole lifetime of Slant, which is one of the things that

makes it difficult for me to find my way out of mimeograph supply shops nowadays, on account of the red mist before my eyes. James had come up again, all eagerness, and we rolled out a little ink on the bathroom mirror and then rolled it onto the type and printed again. The result was both triumph and disaster. On the one hand there was a clear and beautiful impression on the paper of nearly every other letter; on the other hand the editorial looked as if it bad been started off with a whimper and finished with a bang. The type we had been sold was compressed and emphatic; it could hardly have been more unlike the type we had, which was obviously neither Bold nor Condensed nor pwobably even Gloucester. We cursed Gutenberg and conferred grimly. Finally we decided that rather than take all that new type apart again and clean it we would keep it for our body type and use the other for headlines. This was the first really bad mistake we made, if you don't count taking up printing in the first place, but we weren't to find just how big a mistake it was until the third issue.

Next evening we had the first part of the editorial reset in the new type, but another blow had fallen. We had run out of small 'i's. (It's a curious thing, but every writer seems to have some letter he uses more than the average, and with me it's small 'i's. Small 'i's, I said. I was to spend many hours in the future filing the tails of 'j's and changing words like 'insipid' to 'tasteless'.) I had barely got the editorial finished and yet it covered only about two thirds of a page. We couldn't publish a magazine with pages as tiny as that, but it would be another month before I could afford to buy more type.

Faced with this impasse, James made a diffident suggestion. He had heard, he said, of things called woodcuts. The idea presumable was that you scraped lines on a piece of wood and the ink didn't get into the grooves so they printed white on black. If we had illustrations we wouldn't need so much type. He was willing to try and supply them. I congratulated him on this brilliant suggestion and gave him a supply of old bits of plywood and single edged razor blades. Actually of course it should have been blocks of boxwood and tiny chisels but I didn't know any better: it seemed to me in my innocence that plywood, being faced with a hard wood, would be close grained enough and he could get large areas of white easily by just levering off the top ply. His first efforts showed our mistakes. The large black areas needed so much ink the type was nearly swamped and even then the grain of the wood showed. But as the production of Slant 1 went on James got cleverer and finally, for page 5, he produced a woodcut with only a few bits of surface wood left here and there. It looked like nothing on earth until we printed it and then in a way first impressions were confirmed because it turned out a perfect lunar landscape. Well, anyway, it looked perfect to us. It illustrated a story by me (I wrote the whole issue of course because we didn't know any other fan writers we could ask), a serious sf one about the problem of communicating with aliens by radio transmission alone. It wasn't up to much as a story...apart from my own limitations there's nothing like setting up your material in print to make you cut it down to the bare bones...but it used an idea which is still original. The aliens sent bunches of pips representing the first twelve prime numbers, and we replied with the thirteenth. Then they sent pairs of numbers which when plotted on a graph became a circle and its diameter, followed by the value of Pi in their scale of notation. Once that basis had been established pictures of almost any complexity could be transmitted. The other contents included an article about telekinesis, a clerihew, a short column and....what was really the reason we had thought of publishing a fanzine in the first place....a list of the copies of ASF we wanted to complete our collections. (We needed, I see, all of 1940, 1941, 1942 and 1943, but were undaunted.)

The whole thing was contained on three sheets of folded foolscap, making twelve pages in all. Such was the publication which burst on a lethargic fandom in November, 1948, the first voice out of Ireland.

WAW.

(To be continued)

In XERO 5 there appeared a four-page essay by Colonel Avram Davidson, the essay entitled "He Swooped on his Victims and Bit them on the Nose." As happens on occasion in the assembly of such magazines as this, a leaf was omitted from several copies. Colonel Davidson's own copy was one such, the missing leaf being, by sheerest (and most innocent) coincidence, from the Colonel's very essay. His comments upon this unhappiness follow....

BEWARE!

Once upon a time there was a man named
Lick* Lupoff.
He had long fangs and two vestigal, but
visible, horns.
He was E V I L.

Finding that, outside fannish circles,
People tend to look askance @ fangs
&/or horns,
Dupoff took Steps:
What with a concealing prosthesis and a
hair-piece,
Dupoff looked Almost Human.

But he was, of course,
Still E V I L.
He was...utterly evil...

Presently he met Avram David-
son.
Avram Davidson was GOOD.
He was also simple-minded.

So, when Lick Dupoff asked him
to write eppis**
For Dupoff's fanxine, Xeno***,
He, Avram, beard dripping with
the Milk of Human
Kindness, complied, and
Wrote a long, long, long, good,
good, good piec.

*From "Lycanthrope"
**From epic opus
***From xenophobe

On receiving this l., l., l., g., g., g., p.,
Lick Dupoff screamed with fiendish and
Inhuman Glee.

He bared his fangs.
He shewed his horns.

Reader, do you know what he next did?
You, with your pure mind, will scarce credit
What the monster, Dupoff, did next.

He printed page 40, with the beginning
Of simple, lovable, Avram Davidson's eppis;
And he printed page 43, with the end
Of gentle, sweet Avram Davison's eppis;

But pp 41 & 42, containing the corpus
Thereof --
These he did not print; instead
He just laughed like a sonofabitching-gahdamn
Fiend... I have given them /he said/

A herring with a head 

And a tail 

But no body !

Ah hah hah hah hah hah heh heh heh ho ho ho haw!!!

Pause, Reader, and Meditate. Beware
The Fiend DUPOFF,
For he biteth like a Serpent, yea,
He stingeth like an Adder.

Col.
Avram
Davidson

from the SF shelf

BY LARRY M. HARRIS

Two orders of business this month, fellow space-rangers, just as it says below. Let us get to the sublime first, and then descend to a level more familiar to most of us. And the sublime, I may continue with barely a note of surprise, is not really science fiction at all.

No, it is a new line of expensive paperbacks -- ninety-five cents to a dollar-eighty or there-abouts. The line is called Dolphin, though I am not sure why, and it is being presented by its proud parent, Doubleday. Those of you who live in cities large enough, or cultured enough, to afford bookshops carrying such items will do very well to look at the Dolphin line. For one thing, they have guts. Not only are they doing some Wells and Verne (though not yet THE FOOD OF THE GODS, finest of the Wells sf opera), but they have also done John Collier's HIS MONKEY WIFE, Wyndham's DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS ... and they plan a Poul Anderson shortly, the recent ASF&F (anybody want to try talking about the differences between Mills' magazine and Campbell's without making typos, by the way? F&SF, ASF&F, F&SF, ASF&F ...) serial about the medieval space-rangers. (My files are gone for a while, and I'm working from memory; please address letters of complaint to the Stuyvesant Moving and Storage people).

But it's not only science fiction that makes Dolphin worth while. No, really. Honest. There are other things in life. Like the detective novels of Michael Innes and Nocholas Blake ... like reissues of Disraeli's SYBIL, valuable for collectors if nearly unreadable as a novel, and Charlotte Bronte's VILLETTE, flatly her best work and long unavailable, like ARCHY AND MEHITABLE (anyone unfamiliar with this? Why?) and Jerome K. Jerome's THREE MEN IN A BOAT (which people may be reading, now that Heinlein has managed it in HAVE SPACESUIT) and Carolyn Wells' NONSENSE ANTHOLOGY

THE SUBLIME...

and Bierce's DEVIL'S DICTIONARY ... and RAFFLES by E.W. Hornung, Johnson's LIVES OF THE POETS, Goldstein's story of the Warsaw Ghetto -- not fiction, friends, definitely not -- which Dolphin has retitled, and I forget how (the original was THE STARS LOOK DOWN) and everything else from popular science to cookbooks (a very short gamut, come to think of it: how to make a monobloc to how to cook an egg). The Dolphin line appears to have everything; I am highly enthusiastic; when you see the line, so shall you be.

And so much, parentheses and all, for the sublime. It gets short shrift this month because my spleen is perking away. We will head, with all possible speed, for the domain of the ridiculous.

This month, the ridiculous is living between board covers, disguised as a lecture turned into an essay, by a man named Alfred Bester, in admiration of whom I yield to no one except possibly the editors of HOLIDAY. The board covers state that this essay is part of a book entitled THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL: IMAGINATION AND SOCIAL CRITICISM (Advent, 1960). But it isn't. Bester is not talking about social criticism, and he is not really talking about imagination. As a matter of fact, he isn't talking about the science fiction novel (any one at all). He is talking about Personality.

According to Mr. Bester, the important ingredient in a science fiction story (in, I imagine, anything resembling light fiction -- as opposed to a small list of deep-level masterpieces like Moby Dick or Middlemarch or The Possessed) is Personality. It isn't what you say, in other words; it's how you say it.

As Damon Knight has somewhere pointed out (in F&SF in a review? I tell you, my files are gone), this attitude explains The Stars My Destination, and it goes a long way toward explaining some other Bester works I don't care for. Unfortunately, it also bears the seeds of its destruction within itself, and some of them not very deeply buried, either.

In the first place, then, what the hell is this Personality? It isn't entirely the way something is said or the attitude with which it is approached. Samuel Johnson, Doctor Magisterius, had, I suppose, about as mubh Personality as any man who ever lived. But is is not possible to imagine the good Doctor expressing himself in favor of a classless society -- or against the Established Church. His opinions, in other words, and not only the fact that he holds them in a certain way, are a part of his personality. (For those of this readership who do not know the Lexicographer, or who refuse, out of a mistaken feeling of dedication, to read anything but stf and comic books, I suggest another simile: try to imagine Ray Bradbury coming out in favor of Buchenwald and electric ovens.)

And this is not all. The fact that the particular things a man knows, and even more, perhaps, the things he does not know, help to make up his personality. What would Heinlein be without the mass of scientific facts he has at his fingertips? Even more, what would he be with any knowledge of poetry, or of philosophy (beyond the cheerful doggerel and the bull-session metaphysics scattered through his collected works)? Many of the people who like him would like him no longer; many others who feel certain lacks in him, despite their admiration, would be happier and more at ease in his company, and would read more of him.

AND THAT OTHER THING

It is beginning to appear that Personality, this mystic quality of which Mr. Bester is so enamored, is a term so wide as to be nearly meaningless. He quotes Perry Lafferty, a TV figure, as saying "We're in the Me business." And so, of course, we are -- all of us writers, editors, actors, showman, painters, composers -- plumbers, lawyers, congressmen ... right on down the list to the people who work for the United States Post Office and the strange gentlemen who answer phones in hotels.

Chesterton says, somewhere, that if he hires a lawyer he does not expect the man to spend twenty-four hours a day on that single case. Among other things, the lawyer will probably want to spend some evening meditating on the evening star. This, says GKC, is perfectly all right with him. A lawyer is a whole man, and a legal case is a small matter. But if the lawyer's meditations lead to any particularly powerful similes, or any special attitude of mind -- then those, Chesterton insists, should be at the disposal of his client. The lawyer, too, is in the Me business; he is, if he is any good, "a whole man, exercising himself through the accidental medium" of the law. (And whose definition of genius am I quoting a piece of? Gratitude dictates that the first answer to this wins $0.35 in coin, or a glass of iced coffee or the like at a local haunt, if we can get together.)

Thus, the science fiction writer, if he is any good, is like any other writer: he is a whole man, exercising himself through the accidental medium of John W. Campbell, Jr. or Robert P. Mills. Not only his charm, but his knowledge, his lack of same, his opinions, the state of his digestion, his meditations (or lack of them) on the evening star, are all part of what makes up any given story.

Q., I imagine, E.D. But proving that this is so does not prove that this wholeness is what actually constitutes his appeal. For all we know, at present, a given writer may be admired for only part of his real qualities; the field itself, or the attitudes of the readers, may so constrict the view that only a very small piece of him -- what Bester means by Personality -- is visible.

Maybe so. But let us see. Let us, for that matter, take a handy case and look at it for a minute. Happily, there is one available, a cause celebre already mentioned in this article, by the name of Robert A. Heinlein.

In Starship Soldier (Trooper), Heinlein has lost none of his famous charm or Personality. He is still exactly what Bester has called him, the Kipling science fiction: a man with a limited ear and a terribly limited knowledge of literature (for final, entire and shocking proof of which I refer you to his own essay in this Advent book we're discussing), a passion for facts and an attitude of good-fellowship and grim knowledgeability that is enormously appealing. Lots of people read the F&SF version of the book, lots more read the final printed book itself.

And nobody, absolutely nobody (unless it was the kindly Mr. Bester, whose opinions I have not on record), discussed the personality, the wit or the charm of Robert Heinlein. Instead, there were screams from two widely opposed camps, and faint belligerent murmurs from the No-Man's-Land in the center, regarding nothing more or less than the philosophical justification for the novel.

Now, it is neither my purpose nor, currently, my interest to discuss this philosophy, beyond saying that either a pro-war or a pro-pacifism attitude appears to me very similar to a pro-purple attitude. Purple is, at certain times and in certain paintings, a necessary thing. It is, at certain times and in certain paintings, a bad thing. But to be pro- or anti-purple without reference to any given painting is an attitude which baffles the hell out of me.

However ...

The discussions were loud, and frequent, and obviously of great importance to the combatents. The ideas behind Starship Soldier (Trooper) were important to these people. They were much more important than any mere question of Heinlein's personal attractiveness.

And this happens over and over. There are a few stories of Ted Sturgeon's, for instance, which I do not reread: having read them once, I am put off enough by the attitude of the story, (that is, the philosophical inwardness of the thing) to feel that the story is, for me, worthless. The same is true, I suppose, of most writers, and most readers. Bester compares the science fiction magazine to the Parisian cafe, the Viennese bierstube ... forgetting that these, too, were primarily idea-centered. Certain cafes were organized around certain outlooks. Which reminds me of a story.

It seems that, in the far-off days of the 1920's, when all was sunshine and light and F. Scott Fitzgerald, a writer was in Paris. And this particular writer met a friend, just arrived, one afternoon, and was asked by the newly-arrived how he liked the town.

"Not so good," the writer said sadly. "I understand Paris is supposed to be great and wonderful and all that, and the center of all these new ideas. But, frankly, it's a disappointment."

Shocked, and half-thinking of returning by the next available packet, the newly-arrived asked why.

"Well," said the writer, "there are cafes for the realists, and there are cafes for the expressionists, and a lot of Dada cafes; there are cafes for the prostitutes and cafes for the tourists, cafes for the honosexuals and the Lesbians -- but, do you know, there isn't one single cafe where we sadists can get together for a chat!"

(My mother taught me, when I was a small child, never to steal anything but books, never to go out with a girl who liked Guy Lombardo, and always to give credit. The story is told, and probably better, in a book of Malcolm Cowley's; I heard it from Phil Klass.)

In a word, the cafes were idea- and not personality-centered. So is science-fiction. As a matter of fact, so is the work of Alfred Bester. Has anybody here read Who He? (paper edition The Rat Race, not to be confused with a bad novel by Jay Franklin, same title). Who He? is built around an idea, the idea of self-protection as a fatal course for the individual. I am sure Bester knows this. I am sure his readers know it.

Let's stop kidding around. No book is ever built around anything but an idea, no matter how small, silly or unimportant that idea is. Sometimes the writer is himself unaware of the fact, in which case it is probably ungenerous to call it to his attention. But the idea is there -- and, more than anything else, it makes or breaks the books. This is true of science fiction -- hell it is true of confession stories, and provides the major rationale for not reading them. Certainly the style and the characterizations are both as good as in a lot of science fiction. (As a matter of fact, naming no names, I know of three authors of science fiction who have written confessions.) But the ideas are unintelligible and repugnant.

Once again, then, fellow space-rangers, Q.E.D.

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One more item in this little article deserves attack, I have a feeling. I quote Mr. Bester: "WHat have any of them (sf writers) contributed to modern science, philosophy, sociology, criticism? Nothing, thank God."

Disregarding the devotion at its close, this pair of sentences is simply silly. Bester appears to have picked a poor sampling here. If he'd said: "modern philology, carpentry, bridge-building or acrobatics," he might have made things harder. Not impossible, but harder. But, as things stand, let's make a little list:

Modern science: the contribution has been a great number of free hypotheses. See Heinlein's article, same book, on the development of the space-suit (alias altitude suit) or on the Waldos. Science fiction, being purely speculative, is not involved in testing hypotheses beyond seeing that they do not conflict with presently known fact. But it does provide a great many new ideas to test. Most of these do not work. (This is, of course, due to Sturgeon's Law.) Some of these provide details worthy of further investigation. The few that do work are, of course, valuable in themselves.

Philosophy: Just the same, of course -- plus an arena for testing statements about the world. A society built along such-and-such lines, says the philosopher, is viable, or "will never develop a given concept," or whatever. This sort of thing has been going on since THE REPUBLIC and THE POLITICS, and THE REPUBLIC, at least, is just an early example of what Eric Frank Russell has done in ...AND THEN THERE WERE NONE, or Sturgeon in VENUS PLUS X. Given anything like recognizable human beings, in other words, does this concept bear fruit? Again, this is no negligible contribution. The scienc fiction stories provide a simple, easily available handle for thinking about philosophical constructions.

Sociology: Given the above, is there more to say? By God, there is. Sociology, in so far as it is a science, is a science of people. Science fiction, like any other fiction, is devoted to descriptions of people doing things. So, like any fiction, it aids in our understanding of people who are, in one way or another, different from ourselves. You may not have been in free fall, he may not be enthusiastic over modern music, I may not have been a professional boxes. In this way, then, science fiction aids sociology, psychology, and any science of people qua people.

And criticism: Well, science fiction gives to criticism what any literature gives to criticism. It stands in the same relationship to that field as does the missionary to the cannibal. Whatever its tenets, whatever its appeal, it is food.

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There are three other essays in this Advent book: they are by Robert Heinlein, by Robert Bloch, and by C.M. Kornbluth. Mr. Heinlein's is joyous, valuable, and anti-literary; Mr. Bloch's is funny, tendentious, and argumentative. Cyril Kornbluth is now where statements regarding his article can do neither good nor harm; he knows the truth he sought. His piece is sometimes wrong, sometimes downright silly, and always worth reading.

You might, in other words, be repaid in fun, if nothing el- . by the purchase of this book.

So Buy it.

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Next month, Mr. Bester has promised an answer to this attack. Unless he be on summer vacation, I should assume that his promise will be kept...in which case I will be even more eager than you to wee what happens. Beyound that, I have no ideas firm enough to state about next month's little dose of wormwood. I will be around: isn't that enough for you? It is for me.

And sometimes too much.

SCIENCE-FICTION TIMES

(S-F Times, Inc., P.O. Box 115, Solvay Branch, Syracuse 9, New York - bi-weekly? 24 for $3) In the last installment of this column, I commented on SFT's chronic lateness and "fictitious" bi-weekly schedule. It now seems that at least part of this was the fault of fandom's reliable old enemy, the post office, rather than that of the editors. The zine is now being sent via first class mail, and the changes are a good example of postal efficiency. Issue #363, the first one to be mailed first class, arrive on July 5. Issues #359 and 360, sent third class, arrived July 11, and issues #361 and 362 haven't arrived yet (July 29). By first class mail, the issues arrive only about a month after the iddue date, and the news is relatively fresh.

Of course, there still isn't much news on professional science fiction to report, but I suppose that can't be blamed on SFT's editors, either. With distribution what it is, one of the most valuable parts of the zine is Frank Prieto's "The Science Fiction Pocket Book Record". (With their usual disdain for the rest of fandom, they stick to the old term "pocket book" rather than the newer and more accurate "paperback".)

Their "second June issue" lists published pb's which still haven't been seen in the wilds of Indiana, and provides me with some specific targets for my newsstand visits.

And since they even seem to have stopped sending out two or three issues bundled together, I suppose they may even be publishing bi-weekly again. All in all, it's quite an improvement.

VORPAL GLASS 2

(Karen Anderson, 3 Las Palomas, Orinda, California - no schedule listed - 25¢) This official publication of the Golden Gate Futurian Society seems -- to me at least -- to be mostly a vehicle for presenting Poul Anderson's column, "Beermutterings". And if it did nothing else it would be worth while, since it also appears to me that this is possibly the best fanzine column extant. (Even if I can't agree with his medieval attitude towards women.) Anderson writes about a fascinating variety of subjects, from the place of women in society to the future of the Danish Nationalist Party (which he quite logically presents as the future ruler of the world).

Ed Clinton is represented by a long article (transcribed from a speech) in which he urges stf fans to get up off their fat cans, put down their magazines, and lead the world. Unfortunately, he totally ignores the fact that people with the interest and drive necessary to become leaders in the real world won't become fans in the first place, which negates his whole idea.

There is also a story by Karen and a poem (by Poul?); both are slightly above average for fanzines and neither is good enough to get excited over. A letter column has a promising start. But pay your 25¢ for "Beermutterings"; anything else that you happen to like will be gravy.

EAST & WEST NEWS 38

(Peter Campbell, Birkdale Cottage, Brantfell, Windermere, England - irregular - 20¢) Actually, it's free to those interested, but send cash for your first copy. Here's a possible answer to Ed Clinton; a couple or three years ago Pete Campbell got up from his relaxed pose, put down his fanzine, and began actively working for international brotherhood. Somehow I doubt that Clinton is broadminded enough to appreciate the results.

Like all similar organizations, the Federation of the East and West seems well supplied with astrologers, back-to-nature disciples, and pwople who make their living by selling good luck charms and questionable cures for the ills of mankind. On the other hand, the group seems a lot more practical than other, similar groups; at least their official publication contains fewer platitudes and more items of interest. This particular issue contains what seems an undue amount of pro-communist writing. (Including an official announcement that "theft of all natures" in East Germany dropped from 334,000 in 1946 to 85,000 in 1958. Since the general rule is that the only thing that stops theft is a lack of things of value to steal, this is the best confirmation I can imagine of our government's assurance that Communism means a decline in the standard of living.)

On the other hand, the "Soviet News Digest" is exactly that; a compendium of non-political news from Russia. It's interesting, and brand new to most U.S. readers, I should imagine.

BANE 4

(Vic Ryan, 2160 Sylvan Rd., Springfield, Illinois - no price or schedule listed) You can't win, Vic; when you put in the issue number you leave out the other information. In his editorial, Vic starts off the boom (at least there are hopes that it will be a boom) for Bob Tucker as guest of honor at the '62 Chicon. He has a point; why should Campbell and Heinlein be honored repeatedly when Tucker has never been the guest of honor? Who's done the most for stf anyway? (Hmmm....well, yes, but have they done that much more?) Anyway, let's all boost Tucker for Guest of Honor. He deserves it.

Tucker himself is present with "Beard Mumblings", a column title more suited to Avram Davidson. The usual Tucker material, plus a service which would have been more valuable if Vic had published sooner; a rundown of the stf films actually released during 1960 and thus eligible for the Seacon Hugo. Interesting in that "Village of the Damned" is on the final Hugo ballot when it is technically ineligible to receive the award.

I have my regular book review column. Vic said that this was the best one I've done for him -- which was rather tactless, inasmuch as this one is a symposium of the writings of 7 people other than me. Shows you what editors think of my writing.

Giovanni Scognomillo gives the background of Baron Munchausen's trip to the moon, and there is a lettercolumn notable mainly for Les Sample's experiences with the South Carolina law and Marion Bradley's defense of lesbianism. Dave English also has a long discussion of Socialism, but you can get all -- sometimes more -- of that than you want in HABAKKUK. (I mean, I enjoy political discussions, especially when the writers know a bit of what they're talking about, but let's not have too many of them.)

Another example of the trend towards bigness in general-type fanzines; with 22 pages, BANE seems small. Or possibly it's just because I liked what it presented and wished it had more.

SI-FAN 4

(Jerry Page, 193 Battery Place, N.E., Atlanta 7, Georgia - 20¢ - published "three or more times a year") If you're a Vardis Fisher fan (and every Right-Thinking individual should be a Vardis Fisher fan) the center of interest here is the letter column, containing letters from Fisher and Alan Swallow, Fisher's present publisher. Interesting background material from Swallow. Fisher takes exception to being compared to Robert Graves. In general, SI-FAN is devoted to serious-type material. Nothing wrong in that, but too little of the mag's material is top-grade, which is a severe handicap. Fans will put up with -- and even applaud -- second-rate humore, but second-rate serious material earns the designation "sercon".

In this issue, Calvin Thomas Beck has a long involved discussion of the present stf "recession" which features an amazing amount of shifting back and forth between facts on publishing, distribution, etc., and opinions on the quality and proper place for stf. The trouble being, of course, that the comments on publishing and distribution have been made before, and the opinions, while controversial enough, don't seem very well connected to the factual material.

A large number of items in SI-FAN are aimed primarily at collectors; Sture Sedolin's review of JULES VERNE MAGAZINE, Bernie Wermers' notes on OPERATOR #5, Ed Wood's report on the collection of Sam Moskowitz, and the part of Jerry Burge's column which deals with various fans' favorite stories. (The latter, of course, aimed at a sub-

genera; collectors who also read the stuff.) Maybe I'm just not enough interested in collecting, but none of these items seemed particularly interesting to me; the writers lack the ability to write entertainingly. Which to me is important; I admire the individual who can write about a subject that doesn't particularly interest me and do it so that I enjoy his writing -- even if I remain uninterested in the subject in general. Anyone can compile facts or state opinions; but how many can be entertaining about it? Compare Wermers' series in SI-FAN on the old adventure pulps with Grennell's similar series in GRUE. When you come right down to it, I don't give a hang about the stories that appeared in OPERATOR #5, or THE SHADOW; no matter how interesting the comments about them are in, I'm not goming to take the time to read the stuff. But Grennell's articles are in themselves interesting; Wermers' are interesting only to those who already have some modicum of interest in the type of magazine he's writing about.

The same can be said of much of the material in SI-FAN. It will probably be appreciated by anyone who is interested in the things the authors are writing about. But it isn't the sort of writing -- best exemplified by Anderson's "Beermutterings" column in VORPAL GLASS -- which is enjoyable whether the reader is interested in the subject or not.

Unfortunately, I seem to have run out of fanzines about which I can write long (well, they're long for me criticisms. Oh, HABAKKUK showed up again, but I want to write a letter of comment on that, not to do a detailed critique. (And don't ask why I don't do both; because I don't feel like doing both, that's why.) So I'm going to make brief comments on a few items that you might not have seen.

GD 2

(Joe and Roberta Gibson, 5380 Sobrante Ave., El Sobrante, California - monthly? - first 3 issues free, after that 3 for 25¢) What is it about California that makes formerly respectable fans begin publishing fanzines? Donaho, the Gibsons -- I'm expecting a zine from Sid Coleman any day now. This is a small personal-type zine, and since this issue is almost entirely taken up with a con report on the Baycon I haven't read much of it. The first issue was enjoyable and I suppose this one is to anyone who likes con reports.

SOMEWHATLY 3

(Joe Sanders, RR #1, Roachdale, Indiana - annual - free) The general idea of the material is approximately that of a Little Magazine, but it makes too much sense to ever become very popular in Little Magazine circles. Lots of modern poetry, and fiction that's supposed to make you think, and like that. I can't put it all in the limbo I reserve for most modern poetry and fiction, though, mostly because of a quote from one of Don Mussetter's poems: "How beautiful young things all seem to be; unless you are one." Of course he had it spread out all over half a page, with no punctuation in the presently approved style, but the essential statement is one I can wholeheartedly admire.

Joe writes a report on the Midwestcon, but it's mercifully short.

GET OUT OF TOWN

(Les Gerber, 715 So. Mitchell St., Bloomington, Ind. - one-shot - free) This, giving the complete uncensored report on the College Caper, is for those of you who, like me, wanted to know more about why Les will no longer be studying at Franklin and Marshall College. I don't know if he has any copies left or not, but you can always try. Liberals should by all means get copies; they'll be excellent ammunition for attacks on Reactionary College Administrations.

MENACE OF THE FASFS 24

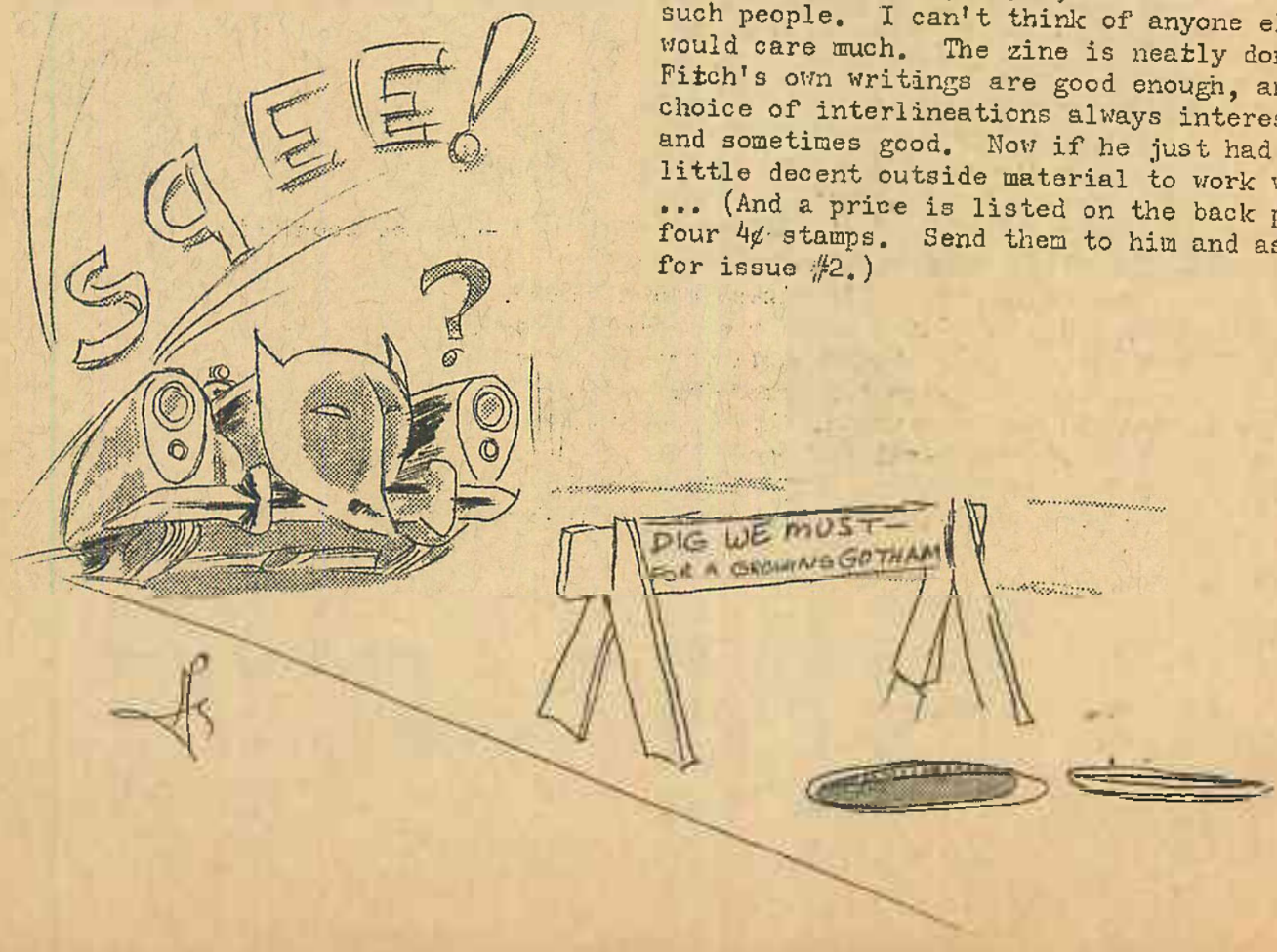
(Bruce Pelz, 2790 W. 8th St., Los Angeles 5, California - monthly? - free?)
A set of minutes of club meetings which MADE GOOD, achieved its own publication and seems to have survived several changes in editorship. Unusual, to say the least, and attractively decorated, this time by Jack Harness. I decline to say how interesting any reader will find them.

OBELISK /

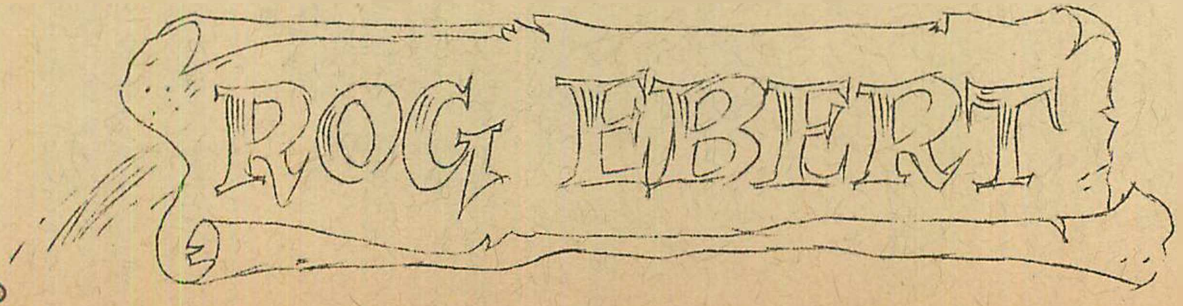
(Lenny Kaye, 418 Hobart Rd., Sutton Terrace, No. Brunswick, New Jersey - irregular - 15¢)
Even first issues these days all seem to have at least one good point. This one is a beautiful Dave Prosser cover. (For Prosser haters, I might add that the subject matter is not horrible; nobody is getting eaten alive or prematurely buried or anything.) Nothing inside the mag comes up to the cover, but it's a reasonably unmemorable first issue. (Which is good; the memorable first issues are usually the ones which the readers remember in spite of the editor's attempts to live them down.)

HALFANTHOGY /

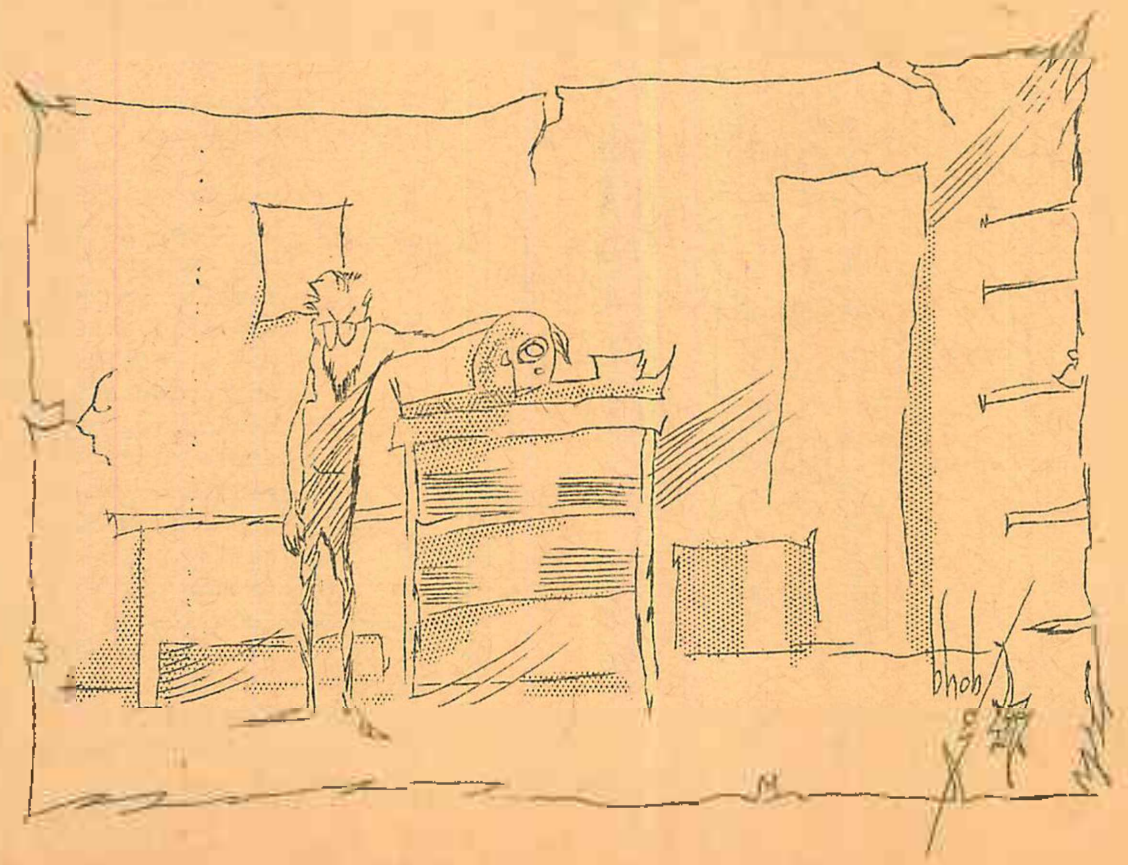
(Don Fitch, 3908 Frijo, Covina, California - no schedule or price given) One oddity: the editor comments that he's publishing this primarily in order to trade for other fanzines, yet he includes a glossary of fannish terms that would seem to be useful primarily to rank neos. (Admittedly, a few of the rankest neos do publish fanzines, but I hardly think that he had them in mind....) Written material consists mostly of history-cum-bibliography of Lichtman publications and West Coast Zines; I'm not at all sure just whom this is intended to interest. Completist fanzine collectors, maybe, if there are any such people. I can't think of anyone else who would care much. The zine is neatly done, Fitch's own writings are good enough, and his choice of interlineations always interesting and sometimes good. Now if he just had a little decent outside material to work with ... (And a price is listed on the back page: four 4¢ stamps. Send them to him and ask for issue #2.)



That's my last Annish framed on the wall,
Looking as if it were Gestetnered. I call
That ish a wonder, now: Ted White's hands
Cranked busily a day, and there it stands.
Won't you have a seat? I said
"Annish" by design, for it was never read
By BNFs like you, or any of fandom;
Its sense of wonder seems almost random,
But to myself it's sercon (and since I'm shy,
Allowed no one to read it, but I)
And worried that they would ask me, if they dared,
How such repro was accomplished, since I fared
So poorly on previous issues. Well, was not
My mimeo only; White's mercenary rot
Brought those five colors to the page; perhaps
Ted himself said, "The ATom illo laps
Over the logo," or, "Ink
Can never reproduce crayola; Ebert stinks
As does his crude stencilling": such stuff
Was his concern, I thought, and cause enough
For paying him a ten-spot. He laid
It in his wallet; his mimeo--how shall I say?--is too soon paid,
Too easily bought; he likes whatever
He is paid to print, his zines go everywhere.
VOID, crud, all 'tis one! My zine at its best,
Or the trash of Berkeley rabble from the west,
The Hugo at a Worldcon in smokefilled room
Presented at the banquet, the bem costume,
Worn at the ball--all and each
He used to draw from fen approving speech,
Or LoCs, at least. He thanked us--yass!--but wrote:



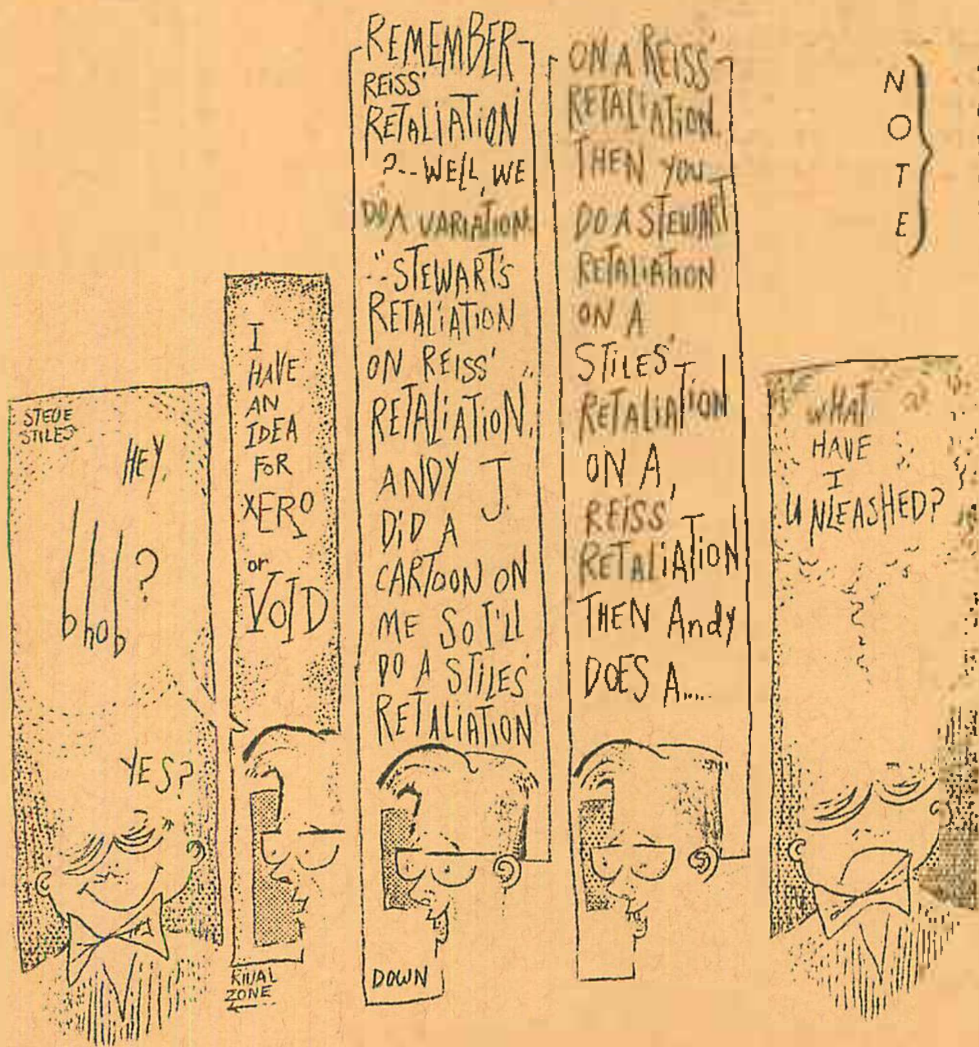
As if--I suppose--he someday haped
To replace my gift of a paid-up 'zine
With columns in Downbeat. He must be keen
On jazz trifles. Even had you will
To crank and pub--(which I have not)--to get a bill
From such a one who says, "This crud
I print for you disgusts me; the thud
Is of your fanzine dully falling."--and still will let
His mimeo be purchased so, and plainly set
On getting money for it, makes no excuse,
--And even then the cash is spent for booze,
Never for stencils. Oh sir, he smiled, no doubt,
Whenever I paid him; but have dirty, bearded routs
With my money. This grew; I gave commands;
Then the blasts were hidden from me. There the Annish stands,
As if Gestetnered. Have you finished it? We'll greet
The fen below, then. I repeat,
The mimeo of your club is said to reproduce
Others' fanzines when it's not in use,
An ample sign that should I proffer
My fanzine, with a sound cash offer,
--Though the noble sercon goal, I admit,
In pubbing, is my purpose--you would print
It on your machine. Uh, notice the Bhob Stewart illo there,
As we leave; blasting off for Mars without fear,
In a four-color cover drawing I saw at a convention
And bought amidst the auction's tension.



The FANTASTIC

Fantasy, science fiction, and horror have formed so great a part of our literary heritage that it is not unexpected to find the fantastic occupying an important and very special place in the history of the phenomenal rise of the paperback industry in the United States. A minor and obscure place, some may say. I do not think that this is the case; the facts indicate the momentous role and historical value the genre has achieved during a volitant publishing evolution. The influence, effects on both publisher and reader, and the results to date, I shall set down from a position just barely "inside" the publishing industry...and speculate a bit about the future.

In the past few years paperback publishing has become a phenomenon, but only in America. It has been a part of European publishing for many decades. The first major publisher to appear on the American paperback scene was Pocket Books, Inc. It is interesting to not that their initial offering back in 1939 was James Hilton's wistful, poignant fantasy-romance of lost Shangri-la, LOST HORIZON. The Hilton novel has since become a Pocket Book perennial. Today Pocket Books, Inc. is among the hierarchy of paperback publishers (occupying a place in the top three), and to this day LOST HORIZON



NOTE

The observations I make are culled from a limited position in space and time. All information, especially as regards sales results on a particular book, does not come from any statistical record, but is based solely one personal, day-by-day experience while managing a Manhattan paperback bookshop. Nor can any of these results found in one shop be taken as indication of nationwide or even citywide results representing any specific publisher. We do not specialize in fantasy and science fiction. The dealer in fantastic literature does, of course, realize a totally different scene from the one I describe. Indeed, buying trends differ so much from location to location that it will be difficult to draw any universality from the particular habits displayed in one shop.

PAPERBACK

is kept in print. Thus we can say fantasy has been with paperback publishing since its inception in America.

In February, 1953, the first bookshop devoted exclusively to paperbounds in New York, and probably in the country, opened in Midtown Manhattan. This was the Pocket Book Bookshop formed by Mathew Belmont and Michael de Forrest. Today Mr. de Forrest is editor-in-chief at Avon Books. Mr. Belmont, now sole owner of the Pocket Book Bookshop, reports that science fiction and fantasy have, since the very beginning, sold well. He maintains a large selection of new as well as back stock titles, and, though not a dealer exclusively in science fiction, finds it profitable to obtain hard-to-get out-of-print titles. The fall of '53 also saw the birth of The City Lights Pocket Bookshop of Beatnik fame in San Francisco. A unique shop in itself, City Lights has grown steadily in nationwide reputation as it branched into a publishing venture and launched many 'beat' authors. Today City Lights is a kind of attraction -- a place the bibliophile would surely not want to miss in San Francisco. At present the paperback bookshop is growing to a point of saturation in New York, and rapidly extending throughout the country. Chain shops formed within the last three to five years are doing a fantastic, unbelievable business with paperbacks. A Times article of about a year ago reported one chain doing a quarter of a million dollar business per year. The concept of the sorrowful, long-suffering, starving and impoverished book dealer is fast becoming outmoded. Be that as it may, I think it is safe to say that in all our new, plush, luxuriant and coffee-serving paperbound bookshops, at least in Manhattan, one will find in varying sizes and shapes a science-fiction/fantasy section.

Paperbacks too have their rarities and collector's items reflecting some curious features of historical note. The late thirties and early forties brought another type of paperback onto the scene. These were the Armed Services Editions published by Editions for the Armed Services, Inc. -- "a non-profit organization established by the Council on Books in Wartime, New York." Their size and packaging deviated from the standard format established by Pocket Books, Inc., being a rectangular book (most of them, anyway) approximately $4\frac{1}{4}$"x$6\frac{1}{2}$". Their list was quite formidable. Among the writers of fantasy and horror one could find representative anthologies by H.P. Lovecraft, M.R. James, and Arthur Machen, as well as novels by Burroughs, Mundy, Haggard, Curt Siodmak, and such classics as FRANKENSTEIN and DRACULA. One can generally find a great bulk of famous novels published by the Armed Forces Editions in any back date magazine shop, but the specialty items, the fantasy and horror titles, needless to say, are quite scarce and bring top prices. In the mid-forties Bartholemew House (now defunct) brought out two paperbacks by H.P. Lovecraft -- THE DUNWICH HORROR and THE WEIRD SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH. Both anthologies contained some of the less frequently reprinted Lovecraft pieces, printed on pretty fine quality paper (to this day my copies have not turned color nor deteriorated in any respect with age) for a comparatively small publishing outfit existing during war years. Occasionally these titles turn up on a dealer's list, always bringing premium prices.

by CHARLES M. COLLINS

In 1949 Avon brought out THE FOX WOMAN, containing the complete short stories of A. Merritt; and though Merritt is reprinted time and again, this collection has never been reissued in paperback. More recently -- well about ten years ago -- Hillman Periodicals brought out a lush, romantic fantasy, rich in poetic imagry, and quite ingenious in plot structure. This was, of course, Jack Vance's THE DYING EARTH; a classic of its type that has steadily gained in reputaion, but to my knowledge, never reprinted. A twenty five cent publication originally brings one dollar and up from dealers today. Such are the ways of the specialty items -- even in paperback.

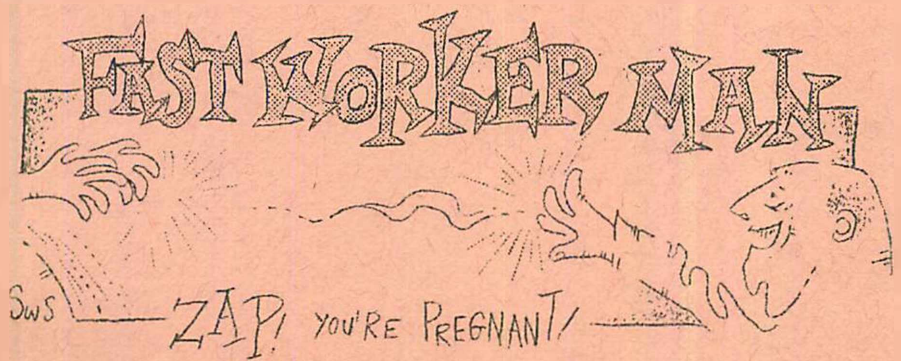
Ace and Ballantine Books are two publishing companies who have made an outstanding contribution to the field. Ballantine inaugurated their Star science fiction anthologies -- a series that did exceptionally well. (Ballantine has just reissued their first Star collection.) Several years ago Ballantine underwent a publishing hiatus for about eight months, during which the common question asked by the science fiction reader was: "When is the next Star anthology coming from Ballantine?" This points out an interesting aspect in paperback publishing, for Ballantine, like Ace with Ace double novels, made the science fiction reader aware of the publisher. Ace and Ballantine became associated with science fiction -- a factor that stimulated sales to an all time high and created a loyal following. Applause is most certainly due Donald Wollheim who has been a steadfast editor, anthologizer, and contributor to the field through the years. Back in the forties he was editor of the Avon Fantasy Reader. Today, with Ace Books, Mr. Wollheim is bringing back into print some of the truly great soories as well as obscure and lesser known works by writers we are well familiar with from Weird Tales, Avon Fantasy Reader, and Famous Fantastic Mysteries and Fantastic Novels. It is a joy to find two such superlative collections as THE MACABRE READER and MORE MACABRE (edited by Donald Wollheim and published by Ace Books,) and an even greater joy to report that both anthologies met with extremely fine sales (at least in the two paperback shops with which I have been associated.)

Looking backwards, we find that science fiction and fantasy have a unique value in the paperback world. In packaging alone we can see a reflectin of trends of the time. In 1947 Avon Books published H. P. Lovecraft's THE LURKING FEAR AND OTHER STORIES. The cover depicted a ghoulish, long taloned creature rising between two tombstones in a desolate, decaying, long forgotten graveyard. It is a pitch black night, but the hint of a wild mountainous region can be made out off to the right. The title is in yellow, with big yellow block lettering superimposed over red to make the word FEAR. It is a packaging job of garish horror, powerfully expressing the rank, repellent, awesome evil we shall expect to find in the content. There were several anthologies around at the time with equally forbidding covers such as the AVON GHOST READER and IN THE GRIP OF TERROR. About a year or so ago Avon reissued THE LURKING FEAR, retitled to CRY HORROR, with not nearly as effective a cover as its predecessor. This has an abstract design on one side of a rather etiolated cover from which one can discern a skull. Lettering is in green against

a white background. The entire cover seems somewhat lop-sided, and fails to evoke the long dead horror, the unearthly born from age old slime and mould, the rotting figures from aeons past, all the phantasmagoria befitting the package of a Lovecraft volume. Today we find much of this abstract work on covers of our current science fiction paperbacks. A large portion of this is still in the experimental stages, as far as publishers are concerned. I personally have not found the far-out, abstract design a conspicuous selling feature, but then, on the other hand, I have found that packaging is not by any means a criterion upon which to base results of a fast selling fiction item. More of this later.

Publishers are more than ever concerned with packaging, and, despite futuristic science fiction invariably being compared to 1984 and BRAVE NEW WORLD, one can find eye catching covers, inventive designs, and thought provoking copy. In 1955 Pocket Books, Inc. brought out Vercors' novel dealing with the breeding of missing links and a subsequent crime perpetrated on an offspring. The first part of the cover, in bold, yellow letters one and a half inches high and set against black had the word READ; below, on the bottom half of the cover, same format, the word THIS. In the middle, in white, set against a blue background, normal print, the title, You Shall Know Them, beneath which was a blurb in black reading: "The extraordinary story of a man who deliberately committed murder (but was it murder?) to test a question that touches every human being." The book, some years later, was reissued with a totally different cover (packaged this time as an average, unexceptional mystery novel) not half as effective (at least not to my way of thinking) as the former edition. Ballantine Books have been coming out with fine covers for their horror series. The three Sarban titles, THE SOUND OF HIS HORN, THE DOLL MAKER, and RING-STONES, all have eerie yet strangely haunting covers in dark and elusive blues and purples and greens, evoking a Gothic atmosphere and depicting phantom figures frightened, pursued, cruel, and evil.

Ballantine too has been exploring the abstract design and subtle suggestion on their science fiction titles. A reissue of A.E. Van Vogt's novel SLAN in this format has not met with any great sales results. Whether this has anything to do with the cover is anybody's guess (I think not). The book has been around now for a long time -- magazine, hardcover, and earlier paperback edition -- which may be the number one factor in accounting for the mediocre sales on a title like SLAN. The Ace double and single space operas, extremely popular items (with double going better than singles and short story collections), turn up with some splendid covers. Usually nothing abstract or too far-out, they are more reminiscent of that swashbuckling, wonderful artwork which all too soon became a part of the past -- the thirties and forties science fiction pulps. Here we find depicted space spics, rocket ships, futuristic cities, space wars, and lovely women in dire peril of loathsome creatures and formidable monsters from other worlds.



Penguin books too, under the Pan imprint, have done some superb packaging on their fantasy-horror anthologies, the ghost stories of M.R. James, and their reprints of Arthur C. Clarke and C.S. Lewis to mention a few. Also available from Penguin are the complete B.B.C. television transcripts of the Quatermass serial in three attractive volumes containing stills from the series. THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT and QUATERMASS II achieved popularity in this country as two very fine science fiction films of a few years back: THE CREEPING UNKNOWN and ENEMY FROM SPACE. Ballantine, however, I feel, has the edge, particularly with the packaging job they have done on their horror series. They have been experimental for a long time, but now have come up with a really fine blend of the old with the new. I am thinking of the covers on the Sarban books and Sturgeon's SOME OF YOUR BLOOD. They possess all the mood and atmosphere to evoke a kind of subtly quiet yet inexorable and overpowering horror that is reminiscent of the forties with a touch of the sixties.

Publishers have become aware of the importance of science fiction and fantasy as a fast selling and htereby lucrative commodity in paperback publishing. A number of gimmicks and experimentation have been employed in advertising and promotion, from hard sell, sex, to movie tie-ins, and even scented books. Monarch Books, one of the later paperbacks to arrive on the scene, explored some of the more bizarre tricks. For a short while they had scented books, i.e. paper treated with a perfume base, the fragrance of which should set off certain olfactory association within the reader. The publicity campaign ran: "Monarch Books Stink!" while a trade joke circulated about to the effect of what their sex books would smell like. And what were the first two titles to launch this campaign? Both were movie tie-ins, and, interestingly enough, both were fantasy-horror. The Monarch scented series began with THE BRIDES OF DRACULA by Dean Owen, and THE STRANGLERS OF BOMBAY by Stuart James. Both books were based on motion pictures released in 1960.

What sells a book? Cover, packaging, publicity, promotion, unique format, blurbs, name author, book reviews, or what? This, I must repeat, can only be discussed by me in the most limited terms based on working experience in two Manhattan paperback shops.

Sex, generally speaking, remains one of the strongest selling points. The half-naked lascivious nymphs, the breast, buttock, leg, and shoe fetish, the blurbs of vice, sin, and depravity employed with colors evoking associations of lust and concupiscence are exploted relentlessly on the potential customer to bring him to the point of buying.

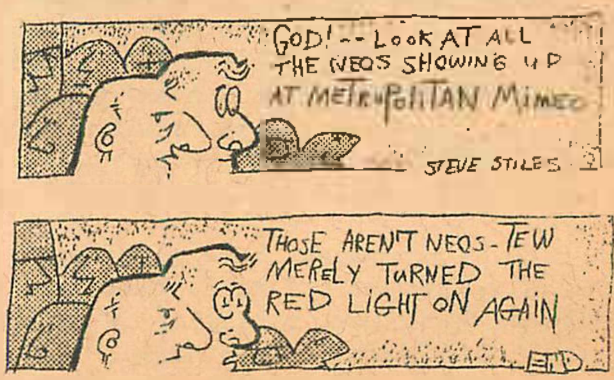
Of late bookshops have been inundated with the 'sex library' paperbacks. The movement began in all its vigor with Fabian and Saber -- paperbacks priced at thirty-five and fifty cents, which, in some midtown shops, are wrapped in cellophane and marked up to a dollar and more. This is pure dealer profit from which author or publisher can expect no percentage. They are a kind of illegitimate discount house in reverse, these stores.

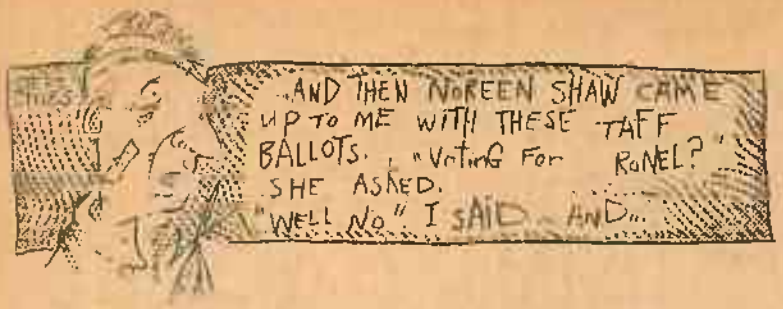
The 'sex library' publishers themselves, of course, are also a sort of at best semi-legitimate operation, constantly fighting court cases, while some of the smaller legitimate publishers have felt a certain amount of pressure in highly competitive locations. But this is the subject for another piece. We are interested in science fiction, and science fiction has not excaped this trend unscathed. An A.E. Van Vogt novel, THE MATING CRY(originally THE HOUSE THAT STOOD STILL), from the packaging looks more like a sadistic-masochistic work of the type readily found in many mid-Manhattan sex-book shops. Oddly, this presentation is the third which the book has had, formerly appearing as a science-fiction story and as a detective story. Any resemblance to either remaining in the newest release is, I am sure, purely co-incidental.

Two novels by Philip Jose Farmer, FLESH and A WOMAN A DAY, also published by Beacon, are geared towards the cerebral pleasures of vicarious sexual stimulation. FLESH sells extremely well, and in this case I think the cover is an important psychological factor accounting for its sucess. It is not by any means a good cover, but it does call forth an unbridled feeling of paganism, lust, and debauchery. This seems to sell books, and not only science fiction. We find similar packaging appealing to our atavistic nature for the most innocuous mystery and historical novel. I also contend that science fiction packaged as sex novels would sell just as well, if not better, in a sex section to customers who would never dream of reading a science fiction book. This, by the way, is an experiment now in progress.

By and large, however, the science fiction regular with whom I have dealt, much like the mystery reader, knows what he wants. He is usually after a specific author, publication, or yarn. He is not often sold on cover, packaging, or copy alone. He is not like the many slick paperback - modern novel type customers who do not know exactly what they want, and will spend twenty or thirty minutes poring over the latest titles. In the end this customer is sold on cover, author (has he read anything exciting by this author in the past?), advertising, store promotion, and word of mouth.

Cover and packaging can, of course, entice the science fiction reader too, especially when a unique job is done in presenting a new writer who does not have the reputation brought about by years of creative endeavor. Movie tie-ins can give a book a shot in the arm -- more so, I find, if the film is based on the book rather than a book based on the movie. A recent example can be cited in John Wyndham's THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS, reissued by Ballantine Books in an attractive movie tie-in format using the film title, VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED. By far the greatest selling factor of any, I have found, is a favorable review. This is true of mysteries as well as science fiction. A good Times or Herald-Tribune review will send sales skyrocketing. Ballantine has been one of the more fortunate paperback publishers to meet with this kind of promotion. When they reprinted the first Sarban novel, THE SOUND OF HIS HORN, for the first time in America, the publisher went out of stock soon after a glowing review of the book appeared in the New York Times. More recently this





reoccurred with Theodore Sturgeon's new opus, SOME OF YOUR BLOOD. A fine review of this novel from Anthony Boucher resulted in the best sales promotion Ballantine could possibly hope for.

The fantastic is read by a vast cross-section of humanity beyond the dedicated circles of 'fans.' It is read by executives for escape literature, idea men for ideas, college students for pleasure, scientists, writers, publishers, and professors to name a few. Anthologies such as Shirley Jackson's THE LOTTERY and John Collier's FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS are popular among housewives and young women who seem to enjoy an occasional shock interjected into their prosaic world of reality. Along these lines we have television stimulating reading among a great number of men and women who otherwise might never touch a science fiction book. I have in mind such collections as ONE STEP BEYOND, STORIES FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE, and the Alfred Hitchcock anthologies of stories "they wouldn't let him do on TV."

There is also the completist. He anything and everything in the science fiction section, and is wholly unaware of any other literature, even when (as when he is looking for new sf releases) completely surrounded by it.

And finally there are the eccentrics, the oddballs, the nuts who oddly enough are invariably drawn to science fiction. There was a wispy, fragile little woman, middle-aged and anemic looking. She was inclined to buy books dealing with reincarnation, and extra-sensory perception, being a self confessed mystic. She could foresee the future (though several predictions she made concerning my life never came to pass), and at night she claimed to fly. Another strange young man, given to epileptic seizures from time to time, liked nothing better than to spend a quiet Saturday in the shop, regardless of who was working or how busy we may have become, and give us in a lethargic, imperturbably manner a paragraph-by-paragraph description of every Ace double novel he had read. He had read them all.

There was a stout, punctilious gentleman who claimed to be a nuclear physicist. He also claimed that he had been in communication with another world for the past two hundred years, and that we are not ready yet to meet our neighbors from outer space. It seems a friend of his was visited by some interplanetary time travelers, and subsequently passed the rest of his life in a madhouse. And finally there are those who have analyzed the oracles of Nostradamus, or belong to some curious religious sect and are patiently and hopefully waiting for the world to end.

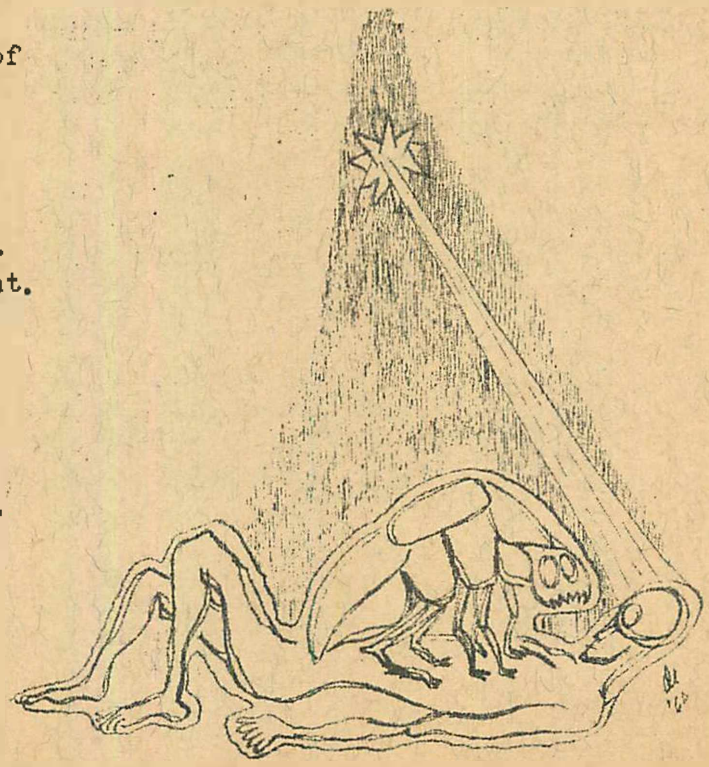
It's a pleasure to find a representative list of fantastic titles in the higher priced or quality paperbacks. There has been such associational material brought out in these editions as Margaret Murray's THE GOD OF THE WITCHES (Doubleday Anchor), Jules Michelet's SATANISM AND WITCHCRAFT (Citadel), Marjorie Hope Nicholson's VOYAGES TO THE MOON (Macmillan), Robert Graves' THE WHITE GODDESS (Vintage), E.M. Butler's RITUAL MAGIC (Noonday), Mario Praz's fine study of romantic and decadent literature, THE ROMANTIC AGONY (Meridian), Siegfried Kracauer's important psychological study of the German cinema, FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER (Noonday), and many, many more.

The quality paperbacks have made some truly admirable contributions by bringing out some of the finest and hardest-to-come-by books in the genre. A big hand should go to Mircho Smrikarov, publisher of Juniper Press books -- an entire series devoted to 'Classics of Forgotten Mysteries.' In his first series of ten he has reprinted stories and novels by Wilkie Collins, Sheridan Le Fanu, Ann Radcliffe, as well as omnibuses of American, British, and Continental masterpieces of mystery, fantasy, and horror. Perhaps his greatest achievement in his first series (and by far the best

selling title) is the collection of Arthur Machen stories, THE STRANGE WORLD OF ARTHUR MACHEN, which reprints in its entirety THE THREE IMPOSTERS, as well as such classics of weird horror as THE GREAT GOD PAN, THE WHITE PEOPLE, and THE SHINING PYRAMID. Juniper Press books sell well. They are reaching the mystery afficionado as well as the fantast. Mr. Smrikarov reports that a new series is in preparation. There will be a volume devoted to the ghostly tales of Fitz-James O'Brien, and Peter Teuthold's very rare Gothic novel, NECROMANCER: or THE TALE OF THE BLACK FOREST, is under consideration.

The Grove Press paperbacks -- Evergreen Books -- deserves honorable mention. Matthew Gregory Lewis' classic novel recognized as one of the butstanding high points of Gothic literature, THE MONK, is available, as well as the spectral TALES OF HOFFMAN, and Vernon Lee's THE SNAKE LADY. Dover Publications has consistently brought out beautiful illustrated editions on fine quality paper, of works by Lewis Carrol And Ambrose Bierce; THE TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN, and various nonsense anthologies. Illustrations have included reprints of classic drawings by W.W. Denslow, and for the Munchausen book, pictures by Gustave Dore. They have also brought out superb volumes of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and H. Rider Haggard. THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO by Charles Finney, published originally in paperback by Bantam Books and out of print for years, was recently reprinted by Compass Books, with the Boris Artzybasheff illustrations of the original hardcover edition, omitted from the Bantam volume, restored.

Small presses and university presses have also made great, almost unbelievable, contributions to the field. Hafner has brought out one of the very early American Gothic novels, WIELAND, or THE TRANSFORMATION, by Charles Brockden Brown. Bison Books (University of Nebraska Press), in their first series of paperbacks, brought out Ludvig Holberg's JOURNEY OF NIELS KLIM TO THE WORLD UNDERGROUND. This famous Scandinavian classic has been compared to our ALICE IN WONDERLAND, yet this new Bison paperback is the first American edition since 1845. Bison followed up with what has been hailed as the finest achievement of the Gothic school, Charles Robert Maturin's MELMOTH THE WANDERER. Dealers have called this reprint a literary event. It is a volume I have sought after for my personal collection for a number of years. Want lists to dealers in EEgland and America cam to nought. The only time I had ever seen a copy prior to the Bison edition was some years ago in the rare book department at Charles Scribners; the four volumes set in two going for seventy five dollars. Now the entire four volumes have been reset as one attractive quality paperback, going for a little over two dollars. Though MELMOTH is not the blood and thunder thriller one might expect from the Gothic school, and though it does contain some blatant flaws in plot structure, it still remains a great, brooding masterpiece, transcending the romance of its day and infuse with a



universality which elevates it to the stature of classic. One dealer called it the biggest bargain he has seen in years, and another reports that sales are tremendous. This, however, is from the science fiction dealer. The scene changes in the average paperbound bookshop of which I speak. MELMOTH sits on the shelf, and in the window. My only sales have been to the few friends who share with me an interest in Gothic literature. Bruce Nicoll, director of the University of Nebraska Press, has written me that the book is doing quite well, and that they have been actively considering other Gothic works for forthcoming publications.

The best news to come along of late is the announcement in a recent issue of Publisher's Weekly of a new line of quality paperbacks devoted exclusively to 'celebrated works of imaginatinn, mysticism, and fantasy.' In the fall of this year, Crown Publishers will inaugurate the Xanadu Library. The first four titles listed for publication are: James Branch Cabell's JURGEN, Ernest Bramah's KAI LUNG'S GOLDEN HOURS, Colonel James Churchward's THE LOST CONTINENT OF MU, and Talbot Mundy's ON, THE SECRET OF AHBOR VALLEY.

In retrospect we find that the fantastic has grown in size, price, and importance along with the paperback industry. Ace Books have just increased the price of their volumes from thirty five to forty cents. This raises the sales tax another penny.

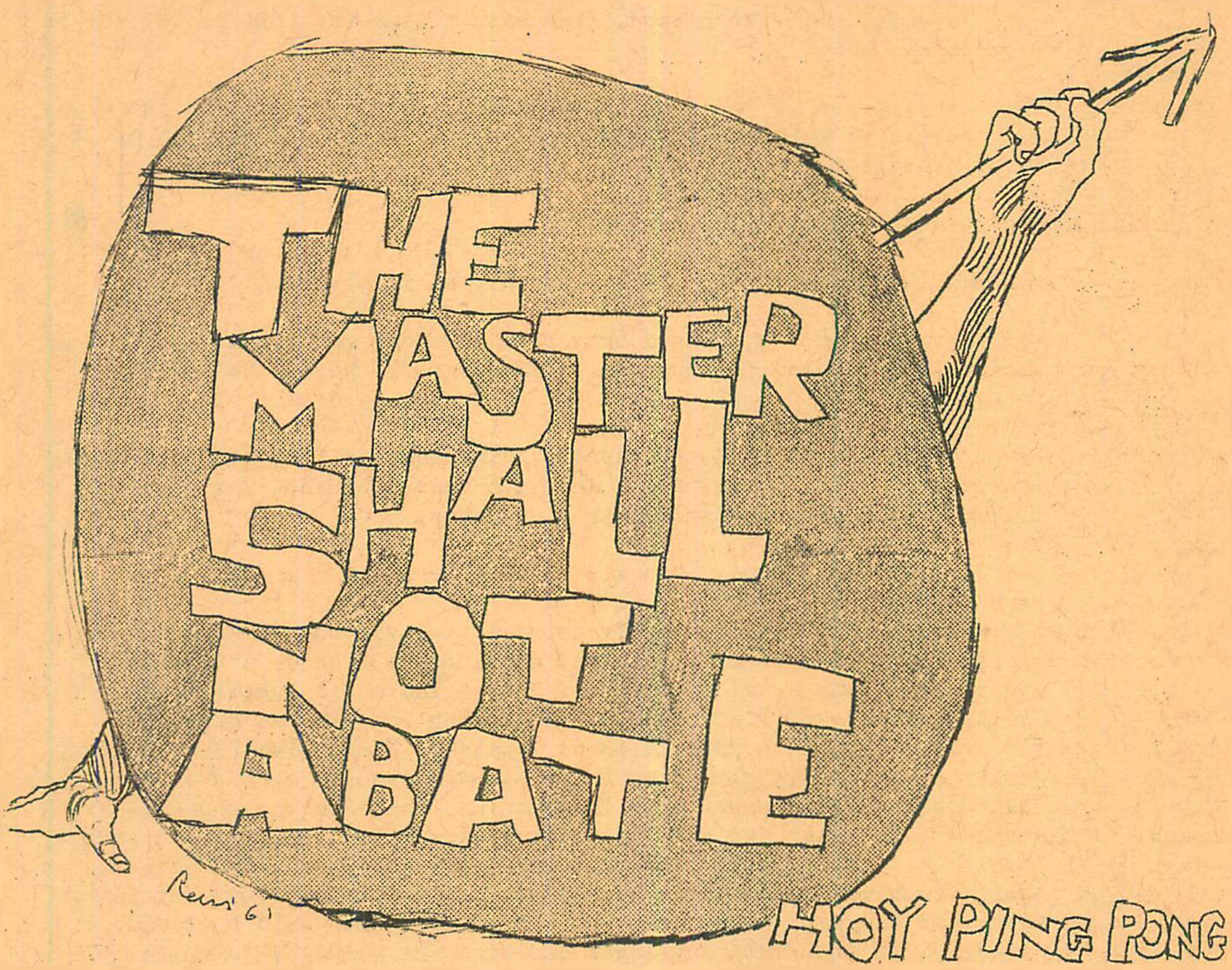
Bantam has followed suit with their latest science fiction title, which normally should go at thirty five cents. However, though I receive some comments and complaints, I have not noticed any effect on sales. It seems people acquiesce to the trends of the times, and if everything else goes up, why not books? At least this seems to be the general attitude.

It is interesting to find that many order forms are now broken down by category, and that science fiction and fantasy are occupying an impressive amount of space. I certainly feel there is no threat or immediate danger of the fantastic losing ground under the great bulk of paperbacks published today. Of course, people like Orwell, Huxley, Jules Verne, and H.G. Wells are paperback perennials, often appearing on school required-reading lists.

Still, there is an avid interest in the field shown by both publisher and reader. Slick paperbacks newly arrived on the scene are not without a fantasy-horror series. Belmont Books, for one, has just started a horror series. The CREEPS BY NIGHT anthology edited by Dashiell Hammett was their first offering, which will be followed by a collection of Robert Bloch stories titled NIGHTMARES.

Between the quality series and the slicks, from what I glean from advance notices and publication plans, the future looks extremely optimistic concerning the fantastic in the paperbacks. As far as the genre goes, there is a great, unlimited potential in the paperbacks; a potential which, at present, has just commenced to be fulfilled.

— Charles M. Collins

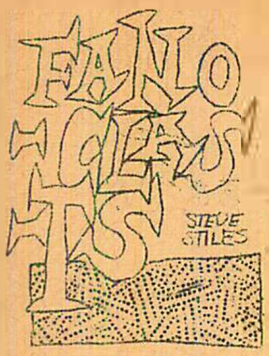


I approached the house with diffidence, acutely aware of the Personage who dwelled within. (The sound of a busily clacking typewriter reached my ears and I smiled knowingly, albeit diffidently.) It was a modest home as befitted the Personage -- a charming little fourteen room bungalow set back from the street about an eighth of a mile, having a three-stall garage and a kidney-shaped swimming pool in the rear. Through the open garage doors I caught a glimpse of the automotive power stored there: a sedate Rolls Royce for the Deity's wife, a speedy little Lancia for his own use as he dashed hither and yon between the studios, and a gold-plated motorscooter for his teenage daughter. It was all so charming, so simple, so diffident. My memory went back to the humble days in Weyauwega when the Personage owned nothing but a rusty bicycle.

It was so heart-warming, so truly American.

I climbed the steps in rather timid fashion and rang the bell. Perhaps half an hour later I rang again, suspecting that no one had heard me. When the shadows lengthened and intuition told me that the afternoon was waning, I became a bit impatient and kicked the door in. The poor thing hung there on one hinge, diffidently. A harried young woman ran to the door and put her head through the new opening.

"Quick, quick!" she cried, "what do you want?"

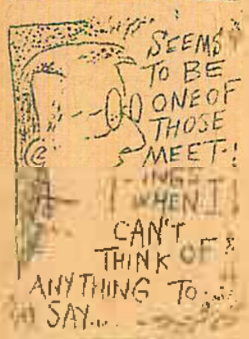


"I have come to interview the Master."

"Oh, heavens, no!" she gasped. "He hasn't time for interviews. He is busy, busy, busy ... "

"But he will see me," was my urbane reply. "I represent the fan press, and besides, I knew him in Weyauwega when he possessed nothing but a rusty bicycle."

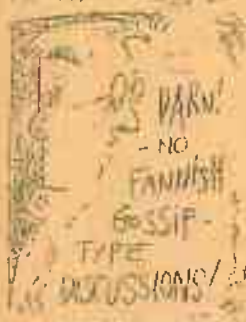
"Is this blackmail?" she demanded.



"Perish the thought, madam. I wish only an interview."

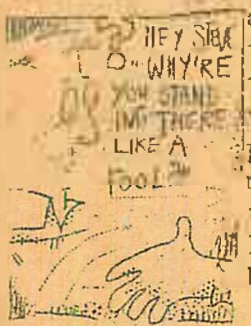
The harried young woman sped away from the door and ran to the foot of the staircase, shouting upwards: "Jim Harmon is here. He wants an interview."

I corrected her in a gentle manner. "The name is Pong, my good woman. From white China, of course." And with that I brushed past her and climbed the stairs to the Master's workshop.

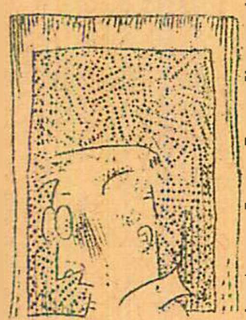


I paused in the doorway, aghast.

The workshop was a bedlam of frenzied activity, crowded with milling people. The room itself contained nothing but a desk, a typewriter and a chair; the Great One Himself sat in the chair lustily banging the typewriter and I saw the desk quivering beneath the onslaught. (My breath caught in admiration as I watched his twelve fingers flying over the keyboard.) A callow youth stood nervously at one side of the desk feeding fresh paper into the machine, while on the opposite side another youth snatched the typewritten pages from the mill and passed them to a waiting girl. The girl hurriedly proofread each page and then assembled the completed pages into neat little piles. At intervals, the harried young woman who had admitted me would snatch up these piles, stuff them into envelopes and hand the packages to uniformed messengers -- the messengers would then race down the stairs, leap to their waiting motorcycles and rush the manuscripts to the proper studio. I was watching a fiction factory at work and my admiration knew no bounds.



The Personage was clad in his favorite working clothes: a colorful sport shirt, slacks, and house slippers. I noticed dust on his glasses and realized with dismay that he'd not had time to take them off for their weekly rinsing. A long black cigaret holder drooped from one corner of the tired mouth and as I looked, the badgered secretary snatched a butt from the holder and quickly inserted a fresh, lighted cigaret. He puffed on without interruption.



After a moment he sensed the presence of a stranger in the room and glared at me without pausing in his work. "Whaddyawant?"

"My name is Pong," I reminded him, "and we knew eachother in Weyauwega when you owned nothing but a rusty bicycle. I once treated you to a steak dinner."

"Come/back/Tuesday," he snapped. "I/toss/coins/to/beggars/only/on/Tuesdays."

"I am not a beggar, sir. I collect picturesque sentences."

"Such/as/what?" he barked, the busy fingers never stopping.

"Such as this," and I quoted a recent acquisition: "The LASFS Christmas party was a rouse, with plain egg-nog, and the pólice, and gift-trading and all the rest of the wonderful things that has come to mean Christmas."

"Didn't/go," he cried. "Too/busy, work/piling/up, no/time/for/frivolity/or/the/police."

"Of course you didn't go, Great One. That's merely a sentence I discovered in the fan press. I collect such odd statements."

"What's/that/got/to/do/with/me?" he demanded.

"Oh, Sir, I have a precious quote from your Very Own Lips."

"What/izzat?" (And the boy snatched another page from his machine.)

And again I quoted a line found in the fan press: "I intend to write the book next month."

"So?" he hissed, as a new sheet was inserted in the typewriter.

"You meant to day next year, didn't you, Master?"

"I/said/next/month/and/I/meant/next/month!"

"But sir, surely there is some mistake. I appreciate your industry, of course, but the published letter recounted many other activities: the half-dozen new television scripts you were planning, the movie scenario you were polishing, the several short stories you were revising for anthology publication, the novelettes you were writing for the science fiction magazines, and the galley-proofs you were readying for the printer. And then you said you planned to write a certain book next month. I felt certain it was a slip of the tongue."

"Well/dammit/I/did/write/the/book ... that/was/three/months/ago. Two/more/books/since/then!"

"A book a month?" I inquired in amazement. "In addition to all your other work?"

"Whattaboutit?" he snapped, working like a demon.

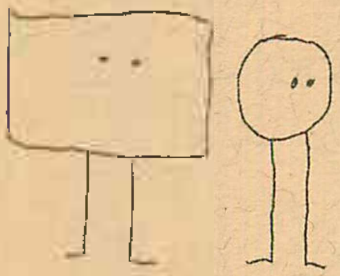
"Sir, aren't you just a teensy-weensy bit concerned about ...(and I hung my head to conceal the blush) ... about quality?"

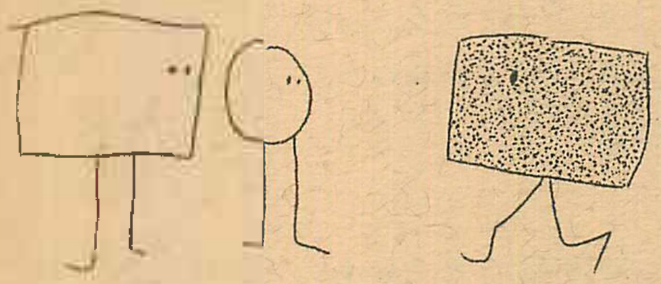
"Quality/schmality!" was the cold rejoinder that cut me to the quick. "I'm/busy/busy/busy ... "

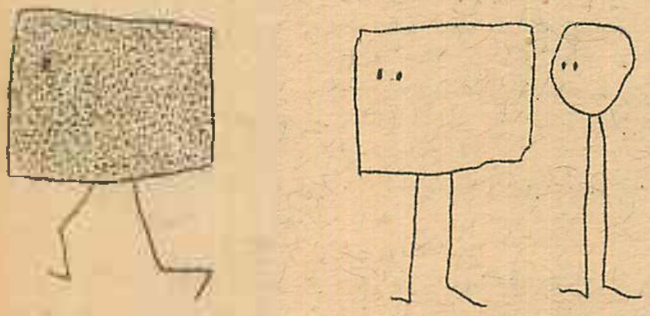
At that moment (to my horror) I espied a dreadful sight. The harried secretary had dropped to all fours beyond the desk and was removing the Great Man's slipper and sock from one foot. She placed a yellow pencil between his toes and a sheet of clean paper beneath the pencil. The foot began to move!

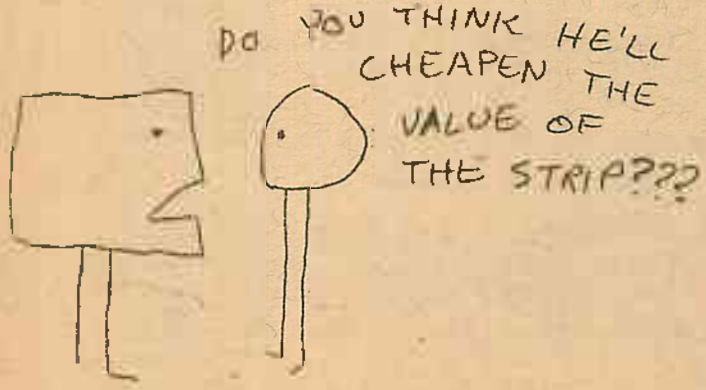
"Sir," I cried out in protest, "what are you doing down there?"

"Writing/my/ROGUE/column/stupid!"









In a state of fright not unmixed with awe I moved nearer the desk to study this human dynamo. Beads of sweat stood out on his wrinkled brow and ran down his gaunt cheeks; there was a certain wild look of -- something -- in his tired eyes; his lips quivered with agony and even the veins of his neck betrayed a great secret emotion. Clearly the man was in some terrible difficulty.

"Master," I whispered, "what is the matter? Tell me!"

"I/wish/I/could/stop/for/a/minute," he breathed huskily. "I've/got/to/go/to/the/john!"

"Please, sir, stop and go. Surely this masterpiece in your typewriter can wait."

"No/no/no," he cried. "Deadline/deadline/deadline .... "

I peered closely to see what he was doing, and my breath caught. The Master was composing volume six (Bulg-Carf) of the next edition of the Encyclopedia Americana.

HOY PING PONG

the nautilus, the albatross, the columbiad

MOST AUTHORS SEEM to enjoy a vigorous, if brief, resurgence of popularity shortly after death, no doubt due to their names' suddenly becoming topical again. (This is happening to Eugene O'Neill right now.)

Then, as if by dying they identified themselves and their work with an outmoded, passe generation, they fade out of view and become neglected, seldom mentioned, no longer "important". (This is happening to George Bernard Shaw right now.)

Sometimes they remain generally forgotten for a considerable period of time, and their achievements, however once significant, are passed over and consigned to general oblivion. (This is happening to James Branch Cabell right now.)

But sometimes--due to a variety of different causes--they return to the full light of popular and critical attention, and suddenly become of far greater importance than ever before. And this is what has happened to Jules Verne.

Jules Verne was born in 1828. A restless and inattentive schoolboy, he entered a bohemian life in Paris once free of school. At 28 he settled down, married, became a stockbroker, and left his wilder ways behind to become a typical bourgeois. But he

was not fated for this kind of life. His wife encouraged his imaginative literary bent, and at 35 his first book, Cinq semaines en ballon, was published.

This book -- "Five Weeks in a Balloon" -- started one of the most amazing literary acreers ever launched. His publisher labeled the work a "Voyage Extraordinaire" -- and to live up to it, Verne began putting his heroes through every imaginable sort of trip, under the sea, off on a comet, around the world by land and air, via balloon, airship, giant sealiner, space vehicle, mechanical steam-powered elephant, and a wonderful, wacky amphibious machine called The Terror that was a combination automobile-airplane-speedboat-submarine.

The odd thing is that Verne wanted to be a serious writer. Five Weeks in a Balloon had its origin in a serious non-fiction treatise on the future of balloon-travel, dealing especially with its possibilities in the exploration of Africa, which in those far-off and innocent days was still a Dark Continent, no doubt liberally filled with Lost Egyptian Cities, dinosauric survivals, colonies of Atlantis, and other delightful conceptions that would endear the names of Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs to the hearts of the world.

Verne's first publisher, however, persuaded him to present his theories in fictional form. Five Weeks was so well received that Verne followed it a year later with A Journey to the Centre of the Earth. And from there, there was no stopping him. He became a one-man literary factory, and in the following forty years he produced seventy books. Books of all sorts -- scientific romances, boys' adventure books, historical romances (including one about the American Civil War), an "Illustrated Geographical History of France", 'straight' travel-adventure stories, humorous works, plays, articles, short stories, a history of world exploration, an occasional Gothic piece (testifying to his life-long admiration of Poe), American frontier stories -- in short, just about every kind of story conceivable.

His popularity was more than immense -- it was gigantic. At times he challenged the stupendous fame of his friend, Alexandre Dumas. When he died in 1905, however, his vast following died with him, and his international audience dwindled. Many of his works had never been translated into English, and of those that had, only a few survived with unimpaired appeal. By the mid-point of this century, his rather dubious claim to immortality was resting on the uncertain basis of having his 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea included as a standard item in the Scribner's Illustrated Classics series.

Then -- the revolution! From a forgotten author virtually impossible to find in English, Verne was catapulted to the position of a writer (dead over 50 years) who was more popular and topical than many best-selling novelists still living. He mushroomed all over theatre marques and paperback stands and began making millions for those publishers and producers who had wisely decided to hitch their wagons on the star of Verne.

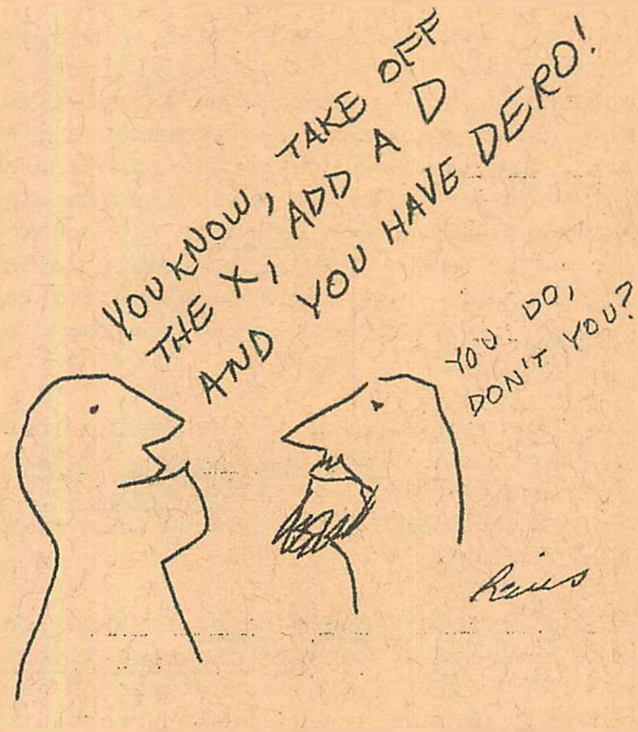
Why -- and how? I have been at some pains to find out where all this started, and the closest I can come to the answer is to say: Walt Disney.

In the early '50s, you may remember, Disney was turning from the all-cartoon feature, which had become prohibitively expensive, to the live-action feature. However, to preserve his association with the classics of childhood, most of his early live-action films were taken from standard childrens' books such as Rob Roy, Robin Hood and Treasure Island. I suspect it was Treasure Island that convinced Disney he was on the right track. That film -- it was a lovely piece of work, with an inspired casting choice of Robert Newton as Long John Silver -- made a pile of money for Disney, and became one of his biggest hits up to that time.

At any rate, in 1955 Disney released his Technicolor, all-live-action version of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, an excellent science fiction extravaganza which preserved much of the authentic Verne flavour, and featured a fine cast headed by James Mason, as the brooding and enigmatic Captain Nemo, with Kirk Douglas as Ned Land, and Peter Lorre in an unexpected comic role that came close to stealing the picture.

As is usual with Disney, the book was released widely as a publicity tie-in with the picture. 20,000 Leagues deluged the newsstands of the nation, and the book was lifted to a new level of popularity from which it has not yet (six years later) declined.

Last year the Heritage Club, a deluxe publisher of boxed gift books, presented a gorgeous edition of Verne's hoary masterpiece, as one of their offerings. It was pleasant and exhilerating to find Verne on a publishing list in the austere company of Dostoevsky, Milton, Virgil, and Boccacio!



And only one year later -- on October 7, 1956 -- came a new picture that really made theatrical history. The Disney feature had been a fine commercial success, and had received an Academy Award for set decoration, -- but Michael Todd's Around the World in 80 Days proved even more screenworthy. This masterly film, one of the screen's outstanding examples of pure, unadulterated entertainment, broke box office records, played for years as reserved-seat houses, won a brace of Oscars (including Best Picture of the Year) and made a fortune. It was the first story-picture in Todd-AO, and the first "cameo" picture to include scores and scores of guest stars in bit parts. Virtually everybody in Hollywood who could still walk was in it, as well as herds of foreign stars like Fernandel, Cantinflas, Jose Greco, and Martine Carol.

Naturally, book tie-ins followed. Around the World became available in a wide variety of paperback and hardcover editions -- and the flood began!

In the next couple years, other Verne titles were resurrected from library shelves and paperbacked. Hector Servadac ("Off on a Comet"), The Purchase of the North Pole, From the Earth to the Moon, The Mysterious Island, Around the Moon, and so on....

Hardcover houses also got into the act. A.A. Wyn, Inc, and the Associated Booksellers began bringing to light inexpensive editions of previously hard-to-find Verne novels like A Floating City (about a giant sea-liner), The City on the Niger, Five Weeks in a Balloon, The Begum's Fortune....

Nor were the movie moguls slow to follow the Disneys and Todds. A so-so color version of From the Earth to the Moon was released, with Joseph Cotton and George Sanders, to moderate success. It remained the colorful period flavour of the novel, and elicited amusement by presenting a spaceship with oak-paneled lounge decorated with brass oil lamps and red leather cushions.

A charming version of A Journey to the Center of the Earth, with James Mason, Arlene Dahl, and Pat Boone, came out hard on its heels. This delightful picture was played with tongue-in-cheek seriousness as a straight boys' adventure book, with splendid sets and fine color photography. It was one of the best of the Verne pictures, and indicated the sophisticated entertainment the movies could draw from Verne's prodigious storehouse of books.

A foreign-made color version of Michael Strogoff, starring Curt Jurgens, had a healthy run (and of course the paperback houses filled newsstands across the country with Michael Strogoff: Courier to the Czar; A Journey to the Center of the Earth; From the Earth to the Moon.)

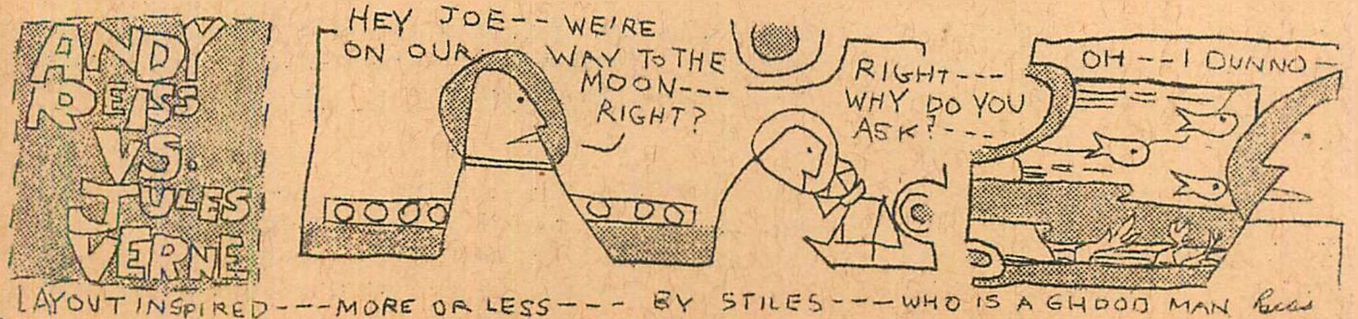
By the time this article is printed, a distinguished companion will have been added to that famous fleet of vehicles that included Verne's super-submarine, the Nautilus (whose fame was not impaired when a real-life atomic submarine of the same name explored the Polar regions a few years back), and the famous projectile in From the Earth to the Moon (one can only wish the Russians had christened their Lunik the Columbiad, in honor of Verne's machine which circumnavigated the moon long before Lunik). The new vehicle will be the Albatross, the super flying-machine in Robur the Conqueror. For a new color movie, starring Vincent Price as the dynamic engineer, Robur, will soon be released. This movie combines two Verne books, Master of the World and Robur the Conqueror into one story, and Ace Books has already released a paperback edition of the two stories.

Also thrilling the screens of the nation about the time of this article is a Czech-made film called The Fabulous World of Jules Verne, which will be followed in months to come by a movie version of The Mysterious Island (with James Mason recreating his role of Captain Nemo), and a Disney film starring Hayley Mills, adapted from another Verne book.

The Fabulous World of Jules Verne is described by the list of screen credits as being adapted from Verne's story A Dangerous Invention. There is no such -- the Czech-made film is an original, a clever pastiche of several bits and scraps from popular Verne books. The film uses a new screen process that lends the illusion of animated steel-engravings to everything in the scene, thus giving a 'period' aspect suitable for a Verne movie.

The forthcoming Disney film will be The Castaways, with Hayley Mills, Charles Laughton, Maurice Chevalier, and others. It is taken from the story Captain Grant's Children.

At the moment, and for some time to come, there would seem to be no letup in the popularity of Jules Verne. In the last seven years, eight movies have been made from his books. That would be an extraordinary record for any contemporary writer to attempt to match. About 15 of his books are widely available from paperback and hard-cover houses, with many more to come.

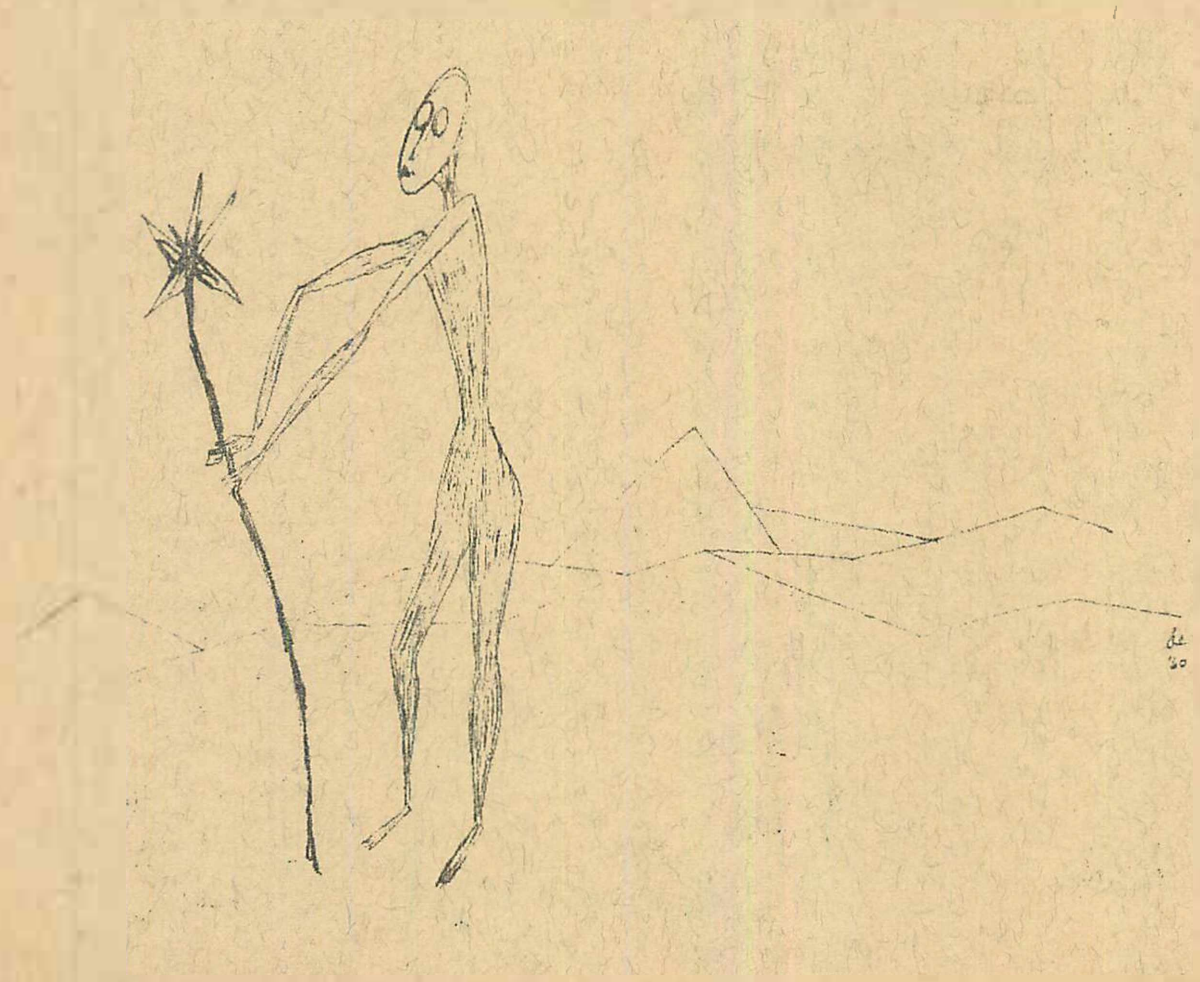


How nice it would be, to have in print those of Verne's many books most intriguing and rare. Books like Le Sphinx de glaces ("The Ice-Sphinx"), Verne's sequel and completion to Poe's fragmentary novel, Arthur Gordon Pym! Or The Steam-House, with its mechanical steam-powered iron-elephant...or Keraban the Inflexible... The Green Ray... The Invasion of the Sea... The Floating Island... The Lighthouse at the End of the World... The Eternal Adam... The Giant Raft... The Cryptogram... The Archipelago of Fire....

And what a ripe harvest still awaits movie-makers among Verne's as yet untouched titles! A mad, Todd-style comedy could be produced from Five Weeks in a Balloon, in which a small party of Englishmen explore Darkest Africa in a large balloon, get involved with cannibals and drop down to hunt animals, and have one merry series of hair-breadth escapes from Zanzibar to the Atlantic. Or The Chase of the Golden Meteor, one of Verne's eight posthumous books published between 1907 and 1911, and the only one of them to be translated into English. Or The Adventures of Captain Hatteras. Or A Floating City, in which the supergiant sealiner battles across the Atlantic on her maiden voyage, through storms, waterspouts, icebergs....

Let's hope the moviemen keep on with Verne. Perhaps someday they will even get around to Olaf Stapledon and E.E. Smith.

I hope I'm here to see it.



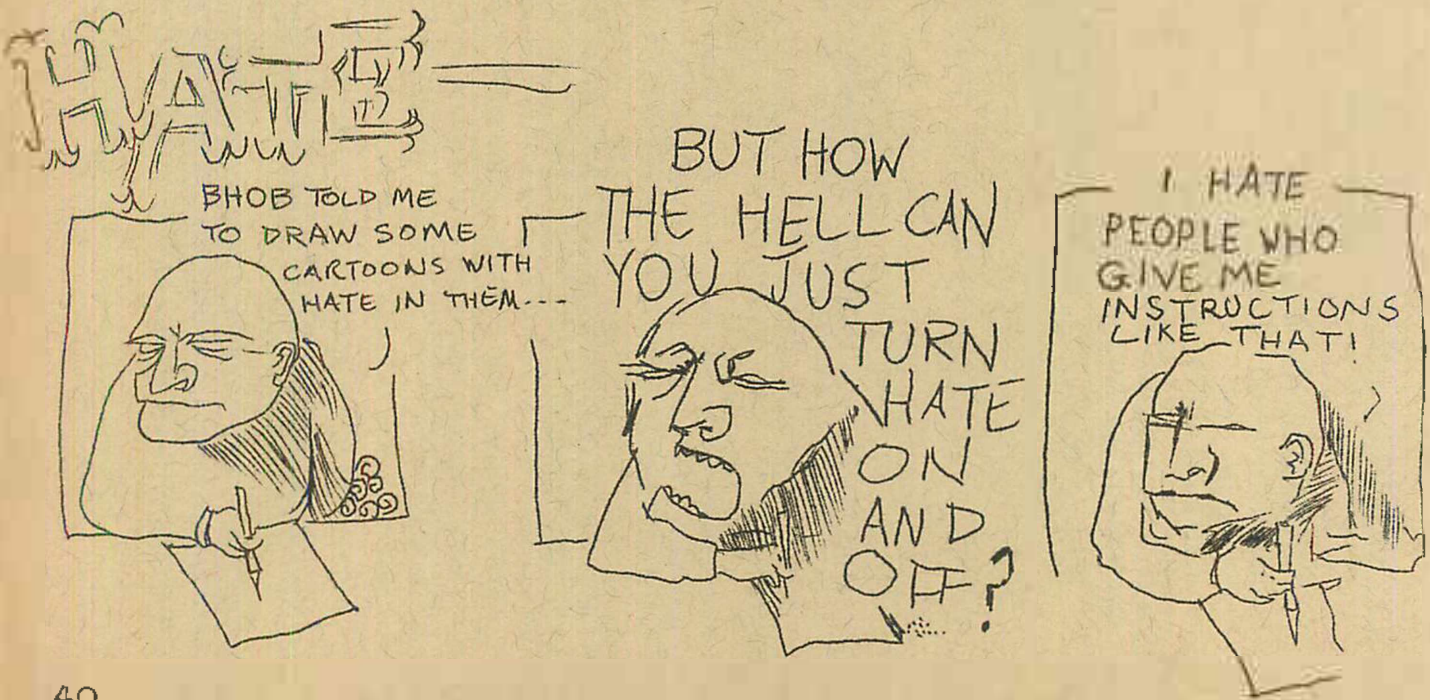
pluck the starflower in the white midnight

Andy Reiss SELF-

My name is Andy Reiss - - -
I come to fan clubs - - -
sit and draw cartoons - - -

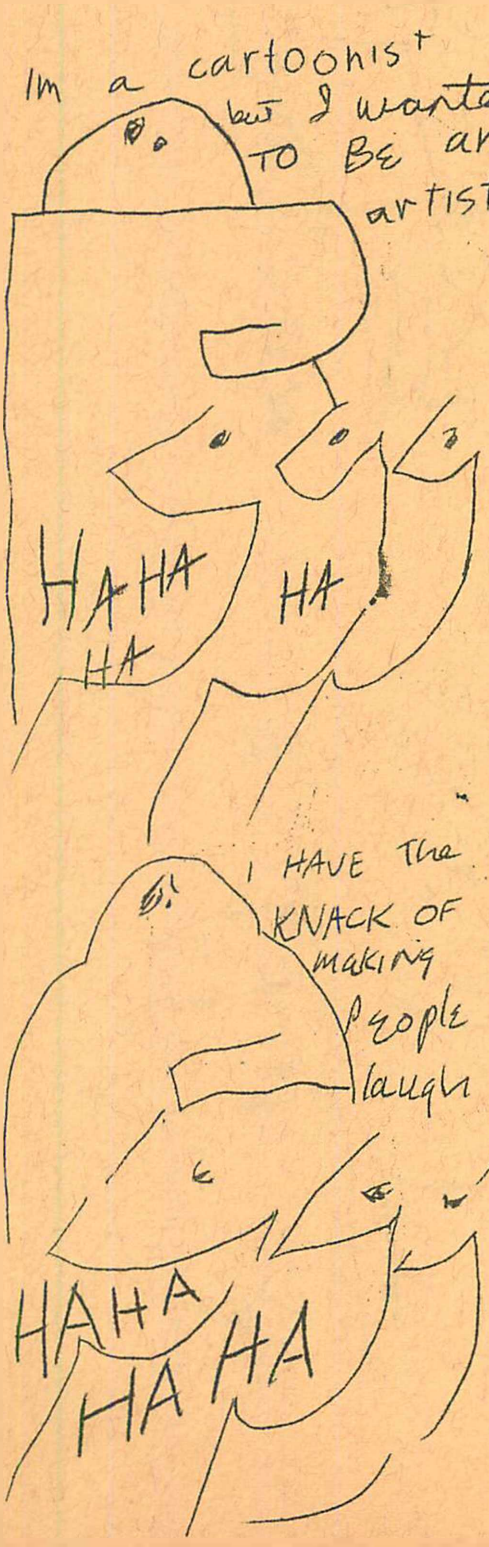
People laugh and
congratulate me - - -

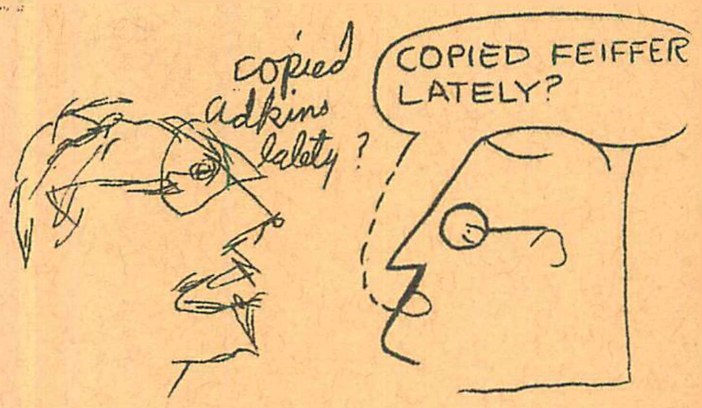
the next day nobody
remembers my name

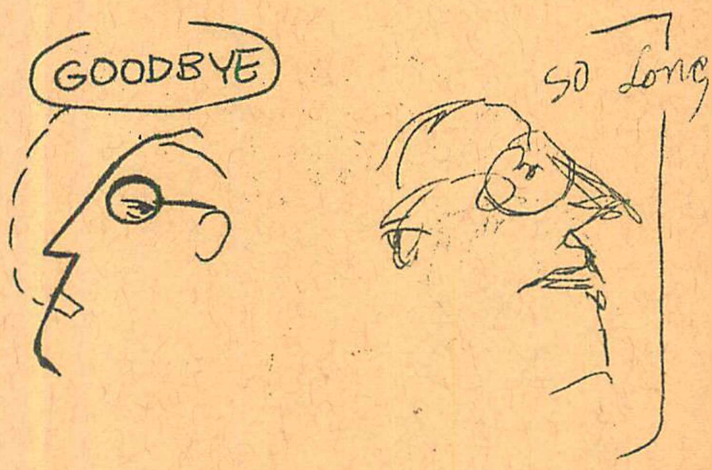


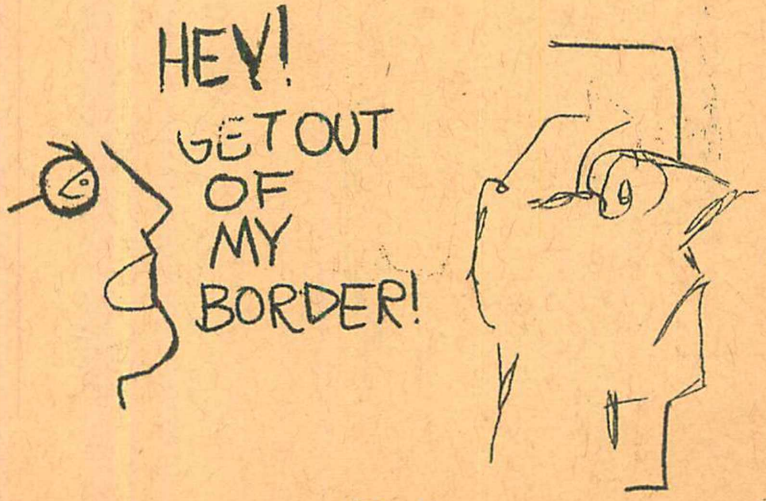
PORTRAITS

FANDOM'S STEINBERG TURNS INTROSPECTIVE







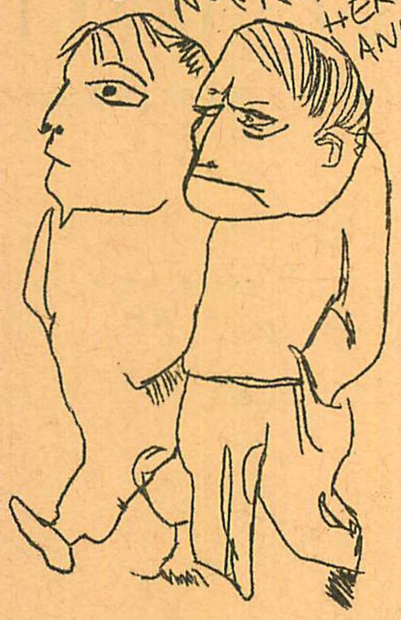


Reiss

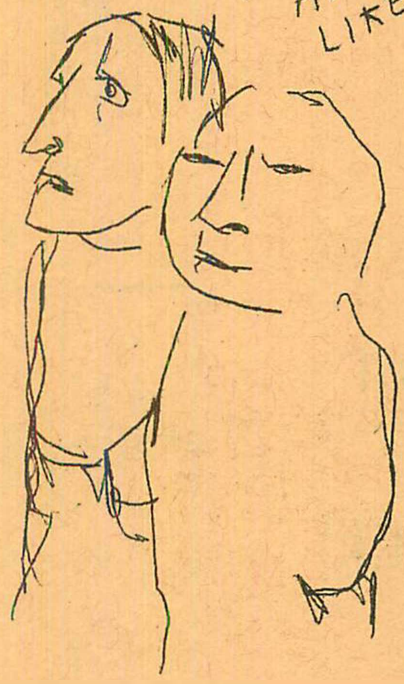
ANOTHER CARTOON FROM THE FERTILE BRAIN OF ANDY REISS?

YES- HIS BRAIN IS PREGNANT.

I WENT TO KISS MY MOMMY GOODNIGHT, BUT NURSE SAID "NO, YOU'LL MESS HER MAKE-UP AND BESIDES



THEN SHE STARTED QUOTING THE BIBLE AT ME ABOUT INCEST AND LIKE THAT...

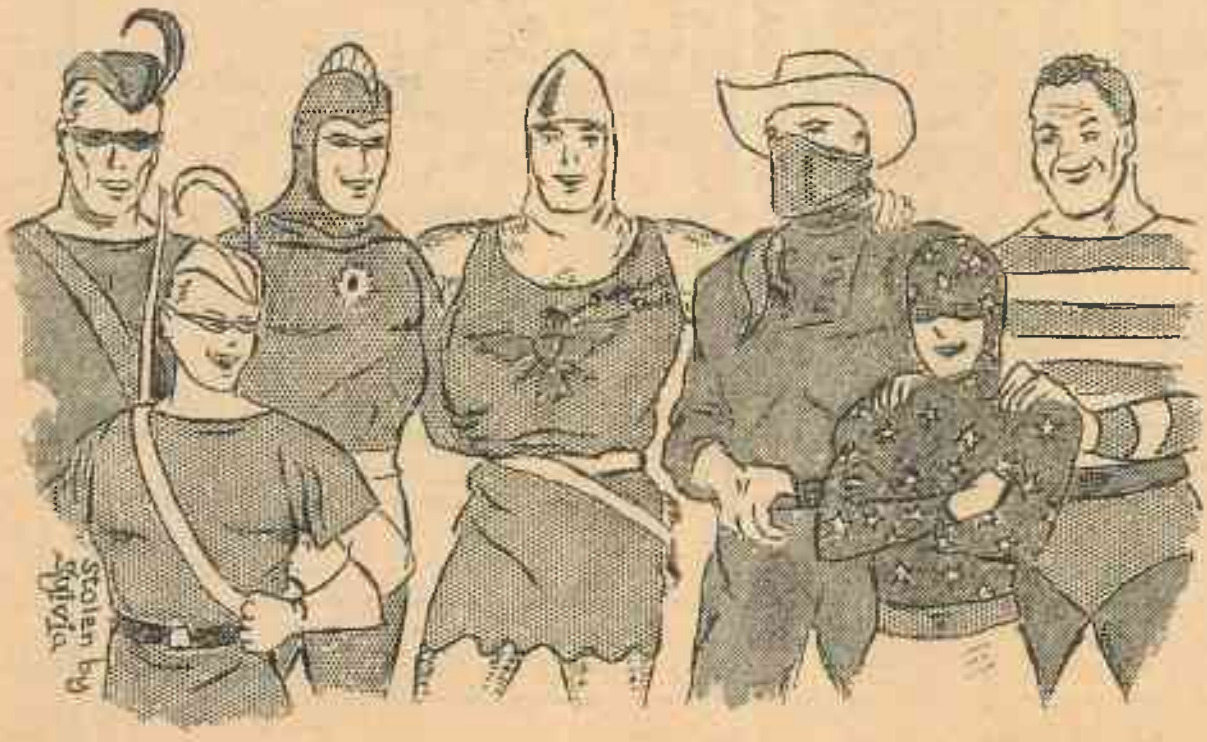


SO I KISSED HER GOODNIGHT INSTEAD...

the several soldiers of victory

by dick lupoff

part five of the series—all in color for a dime



You're a struggling young comic book writer. You and your artist-partner grind out a series of competent but generally uninspired strips -- Radio Squad, Federal Men, Slam Bradley, Dr. Occult -- and then one day you create the most valuable single fictional creation in the entire history of literature: Superman.

Surprisingly, you have trouble peddling Superman at first, but once the strip is bought and appears in ACTION COMICS, it is an immediate sensation. Prepared now to cash in on the immense value of your creation, you discover to your dismay that when you sold the first Superman story, you sold not only that story but all rights to Superman! This of course is exactly what did happen, lo those twenty years ago, to Jerry Siegel (writer) and Joe Shuster (artist).

What happened next is of present interest, specifically what happened next to Jerry Siegel, brain-parent of the comic character who has become a household word, a national and international institution, who has been the hero of radio and television series, movie serials, animated adventures, and a feature motion picture, subject of a hard-cover book, inspiration of children's costumes, wrist watches, raincoats, lunch boxes and scores of other tie-ins, and inspirer of dozens upon dozens of other assorted tight-suited, power-laden comic book heroes.

What, to ask the question I started towards way back there, happened to Jerry Siegel? Why, exactly what you would expect to happen: he went on writing comic books. And, while the magic lightning never again struck as it had with Superman (if you'll pardon the mixed mythos) some of those post-Krypton Siegel creations were pretty creditable.

The Spectre, for instance. Remember that deathly-white, green hooded and cloaked mystic being of seemingly limitless powers, who livened MORE FUN COMICS for some years? Siegel's.

Remember the Star-Spangled Kid and Stripesy, the patriotically-garbed team who combined brain and brawn with precision teamwork, a few tricks, and a super-auto, to combat evil and aid the forces of law and order? Siegel's.

Let's talk awhile about the Star-Spangled Kid and Stripesy. The brains of the team were supplied by the Kid, secret ~~identity~~ Bylvester Pemberton, youthful scion of a millionaire tradition. The brawn came from Stripesy, otherwise known as the Pembertons' chaffeur, Pat Dugan.

Hal Sherman was assigned to draw the strip, and the Star-Spangled Kid and Stripesy were introduced with both a front-cover action drawing and a full color bacover portrait on STAR-SPANGLED COMICS #1. The Kid wore a blue jersey and tight blue hood studded with white stars, a red belt and tights and over them blue trunks and boots. The huge Stripesy wore a shirt of broad horizontal red and white stripes. No covering hid his curly orange hair. From the waste down his attire resembled that of the Kid, except for the reversal of reds and blues. Fighting the fiendish Dr. Weerd with football-like signals and maneuvers, the Kid and Stripesy dominated STAR-SPANGLED COMICS for only a year before being upstaged by Simon and Kirby's Guardian, and finally being dropped. But let's move on from STAR-SPANGLED COMICS.

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"FASTER! FASTER!" -- Thadeus Bodog Sivana.

"SLOWER! SLOWER!" -- Beautia Sivana.

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Imagine a knight of the days of King Arthur, embodying the virtues of chivalrous conduct, of strength, skill, lofty mind and noble soul. Imagine such a man garbed in golden mail and scarlet cloth, mounted upon a magically winged white stallion and armed with Excalibur itself, cast forward into modern times by the enchantment of Merlin, making his way in the world as assistant curator of a museum of antiquities, but emerging, when the cause of justice called him forth, as Justin the bold: the Shining Knight.

Just such a man did exist, or at least he existed in the enchanted world of the children (and others) who read ADVENTURE COMICS in the 1940's, and thrilled to his exploits as they were unveiled month after month. Justin used archaic forms like 'swounds and forsooth, and periodically dreamed of returning to the Arthurian age, but he never made it.

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Try to conceive of an ordinary man with an ordinary name, an ordinary job, and an almost-ordinary houseboy named Wing. Fill in the blanks now... name: Travis; job: newspaper editor.

Try to imagin this ordinary pair, a well-off bachelor and his Chinese houseboy, donning a pair of tight-fitting costumes of red and yellow, setting forth to face danger and to find triumph in the face of evil, confounding their enemies with capsules of blinding crimson vapor but gaining ultimate victory through no device save their own courage and agility.

Try, and you may find it impossible today. But make yourself six years old and the year 1941, and your world the child's world of giants and spirits and sorcerers and heroes and you will find it easier to imagine the Crimson Avenger and Wing as they appeared in DETECTIVE COMICS, the duo a creation of Jack Lehti.

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Don't let's stop the catalog of heroes now. Let's go one with some more. Let's go on with the Vigilante. The Vigilante was Morton Meskin's modern-day cowboy hero who rode a motorcycle instead of a horse, and who took a modern approach to his gangland adversaries. The Vigilante wore a cowboy's broad-brimmed hat and a bandit-like bandana mask to hid his secret identity of Greg Sanders, a strictly eastern entertainer known as "the Prairie Troubadour." The Vigilante roared through the big cities of ACTION COMICS in the early 1940's, in western garb and on his motorcycle, sending gangsters to jail, and singing with a "golden voice" to earn his keep -- a rare occupation for a comic hero. His sidekick in ACTION was Stuff, an oriental youth known as "the Chinatown Kid." But forget Stuff for this article.

==========

And finally Roy Harper and Oliver Queen, better known as those modern-day Robin Hoods, Green Arrow and Speedy, made their excitement-filled way through the pages of MORE FUN. That was long ago, and the array of arrows used by George Papp's daring archers was simple -- an arrow-line in addition to a quiver of conventional shafts -- as compared to today's arsenal of rocker-arrows, radar-arrows, television-arrows, magnetic arrows, boomerang arrows, and assorted other absurdities.

Green Arrow and Speedy alone remain of this roll of courage, but once these adventurers composed a corps of thrills and gallantry as they faced menace and malignity in issue after issue of LEADING COMICS.

For these were the Seven Soldiers of Victory.

When Whitney Ellsworth gained authority in 1941 to start a new anthology type comic, he ran down the list of available DC-group heroes to select a cast of characters. Each of the DC comics featured a colorful array of adventurers (except only the single hero books like SUPERMAN and BATMAN) including costume heroes galore, plus magicians, cowboys, and detectives. Ellsworth selected five favorite features and brought them together in this new quarterly, LEADING COMICS.

The first issue of LEADING COMICS opened with a somewhat flamboyant but not overly original blurb; nonetheless, it was an inviting one and not without promise:

> From today on, the grim hosts of gangdom have a new and powerful combine of righteousness to contend with...You know all these heroes...Now follow them as they pool their vast powers* to lash out with crushing force against dark demons of destruction in the hand of a mastermind of machiavellian cunning and power!
>
> But how came these gallant figures to join in mortal combat against the arch-criminal and his glittering galaxy of goons? Strangely enough, it was the arch-criminal himself who brought them together!
>
> Turn the page...read on...learn how the super-ego of a super-crook led him to pit himself against these modern knights of the round table.

Yes, turn the page and you find The Hand, "the greatest criminal the world has ever known," being told by his doctor that "The x-rays are conclusive." He has less than a month to live. There is no hope. The Hand -- a Napoleon of crime, whose masterstrokes have stunned the world! An enigma the police have never solved...devises a scheme to play the greatest game of all! He will outwit the cleverest brains on the side of the law! He will make the world remember him forever!

He proceeds to engineer prison-breaks and gather the master criminals of the day: Professor Merlin, the Red Dragon, Big Caesar, the Needle, and the Dummy...into a single coalition of crime.

Issuing a challenge to the as-yet unacquainted heroes, he causes them to assemble and deploy against the five surrogate villains. Green Arrow and Speedy defeat Dr. Merlin in Death Valley. The Star-Spangled Kid and Stripesy overcome the Needle in Panama. The Crimson Avenger and Wing outwit Big Caesar on Broadway. The Shining Knight whips the Red Dragon in the Wamona Valley. And finally the Vigilante (Stuff stayed in DETECTIVE COMICS) foild the Dummy in Hollywood.

But the Hand remains at large! Mocking the reasembled heroes he reveals (via telescreen) his hiding place. They cannot harm him; he is a dying man.

Then comes the phone call from the Hand's physician. A new treatment is devised. He can be saved! Battling in frantic hope now against the combined forces of good, the Hand ends his career ironically, accidentally electrocuted.

In all, it was not a bad beginning. Essentially a collection of repetitious adventures, the first LEADING COMICS was better integrated than some "combined-adventure" comicthologies. But while not really bad (for its type) the first issue of LEADING creates a discouraging impression of formula, a sorry lack of

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* The "powers" referred to were not the superhuman or supernatural powers held by such as Superman or the Spectre. None of the Seven Soldiers possessed any such "powers." One can only surmise that the writer was somewhat confused, or else that he was using the word in its more mundane sense, referring to the powers of unusually (but not unnaturally) keen minds and trained bodies.

elan which boded ill for the series.

And the foreboding was borne out in LEADING COMICS #2, wherein the Black Star and another collection of villains run the adventurers through an almost identical dequence of challenge and chase. And issue after issue of LEADING offered discouragingly little variation on the theme. Perhaps that is all the more reason why a shift in the standard plot-line was welcomed when it came in the best of the LEADING group's adventures, that of "The King of the Hundred Isles" in LEADING COMICS #10. This adventure was instigated by Professor Moresby, superior and confidante of the Shining Knight.

A scientific expedition has disappeared in the Pacific, and Professor Moresby seeks Justin's aid in the search. Justin calls on hisfellow adventurers, and the Seven Soldiers set sail.

A Pacific storm, a mysterious "ghost ship", a hidden reef and the Seven are shipwrecked. They drift to different islands only to find their usual alignment of teams badly disordered.

The Crimson Avenger and Speedy team up to make a rather comfortable adjustment to tropic isle living, only crooks are encountered, and the Avenger and Speedy are bound and left on a rock to be drowned by the rising tide. They escape, however (their bonds are eaten by little fish), overcome and maroon the crooks, and set out in a motorboat which they appropriate from the baddies.

The Green Arrow and the Vigilante land on the home island of the King himself, a remarkably Eney-looking fugitive from justice who has established an island-empire all his own. Much combat later, the island itself sinks beneath the waves, leaving King, cum henchmen, and the two heroes, to escape in opposite directions.

Stripesy and Wing (now there's a team for you) find an island where several of the King's "nobles" are living high by mercilessly exploiting the descendents of long-ago shipwrecked colonists. These poor quasi-indigenous folk are pacifists by tradition; further, the "nobles" have been passing themselves off as representatives of the King's government, and the result is nothing less than tax-slavery for the poor yokels.

Well, our two social reformers, Stripesy with his unguided muscles and Wing, looking ridiculous as ever in his baggy trunks, almost overcome evil but are instead overcome by evil, and as the chapter ends, they face a painful and protracted death.

The Shining Knight and the Star-Spangled Kid, in their turn, find the missing expedition over which the entire mess began (remember?), stranded but safe, merrily carrying on the icthyological research it was originally intended to accomplish. Criminals arrive, the Kid is captured but Justin escapes despite being knocked out, as his horse bears him, all unknowing, into the sky where he regains his senses. Justin promptly returns to earth, saves the Kid, whereupon they set out to round up their separated comrades and defeat the bad guys. It takes them two more chapters of running battle, but they succeed.

And that, that was the best of the fourteen Seven Soldiers adventures.

The Seven Soldiers of Victory lasted until 1945, appearing quarterly for four and one-half years before they were dropped. LEADING COMICS then became a cute-little-funny-animals comic aimed at what even we pre-adolescent readers of the former LEADING called "little kids."

The Seven Soldiers of Victory, as a group, never attained great success, and it might be well to ask why. I can think of at least two reasons:

1. As the sum of its parts, LEADING COMICS was made up of sadly non-viable ingredients. Only Green Arrow survives of the Seven Soldiers (along with his sidekick Speedy), and despite Green Arrow's recent "election" to the JLA, even he has never been a star of the first magnitude.

   Lacking characters capable of generating the interest stirred by the likes of the Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkman, Spectre, and Wonder Woman (all members of the old JSA), LEADING could never hope to be anything but a pale, washed-out imitation of ALL-STAR COMICS, which is, of course, exactly what it was.

2. Accepting the innate weakness of the characters in the group, the Seven Soldiers might still have been made to amount to something, except for the at-best barely mediocre art and the simply very bad writing of their adventures.

   Not even the unifying theme of a JSA-like league of crime-fighters was developed very well, the Seven remaining a rather loose association throughout their joint career. Their foes were even duller than the heroes, and the stories were admirable for plot no more than for characterization.

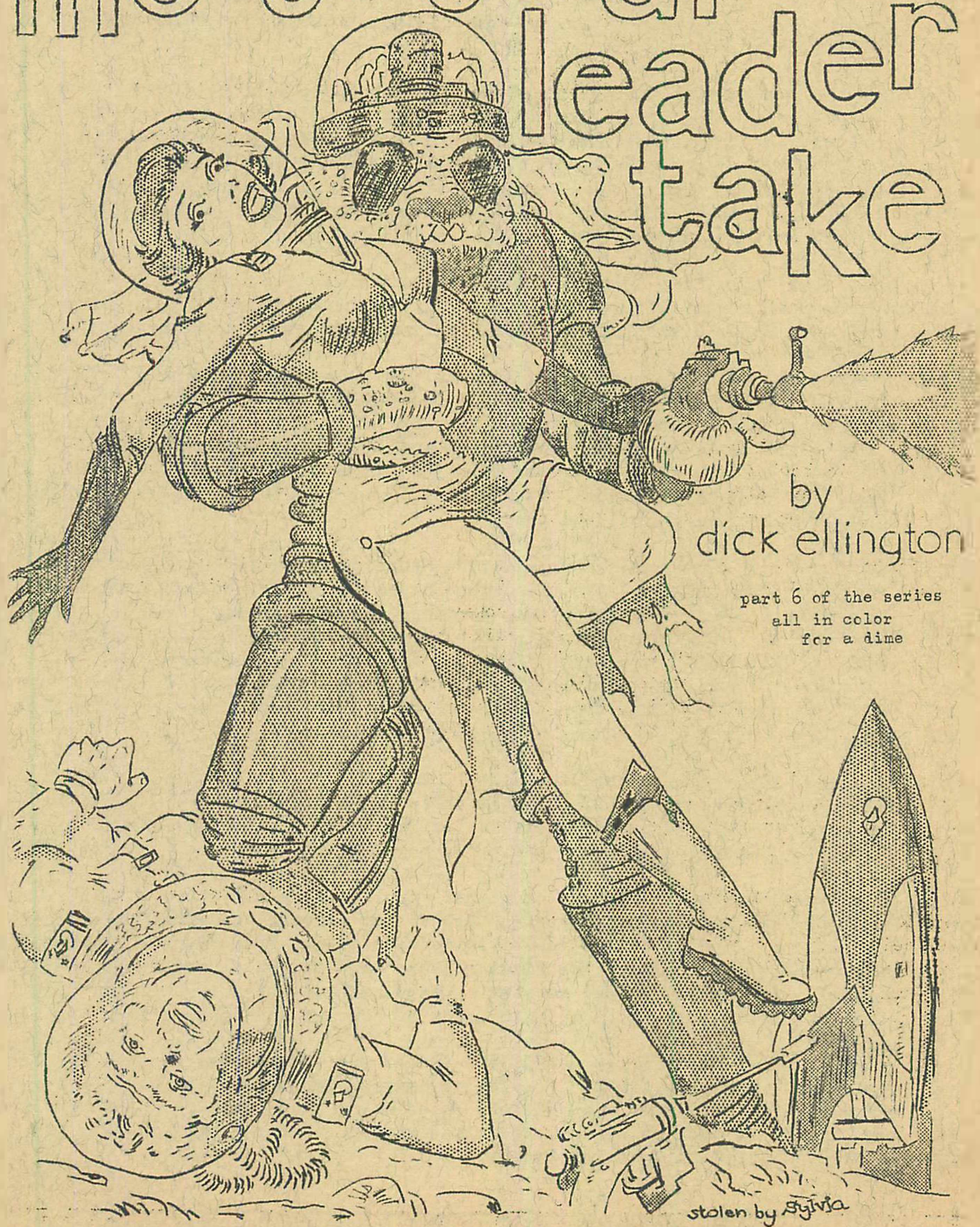
In short, LEADING COMICS had neither any externally-provided raison d'etre nor that self-provided justification of art, the fact that it is art. The wonder is not that LEADING survived no long than it did, but that it did not perish far sooner.

By the way, if you've been counting the Soldiers of Victory all through this article and you keep getting eight instead of Seven:

Star-Spangled Kid
 Stripesy
Shining Knight
Crimson Avenger
 Wing
Vigilante
Green Arrow
 Speedy

...the lesser halves of teams being indented...it's Wing who's causing your distress. I mean it's bad enough that Stripesy was a servant, and that Speedy was an assistant ...but at least they were white. You don't expect a non-caucasian servant to be counted, do you?

me to your leader take



by
dick ellington

part 6 of the series
all in color
for a dime

stolen by Sylvia

Even during my really active comic book buying days (circa 1938-44) I didn't have any illusions about the quality of what I was plunking down my dimes for. I realized even then that comic books in general were pretty crude items, and, toward the last I was a little ashamed of them and began trying to conceal them from my more intelligent friends.

With this sort of a situation the advent of the Fiction House line as a major comics publisher (actually the very first FIction House comics started somewhat earlier) in 1940 was quite welcome. Not that these were Adult Comic Books, you understand -- far from it. With the possible exceptions of MISS FURY and a very few others there just ain't no such thing. But these were definitely aimed at a teenage and young slob audience rather than at the little kids, and this game them a glamorous air for me which the rest of the comics of the ara just didn't have.

And of course, about this time I was beginning to take an active interest in that mysterious Other Sex and the liberal injections of half-clad, impossibly-dimensioned broads that Fiction House dished out was definitely a big part of their attraction.

Starting with the antedeluvian bedsheet JUMBO, by 1940 they also had JUNGLE, FIGHT, and PLANET on the stands, and later added WINGS and RANGERS (of Freedom) to the line. Oddly enough I read them all actively at the time except PLANET, probably because about this time I had already discovered AMAZING and FANTASTIC, thereby neatly by-passing the comic book stf stage. I guess it's just as well, because those first issues of PLANET were about as abysmal as anything I can think of in the comic book line, and I can think of some real bad ones.

Unlike most other comic book publishers, Fiction House never relied very strongly on central characters for a drawing card, figuring instead on a very definite theme and style for their whole line and letting this dominate the characters. From the circulation they enjoyed, they were obviously quite right in this policy and never varied much from it. Not that there weren't popular and long-lived characters -- Rangers of Freedom, Sheena, Captain Wings, and a few others lasted quite well -- but they never achieved the individual prominence of the Big Red Cheese, Supprman, Batman, et al...nor were they allowed to by the publishers.

But Fiction House didn't really need anything like this. They had realized, well ahead of their competitors in the field, that there was a big audience in the older teen - young adult market and proceeded to capitalize on this quite successfully by merrily ladling out liberal dollops of their own peculiar ideas of sex.

Not that there was anything in the way of actual copulation in the strips. Quite the contrary in fact. The morals of the heroes were so far above reproach as to make one suspect their manhood, and of course the villains were always frustrated in their evil aims, albeit in the nick of time. The Fiction House idea of sex -- and remember that it was financially successful -- was to show as many half-clad females per page as possible, and they needled the mags up with doses of bondage and torture to boot.

You could pick up any Fiction House mag of the 40s or 50s and be sure of finding liberal helpings of partially clothes females of amazing proportions being tied up, beaten, tortured, and threatened with farious Fates Worse than Death. Not to mention a little cosy female contact, a la the recently discussed Wonder Woman* just to liven things up. A little something for everybody.

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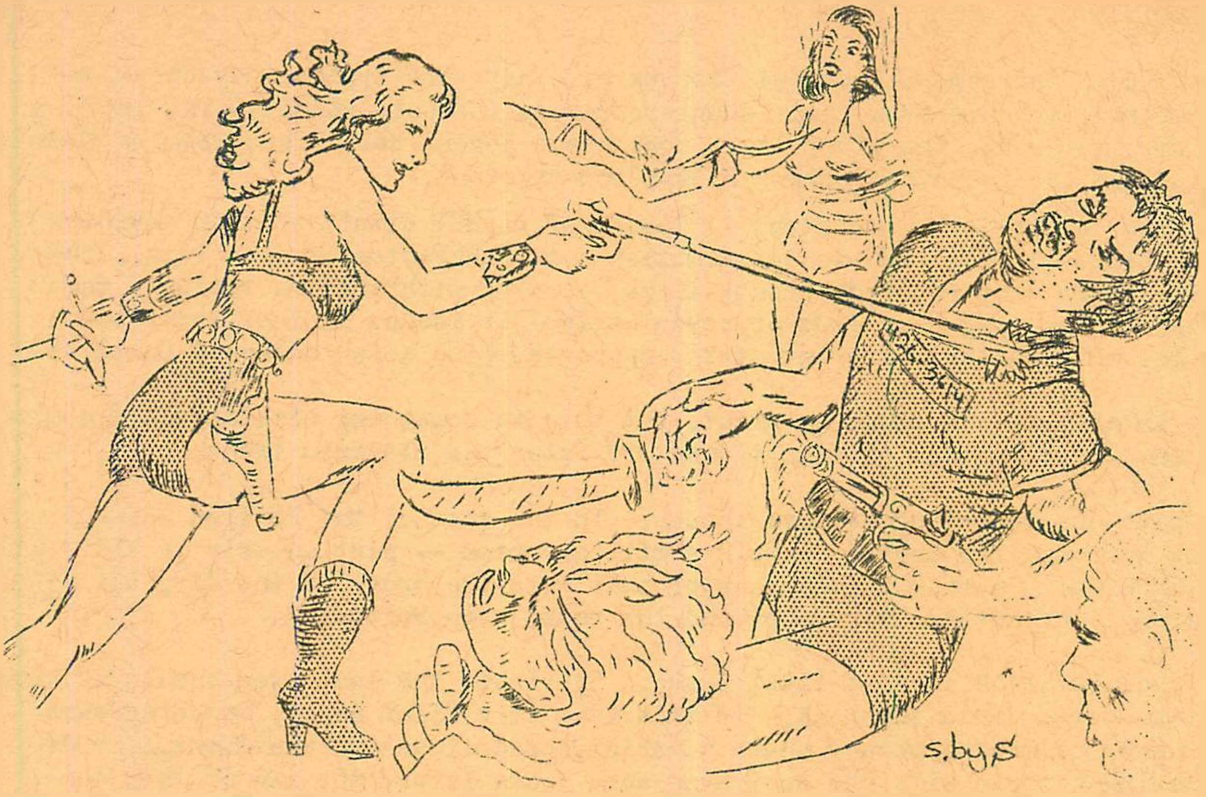
*Recently discussed by Jim Harmon, briefly, in XERO 3. To be discussed in far greater detail by Larry Ivie and Lee Anne Tremper, most likely in XERO 7.



Let's examine that something for everybody, by picking up a random copy of a Fiction House mag. I'll use JUMBO No. 141 for November, 1950, because it's to hand. The lead story features Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, replete with long blonde hair and clad in the typical spotted bathing suit and a few bangles. For [illegible] interest there is an equally statuesque brunette in a two-piece fur bathing suit and bangles. Both are liberally man-handled several times and tied up once apiece. The plot? Don't be silly.

The Ghost Gallery features a showgirl in appropriately scanty costume who is killed at the end.

Next some the Hawk, who, incidentally, was also quite a long-lived character. His female accomplice, Velvet, sports shorts and an off-the-shoulder blouse, plus the usual blonde hair and dimensions. I doubt this costume would really have gone over very well in the historical era in which it's set, libertine pirates or no. Velvet gets tied up several times also.

Long Bow, an American backwoodsy affair, features a brunetter clad neatly in buckskins (remind me to discuss leather fetishism some time). The end piece is another Sheena, this time featuring what I suppose the artist considers to be Negro women clad in clever little form-fitting crocodile costumes. This strip is remarkable in that Sheena doesn't get tied up once. But that's the way things went at Fiction House.

Not that I have any objections to the gratification of the various fetishes so prevalent in modern society, but unfortunately that's all Fiction House had to offer. Their stories were on a par -- a low one -- with everything else on the market, showing little imagination or thought, monstrous technical inaccuracies, and just about every other fault you can think of, redeemed only in part by an occasional piece of really superior art.

PLANET was, at first, an exception to the rule in that it featured very little of this kind of sex, but it was also generally worse than the other mags of the line in other ways. Looking over these early issues of PLANET I am really appalled at how bad they were in those early days. The covers are about the only thing that was even moderately competent in the way of art, and significantly, that was one of the only items that

stayed pretty much the same throughout the years. They were typical boy-babe-bem affairs, indistinguishable from their counterparts on the pulp PLANET. The interior art was clumsy and crudd, the story lines monotonous beyond belief and with no thought behind them. And the technical work was just non-existent.

With a few minor exceptions, the first 11 issues of PLANET didn't contain anything memorable. About all they did was to establish a few characters and an idea...and even the characters were far from steady items, varying with amazing rapidity from issue to issue. Figuring a maximum of seven strips per issue, in the first eleven issues a total of eighteen different strips appeared, plus a few one-shot features.

The variety in artists was almost as great, but this is something Fiction House seemed to delight in generally, and it didn't ease off fater the eleventh issue.

PLANET did have one redeeming feature though. In the rest of the Fiction House line the by-lines were usually beefed up with a military rank -- particularly in WINGS and RANGERS OF FREEDOM. Captain this and Major that were the order of the day, but at PLANET apparently promotions were slow and the ranks were omitted.

Let's take a closer look at that first issue. By rights the lead item should be something a little better than the rest. In this case it's Flint Baker, who progressed through a number of metamorphoses under a variety of artists and was eventually demoted to sharing a strip with one Reef Ryan some years later, the two of them constituting the Space Rangers. This first one is credited to Dick (Frankenstein) Briefer, and is a fairly average example of the kind of crud PLANET ran at the time.

As with most PLANET strips, the time is indeterminate but in the first strip the time could probably be pinned down to the near future. This particular story is titled "Flint Baker and the One-Eyed Monster Men of Mars." The title page is a one-panel affair showing an utterly meaningless array of futuristic machinery and the brief but confusing explanatory note: "When Fletcher Baker's scientist father died, Fletcher was left with the task of completing his rocket ship, to be sent to Mars. Now it is finished, and is ready for magic ((?)) flight!" Yeah, sure.

Baker is a complete Babbitt personally. He favors a wide-collared trenchcoat and ascot scarf on Earth, and looks a little like Bulldog Denny, but in space he switches to a more futuristic outfit for reasons unknown. In this first issue we are treated to an attempt at an actual beginning. For reasons never explained (certainly not because of the danger), Baker picks for the crew of his rocketship three prisoners from a state prison: Grant, Godwin, and Parks, all supposedly ex-mechanics.

They take off without incident in Briefer's idea of a space ship, a torpedo-shaped affair with lots nice chrom and ornaments. Naturally enough, as soon as they get into space (Mars allofasudden looms hugely ahead) they discover Mimi Wilson of the New York Globe hiding out in the provision room. Briefer didn't have the knack for drawing sexy chicks but she is obviously supposed to be a blonde version of Lois Land.

En route to Mars the three ex-convicts tell of their "crimes". They get one-third of a page apiece and the stories ought to get some sort of special Banality Award.

"I'm Harry Parks. My fireman on my locomotive was drunk. He wanted to run the engine himself. He whipped out a gun and threatened me! A shovel put him to sleep for godd. Fate was against me, and I was sent up for murder!"

"I'm Phil Godwin. Some ganster fell in love with my kid sister. She thought she loved him, and refused to listen to me. The crook was rotten through and through. At the wedding I lost my head...." (He shot the bounder.)

"I'm Cliff Grant. Years ago, I worked for a man who was crazy. But he had hypnotic powers and used me to carry out his plots. I was picked up for murder. Later, he was discovered and put in jail. But he escaped."

You bet.

After "weeks of monotonous travelling" they reach Mars and what do you know...they land right next to a battered spaceship which contains a skeleton and a mesagge warning them to keep away from the dark side ((!!!)) of Mars. Don-da-dom-dom.

The canali of Mars are just handy super highways and they join the traffic pattern in a futuristic car they just happen to have along and end up at a "wondrous city." The inhabitants are humanoid, naturally, and it seems Baker and Co. are just in time to fight tha last load of earthmen who have set up a dictatorship on that mysterious dark side of Mars, led by the villainous Sarko, "last of the wicked earthmen", and staffed mainly by these one-eyed critters who are apparently just a head with a prehensile tail and legs.

In the first attack Mimi and the Princess of the city (a brunetter for contrast) are kidnapped by the monsters. Flint and the boys take off in hot pursuit for the dark side (I can't help it, I keep giggling every time they mention the dark side of Mars) where they don black cloaks because with them "...we'll be invisible here on the dark side." Sure. Sarko has Mimi and the Princess atrapped down to his version of a Fiendish Machine. Coincidence rears its ugly head again. He's the same evil hypnotist who fouled up good old Cliff Grant. There's a little tussle and Sarko is beaten down. End of strip. Exciting, wasn't it?

Also present in the fifst issue is Auro, Lord of Jupter, who managed to survive a surprisingly long time, though as usual he went through a variety of changes en route. The idea for this one was quite obviously lifted straight out of Burroughs (no, silly, Edgar Rice). Auro is a sort of combination Tarzan and John Carter.

Auro is the son of a 21st-century couple (one of the few times where they bothered to tie down a time) out for a little cruise in space. Their ship is hit by a flaming meteor (!) and crashes on Jupiter where the parents are killed. A kindly old sabre-toothed tiger rescues the boy and raises him, sharing his raw meat and all. "The tremendous gravitational force of this planet slowly turns his earthly muscles to steel." Hahn? You figure it out.

When he becomes an adult he proceeds to conquer the local natives, ape-like critters, and become their king. From here the story deteriorates into a straight action strip with Auro saving various earth chicks who conveniently happen by from various villain or alien menaces.

Somewhere along the line they killed poor Auro off, then proceded to revive him by having Dorna, Princess of Juiter (don't ask me where she came from) transfer the "spirit" of Chet Edson, young earth scientist, into his body. We then have Auro,

now clad in fancy space togs, continuing to make the hero scene with the ghost of Chet Edson hanging around and interfering whenever it's convenient to the story.

Another comparatively long-lived character in the first issue was the Red Comet. He's particularly interesting because, unlike most of the PLANET central characters he was possessed of a special power, the ability to increase or decrease his size by twisting a dial on his "intra-atomic space adjuster." His existence is otherwise never explained at all and he is referred to regularly as "The Mystery Man of Space."

Let's look at a typical adventure of the Red Comet from the seventh issue. A space ship lands on an unexplored planet "somewhere in outer space" to do a little exploring. The explorers discover a race of giants and their terrified cries bring the Red Comet to the rescue (how he hears their hollering in space isn't explained). He reassures them that the giants are just harmless clods (they're actually kind of cute) and proceeds to make friends with the giants by expanding to their size. It seems they have a problem. The Stickers, tiny worm-like affairs with unicorn-like horns on their heads are bedeviling them by -- you guessed it -- sticking them. Red Comet attacks them but is pinned down. One of the friendly giants comes to the rescue by lapping up the Stickers who immediately proceed to stick holes in his innards. Red Comet reduces himself and his ship to miniature size and flies into the giant's intestines where he proceeds to ray the Stickers down. (Why he hasn't done this before is something we won't worry about.)

So now "These giants have nothing to fear, but the next adventure of the Red Comet holds terror and peril enough to fill the universe."

The fourth issue contains one really funny item -- Kenny Carr of the Martian Lancers. Only this one episode appeared and it was obviously a spur-of-the-moment product. Possibly some other artist missed a deadline or the editors were just feeling cute that day. Anyway, the strip is quite obviously a straight Bengal Lancers affair and (also obviously) had been drawn for use in some other mag -- possibly FIGHT.

It starts with the hero preparing to go back to London, having completed his term of enlistment. The colonel and one of Carr's friends scheme to get him to re-enlist by planting a couple of fake natives aboard a train to drop a word in his hearing, about a coming attack. Loyal, Carr rushes back to the post and re-enlists, but of course the attack does come off, and Carr is the hero of the day.

The uniforms are all strictly Indian Service, as are the natives, and such place names as Basha, and the Eastern Border. By simply substituting Martian for Bengal in the title, and Earth for England in the opening paragraph, they fob the thing off as a space story. Definitely a funny one.

The sixth issue saw the beginning of what could have been a moderately interesting strip: Crash Barker and his Zoom Sled, by-lined Charles M. Quinlan. This strip was very definitely set in present time, and while the art was pretty mediocre, the plotting was adequate and a little more realistic than the norm; and some of the science was quite good. It was also notable for serial stories, something PLANET had carefully avoided up to this time.

The hero is a stunt pilot and inventor, and has a typical girl friend and big tough sidekick (named "Wheel" Barrow yet). The story opens with a crowd jeering Barker's newly-invented "zoom sled" which Barker is about to demonstrate. The taunts from the bystanders include: "Baloney! Take that looney cart back to the comic books!" A jealous airport-owner's son and a sinister group of foreign agents are also introduced.

In the next issue, while Crash is demonstrating his zoom sled to a now-awed crowd, the foreign agents invade the hangar and try to steal the plans. The airport-owner's son, Bart, with the same idea in mind, discovers the mechanic knocked out. Bart pulls a gun and goes for the agents but is shot himself. Barker completes his test flight by landing the ship inside the hangar, where he discovers the body of Bart, and takes off again just in time to overtake and shoot down the foreign agents.

The zoom sled itself was rather a silly looking affair but it's interesting to note (this was 1940, remember) that on land it travelled without wheels, on compressed air.

The following issue picks up in time directly after this, with Crash receiving a letter from the War Department informing him: "Enclosed find plans of your ridiculous 'Zoom' sled, as you call it. Such a contraption could never fly, float, or run as you claim. Our shelves are already overcrowded with similar hair-brained schemes. Why not try building one of those perpetual motion machines. We believe you would be able to waste your time much better." Crash and his friends get a hearty laugh out of this and remark that they're glad they didn't submit plans for Crash's new "atmospheric preseure gun." They go out the next day and casually capture a band of pirates operating from a plane -- just to test the gun out.

Apparently the idea didn't catch on well enough because the next issue featured a new artist and a new strip, called Crash Parker. He had unaccountably become, overnight, an "interplanetary flyer" and was now off with the rest of the herd, fighting monsters on other worlds.

This same issue saw the beginning of Cosmo Corrigan, the first attempt at humor in PLANET and pretty weak all around. He was titled Cosmic Corrigan in the next issue and then back to Cosmo in the next. But that brings us up to the 12th issue and he was dropped altogether right there.

With this twelfth issue, Gene Fawcette took over as editor and radical changes began to take place, though many of the characters, being pretty much nonentities anyway, remained. The artists were completely replaced by a new crew for one thing, a little more attention was paid to the stories, and the magazine's policy was pulled into line with the rest of the Fiction House group -- in other words, more sex was added.

The improvement continued on through Paul Payne's term as editor and was even more pronounced when J.F. Byrne took over. The basic theme was the brawny hero (often undistinguished by any special powers), the leggy chick, and the alien menace, still, but the way it was handled was altered radically.

There had been a few feeble attempts at letter columns in the early issues, but one of the later editors, probably Payne, was responsible for the initiation of a real letter column: the Vizigraph. This wasn't a bad item at all, and was quite honestly handled. They initiated the idea of making the staff responsible for answering the various challenges thrown by the readers at the more blatant technical flaws, and this went a long way toward eliminating them.

The Vizigraph and the contemporary changes in the magazine certainly indicate that PLANET's readers were becoming a lot more intelligent. Some of the complaints were quite sound and you can detect an occasional fannish reference here and there. A couple of examples are indicative, and certainly reminiscent of the Sarge Saturn type of pulp letter column.

From No. 46:

> "At last! A Vizigraph! Now I can tell you what I like and dislike. I'm starting with -- you guessed it -- the cover!

Now the art work is swell, but sizzling comet-tails, can't you change the ideas? I mean the eternal triangle -- the guy, gal, and the goon, usually called a bem or bug-eyed monster. It's positively boring. I noticed you had a space-scene (the first one) on issue No. 43, but on issue No. 44 you went back to the same old stuff with a purple octopus (which owns a face), holding an oversized bubble which contains a girl, while the her dashes to the rescue.

"One other thing. In the strip 'Life on Other Worlds' it was stated that Pluto was next. But I found Callisto was. Yeeps. Where's the space go? I'd better blast off.

John Grossman
Des Moines, Iowa"

And on the technical end, get this little exchange from No. 49:

"Dear Sirs:
Your theory on the possibility of Earth once being a colony of Venus is all very interesting, but has one serious flaw. When the Venusian colonists transplanted their supposedly well-developed brain into an anthropoid ape, the author assumed that the offspring of the biped would have large brains too. This is one of the chief fallacies of pseudo-evolutionists, for it is a fundamental principle that acquired characteristics do not reappear in the offspring. For example, if you cut the tails off two rats and mate them, the offspring will still have tails.

"Also, it is not unusual for man and apes, both belonging to the same family, to be so different. The domesticated housecat and the man-eating tigers of Bengal are of the same family, and there is certainly a world of difference between them.

"I don't see why so much comment is aroused by the Voltamen in Lost World as to their language. It is sublimely obvious to anyone studying Latin that their slang is nothing more than Latin translated into English, but kept in the same form with the verb at the end and the other parts of the sentence placed accordingly. To add to this, almost direct Latin derivatives, such as Video station, etc. are to be found in the Latin lingua.

William Maye
Detroit, Michigan"

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"Dear Mr. Maye:
The article does not claim that the immediate offspring of the apes with transplanted brains also had the identical brains of their parents. It states that this branch of the ape family was the one from which present day man evolved. Children born of apes with highly developed brains would have a markedly different environment from ordinary ape children. Their entire training and education at the hands of such creatures would leave them tremendously superior animals at adulthood. Such a head start toward civilization was given the type of ape used by the colonists from Venus and thus he evolved through millions of years into modern man. The preocess was not instantaneous.

Sincerely,
H. McLeod Kensington, Ph.D."

I hope Maye was properly put in his place.

Apparently PLANET was determined to have one humorous strip, for the 13th issue saw the beginning of Norge Benson, which was really quite amusing at times. It featured a teenage boy in an amorphous arctic-type situation, aided by a pet polar bear, a reindeer and some friendly penguins, with the protagonists being a group of villainous penguins, led by Slug, who wore a slouch hat and smoked a pipe. Actually, it was pure fantasy rather than science fiction, even by PLANET's admittedly elastic standards, and wasn't too popular for it gradually shited its emphasis until it was really just another action strip with just the polar bear, Frosty, retained as comic relief.

Gale Allen (variously accompanied by a Women's Space Battalion, Girl Squadron, and Girl Patrol) started in issue number 4 with bad art and worse plotting, but managed to pick up a little at a time, over the next few issues. The strip was consistently credited to Fred Nelson, but the drastic improvements evident in the artwork indicate a shift in artists somewhere along the line. By No. 11 it was obviously popular enough to be retained in the big shakeup of No. 12, though of course with a new artist. The idea of a female lead was undoubtedly a main attraction and the sex element picked up steadily from 12 on.

Let's look at a day in the life of this Average Space Miss as she was handled by Douglas McKee in issue 32. From a rather plain, tough, short-haired military chick she has evolved into a lush-figured, mostly unclad, long-haired blonde. She and her Girl Squadron (more of a chorus line than anything else) are investigating the disappearance of ships along the spaceways. They spot wreckers towing salvage and pause to inquire at the salvage planet. Natch it's the pirates, lizard-like humanoids who preceed to capture the unarmed girls with a net. The pirates are apparently running a little slave business as a sideline and toss the girls into a prison where Gale makes contact with a handsome male earthman who's also a prisoner. He's also a whiz of a scientist and immediately rigs a cutting torch out of Gale's planochrono (wristwatch) and cuts them loose. We then have the typical last big battle and destruction of the pirates. In other words, the same old jazz but lots pretty women.

No. 12 saw the advent of the popular Star Pirate also. This was originally credited to "Leonardo Vinci" but as usual was tossed merrily from hand to hand for more beefin up. Star was technically a pirate and several times did actually engage in a little mild piracy. Actually of course, he had been driven into his life of crime by the evil interplanetary smugglers.

He went through various sidekicks, including a distinctly fishy looking Martian and a humanoid cyclops indentified as a "Trodelyte," or Trody for short, though I never did figure out if this was his name or his race.

Although Star Pirate always acted in typically heroic fashion, I think it was the air of somewhat illicit behavious that made him so popular. He had a black ship called variously the Revenge and the Vengeance, and was always at least a little at odds with the law.

By issue 32, the Robin Hood of Space (they were being honest about it by then) takes on space gangsters who are trying to take over a legitimate space run. Star is approached by a Space Patrol officer who grudgingly asks his help: "Pirate, this is unofficial...I've never approved of your methods, but you do get things done, and that's what's important now."

Star and Gura, his Martian friend, take off but they are too late -- another commercial liner has already been destroyed and the pirates are fleeing. Star halts his

ship in mid-space to search for survivors. Things technical go completely to pot here. For a space suit, Star sports a little glass helmet. Aboard the ship the windows (sic) are busted out all over the place, yet Star runs across a man without a space suit who is slowly dying (sic again). It is Blandow, owner of the shipping company. He gives Star some trinkets to take to his daughter Lara, who is (natch) another va-va-voom girl in two-piece bathing suit. She mistakes Star for another of the gangsters and puts him down. Stung by this, Star hires out with the rival shipping firm he's sure is behind the raids in an effort to help the girl. There's a big space-epic finale space battle and a big kiss for Star from the chick. Pretty nothing.

One of the more interestigg strips in PLANET was Mars, God of War. I'm a little vague as to whether he sprang into being full-fledged or was originally a villain in another strip. Whatever the origin, it utilized the interesting idea of an evil central character with a variety of nondescript hero types thwarting his evil plans. PLANET had tried it briefly in the first issue with Quorak, Super Pirate, but dropped it immediately. This was a gimmick several publishers tried at different times with verying degrees of success. I can think of the Claw right offhand, and Frankenstein at one stage of his highly colored comic career; Landor, Maker of Monsters, and (if you want to stretch things to admit a creature of equivocal morality) the Heap.

Mars was cast as a spirit with powers that seemed to vary at the whim of the artist. Normally he worked by entering the body of a person and influencing or controlling that person's actions for his own evil ends. Eventually it was decided to drop him and in issue 35 they pulled a really cute ploy that's worth relating in detail.

Mars had launched a series of conflicts on Earth, culminating in an anti-intellectual riot that leaves civilization on Earth mostly destroyed. But -- and I quote -- "Long years ago, a scientist foresaw this coming madness...and so he mysteriously disappeared. The same day, two infants were stolen from plexiplastic cribs. Exiling himself to the moon, Dr. Kort built a laboratory to house all culture of the decaying universe...There also, he reared the two children, instilling in their eager minds the knowledge their fathers scorned! And now comes MARS--"

The scientist is just completing the hypno-sleep education of the young man and woman when Mars discovers them. Kort gives each of the young people a powerful robot which is tuned to function to their mental commands. Mars takes over the boy's robot and attempts to kill Mysta, the girl. But she and the scientist destroy the robot, angering the boy -- "Why did it have to be my robot?"

Mars, sensing the discord, merges his will with the boy's. He then destroys the laboratory and kills the scientist, but Mysta senses his presence and kills the boy. Mars flees, but swears to return again, leaving us with: "A slender girl, along against the universe's most evil force...the God of War! She is a living temple of Man's essential goodness, is his last hope! CAN MARS STILL WIN?"

And there you have, slick as a whistle, a brand-new strip called Mysta of the Moon. Mars is around in the background in the next issue and is then eased out of the strip, leaving another underclothed, well-built heroine. They tried a variety of costumes and hairdoes on Mysta and the Vizigraph reflected outraged howls when they tried putting more clothes on her.

Issue 43 saw the beginning of another above-average strip: Futura, by John Douglas. It was exceptionally well-drawn and the story interest was well above average. In addition, though there was a sub-plot complete in each issue, the main story had a definite serial continuity from issue to issue with some really good character development.

The story opens on a dark street of Titan, a 21st century earth city. Marcia Reynolds, attractive and partially undressed as per PLANET rules, is on her way home from work. She feels she is being followed but a police check on the "radia-screen" shows nothing. Obviously, the copy says, she is imagining things. She agrees, for (in her own words) "...maybe he's right...'hy should anybody waylay a second-grade technical secretary? No money, no family...only a norm-plus rating in intelligence quota, energo-efficiency and mating potential...Who'd be after me?"

An invisible creature smashes in the window of her room and drags her off into space in a strange ship. The creature becomes visible inside the ship, a muscular, satyr-like humanoid semi-automaton with a bony chin and pointed ears. "Spehny," he croaks, "Terr bell gree, pojek surr-val...hee-hee-hee!" Meaning, "Specimen nine from Terra Belt Green for Project Survival!" The translation is provided by the creature's master, a small, dwarfed creature with an oversize cranium.

He takes the controls and "Now home!" he said, "and if you find our methods ruthless, Specimen Nine, it is because our needs are desperate..." They land at the city of Cymradia on the planet of Cymrad and it is apparent the girl is to be used for an experiment of some kind. "The life of our Cymrad race at stake...strong new flesh and blood is needed to feed and house our treasures of the mind."

As the story develops we find that the Cymrads are possessed of mighty, immortal brains, but their bodies are weak and there are now very few of them physically alive. These few, under the leadership of Mentor, their leader, are experimentig with various subjects kidnapped from around the universe to determine which species possesses the necessary qualities to serve as host bodies for the Cymrad brains.

Marcia, along with life-forms from a dozen worlds, is tested thoroughly and apparently has the potential they desire. She is classified and given the lab-name of Futura.

In the dungeons with the other prisoners she is soon the center of a group planning escape, but the Cymrads are watching her every move, pleased that she has leadership potential. Mentor devises a test of courage for her and sets the scene to give her a chance to escape. The strip ends with her heading out in a stolen flyer into the purple mists of Cymrad.

Futura has been underestimated though, and manages to get through the purple mists to Gargazzo, land or the Aborotes, where with the

aid of Jarl Nord who wears a powerful ring, she becomes the leader of the Aborotes and leads them against the Cymrads. By about the third or fourth strip the story has solidified and at the end of one of them Futura confronts Mentor on the visi-screen and informs him, "Futura by your naming, Mentor -- and by that name I'll conquer you. Take warning, big head -- this tower is ours and not until I lead my Aborotes to Cymrada will I return to earth as Marcia Reynolds."

This establishes the pattern for subsequent adventures which were quite well thought out. Some of the ideas show real imagination. In one issue, for instance, she encounters, practically simultaneously, several species of giant insects, a Tyrannosaur-like beast, a living tree which fights the beast to save her, and a race of strange beings that are part human and part moth. Certainly well above the run of the mill PLANET strip.

There were many other strips of course, but for the most part they were grey mediocrities best quickly forgotten. However, I've saved for dessert the most popular and undoubtedly the best strip PLANET ever produced -- Lost World.

The strip was credited to Thorncliffe Herrick and stayed in his able hands throughout its life. I don't recall any other strips by him, certainly none in PLANET, but he did quite a few of the little two-page stories which PLANET ran.

According to the Day Index, "Herrick" was actually a house name, and one of the writers whose works appeared under it was Jerome Bixby.

The setting of the strip was an Earth of the not too far distant future, devastated and with most of the inhabitants killed. The devastators are the Voltamen, surely among the best-known Alien Menaces and definitely one the best characterized. Of course they were typically cloddish villains in their actions, but they had, if not individually then certainly as a race, real character. They were humanoid, of a pale green complection with long vertical wrinkles in their faces, practically no lips, fangs and pugges noses. As befitted their ultra-regimented culture, they were uniforms of shapeless dark-green blouses and spike-topped helmets obviously patterned after those of the German army in World War I.

At first they spoke rather ordinarily, but later they developed a really distinctive speech pattern(see explanation by William Maye in the Vizigraph) that excited all sorts of pro and con comment from readers. Many identified it correctly as Latin-type phrasing, thusly: "We the switch pull." "The earthling it is!" "No--not fair is! Revenge my right is!" Sounds silly maybe, but it lent them a definite air of authenticity which most PLANET Menaces didn't have.

The hero was Hunt Bowman, a typically magnificent specimen with no special powers except the usual charmed life and some aptitude with a bow and arrow. Of course no explanation was offered as to why he kept using these primitive weapons when so many others were easily available to him. He was accompanied by the usual semi-clothesless, overdeveloped, long-legged blonde. Her name was Lyssa, and while she was never referred to directly as Hunt's woman, she was obviously, from several hints dropped, a bit more than a Person Friend of His.

For some time these two were pretty much along, but later, in one of the better episodes, they discover three teenagers -- two boys and a girl -- in suspended animation in a laboratory. They have been placed there by their father, a Brilliant Scientist, and are revived by Bowman. In the following scenes one of the boys is killed off by the Voltamen but the other, apparently inheriting his great surgical skill from his father, transfers the dead boy's brain to the body of a dead Voltaman, giving the earthies a rather unusual ally who pauses every now and then when

the strip bogs down to meditate and sigh a little over the cruel fate that has stuck him in this awful body.

At about this point, Herrick abandoned the aimless wandering bit and worked into the theme of Bowman and his little gang uniting all the remaining handfuls of earthmen to fight the Voltamen with the eventual hope of freeing the earth.

The art was excellent, certainly a cut above most of the rest of PLANET, and the story lines, while repetitious, were enlivened by an occasional, really good one; and even the poorer ones had fascinating detail, showing a really imaginative hand at work. Chases through subway tunnels, battles in Central Park, lookouts in the Empire State Building; all this lent a definite extra something to the strip.

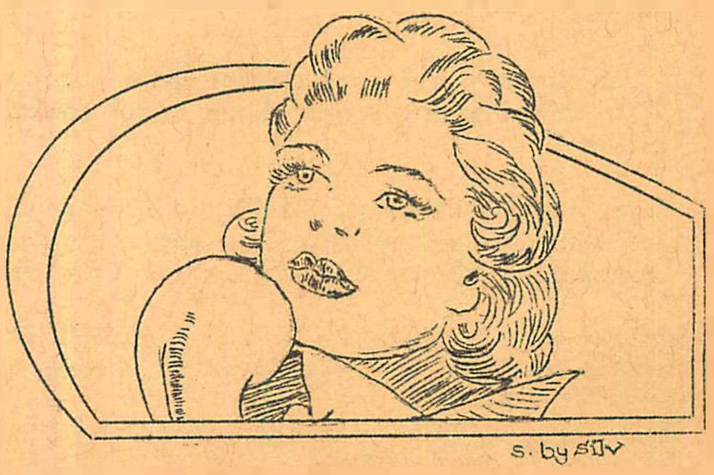
It was issue 36 that introduced the three teenagers, and in 37 Herrick followed this up with a trip to Volta, the invaders' home world. As the strip opens the four heroes are captured, but Bruce, in the Voltaman body, saves them, and Bowman says with determination, "First gather up their blasters -- we must learn Volta science. Somehow -- I don't know how -- we've got to rid the lost world of the Voltaman...We must contact other Earthmen...weld them -- and us -- into a powerful force! Well, let's start with those blasters...."

They follow this up by raying down a Volta patrol in fron of the 42nd St library and taking over their space ship which Bruce's Voltaman body is instinctively able to pilot. They take off but are boarded by a Volta inspection patrol. The others hide and Bruce greets the inspectors nervously, only to have them fall on their knees at the sight of him. Another happy ole coincidence -- Bruce's body is that of Prince Guth of Volta. The patrol informs him he must return to Volta, for his father, the King, dies of grief.

They head for Volta where Bruce-Guth greets his father. The hiding earthmen are discovered but Bruce weasels out of it when his father exclaims: "Then they are a gift for me, son? You remcalled my experiments on humans!" Later, in typical hairbreadth style they escape.

With this and several other issues we had a close look at the home world of the Voltamen and at their regimented dictatorial society. We are also informed that the rest of the solar system has been conquered and one issue features a combined revolt of the slaves from various planets.

But let's follow the crew through a typical adventure. In issue 49 the opening paragraph runs: "It was a fiendish devil-kingdom from the outer void that spawned those loathsome Voltans, and spewed them forth in monster spaceships against the other sky-worlds. So Earth lay shattered and devastated from their awesome blows. Yet some few Earthling survivors with immortal courage united in resistance. HUNT BOWMAN was their leader, and LYSSA, his faithful companion. And now they stood before the monument at Bunker Hill...."



There's a little moralizing about birthplaces of freedom and suchlike, then Bruce comments: "This cursed body I wear will ever be a symbol of their cruelty. But come. The outpost is in an old ship, named the 'Consitution.' The watcher reported Voltamen in the vicinity!"

But the Voltans have already captured the old man who watches from the Consitution and they demand that he translate papers they found on him. He refuses and they tie him to the mast and fire the ship. Hunt arrives in time to cut him loose but he is dying. He tells Bowman that the paper the Voltans took described the location in the Luray Caverns where a time capsule is buried -- and the capsule contains infommation on how to make an atomic bomb.

Hunt, Lyssa, and Bruce head for Virginia, but meanwhile Volta scientists have arrived with a new secret weapon called the hypnosphere. Naturally they land near the Luray Caverns and decipher the paper giving the location of the capsule. They decide to test their weapon there also.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, our three heroes have discovered an old steam engine, fired it up and set off highballing it for Virginia. The Voltan scientists have their hypnosphere set up and have equipped their troops with special glasses to resist its powers.

"Lever to Gamma adjust now. To twenty million ruds it advance!" orders the chief scientist.

The machine goes into action just as Hunt and Lyssa are asbout to dig up the time capsule. Along with a horde of wild dogs, a few other wild creatures, and a stray giant mutated spider, they are drawn toward the hypnosphere and led inside.

Bruce is also under the influence but falls down a ravine en route and lies stunned until the machine is shut off. He then frees Hunt and Lyssa and they take off after the Voltan scientists who are now in the process of digging up the time capsule themselves.

Hunt grabs a Voltan flyer and aims it at the cave entrance, jumping just before the crash. The flyer smashes the scientists and effectively seals the cave entrance and the atomic secret against all of them, though Hunt now has possession of the Voltans' hypnosphere.

Fun, huh?

A few words would be in order here about the possible tie-ins at Fiction house between their pulps and their comic books, but frankly I know little about this subject.

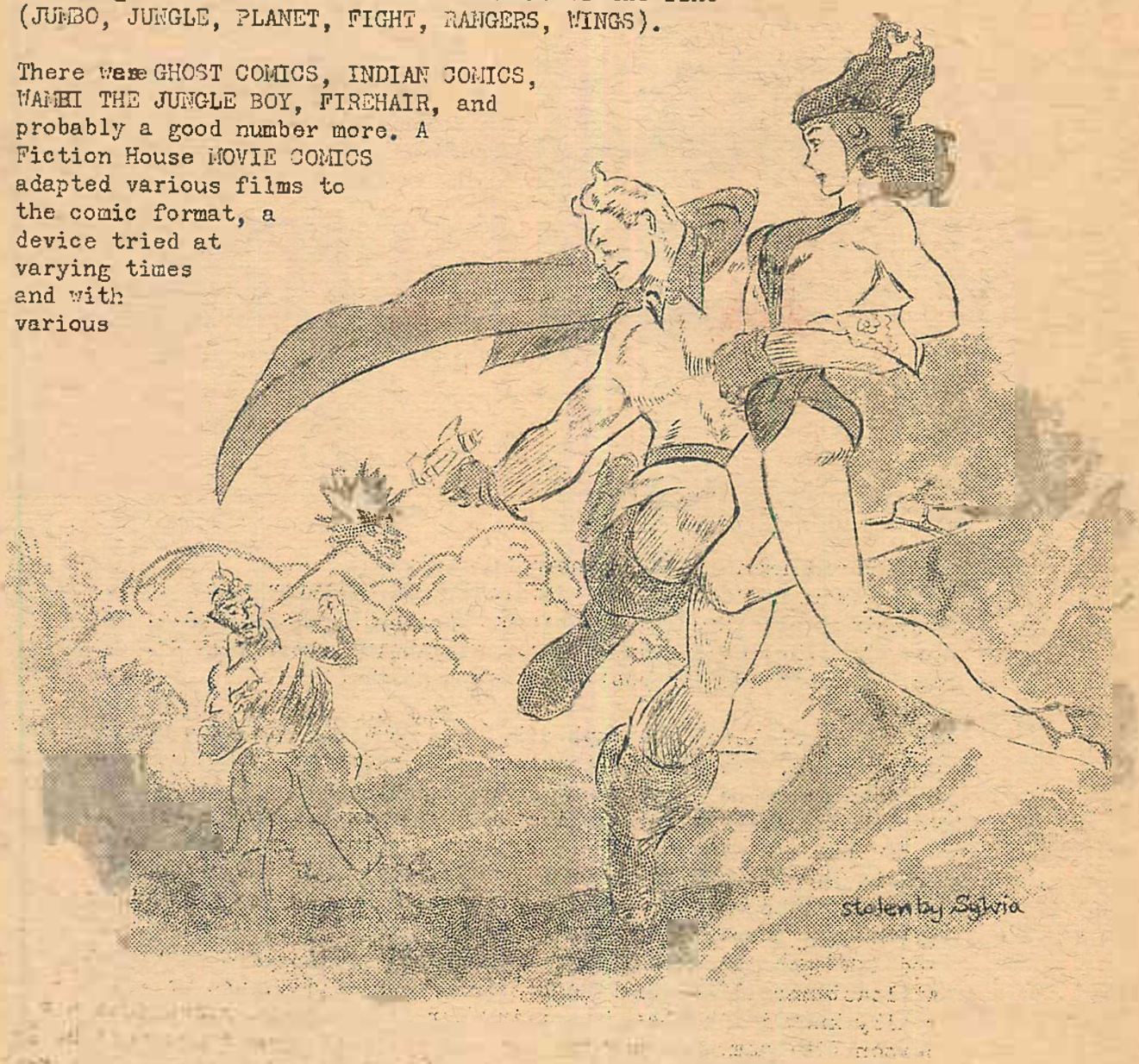
There was, obviously, PLANET COMICS and PLANET STORIES. I do not believe that the continuing characters in the comic series had text counterparts in the pulp magazine, although I am not absolutely certain that there was no correspondence.

There was a JUNGLE COMICS and a JUNGLE STORIES, and there was a pulp devoted exclusively to the adventures of Sheena, the leading heroine of JUMBO COMICS.

There was a WINGS pulp and there was WINGS COMICS, and also a FIGHT in each series.

To return to the Fiction House comics, there were quite a number of more or less specialized comics, other than the "Big Six" which formed the backbone of the line (JUMBO, JUNGLE, PLANET, FIGHT, RANGERS, WINGS).

There were GHOST COMICS, INDIAN COMICS, WAMBI THE JUNGLE BOY, FIREHAIR, and probably a good number more. A Fiction House MOVIE COMICS adapted various films to the comic format, a device tried at varying times and with various



degrees of success by National and Fawcett as well. And currently Dell is issuing movie adaptations.

The Fiction House line is long gone, of course, but several of its titles are currently being reissued by the "IW" comic reprint series, and worth looking into if you cannot get at copies of the originals.

To sum up PLANET COMICS -- even with the fantastic changes made by Fawcette, Fayne, and Byrne, I'd hardly call PLANET a great comic book. But the improvement it underwent over the years was truly remarkable.

Lost World alone was worth the ten cents to me any time, and can stand comparison with almost any strip around for interest, imagination, and originality.

EPISTOLARY INTERCOURSE

conducted by Pat

RICHARD KYLE

(95 West Gilman Street, Banning, California)

I like your new sub-title. It is far, far better than "The Unique Magazine," or "The Best in Science Fiction," for instance. Don't lose Castillo; he is one of your outstanding contributors. Even the cancellations on his post cards are superior.

The cover of Xero 5 was splendid. The new logo is excellent; I hope you keep it. The mimeography was rather erratic in my copy -- which is probably to be expected on a new machine -- but I should imagine you'll have everything straightened out next issue. /Fingers crossed./ Larry Ivie and Steve Stiles are both in fine form. Sylvia White's drawing for "Contention" and Dave English's for "Mesopotamia" are a couple of laps behind. The rest of the drawings do not impress me (although I suspect I'd like Reiss's stuff if he'd quit dabbing around and draw a continuous line for a change). I haven't been in touch -- at least olosely -- with fandom for a long while, and so I don't really know if the Les Gerber in Warren's cartoons represents a real person (the name and physical appearance lead one to suspect he is a composite of all adolescent fans). /The Les Gerber I know is a real individual, but now that you suggest it, he may also be the composite of all adolescent fans./ If he is real, though, I don't know, it doesn't seem right to publish them, no matter what his sins -- even if they are funny.

Well, you are soliciting opinions. If you are publishing poems (or at least these poems) for my sake, don't.

Harris' "The Finish Line" didn't quite live up to my expectations. But -- as Castillo would say -- it was interesting. Frankly, I thought Some of Your Blood had the same fake quality Robert Lindner's "Jet Propelled Couch" had. And for the same reason: the materials the authors interpolated or paraphrased were at variance with what I sensed were the real facts; neither work seemed psychologically consistent. Of course maybe it's me that has the tin ear.

I haven't read Rogue Moon yet, although I have it on order (I skipped it when it first came out because Gold Medal's science fiction is usually inferior, but Blish's review in F&SF sold it to me), but some of Blish's observations strike me as faulty.

I don't think the overwhelming majority of science fiction readers have made it clear that they actively distrust and dislike emotional content in stories, "even in the rare instances where the author has it under perfect control." I do think they actively distrust and dislike science fiction stories where the particular emotional content does not bear any coherent relationship with the physical situation of the story. This is a major flaw in the work of every one of the writers Blish cites, except Stuart -- and the Stuart stories were popular and well received. Science fiction, like every other distinct literary form, places some limitations on the emotional range of its stories. A romantic love story is irrelevant to science fiction just as much as a Mickey Spillane style murder is irrelevant to the romantic love story. Which isn't to say that people in science fiction can't be in love or death should be secondary to the primary theme of the stories and emotionally consistent with it. I've read too many stories by the authors Blish mentioned in which the characters and settings have had all the consistency of a Jane Austin story with George S. Patton, Jr. as the hero. It isn't that their characters are poorly drawn, it's that they belong in wholly different stories.

And I frankly question just how much craftsmanship had to do with the success of "Heinlein, Kuttner, and del Rey." Laurance Manning, for example, was as good a craftsman -- and for that matter, an imaginative craftsman -- but his style and viewpoint and emotional insights belonged to a previous generation. Heinlein and Kuttner and del Rey were just with it, that's all. They were steam engines and it was steam engine time; Manning was driving a damned fine horse and buggy. I suspect they would have been successful if they had written with all the finesse of Norvell Page.

Going back to Xero 4, Blish's comments on New Maps of Hell provided the only blood pressure rise for me in the issue. I have great admiration for Blish as a writer, and -- usually -- considerable respect for him as a critic; but I cannot understand his support of Amis' book.

If someone were to write a "survey" of the modern mystery story deifying George Harmon Coxe, exalting Henry Kane, brushing aside Raymond Chandler, ignoring Dashiell Hammett, upbraiding Arthur Conan Doyle for the paucity of sex and sadism in the Sherlock Holmes stories, and completely dismissing the contributions of Ellery Queen as an editor and anthologist, we can be sure -- no matter who the author might be -- that the book would provoke no more than a snort of amusement and a sigh of regret and soon find itself remaindered away to the 10¢ each, 3 for 25¢ tables of ill-managed second-hand book stores.

Yet New Maps of Hell thrust greatness on the shoulders of a competent Frederik Pohl, enthuses over Robert Sheckley's superficialities, scarcely mentions Robert A. Heinlein (the "excellent" index James Blish speaks of lists four entries under Heinlein's name -- Robert Sheckley has nine -- and two of these merely notebook titles), speaks not at

all of Olaf Stapledon, one of the foudding fathers of modern science fiction, condemns some of H.G. Wells' most powerful stories because they are not satirical, and describes the founder of modern magazine science fiction, John W. Campbell, Jr., as a "crank: and expresses the hope he be kicked out of science fiction (Amis had previously written of the emergence around 1940 of increased quality in magazine science fiction: "Why this happened when it did, or at all, I am not sure") -- yet New Maps of Hell does all this in its survey of modern science fiction, and rather than merriment, it produces shouts of praise and screams of outrage, and instead of dying on the remainder tables, it sells en masse in the drugstores and newsstands across the land.

Why? Mainly, it would seem, because the author's name is Kingsley Amis, and science fiction -- after all these years still dressing on public occasions in its out-of-date and threadbare inferiority comples -- defers to "important people" the way poor relations do to the rich, either by fawning servilely or by leaping for their throats.

It is beyond me, though, why James Blish, who is certainly no poor relation and who knows the history of science fiction as few current fans and writers do, chooses to praise this ineptly organized and shabbily researched book (and it is shabbily researched, regardless of the number of questionnaires Amis sent out: it was his responsibility to get the facts, not the writers' to send them to him). Certainly, it is written with charm and style; but charm cannot make up for a lack of factuality, and style of itself, no matter how pleasing, makes no book good. Blish speaks, too, of the many years Amis has read science fiction, but familiarity with a body of literature does not insure understanding of it (witness the legions of western story readers who know nothing of the western as an art form). Aside from that, the bins of "Yank Magazines: Interesting Reading" in the English Woolworth stores of the middle '30s are not likely to have provided a rounded view of American science fiction, or a chronological one, if the English magazine displays on American newsracks of the time offer a parallel; at any rate, there is no evidence in New Maps of Hell that they did.

The truth is that Kingsley Amis no more understands science fiction than the man who describes Moby Dick as "that fishing book" understand Melville. And because he does not understand, and because his literary reputation is what it is, his ill-thought-out utterences are bound -- by their very lack of accuracy -- to do science fiction more harm than good in the long run.

The literary reputation science fiction deserves -- in the measure it deserves -- will be determined by time and truth, not by any man, no matter what his name.

I think it is time science fiction took a good, direct look at itself and its history. I think it is time the field showed proper respect for the men who made it. H.G. Wells was a far better writer than he is given credit for by tho literary critics and by Amis. Stapledon still influences the field. And John W. Campbell, Jr., (whatever one's opinion of his current editorial work may be) created the modern magazine science fiction story.

Anyhow, some of us who were reading science fiction in the late '30s and early '40s remember what John Campbell did. We remember what came before him. I wish James Blish did.

JAMES BLISH

(P.O. Box 278, Milford, Pike County, Pennsylvania)

Xero 5 welcomed here with gasps of awe.

Ebert's question -- "was Amis right in his pronouncements on the relative worth of various stf writers?" -- is not in my view "the only cogent issue," obviously, or I'd have paid some attention to it in the review. It would have been absolutely impossible for Amis to please everybody, or even a majority, on this subject. Budrys' list of people Amis has slighted (Kuttner, Heinlein, Kornbluth, Sturgeon) almost completely overlaps mine; and it would be at least a tenable argument to note that in a literature of ideas, a critic might evaluate the contributors at least in part by what they have contributed that was new and/or influential in the field. In addition, a critic who is also an expert fiction writer (like Amis) /and like Blish!/ might have been influenced by who-made-purely-technical-contributions. I'm speaking here of writing techniques, not technological background: Van Vogt, for example, doesn't know enough science to put in a thimble, but as a technical innovator he was enormously inventive and influential. All four of the men mentioned by Budrys qualify on both counts, where some of the people Amis praises have visibly been followers all their lives.

From these twin grounds I continue to think that Amis over-emphasizes Sheckley. Talent, sure, that's been visible from the beginning; and the man handles the language very much better than most of us; in addition, he's inarguable witty. But in terms of contributions? The field is no different now that it would have been had Sheckley never existed. (A completely untestable and hence empty judgement, I know.) It might of course be argued that he started the trend toward what I now think of with horror as the Galaxy type of short story, but that bias pre-existed in the editor; since he was certain to publish that kind of story anyhow, I suppose we should be grateful that he got much of it from as skillful a writer as Bob.

For the rest, it seems to me that taste enters in to so great an extent that this question can never be the central one. For example, I personally believe that Amis gives Fred Pohl somewhat more than his due; but since Pohl plainly has contributed both ideas and techniques to the field in overflowing measure, perhaps more of both than nearly everyone else still practising, I have no objective grounds for complaint, and have to retreat to Perelman's admirable formulation, "De gustibus ain't what dey used to be."

Harris on Sturgeon continues to be 95% sound for my taste, and I think the subject richly merited this much space. I am not surprised that Harris doesn't like THE SILKEN-SWIFT and BIANCA'S HANDS, though, and that he can see no difference between the language in which they are written and the gluey prose of LARGO, a sufficiently-awful sample of which he quotes. LARGO belongs to a category Larry doesn't deal with -- Baby-Picture Sturgeon -- and furthermore it uses concert music for a subject, this being a field in which Sturgeon, like every other s-f writer known to me, appears to be incompetent. (I have often wondered why, since many s-f writers seem to write pretty well about jazz, Sturgeon included; but no answer has occurred to me yet.) THE SILKEN-SWIFT and BIANCA'S HANDS, however, are pure poetry, in the same canon with TO HERE AND THE EASEL.

Eight publishers for fourteen books, by the way, is nothing like a record; the usual situation for an s-f author is to have more publishers than he has books. My own score, for instance, is 22 for 16. Larry is counting original publishers only, but this is misleading, since a reprint may often be a more definitive edition than the original -- Merritt is the prime example of this in our field /and Blish is another; see F&SF vs. XERO versions of "The Hard Way"/, and Henry James in the mainstream -- or the original may have been a foreign version unavailable here (Bester's TIGET, TIGER or my own THEY SHALL HAVE STARS). I think this is mostly a reflection of the fact that most publishers in this country cannot be broken of thinking of s-f as a category field quite like the detective story, where a hard-cover novel can be expected to sell 8000 copies in

the first six months and thereafter may safely be remaindered; it appears impossible to convince these people, even by experience, that s-f doesn't sell that way (3000 copies in the first year, some 7000 copies more in the next three years, and an indefinite number of subsidiary rights thereafter, is the usual s-f score); they seem to take an active pleasure in being disillusioned of something they should never have believed in the first place, and thereafter you're off to another publisher. There's a practical way of coping with this though: strike the option clause from any contract you may sign. This worries publishers to tears, and saves much unnecessary playing of musical chairs.

Bhob is great, not only for what he does but for what he chooses.

Avram is great too, not only for what he does but for what he is. I do think that Amis sent out his questionnaires on some sort of frequency principle. I surely didn't get mine because I'd contributed to Galaxy, for I've appeared less often there than Avram has. My point was not that Amis sent his questionnaires only to Galaxy writers, but that Galaxy and Ballantine appear to have operated something like an organized campaign to get replies to Amis, hence the skew on the data. If this is true -- and I certainly can't guarantee that it is -- the fault for the skew lies not with those who did reply, but with those who didn't; and it can't at all be said to lie with the questioner.

AVRAM DAVIDSON

(410 W. 110 Street, New York 25, New York)

Yon Cur, Sur,

I have dealt with your perfidy in re: me on the adjacent pp., & will now go on to other items.

Not having any interest in making fillums (but certainly not scorning), I'm not reading the Warner/Lynch items: but suggest that you send a copy of the issue to Ed Emsh(willer), who has made some damn good fantasy films, beside some very good other ones.

Your artwork continues Superior. Ghood Show, Bhob. Jolly well done, Reiss. Peter Schug's MESOPOTAMIA (har har he /Bhob's lettering/ missed that last obvious ploy: A) -- why MESO etc? -- but evidence of something I've considered but almost done nothing about: poetic rhythm &c. can be gotten without understanding the words, without the words being capable, even, of understanding: though, of course, his poem does have it. Capish?

Steve Stiles is smoothy. James Warren may be a rising young talent, but he'll have to rise higher than the pubes before he'll capture my interest. Item: One does not "have" puberty; one reaches it. (If one does, of course) /B-but tha wording was part of the gag. It's surprising that you missed that, Avram./ Item: Who the Hell cares? Poor taste, the pair (of cartoons). How old is Warren? About 15, max., I'd say. What's your excuse?

Eric Bentcliffe sends nice Limey Snuff, but here the SeaCon is 'most upon us, & still no Pittcon Report from Bentley Earlcliffe; how come?

Please... someone... anyone... What means "Zonky"? I've asked Harlan Ellison, and all he says is "Now, don't get broygus with me, kid; don'g get broygus with me!" /What means "broygus", Avram? Harlan? Anyone?/

I wish to announce that my churlish remarks about Randy Garrett were written in a moment of despair, and that 3F's own Amorous Theologian has since reduced his indebtedness to This Establishment by a full 20%. Anybody who will mimeo any amount of Anthony Boucher off the page & give full space to driveling inferiors is capable of anything. Even of dropping two pages out of my so-called "odd" letter, you sonuvabitch.

ALGIS BUDRYS

Murr, Knight didn't give away his mimeo to anybody. He lent it to me, and I asked him did he mind if I stored it in Larry Shaw's basement. He didn't mind, and that's how come. /Oops, we stand corrected./

Rogue Moon? What kind of a title is that? Obviously, this is a low-bodice book about a Mississippi riverboat gambler with wavy hair and a cheroot stuck in the corner of his mouth. (The low bodice is for hiding extra aces.) Whaddaya doing revieving it in an sf fanzine? First comix and now this!

Your new man Warren will go far once he gets rid of his sex-fixation.

Okay, Davidson: You remember Ace Drummond? Ran in the Hearst funnies for years and years. Suddenly he was caught in a terrific explosion, and no more Ace Drummond, intrepid aviator. Next week out came an entirely new Ace Drummond, drawn by some left-handed cartoonist using his right hand, apparently in the middle of an entirely different story line, and Zot!, he disappeared. You remember? I remember. Whatever happened? Anybody? Where do all the old intrepid aviators go? Where is Barney Baxter? Where is Jack Armstrong? (All right, so he wasn't exactly an aviator, but the last I saw of him he had landed his plane near a Western ghost town, and the Old Prospector began telling him the story of Laredo Crockett. Next week, Jack Armstrong had been retitled Laredo Crockett, and the story proceeded. Is Laredo Crockett still running? Is Jack Armstrong still listening? Is anybody listening?) When Captain Easy hits people, does it still stay 'Lickety Pow!'?

I think I, too, would have skipped over the closing paragraphs of Larry's first installment on Sturgeon, had I not developed a morbid interest. I'm constantly surprised by the number of critical speculations in this field which concern matters of fact easily checked by dropping a card to the author. I cannot speak for Harris vis-a-vis Sturgeon, but Bester vis-a-vis Budrys could have picked up a phone and called Gold Medal without stirring from his desk, and this general sort of thing happens so often that I'm convinced most critical articles in this field are in fact simple exercises in Aristotelian ratiocination for its own sake. I smell the same thing all over these articles of Larry's, and I'm prompted to ask whether he did, indeed, make any effort to discover what Sturgeon had to contribute to this discussion.

More of the same. There's laziness and laziness, (apropos of Harry Warner's letter) and Sturgeon's if he has it at all, is of the better kind. (I see I'm dragging myself into this discussion by my own heels. Well, so goes it.) It seems to me that a time comes when the writing of even a very good story becomes too easy; when a man's grasp of what makes a story catch and hold a reader is so complete that he has reason to believe he can, if undisturbed, do it every time. Then to continue to do so would, for some people, be laziness. Sturgeon reached and passed that point so long ago that many of us, however precocious, weren't even reading yet. He has for some years been trying to practice indirection on himself -- or so it seems to me. He is trying to write good stories without deliberately introducing sure-fire elements into them. Every time he thus stumbles -- that's the wrong word, but what the hell -- every time he thus swims into a discovery of a new sure-fire element, he reduces it to its quintessence and than, having done so, discards it. So he keeps boxing himself in more and more tightly, and I think he's doing it deliberately, in the promise that when enough internal pressures have been generated the box will burst, and he will have found an entirely new way to write. The risks he takes are appalling, because for only one thing people are already beginning to feel that he's searching for oblivion, which can't make him feel any better, unless he's learned to ignore critical opinion. But the possible reward is worth the risk. I'm not sure that Sturgeon could now go back to writing merely good stories that would swell his reputation and his waistline at the same time. But there was certainly

a time when he knew he could keep on doing the same old satisfactory thing forever, and chose not to. If that's laziness, it's the kind of laziness some of his critics could stand to get. It seems to me that SOME OF YOUR BLOOD is the quintessence of everything he's been doing for the past fifteen years -- that on its own terms it's perfect, and that he's beginning to create a truly individual story, instead of what seems like a merely idiosyncratic one. And when the great wide world discovers him -- if it ever does -- and wants to know where this man has been all this time, the significant places to look for him will be in the endings and bridges of his previous stories, not in the conventional -- if superbly executed -- narrative-hook beginnings. Of course, for some people just learning the Plot Skeleton is such a complex job that they feel entitled to relax when they've learned it well enough to parrot it, even if they still can't use it very well. That's the other kind of laziness; it's a clerkly sort, and it's for clerks, not for Sturgeon.

Well, I don't know what Art Castillo gets out of Gershon Legman, but when I spoke to Legman, several years ago, that gentleman was well down the road to hysteria. Every teensy-weensy thing had enormous significance for him; I have met others of the type, and every last one of them was just about ready to run blushing from hot dog stands. I'll take vanilla. (Breyer's -- it has specks in it, and makes me think of flies.)

Speaking of the hearse-coachman incident in DEAD OF NIGHT -- which, like some of the others, is itself lifted or perhaps purchased from various short stories; this one was a Coronet /the late Coronet/ filler--how many of you saw the TWILIGHT ZONE steal of it, sans any credit?

How many you people seen ORPHEUS? Not BLACK ORPHEUS. ORPHEUS. How's about them motorcycle-riders, eh? Two quick scenes, and THE WILD ONES became a supererrogation. One of the neatest capsule justifications of the fantasy technique.

ANTHONY BOUCHER

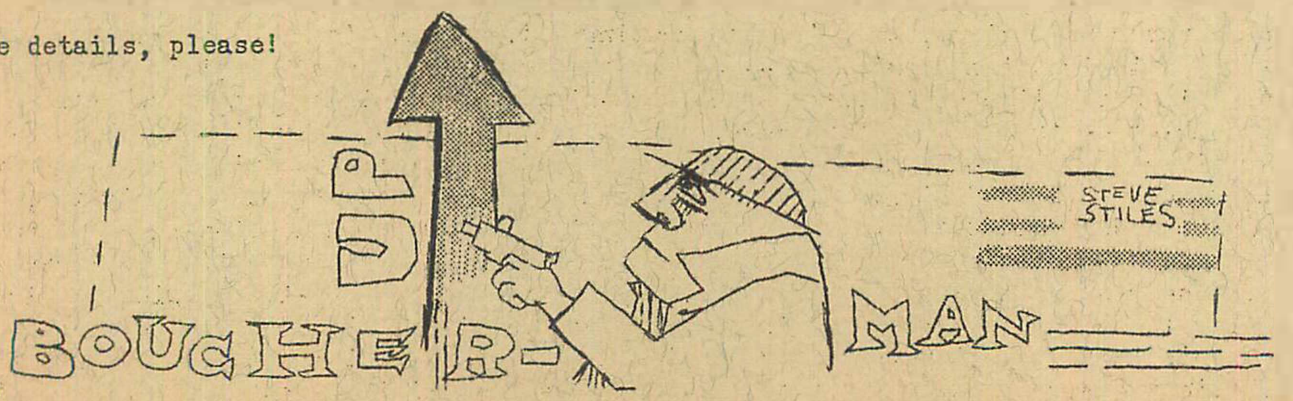
(2643 Dana Street, Berkeley 4, California)

In Xero 5 Avram Davidson describes a film episode about palm-reading & murder which he suspects "was based on a story by Oscar Fingall O'Flaherty Wilde"; & Larry Harris replies that it "was based on a story by 'George Hopley' (Cornell Woolrich) of which I have a copy."

I'm surprised & puzzled: the story that Avram recounts is, detailedly and precidely, Wilde's "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" (1891), now on the newsstands in the Laurel edition of Wilde (LC152) -- a brilliant story too little known among murder fanciers.

If there's a Woolrich story that's identical, this raises interesting questions as to the professional activities of Cornell George Hopley-Woolrich (which is, according to the Library of Congress, his complete name).

More details, please!



KEN BEALE

(115 E. Mosholu Parkway, Bronx 67, New York)

A LETTER TO LARRY HARRIS:

Dear Larry,
I think you and Avram Davidson have the makings of a great comedy bit there. It just needs a little more polishing up and then you can try it out on the Borscht Belt. After that, who knows -- the Sullivan Show?

You know the routine I mean. Avram says, "What's a sarcophagus?"

"Why Avram," you reply, "I'm surprised at you. Everybody knows that a sarcophogous is a man with a nasty disposition."

Avram: "I think you're wrong there, Larry. That's an octopus."

Larry: "Don't be silly, Avram. An octopus is an old-fashioned kind of gun. You're thinking of an arquebus."

(They both hit each other with rolled newspapers.)

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In case you can't you can't see what I'm driving at, I refer to Xero 5, page 41, paragraphs 5 and 6, wherein you "correct" Avram about a film. Actually, you have gotten three films hopelessly intertwined there, admittedly not a very easy feat. As for the laugh potential, I can only say it got a few chuckles when being passed around among the members of the Fantasy Film Club. If you hadn't already left, we could all have corrected you then and there.

It would all have been like the old Kay Kyser show. "Which film was Davidson thinking of?..... Students -- .....FLESH AND FANTASY!.....Right!"

Let me see if I can straighten out some of the mess.

Davidson is quite right: the ventriloquist-dummy story was in Dead of Night. So were 4 other stories and a "framing" story about a recurring dream. And the Thomas Mitchell-Edward G. Robinson segment was based on a Wilde story: Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, to be exact. I would offer to lend it to you, but I don't seem to have it. It can be found in most standard editions of Wilde's short stories.

But it can't be found in Dead of Night, not even the complete version, which had two more episodes than the standard American theatrical release print. It can be found in Flesh and Fantasy, a Universal picture for 1943, with, besides Mitchell and Edward (not Edgar) G. Robinson, Charles Boyer, Barbara Stanwyck, Betty Field, and Robert Benchley (!). This was a 3-episode film, but unlike Dead of Night all episodes were directed by the same man: Julien Duvivier. He is a famous French director who came to the U.S. during WWII. His best film (in my opinion) was Under Paris Skies ('52), responsible for the beautiful tune of the same name, which the Three Suns and other musical cretins have bombarded us with in mangled versions.

The first episode had Betty Field as an ugly girl in New Orleans at Mardi Gras time. She purchased a beautiful mask and put it on to hide her real features. Meeting a dashing young man (played, incredibly enough, by Robert Cummings) she falls in love but fears to let him see her real appearance. At the end, her features have magically altered and she goes on to Live Happily .... etc. This was all a good deal better than it sounds. Cummings even turned in a decent performance in a straight role, difficult as this may be to believe. In fact, the first episode was the best. After that they steadily declined.

Episode two was the one Avram described: right story, wrong picture.

Episode three was the poorest of the batch and had Stanwyck and Boyer meeting aboard ship, and falling in love. There was some jazz about a prophetic dream and a ring (engagement type) and the death of a circus aerialist. But this portion of the film made very little impression on me, and I only saw it once.

It is perfectly true that there was story about clairvoyant prophecy with Robinson, and that it was called The Night Has a Thousand Eyes, and indeed based on a Woolrich story. (Said story appeared in the prozine Fantasy Fiction #1, May '50, or rather reprinted there, with a 1937 Popular Publications copyright. The name of the story was "Speak to Me of Death."

The movie was a Paramount release for 1948, and Walter Lee's S-F and Fantasy Film Checklist informs me that Gail Russell was in it. But definitely not Thomas Mitchell or any character named Septimus Podger. My own notes do not mention the director (which means he wasn't anyone important) but they do tell me that the script was by Barre Lyndon, who also worked with George Pal, and by Jonathan Latimer.

Unlike the Flesh and Fantasy sequence where Robinson was a fortuneteller's client, here he played a fake fortuneteller who suddenly developed real ability, and foresaw his own death. An escaped lion was involved in the plot also, and a trick ending in which Robinson's prophesy cam true, but not as he'd expected.

All this, without my ever having seen the film! But a few reference works come in handy, and several people have described it to me. I also vividly recall hearing a radio adaptation about the time of release.

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AND A FEW PARAGRAPHS TO XERO

I will say again that it serves absolutely no purpose to run a letter by someone who vaguely recalls seeing a picture, at the age of eight, which he thinks had so-and-so starring, or maybe such-and-such, and was about...(whatever it was)..., but he just can't quite recall the title. Not when film magazines and books are full of authentic data, and when fans of this subject argue over such recondite matters as whether or not Harry Langdon was better than Buster Keaton, or whether a given D.W. Griffith film was 1910 or 1911. Now that is what I mean when I talk of old movies. A film made in the 1940's is not old, except in the memory of a teenager, who realizes it was made before he was born.

It is as if I were to write and say "I can just remember reading a story about robots taking over the world. Pretty good, as I remember, and I think it appeared in Astoundin or maybe Galaxy. I can't remember if it was called The Mechanoids or The Robot Mind or what, but I think it was either by Edward Hamilton or John Williamson." See what I mean

And even if the abovementioned hypothetical idiot is able to recall the plot of the film perfectly, and who the top 2 or 3 stars were, what earthly reasons do his recollections serve, if printed? That's not what film-history is, as a reading of any decent publication on the subject will prove. The name of the director, year of release, and the visual techniques used are the important things, not whether the hero died at the end. (Cf. The Liveliest Art, by Arthur Knight.)

I therefore wish you would either print an intelligent article on the subject (or reprint one), or cut off all this moronic babble about how many and what stories were in Dead of Night. It is really very painful to read, just as painful as it would be for you to listen to the conversation given in the 2nd paragraph above.

BETTY KUJAWA

(2819 Caroline Street, South Bend 14, Indiana)

A beautiful, beautiful, beautiful issue! The covers, front and back, are gosh-wow! Personally I still dig poetry in zines not at all -- but this IS your zine and not mine -- would rather see you put them all on one page and thereby have more space for other things. I don't mean to sound mean or anything -- just ain't my cuppa tea and I hate to see the space used up that way. /But the presentation of material is regarded as an integral part of the unit (at least it is around here) -- copy plus layout plus illos plus duplication. Just cramming as much material into as few pages as possible does an injustice to writer, artist, and reader alike. Ebert's poems would have suffered severaaly from jamming, and several people who dug them commented that they felt the layouts and illos helped materially in creating the gestalt./

Me too...I got a copy of ENGLAND UNDER HITLER when we were staying in Chi two weeks back -- the info in it I found deeply interesting (like to see this reported on at length in a zine someday) was that part about the mating of Nazi superior boys and girls and the babies reared in State Homes and how, says this author, it was discovered at war's end that these children were mainly feeble-minded or emotionally defective due to the impersonal state-run upbringing. I had often wondered the outcome and results of that breeding-farm plan of theirs.

Happy to find the follow-up article of Harris on Sturgeon -- enjoyed it muchly. Also the Blish article in its entirety -- merci for that. I liked the James Warren cartoons /Glad of that --you are not alone, but you're in a minority./ -- hope you'll be having more by him?

Charmed tremendously by Bentcliffe's report on the story-magazines of his youth...great fun, this. And I echo his sentiments on comic books in his next-to-last paragraph. Amen!

Say -- all the illos and cartoons are excellent in this issue. I do so relish the work of Steve Stiles. Loved Calkins' comments on Castillo -- chuckle. And that Guest Editorial -- oh brother!! Uh, do you think there will be more from on high in the future?? It's vital Messages like these that make my day.

And just think, he may reconsider! /No word from Art since Xero 5. He has been one of our most popular contributors, in his two all-too-brief appearances. Art, are you out there? Art? Art?/

BUDDY JOE PLOTT

(PO Box 654, Opelika, Alabama)

The cover by Ivie strikes me as being beautiful -- yes, beautiful. There is something weirdly captivating about the ominous figure, the delicate shading, and the sharp lettering. It's the first piece of real G*H*O*O*D Ivie artwork that I have seen in a long time; it's much better than the crud he had in Monster Parade. Heck, it's downright unghodly to compare the two at all.

I share Bhob Stewart's resentment at Lichtman's slash at ECdom or EC Fandom if you will. I remember when EC's mags were at their heyday in the comic industry, but my memory is confined to mere titles and occasional stories. The beauty of the art and the depth of the stories never reached my tender then-unfannish mind in any appreciable capacity. It was after the folding of EC that I became involved in ECdom and the sidelights therein. Up until a year ago there were several EC fanzines still being published. Of course they were extremely reminiscent and remorseful in general attitude wherever the "good old days" were concerned, but they also contained some interesting items and some pretty

good amateur humor along the lines of Kurtzman...NOT the current crop of idiot-impressing trash found in MAD. There was a good deal of discussion concerning EC artists and their current assignments and work. And from the EC fanzines I have seen from the era when EC was alive and pulsating, EC Fandom was organized, and reasonably well. ECdom was by no means as stable as science fiction fandom is, but I wonder if possibly the basic foundation of EC Fandom didn't derive from some apt stfan who was also an EC addict.

There is no doubt that EC produced top quality material. WEIRD SCIENCE and WEIRD FANTASY contained high-grade science fiction that challenged the readers' minds and imaginations, not their eyesight for gore. There can not be any possible exception to the fact that EC's science fiction was a damn sight more readable and mature than the gobbledegook which appeared in the Ziff-Davis publications about the same time that EC was leading the comic book industry.

I like Ebert's verses. They are indeed "more than meets fan standards." Reminds me of Carl Sandburg, but then all free verse reminds me of Sandburg, who just happens to be one of my favorites.

Ah, I'm glad to see you voted for Amazing for the Hugo. Old Gernsback's descendent is where I cut my first stf teeth outside of Winston juveniles -- although I'll freely admit that this period of time was a fragment of the Ziff-Davis era described a couple of paragraphs ago. I've stood faithfully by and proudly watched Ziff-Davis climb the ladder to respectability after an all-too lengthy stint in the quagmire of crudity.

I saw the General Electric Theater presentation of the French "The Red Balloon", I call it an epic; to me it was an epic -- undoubtedly the finest half hour television I have ever seen in regards to science fiction and related areas. This conclusion is arrived at after countless hours before the screen watching Twilight Zone, Way Out, Alcoa Presents, Science Fiction Theater, and the new flop, Great Ghost Tales. Contrary to the seemingly obvious, I do not watch television very much. Naturally I am doing as any intelligent person does -- I ignore the general crop of horse operas, sex-starved detectives, and similar maladjusted individuals. Oh, there are some good programs to be sure, but they are few and far between. I did break down and watch "The Gunfight at the OK Corral" on the Wyatt Earp series recently; that, however, was a matter of curiosity. The production itself was lousy, but amazingly authentic.

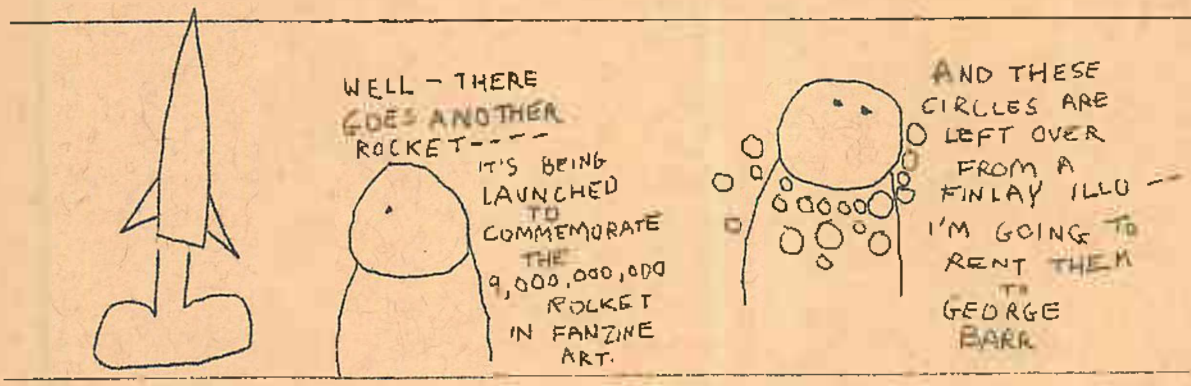
If I am to submit to subliminals, I prefer to do it in a theater. At least there is a fairly good selection of worthwhile material on tap there. For instance Parrish, which I saw this last week was excellent. On the other hand, Ernie Kovacs dipped into the slimepit in an Italian job called Five Golden Hours. And getting back to your Hugo choices, I agree with you -- The Time Machine has no contenders as far as the drama category is concerned. The best science fiction movie since The Invasion of the Body Snatchers (which was a damn sight better than Finney's novel of the same name! Never have I read a cruddier, more assinine piece of juvenilia than the retreat of the pods in the Dell paperback. Agh!

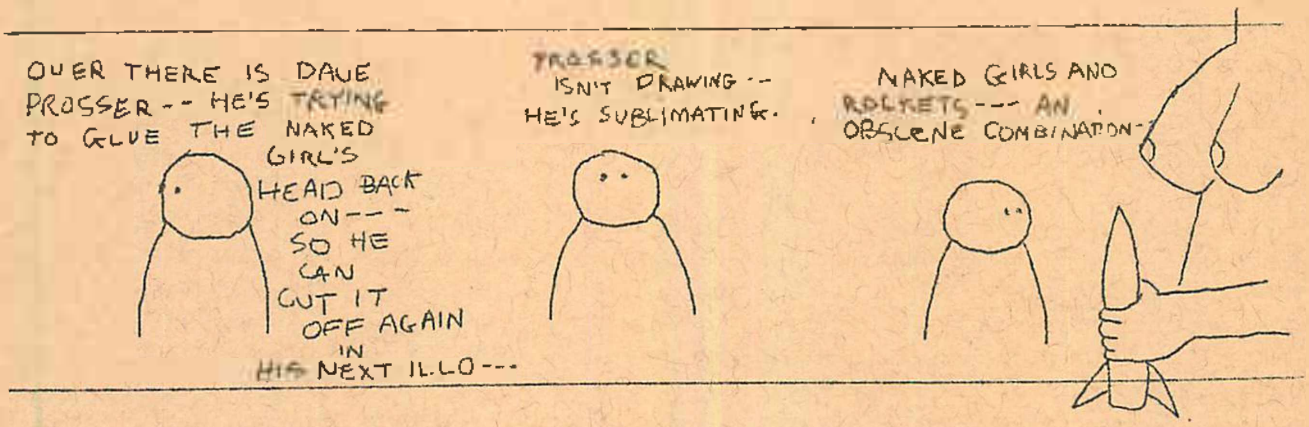
Those letter-writers who made EI this time, but who did not buy this Willish are receiving tear-sheets of the letter section only. Similarly, faneds reviewed in The Silver Dagger will receive tearsheets of that section.

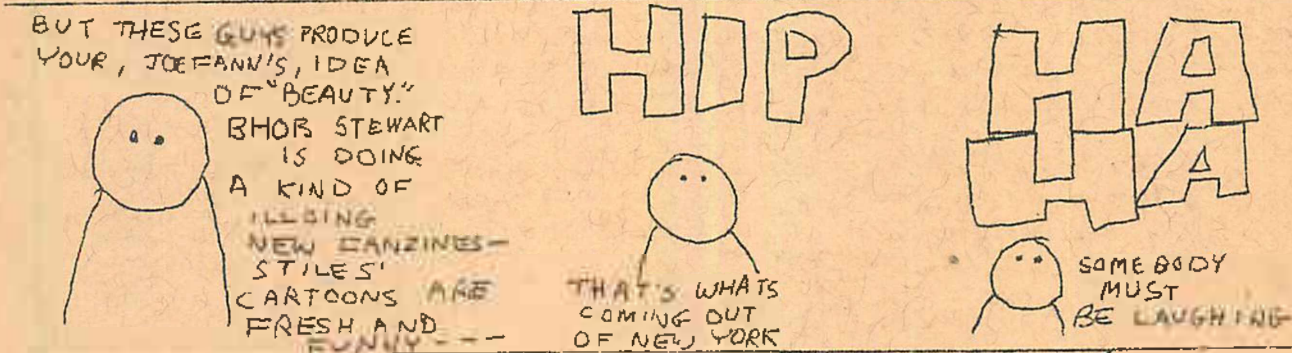
Thanks again to all writers, published or not. There will be no WAHF here, even though Charles states a logical reason for one. He says it assures writers that their letters did not get lost in the mail. A good point, but not adequate in my view. Fred Norwood: jes' keep trying and you may make EI unassisted by WAHF. It's better that way, you know.....PL

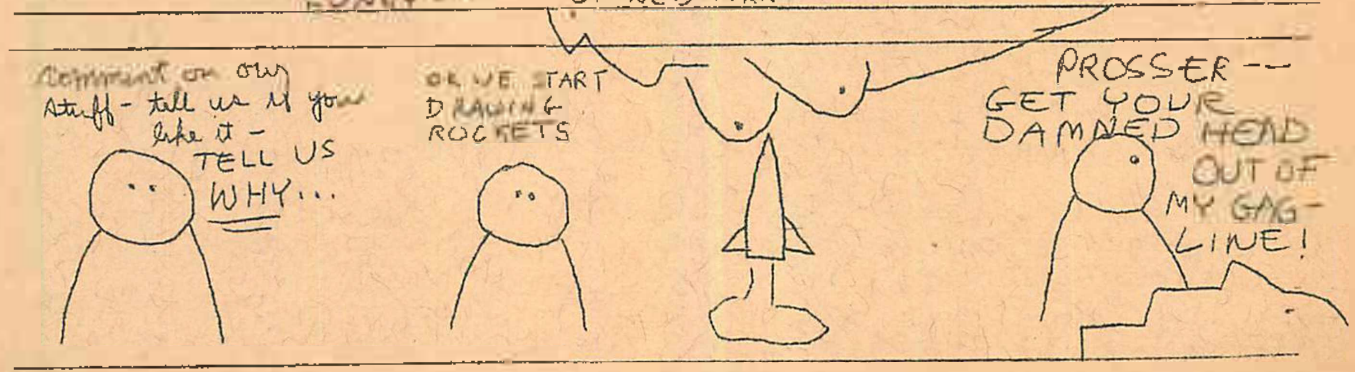
I Hate All You Slimy Rats.

a letter of comment from Andy Reiss.









I looked for rarity, and found none -- I looked for beauty and found none ---
I looked for art, and found the fanart show --- Sincerely Andy Reiss

XEROG

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