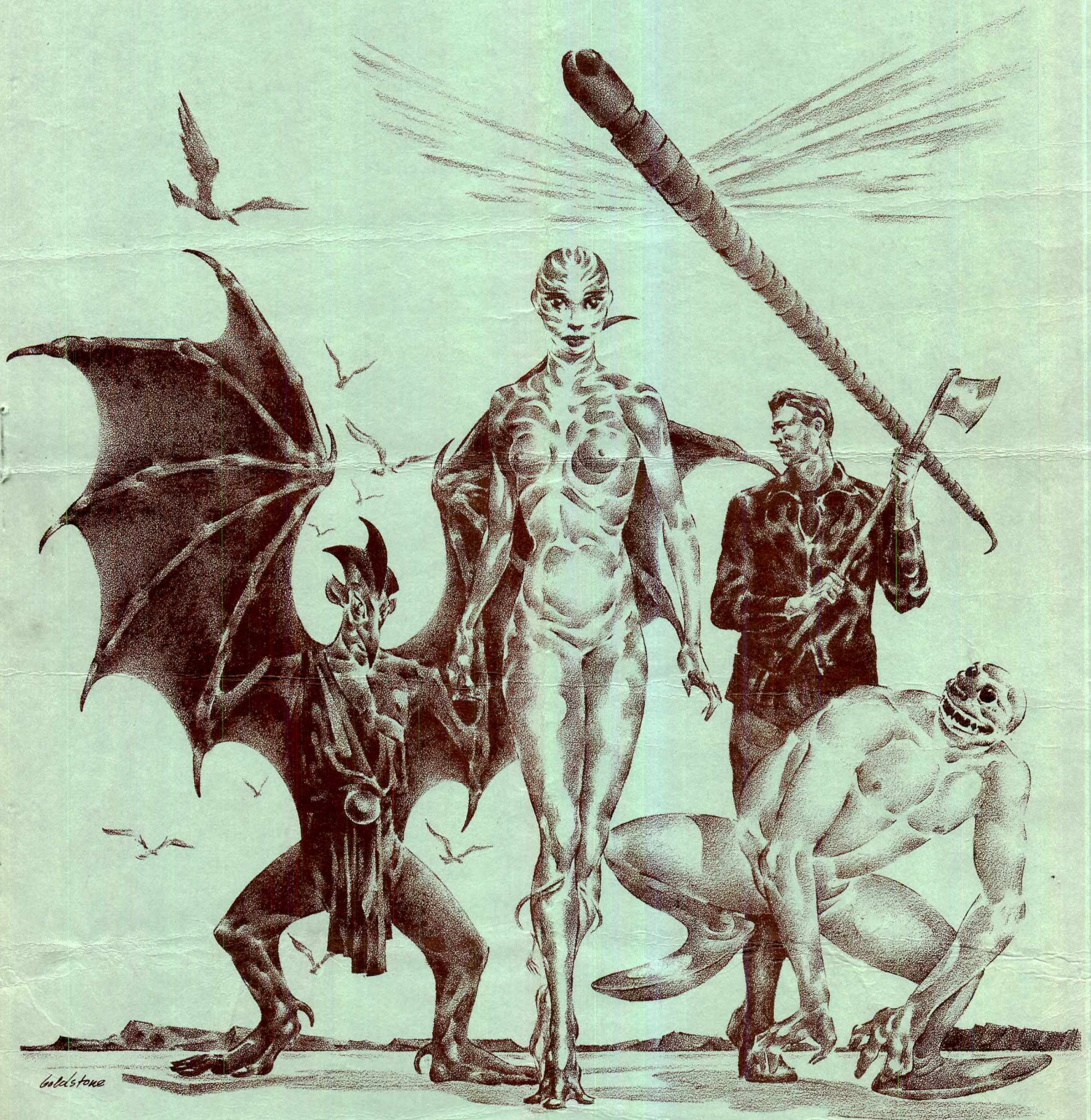


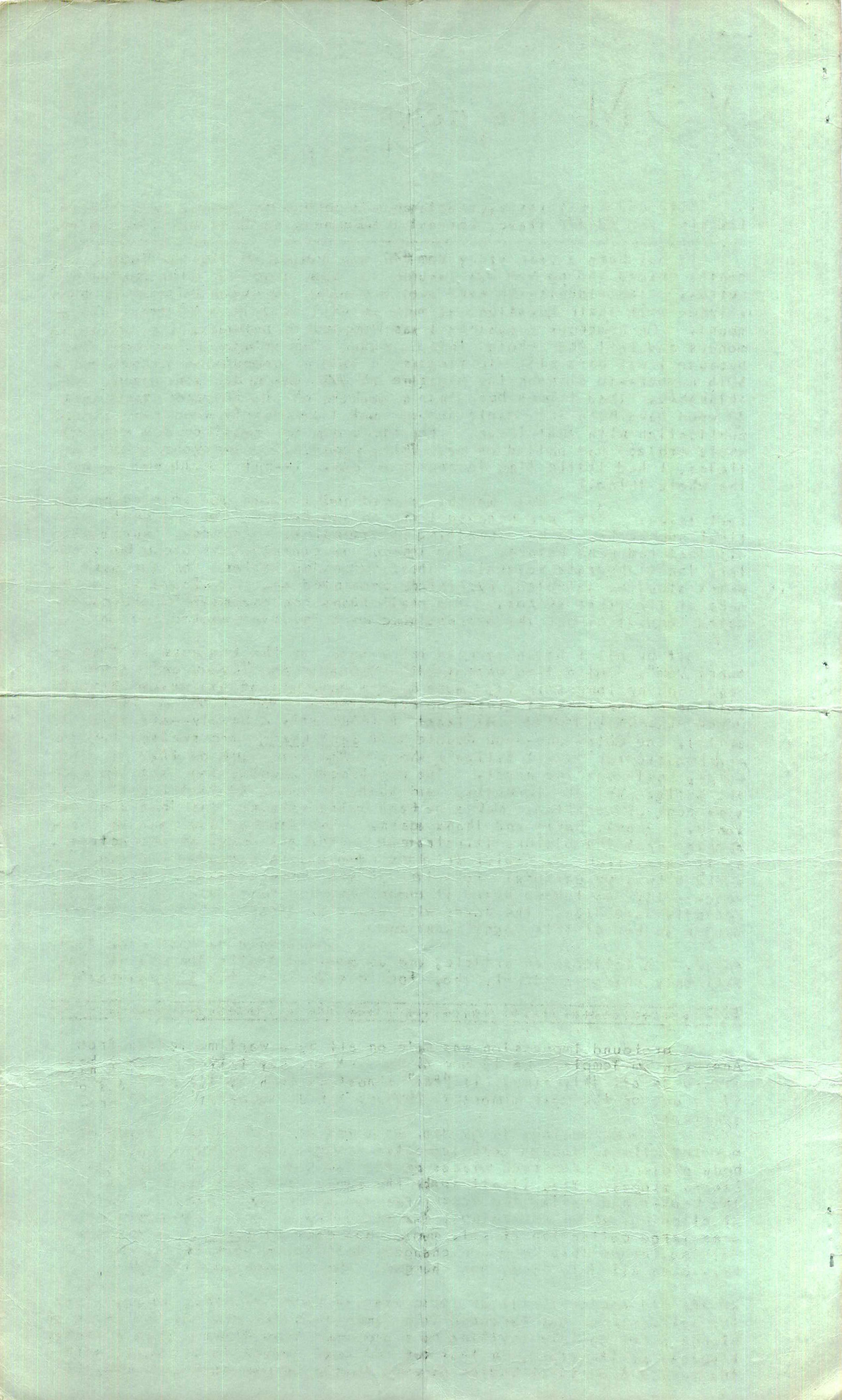
July 47 50

VOM

50TH Issue.



Richard Bergeron



VOM the defunct fanzine

50th and Final Issue, spontaneously combusted during July 1947 by its sire and ~~assistant~~ slave, Forrest J Ackerman, Bx 6151 Met Stn, LA 55.

It has been a year since Vom #49 was issued at the Pacificon. As months ensued and no Vom was issued, I was peppered with postal inquiries. Individuals who were owed a single 15c issue twinged my conscience with their questions as much as if I owed them 10 times the amount. On numerous occasions I was tempted to return all outstanding moneys and call the whole thing quits. Two things deterred me: One, because I was born with 10 fingers I felt a compulsion to publish a 50th number--to abandon the magazine at #49 would be monstrous, unthinkable. (Had I been born into a society of 12-fingered homo saps, 48 would have been the magic number and I doubtlessly would have ceased publication with that issue. For there was no question but that the whole project had palled on me. While reproducing everyone else's articles, I had little time to create my own. I--but I will not go into the whole thing.)

But months passed and I never got started on the last issue. That was because I was so appalled by the prospect. The final number had to be something extraspecial, ofcourse, surpassing all that had gone before. The line-up of contributors should be stellar, the lithographs several. The outstanding letters of the past 10 years should be selected, reprinted, commented on. A résumé should be made of the first 49 nos., and predictions for the next 50 pronostigated (oops!) -- but the overwhelming work involved whelmed over me...

Bit by bit I began to read references in the fanpress to "the defunct Vom". At a time when I still intended to "kiddy on" altho my heart was no longer in it, more & more mentions of the ex-Vom finally sold me on the idea of giving up altogether. BUT I HAD A BEAUTIFUL COVER ALREADY LITHO'D! At least I think it's a beauty--all hail the artist, Lou Goldstone--and double hail Earl Leeth, the swellow (that's Ackermanese for "swell fellow") who did the wing-work on it. In other words, Leeth was the angel. The regalength 2-color job set him back the better part of 10 bucks, and that, friends, is what I call a fan size hunk of angeling. Makes me feel quite salaamy, and that's no baloney. Thanx, Earl; and thanx again. Incidentally, how many of U recognize what the picture illustrates? It's the "cast of characters", as it were, from S. Fowler Wright's tremendous futurian fantasy, THE WORLD BELOW, my personal favorite of all book fiction I have ever read. If, as I have heard it rumored but not confirmed, Wright should recently have died, the cover will prove a timely memorial for the master author of this magnificent novel.

--Without further ado, then, adieu. A letter, an article, and an ad--and that's the end of Vom. Will only charge a nickel, tho, for this Voice of the Slimagi-nation.

A profound impression was made on all by a wartime letter from Anglotan Wm Temple. On 13 Nov 45 he sent another letter which I have treasured all this time. It "has" almost as much as its predecessor. It is one of the most memorable letters I had the privilege of presenting:

Some musings in my den, attained at last after 3 years in foreign climes, though occupied often enough, God knows, by my astral body projected from such places as the Red Sea or a slit trench on Etna's slopes. Yes, it all looks the same: the same fotos of Wells, the book-lined walls, the typewriter and my letter files, the batches of clippings about odd things, the carefully selected survivors of my once large collection of stff. mags. But does it quite feel the same? Nothing inside this room has changed, but the world outside, where I have been all this time, has changed. Have I changed with it?

Some of the old wonder-thrill of these rows of books of stff., fantasy, and the weird-horror has hardened into lumpy fact for me. Do the pages of Bierce & Poe contain anything more gruesome than those 4 days & nights I spent, partly alone, in that cut off road tunnel in the Alps, with the bodies & parts of bodies of some thirty German engineers who, in

attempting to blow up and block the tunnel, only succeeded in scattering themselves in unpleasant death along its length? Think I know now what it would be like to stand in a crater on the Moon. At one spot as you approach the Matterhorn via the Aosta Valley there are 3 gigantic rock-mountains in a row, upflung into jagged horns & sharp peaks, dead gray, utterly bare of vegetation and littered with volcanic rubble, and to the pigmy me who stood in the valley and gazed it was one of those "Imaginary Landscape on the Moon" illustrations of my astronomical books grown enormously into three dimensions. Except that the sky would be black instead of intensely blue, I've no doubt that it was almost exactly the first view of the Moon one would get on stepping out of a lunar spaceship.

Could any fantastic "rose-red city, half as old as time" be more picturesque than the tiny fairy-like town of San Marino perched like a Disney castle on the very summit of a great rock peak; or the minarets & domes of the Arab city of Takrouna, in the desert, also on a lone rocky height; or Venice, a city of colored floating bubbles in green water? That's Dunsany for you. As for Lovecraft and his ancient forgotten cities and haunted mausoleums: the silent streets of Pompeii--a time trip back some 2000 years; or the Colosseum at El Djem in the Tunisian desert, better preserved than the one in Rome, a huge bulk of masonry standing quite solitary & forgotten--"Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless & bare, The lone & level sands stretch far away"; or the tombs of Egypt.

As Mr. Wells knows, the ruins of "Everytown" in THINGS TO COME stand in London today. Which reminds me that all these books I'm looking at in this room once, in 1940, disappeared together with their shelves under the collapsed ceiling when a bomb landed at the end of the garden, and had to be dug out and cleaned patiently one by one. Which in turn reminds me of the time when one of the earliest bombs to fall in London fell near "George" Medhurst's house, and a lone bomb-splinter came in through the window and of all his collection of some 500 books of stf. & fantasy chose THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME in which to embed itself.

Far away seemed the war when I stood above the clouds 11,000 feet up on a glacier on Pian Rosa, where the Swiss, Italian & French Alps meet & join, the most wonderful spectacle I've ever seen: in every direction, range upon range, the countless snow-veined summits stood up, and it wasn't hard to imagine that through one of those high & lonely passes one might, by a geographical accident, stumble upon Shangri-la or the Country of the Blind. The Atomic Bomb of THE WORLD SET FREE has come right out of the pages with a bang, together with atomic power and a shower of rockets of all sizes--I first met rockets coming the wrong way in Tunisia, in bunches of six at a time and with vampire howls--we called them the "Sobbing Sisters." And talking of vampires, what Transylvanian roost could be more grim & foreboding than the Castle of Malatestiano in North Italy, the best-preserved mediaeval castle in Europe? I had stood in that room over the drawbridge where Francesca da Rimini & Paolo were slain by the half-insane Conte (an episode which inspired a tone poem from Tchaikovsky and a drama from Dante). The torture chamber, in the dungeon, with all its original ingenious fittings, is from the Poe of "The Pit & the Pendulum," and there is a Pit too, from which the bones of scores of murdered victims are still being extracted. In one of the gloomy halls hang the original portraits of two of the Conte's wives: he strangled one and poisoned the other. Dracula had better take a back seat.

Yes, fantasy has grown more factual since I was last in this den. And yet, you know, these old romantic symbols, the very stuff of which it is woven, still hold their magic. These wanderings have it anything strengthened the fabric, given substance to smoke, made vantage points of possibility upon which credulity might stand. Which reflection inclines my eye to a newcomer on these shelves, JULES VERNE by Kenneth Allott. It is so much more than just a biography of Verne. It's also an analysis of the 19th century birth of science and the romantic literature which inspired Verne, by someone who knows what stf. & fantasy mean & what they're made of. He lumps them together as "romanticism", as against the dry factual "classicism" of reason. And shows that, as always, the poets were in the vanguard. This exposition is mainly in a fascinating last chapter entitled "The Future of a Sentiment", the Sentiment being "romanticism." Herewith a taste of it:--

"The poets woke up from the anaesthetic of rationalism to cultivate their senses. They sought refreshment from the commonsense & good taste of the coffee houses in the noisiest waterfalls, the most precipitous cliffs, the most wind-tortured trees. They followed nature ecstatically and

Invented a sixth sense, the sense of wonder, to enjoy her in her most mysterious moods.

'Next, when you are describing
A shape, or sound, or tint;
Don't state the matter plainly,
But put it in a hint;
And learn to look at all things
With a sort of mental squint.'

"The flash of lightning over a graveyard, the typhoon at sea, the owl hooting by the ruined seat of greatness--all these gave extreme pleasure to the senses, and the most refined sensibility collected new types of sense experience as 18th-century earls collected antique marbles and as present-day monarchs collect stamps.

"The love of cruelty and of torture, the excitement over exotic loves, the passion for the new in exploration & adventure were in part an expression of the desire for new tracts of territory in which the sense could be exercised. 'I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts,' says Ishmael in MOBY DICK.... The Gothic castle by twilight became the symbol of the mysterious and around it were woven the supernatural or sexual-sadistic fantasies of the horror novelists. Hoffmann, Mrs. Radcliffe, Edgar Allan Poe are the heliophants of a cult.

"The romantic loved solitude. Wordsworth retreated to the Lake District. Hatteras (Captain Hatteras, of Verne's "The English at the North Pole") fled to the shaggy north like Frankenstein pursuing his monster...

"The sea, the ivory tower, the desert island, the wind, artificial man, the poles, the doppelganger, the noble savage, the secret city of a lost civilisation, the ghost ship, the journey through space to the moon or one of the planets, broken machinery, the Wandering Jew--these are a few common romantic symbols to which an almost sacramental mystery was attached...."

Adjacent to JULES VERNE I see another stranger: to me, i.e.: Speer's monumental FANCYCLOPEDIA. Only recently did I get my first view of it--I hadn't dared have it sent out to me abroad lest it be lost, as so much else was. A perfect example of the wit & industry of American fandom. This leads me to compare mentally American & British fandom, which broadens into a general view of the respective fantasy-stff-doms. Who has done more for this "romanticism"--Americans or British? On the surface, the States: they produced a once enormous, and now still large, flood of magazines, against which the British produced only two, now both defunct (admittedly not because they failed to prosper, but because of DYKTAWO) /and once again there are two: New Worlds & Fantasy/. But then the American public is magazine conscious: it buys comparatively few books. Whereas you can't keep the British out of their bookshops & libraries, and they have no great interest in the ephemeral magazine. Again, having a population going on 3 times the size of Britain's, naturally the Americans would produce more mags. Yet, nearer literature, Britain has produced more of the better class writers. Glancing along the backs of these books of mine I see the names Wells, Stapledon, Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, M.P. Shiel, J.D. Beresford, M.R. James, Aldous Huxley, S. Fowler Wright, Arthur Machen, Victor MacClure, James Hilton, Lord Dunsany, G.K. Chesterton, Bram Stoker, Walter de la Mare, J.B. Priestley, William Hope Hodgson, Neil Bell, George Griffiths, Sax Rohmer, Eden Phillpotts, Algernon Blackwood. What American book authors can we place beside these? Bierce, Burroughs, Poe, Merritt, Jack London, Lovecraft, Thorne Smith, John Taine. I'll gladly admit Weinbaum. But are the Heinleins & Campbells human enough to stand on their own with the public outside the covers of ASTOUNDING? I don't think so. You've got to be an old hand with plenty of technical knowledge before you can fully appreciate the very real merits of their work. They might arouse John Doe's sense of wonder all right, but he'll only wonder what the hell they're driving at. And here, of course, is where we do hand it to the Yanks: all the latest experimental work in, and development of, stff. has been wrought in the States: thought variants & mutants & the super-terrifics hammered out in the EESmithery, and refinement upon refinement (until in some cases the wonder has been refined out of it altogether).

Still, I maintain, the poets were in the vanguard--"Locksley Hall," "Ozymandias," "The Golden Road to Samarkand," "Kubla Khan," "The Music Makers," "Omar Khayyam," and so on. There's the font of our romanticism, the primary source of stff. & fantasy. Very British, you might notice. Line your poets up against Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, Byron, Shelley, Keats,

Burns, Coleridge, Gray, Tennyson, Swinburne. What, poor little Poe on his own again? Where's Whitman & Longfellow?

But all this isn't getting me anywhere (except in bad with my friends across the Atlantic). To-morrow my furlough ends, and I must away back to Italy, to Bordighera on the Riviera where the thousand lights of Monte Carlo glitter all night across the bay. How much rather I'd just sit here! What new things to see, I wonder, ere I can dream in here again?

"LAST MEN IN LONDON" by Olaf Stapledon Methuen and Company, Ltd.
London.

The author, imagining himself for the purpose of writing this book, to be a Neptunian researcher of two thousand million years in the future, observes and comments upon humanity's attempts to adjust itself in the Universe.

The Neptunian observer selects one individual, Paul by name, into whose mind he enters, experiencing our present-day thoughts and emotions through Paul's eyes while yet retaining his own Neptunian intelligence. The set up affords the author full opportunity to inject his propaganda and expound his radical views on improvement toward a better civilisation. Placing Paul upon a figurative dissecting table, the Neptunian mercilessly probes through Paul's brain and offers up for the readers' minute inspection all of Paul's most intimate thoughts and reactions to life and its problems.

The Neptunian observer pounces upon humanity's faults and foibles with uncanny accuracy. In his observations on the reaction of various types of human beings to war, for instance, the reader is able to simultaneously comprehend humanity's attempt to rationalize war and the Neptunian realisation of the futility of such conflicts. The insight into the reasoning of the pacifists, the soldiers and the Red Cross workers through the observations of the Neptunian is very enlightening.

Although Paul is the main character of the book, at no time does he assume a definite personality of his own. Paul is merely a guinea pig through which the Neptunian characterizes humanity as a whole.

The Neptunian has the power to influence Paul to some extent without the latter's knowledge. I could not help but feel, however, that if all humanity were to be similarly influenced, it would lead toward retrogression rather than progress, since occasionally the Neptunian advocated a surrender to humanity's weaknesses rather than to overcoming them. However, I suspect that Stapledon also uses his shockingly cold-blooded and impersonal views on the mores and behaviour of humanity to achieve the alien effect prevalent within his books. The description of Neptunian life, living habits and appearances of these individuals of the future, who have both human and animal qualities, lends a credible other-worldly atmosphere to the story.

Toward the conclusion of the book, a new mutant species appears on the scene, and it is intimated in the Neptunian's chronicle that this type will ultimately assume leadership of the world.

Though not so great in scope as "Last And First Men", this book is more compact and will be retained longer in the memory of the average reader, I believe, for the author did not have to contend with the problem of crowding millions of years into a few hundred pages.

"Last Men In London" is brilliantly written and contains some exceedingly keen observations and sound criticisms anent our way of life. If you enjoy Stapledon, don't miss this book.

Pignina

November 23rd, 1946.

FJA speaking-- Now here is a curious fanomenon: Altho no subscriber rcvd a copy of Vom for a year, and it seemd to be clear that publication had ceast, not a soul askt for a cent back! What does this indicate--that Vom's readers have no souls? They certainly have no cents! But, facetiousness aside, I don't know whether to feel insulted at the implication that I am a petty thief, or just ashamed of fan publishers at large. Have my predecessors set such precedents that the victims of folding fanmags merely mentally shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, there's more money gone to Limbo"? Has it come to be the common, expected thing that money invested in a fanmag is a gamble and will not be returnd if the publication quits? Well, it's not that way with me, folks; every outstanding penny will be returnd, in cash if U wish it. In the following space, if my records show any money due U, U will find the amount recorded: _____. On this & the following page U'll find bks I have for sale. U may wish to apply your credit to the purchase of one of them. Or, I have back issues of Vom to offer. First price is the regular price to someone picking up this magazine for the first (and last) time. If U have any credit, the parenthetical price is what your credit is worth to U as a previous supporter of Vom. Is that statement ambiguous? Now that I think about it, I think maybe it is. What I mean is, if a number is priced 50c (35c) and U have 35c coming to U, U may have the issue for the reduced rate. If I don't hear from U by the middle of August, I'll return your money to U.

I am sending a few other of the letters I had on hand to Henry Elsner jr. He may be able to salvage some of them. Watch this publisher for a publication somewhat similar to Vom. His address: 13618 Cedar Grove, Detroit 5, Mich.

And that's "30" from 4z.

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