

# FANTASY COMMENTATOR

...covering the field of imaginative literature...

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editor and publisher

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Vol. III, No. 8

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Fall 1953

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This is the twenty-eighth number of *Fantasy Commentator*, an amateur, non-profit periodical devoted to articles, reviews and verse in the area of science-fiction and fantasy, published at irregular intervals. All opinions expressed herein are the individual contributors' own, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the staff as a whole. Manuscripts dealing with any phase of fantasy literature are welcome. Accepted material is subject to minimal editorial revision if necessary. Unless correspondents request otherwise, letters of general interest may be excerpted and printed in "Open House," the letters column. Please address all correspondence to the editor at 7 East 235th Street, Bronx, N. Y. 10470.

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## This 'n' That

The explanation for the discrepancy between the issue date and the copyright date given in the last *Fantasy Commentator* applies to this number as well. The entries here conclude publication of the backlog of mss. remaining when the magazine suspended appearance after its twenty-sixth issue; as far as I know, they were not printed subsequently elsewhere with the exception of the last installment of "The Immortal Storm." The review of *The Peacemaker* (pp. 239-240) has a checkered history. Many years ago, after a period of feuding, Francis T. Laney and I "made up" and agreed to cement our improved relationship by writing and exchanging articles for our fan magazines. I received Laney's and published it in the Fall, 1946 issue of *Commentator*. Mine—the Forester review—was composed and sent to him but lost in the mails, which I did not learn until *The Acolyte* ceased publication without printing it and I asked for its return. Fortunately I had kept a copy of the ms., but never got around to publishing it.

I have included in this number as well two short pieces of my own that originally appeared elsewhere in journals even more ephemeral than this one: the Dahl and Burroughs reviews on pp. 235 and 249. The former, written in late 1953, first appeared in J. Michael Rosenblum's *The New Futurian* for Summer, 1954 (vol. I, #2, pp.22-23); the latter in Henry Elsner, Jr.'s *The Scientifictionist* dated November, 1946-January, 1947 (vol. 2, #1, p. 20).

Since this number is the last in what I shall hereafter call the "old series" of *Fantasy Commentator* (as distinct from all later ones, beginning with volume IV, which will be termed the "new series"), subscribers and collectors may be interested in a brief history describing the magazine's genesis and a few important facts about it. The remainder of this column will be devoted to these. A "Practical Guide" to the magazine was once announced by Camille Cazedessus, Jr., but apparently never appeared; Cazedessus did, however, compile an index to the six issues of volume III that had been published. This was included in the 1969 annual issue of *The Fantasy Collector*, and is now supplanted by the complete index you will find on page 254.

Any history of *Fantasy Commentator* is to a considerable degree a history of myself. To be clear and complete about the first topic I shall have to relate some of the second; satisfying as it is to write autobiography, I shall try not to become overly self-indulgent. Some relevant background, however, seems appropriate. When the first number of this magazine appeared I was twenty-three. I had read in the fantasy field for many years, since the age of fourteen intensively. In 1937 I began to collect back issues of science-fiction magazines, in 1938 fantasy books, and in 1939 I encountered fandom and fan publishing through attending the First World Science Fiction Convention of that year. By 1942 my files of science-fiction magazines were complete (though I did not obtain the earliest numbers of *Weird Tales* until 1944). During the early 1940's I acquired sets of what I have always thought were the finest fan periodicals of all time, *Science Fiction Digest* and its successor, *Fantasy Magazine*. The format, scope and content of these influenced *Fantasy Commentator* strongly. The other two primary influences on it were my growing interest in fantasy in book form (then greatly under-exploited in the fan press) and the format and professional presentation in scientific journals. My collection of books had grown to one of the largest in the field; and studying for a Ph.D. in chemistry (following my graduation from college in 1942) had familiarized me with the tools of scholarship, of which technical journals were an integral part. By this time, then, I had an excellent reference library to draw from, I had read enough of it to be knowledgeable, and I was beginning to feel mature enough to express my opinions about the fantasy field.

(continued on page 252)

# "THE OTHER WORLDS":

## A REAPPRAISAL

*Sam Moskowitz*

It is now just over a decade since Phil Stong's anthology of the fantastic, *The Other Worlds* (1941), was published. The book sold well, was popular enough to be reprinted within a year (under the title *25 Modern Stories of Mystery and Imagination*), and received generally favorable reviews in most quarters. Its reception by the fan community, however, was distinctly chilly, and reviews of it in the fan press ranged from indifferent to angry and derogatory. Was this reaction justified? By now, with new science-fiction anthologies appearing almost monthly, enough time has probably passed for us to reexamine the basis of this bitterness more temperately and reassess its appropriateness.

Careful reading of fan criticisms shows that beneath the obscuring and often vehement rhetoric lie a number of serious allegations. These we might list as follows:

- (1) Phil Stong purposely picked for *The Other Worlds* poor and mediocre material in preference to the good.
- (2) He pretended to be an expert on fantasy fiction ("America's foremost critic")—and he was (and is) not.
- (3) He deliberately went out of his way to run down science-fiction.
- (4) He unfairly omitted certain types of stories (e.g., those having interplanetary themes) simply because he was prejudiced against them.
- (5) Because of their inferior quality, some of the stories he used had no place in the book under any circumstances.

Off hand, all these charges sound plausible, and some seem incontrovertible. But in actuality, I believe the truth itself, simple and obvious as it is, has eluded most critics. They bought a book alleged by publishers' blurbs to be one of the finest compilations of fantasy fiction ever assembled in one volume—and nearly all stories in which had been taken from the fantasy magazines. Through their minds flashed titles of dozens of fine stories, stories so memorable that they could probably recite their plots from memory years after first reading them.

They thought of David Keller and of his accepted classics—"The Revolt of the Pedestrians," "No More Tomorrows," "The Thing in the Cellar"; certainly at least one of these would appear in the anthology! They thought, too, of Stanley G. Weinbaum; what of "A Martian Odyssey" or "The Lotus Eaters"? Surely one of the two would be included!

And where were Don A. Stuart's "Twilight" and "Night"; Edmond Hamilton's "The Man Who Evolved"; "Old Faithful" by Raymond Z. Gallun; Chester D. Cuthbert's "The Sublime Vigil"; "The Undersea Tube" by L. Taylor Hansen; D. D. Sharp's "The Eternal Man"; Harl Vincent's "Rex" or his "Prowler of the Wasteland"; "Short Wave Castle" of Calvin Perego; "The Sea Witch" of Nictzin Dyalhis or Seabury Quinn's immortal "Roads"; John Beynon Harris's "The Man from Beyond"; and hundreds more?

The problem as fans envisaged it was not finding enough good stories to fill an anthology, but rather which of the many available classics to choose for

inclusion. And when the volume appeared, without the expected favorites, their feelings were expressed in the statement "It could have been so great."

In their chagrin they overlooked the obvious, glaring facts that fairly shouted aloud why the anthology was what it was. After all, this was not the detective field, the western field, the sports field, where anyone could pose as an expert. This was the field of fantasy fiction whose followers knew very well just who were the experts and who were not. They knew beyond any question of doubt because in their own ranks were the greatest authorities on fantasy and science-fiction alive.

In part III of the forward to *The Other Worlds* Stong remarks: "In selection, of course, some little attention was given to the writing of these ideas, in order to reduce a possible seventy [stories] from some five hundred odd copies of magazines, to the comfortable number included here."

This of course partially explains the first charge against our editor and partially justifies the second. Phil Stong never read five hundred fantasy magazines, because during the decade before publication supposedly covered there had not been that many fantasy magazines published. Indeed, he claims only to have read that many *magazines*, with no specification as to their *kind*.

Though there have been far fewer than five hundred fantasy magazines published since 1931, Stong has by no means perused them all—or even a majority of them. He is by no means an imperceptive critic, and he couldn't have, and still come up with the stories he did. The evidence points to his having examined between two and three dozen fantasy magazines, for, on checking through my files, I find that Stong has selected for inclusion in *The Other Worlds* the best stories from from the issues he used!

"Alas, All Thinking" was by far the best tale in the July, 1935 issue of *Astounding Stories* magazine. "The Adaptive Ultimate" was the best one in the November, 1935 *Astounding*, being contested for that position only by Weinbaum's "The Red Peri," whose length might well have prohibited its inclusion were not Stong's admitted aversion to interplanetary themes already operating against it. "The Woman in Gray" by Walker G. Everett was also an outstanding yarn in the number of the magazine in which it originally appeared. So were "The Considerate Hosts," "Escape," "The Pipes of Pan," "A God in a Garden," "Adam Link's Vengeance"—and, indeed, all the others which first saw print in the fantasy pulps.

In choosing from the issues he had, then, Stong showed good judgement. He just didn't have enough to choose from! He probably bought occasional issues of fantasy magazines from the newsstands, and obtained a few others from dealers in back-number periodicals. A strong substantiation of this is found in his remark about tales with an interplanetary theme: "There are no interplanetary stories, simply because in the magazines available there are not a dozen such stories with even mild originality and amusement value." Notice that: "in the magazines available." Since many good interplanetary stories undeniably *have* been printed, our editor never saw the issues of the magazines containing them. I am not surprised at this, for the crop in recent years has been far from good; plots of the truly outstanding interplanetaries of past decades have been so formularized by editorial policies that most of their modern counterparts are scarcely worth reading. Some of Stong's astringency seems to me to be entirely justified.

He does, however, take the trouble to explain why some popular authors were excluded. Among the shorter works of John Taine and A. Hyatt Verrill nothing suitable could be found. (It is certainly true that practically all of Taine's work is of novel-length, and most of Verrill's is as well.) David H. Keller, he claims, has a style unsuited to science-fiction—which is undeniably true; it is suited more to the weird tale, in which Keller has done some very powerful work. Stong also found E. E. Smith "dull as dishwater," but this is entirely irrelevant, for

aside from his eight long novels Smith had had published but one short story before this collection appeared—and I doubt if even the most rabid fantasy enthusiast would have nominated it for inclusion.

Does Stong, as charged, go out of his way to run down science-fiction? Far from it; indeed, he gives it a remarkable recommendation. Instead of apologizing for his tastes in reading-matter, his foreward justifies them:

The enjoyment of such stories as these rests on one's acceptance of an initial law which is completely irrational but which is put down in a calm and matter of fact manner as an obvious circumstance which you must accept if you are to play the game and have any fun out of it.

For those nearsighted people who believe that a fantasy is a brittle thing, God wot, whose principal appeal is to weak minds . . . I may say first that no story in this collection requires such concessions as are regularly made to Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Philo Vance, Lupin and the whole gallery of super-dicks . . . . . At one time I went through a short season of detective mysteries but I found that they strained my credulity and so I returned to fantasies.

. . . . . As far as being "fairy tales" is concerned, the fantastic stories are quite as worthy of serious reading as the works of William Shakespeare, P. G. Wodehouse or Ernest Hemingway—to collect, casually, from three strata and manners.

Stong goes on for pages in this vein, defending all types of fantastic fiction. True, he is witheringly critical of the mediocre material which has been foisted on willing and unwilling readers alike—yet is this unjustified? And even then, he strongly qualifies his criticism:

In this pabulum of reiterated nonsense, however, there appear with almost incredible frequency, stories that are original, stories that are brightly written, stories that present extensions of engaging philosophies, and neatly constructed stories of dramatic impossibilities.

Perhaps it was a little unfair to poke fun at H. P. Lovecraft; but the quotation he chose *was* not only susceptible to parody, but exemplified one of the weaker characteristics of Lovecraft's fiction. And if Stong felt Lovecraft was truly a bad writer, he would scarcely have included "In the Vault."

This brings us to the last complaint, that some of the stories in *The Other Worlds* had no business being there under any circumstances. A partial answer to this has already been implied above, where I have stressed that lack of raw material limited the editor's selections. Perhaps the poorest entries in the volume are "The Man Who Knew All the Answers" by Donald Bern and David W. O'Brien's "Truth Is a Plague." These tales do indeed fall below the designation of "fair." That they are "fresh variants" to Stong shows simply that he is not as familiar with the fantasy field as he should be—else he would recognize them immediately for what they are: fictionalized gambits too well known to reprint. I should rate all other stories in the book as at least presentable, with "Alas, All Thinking" and "The Adaptive Ultimate" outstanding.

Where does all this leave us? In reviewing the charges which have been made against Phil Stong, the first and fourth clearly cannot be substantiated. He certainly did not fill *The Other Worlds* with mediocre stories deliberately, but rather picked pretty much the best of those he chose from. His exclusion of interplanetary tales is understandable, because he seems to have encountered few if any good ones. There seems even less substance to the third charge, that he went out of his way to run down science-fiction; anyone reading carefully the foreward to this book will find, mixed with fully justified criticism, much praise for the field. As to the last charge, I believe it may be technically true, but even if so, it brands Stong as no more incompetent than a good many later anthologists who have followed in his footsteps. Very few collections do not contain their share of duds, and I feel that the average of its quality overall justifies the book's existence. We are left, then, with charge two, and here I think that fans' complaints are fully justified. Phil Stong has no particular expertise in the field

of fantasy. But while the general public might believe he had, no perceptive fan would be fooled, or should have expected much more than he got.

At the time of its appearance, I felt devotees should buy this anthology for all its faults. In the reprint edition it was well worth its price, and the higher-priced original edition would also be valuable historically, as one of the earliest anthologies in the field. Later editors, as I prophesied, have produced collections which have reduced, if they have not eliminated, the objections which were made against *The Other Worlds*.

In retrospect, we can see that much of the criticism Stong's book aroused was generated from disappointment. "It could have been so great." That, plus annoyance at advertising which inflated his reputation, led to overreaction. Fans must learn to accept criticism as well as dish it out, and not let their emotions lead them to hypercritical rhetoric which advertises hasty and shallow thinking.

In the first paragraph of this article I stated that reviews of Stong's anthology in the national press were largely favorable. One of these was particularly perceptive. It was written by Basil Davenport, long a devotee of the field, and appeared in *The Saturday Review of Literature* for September 27, 1941. In it Davenport took the editor to task sharply, lamenting the very defects in *The Other Worlds* that fans pointed out—that those who were well-read would find none of their favorites there, and that many entries were unoriginal, stale and old-hat. He even went out of his way to defend and laud the pulp magazines as a source for "writing that is genuinely imaginative, emotive, and interesting." Many libraries store and bind their copies of *The Saturday Review*, and anyone who follows historical aspects of the fantasy field will be rewarded for seeking out this interesting review and reading it carefully.

—oOo—

### THE TRAVELLER

He passed at noon a little hill  
 With a rotting gallows-tree;  
 He shivered in the sun, for still  
 Its empty chains swung free.

The uplands round him seemed to burn,  
 The heat hung everywhere,  
 No matter where he chanced to turn  
 He saw the gallows there.

And so he took the lower track  
 That led to a distant plain;  
 The gallows-hill, when he looked back,  
 Was lost to sight again.

He felt no more that strange remorse  
 And sadness, cutting keen,  
 Instead he saw the glowing gorse  
 And children on the green,

The slowly plodding country folk,  
 The gold on vane and spire,  
 The steady pillars of blue smoke  
 From many a cottage fire.

Then once again he changed his way,  
 And left that landscape kind,  
 Now softened by the parting day,  
 Reluctantly behind.

He heard a wounded leveret cry  
 A hawk dropped down like stone;  
 Death hovered in the evening sky  
 And then he was left alone.

He crossed a shrunken river bed  
 Whose waters' thirsty stream  
 Flowed round the boulders bloody red  
 As in a murderer's dream.

And far beyond the barren heath  
 Past sunset, he could see  
 The mountains rise like jagged teeth  
 With blood on their ivory.

He turned; against the eastern sky  
 Stood the hill he passed at noon,  
 And on its top the gallows high  
 Barred black the harvest moon.

—W. F. Harvey

# HE CAME EARLY AND STAYED LATE

*Darrell C. Richardson*

Very few of the old-time science-fiction and fantasy writers are with us today, and among those continuing to write still fewer are on the top level. Jack Williamson began early and is still going strong. He is also one of the few writers whose work matured along with the field, and is universally acknowledged today as one of its finest craftsmen. His early work—which tended more toward fantasy and adventure—is vastly different from what he writes today. Perhaps more than any other science-fiction writer, he has grown and developed with the times, and demonstrated a unique ability to adjust to changing conditions.

Williamson started selling fiction in 1928, when he was only nineteen. His first short story, "The Metal Man," appeared in the December 1928 *Amazing Stories*. In rapid succession he sold stories to other fantasy magazines. Williamson was a find of Hugo Gernsback, and when Gernsback left *Amazing Stories* and started *Science Wonder Stories* and *Air Wonder Stories*, Williamson's work began to appear in those publications. Within five years his yarns had appeared in *Weird Tales*, *Astounding Stories*, *Strange Tales*, *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, *Wonder Stories* and *Wonder Stories Quarterly* as well. Count these titles, and you will discover that his tales appeared in *all* the science-fiction periodicals published up to that time. (The only other magazine in the field was *Ghost Stories*, which started in 1926, and it published no science-fiction.)

In his book *Of Worlds Beyond* Lloyd Eshbach tells us that Williamson had originally planned to be some sort of scientist. But his discovery of *Amazing Stories* in 1926 opened up a whole new field of interest. "A friend gave me a stray copy of the old Gernsback *Amazing Stories*—the November, 1926 issue which contained Stribling's 'The Green Splotches.' I talked my sister into helping finance a subscription, and the next issue I saw plunged me again into a wonderful new world of escape from all the harsher aspects of life, with the second installment of A. Merritt's 'The Moon Pool.' Immediately I started dreaming up stories while I was riding a horse, or plow, or leaning on a hoe, and soon started writing."

Like a number of other writers in the field, Williamson had a great admiration of the work of Merritt, and many of his earlier stories showed Merritt's rich and imaginative influence. He was once asked why, as a Westerner born and bred, he had never written Western stories. His reply was, "Science-fiction is the answer. . . . For nothing else has quite equalled the thrill of Merritt's 'The Moon Pool.'"

Williamson began writing when he was eighteen. He worked mostly at night by the light of an old kerosene lamp, pounding on an antique typewriter. Nearly two years of this, and a number of rejected stories preceded acceptance of "The Metal Man." He had not been informed of its acceptance, in fact, and learned of it by seeing the story in print. "It was complete with a gaudy Paul cover—sight of that was a moment I shan't forget!" he recalls.

Williamson's first long novel was "The Alien Intelligence," a two-part serial that began in the July, 1929 *Science Wonder Stories*. His second was "The Green Girl," which began in the March, 1930 *Amazing Stories*. (The latter was reprinted as an Avon paperback in 1950.) These novels are not Williamson's best and today seem rather dated, but they were well received on appearance, and compared well with other stories of their era.

What sort of person is John Stewart Williamson, that science-fiction writer with such imaginative powers? No doubt the average reader would think of him as a sophisticated man of the world, a modern among moderns. I can sympathize with the editor of the *Unicorn Mystery Book Club News*, who, when writing about him said, "We are sorry this particular profile has to be written by the primitive method of punching a typewriter keyboard. A biographical sketch of science-fiction writer Jack Williamson should, obviously, be dictated into an electronic gadget that picks up the spoken word at one end and turns out finished copies of *Unicorn News* at the other."

As a matter of fact, Williamson is modest, self-effacing and extraordinarily quiet. According to one observer, he "looks more like a southwestern cowboy with an inferiority complex than a successful author of wildly imaginative tales." After interviewing him a reporter once remarked, "If you ever stopped to wonder about the type of person who writes such stories, you probably have pictured a cross between Buck Rogers and the comic conception of a Man of Mars, and invested him with a personality just slightly less volatile and explosive than some of the substances ('contra-terra') he describes to vividly. This reporter, Kathryn Henry of *The Amarillo Daily News*, went on to say, "Jack Williamson is just about as far from such a concept as a man in New Mexico can get without concealing himself in one of the rockets sent up from White Sands Proving Grounds and traveling off into the stratosphere in fact instead of fancy."

Williamson and his wife once visited briefly in my home. He is over six feet tall, lean and muscular-looking, with black hair and dark eyes. He dressed as many cattlemen in the southwest do, wearing a denim jumper instead of a coat. He wore what looked like the same shell-rimmed glasses seen in the earliest pictures of him. From the moment of first meeting I felt very much at ease with him, and he did not seem as shy as he is often described as being. His quiet friendliness was impressive. He spoke slowly and deliberately. I found him one of the few genuinely modest writers I had ever met; he did not talk about his own work unless almost coerced into doing so. When I pulled down all of his volumes from my shelves for him to autograph, he gave the impression that he was the one being honored, that it was a privilege for him to have the opportunity of signing them.

I learned that had been born in the mining town of Bisbee, Arizona on April 29, 1908. He lived on a ranch in Sonora, Mexico until 1910, when his parents moved to Texas. The family came to New Mexico in a covered wagon in 1915 and homesteaded south of Portales. Jack's father was in the cattle business and then became a school teacher. His son learned to read at home, and later attended the school where his father taught. He was graduated from high school in 1925. For a while he was out of school, and then entered West Texas State College, where he majored in chemistry and physics. Later he studied psychology at the University of New Mexico, feeling that it would help his characterization and plotting.

In high school he was very much interested in one of his classmates. "She was a pretty, blonde, athletic girl named Blanche Slaten," he said, "and I used to admire her timidly from a safe distance. The Christmas before I was graduated she married another guy."

Over twenty years later, Williamson moved from his ranch into Portales, New Mexico, and worked for while as wire-editor on the local daily paper. "Six months at the desk was enough to satisfy me about the glamour of newspaper work," he said, "but the episode is important to me because I found Blanche again, unattached. We were married in August, 1947."

In a recent letter to me Jack said, "I'm still happily married to the same girl, still in Portales, still laboriously trying to turn out one more science-fiction novel, in spite of allergies to all known foods and the efforts of all the demons outside hell."

Jack Williamson has always taken his chosen field seriously. He is not in it just to make a fast buck. Typically, this sincerity and honesty is apparent in the dedication of his first published book, *The Legion of Space*: "To all readers and writers of that new literature called science fiction, who find mystery, wonder, and high adventure in the expanding universe of knowledge, and who sometimes seek to observe and to forecast the vast impact of science upon the lives and minds of men."

By now—late 1952—he has sold more than a million and a half words of fantasy and science-fiction. His name has appeared consistently in most of the major publications in the field. Although he has done most of his better writing for *Astounding Science Fiction*—particularly under his Will Stewart pseudonym—he has written also for other publications in addition to those already mentioned. Among these are *Captain Future*, *Comet*, *Future Fiction*, *Marvel Science Stories*, *Startling Stories*, *Super Science Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. He also has had one story published in *Blue Book* magazine and three in *Argosy*.

During World War II Williamson's knowledge of science gained him the position of weather-forecaster. He served with the Third Weather Squadron, and later went to the Pacific area with the Air Force. "Cold Front Coming," his novelette in *Blue Book*, was based on his war experiences. In 1945 he travelled in the Solomon Islands, Leyte and New Guinea. He used New Guinea as a setting for part of his recent novel, *Dragon's Island* (1951). This can be described as either science-fiction or mystery, a blend A. E. van Vogt has used to advantage. Williamson attempted only one serious, realistic story for a "quality" magazine; This was "We Ain't Beggars," which appeared in the August, 1933 *New Mexico Quarterly*. During 1933-1937 he had four horror tales published in *Thrilling Mystery Magazine* and in 1938 his article "Chivaree" appeared in the *Portales Daily News*. To date, this is the sum total of his writings outside the fantasy genre.

Among his better stories, I have always been particularly fond of the two novels which appeared in *Unknown Worlds*, "The Reign of Wizardry" and "Darker than You Think." The latter, which was expanded to 90,000 words for its book appearance, Williamson himself calls his "own favorite of the lot." Though I should not call it his best story, it happens to be my own favorite also.

Suppose man developed self-replicating machinery to the point where he had a perfect robot for every task, and nothing left to do except revel in the luxury of having every need met, every wish fulfilled? This is the theme of *The Humanoids*, which is generally considered his finest work. It is a modern parable, reminiscent of those by H. G. Wells.

Or how does this concept strike you? Suppose that somewhere in the far reaches of our universe there exists matter composed oppositely to that we have on our planet Earth, matter where the nucleus of each atom has a negative charge and is surrounded by electrons carrying positive charges. Imagine what would happen if this "contraterrene" matter came in contact with our own kind! This is the basic theme of *Seetee Ship* and *Seetee Shock*, which appeared under Williamson's Will Stewart *nom de plume*. These should surely be classed among the finest science-fiction novels ever published.

Among the author's old-time favorites are *The Legion of Space* and its sequel, *The Cometeers*. These are in the interplanetary "space opera" tradition, and were followed by the more modern *The Legion of Time*. This last, designated as a "mutant" story by John Campbell on its magazine appearance, may well be the very first of many to utilize the theory of branching time—coexisting worlds of alternate probability.

Another long-time favorite is "Golden Blood" (1933), which has never appeared in book form. This novel, which was serialized in *Weird Tales*, may well be Williamson's most fanciful and fantastic work.

Like other science-fiction writers, Jack Williamson has seen some of his fictional concepts become reality. He wrote about atomic energy long before Hiroshima. One of his theories regarding multicellular rockets was explored by the Aerojet Corporation laboratory in the course of studying jet-assisted take-offs.

He has also seen his stories collected frequently in some of the better anthologies in the field.

He likes photography, and considers himself an amateur star-gazer. He enjoys taking long walks while thinking up ideas for new stories. He also loves music. He enjoys reading, and particularly likes the work of J. P. Marquand and Somerset Maugham. In an interview he said "I read most of the current science-fiction magazines with a good deal of pleasure and a keen appreciation of new writers. However, I must confess a lingering fondness for such old favorites as Merritt, with his exotic atmosphere, and Doc Smith, with the galactic scope of his adventures. And H. G. Wells, in my estimation, remains the greatest figure in the science-fiction field; he was a pioneer with most of the common themes, and I believe that many of his earlier stories are unsurpassed in their feeling for the impact of science on human life."

"With a few interludes of various kinds," he claims, "I've made a living writing science-fiction. While it hasn't been all moonlight and roses, there are compensations. I've been able to spend a good deal of time in more or less care-free knocking about odd corners of North America—often in the pleasant company of Edmond Hamilton, whom I first met in 1931, when we went down the Mississippi in a small boat."

In general, Williamson has a very high opinion of the editors and writers he has known. He calls them "a friendly fraternity," and states, "I've enjoyed knowing a good many of them in several cities. There are too many names to list, though I might say a word of debt to such editors as John W. Campbell and Leo Margulies and the late Farnsworth Wright of the old *Weird Tales*. I'm still a science-fiction and fantasy fan—although it is impossible to find the time to take much part in fan activities."

When asked how he went about writing a story Williamson replied, "I usually have the plot of a new story completely in mind before beginning to write although it sometimes takes months or years of brooding over the idea and the writing of numerous outlines. And, once the writing is started, the plot doesn't always follow the outline but strikes off in new directions as some characters show unexpected strength or others fail to materialize. I revise a great deal, making two or more complete drafts. Revision is an insidious habit which grows continually." As he types, he says, he finds it more difficult to plot than to inject science into his fiction. "My earlier works included more romance than my later stories, and in fact some of the fans are a little annoyed with the way I'm beginning to treat my heroes."

Yet surely this is an indication of Williamson's growth and maturity as a writer. His work constantly demonstrates a growing knowledge of psychology and political science. His treatment of sociological concepts has added a depth which has helped gain the entire field increased respect in the literary world.

Today I should rank Williamson, along with Robert Heinlein, A. E. van Vogt and a few others, as the very top practitioners in the science-fiction field. And if he continues to evolve in the future as he has in the past, he may well become the greatest of them all.

Over a decade ago he had the vision to say, "I believe that science-fiction will come to fill a very important niche in a scientific age, and that the possibilities in depicting the dramatic impacts of science on human beings have hardly been explored." Time increasingly has shown the truth of this prophecy, as well as how faithfully and untiringly Jack Williamson has contributed to the exploration.

# Book Reviews

SOMEONE LIKE YOU by Roald Dahl. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953. 359 pp. 19.5 cm. \$3.50.

Are you tired of *Astounding Science-Fiction* and *Weird Tales*? Are A. E. Van Vogt and L. Sprague de Camp boring you? Does the contents-page of the latest *Galaxy* look a bit dull? Do you sometimes even wonder if those brightly-jacketed science-fiction volumes crowding your bookshelves were really worth buying? In fact, have you begun to think that very little top-drawer fantasy is being printed these days? Those who have been answering "yes" to these questions should run, not walk, to their nearest bookstore for a copy of *Someone Like You*.

There are eighteen short stories in this book, and every one of them is excellent. Two can be classed as science-fiction; three are horror stories; and most of the others include enough macabre, off-center happenings to be called fantasy too, even if your definition of that much-abused word is not charitably broad. Be that as it may, those five entries of unquestioned status alone are easily worth the price of the volume. The quality of the writing is on an exceptionally high level throughout; Dahl's prose can be rolled over one's tongue like a rich sherry.

The two science-fiction stories are "The Sound Machine" and "The Great Automatic Grammatizer." The first tells of a scientist who builds a device to detect the language of plants, and what resulted. The second is a beautifully biting satire on modern fiction-writing, describing as it does the assembling of a machine which can produce fiction faster—and often better—than can professional authors. These themes may not be new, but their treatment is one of the most mature and competent I have ever encountered.

Just as expertly constructed are the horror tales. Two ("Rummins" and "The Wish") are given an effectively oblique cast, while the other one, "The Ratcatcher," deals the reader a nasty mental uppercut with plenty of warning. This last story is one of the most powerful examples of writing I have come upon during twenty-five years' reading in the field; in its own way it is just as memorable as Machen, Lovecraft or M. R. James at their best. In fact, I defy any sensitive person to forget the damned thing!

At least half-a-dozen other titles in *Someone Like You* are contes cruels that would make Villiers de L'Isle Adam or Maurice Level toss in his sleep. There's the faithful wife who murders her husband and gets away with it because she uses the oddest weapon on record ("Lamb to the Slaughter"); the man who throws himself off a transatlantic liner in order to be rescued—and why he isn't ("Dip in the Pool"); and the famous artist who tattooed a masterpiece on his friend's back ("Skin"). My own favorites in this group are "Man from the South" and "Poison." The first tells about a chap who gambles compulsively—his Cadillac against, say, one of your fingers—with a butcher's cleaver poised in the air to collect on the spot if you lose. "Poison" is a truly suspense-filled account of a chap in India who woke up to find a krait viper curled up on his stomach under the sheet—he would be dead as mutton if one muscel quivered.

It is hard to compare Roald Dahl with anyone else, for he is an original, in a class by himself. John Collier, another original, comes first to mind; but although the themes these two writers use are much alike, their prose styles are from different matrices entirely. Collier is offhandedly malicious, baring his horrors with an insouciant tartness; but Dahl is deadly serious, and playing for keeps all the time. He is to fiction what Charles Addams is to the macabre cartoon.

Dahl was born in Wales of Norwegian parents in 1916. He spurned college after a public school education, and worked for a time in Newfoundland and Tangan-

yika before joining the R.A.F. in 1939. Injuries invalidated him out of the service three years later, and he spent the rest of World War II in Washington, first as an air attaché and later in the British Intelligence. His first full-length book (*Over to You*, 1946) was a collection of flying stories, and he has sold a fantasy script, later made into a children's book (*The Gremlins*, 1943) to the Walt Disney cinema studios.

Most of the titles in *Someone Like You* appeared during the past five years in quality periodicals like *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine* and *Town and Country*. I can unreservedly recommend Roald Dahl's latest book to new, old and ex-fantasy addicts alike. And I especially recommend it to those present-day editors who have been having such a hard time assembling decent fantasy anthologies—mostly because they can't get their noses out of current pulp magazines.

—A. Langley Searles

THE SCIENCE FICTION GALAXY, edited by Groff Conklin. New York: Garden City Publishing Co. (Permabooks P67). 242 pp. 18 cm. 35¢ (paper).

It would not surprise me if science-fiction anthologies in pocket-book form soon became as popular as the hard-covered variety. Frankly, I hope they create a bigger "fad" than their costlier brothers. There is scant reason why they should not; a book's price is always something to be taken into consideration and I'm sure most people reading this usually do so.

Does anyone maintain that only hard-covered, durable books are worthy of a collector's shelf? If so, let me point out that there is practically nothing in or about most anthologies to make them bibliographically desirable. When an author worthy of the name writes any amount of stories at all they are bound to appear in a collected volume—so why pay to duplicate them? Why buy stories that are already in your magazine files, yes, even if you have been saving your pulps for only two or three years? The one motive I have in purchasing an expensive anthology is to obtain those stories from the slicks by one-shot authors who don't produce enough to fill a collection; and I would stretch that motive to include a few of the old, rare stories which, while they may be had for sufficient money, certainly can't be had for love.

Two years ago I did not believe a time would come when I would have to discriminate among hard-covered science-fiction anthologies because of their profusion and degeneration. I was wrong! That time is here, and it is not due so much to lack of fine material still untouched as it is to the compilers' want of critical ability, which is coupled with a singularly new and high-handed attitude that readers will not only accept any form of literary butchering but like it.

I doubt very much that they will. If the completist is not yet gone he is fast being suffocated. And it appears that from here on out the critical reader, desirous of adding to his library the old, famous stories of top quality, will get his wish—and get it without having to spend haircut or lunch money for science-fiction as some fans are reputed to do.

While credit must be given to Phil Stong for the very first science-fiction anthology (*The Other Worlds*, 1941), it was Donald Wollheim who assembled the first one in pocket-book form (*The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*, 1943). And since then three more have appeared: Orson Welles's *Invasion from Mars* (1949), Judith Merrill's *Shot in the Dark* (1950) and now Conklin's *The Science Fiction Galaxy*, with which I am about to deal.

I am not suggesting that this anthology is *per se* without quality: if I were to choose the contents of an anthology myself I certainly should pick such items as Forster's "the Machine Stops," Hodgson's "The Derelict" and Bradbury's "King of the Gray Spaces," the last one in particular. But I wouldn't bother with

stuff like Manning's "The Living Galaxy" or Kipling's "Easy as A. B. C." They are out-dated and comparatively worthless; I see no sense in showing new, potential science-fiction readers what they are better off having missed. As for the present-day stories, like Clarke's "The Fires Within," MacDonald's "A Child Is Crying," and Sturgeon's "The Huckle Is a Happy Beast"—I don't know, the best I can say of them is that they are cute and I wouldn't reread them on a bet. The same goes for St. Clair's "Quis Custodiet...?" Breuer's "The Appendix and the Spectacles," Hilliard's "Death from the Stars" and Leinster's "The Life Work of Professor Muntz" are prime examples of the outmoded approach to the light story, all three of them, even if there's twenty years' difference between the first and the last. Breuer died in 1947, Hilliard may be dead also, while Leinster, save for a rare spark of genius, seems unable to learn.

Except for the first three stories I have named, then, *The Science Fiction Galaxy* is maybe good enough to read once, but it lacks brilliance and leaves no lasting impression. One expects something better of an anthology.

In summation, I regret that more people cannot write of mankind as human beings rather than straw-men. I regret that more people have not looked at their subjects as closely as E. M. Forster, I regret their failure to achieve the compelling atmosphere of William Hope Hodgson, and I am heartily glad there is a Ray Bradbury to have written "King of the Gray Spaces."

—Philip Gray

A STRANGE DISCOVERY by Charles Romyn Dake. New York: H. Ingalls Kimball, 1899. 310 pp. 19 cm.

Probably there is no serious reader of the weird and fantastic who has not read and marvelled at Edgar Allan Poe's "Narrative of A. Gordon Pym." At the end of this story it will be recalled that Pym and his companion, Dirk Peters, disappear in their boat as they pass through a veil of mist—a veil through which a great white female figure seems momentarily to loom.

Jules Verne, long an admirer of Poe, wrote a sequel to this work called *Le Sphinx des Glaces* (1897). So have others, including H. P. Lovecraft, in his "At the Mountains of Madness" (1936). One of these is the little-known work of Dake which I am describing here.

The story is related by an Englishman travelling in America; his associates are two local physicians. While the earlier chapters of the novel suffer somewhat from philosophical digression, in an attempt to portray in detail a small American city and its democratic simplicity, very soon the amazing and fascinating account of what happened in "Pym" after the point Poe abruptly ended it holds the reader's attention firmly.

The physician reveals that he is treating a man living on a farm whose name is Dirk Peters. He is about eighty years old, and had once been a sailor. Wondering if he could be the Dirk Peters of Poe's tale, the doctor and his companions visit the old man, and are able to verify that he is indeed the same person, and that Poe's story is founded on fact. Peters survived his adventures with A. Gordon Pym, and returned to finish his life in the world he knew.

Realizing that here is the opportunity for the literary revelation of the century, the men eagerly question the bed-ridden old sailor. Slowly, with factual allusions which no one of his meagre education could invent, he reveals his marvellous story. The tiny craft which carried him and Pym eventually was driven by insistent currents through and beyond the curtain of mist, which turned out to be caused by the meeting of intense cold and volcanic heat. The mysterious white figure of a woman proves to be a great statue, past which they are drawn into the harbor of a fair city, a city of such stately architectural design and perfect construction as to seem like Paradise.

This city is centuries old, and over the years its people have reached a state of social near-perfection. Originally they came from ancient Rome. When the Roman empire was being overrun by the Barbarian invasion, a group of people prepared a ship for their escape. They loaded it with their household effects, food, tools, seeds and all other necessities for beginning life anew elsewhere. Fierce storms drove them out of the Mediterranean Sea, southward in the Atlantic, and finally into the Antarctic region. Beyond the veil of mist they discovered a region near the South Pole made tropically warm by continuous volcanic activity. Here their vessel was wrecked and, their way back impossible, and indeed unknown, they founded their colony, which prospered and grew in time to a nation of considerable size.

This city-state has endured but one war in all their history, a fierce encounter with hordes of black natives who invaded them from behind the veil. Although outnumbered, these Roman descendants defeated them with dreadful slaughter. As punishment and perpetual warning, the remnants of these invaders were forbidden thereafter the use of white—and must even blacken their teeth (cf. Poe's tale).

On rare occasions people of the outer world had been driven by storm or accident into this city, and all but one chose to remain there. The exception, Sir Walter Raleigh, managed to make his way out. And here Pym and Peters were given shelter and clothing and offered permanent residence.

The rest of Dake's book recounts their adventures in this strange, isolated place. Some of these are conventionally predictable, such as Pym's falling in love with a beautiful maiden there; others are less so, such as their encountering an ancient mage who has lived since the original Romans arrived in the region. All are interestingly told, and often too bizarre and weird to be spoiled by my recapitulation. I shall leave to the reader, then, the pleasure of discovering for himself the fate of the protagonists, and with the assurance that the process will be absorbing and pleasurable totally aside from any connection with the story of Poe which preceded it.

From a literary standpoint the importance of *A Strange Discovery* seems self-evident. When an author dies and leaves a story which invites a sequel—or, as here, perhaps completion—it is an open field for any writer who cares to enter the lists. (We may recall those that have appeared for *Treasure Island* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.) So, then, Verne, Lovecraft and Dake have acted appropriately in attempting continuation of Poe's *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*. Who did the task best is probably a matter of opinion. In mine, it is Dake; I feel that it was he who best caught the spirit of the original work, giving us as rousing an adventure story as the master himself might have done.

—Thyril L. Ladd

A BOOK OF MODERN GHOSTS, edited by Cynthia Asquith, with an introduction by Elizabeth Bowen. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953. x-236 pp. 20 cm. \$3.00.

The title of this book, its attractive jacket and Elizabeth Bowen's interesting introduction all led me to approach its contents in a hopefully expectant frame of mind. The spectres to be found here, it was promised, "...have grown up. Far behind lie their clanking and moaning days . . . bleeding hands, luminous skulls and so on. . . . They abjure the overfantastic and the grotesque, operating, instead, through series of happenings whose horror lies in their being just, just out of the true." I thought of some of the sprightly tales in *Unknown Worlds*, of Margaret Irwin's satisfying collection *Madame Fears the Dark*, of Oliver Onions' similar *credo* that the most disturbing ghosts of all are those which do not seem to contradict nature, but rather join hands with it. But alas! I was expecting too much. It is certainly true that no bloody hands soil these pages, but after

patiently wading through the book I would cheerfully have welcomed a little gore, and even one or two luminous skulls as well, for that matter. All editorial claims to the contrary, these are not modern ghosts; no, they are for the most part tedious and pale refugees from the files of psychic research societies and their ilk—bland, dull and familiar plots transposed from the nineteenth century, where they belong, to a modern background. Walter de la Mare's "The Guardian" and V. S. Pritchett's "A Story of Don Juan," alone among the twenty entries here, offer the reader the subtlety which the introduction promises.

Obviously I am not implying that all the other stories are badly written. Authors such as L. P. Hartley, Lord Dunsany, L. A. G. Strong, Rose Macauley and Eleanor Farjeon are all at their expected level of literary competence. But the trouble is, they simply are not represented here by good ghost stories. There is one and only one striking idea in this collection, "Bombers' Night" by Evelyn Fabyan. I shan't spoil one of the very few pleasurable *frissons* you can look forward to by recounting its details; the plot could have been more forcefully developed and adorned with less stilted conversation, but it embodies a powerful gambit and is as thoroughly modern a tale as most others in this collection are not.

Yes indeed, as Elizabeth Bowen says, "Ghosts have grown up." What seem not to have matured, unfortunately, are the taste and literary perceptions of Miss Bowen and editor Cynthia Asquith. For the record, this volume appeared in England under the title *The Second Ghost Book*.

—A. M. Perry

THE PEACEMAKER by C. S. Forester. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1934. 310 pp. 310 pp. \$2.00.

The claim of C. S. Forester to literary fame rests on the vivid character of Captain Horatio Hornblower, the polished British gentleman-seafarer whose adventures have been entertainingly narrated in some half-dozen recent books, as well as on the cinema screen. Among the author's other interesting accomplishments are twice reading (in entirety) the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and writing *The Peacemaker*, to date his only production employing a fantasy theme. It is the latter which concerns us, for despite its sterling quality the novel has received little attention from the reading public as a whole, or even—until its recent reprinting in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* magazine (February, 1948)—from that smaller segment which would appreciate it most.

The chief character in *The Peacemaker* is Dr. Edward Pethwick, whose specialty is theoretical physics, a subject in which he shows talent approaching genius. In the course of investigating another worker's findings he notices implications that were missed, and goes on to derive equations that predict what is later called the Klein-Pethwick effect. A machine operating on the principles of these equations could nullify completely all magnetic force a considerable distance around it. Pethwick constructs such a device and uses it as a weapon against the English government, hoping ultimately to bring about world disarmament.

To even the casual reader this plot is all too familiar. With variations to suit other locales and pet political theories of their authors, literally hundreds of science-fiction stories have embodied it. Some have been entertaining, even good; but the vast majority would best have been left unwritten. Why, then, has *The Peacemaker* succeeded where its predecessors habitually failed? The answer is that Forester has handled his theme maturely; he has depended upon careful characterization rather than banal clichés. The logical development of plot here is unmistakable; the whole novel has a sharp, true ring to it. The people in it could have stepped out of real life.

Pulp fantasy tradition would paint the protagonist of such a novel as a Herculean young genius, and recount in detail his successful frustrating of powers

in control up until the final moment when his political plans were crowned with success, ringing down a rosy curtain on a remade world—the whole scenario being as synthetic as the last-minute romance which would be simultaneously consummated. No such disappointing finale mars *The Peacemaker*, nor does Edward Pethwick conform to the made-to-order fictional mold. He is a senior master at Liverpool School. He is plain, middle-aged, and his wife is an alcoholic. He is shy, unassuming, impractical and unambitious. By common standards he would be considered a weakling; yet fate makes him heir to one of the most important scientific gifts of his time.

Judging by Pethwick's disposition, one would have expected his discovery to be meticulously written and published in *Transactions of the Faraday Society*. He would then have become quietly famous, and continued his teaching and research as selflessly as before. These things did not happen because of his wife Mary, whom he detested, and Dorothy Laxton, daughter of the school's headmaster, with whom he falls in love.

To Dorothy he confides his secret; and she, with all the enthusiastic naivité of a young college graduate, tells him how easy it would be to bring about world peace by using it. Convinced, he constructs a Klein-Pethwick effect transmitter, and periodically interferes with London motor traffic (no magnetic device can operate within the transmitter's range) to make his presence known. At the same time he writes letters to the London *Times*, threatening further dislocations unless steps towards national disarmament are initiated.

Government officials are at first incredulous, then angry. The Peacemaker—for so Pethwick terms himself in his letters—is regarded first as a nuisance, and then a menace. Physicists are baffled, and Scotland Yard is unable to unearth the slightest clue as to the Peacemaker's identity. The British public is divided: a few share Pethwick's hopes for a warless world, a few who have been inconvenienced are hostile, and the great majority is either apathetic or neutral.

To overcome stubborn official resistance Pethwick finally uses his invention to put London's largest power-station out of commission. When the electricity fails underground trains stop. It is rush hour, and women and children are trampled to death in the darkened tunnels. Public opinion now veers solidly against him. He reads all this in the newspapers, and realizes he has failed.

Meanwhile his wife, who has learned about his extra-marital affair and put an end to it, stumbles on his secret. In a period of drunkenness she confides her knowledge to a barroom companion. The word spreads, and an angry mob attacks Pethwick's house and sets it afire after sacking it and destroying all his apparatus and his research notes. Pethwick himself, who has lost his ideals and the one love of his life, offers no resistance as the mob drags him out to the village common and beats him to death.

Forester's work is suspensefully told, sharp with realistic detail, and holds one absorbed throughout. His characters are vividly three-dimensional, and the climax to his tale is shattering. *The Peacemaker* is so good, in fact—I rate it as a classic in the science-fiction field—that even as revealing a review as this one will not spoil it for potential readers.

To be a science-fiction classic a novel should, of course, be one of the earliest or one of the best exemplars of its theme—preferably both, like *The War of the Worlds* or *The Invisible Man*. It should also, if possible, illustrate or be permeated by some important quality of humanity, a universal characteristic with which readers can identify or empathize. *The Peacemaker* exemplifies several of these universal qualities, and in the resolution of its plot another is implicit as well: "People always have the kind of government they want. When they want change, they must change it." Van Vogt stated this social principal most clearly, but C. S. Forester used it almost a decade earlier.

—A. Langley Searles

# THE IMMORTAL STORM

A HISTORY OF SCIENCE-FICTION FANDOM

by  
Sam Moskowitz

(part 20)

XLVI

The Futurian Comeback

To the Futurian Society of New York, the events terminating in six of their members not being permitted to attend any sessions of the first World Science Fiction Convention proved a political wind-fall of great consequence. If, as Sam Moskowitz had inductively reasoned in his bitter article "There *Are* Two Sides," the situation had been planned that way by the Futurians, their strategy was no less than brilliant. If it had been caused by no more than a chain of coincidences, as they themselves maintained, nothing more providential could have befallen them. Previous to the convention, it must be remembered, New Fandom and its leaders had succeeded in discrediting the Futurians thoroughly. With the aid of their leaders' own published statements New Fandom had attached the Red label to the Futurian Society, the political implications of Michelism, and the leading Futurian figures' own personal political beliefs. Futurian influence had dwindled to their local New York meetings and the pages of Olon Wiggins' *Science Fiction Fan*. Even in the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, which they themselves had founded, they were no longer all-powerful. *The Science Fiction News-Letter*, their only remaining medium for disseminating news slanted to their own point of view, had been driven out of the circulation race by Taurasi's *Fantasy News*. Their nadir had been reached in "Retreat," an article appearing in the December, 1938 issue of *The Science Fiction Fan*, in which Donald Wollheim wrote what many believed was his swan-song to science-fiction fandom.

Now all this was changing. Even before the convention was a few hours old the Futurians had realized the value of playing the "exclusion" angle for all it was worth. Outside the convention hall they halted and spoke with prominent delegates from many points of the country. They influenced author Jack Williamson temporarily to adopt the posture that if his "friends" weren't admitted he wouldn't stay either. (He was told that if the Futurians were indeed his friends and he shared their views, he might not be welcome—whereupon he modified his stand.) Women attendees such as Frances N. Swisher (wife of writer/fan Dr. R. D. Swisher) and Myrtle Douglas (better known at the time as Morojo) were particularly active on the Futurians' behalf, urging continually that they be permitted to enter the convention hall without pledging good behavior. Another well-known active fan of the period, Dale Hart from Texas, also agitated in their favor. There was no denying, then, that the Futurian group received much sympathy from that part of the science-fiction world they were able to contact.

Knowledge of this catapulted them into action. Before the sessions of the convention were over they were distributing to delegates entering and leaving the hall a mimeographed circular which announced an open meeting of the Futurian Society of New York to be held Tuesday, July 4, 1939 at 2:00 P.M. at 224 Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. On the agenda for this meeting were the following topics: 1) The future of science-fiction organizations; 2) The Fantasy Amateur Press Association crisis; 3) Conventions in coming years; and 4) Estimates of the convention just past. An open forum was promised on all questions. This meeting was later referred to as the "Futurian Conference."

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The last-minute organization of the affair, and the inability of the Futurian Society to offer a more interesting program than one of general discussion, necessarily limited the attendance. Seventeen people were present at this meeting. Ten of them—Asimov and his sister, Gillespie, Kornbluth, Kyle, Lowndes, Michel, Pohl, Wilson and Wollheim—were members of the Futurian Society. Significantly, while few non-Futurians came, most were people who exerted considerable influence in the science-fiction fan world. They included Forrest Ackerman and Myrtle Douglas of California, Mark Reinsberg of Chicago, and Kenneth Sterling, a fan from the local area who had sold fiction to Charles Hornig of *Wonder Stories*. Despite the sparse attendance, then, the Futurian Conference proved a political success, since all these important figures henceforth supported the Futurian viewpoint in that in action, in print or speech they turned emphatically against New Fandom.

Cyril Kornbluth acted as chairman of this Futurian Conference. As a youth, Kornbluth was stocky and rotund, and had a voice of stentorian depth. His Futurian friends described him as "Faustian, ribald and puckish." He was a master of the cynical and bitter retort, and usually maintained a facial expression that led one to believe he was repressing a sneer only by exercise of prodigious restraint. Beyond his immediate New York circle he was seldom active and therefore little known nationally. His fiction and verse had appeared in Kuslan's *Cosmic Tales* and Lowndes' *Le Vombiteur*. Small though his published output was, however, it showed talent even then. He had entered fandom through the Washington Heights SFL chapter (see chapter XXVI), and become acquainted with the Futurians when Wilson and Gillespie visited the chapter in January, 1938. Kornbluth gradually became and accepted an important member of the Futurian Society's inner circle, but his value to the group was shown to better effect in his literary production, as we shall eventually see.

At this conference Kornbluth, Lowndes, Michel, Pohl and Wollheim acted as an answering committee to answer and clarify all questions relative to fandom put to them by the visitors. Under pressure from the latter, the Futurians agreed to consider seriously a change in the name of their pet political dogma, Michelism; many felt that the name not only had an egotistical connotation, but was indelibly associated with the communist label opponents had pinned on it. Michel himself was appointed head of a committee to investigate the matter.

It was decided that David Kyle would continue to head the Association for Democracy in Science Fiction Fandom, under whose aegis the leaflet "A Warning" had been serruptitiously distributed at the recent convention. Mark Reinsberg announced the intention of his group to hold another world convention the following year in Chicago, and the Futurian Society pledged its support for the event. Interestingly, neither Reinsberg nor the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers ever utilized or even acknowledged that support publicly.

The Futurians considered their conference a triumph for democracy and free discussion, in contrast to the atmosphere prevailing at the first World Science Fiction Convention; but except for its influence on a few out-of-town delegates, as noted above, it rated scarcely a footnote under the pitiless scrutiny of historical perspective.

Although the Futurians claimed to be pursuing journalistic and artistic careers, and were attempting to pose as true Marxists, Bohemians and apostles of the decadent in art and literature, most were minors living with their parents. They chafed under the restraints placed on them by these ties, yearning for an independence which would make it possible for them to pursue these goals and desires to the limits of their capabilities without being hamstrung by their kin. Even their holy crusade against New Fandom had suffered, they felt, because domestic limitations had curtailed their ingenuity. They therefore began to search for a dwelling of their own, one which would house communally all Futurians who wished to live in it on a share-the-expenses basis.

An eight-room house for rent was eventually found in the Kensington area of Brooklyn. Originally Fred Pohl, Leslie Perri (Doris Baumgardt, his fiancée), Donald Wollheim, John Michel, Richard Wilson and Harry Dockweiler (subsequently better known under his pseudonym of Dirk Wylie) planned to nurture their genius at this location, but at the last moment Pohl and Perri withdrew. However, Pohl magnanimously agreed to sign the lease, and his cohorts moved in August, 1939.

They were not doomed to lonesomeness or boredom. George R. Hahn, an up-state fan whose major claim to fame was publication under the pseudonym of Cyril Mand of the story "The Fifth Candle" in *Weird Tales*, descended on the premises and took up residence there, borrowing enough money to live on from the other inhabitants and visitors, writing fiction until 4:30 in the morning—at which time Harry Dockweiler arose to go to work, and Hahn appropriated his bed to catch up on his sleep. Hahn's professional prestige slipped when Richard Levin arrived from Buffalo and took up non-contributing residence also. It developed that Levin had done at least half of the work on the Cyril Mand story, but Hahn had neglected to inform anyone of this fact. Others present so frequently as to be practically inhabitants were Cyril Kornbluth and David Kyle. A frequent visitor was Julius Unger, a fan who had disappeared from sight after being active in the Scienceers in 1930 (see chapter III), had married, and was once again evincing interest in the field.

According to Richard Wilson, who once wrote an account of life at the Futurians' house, the residents on at least two occasions were engaged in scuffles with the local constabulary. Policemen dropped in on one occasion and questioned Wilson, Kornbluth and Hahn after receiving complaints from neighbors about music being played at peak volume during ungodly hours of the night and of "fencing exhibitions on the sidewalk." On another occasion Hahn and Levin were awakened from their sleep at two o'clock in the afternoon by three men armed with revolvers. These men identified themselves as Treasury Agents. Neighbors had reported that the place had little furniture but a plethora of printing presses and mimeograph machines, and that the residents were suspected of being counterfeiters. Thorough searching of the premises from cellar to roof ensued, the agents not leaving until they were convinced no illegal activities were being carried on by this bizarre menagerie of Bohemian science-fiction fans.

Fate now intervened. It developed that the owner of the house was unable to keep up mortgage payments, and his interest in the property was being foreclosed. The Futurians were given notice to move by the new owners, and once more had to seek housing. This had to be accomplished by September 15, 1939—all the action recounted above had occurred in the short space of six weeks.

Dockweiler, Michel, Wilson and Wollheim, the four primary members in the act, were able to secure a new residence in Brooklyn, a fourth-floor apartment at 2574 Bedford Avenue. Because its paint was ivory-colored, it was promptly dubbed The Ivory Tower, and it became the Futurian pentagon for its war against New Fandom and against the editorial obstinacy that up until then had refused to recognize the ringing character of its members' brilliant prose.

From the bastions of the Futurian House and The Ivory Tower the Futurian brain trust launched a better-coördinated attack against New Fandom and its followers than they had previously been capable of. They were less reluctant to correspond with fans anywhere in the world about the justice of their cause, and they made many converts in this grass-roots fashion. In order to keep in the good graces of the Chicago group, all their publications constantly plugged the forthcoming convention there; but more than that they enlisted, one and all, as tried and true reporters of doings in the science-fiction world for the news and views magazine *Le Zombie*, published by Bob Tucker. This served a two-fold purpose, for they found it possible to mix with their news both cracks at New Fandom and propaganda for their own cause. Tucker was not at all reluctant to accept their help,

for their regular contributions and occasional scoops aided him in making *Le Zombi* a lively publication that eventually all but scuttled Taurasi's straight-laced *Fantasy News*. On his own, further, Tucker himself needled New Fandom and its leaders Moskowitz, Sykora and Taurasi frequently and with scant mercy.

*The Science Fiction Fan*, whose policies were almost completely controlled by the Futurians, continued to print pointed columns and articles by Wollheim and Lowndes directed against New Fandom.

No group was too humble to be targeted as fallow ground for Futurian propaganda. In Maine, James S. Avery, who had issued the humor magazine *Funtasy* (which continued later as part of Bob Tucker's *Nova*) and who had been one of the co-editors of the first contemplated issue of *Spaceways*, was striving mightily to organize the science-fiction fans in his state. In September, 1939 there appeared the first number of his *Maine Scientifiction Association Bulletin*, or *MSA Bulletin*, as it was called for short. With this appeared a hektographed *Special Bulletin* carrying the same date. This was published as a supplement to the *MSA Bulletin* (which was mimeographed), and circulated chiefly locally, as it was intended to carry news of primary interest to MSA members only. Elections held the first week in October made Gerald Clarke president and Avery executive-secretary. Other members of the organization were Norman F. Stanley, Carl Paradis, Laurence Dube, Phil Gilbert and Gerald Meader. Other local and now little-known fans continued to increase the roster. Stanley, who apparently owned the largest collection of the group, offered to lend any of his seventy bound volumes of professional science-fiction magazines to any member wishing to read them, but had few takers.

From the first issue of the *MSA Bulletin*, the Futurians managed to get their anti-New Fandom material into print. That number carried Wollheim's article "New Fandom Versus True Fandom," which accused New Fandom of being Fascist, juvenile and a menace to the field. But its historic importance proved to be the introduction of a new phrase when Wollheim referred to Moskowitz as a "fake fan." This circulated, usually humorously, for a long time. Old-time fans who had been active and interested in science-fiction for years, when accused by newcomers of being cynical and uninterested, were wont to make a wry face and retort, "I guess I'm just a fake fan!"

The *MSA Bulletin* also carried a two-part article by Richard Wilson about the misadventures in the Futurian House, as well as news items pertaining to the Futurians. On one occasion they lashed out at Taurasi and *Fantasy News* because in a story there the retirement from fandom of Louis Kuslan, a New Haven, Connecticut fan, allegedly belittled the importance of the Maine group. (Careful examination of the chronology of the event proves the accusation is false.)

Though fully indoctrinated, Avery confessed suffering from an embarrassing fondness for Moskowitz's articles. "Regardless of what I may think of the man and his methods," he once said, "he's still one of the best of the many good fan writers." Later other fans, convinced by Futurian propaganda that New Fandomites could do no good but fully agreeing with Moskowitz's youthful, enthusiastic and single-minded notion that the most important thing in fandom to discuss and write about was science-fiction, began similarly to praise his articles with appropriate qualifications. Yet they refused to admit to themselves the truth that since his writings necessarily reflected his belief as to what comprised ideal science-fiction activity, liking his articles must mean that they really approved of his ideas and ideals. It was a hard and lackluster task that the Futurians insisted this group of teen-aged fans assume—first drive out "the Fascists in fandom," and then work with the Communists for achievement of a world-state!

In his pamphlet *The Futurians and New Fandom*, Robert Lowndes had sounded the keynote of the new, reinstated Futurian drive. He admitted that the Futurians and New Fandom were indeed working for the same things, and that in point of fact

New Fandom had actually accomplished much more in the field; but he asked fans to unite against the New Fandom leaders because in his eyes they represented dictatorship while the Futurians stood for democracy. He dramatically presented examples to illustrate his point, and declared that the Futurians were strong and united, and would never relent or give up their battle until the conflict was decided and their opponents crushed. This pamphlet was prepared in October, 1939, shortly before the Philadelphia Conference, and distributed there along with a long poem by Lowndes titled *Moskowitz's Farewell to His Greatness*.

In the special issue #16 of *Le Zombie*, also distributed at the Philadelphia Conference, Lowndes had a letter expressing his thanks and happiness at the manner in which science-fiction fandom, particularly the "top" fans, had rallied to the Futurian side after the "fiasco" of the First World Science Fiction Convention. An indication that the Futurians were softening their hard Michelist line appeared immediately below Lowndes' letter. There Tucker quoted from a letter sent him by a Futurian he did not name: "...the line adopted since the Futurian Conference is to take politics out of fandom without excluding such aspects as sociology, which really do have a place in science fiction fan discussions. In other words: we Communists will confine our propaganda to personal correspondence in fandom. We will also refrain from leftist attacks upon other fans and their viewpoints *so long as they tolerate us and our viewpoints.*"

Even as he wrote in *The Futurians and New Fandom* of the Futurians' invulnerability and unconquerable resolve to crush their foes, Lowndes showed more perspicacity than many of his followers. He seemed to sense the possibility of a set-back at the conference, and was suspicious of the long silence of New Fandom leaders. "We are not seers and prophets," he wrote. "We cannot say precisely what events will occur; we have been defeated in the past. We cannot say precisely what line of attack the dictators and their followers will use; they have succeeded in hypocritically presenting themselves as the saviors of democracy in the past, even while they denied simple democratic rights to their own members."

Let us recall that in the past the Futurians had always made a great show of wanting to obtain an open platform with New Fandomites. They maintained that New Fandom heads had deliberately kept some matters off the floor of the convention in order to muzzle them. They constantly reiterated that New Fandomites were afraid to meet them in open debate, that they were fearful of letting the truth be known. But at the Philadelphia Conference the Futurians had their opportunity. There was virtually no limit their spokesmen could have had, had a desire to speak been made known. Well known representatives from many segments of fandom were present, ready to rally to their defense should they not get a fair hearing. Opinion was already building against New Fandom, and former powerful allies like Jack Speer were working against, nor for it. Outstanding figures like Milton A. Rothman and Bob Tucker literally punished the organization in their speeches. Yet before the conference was over the Futurians gave the appearance of a confused and beaten group. New Fandom, the organization that was purportedly undemocratic, had arrived on the scene with a prepared constitution and an illustrative chart pointing out its salient features. More, it offered to mail to its members for competitive consideration constitutions devised by anyone else willing to provide sufficient copies.

The Futurians were clearly unprepared to meet this challenge. That this was true, and that they truly cared little about democracy, was shown by their tactics. These consisted of the most continuous and insulting mass heckling ever witnessed at a science-fiction gathering in the entire recorded history of these events. Where before they had accused New Fandom of attaining its ends through parliamentary trickery, they themselves now desperately used every such device they could seize upon to forestall a vote for or against New Fandom's constitution.

When the conference ended, the sympathies of the entire Philadelphia faction, with the exception of Rothman, had swung strongly back to New Fandom. Moskowitz's claim that the Futurians had forced politics and feuds upon his group and deliberately practiced Communist techniques now seemed dramatically credible in view of the Futurians' own behavior, his own explanations in his article "There Are Two Sides," and the anonymous Futurian letter in *Le Zombie*.

In another pamphlet, *Storm Over Philadelphia*, published December, 1939 by the Futurians, Lowndes described the conference. In this he openly admitted that "...with the exception of direct quotations (statements in quotation marks), I have not tried to reproduce exact wordings of either speeches or statements. Thus, the reader is warned that some details will be inaccurate. The general tone of this report is, as those who were there can testify, accurate." Actually the account is fictionized and highly colored; it stresses the doubts the Futurians claimed to have had about the New Fandom constitution, but is unable to show that they had not had an equal opportunity to attend, debate and vote. They had lost, as groups do lose at political conventions, in a manner which does not make winners one hundred percent right or losers one hundred percent wrong. Lowndes intimated that there had been collusion between New Fandom and the PSFS. His evidence was the fact that New Fandom, under the auspices of the Queens SFL, contributed ten dollars towards liquid refreshments for the entire conference—refreshments which the Futurians themselves consumed without prejudice. Yet the actions of chairman Baltadonis in averting a clash between Sykora and Wollheim was universally praised, as was the adroit manner in which he pacified both factions and prevented a threatened walk-out. If there were any collusion, it certainly could not have involved the chairman.

In the same month Lowndes wrote and had published by the Futurians yet a third pamphlet, *Unity, Democracy, Peace*, which was an attempt to counteract Moskowitz's article "There Are Two Sides." Again Lowndes proved that he was the wisest politician in the Futurian camp. He recognized that Moskowitz's letter in *Le Zombie*, asking readers to buy the issue of *The Science Fiction Collector* containing that article, was but a feint to divert and mislead. He pointed out techniques Moskowitz had used to defeat his opposition and win his point.

Previously the Futurian method had been to satirize their opponents, search out their spelling and grammatical errors as showing lack of intelligence, malign and tease them—but never, under any circumstances, give them credit for intelligence or good intentions. With this series of pamphlets Lowndes changed all that. He took a new tack. First, he claimed that New Fandom's intentions were fine, but that its methods, which were those of Fascists, made it necessary to fight it. Now he admitted that there was intelligence, artfulness and design in his opponents' methods which proved the insincerity of their statements. He particularly deplored their using a Communist label to frighten fans and turn them against the Futurian group. "Their cry is: a Communist cannot be a science fiction fan," he said. "When they have persuaded fandom as a whole that this absurdity is true, then they intend to raise the same cry against others who oppose them or with whom they disagree."

Not surprisingly, *Unity, Democracy, Peace* urged fans to stay completely neutral as far as the war in Europe, which had broken out in September, 1939 was concerned. Immediate anti-war activity was advocated. Futurians wanted anti-war stickers printed and pasted on all envelopes. "We must explain to new fans, and to oldtimers who may not understand, precisely why the entrance of the U.S.A. into war would mean the end of stf and fandom here." This was diametrically opposed to their earlier promise to keep politics out of fandom. And shortly thereafter, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the Futurians' stand against the United States entering World War II was promptly reversed.

## TIPS ON TALES

Eando Binder's *Lords of Creation* (1949): In 1940 models of man's achievements in science and invention are placed in a secure vault, and with them a young scientist who has volunteered to be placed in suspended animation. The vault is sealed and on its portal engraved the request that it not be opened until the year 5000. The story is about life in that future era from the standpoint of the scientist, who has of course survived. He finds a world where civilization has backslid due to the near-exhaustion of metals, petroleum and coal. In the most southerly region of the planet, called Antarka, are its ten and only cities, supported by limited supplies of coal and oil mined from under the polar ice-cap. Elsewhere people live an agricultural life in small tribal communities, from which the Antarkans exact tributes of foodstuffs and annual quotas of young men and women to serve as servants and laborers in their cities. The young scientist of course sets out to rescue these people from their slavery. He is eventually successful through discovering, cached in sealed tunnels beneath the ruined city of New York, an enormous supply of firearms and ammunition left over and forgotten after the last great intercontinental war which preceded the failure of metals and fossil fuels. There is also the expected romance between him and the ruling woman of Antarka. Despite the rather old-fashioned plot Binder makes the story interesting and even occasionally charming. The science is for the most part acceptable, the scenes of a ruined civilization add verisimilitude, and there is drama enough to satisfy any reader. As bibliophiles are probably aware, it is available not only as a book, but in magazine form, since it was originally serialized in *Argosy* in 1939.

—Thyril L. Ladd

Albert R. Wetjen's *Fiddlers' Green* (1931): This is the story of Tommy Lawn, second mate of the SS *Brancaer*, after his vessel hits an iceberg and sinks. When he recovers consciousness he is conducted by Ben the Bosun to Fiddlers' Green, the Valhalla of sailors, where are gathered all who have died at sea from cave man to modern admiral; great captains such as Lief the Lucky and Ulysses, Drake and Hudson, are here, along with lesser men of the fo'c's'le. The Old Man of the Sea, who is in charge, finds Tommy's papers in order and admits him rather than sending him to Davy Jones' Locker or to St. Nick. The Green has all things a sailor ever wanted—wine, women and song in every possible variation to suit all tastes. Each man has his own seabird—a gull, a petrel or an albatross, according to his worth—to bring him news of the sea. Being of an inquisitive turn of mind, Tommy explores, visiting Davy Jones' Locker, where deserters, mutineers and other criminals of the sea not bad enough for St Nick work at endless disagreeable tasks—bailing bilges with bottomless buckets, chipping at rust with rubber hammers and such. He also visits the Hall of Lost Ships, a museum where are also kept such curiosities as the key to the compass, red and green oil for navigation lights, and Casey Jones' Glory Hole at the North Pole, which is the marine engineers' equivalent of Fiddlers' Green. In the end, though, it all turns out to be a dream, and a lifeboat rescues Tommy from the water. The chief interest in the book is not the plot, which amounts to little, but the collection of legends and traditions the author has assembled. Wetjen was not only a sailor himself, but came from a seafaring family, and had first-hand contact with his material. One wishes that he had written an authoritative work on the subject, rather than using it merely for the background of a novel, entertaining a one as *Fiddlers' Green* is. The American edition of the book contains sixteen pleasant illustrations which the English printing unfortunately lacks.

—William H. Evans

Iris Barry's *The Last Enemy* (1929): There is jubilation in all England when people realize that mankind's Last Enemy has ceased his activities: no one dies a natural death. But this is soon followed by grumbling and complaints. Sons and heirs who had looked forward to inheriting business or social positions are thwarted; aged and ailing patients lie in pain with no hope of release; insurance companies face disaster, for they face paying out annuities forever while no one is interested in buying ordinary life-insurance. Eventually mobs riot in London on Armistice Day, and chaos reigns. The author sets out to show that death is a boon to man, not the curse it is usually considered, and she does so with much artistry. Most of the picture she describes is stark tragedy, but this is occasionally alleviated by scenes of sly amusement, which break the tension. The action builds smoothly and slowly, and leads to a clever climax. I enjoyed the book, and I think most other fantasy readers will, too.

—Thyril L. Ladd

Frois Froisland's *The Man with X-Ray Eyes and Other Stories* (1930): The locale of this book is World War I Europe, and it is divided into three sections. The first and last of these describe some of the author's own experiences in France, and the center section consists of eight "Stories from the Front." It is flattering to call them stories; actually they are better described as vignettes, since for the most part they have very little in the way of plot development. The last of these is the one that gives the book its title, and is definitely fantasy, about a soldier who suddenly finds he can see through solid objects after a bad accident. Unfortunately nothing very much comes of this ability. The book is translated from the Norwegian by Nils Flaten, and is illustrated.

—James B. Harlow

Rufus King's *The Fatal Kiss Mystery* (1928): Don't be misled by this book's deceptive title; it is out-and-out science-fiction and a rattling good story to boot. Following a rather disastrous college experiment by his professor, the hero, a wealthy orphan, continues experiments. He hopes to be able to disintegrate a human body and transfer it to another environment, and later reassemble it and return. These experiments are being carried out in an isolated shack with the aid of Drusilla, an able assistant to whom he is engaged, and Billy, another laboratory worker. He has also devised a radio-like transmitter which is to be used to communicate from whatever limbo a person reaches if his experiment succeeds. The hero believes he has accomplished his goal, and the time for the first trial is set. At that moment Drusilla embraces him, and by chance gets into the spot where the rays of the apparatus focus—and disappears! This is the beginning of a most amusing farce, reminiscent of Murray Leinster's later "Fourth Dimensional Demonstrator," in which people are sucked into limbo, brought back, and conversed with by means of the aforementioned radio-like device. You can't take the science in the novel very seriously (especially as King even posits his limbo being inhabited by an ancient Greek who succeeded in the same experiment two thousand years ago, and has been stuck there, deathless, ever since), any more than you can its complicated, soap-opera type plot, which climaxes as a forest fire rages towards the shack and state troopers, sure that murder has been committed, descend on it just as our hero is about to rematerialize Drusilla. But it's certainly a lot of fun!

—Thyril L. Ladd

E. F. Benson's *The Inheritor* (1930): The underlying idea in this novel is superb: For many generations the eldest son in a noble English family has been born a monster with hooves and horns. With one exception these abominations have been either stillborn or have died early in life. They all are buried in a neat row in a secluded spot on a desolate hill of the great estate; there is room for just one

more little mound in the burial ground. However, the ancient curse seems to have died with the modern representative of the family. He is a Cambridge man, physically normal, and indeed almost beautiful in his bodily perfection. Nevertheless, we are soon made to realize that Steven is definitely an outsider, mentally and spiritually. He is absolutely *unmoral*, with no more conception of human kindness or values than the wind blowing through the trees. His degeneration (from our human viewpoint) is inexorable, and seems linked cumulatively, in both a mental and spiritual sense, with his visits to the dreaded ancestral estate. He makes a familiar of an idiot lad in the local village who is satyr-like in nature; the lad prances through the dark forests, playing rude pipes he has instinctively fashioned. (Here it is we have flashes of Dunsany's potent credo.) Steven becomes more and more involved in these invocations to abhorred Pan. Eventually he tries to pull away from these noxious influences, and falls in love with and marries a lovely girl. He swears that they will never go back to his old estate. But what chance has puny man to escape the fate willed for him? He and his wife return, and in due time the story reaches its grim and inevitable climax, which connoisseurs may already have guessed. I should not class *The Inheritor* as a great novel; for me it is marred by diffuse development and prolixity in many of the descriptions. I cannot help imagining, also, what H. P. Lovecraft would have done with this plot! But I did enjoy the work, and I think many other readers of fantasy and the supernatural would also.

—Matthew H. Onderdonk

Dennis Wheatley's *The Man Who Missed the War* (1946): In 1936 this author wrote what is probably his best-known fantasy novel, *They Found Atlantis*. Ten years later he is back with the Atlantis theme, this time locating its descendants not on the ocean's floor but in a mighty cavern in the polar regions. World War II is in progress, and the Atlantzeans (for so they call themselves, and from whom, it develops, the Aztecs were also descended) favor a victory of the Axis powers. An Englishman and a young American girl, adrift in a small boat, are, after various exciting preliminary adventures, captured and brought into this subterranean kingdom. The Atlantzeans maintain (and probably originated) many Aztec customs, such as sacrificing human victims by tearing their hearts from their living bodies—and indeed these two captives barely escape the same fate. They have magic, which would be better described as science. This includes an advanced kind of television, which permits them to both see and hear events taking place in any part of the planet, and the ability to control weather, even at a distance. The climax of Wheatley's novel is their attempt to create fierce storms in the English Channel and thus frustrate the Allied D-day invasion of the continent, and how the attempt is frustrated. There is little originality here, and Wheatley's writing style is workmanlike rather than deft or brilliant, but if you enjoy fast action in a fantastic locale there's plenty here to satisfy you.

—Thyril L. Ladd

Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Escape on Venus* (1946): Shortly after book publication I read this opus, which is composed of Ziff-Davis magazine acceptances strung together into a sort of a novel. Just why I read it, I don't exactly know—perhaps in part out of sheer curiosity (since I'd not touched Edgar Rice's work for some years), perhaps out of sentiment, since I cut certain avocational teeth—now loosening a trifle—on the first two novels in the Venus series, enjoying them immensely. Anyway, I encountered nothing of striking interest here, nor can I say that Burroughs (as many fans seem to think) is a poorer writer than he used to be. The trouble is that the fans are growing up, learning to appreciate better prose; Burroughs is still writing about the same way he did twenty-five years ago. I'd say he improved definitely from 1912, when he started, up to, say, 1923 or so,

reaching a mild peak of quality with the *Moon Maid* trilogy. From then on he coasted; and *Escape on Venus* shows him still doing so, coasting along easily but by no means tobogganing down out of sight. *Escape*—to save you the trouble of reading it—deals with Carson's further adventures on the planet, a new civilization (the latter term referring more to the etymologic root "city" than to culture) being encountered every few chapters by means of Carson's *anotar*, as the first airplane on Venus is called. Duare, his mate, gets lost occasionally, and her rescues provide excuse for several varied exhibitions of Carsonian heroism. On an absolute basis, I'd call this book the weakest of the entire series. For one thing, it's only too obviously stitched together from what originally were novelettes; and as a whole it still impresses me as disconnected. *Pirates of Venus* and *Lost on Venus* were unquestioned novels, structurally. And with disconnection comes haphazard motivation: all the adventures in this latest epic are caused by the *anotar's* becoming disabled at appropriate moments, which becomes tiresomely repetitious after a while. All in all, the book is definitely not worth buying, unless you happen to be a Burroughs completist.

—A. Langley Searles

S. Fowler Wright's *The Hidden Tribe* (1938): Hidden away under the center of the Sahara Desert lie the secret chambers of an underground city, whose people have purposely kept themselves isolated from modern civilization. Seeking this, from slim evidence he has unearthed, a young explorer gets to the place barely alive; and seeking him, a girl is captured by this strange people when her plane is forced down nearby. The couple find another girl imprisoned there, and learn that the king—last of an age-long hereditary line—had had an American girl kidnapped, since he seeks a bride and feels the royal line needs new blood. When the second girl is kidnapped, she too becomes a forced candidate for the post of queen. The customs of this hidden culture are described in some detail, and Wright's plot is built up in a more circumstantial and satisfying fashion than we find in most tales of this kind. The climax is both rational and exciting, and I found *The Hidden Tribe* unusually entertaining.

—Thyril L. Ladd

Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls Wundersame Geschichte* (1814): Sometimes it is hard to distinguish among the "moral" of the fairy tale, the "symbolism" of the Hawthorne fantasies, and the "significance" of many a piece of modern fiction. This is particularly true with *Peter Schlemihl*, a curiously powerful story that remains still effectively strange despite more than a century's existence and certain glaring faults of construction. Schlemihl, the name of the chief character, is significant in itself, meaning as it does the unfortunate, humble man of the crowd. Contrary to the custom of the time, Chamisso does not spend the first part of the book tracing the history of his hero and ancestors; we never learn anything about Schlemihl's life prior to the opening chapter, or even the precise nature of his visit to the rich estate which is the starting point of his adventures.

Schlemihl trades his shadow for an inexhaustible magic purse to a stranger who is something more than the personification of the powers of evil or Satan to which it is temptingly easy to equate him. Throughout this rather brief novel, Schlemihl wages a strange battle, striving to gain security and respect in a world where money does not eradicate the loathing and fright inspired in men and women by a human being who lacks a shadow. Seldom is there even pity for him, even when he alibis that his shadow vanished with his hair and nails during a serious illness, or froze fast to the ground on a particularly frigid day. Chamisso, commendably, refrains from moralizing on the obvious parallel he draws between worldly and spiritual values, depicted in the forms of purse and shadow.

The story is told in the first person, by Schlemihl to Chamisso, who was

supposedly been with the safe-keeping of the strange adventures by his old friend. This leads to a crude tacking-on of the final chapters. The story could end with artistic worth at chapter eight, but Schlemihl was in fairly good spirits and circumstances when he called at Chamisso's home, and accordingly the author must drag him out to the dregs of despair by making him accidentally purchase a pair of seven-league boots, and with this advantage, devote the remainder of his days to the study of botany, having successfully resisted the mysterious stranger's offer to trade back the shadow in exchange for Schlemihl's soul.

I recommend reading this novel in the original German, if you have had a year or two's study in that language; it is available in annotated texts for classroom use that make the few archaic words and phrases readily understandable. Chamisso's work was first translated into English in 1824, and has appeared in numerous editions since. Of these, the discerning collector should probably choose one containing the superb Cruickshank illustrations that appeared in the French edition of 1838.

—Harry Warner, Jr.

Ethel Smith Dorrance's *Damned: the Intimate Story of a Girl* (1923): Everything about this book points to its being a stern moral tract—except the text. This tells the story of Dolores, a young girl who has committed suicide and taken her illegitimate infant into death with her, thus automatically condemning herself to hell. She recovers consciousness there, and is taken before Satan himself. He is both bored and attracted by her beauty, and commands that she relate to him her life story in full; in hell, he reminds her, no asterisks are used—evil is enjoyed. From this point the novel switches back and forth between installments of Dolores' life and her weird experiences in hell, where she gradually becomes a favored guest of Satan. Satire and morality are present, but Dorrance presents a serious, plotted narrative, and makes the descriptions of hell far more interesting than the account of how Dolores got there. The devil escorts her about, explaining the various tortures and dooms that might await her, and simultaneously hints that if she cooperates with him she could become the reigning queen there. There are even bits of science-fiction described: Satan has inventions which permit him to view by powerful rays (not just by magic) scenes occurring on the earth above at any time, and to travel anywhere at unheard-of speeds (again, not by magic, but in a weirdly-constructed airship). Classical mythology is introduced as well, for he is still chafing at his expulsion from heaven, and plans a mighty conquest of the planet as a prelude to return. Amazingly, perhaps, this melange works. Dorrance writes well, and keeps the reader entertained throughout. I enjoyed it, and reflected as I read that it might be what John Collier would have written had he been born twenty years sooner.

—Thyril L. Ladd

Edward B. Shanks' *The People of the Ruins* (1920): The bleak futures that authors frequently forecast for mankind usually cite a world war as their cause. In this novel, however, Shanks sees it originating in a series of independent social revolutions. Conditions in Britain are described by a man from this century who has awakened from suspended animation. The people have become superstitious peasants who live in a semi-feudal state; they wonder at the relics from former civilization and laugh when their visitor from the past tells them man once could fly and talk through the air over long distances. A few railroads still run when engines work, but new ones cannot be made, and only a few elderly artisans know how to repair the old ones. Worse, a civil war between Britain and Wales is raging. Because he has a technical background (he was an artillery gunner in World War I) he is able to construct crude firearms for the British army; but the advantage is not enough to end the war decisively. Faced with the dreary prospect of civiliza-

continuing its slow, inexorable decline and seeing all of man's achievements and learning eventually disintegrate "to a few shards and a little dust" our hero commits suicide. The novel is very well written, and even its pessimistic climax did not make me enjoy it any less.

—Thyril L. Ladd

—oOo—

## THE PATH OF PROGRESS

by  
Garth Bentley

"Give us more bombs! And greater bombs!" they cried.  
 The scientist, within his cloistered tower,  
 Tore from the atom's heart its secret power  
 And watched destruction spreading planet-wide.  
 Yet when the last explosive burst has died  
 This giant loosed, before whom all men cower,  
 Will turn our wheels, light cities, grind our flour,  
 Bring centuries of progress in a stride.  
 So has it been, so shall it always be!  
 The best of human brains and human skill  
 Conceive. Their product is unhailed until  
 It proves its worth in wanton butchery.  
 This is our shame on history's pages spread:  
 Man climbs but on a ladder of his dead.

—oOo—

This-'n'-That — continued from page 226

The best way of doing this, I decided, was to publish a periodical of my own. I began conservatively by joining the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA). Here one could distribute a limited number of copies of one's publication (65 then, as I recall) all at once (no bother of wrapping single copies) to a ready-made body of readers (no subscriptions to solicit) as infrequently as once a year. The first issue of *Fantasy Commentator* was distributed there in December, 1943. So were the next four. Interest in the magazine grew rapidly, rather to my surprise; and, doubled in size, it was successfully launched on a subscription basis with the Winter, 1944-45 number.

From the beginning it was visualized as a permanent contribution to fantasy scholarship. It was intended to be kept as a reference and bound (hence the consecutive pagination within each volume and the different identifying color for the first page of each issue). The number of issues per volume was determined not by the date (though I made a point of not ending a volume in the middle of a year) but by how many pages would produce a book that could be handled easily. Each volume was indexed by author and title (and I plan in the future to compile a more comprehensive index to the contents of both the old and new series). The format was conservative to a fault; to some it looked dull, and one fan complained that it was just "page after page of black print." (It was supposed to be.) Few illustrations appeared. Right-hand margins were professionally straight. Fannish chit-chat was studiously avoided, even when I became involved in a dispute that saw Francis T. Laney use his magazine *The Acolyte* (*Commentator's* most serious com-

petitor) as a vehicle for promoting his side of a feud. Fantasy in book form was the subject of most articles, leavened by checklists of fantasy in non-fantasy magazines and pieces by and about prominent authors, particularly H. P. Lovecraft, whose work was examined more seminally than in any journal of the time. Later this policy was broadened to include entries discussing major trends in the field, and a history of fan organizations and fan publishing ("The Immortal Storm").

Many fan magazines published entries pseudonymously, often to the near-total exclusion of real authors' names, and I was often queried as to the authenticity of those appearing in *Fantasy Commentator*. I am aware of only three pseudonyms in the magazine. One was James B. Harlow, which H. Orlo Hoadley quite openly employed as a "fan name," as some writers then did (and probably still do). The others were Charles Peter Brady and Alice M. Perry. The latter is the *nom de plume* of Lee Becker, whose work has continued to appear in the new series of *Commentator*, and the former is that of myself. I adopted it because I found there were times when expressing a candid derogatory opinion might offend people I knew well, and I was unwilling to sacrifice honest opinion even on an altar of friendship. Using it also distanced myself as editor from a specific point of view that might have influenced potential contributors. Of course I was not personally acquainted with every writer who made submissions, and if someone wanted to go to the elaborate trouble of maintaining a pseudonym without my knowledge I am sure it could have been managed.

*Fantasy Commentator* appeared quarterly, which meant that about 90,000 words of material a year was needed to fill it. To assure that all this would be forthcoming, I enlisted the help of several interested fans by making them titled members of the staff. William H. Evans, whose location gave him ready access to the Library of Congress, and who was thoroughly conversant with research methods, contributed valuable bibliographical material. Long-time reader (and later fantasy dealer) Richard Witter provided important articles. Two names new to fandom, Thyril L. Ladd and Matthew Onderdonk, were induced to utilize their wide reading in the field in writing for publication for the first time. So, later, was the collector Darrell Richardson and the bibliophile George Wetzell. But the one who contributed most of all was Sam Moskowitz.

Sam, then as now, was probably the most knowledgeable person in the field of fantasy and science-fiction, and from the very first he was a tremendous help. He aided in every category imaginable, from preferring sound advice on how to run an amateur magazine economically, how to distribute it and what it should feature in order to attract readers to supplying it regularly with interesting and important articles and perceptive reviews. (He even supplied the mimeograph machine on which most of the later issues of *Commentator* were produced.) I have always believed, too, that his relationship with this magazine and its staff was symbiotic: just as he gave so much to them, so did they the while stimulate and deepen his interest in scholarly attainments in the field, within and about which he has certainly written more than any living person.

Over the years I have kept running track of individuals' contributions to this magazine, and they amply confirm the above remarks. For volumes I-III of *Fantasy Commentator* the figures are as follows: Moskowitz, 258 pages (which equals 30.4% of the total, not counting contents and index pages); myself, 141 pages (or 16.6%); Ladd, 45 pages (5.9%); and Onderdonk 43 pages (5.1%).

Sam may be remembered longest in fan journalism for his serial article "The Immortal Storm," which popularized and accented the importance of fan history as a separate research topic all its own. But for that, and for his other writings here, *Fantasy Commentator* would never have continued as it has, and I should not be writing a column about it in this issue today.

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