

# Astra's Tower

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S T E N C I L   G A Z I N G S

A n   E d i t o r i a l

With this issue, ASTRA'S TOWER converts to a FAPA publication, and thereby withdraws from general circulation. Unless you are a member of FAPA, the chances that you will see another copy of A-T are something less than those of Sol going nova. This issue is published to close out our subscription list and satisfy our readers that we weren't dead.

Only - we are. One-half of ASTRA'S TOWER died on February 21st with the death of my dear friend and co-editor, Stephen Weber. The remaining half has been procrastinating on the very lonely and sorrowful task of getting out this issue. Stephen's title of "Associate Editor" was more or less honorary, but he helped me wonderfully with moral courage, never-failing interest, and the cheerfulness that comes from shared labor.

Steve Weber was the first fan with whom I ever corresponded, and always remained my closest fan associate. The whole history of ASTRA'S TOWER, from its first sketchy plans under the name of ALTITUDES, is tied up with my memories of Steve; his joking comment on my procrastination -- I resented them from anyone else, but took it in good part from Steve; he was himself a good-natured deadline-hater. His frank and honest disagreements with me on policy, and his chummy letters and criticisms, made a delightful task out of editing this old magazine. It is a ghastly business to work on it alone, but I am going to keep on publishing, and try to make it the kind of fanzine he always hoped I would publish--a better one. For me, at least, something has gone out of fandom forever, now that he is not here to share it. I don't think fandom will ever mean as much to me again.

There's nothing I can say about Steve except that I, and fandom in general, will miss him terribly. He wasn't well known, and there were few fans who ever met him personally, but those who did, never forgot him. For years fandom owed Steve Weber a great debt and never knew it, for it was from Steve's private collection that many book editions reprinted in FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES were borrowed.

Those who knew Stephen Weber well, will know what I mean when I speak of a personality that shone through past all barriers. I can think of no word for him but lovable. And perhaps it is fitting that my last tribute to Steve should come from the fantasy he loved. Ray Bradbury wrote them, and I can think of no one to whom they so justly apply.

"He walked among us and was fine and good".

And for my own part, and for Thyril Ladd, and for all those who knew Steve with any degree of closeness, I add-- "And we loved him."

## V e t e r a n

Then the Red Gods called forth red sacrifice  
And thirstily their vampyre mouths drank death;  
From pole to pole men felt their blasting breath -  
With unnatural hunger of live life slain twice.  
And you, whose eyes looked only on the stars  
Found doubly-damned approval of the sight;  
You saw the monster's gory fetid blight--  
And thought you wore the gallant cloak of Mars.

(Continued on next page)

You used to be a man whose eyes were kind--  
Whose voice and hands remembered gentleness.  
I think I hate you, now; the flame's duress  
Has made your eyes, once star-beholding, blind  
To everything but what they once held least.  
The Red Gods sacrifice made you their priest.

Marion Zimmer

REVIEWING THE RARITIES

A DEPARTMENT

I

"WINGS OF DANGER"-by Arthur A. Nelson  
Published by Robert M. McBride & Co.,  
New York, 1915.  
Illustrated with frontispiece in  
color, and three black-and-whites,  
by G. W. Gage.

Seldom, outside the pages of Sir Henry Rider Haggard's African epics, has this reviewer come across so engrossing a tale as this one. It seems to have everything.... adventure of the swashbuckling type, fantasy of the lost-race variety, a smattering of international intrigue; and, withal, a tender love story interwoven among its many other attractions.

After the opening chapters -- introductory ones in which we meet Alan Severn, our narrator, and Norma Raylescroft, as well as sundry other characters that flit in and out of the succeeding pages -- we are swept along in a continual tide of action, even a small hint as to the nature of which would be to spoil much of the book's attraction. We can say, however, that "Ingulf the Second" who is called the "Wanderer" (so reminiscent in itself of a favorite character of Haggard!) is, perhaps, the story's chief key to the mystery of the Norse Saga that continually intrudes itself into this tale of the Heart of the Dark Continent. In the seeming incongruity of coupling the Scandinavian lore with that of Africa there lies our first hint that this story is to build itself up into Fantasy; there is continual suspense, well upheld, that makes us wonder just what IS the mystery that surround Ingulfa, the "native who is NOT a native". And in writing a review such as this one must be careful not to follow the usual practice of synopsisizing the story...to do so would be but to destroy for the reader the undenied pleasure of "finding out for oneself". Let us say only that "Wings of Danger" is well worth any reader's time, that it fits well into a collection of Fantasy, and that, like other books we hope to review for you in the pages of ASTRA'S TOWER, it is truly RARE. The copy we read is the only one we have ever seen, and that was loaned to us; we only wish it stood on our own bookshelves!

Reviewed by ..... Stephen Weber

II

"TROUBLE ON ISK"

(Something about the book, "The Expedition of Captain Flick" - England 1896 -  
by Fergus Hume.)

"THE EXPEDITION OF CAPTAIN FLICK", England 1896, is a particularly excellent

example of the "Lost-Race" type of Fantasy. The legend that an original statue of Venus, done by Praxiteles' own hand, still exists, and is worshipped by a dwarfen black race, on a lost island known as Isk, is the cause of the voyage. The adventure assumes serious proportions when the betrothed of the teller, sister of his friend, is kidnapped in a scarlet-and-black galley, and taken away to Isk by natives, to become a bride for their white King....

From a slow beginning, the tempo of the tale increases, until at conclusion, we find events meshed in a thrilling climax, in which rescue of the maiden, battle with rage-crazed natives, explosion of Isk by volcanic action, mingle together. Needless to say, the British girl is rescued and all ends well, with our party sailing safely away just as the Island and its white temple to Venus sink forever beneath the sea.

But if one gathers this is a poorly-written "Thriller", - he is wrong. Thriller it is, but produced with skill, both as to construction and style, and with artistic descriptive matter relative to the strange land, and with an obvious erudite archeological knowledge as background. Probably little-known, this scarce old-time Fantasy merits the collector's reading.

Reviewed by .... Thyril L. Ladd

#### Dark Renaissance

Enjoy the sunlight while you can;  
There is a lady in these parts  
Who has a demon in her womb  
And knows it in her heart of hearts.

And while her cuckold husband moves  
Sedately through his morning bath  
She feels within her belly grow  
A thing of dark satanic wrath.

She knows within her heart of hearts  
That serpent death lies cradled there  
But still her lips part in a smile.  
She plucks a flower for her hair.

And turns, and looking out the window  
Watches as the sunlight dies.  
The smile slips off. There is a crawling  
In the pupils of her eyes.

Theodore R. Cogswell

#### The Sound

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Up the cellar steps<br>Comes a small dry sound,<br>Stops on the landing,<br>Moves quietly around. | 2. Scratches on the door<br>As if it wanted in,<br>Not a mouse or rat<br>Or any of their kin.          | 3. A thing not dead,<br>Something not free,<br>A weird faint sound<br>That ought not to be. |
| 4. And if I tell it<br>To please go away,<br>Something sights<br>In a small weary way.               | 5. And then it goes back<br>Down the narrow stair,<br>But it knows that I know<br>It won't stay there. |   |

by Genevieve K. Stephens

## GRANDCHILDREN OF THE LENS

Someone commented lately in FAPA that the latest E. E. Smith title had a Bobbsey-twins atmosphere. That didn't bother me; I managed to keep Kay, Kat, Cam and Con separated in my mind and even had a chance to admire the way in which Smith had effectively made each girl an individual. Often, when several girls are portrayed in mass-production, they become four carbon copies. Yet I noticed, that Kathryn was the most like her mother; that Camilla was a trifle hard; that Karen had a bluntness which made her a carbon copy of Kim Kinnison himself; etc. Also I liked the fact that Kit Kinnison was more like Clarissa than like his father. I spent one entire fan-gab discussing the subtle differences in the characters of the "LENSMEN" series; a discussion which led us far afield into the intricacies of Merritt and Kuttner and C. L. Moore. We did, agree that like Merritt's characters, the Kinnisons can be discussed as if they were real people.

The discussion, however, did not touch on a point left intriguingly open in my mind by Smith; a point brought up in the story by the old Arisian elder himself, said to Karen.

"Some day you will love with a depth which no human can even imagine now" ---

What I'd like to know is, who will the four Kinnison girls marry? What woman will be fit for Kit Kinnison's bride? Agreed that this sounds rather like those little tags at the end of a soap-opera serial-installment; yet though about it a little, it's an intriguing question. The build-up given to the fondness of Constance for Tregonsee gives a hint and a lead, but not much of one. After all, Tregonsee is a Rigelian!! That's definitely out unless these Lens-children are far more non-human than Smith intimated.

Dismissing the clique of Kim's friends, as possible future husbands for the four girls, what remains? Mentor makes capital of the fact that they are perfect, the result of a mating of two distinct blood-lines. Possibly those lines have produced others somewhat like the Kinnison children, lesser of course and without their specialized Lensed powers, but near enough to this super-race.

Or possibly a Third Galaxy will produce a race as perfect as they -- or perhaps certain Arisians, basically human, will come into normal space.

Or could it be that--- with a thought repulsive in deed to modern prejudice, so that Smith dared not hint at it, but scientifically used in ec genetics--- is it the intent of the Arisians who maintain this super-race to keep the line completely pure by a marriage of brother and sister such as the lines of Egyptian pharaohs used to avoid contamination of the royal blood?

Intriguing question indeed. THE VORTEX BLASTER, the promised sequel, may solve my question.

A simple problem has an obvious solution. This is neither simple nor trivial, but has universe-shaking implications. Suppose Kathryn, the most human of the four girls, were to spoil the plan by falling in love. These four girls can make or break a Galaxy. If one of their number were to rebel, most likely, according to the strong tie of affection Smith has shown among the five, the others would follow along.

Or--- Kit Kinnison is certain to be the hero of the Universe, adored by every woman in the Galaxy. Suppose it goes to his head?

When an Ultimate type is produced, possibilities are limitless. Will they be a

new God-race? Just what WILL Arisia do with these Children of the Lens?

Read the VORTEX BLASTER and find out--- I HOPE!

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Note: A later discussion of this same problem elicited the remark - stated flatly - "Of course, Christopher will marry Kay".

What - no polygamy???

- The End -

#### VARIATIONS ON AN OLD THEME

Marion Zimmer

The "Lost-Race" story, as such, has greatly diminished in quantity of recent years. With exploration even of the most remote corners of the globe, expeditions to the Antarctic, observatories erected in the wildernesses, archaeologists seeking and verifying even Atlantis--- much of Fantasy and more particularly the "Lost-Race" story as such, has been transmuted into, not fantasy, but science fiction.

However, of recent years, three authors of note have introduced a new type of "Lost-City" story into our literature. Following the paths carved by Haggard and his imitators (for it cannot be denied that Haggard was the originator or at least one of the trail-makers in the "Lost-Race" story), A. Merritt wrote a number of new and different "Lost-Race" stories.

As good an example as any is his well-known "Dwellers in the Mirage". He changed radically the paths that Haggard had set. Haggard's stories are mainly adventure stories, and many are fantasy only in the sense that they are about lands that do not exist-- or, in the case of the "taduki" series of Allan Quatermain, dreams-stories. However, Merritt introduced into these "Lost-Land" stories, a new element-- that of pure fantasy. It might be said that Merritt combined the lost-race story with the sorcery story, obtaining a new and delicious recipe. DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE, while founded on actual legends (which few of Haggard's are) soars into the purely impossible many times. It is seldom that Haggard's feet get off the ground, although admittedly the ground he walks is cloud-like. Merritt seldom, if ever, touches earth. He combines the "pure" fantasy of Dunsany with the "Adventure" fantasy of Haggard, and does it nicely.

Three very fine "Lost-Races" -- legitimate "Lost Races, right on this Earth, --- have been portrayed in STARTLING STORIES in the last two years. The first was Keith Hammond's (Kuttner) THE VALLEY OF THE FLAME, seconded by a little short which one fan called "A cheap rewrite of VOTF" called I AM EDEN. These both took place in the South American jungles; one in a land called "Paititi" where Cats, not men, were the dominant race; the other in a valley where all things lived and were sentient .... even rocks and plants. Next came THE BLUE FLAMINGO, written by one of the greatest of Merritt's devotees, Hannes Bok, who has benefited by his attempts to finish the Merritt fragments. The third was a Mowgli-ish tale of a Tibetan paradise where Men and Beast were brothers; Edmond Hamilton's VALLEY OF CREATION.

Amazing Stories, too, has contributed Don Wilson's "Desert of the Damned" and "The Ice Queen", as well as something called "Goddess of the Golden Flame" by Berkely Livingston or somebody like that - William McGivern, too, has written lost-race scientification.

But Edmond Hamilton, even the creator of Captain Future of malodorous fame, has topped an enormous rise in the field of Lost-Race tales of the future. He hinted at this success at a little short called THE DEAD PLANET--- where the end made Earth the mysterious lost race. But in January, 1947, Hamilton made fantasy history forever in a tale called THE STAR OF LIFE -- story of a strange, forbidden planet which held the secret of immortal youth.

In a marvelous commentary on the tale, "Meet The Author", Hamilton discusses the lost-race story. I would suggest that the reader dig out this article; brief quotes, don't do his ideas justice. The article might be summed up in his own words -

"All that" (the lure of a horizon) "has faded as the surface of the Earth has become completely known and the last mysteries exposed. But there is no reason why it should be so. Out in Space lies a vastly larger and even more mysterious realm for the imagination to play in." And he adds "I should like to hear some of the strange tales that will be afloat then about the far-off and unvisited stars".

Strange thought! Perhaps some day men will doubt the fact than an "Earth" existed back in primitive days. Then, indeed, we will, have "Lost-Race" tales without peer. But I can wait--while Hamilton and Kuttner keep writing.

End

## THE MIRACLE

by Stephanie Grace

Was she not beautiful! Her hair was ebony to the startling pallor of her skin. How still she lay!

"Marie..... Marie!" She did not answer or stir; the dead lie in the very center of silence itself.

He had taken the breath from her lips as neatly as if she had never breathed at all. He would have to bury her of course - Death would tarnish the waxen loveliness - but not yet, later.... later....

The second day he perceived no imperfection, still her death had been singularly unviolent.

On the third day he knew he had performed a miracle. Time had ceased or dissolution would have set in, yet she lay as coolly lovely as fresh as an uncut flower.

Another day passed -- another, he resumed his lonely life, curiously peaceful and Marie, the exquisite, the untouched, could be looked at, adored, whispered to, wondered at ....

Lest there be interruptions by passing strangers or inquisitive neighbors he had pulled the shades down, eaten without fire, gone out only at night. A small fear gnawed him now and then that the world, would not acknowledge his miracle, the people not believe what their eyes saw, he himself might doubt.. but that was unthinkable.. he went to look at her again...

how exquisite she was!

"She cometh no more  
Time too is dead.  
The last tide is fled  
From the last shore.  
Eternity --  
What is Eternity  
But the sea coming,  
The sea going --  
For evermore."

Fiona Macleod

D I S M A Y    I N    H A D E S

Lord Satan on his ruddy throne  
Watched sinners squirming in a brimstone well;  
Relaxed at echo of the anguished screams  
Convinced that everything was right in Hell.  
When suddenly, with seething hiss  
And firey glow, a ruddy imp appeared  
With awful face and signs of dire dismay  
Waving a lettered paper as he neared  
"Alas-" Low crouched the quivering fiend -  
"On Earth, this came - and Lo - I trembling cower!"  
The devil took the printed page, amazed -  
"What is this Ghastly Thing called - ASTRA'S TOWER?"  
Lord Satan, quailing, silent read -  
His hands the burning torments then did quell -  
All Hades, trembling, listened as he said -  
"This is beyond the worst we have in Hell!"

Envoi

Fires damped, the sinners scorchless lie  
No greater torment for each one than be  
Condemned (oh horror deep) to read and read  
from Astra's Tower throughout eternity!

- Thyril L. Ladd

- Dedication -

This entire issue - to our friend and comrade, the late S. Stephen Weber.  
May we carry on this publication as he would have wished - although he is not  
here to share in it.

The editor wishes to thank Dorothy G. Quinn for her help in what would have  
been a very sorrowful task - that of putting together this A-T #3. See you in  
November - M. E. Z.