

# SCIENCE- FANTASY REVIEW

Vol. IV. No. 17

WINTER '49-50

ERIK FENNEL *says*  
**NOBODY WANTS  
UTOPIA!**

THOMAS SHERIDAN *on*  
**The Palmer Hoax**

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**THINGS THAT  
DIDN'T COME**

GEOFFREY GILES *on*  
**Jack Williamson**

FANTASY BOOK REVIEWS

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# Nobody Wants Utopia!

By **ERIK FENNEL**

Before I turned to making a living with a typewriter I was a member of two engineering unions. Now, according to two of the gentlemen behind the Iron Curtain, I'm a lackey of Wall Street. Yet my financial position, like that of many other science fiction writers, is enough to prove that Wall Street can be woefully remiss with its bribes; and I have to sell what I write to eat regularly.

Now, the British Government has created grave difficulties for the distribution of American magazines in the British Isles, while the copies of our s-f pulps sold in Russian territory may be counted on one paw by a three-toed sloth. Therefore, American writers and publishers are obliged to depend almost entirely on American sales. It

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HAS science fiction a political bias? Is it fascist—too much concerned with power-seeking heroes and big corporations seeking a monopoly on the Universe? The controversy which started when *Fantasy Review* reprinted an article from a Russian journal\* has been given fresh impetus by the reiteration in *Astounding Science Fiction* of the Soviet critics' condemnation of American s-f writers as "lackeys of Wall Street." One of the new school of fantasy writers, whose work has appeared in *Astounding*, *Planet Stories* and *Blue Book*, now has something very definite to say on the question which is being pursued in "Fantasy Forum."

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follows that it would be neither good taste nor financially expedient to trump too heavily upon the emotional unions of the reading public—for it is the reader rather than Wall Street that determines the course of science fiction. Give the reader something too completely at variance with his basic beliefs, conditionings and previous experience, and both the writer and the magazine will meet with widespread rejection.

Most Americans are experimentalists at heart. Our entire history since the Revolution has tended to keep us from becoming slaves of tradition. Most of us (with the exception of a few mental nonentities) realise that this is no utopia. The faults of our democratic-individualistic-capitalistic system are many, and they glare. We will change—but only when we see good odds of attaining something better. We haven't seen it yet. Communism? Suppression and compulsion? Hell, no! Socialism on the British pattern? Many of us think you have lost more in liberty than you've gained in security. But if slavish conformity is the ultimate in desirability, let's all A-bomb ourselves into extinction and turn the planet over to the ants and termites. They're already better conformists than we are.

Certainly, our science fiction "utopias" are retrogressive. Conflict is the basis of any story, and in a true utopia where peace and plenty for all was universal and automatic there would be no conflict, no story, no cheque for the writer, and no readers.

\* "Science Fiction—The World's Nightmare": Dec. '48 - Jan. '49.

## SCIENCE-FANTASY REVIEW

QUARTERLY: ONE SHILLING

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EDITOR: WALTER GILLINGS

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So the utopias of *s-f* are in reality only pseudo-utopias, set up to be knocked down. Many writers start building on a premise of "This is the year —." Some of the characters probably like things that way, and want to keep them so; but this does not necessarily imply that the author considers his created social and governmental system perfect—or even good.

**Astounding Science Fiction** once—and during the war!—ran a story based on the premise that Hitler had won World War II and that the title had become generic, like King. The villain was Hitler XXVII, or some such number. Does that make the author a Fascist? The Artur Blord stories carried big-business capitalism to the ultimate, with legalistic shenanigans to make present-day corporation lawyers green with envy. Is this pro-capitalist propaganda? Or satire, in the tradition of Swift's modest proposal that Baked Irish Baby be added to the menu of the British upper classes? Sprague de Camp once put humans under the thumbs of the Hoppers and gave them a medieval system of knighthood and serfdom. That makes him—according to the "logic" of our critics—a *per se* advocate of feudalism.

Most science fiction stories deal with unusual individuals—unusually docile, unusually greedy or altruistic, or unusually intelligent or insane. This is only natural. Who wants to read about mediocre personalities living in a moderately dull routine? (Even the Communists, those fanatical exponents of conformity, make quite a huzzlecoo about their Stakhanovite workers.) The unusual individual is frequently—nearly always—out of step with his environment. So what would he be doing in a perfect utopia?

The unusual individual in an imperfect environment is bound to react in one way or another. Perhaps, driven by idealism or some equivalent, he tries to tear the system apart, polish up the pieces, and reassemble them in conformity with his own ideas of how things should be. But not every character is driven by idealism. Perhaps he tries to get along inside the system, evading the thought police instead of attempting mass assassination, and attending to his own business. Does this mean that the character—and through him, the author—actually approves of thought police?

It is true that in most American stories of way-in-the-future and inter-

planetary travel, the Earth base for the spaceship is in the United States and the U.S. is one of the leading powers of the world—often *the* power as far as gadgetry and engineering are concerned. Nationalistic pride? I don't think so, although some of us have confidence in our future. Rather, an attempt to extrapolate into the future from the recent past, in the interests of plausibility. For America is the gadget capital of the world, said gadgets ranging from zippers to A-bombs. Whether this is good or evil is another matter: I personally think we're gadgetting ourselves into deep trouble—for which heresy Mr. Gernsback would have sent me rejection slips if I had been writing in his day. But our capitalistic, free-enterprise, restless, iconoclastic system encourages the development of gadgets. So some of us, extrapolating, feel that America will get further and further ahead in gadgetry—until we blow ourselves to hell, probably.

In our chief competitors, the Russian and British systems, the trend is towards state management of everything, with less and less profit for the inventor and developer. Individual initiative is not only unrewarded under these systems, but actually penalised. But American readers would not understand a story in which the hero had to go around for weeks on end, standing in line at numerous government bureaus to get permission to buy materials and tools, get his workshop hooked up with electric current, get hold of enough coal to keep his hands from freezing while he worked, have his ration book checked and counter-stamped, and do all the million-and-one things he would have to do under any Statist regime.

On the charge that most American *s-f* heroes carry American passports and are of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, the plea is guilty. And for this some of us are genuinely sorry; we feel we are missing some wonderful opportunities. But we have neither been bribed by the Race Purity League nor intimidated by the Ku Klux Klan. This situation arises from a peculiar reader habit which texts on writing call "identification." Many readers imagine themselves into the hero's shoes as he slaughters nasty BEM's, battles with broadswords and/or planet-wrecker bombs, makes passes at suitably pneumatic heroines and thwarts vile villains. Some editors will not buy a story in which there is no

character suitable for identification.

And many readers, it seems, have difficulty identifying if the leading character is a Zulu or an Eskimo or has two heads—which shows up a certain lack of mental flexibility among readers rather than race prejudice among writers. I once wrote a story—still one of my favourites—about a Chinese-Samoan-Filipino boy who had been raised in Hawaii. He liked to play with a ukelele while thinking, sleep in the sun, make corny puns, and generally enjoy life both on Earth and as a spaceman. He ended up by marrying, in Luna Farside Observatory, a statuesque blonde from Norway. But that story is still in my "lemon" file: it never sold.

Personally, I am a Moderate Anarchist. I believe that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely; that the minimum government is the best government; that we have to decentralise and decontrol very quickly, or else; that bureaucratic government is a cancerous growth, malignant and deadly, which will spread and take over everything unless sharply checked. I am anti-Socialist, anti-Communist and anti-Fascist,

In the next issue:

THOMAS SHERIDAN on  
**HUGO GERNSBACK,**  
Pioneer of Scientifiction

ARTHUR F. HILLMAN on  
**A. MERRITT,**  
Master of Fantasy

against all Statist forms of government that deal in threats and compulsions and controls. I have a deep and bitter distrust for super-governments of all types, and most of my work naturally tends in that direction. I love to set up dictators and then dream up unpleasant fates for them, or create worlds of rampant socialistic bureaucracy and then plot them into chaos from their own inefficiency and mass stupidity. I will continue to slant my work along those lines, without apology; and if any Communists or party-liners wish to accuse me of turning out "dirty capitalist propaganda" they are still at liberty to do so

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**JACK WILLIAMSON,**  
who might have been a cowboy  
but became instead a

# Space-Time Ranger



Ask any science-fantasy reader of long standing for the names of a dozen writers who have done the most to develop the field in the past twenty years and he is almost certain to mention Jack Williamson. The only one who would be certain to overlook him is—Jack Williamson. For he has been as diligent a reader as he is still, after more than twenty years, an industrious contributor to the s-f magazines; and next to his record for imaginative concepts and intriguing plots, he has gained a reputation for personal modesty. At any get-together of writers and fans he is conspicuous for his silent presence, contributing little more than a sentence, in a slow drawl, to the discussion—unless he is prevailed upon to give a talk, when he makes his points quietly and persuasively\*. A woman journalist who interviewed him for her Texas readers recently was so taken with his unexpected personality that she wrote:

Extraordinarily quiet, shy and self-effacing, Williamson looks more like a Southwestern cowboy with an inferiority complex than a successful author of wildly imaginative tales . . . More than six feet tall, he is big and muscular-looking, and dresses much as many of the cattlemen of the area do, usually wearing a denim jumper instead of a suit coat. His only concession to scholarship is a pair of rimmed glasses.

He speaks slowly, with deliberate choice of words . . . drawing on an astonishing store of mechanical, chem-

\*As at the recent World S-F Convention, when he spoke on the different appeals of the various types of fantasy-fiction.

ical and physical lore. Although he will offer an explanation of some of his more profound theories with an air of "you-probably-know-more-about-this-than-I-do," it doesn't take him long to leave a mere layman suspended somewhere in the cosmic void . . . If there is an ounce of conceit anywhere in Jack Williamson's make-up, he conceals it perfectly.

Those who know him better—and he is no recluse, if retiring—know well that he is not egotistical, though he is both proud and sensitive about his stories. "It's not that I shrink from publicity," he assured me. "On the contrary, I still look through the letter columns with a pretty eager eye for readers' comments on my work." And he is not entirely averse to writing about himself; he has told his own story several times in various places†, and considered the merits of his proudest pieces in "Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science Fiction Writing."<sup>1</sup>

Most of his admirers are familiar with the romantic tale of his early days, forty years ago, in the remote canyons of New Mexico where, as a mere babe reared in a palm-thatched hacienda, deadly scorpions, mountain lions and renegade Apache Indians were the first perilous obstacles in his career. They have heard of his journeying, at the age of seven, across the prairies in a covered wagon to

<sup>1</sup>Including *Tales of Wonder* (Autumn '39), which was not the first magazine to reprint his work in England. His *Air Wonder* story, "The Second Shell" (Nov. '29), was presented in the May '31 issue of *Chums*.

†Reviewed FR Dec. '47-Jan. '48.

reach the ranching country where he has lived most of his life since. But not as the bronco-busting cattleman he might have become—perhaps because a bronc busted him, instead, when he was only five years old. His Texan parents, before they turned to ranching and farming, had both been school-teachers, and had taught him to read in their lonely homestead. It was natural, therefore, that the discovery of some of his father's dusty college books and an ancient encyclopedia should bring out the latent interest in science and history which inspired in young Jack the desire to become a scientist—until he encountered the first science fiction magazine, **Amazing Stories**.

That momentous turning-point in his career followed his graduation, at 17, from a country high school, where he timidly admired a pretty girl student named Blanche, who was good at athletics, and who married someone else. It was 22 years before he met her again, unattached, and became her second husband—and an adopted grandfather. They live now in Portales, New Mexico's county town, where for six months in '47, following discharge from the U.S. Army Air Force, he served as wire editor on the local daily. But he didn't care much for journalism; he got more fun out of his three years as a weather forecaster in the A.A.F., most of which period he spent in his home State. For the rest, he got around the tropical islands of the South Pacific, and found them as interesting as meteorology. Though from his experience of the latter, he came to the conclusion, expressed in a subsequent article for **Astounding Science Fiction** (Feb.-Mar. '46), that "the modern weather man . . . has a good deal in common with the tribal witch doctor. They both pretend to superior knowledge (and) engage in rites that mystify . . ."

#### THE MERRITT INFLUENCE

In those 22 years which separated him from Blanche, Williamson was busy pursuing that other love to which he is still devoted—science-fantasy. Life in his teens, on the Llano Estacado, was a constant, heart-breaking struggle against sandstorms, hail and frost, which ruined his family's crops, and the dreaded drought which took toll of the cattle. When a friend lent him a copy of **Amazing**, then but a few months old, it opened an avenue of escape from such harsh realities into

thrilling worlds of romance and adventure on this and other planets. With his sister, he scraped up enough money for a subscription; and after devouring such classics as Wells' "The Time Machine," Stripling's "The Green Splashes" and Merritt's "The Moon Pool," he found himself dreaming up his own stories while he watered his horses or leaned on a hoe.

For one with imagination so unconfined, the next step to authorship was inevitable. On an antique typewriter with a faded purple ribbon, by the flickering light of a kerosene lamp, he battered out four pieces which boomeranged. The next one didn't—but it wasn't until "The Metal Man" appeared in the Dec. '28 issue, complete with gaudy cover illustration by Paul, that he knew he had made the grade as one of Gernsback's finds, who was to prove fully deserving of encouragement when he bloomed into authorstardom. By that time, his father had managed to send him to college, whence he proceeded to the University of New Mexico, to major in chemistry and psychology; and it wasn't long before he was selling enough of his science fiction to pay his own way.

At first, as a result of the tremendous impression "The Moon Pool" had made on him, his tales showed rather too much of the influence of Merritt; e.g. "The Alien Intelligence" (**Science Wonder**, Jul.-Aug. '29) and "The Green Girl" (**Amazing**, Mar.-Apr. '30). "The Prince of Space" (**Amazing**, Jan. '31) early revealed his penchant for bold treatment of the interplanetary theme, which eventually reached perfection in "The Legion of Space" (**Astounding**, Apr.-Sep. '34)\*, and its sequels, "The Cometeers" (May-Aug. '36) and "One Against the Legion" (Apr.-Jun. '38). But colourful atmosphere (and a strange fascination with green things) of the sort that Merritt excelled in persisted in his work for several years, particularly in such longer stories as "The Stone from the Green Star" (**Amazing**, Oct.-Nov. '31) and "The Lady of Light" (**Amazing**, Sep. '32). So obvious was it that it attracted the notice of the Master himself, who, on reading the first part of "The Alien Intelligence," wrote to Williamson, impatient to examine the rest of it.

"I was vastly pleased, and it led to

\*Published in book form by Fantasy Press (reviewed **FR** Aug.-Sept. '47), its sequels (see above) will appear in a single volume from the same source.

a correspondence between us. Merritt told me something of his working methods and gave me some good advice. He even agreed to undertake a collaboration with me. I sent him something I had written—called, if I remember correctly, *The Purple Mountain*—but it was off the beam somehow and he never did anything with it; nor did he return it. I doubt if even Hannes Bok could finish it."

There was another writer, of very different style, with whom he did collaborate successfully in those days: the late Dr. Miles J. Breuer. Although Merritt was to remain his idol, Williamson soon realized that his stories were too imitative of his florid style, and he began to try for more simplicity and, at the same time, more significance—things that Breuer advised. Reading his stories in *Amazing*, and finding them good, he had started to correspond with the writing physician in Lincoln, Nebraska, whose *The Gostak and the Doshes*" (*Amazing*, Mar. '30) was one of the first psychological tales in s-f. As a result they combined in a short story, "The Girl from Mars," which was published in *Wonder's Science Fiction Series*, and in the memorable *Amazing Quarterly* novel, "A Birth of a New Republic" (Winter '30).

"He was the instructor, I the student," Williamson readily conceded. "I did most of the plotting and writing while he made suggestions for improvement—and they were excellent. He had a sound knowledge of the fundamentals of fiction, and of what constituted good writing. I believe he was actually capable of much better writing than appeared in his published work. He was mainly concerned with putting a meaning into everything he wrote. I met him only once, when I visited him in '31, and lost contact with him later, much to my regret. It was only by accident that I heard of his death."

#### WIZARDS AND WEREWOLVES

Within four years of his debut, the Williamson by-line was to be found in all three s-f mags. of the day, and in *Weird Tales*, where he made his first hit with "The Wand of Doom" (Oct. '32) and later distinguished himself with the exotic "Golden Blood" (Apr.-Jun. '33), scheduled to appear in book form from Fantasy Press. He also contributed a single story to the Clayton *Strange Tales*: "Wolves of Darkness" (Jan. '32), a tale of lycanthropy on which he based his *Unknown* story

on the same theme, "Darker Than You Think" (Dec. '40), which was further extended into the book of the same title. Also due to appear from Fantasy Press are book versions of his *Astounding* "mutant" story, "The Legion of Time" (May-Jul. '38), in which he got an entirely fresh slant on time-travel with his theory of several possible futures, and "The Reign of Wizardry" (*Unknown*, Mar.-May '40), a tale of magic and mystery with a mythological background; and a collection of his shorter pieces under the title of "The Metal Man and Others."

It was with the development of the Street & Smith *Astounding* that Williamson firmly established himself as a writer who could be relied upon, not only for novel treatment of familiar ideas, but for startlingly new concepts—witness "Born of the Sun" (Mar. '34)—and, most of all, for plausible stories with interesting characters such as Giles Habibula of the "Legion of Space" trilogy. For in spite of his constant striving for originality, he believes that plausibility—the introduction of logic—and the depiction of character are the first principles in s-f writing. "The more striking the (basic) premise, the more strict is the logical discipline required to present it successfully . . . (and) a scientific gadget is significant only to the extent that the reader can be shown its effect on human beings": such is the burden of his contribution to "Of Worlds Beyond," in which he gives instances of his own success in following these directions. Then, lapsing into his customary modesty, he concludes: "Many other writers in the field are able to turn out more material, doubtless with much less fuss about how they do it. For my part, I've never been able to produce much more than 100,000 words a year."

Yet, of his eighty-odd tales in two decades and more than a dozen magazines, there are few over which he has any cause to be diffident. Among his contributions to other publications, "After World's End" (*Marvel Science Stories*, Feb. '39) proved as popular as any of his most appreciated *Astounding* pieces, and he himself is especially proud of a little whimsy called "Star Bright" which appeared in *Argosy* and is currently reprinted in the anthology, "My Best Science Fiction Story" (Merlin Press). A short series of tales based on the concept of contraterrene matter,

Reviewed FR Apl.-May '49.

for which he invented the pseudonym of Will Stewart, commencing with "Colliston Orbit" (*Astounding*, Jul. '42) and lately concluded with "Seetee Shock" (Feb.-Apr. '49), did not entirely commend themselves to critics of the "new author," except for their novelty of ideas; and "The Equaliser" (Mar. '47), which marked his return to the field after over three years' absence, left his *Astounding* fans wondering if he had lost his touch in the interval. But he

!Yet, somewhat to Williamson's abashment, Simon & Schuster will put "Seetee Shock" between hard covers next Spring, and Gnome Press will follow it with "Seetee Ship," a novel assembled from the three earlier stories. Of the serial, he says: "It wasn't so successful, I imagine, because it was concluding a series too long after the first stories had appeared, and I was unable to include enough explanatory material without repeating myself too much. The book version has given me the chance to fill in the technical and historical backgrounds more completely, which has improved it considerably. Re-writing the short stories as a novel will also give me the opportunity to fill in the picture of Seetee and its possible part in the operation of the universe even more fully."

banished the doubt very forcibly with his stories of the Humanoids, "With Folded Hands . . ." (Jul. '47) and ". . . And Searching Mind" (Mar.-May '48), now presented in book form by Simon and Schuster (see Book Reviews, this issue).

". . . And Searching Mind," in which he extrapolated on the Rhine experiments in parapsychology, was written in the little ranch-house, stacked with s-f mags. and books, that has been Williamson's base of operations since his old friend Edmond Hamilton (with whom he has roughed it on many pleasure expeditions, but never collaborated on paper) helped him build it. He still keeps up with his reading, and joins in acclaiming brilliant new exponents of the medium, such as Bradbury; but he will confess to a lingering fondness for his old favourites—Merritt, "Skylark" Smith, and the greatest of them all, H.G. Wells. "He remains, in my view, the pre-eminent figure in the field," he will tell you, quietly. "He pioneered with most of the ordinary themes, and many of his earlier stories are still unsurpassed in their convincing presentation and their tremendous feeling for the impact of science on humanity."

The New

## NEW WORLDS 1/6

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# Walter Gillings' FANTASIA

New York Times and Chicago Tribune carried full-page ads for Frederick Fell's Science Fiction Library (see "About Books," last issue), said to be selling twice as well as expected . . . Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch ran picture-feature by Book Editor Ernest Cady reviewing new fantasy novels, citing Bleiler-Diky's "The Best S-F Stories, '49" to show why "men-from-Mars stories have climbed the literary ladder" . . . First of three s-f anthologies with central theme being compiled by Martin Greenberg for Gnome Press, "Men Against the Stars" will foretell tale of space-conquest from Moon trip to intergalactic flight . . . August Derleth's next anthology from Pellegrini, "Beyond Time and Space," to be historical survey of fantasy field, reprinting Bishop Godwin's "The Man in the Moone" with other classics . . . "The Science Fiction Galaxy," edited by Groff Conklin, forthcoming (at 35c.) from Permabooks . . . John W. Campbell's "Wade, Arcot and Morey" series from Amazing Quarterly ("The Black Star Passes," etc.) to be revived by Fantasy Press, whence comes his "The Incredible Planet" (\$3.00), also presenting "The Interstellar Search," "The Infinite Atom," all hitherto unpublished sequels to "The Mightiest Machine" . . .

Telling story of "Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc." in *Writer's Digest*, Dolph Sharp recorded that "he'll be 74 this year, and he isn't happy about it . . . 'I keep yawning all day long,' he says of his typical day . . . 'Every day I think I might start writing again but thinking about it alone wears me out' . . . Interplanetary P. E. Cleator, now touring South Africa, described himself for *BIS Journal* as "agnostic, sceptic and pacifist . . . A one-time idealist whose disillusionment is now complete" . . . Arthur C. Clarke's prize essay, "The Challenge of the Spaceship," got yet another airing in *Pacific Rockets*; his *Startling Stories* novel, "Against the Fall of Night," to see book publication in extended version . . . Theodore Sturgeon attended 7th World S-F Convention with new wife, Mary Malr . . . Convention Finance Committee, with total income of \$1,300, voted \$300 for books and mags. to go to English and Australian fan clubs . . . Portland (Oregon) S-F Society's John De Courcy elected Chairman 8th World Convention ("Norwescon") Committee . . . Lamont Buchanan resigned Associate Editorship of *Weird Tales* . . .

"To the Stars," serial by L. Ron Hubbard starting in Feb. *Astounding*, will launch new series; A. E. van Vogt's "The Wizard of Linn," starting April issue, will complete "Gods" series . . . Stories by van Vogt, Heinlein, Williamson, Bradbury, being considered for U.S. radio series featuring science-fantasy . . . John Keir Cross ("The Other Passenger"), visiting London Circle, confessed to examining similar material for radio adaptation this side . . . Meanwhile, BBC presented film star Eric Portman in R. C. Sheriff's "The Hopkins Manuscript" (in two parts); revived Conan Doyle's "The Lost World" (six parts); televised J. B. Priestley's "Summer Day's Dream," depicting life in England 25 years hence following atomic war . . . For Poe Centenary, televiewers saw "The Fall of the House of Usher," two other Poe tales dramatised; Everybody's featured "The Tragedy of Edgar Allan Poe," by Kenneth Hopkins, revived "The Pit and Pendulum"; Bodley Head issued "The Centenary Poe" (15s.), edited by Montagu Slater, reprinting the master's best works . . . British edition "The Moonlight Traveller," edited by Philip Van Doren Stern, companion volume to "The Midnight Reader" (reviewed *FR*, Dec. '48-Jan. '49), due from Bodley Head at 12/6 . . .

Isaac Asimov's new novel, "Pebble in the Sky" ("Grow Old Along With Me" retitled) due shortly from Doubleday, who will follow it with Robert A. Heinlein's "Waldo" (from *Astounding*) and "Magic, Inc." ("The Devil Makes the Law," from *Unknown*), in one volume . . . Heinlein's "Red Planet" (Scribner's, \$2.50) is follow-up to "Space Cadet" (reviewed *FR* Feb.-Mar. '49) . . . Hal Clement's recent *ASF* serial, "Needle," also coming from Doubleday . . . New series of *Avon Fantasy Novels* will revive old-time magazine serial classics, commencing with Ray Cummings' "Princess of the Atom" . . . Jack Williamson's *Startling* stories, "Fortress of Utopia," "Gateway to Paradise," to appear as 15c. Checkerbooks . . . Gnome Press will publish "The Castle of Iron," by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, rewritten from *Unknown* novel as sequel to de Camp's ditto, "The Undeared Princess," forthcoming from Fantasy Publishing Co. . . . "Exiles of Time," by Nelson Bond (Prime, \$3.00), is first of tetralogy based on Toltec legend, expanded from *Blue Book* and *Amazing* stories . . . "Arthur Machen, Weaver of Fantasy," by William Francis Gekie (*Round Table*, New York), is new biography for collectors . . .

## AMONG THE MAGAZINES

# THE PALMER HOAX

By GEOFFREY GILES

"Science fiction is . . . pregnant with wonderful possibilities for development into a new and infinitely beneficial type of literature . . . To achieve (its) purpose (it) must contain actual scientific facts and ideas not based on unfounded theory. Thus it is up to the writers of this fiction to include . . . real science and sound reasoning in their stories . . . It is in the production of more accurate and better science fiction that I am now greatly interested . . ."

Twenty years ago, when he wrote to *Science Wonder Stories* telling "What I Have Done to Spread Science Fiction," and collected \$100 in a Gernsback propaganda contest for his pains, Raymond A. Palmer, secretary of the Science Correspondence Club, was a young Milwaukee, Wisconsin fan who had been converted in '26 by a copy of *Amazing Stories* he had bought at a drugstore news-stand. Little did he suspect, as he succumbed to its pure delights, that he was destined to become editor of that same magazine—or, rather, of a magazine with the same title. Nor that he was to be assailed by its once devoted readers for deserting the principles he had laid down and degrading science fiction with the unfounded theory and false reasoning of the so-called Shaver Mystery.

By '38, when the Ziff-Davis Publishing Co. of Chicago acquired the decrepit pioneer of s-f magazines, with a view to re-vamping it in the same way that *Wonder* had been made over into *Thrilling Wonder* a couple of years before, the name of Ray Palmer had come to mean something in s-f circles. Having stimulated correspondence between hundreds of fans and authors, he had launched the first of all fan magazines, *Cosmology*, subsequently to join in the production of *Science Fiction Digest* (later *Fantasy Magazine*) with Mort Weisinger (who became *Thrilling Wonder's* assistant editor), Julius Schwartz (leading s-f writer's agent of the '30's), and Forrest J. Ack-

erman. As Literary Editor, he originated the famous "Cosmos" serial and reported on current trends in a feature titled "Spilling the Atoms," signed with the well-known initials RAP. He also contributed a five-part serial, "The Vortex World," himself.

As a writer of fiction, however, he did more in other fields than in fantasy, where he had made the grade in *Wonder Stories* with "The Time-Ray of Jandra" (Jun. '30). A member of the Milwaukee Fictioneers, to whom he introduced the late Stanley G. Weinbaum (whose Memorial Volume he supervised all too soon afterwards), he churned out material for detective, Western and adventure magazines under his own and other names\*. With such a wide experience for a comparatively young man, such a record in the s-f field, and such enthusiasm as he always displayed whatever he tackled, he was just the man Editor B. G. Davis wanted to pep up *Amazing*. Or, as RAP himself put it, looking back after two years of directing its altered course—and that of *Fantastic Adventures*, which he started in '39:

"I succeeded in deluding him into committing the magazine into my tender care . . . You can imagine how I felt. Here at last I had it in my power to do to my old hobby what I had always had the driving desire to do . . . the power to destroy, to create, to remake, at my own discretion."† He was "determined to make the worst magazine . . . the best in the field"; and in spite of s-f's recent invigoration by *Astounding* and *Thrilling Wonder*, which he had heartily welcomed, he

\* Self-confessed pseudonyms: Rae Winters, A. R. Steber, Alexander Blade, Wallace Quitman, Morris J. Steele. It has also been admitted that he has much to do with the actual production of Richard S. Shaver stories.

† In an article, "Palmer Tears His Hair," published by William Lawrence Hamling in his amateur magazine, *Stardust* (Nov. '40).

found ample scope for his new powers. "Half-baked ideas, screwy science, and pedantic, unprofessional writing. Not one professional author's touch glittered from the . . . dunghheap of gadgets, theories and interplanetary travelogues. There wasn't a living, breathing character, emotion (or) adventure in the whole lot."

#### EMOTION AND "HACK WORDS"

It was a "tremendous task" to get the sort of stories he thought were needed from authors who, in spite of their plentiful ideas, "didn't know what a plot was." The contents of his first (Jun. '38) refurbished issue, which he whipped up in a fortnight, were far from satisfying him: "Only (John Russell) Fearn ('A Summons from Mars') was any good." He readily agreed with the fan who immediately decided: "Your revised *Amazing Stories* stinks." Yet circulation climbed as for two years he strove to teach a new roster of old and new writers what he thought his readers, if not the protesting fans, wanted—stories full of human interest, in which the emotional problem was more important than the science; although, to start off with, the cover carried the slogan: "Every Story Scientifically Accurate." Stories, too, which were simply told with the "hack words" he advocated, rather than the "pretty, high-sounding phrasing" which some of his most difficult authors (e.g., Robert Moore Williams) insisted on putting into the MSS, he rejected.

But the fans were quite intractable. They squawked, loudly and resentfully, in their mimeographed critiques, against the blatantly juvenile appeal of the Ziff-Davis magazines; the repulsively hideous cover BEMs; the scrawly, sexy interior illustrations; the old-fashioned, overlong story-titles; the puerile humour and, not least of all, the ramblings of RAP in "The Observatory." Whatever he had accomplished as a fan, as an editor, *Spaceways'* "Star Treader" regretted, Palmer was "a pathetic flop." Again, as he saw it himself in retrospect: "All through those two years, the fans swung their axes at my head. Not only did my magazine stink, but I too . . . I was a traitor to science fiction . . . I dragged the 'literature' of s-f down into the dirty, filthy fen of 'hack' pulp . . . I printed tripe. I ground good s-f writers into the dirt."

What riled him most was that all the time they actually denounced him

for trying "to sell *Amazing Stories*. And I have! I have taken the worst magazine in all s-f history and brought it up to the peak of sales. I have pleased my publishers immensely." So he consoled himself; while, at the same time that he discounted the reactions of an estimated 200 fans, he reminded them of his continued championship of their cause, their likes and dislikes, their organised activities). "In every instance, where it was sensible, I gave (them) what they asked for. And no editorial office in the country is as open and extends as heartily a welcome to the visiting fan as does Ziff-Davis."

Such items as Weinbaum's novel, "The New Adam" (*Amazing*, Feb.-Mar. '43), new Edgar Rice Burroughs tales, Witty Ley articles, and Paul's back-cover conceptions of extra-terrestrial life, were not unacceptable to the fan-reader, as *Amazing* and its even more flamboyant sister-mag, progressed—or careered—through the next few years. But the fans did not ask for the Shaver Mystery, which in '45 came as the final insult to their long-suffering intelligence. Richard S. Shaver's Lemurian fantasies, which began to monopolise both magazines, were fair enough, as Ziff-Davis material went; but to be expected to accept them as truth—or as "racial memories" with a foundation of actual fact—was too much. To them, it was the Shaver Hoax, Lemurian alphabets and other "proofs" notwithstanding; to a *Fantasy Times* commentator, these were so much "idiotic flapdoodle and mystical balderdash." The whole unhealthy business was dismissed as a stunt to revive dwindling circulation by attracting the lunatic fringe to the Palmer magazines; and if such was his aim, the decent thing would be to disassociate them from the legitimate s-f field. To put it more bluntly—which the *Times* headline did: "Scram, Mr. Palmer!"

#### THE NEW S-F ?

But RAP had become used to fandom's hard knocks. Not only did he fulfil critic Thomas S. Gardner's early prediction that his new policy would prove such "an outstanding success . . . that the Lemurian hoax will go on for years, possibly becoming a permanent

§ In '39, he tipped off *Time Magazine* to the New York Convention, got blamed when it described s-f fans as "mostly boys of 16 to 20 . . . the jitterbugs of the pulp magazines . . . exceptionally articulate."

esoteric feature of *Amazing Stories*,\* but he had the audacity to suggest that this was "the new s-f" which was going to revolutionise and vastly extend the field. Such "flagrant disregard" of fandom's disapproval by "our own little two-bit dictator . . . who would turn s-f into a plaything for every semi-sane crackpot who ever dreamt he was a Lemurian" could not be permitted to go unchallenged. A meeting of the Queens (New York) Science Fiction League solemnly passed a resolution expressing the opinion that the Shaver "Cave" stories actually endangered the sanity of their readers, and bringing the menace to the notice of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. A fan conference in Philadelphia discussed a proposal that a 1,000-signature petition be organised to get the offending magazines banned by the Post Office; but this project did not meet with approval, although speakers were unanimous in denouncing the Shaver Mythos as paranoic.

There was even a suggestion that Editor Palmer had been taken off to a mental institution, which was subsequently revealed as a deliberate hoax perpetrated by RAP himself, with the connivance of assistant editor William Lawrence Hamling, former editor of *Stardust* and a successful recruit to *Amazing's* staff of writers. According to Hamling, fandom had passed up a great chance to enlarge its circle by its uncompromising attitude; but it only rallied against the Shaver Hoax with redoubled vigour, while Palmer reiterated time and again that, according to the Pennsylvanian steel worker who claimed to remember Lemuria, the stories he welded from his ancestral memories were "based on true conditions as yet beyond the ken of ordinary men."

The only reasonably certain fact that emerged was that the business had indeed been good for circulation. When fan Gordon M. Kull, returning in blissful ignorance from the wars, called on him to find out what all the fuss was about, RAP claimed that the sales of *Amazing* had gone up by 50,000, almost overnight, following the presentation of the Mystery as "something new in science fiction" without any expectation of its devastating effects. By that time, he had received such a mass of

"evidence" in support of Shaver's premise (that the descendants of the Lemurians still live in their subterranean lairs) that he was practically persuaded of the truth of it. Yet he wanted desperately to be friends with fandom; he thought their animosity towards him was blinding them to the good stories he was using, apart from those of Shaver and his imitators (who knew a good thing when they saw it).

The occurrence of such material (especially by Chester S. Geler and Rog Phillips) had been duly noted, however, by the more impartial critics. Nor did the fans fail to observe that, apparently as reward for his circulation-raising tactics—whether calculated or fortuitous—RAP had been promoted to editorship of the whole Ziff-Davis pulp magazine set-up, Hamling taking his place as Managing Editor. And when, at the end of '47, he made a real gesture of friendship by instituting a new department devoted to their activities in *Amazing*, the fans wisely decided to let bygones be bygones, even though they would still have no truck with Shaver. As an ambassador of his goodwill, RAP sent out Roger P. Graham, who was to conduct "The Club House" under his Rog Phillips pen-name; his likeable personality endeared him to the fans on sight, and ensured their ungrudging co-operation. "We wish Mr. Graham . . . good luck." *Fantasy Times* Editor James V. Taurasi patronised, "and hope that the day is not too far off when *Amazing Stories* can once again return to the s-f fold."

#### A CHALLENGE TO 'FATE'

That was two years ago; since when there have been indications that the Shaver Mystery, having served its purpose and remained insoluble, was going to be abandoned. But its unwholesome aroma, and the writings of Shaver, lingered in both *Amazing* and *Fantastic*; while the problem of the "deros" received further impetus in other quarters, notably in the *Magazine of the Shaver Mystery Club*, formed to continue the "investigation" when it looked as though *Amazing* was about to drop it. Extensive book publication of the longer works of Shaver and other Ziff-Davis writers exploiting the "Elder World" theme has also been embarked upon. The appearance of *Fate*, whose points of similarity with the Palmer magazines were obvious in

\* "Calling All Crackpots! An Analysis of the Lemurian Hoax"; *Fantasy Commentator*, Spring '45.

† See *FR* Oct.-Nov. '48; Dec. '48-Jan. '49.

## SUPER-LACKEY

Russia's *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, which described American science fiction as an "arch-reactionary and screamingly shameless mess," has since attacked the comic-strip hero Superman as "an agent of Wall Street (who) depraves young children." This blow, like all others, has bounced off his muscle-bound superbody—but after ten years of absolute invulnerability, he now reveals his weakness. His creators, writer Whit Ellsworth and artist Wayne Boring, have made him succumb to the wiles of his sweetheart, Lois Lane, and get married. In due time, it is reported, she will present him with a Superbaby.

spite of its different imprint and non-fiction content, afforded an opportunity to attract further notice to the first of these works through its advertising pages; though it was not until the magazine had been running well over a year, during which it concerned itself with such matters as the Flying Saucers, lost planets and ghostly visitations, that it took up the "challenge" of Shaver in response to a reader's letter (in the Jul. '49 issue).

"If Richard S. Shaver has anything, we'll print the truth about it. If he hasn't, we'll print that too . . . To us it seems amazing that no one has seen fit to present the facts about a subject that hits our mail as often as this one does." Thus Editor Robert N. Webster's comment, right next to an ad for the Shaver Mystery Club. And, having "put a writer on Mr. Shaver's trail," in the November issue he promised to run an article on the theme: "Is the earth hollow . . . honeycombed with vast caverns inhabited by living beings? Or is there another answer to the mystery created by Richard S. Shaver, one of the most unusual pulp writers in America today? Puzzle with us over THE SHAVER MYSTERY."

Simultaneously, *Other Worlds: Science Stories*, newly launched by the publishers of *Fate* (Clark Publishing Co., Chicago), featured in its initial (Nov. '49) issue "The Fall of Lemuria," by Shaver, and offered for the future his "Kingdom of the Gods," a "tremendous new tale from the thought records of the dead race who once inhabited the lost caverns of the Earth," inaugurating a "new series of the

world's most imaginative and stimulating stories." Suggesting that the *Mystery*, however insoluble, was still good for much more cogitation. And for some more editorial teasing; for, as Editor Webster observed: "Mr. Shaver, as some of you well know, puts a certain verisimilitude into his writing, and in all sincerity claims it is not entirely fiction. We don't take any stand on that . . ."

What has all this to do with RAP? This time, Editor Palmer has hoaxed fandom well and truly—and, again, has been his own exposé. On the eve of the appearance of *Other Worlds*, he took the 200 fans assembled at the Cincinnati World Science Fiction Convention by surprise by appearing amongst them, for the first time for many years, and letting them into his stable secrets. Mouths and eyes opened wide as he blandly announced that he was no longer Editor of the Ziff-Davis magazines, having resigned his position because of disagreements over editorial policy during the past two years. He proceeded to reveal that he and Robert N. Webster are, in fact, one and the same person, and that the Clark Publishing Co. now belongs to him.

He went so far as to express his own preference for the type of s-f published by *Astounding*, while promising that, as from the third issue of his new mag., he would give readers of *Other Worlds* the type of s-f he really believes in. But editor-publisher Palmer has not done with the Shaver Mystery. The whole business, he insisted in his talk to the fans, is so convincing that he believes in it as much as Shaver believes in every word he writes; he himself has "heard the voices," and "everything that happens to Shaver is bad." It must, therefore, be true. However, as truth, the Shaver Mystery should properly be presented by a magazine like *Fate*; as for his other stories, they will be used in *Other Worlds* as long as they're science fiction. So, having made them a present of *OW's* first cover painting (depicting a luscious snake-woman from the Shaver novellette), which got auctioned off for \$32, RAP made his excuses and departed, to the accompaniment of every indication from his audience that he wasn't, in their estimation, such a flop after all.

## NO MORE PARANOIA

What of *Amazing and Fantastic*? Their new editor, Howard Browne, was not slow to issue a statement concern-

ing future policy. Both magazines, he said, will attempt to give "fandom and other readers" the kind of s-f and fantasy they have been requesting "for so many years," but neither will become "a pseudo-scientific journal." The same story elements which RAP held so important will remain paramount, but the scientific interest will not be neglected. At the same time, the "comic-book type of (story) will be weeded out as quickly as possible, (and) all the type of mysticism that borders on paranola will not be published by us."

Requesting fandom to withhold judgment until changes in policy can take effect (with the February issues), Editor Browne welcomed suggestions and criticisms, adding: "Our writers are not going to 'write down' to the readers, nor are they going to impugn the basic laws of science by offering as truth the babblings of befuddled minds." Whereupon *Fantasy Times*, its expressed hope of two years ago showing promise of realisation, wished the new editor all success and the objects of its former opprobrium a healthy future as "outstanding s-f magazines."

As yet, fandom's reactions to *Other Worlds* are not forthcoming; but Editor "Webster" appeared to be playing safe. "Our policy," said he, in an editorial mentioning six of its competitors

by name, "is s-f at its best." Of *Astounding* he frankly admitted: "We like its editor John W. Campbell, and we think he's tops when it comes to putting up-to-the-minute science in the stories . . . and he's always careful to be 100 per cent accurate in his science data." Of "Ray Palmer's *Amazing*": "There's a mag. we cut our eye-teeth on. It's given us countless hours of pleasure and quite a few surprises." Each story in his first issue, he tried to show, might well have appeared in one of "our older competitors (to which) we nod with respect": Shaver's piece in *Amazing*, of course; Rog Phillips' "The Miracle of Elmer Wilde" in *ASF*; G. H. Irwin's "Where No Foot Walks" (written to order around its title) in *Planet*; John Wiley's "Venus Trouble Shooter" in *Thrilling Wonder* or *Startling*. "But . . . we intend to beat each one at its own game by giving (our) readers exactly what they want . . . the best stories that money can buy and the best editing that 26 years of experience in the field can give . . ."

On the face of it, it seemed that RAP, with a *Fate* full of weird and wonderful mysteries, and an *Other Worlds* full of amazing, startling, astounding science fiction, was going to make the best of all possible worlds henceforth.

## NEW MAG. FOR MERRITT CLASSICS

Designed to introduce new readers to those *Argosy* classics which the majority of fantasy fans have read time and again, such as "The Moon Pool," "Dwellers in the Mirage," "The Face in the Abyss," etc., *A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine* has been launched by Popular Publications, New York, as a companion to *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels*, in which they have been reprinted several times.

The first issue, dated Dec. '49, features Merritt's "Creep, Shadow!" and a short story by Robert Arthur, "Footsteps Invisible." With a title-design bearing the legend "Celebrated Classics of Fantasy," the new mag., which will appear bi-monthly at 25c., will also carry other tales too familiar to regular readers of *FFM* to bear repetition, by authors beside Merritt.

Announcing the magazine in *FN*'s November issue, Editor Mary Gnaedinger referred to her previous comments "about letting the generation of newcomers have a chance at the Merritt

stories and other high points of *FFM*'s backlog," explaining that the new title will "take care of the Merritt stories and some others in the same category of classic value," leaving *FN* to feature the old stories for which fans have been asking.

January *FN* reprints George Allan England's "The Flying Legion," first published in '20 and serialised by *Air Wonder Stories* ten years later. December *FFM* features "Ogden's Strange Story," by Edison Marshall, presented in book form in '34; "No-Man's Land," a weird tale by John Buchan, and the famous fantasy by Fitz-James O'Brien, "What Was It?" The next (Feb.) issue will revive H. Rider Haggard's "Morning Star," and the March *FN* will feature Ray Cummings' classic tale of "The Man Who Mastered Time."

### NO MORE "UNKNOWNNS"

The British Edition of *Unknown Worlds*, which has been running since the Sep. '39 issue and has outlasted the

original U.S. edition by six years, is no more. Since it was always of necessity a smaller edition than the original, it was able to continue when the Street and Smith mag. was suspended by re-printing material it had not previously published; but, having exhausted this, it was forced to cease publication with its 41st (Winter '49) issue.

Many readers will regret its demise; so do its publishers, the Atlas Publishing Co., who by way of making amends have launched a British Edition of **Thrilling Wonder Stories**, which has not been available in this country since before the war apart from one issue imported from Canada. "As soon as the regulations governing the publication of magazines permit, we expect to be issuing this title regularly," says Atlas hopefully.

Last August's American edition, featuring Murray Leinster, A. E. van Vogt, Arthur C. Clarke and John D. MacDonald (reviewed **FR** Summer '49), is the source-book for the first **Wonder BRE**, which you may see on the bookstalls alongside the second issue of the British **Starling Stories**, which reprints Keith Hammond's "Valley of the Flame." Frank Belknap Long's "Shadow Over Venus" and Jack Williamson's "Twelve Hours to Live" from the March '46 U.S. original. Both are priced at 9d. And that's not all . . .

Last month, a British Edition of **Weird Tales**, consisting of a complete reprint of the original November issue, appeared on the bookstalls at 1/- under the imprint of the Jenson Book Co.; and in October a British reprint of the Jan. '49 issue of **Super Science Stories** (the first of the new series), appeared without date or number. Manly Wade Wellman's story was also missing, but otherwise it was the same as the original. Whether regular publication of these two mags. is intended remains to be seen, but it all serves to indicate the shape of things to come—or is it just a flash in the pan?

#### "NEW WORLDS" SUCCESS

Nova Publications report that **New Worlds** No. 5 is almost sold out, and that a sixth issue is due in January. The success of this fan-financed magazine has fully justified the confidence of those who combined in the effort to re-establish it as the only genuine representative of British science fiction, whose readers have applauded the immense strides it is making.

No. 6 will feature John K. Aiken's

sequel to "Cassandra," titled "Phoenix Nest"; another story by A. Bertram Chandler, "Co-efficient X"; "Castaway," by George Whitley; "Adoption," by new writer Don Doughty; and a piece by the popular P. G. Rayer. Already in hand for No. 7 is "Dawn Breaks Red," the sequel to John Brody's "World in Shadow" in No. 4, of which a few copies are still available from the publishers.

### WALTER GILLINGS FOR BIS COUNCIL

Walter Gillings has been elected to the Council of the British Interplanetary Society, in succession to Terence Nonweiler, who has retired. A. V. Cleaver, Kenneth Gatland and G. V. E. Thompson were also re-elected, in the first postal ballot held by the Society since its reorganisation.

Mr. Gillings has been a Member of the Society since '36.

### OPERATION FANTAST

takes this opportunity to inform you that there will be a **FANTASY CALENDAR** for 1950, published by Gnome Press; more details when available.

The **NATIONAL FANTASY FAN FEDERATION (USA)** is trying to ensure continued supply of prizes for British members; a further announcement will be made shortly. Membership is now 7/6 for British fans, from whom we are authorised to collect subscriptions. The **SFI** is working on a similar scheme, and we shall be pleased to pass on information to anyone on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.

Our **LIBRARY** grows steadily in membership and contents. A new catalogue will be produced very soon; full details from M. Tealby, 8 Burfield Avenue, Loughborough, Leics.

**OPERATION FANTAST** No. 3, now out, contains a 2,000-word fantasy by Sandy Lawrence, a couple of shorter s-f stories, and all the usual features. Subscription: 3/- for six issues.

We too are doing our best to keep up supplies of new **MAGAZINES**. Let us know your needs, and we will try to fill them.

**CAPT. K. F. SLATER,**  
13 Gp., R.P.C.,  
B.A.O.R., 23.

## About Books

By Herbert Hughes

# TREASURE TROVE

The fuss the American book trade is making over fantasy-fiction is enough to make one wonder how they can possibly have overlooked it all these years—and how long it will be before British publishers and booksellers latch on to its potentialities. That so many U.S. publishers are now turning in earnest to the medium is largely due to the recognition it has been afforded by the bookshops—which in turn is the result of constant efforts by the Associated Fantasy Publishers, consolidating the interests of nine specialist houses, to bring their productions to the notice of a larger reading public, and to make them worthy of their attention.

The success of their campaign to introduce fantasy-fiction into every bookshop (or, if it was there already, to bring it out of hiding) has been aided and abetted by the weekly magazine of the second-hand book trade, *Antiquarian Bookman*, which for the second time in fifteen months has published a Special Science-Fantasy Issue. This devoted practically the whole of its articles and features, as well as its displayed advertisement pages, to the field, and presented a checklist of current and forthcoming productions of all the firms interested in the medium, totalling over 150 titles.

The issue was dedicated to the Seventh World S-F Convention and its Cincinnati organisers, to whose labours an editorial paid tribute as typical of the fan efforts which have helped to develop the field thus far. At the same time it emphasised that, in spite of the competition of bigger publishers, the specialist houses must still be the mainstay of the medium: that "authors, publishers, dealers and collectors must retain that personal contact which has held this field together from the first beginnings, and which must not now be sacrificed in the face of approaching popularity." In other words, it still depends on us, Messrs. Doubleday, Simon & Schuster, Frederick Fell, etc., notwithstanding.

### HIGH-PRICE CLASSICS

Among the difficulties which Editor Sol M. Malkin sees in the further development of the field by antiquarian booksellers is the confusion caused by

its varying descriptive terms; and he proposes "science-fantasy" as "the one most inclusive term" for a literature which still suffers from growing pains in this respect. He also appealed to the specialist book dealer to maintain the prices of out-of-print classics, which he had found to be "fair in the main."

For the benefit of the uninitiated, Martin Greenberg and David A. Kyle, co-partners of Gnome Press, in an article on "The Growth of Modern Science Fiction," traced the beginnings of the medium back to Hugo Gernsback and pointed out that the Atomic Age had only stimulated the desire for such stories. They attributed the growth of the specialist publishers who followed the example of Arkham House to the demand for back number magazines among the thousands of s-f fans who returned from the war to find them more expensive than bound volumes. So, after "The Skylark of Space," of which 1,500 copies were first printed, has come the increasing stream of reprint editions which to-day may run to anything between 3,000 and 10,000 copies.

But every reader who has been attracted to s-f through one of these "new" titles has become a seeker after older treasures which had lain neglected on the shelves of second-hand bookshops. Hence the inflated prices which certain titles now command, such as first editions of Merritt, which fetch from ten to seventeen dollars, George Allan England ("Darkness and Dawn," published thirty years ago, brings \$15.00), Ray Cummings and others. You probably grew out of Burroughs long ago, but if you'd kept that first edition of "Tarzan of the Apes" (McClurg, Chicago: 1914) you might get at least \$65.00 for it now . . .

### VALUABLE VAN VOGT

As proof that age alone is not the determining factor of these fancy prices, the article mentions that Cummings' "The Girl in the Golden Atom," published in '23 and now selling at \$10.00, is easier to come by and less valuable than the same author's "Brigands of the Moon" (McClurg: '31). And, apart from the now almost fabulous Arkham volumes by Lovecraft



and Clark Ashton Smith, among the titles of the specialist houses are some which are no more than five years old yet are now worth two or three times their published price—and a good deal more. The above-mentioned "Sky-lark" ('45) and Talne's "The Time Stream" ('46), products of the Buffalo Book Co., bring ten to fifteen dollars a copy these days, and van Vogt's "The Weapon Makers" (Hadley; '46) is worth no less than \$35.00 already!

After that, it's not surprising to read, in an article on "Scouting and Selling Science Fiction" by James A. Williams of Prime Press, that whereas a year ago, in his capacity as a book scout, he could find no more than a dozen s-f titles in most bookshops, to-day "all but a very, very few dealers are conscious of the fact that books of this category are something a bit special, and . . . they no longer keep them in their general stock but have a separate alcove or shelf for them . . . The buying and selling of s-f is quietly and rapidly becoming a definite part of a bookseller's income."

Surveying the remarkable expansion of the field during the past year or more, T. E. Dikty, of Shasta Publishers, mentioned the several write-ups it has received in various magazines, the recent incursions of well-known book publishers, magazine developments (including *New Worlds*); and international repercussions in the form of translated editions and an exhibition of imaginative fiction held in Copenhagen last May. "The Scandinavian world, in particular, is rapidly becoming interested in this type of literature." And: "The motion picture industry seems to be not too far behind in recognizing this new popular trend in story material . . . Hence, wideawake booksellers carrying science fiction will do well to watch movie headlines for tie-ins with their fantastic books."

#### MORE MERRITTS

To the list of Associated Fantasy Publishers the name of the Grandon Company, of Providence, Rhode Island, has lately been added. Their first production is the third and last of the late Otis Adelbert Kline's noted series of Venus novels, of which "The Planet of Peril" and "The Prince of Peril," published by McClurg some twenty years ago, have been vainly sought by collectors during the past decade or more. Like its predecessors, "The Port of Peril" was published as a serial in

Argosy long since, but it has never been available in book form until now. The same author's "The Swordsman of Mars" is among other titles Grandon plans to publish, which include Ralph Milne Farley's "The Golden City" and Merritt's "Dwellers in the Mirage."

Meanwhile, the Borden Company of Los Angeles has revived "The Ship of Ishtar" in its original form, as Merritt wrote it a quarter-century ago, and illustrated by Virgil Finlay. Also available in the Avon pocket-book series is "The Fox Woman and Other Stories," featuring three of Merritt's four surviving literary fragments, "The Fox Woman," "When Old Gods Wake" and "The White Road." "The Black Wheel," which has been omitted from the collection as too long, and "The Fox Woman" have been completed elsewhere by Hannes Bok, and "When Old Gods Wake" recently appeared in the *Avon Fantasy Reader*; but "The White Road" sees its first publication in this new collection.

Other additions to the Avon series are Philip Wylie's "The Gladiator," C. S. Lewis's "Out of the Silent Planet," and Robert Bloch's novel (reviewed *FR* Dec. '47-Jan. '48), now re-titled "The Scarf of Passion." Just arrived from Prime Press is a new novel by Dr. David H. Keller, "The Homunculus," which deals with a modern Paracelsus in a style between sentiment and satire. Nelson Bond's "Exiles of Time," the first of a series of novels based on ancient legend, derived from little-known magazine stories, comes from the same source.

Fantasy Publishing Co.'s latest offerings are "The Kingslayer," a tale of the year 3974 told against an intergalactic zetting, and "Worlds of Wonder," incorporating three short novels by Olaf Stapledon which most British readers will have devoured already but may like to have in one volume: "The Flames," "Death Into Life," and "Old Man in New World." (The jacket tells us, incidentally, that Stapledon's next will be "A Man Divided," the tale of a schizophrenic.) Due shortly from Los Angeles is "The Rat Race," a political fantasy by Jay Franklin culled from *Colliers*, to be followed by Ralph Milne Farley's "Omnibus of Time," presenting a selection of time-travel tales and concluding with a discussion of the paradoxes they offer.

\*See Book Reviews, *Fantasy Review* Aug.-Sept. '48.

## LOOKING BACKWARD

## THINGS THAT DIDN'T COME

By WALTER GILLINGS

A comparative few of us, even in untroubled times, gain any satisfaction from looking into the future, unless it is to see what the stars are presumed to foretell. In these days, when the prospect before all of us is frightening, there is all the more temptation to look wistfully at the past; and the general wave of nostalgia has produced a glut of novels, films and radio plays set in more peaceful or boisterous years. Popular music now looks back to revive, either in original or bebopped style, the tunes to which I danced in my courting days—and I am no old-time two-stepper. Even science fiction, super-streamlined though it may be in aspect, is not immune to the trend: in the spate of books coming from the U.S. today are many which had their origin in the magazines I used to read in bed once home, footsore, from a Saturday night hop . . .

But looking backward in the field of science fiction is always a profitable as well as amusing pastime, especially when you begin to examine the prophetic ideas of those pioneers who confined their dreams to things which they thought might reasonably materialise to form part and parcel of our lives in the not-too-distant future. Or which, though they did not take them so seriously, have actually come to pass. Aside from such obvious examples as television, space-rockets and atom bombs, there are around us innumerable devices which may be traced back to the imaginings of latter-day science fiction, from which they have developed into commonplace fact by a process of necessitous invention or fortuitous discovery. On the other hand—and not alone in fiction—there are many more ideas which have come to naught, inventions which came to grief, and things that just didn't jell.

For two years before it folded up, as it did to my chagrin recently, that interesting magazine *Science Illustrated* had run a quiz feature entitled

"Only Yesterday," in which it looked back at the strange brainwaves of a century since or more. It reproduced old prints of inventions, some of which—almost miraculously—worked, while the rest were just screwy ideas or attempted prophecies of s-f writers; the game, of course, was to guess which were which. Among the queer contraptions which actually did make out were two machines, one for swimming and the other for flying, propelled by pedalling for dear life. Less successful was the Chapman Roller Boat, a huge bargelike affair with great roller-paddles turned (perhaps) by locomotives running on endless rails inside them, like tame mice in a spinning cage. As one might expect, the Giant Armoured Car and Electric Snow Cutter of our old friend the *Frank Reade Library*<sup>1</sup> also turned up among the also-rans.

More recently, two lookers-back at the development of mechanical invention produced a profusely illustrated volume which provided the *London Evening Standard* with a series of similarly quaint conceits to run in its early editions mid-week, and furnished me with a further opportunity for pleasant and profitable contemplation of things past—and, as a result, expectation of even stranger things to come.

Turning the pages of this book, with its almost incredible pictures of "masterpieces of human ingenuity," one is reminded very forcibly of the truism, so often quoted in defence of fantastic literature, that truth is stranger than fiction. Because those of us who amuse ourselves with scientific fantasies have long since realised there are no limits to the inventive mind, we smile condescendingly when such things as

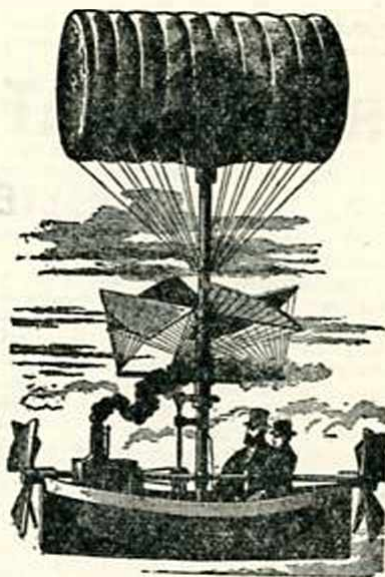
<sup>1</sup>See "First of the Fantasies": *Fantasy Review*, Oct.-Nov. '48.

<sup>1</sup>Patent Applied For—A Century of Fantastic Inventions, by Fred Copper-Smith & J. J. Lynx. Co-ordination Press & Publicity, London, 10/6.

atomic power plants and space stations creep from the musty pages of our science fiction magazines into to-day's headlines, to shock our more sceptical friends and leave them gasping. "Well, I never! What will they be up to next?" Even the atom bomb failed to surprise us, once we had recovered from the initial shock. For us there are no surprises—except when the materialisation of the dream exceeds our most fantastic expectations, as it so often does these days. Through science fiction, we live mostly in a world of things to come, of gadgets yet to be invented, of vast scientific projects which only lack the mercenary motive to be accomplished. For as Mr. Lynx points out: "the world (to-day is) so competitive and commercialised that even the best idea is doomed to failure unless, in addition to inspiration, three vital things are available—Money, Money, Money."

But he is not concerned with inventions which have succeeded. His book offers ample evidence that for every inventor's dream that materialises there are dozens which do not, or which soon fade into obscurity when the gimmick has been tried and found wanting. There are some ideas which take so long to come to fruition that, by the time they are ready to be tested, they are no longer necessary: the floating islands of "A Modern Atlantis" (*Amazing Stories Quarterly*, Spring '28) and the film "P.P.1" are a case in point. There are others which find favour only when they become a vital necessity. We recall the plan for Giant Windmills to Generate Power, which is making news just now, being aired in Mr. Gernsback's *Science and Invention* just as long ago. As for Herr Noordung's space terminal, it is only a matter of time...

Mr. Lynx and his collaborator have delved back over a century to the days when inventors worked in the Front Room and were openly hailed as the benefactors of a world newly conscious of the benefits of mechanisation and gadgetry. There was ample scope for them, then; and although some of the things they produced now seem quite absurd, at the time they were seriously advanced as genuine contributions to the comfort and progress of humanity. Such, for example, as the pocket bowler-hat umbrella, the dog-driven sewing machine, the air-conditioned "swooning" chair, the dinner-table railway and the mechanical waiter (precursor of the cafeteria), the electric bicycle which



This Heath Robinson contraption, the "Ballonboat," designed by Henry Bagdley in 1875, was the first attempt at the scaplane. It floated all right, but flying was too much for it. — From "Science Illustrated."

was to run on telegraph wires, and the railway trains which were to climb over each other instead of colliding head-on.

Concern for the life and limb of our grandfathers was the inspiration of many inventions in that gentle age, before the advent of such questionable boons as the atom bomb. Mr. Lynx has devoted two interesting chapters to the development of the bicycle and the railway train which clearly show these charitable motives, also evident in the life-saving suitcase (in case of fire) and cabin trunk (in case of shipwreck), the 75-dollar outfit for shipwreck victims, and Bessemer's floating luxury saloon which was to obviate sickness but only made the vessel roll the more. Of Captain Coles' Turret Ship, which was designed as unsinkable and drowned her whole company on her maiden voyage, the less said the better. Far more effective, if revolutionary, was the circular man-o'-war of Admiral Popoff, who went one better by presenting the Czar with a pleasure launch with its own beach permanently attached.

There is another amusing chapter on marvellous musical instruments of such

mechanical efficiency as to rival the modern juke-box, some of which come very near to justifying the prophecies indulged in this department by the early Utopian writers. Not the least ingenious parts of them were their names: the Daimoniom, the Baskanium, the Panomonico (a sort of one-man band with 300 instruments), and the Lustre Chantant or Singing Lamp, which surely was the progenitor of the Colour Organ predicted in *Amazing Stories* some years before it was actually demonstrated. There was even a machine which, in 1846, produced poetry at the rate of 1,440 verses a day (including Sundays), but to this day nobody knows if it was genuine or not. If not, it would seem to rank among the "Fantastic Hoaxes" along with Von Kempelen's checkers player.

The fictional inventions of Frank Reade, who seems to be having quite a revival of late (Mr. E. S. Turner, in his "Boys Will Be Boys," tells us there were actually two Frank Reades—father and son—and also about their rival, Jack Wright), have so many counterparts in real life that Mr. Lynx cannot resist adding a chapter on them. Mr. Edison, as he reminds us, was never short of ideas, though some of them didn't quite come off. There must have been something of professional jealousy in his comment on Reade's constant success with the contraptions which emerged from Lu Senarens' fertile imagination—"Non-sense, the man's nuts!"

But of this otherwise factual book, whose seventy-odd illustrations speak more effectively than the text, the part which comes closest to fantasy-fiction is the chapter on "Castles in the Air." Here we are told of a project which would not only have dwarfed the Eiffel Tower but most of the architectural marvels of Atlantis or the monuments erected to The Man Who Saved the Earth. To mark the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the land where science fiction was to flourish, a Spanish architect planned a monument to consist of a concrete base 85 yards high on which an enormous globe four times that in diameter would be mounted, topped by a giant statue.

Inside the globe were to be restaurants, hotels and a fairground, served by an electric tramway running from pole to pole on a five-mile track. Museums, lecture halls and a planetarium were to

be housed in the base. The architect was not dismayed at the builder's estimate of eight million dollars, convinced that his World's Eighth Wonder would attract at least 100,000 paying visitors. Seeing that it was proposed to establish it on the remote island of San Salvadore, which had only a few thousand inhabitants, the capitalists were not, however, inclined to regard it as a money-spinner.

Two years later, in '94, an exhibition in Antwerp gave the cue for an even more visionary scheme, to implement which half a million Belgian francs were invested in a company with the high-falutin' title of Castles in the Air Ltd. The proposer, M. Tobianski, aimed to construct a large building comprising a theatre and a restaurant, surrounded by gardens, all of which was to be hoisted into the air by a colossal balloon containing 150,000 cubic feet of gas, to hang suspended above the exhibition grounds. Accommodation for two hundred people, to be carried up by lifts, was to be provided in the aerial resort, which in the unhappy event of a gale would be brought down to earth by nineteen steam wheels.

Although the grandeur of the idea appealed strong to the Committee, the Government refused to sanction it, and the castle in the air remained just that. So did various other up-in-the-sky schemes of the time, which will have to wait for the gravity-nullifying devices confidently anticipated by later dreamers of Cities in the Air. But, meanwhile, other inventors were working hopefully on plans to cross the Alps by canal-boat and the Arctic by balloon. Not to mention, of course, perpetual motion. There was actually a British ex-P.O.W. who devised a thread-spinning machine powered by mice imprisoned in drums and fed on bread and cheese. They had a midday break, worked a six-day week, and produced 4,500 miles of thread each in a year—at the end of which their gentle taskmaster found that his animal labour was just ten shillings cheaper than human. Undaunted, he planned to turn an old church into a mouse mill and advertised for 15,000 mice in order to make a better thing out of it. But he died before he could get that far, releasing the mice from their bondage.

Not even Mr. Fosdick, with his Felino Light & Power Co., nor Mr. Hicks in his heyday of "Inventions with a Kick," could do better than this.

## Book Reviews

# By Bonestell to the Planets

**THE CONQUEST OF SPACE.** Paintings by Chesley Bonestell; text by Willy Ley. Viking, New York. \$3.95.

Reviewed by John K. Aiken

Just occasionally, for the briefest instant in some particularly well-told tale of space-travel, one has a vision of the possible ultimate reality of its imaginings. Suddenly, our emotions and fancies take fire from an intellectual spark—and for a second we are struggling to orient ourselves in a methane-ammonia tornado on Jupiter, or gazing at the glory of Saturn from Titan's frozen plain. Or, we are stirring with a heavy boot the dry, red sand of Mars, spangled here and there with flakes of mica; or ploughing campward through three feet of Lunar rock-dust, and looking forward eagerly to beans for supper. And then one is back in an armchair by the fire, the interest of the story still real enough but the moment of insight gone.

Weinbaum could, from the very first, produce these rare flashes of feeling, which are very nearly at the root of our delight in science fiction. So also can Williamson and Heinlein; and Wells, and—yes, I think so—Verne. From the work of others, such as Stapledon and van Vogt, although it is completely satisfying intellectually and imaginatively, this capricious touch of *elan vital* is absent, at least for me; I don't know why. But never in any fiction have I found this final catalyst in such power and concentration as in this joint product of Messrs. Bonestell and Ley's rare combination of talents.

It must, I think, be the fusion of authenticated fact, sober accuracy and careful attention to detail, with something on quite another plane, the touch of the true artist, that has achieved this. Both the collaborators have, in their different ways, these commendable qualities. No-one who has seen Bonestell's covers for *Astounding* during the past few years, or his astronomical paintings in other U.S. magazines (many of which are collected in this book), will deny him artistry of a high order. Fewer of his admirers will be aware, however, of the background

which has made him so peculiarly fitted for this work.

Willy Ley, in a foreward, describes him aptly as a poetical mathematician with a paint brush. By profession he is in fact, an architects' renderer—one of those wizards who produces from plans a simulacrum of the building to come. His interest in astronomy dates from his tenth year, when he read Laplace's nebular hypothesis; and his teacher of architecture at Columbia University was Frank Dempster Sherman, himself a blend of poet and mathematician. Could any upbringing be more appropriate to the task of bringing the Solar System to life?

Mr. Ley is so well-known as an expert at once in the remotest periods of Earth's history ("The Days of Creation"), in the origin and development of life ("The Lungfish and the Unicorn"), and in that most modern development of human mechanical ingenuity, the controlled and directed rocket ("Rockets and Space Travel"), that perhaps he needs less personal introduction; but before leaving the authors of the book, I would emphasize the extraordinary diversity of the fields of interest they represent. The probability of the existence of this book in the year 1950 is, mathematically speaking, zero. In 1985, perhaps; not now. And yet here we have it. No other two men could have produced it.

It is not unfair to Mr. Ley to say that the core of the book is in the paintings, since this is the obvious intention. Nonetheless, what he has written as a setting for the Bonestell jewels is full of interest; he can be depended on for full technical and historical documentation. And it is sad to learn, from this most informed source, that we are not yet at a measurable distance from the stage of development when we can think seriously of manned rockets, even to the Moon.

No chemical fuel as yet known gives exhaust velocities great enough to reduce the mass-ratio to manageable proportions; a factor of two or three is still needed. Atomic fuels, hardly yet considered, will undoubtedly—if controllable—give the necessary power, but

will carry with them grave difficulties of shielding both on Earth and aboard; the latter meaning, of course, more mass to carry. Yet, by a booster or multi-stage system, both problems may be solved. The establishment of a "space station" in an orbit round Earth is, too, by no means outside immediate possibilities. This would serve both as a laboratory and a refuelling point for longer-range attempts; once in position, it could be enlarged at will. And the other interim possibility, of "messenger" rockets to the Moon which would be used to observe landing conditions and so forth, is also very real.

Having reached the Moon, Mr. Ley passes to its history and geography, and thence to those of the rest of the Solar System. In spite of the simplified approach necessary to keep his text within bounds, this is a most stimulating survey, the key of its appeal lying in the multitude of facts—many of them new to me—which it presents. For example, those fascinating unsolved problems about the Moon . . . Why is the floor of the crater of Plato black in the sunlight, and why does it actually darken as the light grows more intense. Why is the crater of Wargentin full to the very top? What are the bright rays, neither raised nor depressed, which are such a feature of Tycho and other craters? What has caused the well-authenticated change in several details of the Moon's topography since observations were first made? As Mr. Ley says, we'll have to wait till we get there to know the answer.

And when we come to the planets, the questions increase in number and interest. Some things we do know, even about Mercury, that most difficult of planets to observe: its sunward surface temperature, for example, is 770 degrees Fahrenheit, a fact which (if they knew it) numerous authors have not let deter them from siting human action in this inhospitable spot. Nor does Venus seem to be that paradise which van Vogt, among others, has made of it in his null-A tales, or that aqueous globe most typically imagined by Lawrence O'Donnell in "Fury." What lies below those persistent clouds, only once seriously disturbed since observations began, is still anybody's guess.

Even the period of rotation is still problematical, though it is at least now known that the planet does rotate; observations of thermal radiation from

the dark limb (a remarkable feat, by the way) have proved this. But the clouds themselves have not yet been shown to contain either water or oxygen, although there is plenty of carbon dioxide. What, then, do they consist of? Mr. Ley does not mention the recent suggestion that they may contain, or even largely consist of, formaldehyde or its polymeride paraform, a possibility that would preclude the existence of life as we know it but might open the way for the formation of increasingly complex organic compounds from which life might ultimately spring.

As for the other planets, it is pleasant to know that Mars still keeps its canals, and probably its vegetation. It was a surprise to me to learn that the axis of rotation of Uranus is almost in the plane of the ecliptic, so that he bows along like a hoop; or that two packs of jackal-like asteroids dance attendance in Jupiter's orbit, some before and some behind the Great One (expert mathematicians that they seem to be, they have solved the three body problem for their special case). Or that Titan, one of Saturn's moons, is unique among satellites in possessing an atmosphere, albeit consisting of that disappointing gas methane—but cannot one conceive of a methane-breather, with a metabolism based on reduction? Still, I must not give away too much of the ore from this rich fact-mine . . .

And so to the Bonestell paintings. But here words truly fail me. Advertising technique has destroyed the value of superlatives, or I would use them. Among the dozen or so pictures in colour, so finely reproduced, most are breathtakingly beautiful, one or two almost awe-inspiring. I think I would pick the Saturn studies which originally appeared in *Life* as supreme, if only because Saturn is such an attractive subject; but all, with perhaps one exception, are worth going far to see. The exception, the study of a space-rocket at "zero hour minus five," fails to convince me: I cannot believe that the site at such short notice of blast-off would be so liberally encumbered with impedimenta, including human beings and gas-cylinders.

For the rest, the detail, checked as it has been by Dr. R. S. Richardson, is above criticism. And it is interesting to compare these paintings with those of similar subjects (a Martian landscape, I remember, and some views of

Saturn) in a compendious popular astronomy which appeared back in the twenties under the not very felicitous title of "Splendour of the Heavens" (Hutchinson, London). Although not the equal of Bonestell's, these were first-class efforts and strikingly similar in general detail—which is not an accusation of plagiarism but an indication of the care taken by the two artists to get their facts right.

The forty-odd uncoloured plates have

also, because of minute attention to detail and care in reproduction, much the aspect of photographs. Altogether, in fact, the book gives an overwhelming impression of having been projected back—how long?—in time. Or has Mr. Bonestell's mind been voyaging in the future à la Dunne, and are these astonishing paintings something even more than the most intelligent and artistic attempts I have ever seen to portray what no man yet knows?

## The Mysticism of Blackwood

**TALES OF THE UNCANNY AND SUPERNATURAL**, by Algernon Blackwood. Peter Nevill, London. 12/6.

Reviewed by Arthur F. Hillman

Publishers' blurbs are seldom if ever modest, and it is tilting a lance at a pretty powerful windmill to say of an author that he is "recognised as the greatest writer in this genre at the present time." Yet, applied to Algernon Blackwood and the supernatural story, it is not easily denied. More than one generation of readers has acknowledged the eerie appeal of his tales; and this representative collection which has gained the recommendation of the Book Society, at a time when he is enjoying a reputation as an exponent of the macabre in the most up-to-date medium of the entertainer's art, will undoubtedly add emphasis to the claims of his followers.

The octogenarian Mr. Blackwood's own story, if not uncanny, is quite surprising. Having been to Cambridge, in his twentieth year he emigrated to Canada, where he went to work on the Canadian *Methodist Magazine*. After a variety of experiences, from dairy farming to gold prospecting, he became a reporter on the *New York Sun* and, later, the *New York Times*. Subsequently he was private secretary to an American millionaire, artist's model for Charles Dana Gibson, an actor in a stock company, and even a scent manufacturer. These varied professions, added to the many years he afterwards spent in Europe, provided the raw material for his writing.

But he was 36 before he settled down to a literary career with the publication of his first book, "The Empty House" (1908), which was followed by

a large number of novels and short stories, mostly on supernatural themes; some of the best-known are "The Listener and Other Stories" ('07), "John Silence, Physician Extraordinary" ('08), "The Centaur" ('11), "Incredible Adventures" ('14), "The Extra Day" ('15), and "The Promise of Air" ('18). In "John Silence" he created a masterly sketch of an occult investigator who surpassed his then only rival, Sheridan LeFanu's somewhat clumsily drawn Dr. Hesselius, and even to-day, against the formidable opposition of Dion Fortune's "Dr. Taverner" and Seabury Quinn's "Jules de Grandin," retains his popularity to such an extent that most of the horror anthologies of note include at least one of his exploits.

Through the knowledge and wealth of experiences he has acquired on both sides of the ocean, Blackwood has arrived at a kind of mysticism which makes him unique among writers of weird tales, in this respect at least. To quote his own summary of this philosophy: "My intense interest in the so-called 'psychic' region has been uppermost . . . My real interest lies in the question of a possible extension of human faculty and the suggestion that the man-in-the-street possesses strange powers which never manifest normally." He has been particularly successful at conveying the mystery and terror of a strange world transcending ours but constantly pressing in upon it, as in those two of his stories most frequently reprinted, "The Willows" and "The Wendigo," the first telling of a desolate Danubian island where nameless presences are felt by a pair of idle voyagers; the second confront-

• Which Lovecraft listed (in '29) among the ten best weird tales ever written.



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ing the reader with horrible evidences of a vast forest daemon about whom North Woods lumbermen whisper at night.

Mingled with this is another strain of Blackwood's mysticism: the feeling of a communion or kinship with a Nature that is not only indifferent but often inimical to mankind. Like Arthur Machen, he has recalled the Pan of legendary awe, with all his grotesque allies; but whereas Machen was often unable to control the powers he created and groped blindly for the climactic ending, Blackwood frequently builds up by careful detail the complete sensations and perceptions leading from reality to the supernatural.

Cast over many of his stories, and particularly over his highly sensitive characters, is a dreamlike atmosphere, which has all the intensity and irrational reality of a dream. This tendency, so evident in his earlier books (e.g., "Jimbo" and "The Centaur"), has pervaded much of his later writing. It provoked H. P. Lovecraft, in his essay on "Supernatural Horror in Literature," to exalt him for his understanding of "how fully some sensitive minds dwell forever on the borderland of dream, and how relatively slight is the distinction betwixt those images formed from actual objects and those excited by the play of the imagination."

With a mind so attuned to the delicate nuances of Nature and the spiritual, it is not surprising that Blackwood should have produced stories which have been accepted as classics in the genre of the weird tale. But although his genius is indisputable, his most ardent followers, if they be honest, will admit that he has failings. It may be due to his journalism, but he has no poetic witchery with words; he achieves his effects with passages that are sometimes bald and oft-times too elaborate, and if he has the advantage over Machen in the construction of his stories, his style lacks the colour of the Welsh writer. Machen painted his delicate canvases in gold and russet-brown, and no whites, greys or blacks, however well applied, can produce the same result.

† See "The Incomplete Machen": FR Dec. '48-Jan. '49.

‡ Lovecraft also found in Blackwood's work the defects of "ethical didacticism, occasional insipid whimsicality, the flatness of benignant supernaturalism, and a too free use of the trade jargon of modern 'occultism'."



None the less, some connoisseurs will readily concede the claims of Algernon Blackwood to the title of master of the uncanny, and will find here twenty-two of his most powerful tales. Besides such familiar titles as "Running Wolf," "The Occupant of the Room," and "The Man Whom the Trees Loved," which may be remembered from previous collections, there are two new novelettes, "The Doll" and "The Trod"; at least, they will be new to those who have not read the American volume in which

they have appeared only once before\*. Though not of the same quality as "The Willows" or "The Wendigo," these most recent works are yet good examples of their author's particular style of writing in this field; and each of the other selections will help the reader to assess for himself the worth of his considerable contribution to its development since the days of the peerless Poe.

\* In "The Doll & One Other" (Arkham House, '46).

## The Benevolent Robot

**THE HUMANOIDS**, by Jack Williamson. Simon & Schuster, New York. \$2.00.

Reviewed by Kemp McDonald

Jack Williamson is one of the very few of the old band of authors of the early 30s—and there was, say what you will, a glamour about their work—who has been able to make the adaptation to the more thoughtful and soundly-based style pioneered by Editor Campbell; and he has managed to do this without losing any of his very individual brand of magic, a matter of delicacy in atmosphere and sensitive choice of words by which to contrive a real sense of other-worldliness, of futures remote and distances vast beyond conception.

Like most writers, he has his pet theme. I think the situation that most clearly exemplifies this is that of a forlorn little band of weaponless humans, the last hope of their race, battling against the mechanised might of a galaxy. They are wounded, in agony, exhausted, desperate. They are marooned on an unutterably remote, inexorably inimical planet. The only reason why they are allowed to remain alive is that the odds against them are so stupendous that the tiny effort of destroying them is not worth while. Their chance of success is, mathematically, zero. Yet, time and again, they bring it off, and in a way which makes one gasp far more with admiration than with incredulity. This is a literary feat which I am content to see Mr. Williamson perform as many times as he wishes: among past examples of it, I remember the "Legion of Space" trilogy and "After World's End" with particular affection.

In "The Humanoids" (my personal preference is for the original title of the story which appeared not long since in *Astounding*—and I'm sorry, too, that the preliminary "With Folded Hands . . ." couldn't have been included), the menace is of a distinctly novel type. A horde of robots, spreading out from a central planetary brain, threatens to smother mankind, not with viruses or radioactives but with a cloying, stultifying benevolence—"to guard men from harm." Their designer's efforts to prevent war have been altogether too successful; men find the tools taken from their hands, the tobacco from their pipes, the very knobs from their doors, as being too dangerous. Their houses and gardens are redesigned, grandiosely but tastelessly. If they appear unhappy about this, they are given euphoride, a drug which produces the elementary happiness of infancy. Those who, in more drastic objection, dare to attempt attack on the vast rhodomagnetic brain on Wing IV are subjected to brain-surgery or worse.

Against all this is arrayed a pathetic little group. Physicist Clay Forester, deserted by his wife, his research perforce abandoned; philosopher Mark White, hounded from planet to planet; walf Jane Carter, wan, pinched wonder-child; and a down-and-out trio—newsman, gambler, minor revue turn. Each, however, has some supernormal capacity; and desperately they try to develop their psychophysical powers as a last resort against the physically invincible humanoids. Ill, frozen, starved, hiding in endless caves (they have mastered teleportation) they work against time; for, on Wing IV, the great platinomagnetic grid which will give

the robots psychophysical control is nearing completion.

What part, meanwhile, is Frank Ironsmith playing: the too-bland mathematician, mysteriously exempt from the humanoids' care, who plays chess with an invisible opponent? He smiles his "sunburnt smile" a little too often for me; but Mr. Williamson gives his ending quite a new twist, and solves, as nearly as makes no matter, two difficult literary problems peculiar to science and mystery fiction. First, that of presenting a clearly benevolent influence in such a way that one will unreasonably but heartily dislike it; and second, that of defining the limits of an apparently almost limitless power (that of psychophysics) in such a way as to make the things it respectively can and cannot do seem plausible and consist-

ent. Both problems have been handled with a good deal of care, and a notable tightening-up, in comparison with the magazine version, is evident. This seems to me indicative of the author's genuine and conscientious interest in his work for its own sake.

The science and philosophy are in themselves very stimulating. Mr. Williamson has all of van Vogt's imaginativeness in devising new sciences and realistic terminologies, and perhaps an even surer touch with his characters. I happen to disagree with his philosophical implication that there are absolute moral standards, which might conceivably be best set for humanity by a mechanical brain. But I have no quarrel with his artistry: this is an absolutely first-rate piece of science fiction.

## The Best of 1948

**THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1948**, edited by Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty. Frederick Fell, New York. \$2.95.

Reviewed by John K. Aiken

Often the most interesting things about an anthology are the deductions that can be made from it about the character and predilections of its compiler. The editor of a magazine reveals himself and his opinion of his public well enough by the material he selects; the anthologist is even franker in giving away his prejudices and blind spots by what he leaves out. One has read anthologies so stamped with the compiler's personality that the stories seemed more truly his than the original authors': it is arguable that he should so indulge his personal preference.

For these reasons, one looks forward to a collection entitled "The Best . . ." with mixed feelings. "My Favourite . . ." may be all very well; but a perfect selection, possible no doubt in theory, is not so easy to make, even over a limited time-section. If achieved, perfection may not seem so to the humanly imperfect critic; while if the selector has not managed—or not wished—to conceal his prejudices, it will be difficult for him to convince the reader that they are more justifiable than his own.

Messrs. Bleiler and Dikty need have no qualms, however. No dark psychological secrets about them are discover-

able from this collection of the best pieces which appeared in the magazines during '48, and now labelled the best of '49. The editors have, in fact, done a brilliantly self-effacing job of broadminded, intelligent selection which is also artistically satisfying; and I at least have no quarrel with their title's claim, no list of glaring omissions.

Deeply prejudiced myself, I might have excluded at least one of two over-competent, over-cynical Kuttner-Padgett efforts—"Ex Machina" and "Happy Ending"—but granting that whackiness (particularly applied to robotic behaviour), time-travel paradoxes and alcohol are three extremely well-developed facets of modern science-fiction, better examples containing them could not have been found. By way of contrast, Ray Bradbury—deservedly—has also been called upon for two stories. With his simplicity of language, which never becomes naïveté, and his sincerity and originality of thought, he provides the most extreme antithesis imaginable to Kuttner's complexity and use of every professional trick.

Bradbury's humanistic-aesthetic outlook is certain to have an enormous effect on the development of science-fiction, and one which could not come at a better time: it is a pity that more of his work does not appear in the only U.S. magazine to be regularly reprinted in England. As for his stories, "Mars is Heaven" and "And the Moon be Still

This striking conception of a spaceport is adapted from the dust-cover of 'The Best Science Fiction Stories: 1949.' The work of Frank McCarthy, it is one of the best pictorial jackets which has yet appeared on any volume in this field.



as Bright," both are Martian nightmares, each, in its utterly distinctive way, quite literally shocking.

Wilmar H. Shiras' "In Hiding" is already celebrated enough to need no more than a mention; this and Poul Anderson's "Genius" have the same theme, but are respectively micro- and macro-cosmic in treatment. There is an unusually elegant brevity in "Thang," by Martin Gardner; while the technical school is adequately represented by Erik Pennel with "Doughnut Jockey," though the realism of his background is a little dimmed by his misconception of pneumonia as an epidemic and virus-caused disease. J. J. Coupling's "Period

Piece," Fredric Brown's "Knock," Murray Leinster's "The Strange Case of John Kingman," and Isaac Asimov's "No Connection"—a pleasantly thoughtful piece about pleasantly thoughtful bears—complete a dozen tales which maintain a remarkable level of excellence coupled with variety.

Melvin Korshak contributes, by way of introduction, a judicious sketch of the history of science-fiction; and the editors' preface contains a tantalisingly brief discussion of the philosophy of scientific fantasy. If, as promised, this book is to inaugurate an annual series of such anthologies, we hope the rest will prove as good as the first.

## The Entertaining Zagat

**SEVEN OUT OF TIME**, by Arthur Leo Zagat. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa. \$3.00.

Reviewed by D. R. Smith

Publication of this *Argosy* serial of ten years ago (Mar. 11-Apr. 15 '39), in the handsome book format for which the Fantasy Press is noted, comes only a few months after the death of a writer who was well-known for his prolificacy in the American pulp fiction field, in which he was so adept as to be accepted as a model tutor\*. Although trained as a lawyer, he made story-

writing his profession; and of his five hundred published pieces, only about five per cent were science fiction. Since he wrote principally for the "action magazines," his fantasies tended to be of the type which are read to-day and forgotten tomorrow; but he will long be remembered for his early collaborations with fellow lawyer Nat Schachner, with whom he built a joint reputation, in the days of Gernsback's *Wonder*, for stories which were characterised by the hectic nature of their plots rather than by any regard for scientific probability.

The first of these collaborations, "The Tower of Evil" (*Wonder Quarterly*, Summer '30), was one of the first of Zagat's stories of any type; unlike most fantasy writers, he did not turn to authorship until he was well in his thirties. In the next year or two, the

\* At the end of the war, he spent much of his time in military hospitals coaching potential writers, and later organised the Writers' Work Shop for Veterans. More recently, he taught short story writing at New York University.

pair produced in quick succession a string of pieces, culminating in "Exiles of the Moon" (*Wonder*, Sep.-Nov. '31), which were fairly popular with the general readership of *Wonder* and the *Clayton Astounding*, but rather less so with the fans, who were then even more sensitive to scientific background than they are now. In '31 the collaboration ended, and each writer went his separate but similar way; though Schachner's output in this field during the next three years was greatly in excess of the other's.

While the enlightenment of *Astounding* under Editor Tremaine gave increasing scope for Schachner's thought-variants, Zagat occupied himself in other fields, until the rise of *Thrilling Wonder* in '36 presented him with a more favourable market for his robust type of fantasy, of which he took immediate advantage: "The Land Where Time Stood Still" (Aug. '36), "The Lanson Screen" (Apr. '37), "The Cavern of the Shining Pool" (Oct. '37), etc. Thence he proceeded to *Argosy*, in which, with his first serial, "Drink We Deep" (Jul. 31-Sep. 4 '37), he endeared himself to readers who, while preferring a mixed brew of action stories, enjoyed

a fantasy now and then as long as it wasn't too heady.

Apart from a few odd appearances in *Wonder*, *Weird Tales*, *Science Fiction* and *Super Science*, he confined himself to *Argosy* during '38-43; but a return to *Astounding* in '46 with "Slaves of the Lamp" (Aug.-Sep.), a sociological fantasy which topped the Analytical Laboratory, showed that he could still please the more demanding readers of that magazine as he had done fifteen years earlier, in spite of the enormous change which had taken place in the interval.

Of all his output, however, "Seven Out of Time" is perhaps the most enjoyable to the majority of readers. It belongs to the plot-category in which the present-day world must be saved from the menace of invasion by our descendants of the remote future: a useful device for bringing human beings of our age and type into conflict with the strange and terrible world of the far future. Here Zagat did not strive for originality. His three-million-year descendants of humanity are big-brained, emotionless monstrosities; the world they have brutally wrested from its amoeba-like owners has a landscape featuring an immense sphinx-shape

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that reminds one instantly of William Hope Hodgson's "The Night Land," and the Seven include, in addition to the present-day hero-narrator and his beloved, such notables of the past as Francois Villon, the ruffian-poet of fifteenth-century France, the prophet Elijah, and other historical characters having an intrinsic interest.

The usual play is made with cases of people who have mysteriously vanished—being snatched into another era is the "obvious" explanation—and the

hero and his lady triumph in the end; while the great brains go down in defeat before the hordes of purple amoebae they had maltreated—with the barest of hints that their sphinx-like god had something to do with it. This may seem to indicate that there is little in the story to make it worth-while, and if one reads for semi-educational purposes that would be the correct inference. But the less seriously intentioned will find in it, as I did, a pleasant evening's entertainment.

## Satirical Superman

**THE KID FROM MARS**, by Oscar J. Friend. Fell, New York. \$2.50.

Reviewed by Arthur F. Hillman

"Er—excuse me. I'm a Martian—"  
"Huh?"

"I've just come from Mars. Could you direct me—?"

"—To the nearest psychopathic ward? Certainly, brother. If you'll just follow me . . ."

It's an odds-on chance that any man who announced himself as a visitor from the Red Planet would meet with incredulity. Any man, I repeat; for everybody knows that only a green-eyed monster with writhing tentacles and a ray-gun could possibly emerge from a space-vessel. So when Llamkin, messenger from Mars, settles his craft down in the midst of a crowd of Long Island polo players, he finds his lack of tentacles, or mandibles, or any other of the accoutrements of non-terrestrial creatures, a definite handicap.

The visitor is not assisted by his explanation that his Martian mentors reared him from birth in a special laboratory that simulated Earth conditions. For the ancient Martian race desperately needs aid from Earth. Having lost their sense of humour over generations, they find that without its saving grace their people are dying, and Llamkin has been sent to summon a conclave of Earth's scientists to see if they can solve the problem.

The moment the ambassador from Mars sets foot on Earth, he is caught up in a train of riotous events. His too-human appearance convinces all concerned that his mission is a down-to-earth commercial stunt; his spaceship is considered merely an improved stratosphere craft. With an eye to sensational publicity, however, the president of Rainbow Pellets and the head

of Tri-Dimensional Pictures vie for his services. His vessel draws the attention, not only of the U.S. authorities, but of a sinister subversive group. It requires only Llamkin's production of a bag of uncut, laboratory-made diamonds to set the pot a-boiling; and the result is one of the most amusing science fiction stories of the lighter kind ever made available for general reading.

To those who followed the fortunes of *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling Stories* during '38-42, when, as Science Fiction Editor for Standard Magazines, his own work was frequently to be found in them, Mr. Friend's admirable flair for satirical humour of this sort will not come as a surprise. Nor, to those who may have read the magazine version in September '40 *Startling*, will this particular story, presented now as his first full-length novel, although it is hardly an "important" book—a tag which the publishers have applied in advance to the volumes they are adding to their new Science Fiction Library—it merits, none the less, a better description; an enjoyable book.

The author's characterisations are all extremely good; from the blasé columnist Louis Shayne, to whose care the visitor is first committed, to the haughty film star Elaine Elliott, whose beauty causes even the very human alien to succumb. But it is in the person of Llamkin, the Kid from Mars himself, that Mr. Friend has scored his greatest triumph. With his quiet air of authority coupled with his sublime innocence, this latest in a long line of supermen and "Odd Johns" strikes one at first as the weakest of his species; but his fallings and amusing slips soon made him for me, a more credible and likeable character than most of his superior breed I have encountered. In fact, a nice kid.

## With a Pinch of Snuff

**THE TERRIBLE AWAKENING**, by Hugh Desmond. Wright & Brown, London. 7/6.

Reviewed by Thomas Sheridan

Not since I stumbled on that excruciating thriller, "The Devil Man from Mars,"\* in which our hero comes to Earth in an ordinary airplane with the wind behind him, have I encountered quite such an incongruous specimen of British science-fantasy (dare I call it that?) as this. Who the author is I know not, except that he has "Blood Cries for Vengeance," "The Secret Voice," etc. to his name; but he is obviously more at home with historical than astronomical matters, and when he seeks to combine them the result is far from being as satisfactory as, for instance, Bohun Lynch's "Menace from the Moon," in which the two elements are mixed so cleverly and plausibly that I shall always hold this fascinating tale in high esteem.

\* By James Corbett (Jenkins, London, '35).

Mr. Lynch's tale of the '20's is, I believe, the only other case where the interplanetary theme has been presented against an historical background. But whereas he was discreet enough to keep his three-centuries-old Lunar colony at a distance, while investigating its origins in ancient documents on Earth, Mr. Desmond lands us in the midst of his space-pioneering refugees from Napoleon's France who have established "Petit Paris" on another planet—which one, exactly, he does not disclose, any more than he reveals the manner of their transmigration except in the most general (and ambiguous) terms. They came in "a great ship of the air which . . . would ride the heavens triumphantly," powered by electricity, of all things. And, having subdued the sub-humans native to the mysterious planet, they have managed to survive, still dressed in the fashion of their ancestors, in spite of its being broken into several pieces by a collision with a comet—"Fortunately, a small

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one." M. de Barsac explains, taking another pinch of snuff.

To their unaccountably Earth-like remnant of a world, also in an electrically-propelled plane, come the daring adventurers from Earth itself, which has been menaced by the aftermath of the same catastrophe in the shape of another piece of planet surrounded by the approaching comet. This situation, with the building of the space-ship (Mr. Desmond never calls it that: it is always a "plane"), the mob's attack on it, and the getaway of Professor Biddulph's picked party, is highly reminiscent too. If he has not read "Menace from the Moon," I feel that Mr. Desmond can hardly have overlooked Bulmer & Wylie's "When Worlds Collide" and "After Worlds Collide," or at least must have been struck by the first of these famous fantasies concerning the voyage to Bronson Betaf.

If I am wrong, I would strongly ad-

vise him to read them, in order to see how science-fantasy intended for the millions, replete with all the familiar emotional elements, may still be handled cogently from the viewpoint of its scientific basis without shirking all the issues which must arise from such a situation as he poses. I also advise him, before he attempts anything of the sort again, to refer to any popular science textbook to clarify his ideas upon such matters as (a) the extent of the stratosphere as distinct from outer space, and (b) the difference between a dinosaur and a mammoth, which was very considerable. Finally, I would urge him to keep his French revolutions on Earth.

† Following serialisation in condensed form by the old *Passing Show* (Dec. '34-Mar. '35), both stories were published separately in this country by Stanley Paul.

## Roman Holiday

**BLEEDING FROM THE ROMAN**, by Eric Romilly. Chapman & Hall, London. 9/6.

Reviewed by Everett F. Blaller

In this latest version of Mark Twain's "Yankee at the Court of King Arthur," Jim Craddock drops back into Queen Boadicea's Britain. As equipment he has an automobile (American, but called Canadian for propaganda purposes), a full tank and a spare tin of petrol, shotguns with an inexhaustible supply of ammunition, and the ability to talk better classical Latin than the Roman officials. Once arrived, like any Graustarkian hero, he has no difficulty in crashing high society, but hob-nobs with Boadicea and her daughters and is even accepted as a god by some of the lower classes.

The initial situation posed, unfortunately, Mr. Romilly's ingenuity flags. He seems to want Craddock to be an eye-witness of the Boadicean fiasco, yet also to keep his story on a personal level rather than let it become a mere war commentary. The result is a series of intrigues with Boadicea, her daughter, a friend's wife, the Romans; an unexciting chariot-automobile race, and much idle chit-chat until the war can get under way. Craddock proves most ineffectual in this, probably because he has no purpose in Boadicean Britain but seems merely to be taking

a vacation there. He is considerably less learned and ambitious than Martin Padway, lacking that gentleman's greater aims.

It is true that Craddock's shotguns and petrol save Boadicea for a short time; but somehow or other, during the last part of the story, he realises that the idyllic days are over, that history cannot be changed (his metaphysics are unrevealed), and that Boadicea must go down. Yet he does not worry greatly about it, and so Boadicea falls, committing suicide melodramatically in an ending unwarrantedly accelerated. Craddock is killed; then an epilogue tells us that he has merely had an auto accident, and that—presumably—the entire novel was so much delirium.

We are left with an average adventure story with an average adventure hero and an average adventure plot: light and frivolous in tone, except for the ill-fitting tragic ending. It is fairly smooth reading, but for a heavy sag in the middle, but is much too long: ten to twenty thousand words could have been deleted to very happy effect. The action-crises are handled without much inspiration; a good deal more could have been made of the chariot race, the attack on the temple, and the death of Boadicea. But one may derive a couple of hours of moderately pleasant entertainment from this book.

## More from Mr. Heard

**THE LOST CAVERN and Other Tales of the Fantastic** by Gerald Heard. Cassell. London. 9/6.

Reviewed by Alan Devereux

Here is another book of four long-short stories by an author whose work, if it is not exactly compelling to the reader who demands tightly-knitted plots and snappy endings, is at least interesting to those who can appreciate a leisurely style and a well-considered treatment of a fantastic theme. Two of the stories are science-fantasy, and two along religious lines. The title-tale is undoubtedly one of the best subterranean fantasies I have ever read: the description of a world of caverns inhabited by intelligent giant bats is graphic and convincing.

"The Thaw Plan" is in two parts, the first telling of a scheme to melt the polar ice by atomic power and raise the level of the oceans; the second dealing with the consequences, with mankind reduced to two communities at opposite poles, separated by impenetrable jungle. This is a promisingly

novel idea, but the story is told too impersonally for my liking. "The Cup," a religio-mystical tale, brings Charles Williams instantly to mind, but somehow misses the bus. Far more satisfying is "The Chapel of Ease," reminiscent this time of Machen, but with a genuine macabre atmosphere and a mounting tension which hold the interest; though this, too, tends to fall flat at the end.

On the whole, Mr. Heard may be said to have improved on his earlier efforts in "The Great Fog and Other Weird Tales"; though one wonders if he would not be more successful if he plumped either for the genuine short story form or the full-length novel, as in "Doppelgangers", rather than half-confine, half-spread himself in these difficult medium lengths. His style, though still formative, is strong, and he does not try to overdo the explanations. If he persists in this vein, he may well carve a niche for himself.

\*Reviewed FR Feb.-Mar. '48.

†Do., FR Jun.-Jul. '47.

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## Fantasy Forum

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# Why Gernsback Gave Up

Thank you very much for the copies of *Fantasy Review* containing "The Story of Wonder" which you so kindly sent me. These are very interesting, and the story itself is excellent with the facts exactly as they were.

The question has often come up why I stopped publishing science fiction. The article in *Fantasy Review* also broaches this question. The answer is fairly simple: My only interest was in science fiction, and in the latter years of my publication of *Wonder Stories* we had endless trouble to get stories with a real science content. They seemed to have degenerated into fairy tales and adventure stories in which there was the merest smattering of science.

To my way of thinking there were, and still are, too few authors who can come up frequently with good science stories. In other words, my problem was the great dearth of plots where honest-to-goodness, plausible science was used as the basis; and this discouraged me, because I felt that I would not like—with our set-up of other scientific publications—to become known as a fantasy, adventure or fairy tale publisher.

Sooner or later, I believe, this situation may right itself, and there may be at some time a crop of authors who think of science first and adventure second.—Hugo Gernsback, President, Radcraft Publications Inc., New York, U.S.A.

[Although some magazines have assisted the further degeneration of the medium which Mr. Gernsback first developed as a specialised form of popular reading, we feel the situation was improved some years ago by the encouragement of the type of story featured by *Astounding Science Fiction*, in which the scientific element has been of primary interest.—Ed.]

### CRITIC'S RETORT

In reply to Mr. Sprague de Camp's suggestion (*S-FR*, Autumn '49) that I should check the magazine version of "The Wheels of If" against the book, may I say that it is not my habit, either as a reviewer or a chemist, to make statements without regard for experimental facts. Both versions of the story were before me when I wrote the review, and I find on going through the new one again that there are even more errors than I'd thought. A quick check-up shows upwards of thirty mistakes by the Vin-

landers in their own language, a number of which did not appear in the original: in particular, Noggle's speech on p. 50 contains no fewer than seven, two of which are new.

If Mr. de Camp would like chapter and verse for the rest—with my apologies for being so tiresome in what I am convinced is a good cause—he shall have them. Usually such fine details are unimportant, and it would be niggling in a critic to point them out. This is one of the unlucky occasions when they aren't and it isn't.—John K. Aiken, Sale, Cheshire.

### NEWSPEAK?

In "Fantasia" (*S-FR* Autumn '49) you report Mr. Robert Heinlein as advising a group of fellow writers to "get hold of a primer of Basic English and find out how well you can express yourself in 850 words." In case any of your readers who have not studied Basic English have been misled by this advice into thinking that this mutilated version of the language is of use to the fantasy author, or that it consists of 850 words, I would point out that neither of these impressions is correct.

Even Dr. I. A. Richards, one of the leading Basic propagandists, admits that a book in Basic would "not (be) very bright reading" (vide "Basic English and Its Uses"); while an article in the magazine of the British Association said of the Basic version of R. L. Stevenson's "Keawe's Bottle" (as far as I have been able to discover, the only fantasy to suffer the dubious benefits of translation into Basic): "Here you shall find errors, wastage of words, distortions, juggleries, turgid periphrases, sheer balderdash." I for one should hate to see any of Mr. Heinlein's own work debased in this way.

As for the oft-repeated claim that Basic consists of 850 words—a claim made, to use Dr. Richards' own words, by "some ill-informed persons"—the analysis made by West, Swenson and others in "A Critical Examination of Basic English" (Toronto University Press) shows the correct figure to be more nearly 4,000! In fact, to the fantasy fan, the main interest in Basic English is the possibility of its being a forerunner of the jargon "Newspeak" forecast by Orwell in "1984."

Talking of which, I think Mr. de Camp may be mistaken in presuming that its social set-up is based on the Soviet Union. Surely, it is equally applicable to the

managerial trends which are manifesting themselves in Britain and the U.S.A. as well as in the U.S.S.R.—S. R. Dalton, Leeds.

[What Mr. Heinlein actually advised, according to report, was that writers should make their vocabularies as small as possible. He was quoted (by the Colorado Springs Free Press) as saying: "I have a vocabulary of over 100,000 words, but I forget most of it when I am writing. Get hold of the primer of Basic English and find out how well you can express yourself in 850 words."—Ed.]

### MOON-FILM PUZZLE

Willy Ley's interesting article brings to mind a much greater puzzle that no-one seems to have noticed. UFA made the film "The Girl in the Moon" (from the Thea von Harbou book) about '32, and I saw it several times in New York in the thirties, though it seems to be lost forever now. In this film, while the Moon rocket is en route to Luna, the crew discover a stowaway—a boy of eleven hidden in a tool chest! The boy takes out of his pocket a copy of a magazine and explains that he only wants to emulate his favourite magazine characters. The cover of the magazine is shown, and it is something like "Nick Carter of the Moon" (Nick Carter was definitely the name)! It is a magazine much like Lev describes, a sort of penny dreadful with a picture cover. But the thing about it is that the audience was assumed to be perfectly familiar with this magazine; for the crew just laugh and, later on in the picture when on the Moon, make cracks and allusions to characters from the stories in that magazine series.

I've never been able to find out anything about this magazine, nor met anyone who ever heard of it.—Donald A. Wollheim, New York, U.S.A.

### BREAST-SWELLER

Science-Fantasy Review—definitely, an improvement in the title. No corresponding improvement in the contents—simply because, I believe, it's impossible to improve upon them. It makes one's patriotic breast swell to realise that the Journal of the British Interplanetary Society and S-FR are easily the most distinguished of their class in the world. Placing my sour cynicism on the shelf for the moment, I really do congratulate you.

Re the article about Shiel: it would seem that, now he is dead, Shiel is to be consecrated like Lovecraft. He deserves it more than HPL, but not by any great stretch. There's plenty of better prose around, and by living writers. "... perhaps the greatest writer of English the world has ever known." In the Morse code, I suppose Shakespeare is an also-ran?

"The Story of Wonder"—a worthy end to a worthy series. "Your book reviews are wonderful" is getting to be a catchphrase, but they are; especially Thomas Sheridan's on "Four-Sided Triangle." Seems to me the story of how-I-dunnit makes better reading than the book. There's an idea for a novel there...hmm. Gunner Temple may have shot well, but Sheridan's shooting is pretty good too. Ackerman's review of "1984" is also excellent; the letters are up to the usual high standard, and surely no-one will ever stump the Datas who runs The Query Box.—William F. Temple, Wembley, Middlesex.

You may like to know that everyone who gets a copy of S-FR from me or elsewhere, among those I have contacted in the U.S., thinks it far and away the best fanzine of them all—probably because it keeps off fiction and sticks entirely to articles and reviews, for which it is eminently suited. Keep up the good work! —Norman Ashfield, Thornton Heath, Surrey.

No fiction in Fantasy Review! That would ruin this splendid magazine, which is just about perfect as it is.—J. Wasso, Jr., Bangor, Pa. U.S.A.

You're still putting out the best magazine in the field.—Henry Kuttner, Laguna Beach, California, U.S.A.

### COLLECTOR'S AID

The Autumn number of Science-Fantasy Review to hand, and I have some questions to ask:

(1) Could you take Mr. Hunt's masterpiece off the cover for a few issues? The reaction of the Brotherhood might induce you to keep it off!

(2) Why have five issues about Wonder and only two for Astounding? The latter is by far the best mag. And there was only one for Weird Tales: it ain't right!

(3) Would it be possible to give a list or index of all the issues of each magazine? You could spread it over six or eight issues; it would not take up too much space, and collectors like myself would find it useful.

However, no matter what you do, I'll still be a subscriber.—Geo. L. Charters, Bangor, Co. Down, N. Ireland.

[ (1) We did, for three issues, and observed no particular reaction. (2) Because Wonder had, on the whole, a more interesting history, from the viewpoint of science fiction's earlier development, and because we could afford to give it more space. The story of Weird Tales was the merest outline, on the occasion of its 25th anniversary; its full story would need much more comprehensive treatment—for which, again, we had not the space at that time. (3) Several American fan-publishers have already performed this service. The latest

"Index of Magazine Science Fiction," edited by William Evans and published by Robert Petersen, 1308 S. Vine Street, Denver, Colorado, has 144 (mimeographed) pages covering the contents of 26 magazines published between '26 and '48, giving titles, authors and illustrators of stories and articles in each issue, with indications of the length and type of each story, and information on pseudonyms. Though it is full of typographical errors, awkwardly sectioned and poorly bound, it represents a herculean feat of compilation and classification which has not been attempted on such a scale since "The Imagi-Index" was issued (by Franklin Brady and A. Ross Kuntz) in '41. This listed the contents of all the s-f magazines (American and English) published between '26 and '38. A Volume Index compiled and originated by John Nitka, first issued as a special supplement to *Fantasy Fiction Field*, was reissued in '48 by the National Fantasy Fan Federation, which is also publishing periodical indexes to various fantasy publications and to the complete works of various leading authors, as compiled by Darrell C. Richardson. For further details write NFFP Sec-Treas., K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Avenue S., Moorhead, Minnesota, U.S.A.—Ed.]

## THE QUERY BOX

### VANISHED AUTHOR

Is author Nathan Schachner still alive? Is he writing—or has he ever written—under an alias?—Roger N. Dard, Perth, W. Australia.

Can you tell me if Nat Schachner has published any other stories of inter-planetary law-twisting apart from "Old Fireball" and "Jurisdiction"?—John A. Wiseman, Sidcup, Kent.

### Important to Subscribers

If a subscription blank is enclosed, you should renew your subscription immediately.

[Nat Schachner disappeared from *Astounding Science Fiction* at the end of '41, when he had evidently turned to writing novels, one of which ("The Wanderer," based on the life of Dante) has been published in England. During the period '35-'37, when he was among the most productive of *Astounding's* contributors, several of his stories appeared under the pseudonym of Chan Corbett; previously, at least one of his tales was by-lined Walter Glamis. There were only two stories of Kerry Dale, lawyer to Kenton Space Enterprises: "Old Fireball" (Jun. '41), and "Jurisdiction" (Aug. '41).—Ed.]

### SCIENTIFUNCTION

Issues of *Fantasy Review* which reach me are greeted with a great enthusiasm and respect. I believe quite sincerely that your publication is the best in the entire fan field; it appears to me far better than anything similar in this country. Will you tell me how many issues there were of its predecessors, *Scientifunction*. The *British Fantasy Review*? I have of this earlier publication but a single copy: Vol. 2, No. 7 (March, '38).—Nelson Bond, Roanoke, Va., U.S.A.

[The first issue of *Scientifunction* was dated Jan. '37; No. 2, April '37; 3, Jun. '37; 4, Aug. '37; 5, Oct. '37; 6, Jan. '38. You have the last issue, prior to its incorporation with *To-morrow*, The Magazine of the Future, of which there were three subsequent (printed) issues: Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spr. '38); No. 2 (Sum. '38); No. 3 (Autumn '38).—Ed]

## Walter Gillings' FANTASIA—Continued from page 9

Giving *The Magazine of Fantasy* (see "Among the Magazines," last issue) its blessing, *Time* ran piece on pulp s-f with its "lithe heroes, bosomy heroines, bug-eyed monsters and space-suited villains from Mars" . . . New bi-monthly from Popular Publications devoted to *Captain Zero*, *Master of Midnight*, made invisible by atomic explosion, whose first adventure in the "City of Deadly Sleep" told by G. T. Fleming-Roberts . . . With *New Worlds* No. 6 due shortly, Nova Publications shareholders gathered to hear Chairman John Beynon Harris report on first year's progress, offer himself for re-election . . . *Toronto Star Weekly* ran "Lord of Atlantis," by John Russell Fearn, whose "The Intelligence Gigantic" will see U.S. pocket-book publication . . . *Satevepost* featured two s-f tales in one issue: "Nightmare at Dawn," by Robert Spencer Carr, and "Doomsday Preferred," by Will F. Jenkins . . . *English Argosy* reprinted Ray Bradbury's "Homecoming," "Uncle Einar" . . . Articles on Rhine experiments in parapsychology in *Strand Magazine* (by John Langdon-Davies) and *News-Chronicle*, which also recorded opening of "new rockets-to-the-Moon season" by BIS, whose "thriving organisation of imaginative zealots" got another column in *Time* . . .

# SMALL ADVERTS

Special Rate to Collectors: 2d. per word (5c. Canada and U.S.A.); minimum 12 words. To Traders and others: 3d. per word (7c. in Canada and U.S.A.) All advertisements in this section must be prepaid. Box numbers 6d. (15c.) extra.

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**BRITISH INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY** Lecture Session 1940-50. Jan. 7: "The Circum-Lunar Rocket," by K. W. Gatlund and A. E. Dixon. Feb. 4th: A discussion on the theme, "The Effects of Interplanetary Flight." Both meetings will be held at Carlton Hall, London, S.W.1, commencing at 6 p.m. Non-members welcome; admission free.

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