

FANDANGO

A STORMY PETREL UNTO YE

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Whole No. 20

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

F. Towner Laney

---ooOoo---

The feckless carelessness of Laney and Burbee destroyed this issue of Fan-Dango. Back last fall, Charles Edward Jr. created a monumental prose epic. It had grandeur and pathos, humor and wise insight, a cosmic power and sweep which would have set Fan-Dango apart as the Fapazine of the age. It dealt with the ideal fanzine, and contained several new concepts plagiarised from Burbee's daily conversation, which ordinarily is not allowed to fall on the ears of the hoi polloi.

But this fine man thought of another sub-punch-line, and so I took it down to work that he might add it. And thru monumental stupidity, I lost this significant essay. Lost it. Imagine what fate would have been meted out to a scribe of other years who lost a papyrus of one of the Great Apostles.

Burbee, though, undertook to rewrite "The Ideal Fanzine".

And then to show that he is as fallible as anyone else, he proceeded to lose the rewrite. No carbon copy was made of either.

The entire ghastly episode is unpleasantly reminiscent of a Walter J. Daugherty project.

BUREAUCRATS AND BUMBLERS

***** ** An Unrehearsed Aside to Harry Tarnier.

-ooO-

My employer is pretty much of a monopolist. Through territory franchises he has a very large segment of the Pacific Coast vulcanised fibre business sewed up in a sack.

And, brother, does that company show it!

In addition to the standard feud between the shop and the office, the office force is split down the middle in a feud of their own. For several years now one group of the girls has been on non-speaking terms with another group. This results in

some rare situations. You see, each girl has her own group of customers--whom she cajoles on the phone and otherwise deals with exclusively, writing their orders, expediting their fabrications, and anything else that may deal with that one firm. Each girl in addition has certain other responsibilities.

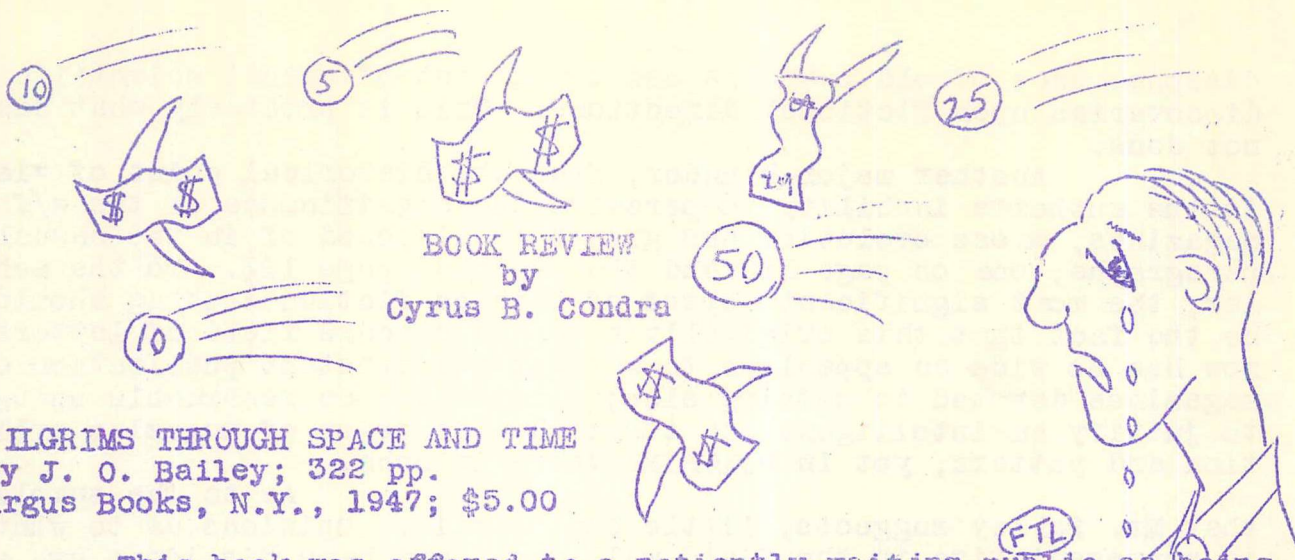
One for example keeps the perpetual inventory. With a stock of several thousand different kinds and sizes of fibre, bakelite, tubes, rods, insulating papers, tapes, and what not--you can see that it is not easy to know offhand if you have in stock the 13 sheets of 3/8" Natural CE Bakelite that some fabrication job may require. But since our two leading sales-girls--the one that handles all aircraft companies and the one who deals with miscellaneous small firms--are not on speaking terms with the girl who keeps this perpetual inventory, they never are able to know for sure if the company has any given item in stock. Occasionally they can sneak a look at the cardex if its keeper has gone to the restroom. But obviously they couldn't speak to her. This leads to their constantly promising fabrications for one to three day delivery when there is no stock nearer here than New York State.

Another interesting feature of our monopoly is the emphasis it puts on the gree enterprise system. Since outside competition is a comparatively new development in our specialised little business, the girls as well as the outside salesmen have set up one of the cutest dog-eat-dog systems you ever saw. There is no overall system of material control, and delivery dates are the result of who can holler the loudest. Thus each salesman and girl is out to cut the throat of each other one--vying with each other to cajole or browbeat the different men in the shop into putting out their jobs first. They also have great fun selling material out from under one another's noses. The only way any of us in the shop have of being assured of keeping any scarce item for a fabrication order is to keep a personal stock pile under a bench or behind a lathe. Otherwise it will vanish, even if it is special stuff ordered specifically for one definite job. I recall one time that I was given a rush punch-press job. I went out in the warehouse, located the needed material, and went back in the shop and set up the die. Then I went back out for the material a half-hour later, I was just in time to see it being loaded into a truck...for some other customer.

The shop itself is not without symptoms of monopoly. The bulk of the machinery is obsolete, semi-wornout, and inefficient. We also have some very fine modern equipment--but are almost totally lacking in the small accessory gadgets that would enable us to get the most out of it. We make pretty good time on most of our jobs, but a modern shop could loaf and still beat the times we kill ourselves trying to make.

And the shop personell is quite a bit like the office force. Last summer a couple of us made a list showing who in the shop was on non-speaking terms with whom. Out of 18 shop employees, there were 9 who did not speak to one another.

Since the war, competition is beginning to hit us for the first time. It will be interesting to observe its effects.



BOOK REVIEW
by
Cyrus B. Condra

PILGRIMS THROUGH SPACE AND TIME
by J. O. Bailey; 322 pp.
Argus Books, N.Y., 1947; \$5.00

This book was offered to a patiently-waiting public as being the first history and analysis of science-fiction writing ever compiled. Since this particular field of letters has grown large enough and old enough to merit the attention, such a work was definitely needed.

It still is. PILGRIMS THROUGH SPACE AND TIME is at best a conscientious attempt to do a difficult job. At the worst, its lack of success will have a certain value to the next optimist who makes the trial; it demonstrates clearly what not to do.

What should have been done in this book is precisely stated in the first chapter, page 10:

"It is time that this body of literature, often considered a curious and childish byway, is defined, presented in some historical survey, sampled, and analysed to see what its major patterns and ideas may be."

Having outlined his objective clearly and concisely, Mr. Bailey proceeds to ramble through three hundred and twenty-two pages of utter confusion. To his credit let it be said that his definition of science-fiction is given; it occupies three paragraphs on page 10. The historical survey, by dint of manful coercion and duress, is compelled to proceed recognizably up to the year 1915 and then lapses into chaos.

Disregarding the fact that more science fiction was written between 1915 and 1946 than in all the years before, Mr. Bailey has treated this thirty-one year period as a unit, lumping everything produced throughout that time into an indigestible literary haggis for which the kindest thing that one can say is, that it is interesting. Inasmuch as the writing of science fiction, paralleling the development of actual science, underwent an accelerated process of evolution and refinement in those years; the writing of 1915 now appears closer in pattern and concept to that of 1846 than 1946, and to give the reader a coherent account of that change requires a higher degree of technical skill than that which produced this book.

Probably the better method to treat the subject matter from 1915 on would be to work through it year by year, pointing out new variants as they arise; the growth of trends, the

disappearance of old patterns and the effect of actual scientific discoveries upon fictional directions. This is precisely what was not done.

Another major blunder, from the historical point of view, is the author's inability to perceive the significance of the s/f magazines, whose evolution and growth is disposed of in two casual paragraphs; one on page 120 and the other on page 122. To the scholar, the most significant aspect of science fiction writing should be the fact that this originally rare and obscure field of letters now has so wide an appeal as to warrant the constant publication of magazines devoted to nothing else; a circumstance remarkable enough to justify an intelligent and thorough discussion of magazine evolution and pattern, yet in PILGRIMS there is none.

As to the sampling that Mr. Bailey suggests, little can be said. Opinions as to what is representative in the field will vary, and here his ideas are as good as those of anyone. It is in the attempt to analyse and classify that this book fails.

An almost phonographic repetitiousness is the offspring of the author's inept approach to his subject matter. The attempt to group various types of stories into distinguishable categories was stultified because few stories are limited to only one idea, with the result that most of the allegedly different type-groups contain almost identical title-listings. This is either hilarious or tragic, depending on whether the reader borrowed his copy or bought it, but in either case the monotonous repetitions will wear him out. Certainly (for instance) Greg's ACROSS THE ZODIAC deserves mention as being a story of a certain type written in such and such a period; but why should the reader be saddled with it through all the rest of the book? From page 67 to page 309, that one work is dragged out for inspection no less than thirty times.

WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES, by H. G. Wells, occupies space on thirty-three separate pages, beginning at page 71 and ending at page 313--and that is only one of the numerous Wells tales mentioned! Also Verne and Stapledon are given disproportionate attention; if the references to these three alone were deleted, the book would be cut in half--and much improved.

The sincere fan who consults this work for information is due for a shock. If what he seeks is truly pertinent to science fiction writing, it has probably been overlooked; if by some miracle it is mentioned, he still has the problem of finding it.

For example, assume that our enthusiast wants to find out who wrote the first time travel story.

Seeking "time travel" in the index (it isn't there), he discovers nine references to "time machines" running from page 81 to page 267. Consulting each of these in turn he finds that four are concerned with THE TIME MACHINE by Wells, and of the five other stories mentioned, two make no mention of time machines whatever! And nowhere is there a hint as to who wrote the first time travel yarn.

If this were an extreme instance it would be arbitrary and unfair to mention it, but such disappointments are typical of the results met in trying to use this work as a source of information. When the author's

performance is compared to his promises, it is difficult to see where anything in it is deserving of praise. And yet, from the absence of open lamentation among the aficionados following its appearance, one would think that this book contains a certain amount of quality even though it may not be a masterpiece, and that this review is out of harmony with fact. Whether this book is worthy of better treatment than it is getting here, or whether it is actually an unproclaimed stinker, is worthy of consideration.

Now a casual observer of the general publishing field might--on the mere basis of public reaction--conclude that this work is neither good nor really bad because it has neither been widely praised nor soundly damned; but these usually reliable indicia of mediocrity cannot be trusted away from the grand scene of publishing where a strict compliance with natural law and the exercise of good sense is necessary to the publisher's survival. Science fiction publishing is a narrow field standing exempt from the laws of nature and of human nature alike because of an inherent peculiarity of the science fiction fan.

Fans were created to play a special part in the drama of life. Their role is to appear as manna from heaven before the eyes of publishers wandering in a commercial wilderness. The eagerness with which they buy books is exceeded only by their reluctance to read them; it is this peculiar trait that enables both writers and publishers to get away with what they get away with, so that the majority of science fiction book collections consist of imposing shelves of undiscovered stinkers. Possibly PILGRIMS belongs in that class.

(In passing, we might note that a widening recognition of this fannish characteristic has led to a tremendous increase in the publishing of science fiction. When it was found that books could be sold regardless of merit, because they would never be read, the rush to pander to this group became a stampede that is now in full tide. Quite probably it will soon dwindle and disappear because of another peculiar circumstance not yet taken into account; namely that fans are the least prosperous of all the identifiable groups in the country and cannot support any one publishing house, let alone all of them.)

PILGRIMS THROUGH SPACE AND TIME has been dealt with rather harshly here because the advance notices proclaimed the advent of not just another book, but a masterwork of historical analysis worthy to reign in pomp beside THE OUTSIDER and other truly excellent books. If my reaction to the work is unjust to its merits, that is the fault of the advertisers, who led us to expect more than we got. Still, if the difference between this book and what it might have been is not so great as to make the angels weep, it is nevertheless enough to cause anguish to the science fiction fan; particularly when he remembers his five dollars.

FAN-DANGO is the personalised, composed-on-the-masters effusion of F. Towner Laney; prepared at 816 Westboro Ave., Alhambra, California, and published by the Walter A. Coslet Publishing Agency which is located in an air pocket deep in the glacier which is Montana. Praise should be sent to Laney, and brickbats thrown at Coswal.

The Problems of the Isolated Fan

A MORE OR LESS SERIOUS DISCOURSE BY F. TOWNER LANEY

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In the current (December '48) issue of Gus Tillmorth's monolithic FANTASY ADVERTISER, he apologises for skipping three issues, pointing out what a big job FA is, and crying yearningly for an assistant: "I'm looking for a co-editor or a typist or a slave or a minor god to work a few miracles."

And so it is that I, F. Towner Laney, am shifting gears into my minor deity facet, and solving all of Norman V's problems for him in the measured prose that goes to make up this article.

Basically, Gus, you have but one stumbling block--all your other woes are mere subsidiaries, stemming from your isolated fannish condition. That you need is the fellowship and collaboration and symbiosis arising from frequent association with other fans. Instead of hiding your light under a beard, you should let it blaze forth across the wastelands of fanless southern California, a fearless beacon light of stf beckoning to the faithful. As it says in the Fan-cyclopedia, "Cast thy beard upon the waters...."

In other words, your course is clear. What you need to do is to found a fan club. Doesn't that idea just thrill you through and through? Just think of it! An association of people cognizant of the Deeper Message of Scientific-fiction, congenial souls banded together to Glorify the Truth--the Truth of Gernsback, of Sloane, of R. P. Graham. If you become the prime mover of such a group, your chief difficulty will be to retain any faint vestige of personal control over the FANTASY ADVERTISER, for these people will be so imbued with holy stefnistic zeal that they will work night and day, preparing 128 page monthly editions which will pour from the planographs of John S. Swift Company like dung from the Hyperion Outfall.

Certainly there is no need for you to be an isolated fan, not in this teeming metropolis of 2,000,000 souls and Cyrus B. Condra.

No, Gus. You must create a club.

Just think. You could call it the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. Or maybe the Walter J. Daugherty Aggrandizement and Embezzlement Association.

I'll bet you could get this advertiser of yours who lives in Box 6151 Metro Station to join your club. He'd probably help you a lot, because look at the customers he could dig up.

And one time I met a fellow named Hodgkins that was a big stf collector. He'd be sure to join because he could talk about all the books he hasn't read and maybe find out if some of them were really fantasy.

And I have heard of a guy named Evans, or something like that, who is supposed to know E. E. Smith personally. Burbee used to know a fellow that this guy Evans taught how to think, but I never knew this other guy. But Evans could probably be had.

My gosh, Gus, just think of

the possibilities?

I tell you what to do. Write to Amazing Stories (that's a stf magazine) and tell them what you are trying to do. They will give you gobs of publicity and you will attract all sorts of people.

Another good idea would be to go around to all the newsstands and tell the people that run them to have everyone who buys a stf magazine to call you up on the telephone.

And don't go overlooking the names you already have either. I'll bet there are lots of your very own subscribers who would be thrilled to death to have a chance to join your club.

You see, if you get a group and call it the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society it will be significant. So you will be doing a whole lot to usher in the brave new world of which all true stefnists dream.

And, from the crassly selfish point of view, this club will labor selflessly to improve and sustain and increase a truly worthwhile project such as the Fantasy Advertiser which benefits all persons interested in this great field. Because the readers of stef are apart from mere people. One of our leading thinkers actually went so far as to state that they are the star-begotten, biological mutants, the men of tomorrow in the world of today. Tho I naturally sympathise with his understandable enthusiasm I cannot quite subscribe to all of it. But on the other hand it is obvious that there is something about the reading of scientifiction that cancels out the failings and idiosyncracies of those who read it. Stef readers will give aid beyond measure, money without stint, hours of work surpassing the imagination if they may thereby contribute one tiny moiety towards the furthering of this Truth which is the keystone of their Faith.

Just imagine it. When you have founded your club the members will do all the work for you. All you will have to do is channel it a little.

Yessir. This suggestion of mine is worth a lot of money, but I'm willing to give it to you absolutely free. You don't even have to give me a life subscription to Fantasy Advertiser or anything.

Just let me know how you make out with the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (or Walter J. Daugherty Aggrandizement and Embezzlement Association).

What LA former fan, formerly of Michigan, wears Chanel #5 on his dates? When asked why he did this thing, he giggled, "Well it lasts so much longer than cologne."

What Banning fan has been so deeply affected by a Laney remark of last summer that he has been considering plastic surgery. ((It really doesn't show in his face as much as he thinks it does.))

What LA fan who was once a FAPA officer picked up a kleenex on which Tigrina had blotted her lipstick--picked it up off the floor, carefully put it in his pocket, and took it home to serve his own inscrutable ends? ((I saw this episode with my own eyes--it was in mid-1946.))

Thoughts While Bandsawing

SOCIAL NOTE. The long-delayed WILD HAIR #2 session is at last in the offing. This one-shot fanzine party will be held before March 1 (maybe will even have taken place by the time you read this), and is calculated to set another milestone in fanzine history. WILD HAIR #2 (which, contrary to rumor, has not been re-titled GOBBLER: THE SUCCULENT FANZINE) will comprise a plethora of top flight stuff, some of which may be: "Daugherty Called Me On The Phone Last Night, or Who Stole the LASFS Lettering Guides?"; "The True Story of Everett" (highlighted with a facsimile tracing of a couple of pages from his Battle Creek address book); "A Coinage For Fandom"; and almost anything else. Probable participants are Burbee, Condra, Widner, Rotsler, Stibbard, and R. P. Graham.

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JAZZ NOTE. A couple of albums have come out during the past few months which deserve a bit of mention: Circle Album S-11 THIS IS JAZZ - 2: Kid Ory and His Creole Jazz Band, and Decca Album 549, NEW ORLEANS REVIVAL, featuring the bands of Kid Ory and Bunk Johnson.

Both albums are authentic New Orleans jazz, and both are excellent. THIS IS JAZZ, a 12-incher, suffers from lousy recording, but this can be forgiven when we consider that it is the transcription of an airshot, especially when the Ory group gets about the hottest I've yet heard them on wax. Only four sides: Savoy Blues, Snag It, Weary Blues, and Down Among the Sheltering Palms--but all are top flight. Biggest kicks are Ory's grating solo on Savoy, Buster Wilson's wild piano on Palms (a strange and tingling blend of Jelly Roll Morton and Earl Hines), and the ensemble work on the last two or three choruses of Snag It. The set costs \$3.94 including tax.

The Decca set showcases the ensembles of both Johnson and Ory, and is an excellent thing to buy if you wish a representative sample of authentic jazz. The 69 year old Bunk Johnson plays a slow blues, Tishomingo (which incidentally is one of the best instrumental blues sides ever waxed); an old pop tune, You Always Hurt the One You Love; a stomp, Alexander's Ragtime Band; and a street parade, My Maryland. Bunk Johnson is a bit tiresome to listen to steadily, since he tends to play repetitive ensembles without modulation or sufficient variation to keep it from becoming now and then monotonous. But he has a beautiful tone--nearly as good as Armstrong's--and with the occasional solos by George Lewis, Jim Robinson, and Alton Purnell each side has enough oomph to counterbalance a few faults. Though none of these men are accomplished technicians, they make up for it with feeling and verve--particularly pianist Purnell and clarinetist Lewis. Bunk's strong point is in driving an ensemble.

Ory's band play the definitive version of their leader's famous Muskrat Ramble, The Girls Go Crazy About the Way I Walk--one of the jauntiest sides yet, a highly competent High Society, and Blanche Touquatoux--a comic song with Creole French vocal by Kid and Cecile Ory. Ory is unquestionably the greatest tailgate trombonist of them all, and he is in high gear all through the album.