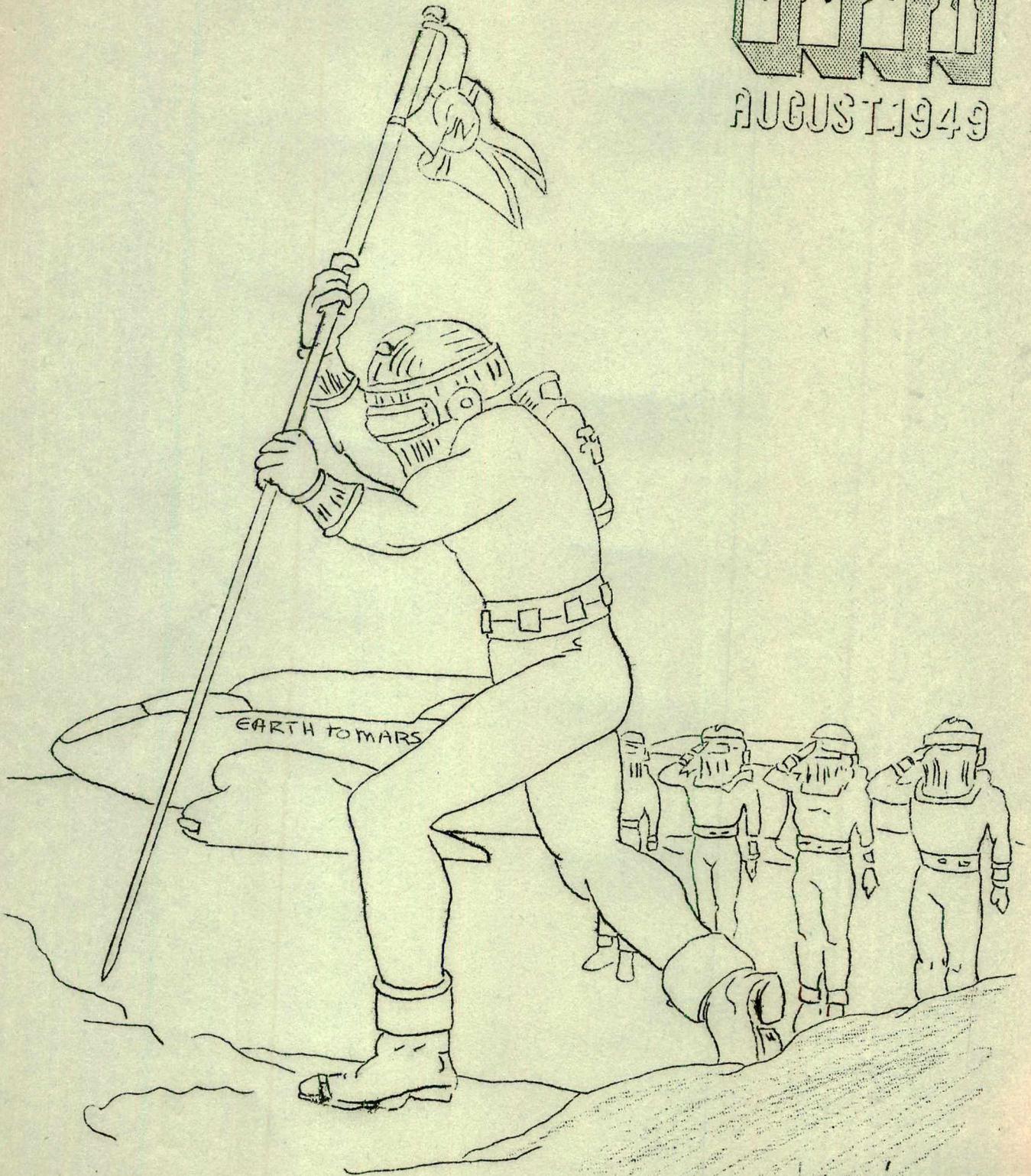


LEER

AUGUST 1949

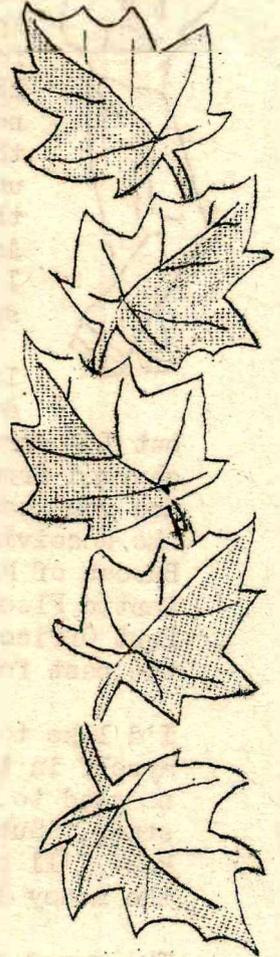


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LEER

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AUGUST 1949, VOLUME ONE-NUMBER ONE



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Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN
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Alameda, California



Peering

In my estimation, the first issue of a magazine is always the hardest to issue. To begin with, I always wonder if I should apologize for the appearance of the fanzine, or should I just forget about the whole thing. Admittedly the appearance of LEER is not what it should be. Perhaps if I explain that I am not financially able to own my own mimeograph, but have to use the one at the office and/or wherever I can find one, you will understand the difference in appearance of various pages. On this first issue of LEER, I actually used four different machines. And I will break from tradition of first issues in stating that I won't promise better issues in the future. Frankly, I'll be surprised if there are future issues!

If there are future issues you'll find a new address for me. I don't know from what clime the next issue of LEER will come from, but I'm sure it won't be Alameda. Because, on 6 September, I will be discharged from the U. S. Navy. However, I'm one of those twenty-year-career-men you read about, and will sign over the next day. But, I'll report to the Receiving Station in Brooklyn, N. Y., for further assignment by the Bureau of Naval Personnel, and will probably land up on a ship of the Atlantic Fleet. So, the next address you have of mine will be c/o a Fleet Post Office. It's about time I got a little sea duty--I've been ashore for the past four years!

I'd like to put in a plug here for my general fanzine, PEON. May I delude myself in thinking that perhaps you've heard of it? If you haven't, I'd be glad to send you a sample copy of the current issue for a three cent stamp. Subscription price is 6 issues for 50¢ or 15 for one buck. Yeah, I know I'll get rich on those prices, but who cares--I'm in this racket for the money I'll make.

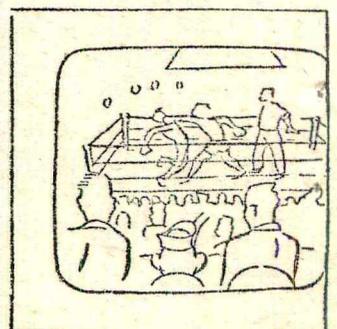
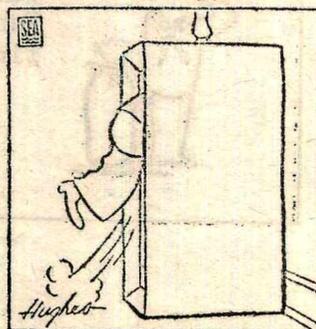
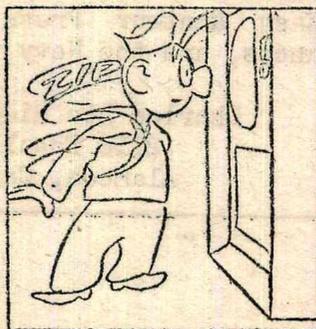
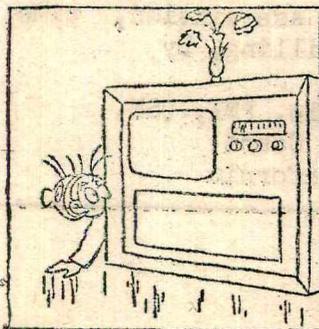
The cover on this issue was drawn by Jerri Bullock and the interiors, such as they be, were done by the editor.

There will be no reviews of other FAPA publications as such in LEER, mainly because I'm not qualified to pass judgement on other publications. I like most all of them and enjoy reading what other FAPAians are doing. If you publish any other 'zines besides your FAPA journal, I'd be glad to arrange an exchange subscription with you.

Stalemate

By Ed Hughes, L13

Televisit



BLOW HARD

BY L. MAJOR REYNOLDS

"You're crazy, the wind never did blow like that!" The speaker was slumped against the side of a run down shack.

"I'm tellin' the truth. The wind blew straight down." The words and tone were vehement.

"But it couldn't," objected the other.

"No? Settle back and I'll tell you how it happened. It was about ten years ago, when I was travelling in the southwest. I came to this fair-sized mountain that had a bunch of big trees on it. I was on vacation, and having nothing better to do, I climbed the thing just to see what was on the other side. Well, the higher I went, the stronger the wind blew untill, when I got almost to the summit, I had to crawl. I found I couldn't make it back in the face of the wind, so I had to keep on going.

"When I reached the top and looked over the rim, darned if there wasn't a pretty, little, deep valley. Well, I slid over the edge, thinkin' to get out of the wind, but it was worse on the other side. I was all I could do to keep my footing at first, and then it go so I couldn't even stand up.

"To make a long story short, I finally half slid to the bottom and then wished I hadn't.

"There was people living there, all right, but such people you never saw. I told you, the wind blew straight down, the hardest-blowing, strongest wind you ever saw. They were human all right, but flat like a pancake. I remember one little blonde ...

"Well, to keep on with my story, I was stuck there, an' no way of getting out. I couldn't climb back the way I'd come, and it was impossible to cross the valley with that wind beating down. The only place to walk were paths between the trees. You should seen those trees. None of 'em over a foot tall, and some of 'em a hundred feet wide. The pressure of the wind wouldn't let 'em grow up, so they had to grow sidewise. Even the river that ran through the center of the valley was sixty feet wide and a half inch deep."

"Well," the reclining one growled, "how'd you get away?"

"Hold your horses," the other said petulantly. "I'm coming to that. The people in that valley were real good to me and it's a good thing they were, because the first few weeks I couldn't do a thing for myself. They fed me and fixed me a place to sleep and in general treated me like I was a Ring-Master. But after I'd been there for a few months I go so I could stand up. When I finally got on my feet and able to handle myself, I was quite a bit of help to them."

"How come?"

"Well, being so tall, I could dig deeper."

"Huh?"

"You ought'a be able to figure that out. With the wind blowing so strong, everything they planted grew the other way. It's logical. When they planted potatoes, the spuds were near the surface and the leaves way underground. Their big trouble was the corn, though. The roots were just under the top-soil, but the ears were sometimes six seven feet down. The messiest job was digging tomatoes. No matter how careful you were, the wind would make your spade slip and ... catsup.

"But the pay-off was the cows. No matter what cut of meat you wanted, it turned out flank steak. Them cattle sure looked funny running around with horns growing out of the bottom of their jaws. The pigs never made pork chops--it was all steaks. But the pickled pig's feet were somethin'. One foot'd feed a dozen people."

"You wouldn't be pushing th' truth a little, would you?"

"Hey, if you want to hear this, stop insinuat' I'm a liar!"

"Okay, you win. Go ahead."

"Well, I was going to tell you about the people who lived there. Mighty nice sort of folks they was. Their ancestors had been on their way to California, and got lost. Every hundred years the wind stops blowing there for forty-six minutes, and it was during one of those lulls they got trapped in the valley and couldn't get out.

"The first generation born there didn't show too much change, but after that they flattened out quick. Their heads were flat discs about two feet across and about three inches thick. Their bodies were never over eight inches high, but they spread out sometimes four or five feet. And speaking of feet, you should've seen theirs. They looked like over-grown clown-shoes. I had a lot of trouble when I first got there. If I stood too long in one place the wind would drive me right down into the ground like a stake-driver, and I'd have to dig myself out.

"But as I was saying, those people were real nice to me. They didn't 'hey, Rube' me like they could've. Of course, I paid my way in work, but they didn't have to take me in.

"And then the worst thing happened. I fell in love. She was the blonde I mentioned. Name was Betty. Of course, she was the same shape as the rest of 'em, but she was cuter'n a lion cub.

"I talked it over with her old man, and it was all right with him, so we started getting ready for the ceremony. A great-uncle was the minister, and one of her cousins was the marriage license clerk. Matter of fact, everybody was related to everybody. I never in all my life saw so many first, second, third and forty-second cousins.

"Well, we had a bunch of parties, and was goin' great guns, when I noticed all of 'em beginnin' to act funny. They started digging deep holes like mad, and when I asked why, they clammed up on me. Finally, one day, I was sitting on top of a tree and heard a couple of 'em talking. Seems it was time for that forty-six minute lull, and the whole tribe was going underground. Seems they were so used to the terrible wind-pressure they couldn't live without it.

"One afternoon about three o'clock I was lying down trying to take a nap, when I heard a commotion outside. I jumped up and got to the door in record time. The wind was starting to die down. The lull was there.

I figured this was the only chance I'd ever have to get out of there. You see, the valley was over twenty miles long, and I had to move fast to get to the end of it before the wind started up again.

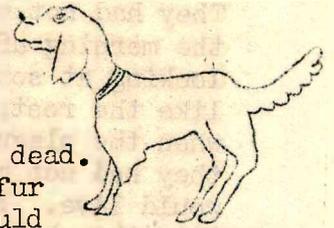
"Without stopping to think, I grabbed Betty and tore out for the far end of the valley. I hit the spot where the trees began growing taller, and started to climb, dragging Betty behind me. I asked her how she was making it. She didn't answer, so I turned around. All I had in my hand was the sleeve of her dress. She was scattered all over the surrounding landscape. She'd blown up like a deep-sea fish coming to the surface.

"Well, I figured there wasn't any use in me going back to that unnatural life, so I set off for civilization. I've been sorry a lot of times since, but I never could find that valley again. If I could, I'd head for there and live the rest of my life.

(continued on page 16)

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

BY TERRY CARR



He was dead. He did not move. He couldn't. He was dead. He would never move again. He would never stroke Pep's fur again. He would just lie there on the ground and Pep would always remember him. Pep wouldn't remember the dead man. Pep would remember the live man, the last man on Earth. Now he was dead. He would never move again. He was dead. And yet he lived. Inside Pep he lived. Only through the love of a dog did he live. But he lived.

When he died the human race died. When he was dead he did not move. Pep wanted him to move. Pep would bring him to life. Pep would bring the human race to life. The man would stroke Pep's fur again, and Pep would be happy.

x x x x x x x x x x

Pep turned. He must go. He trotted off, sadly. He must find a way to make the man live. He would.

Pep had an idea; an instinct in him. The man had worked with queer things. The man had taught Pep how to use them. Somehow Pep would learn what the man had been doing. Pep would finish it for him. Pep would bring the man to life. Pep would be happy then. Once Pep had brought the man back to life, he could bring other mortals to life. Humans would live again. Pep would be so very happy then.

Then Pep saw Buff. The collie trotted toward Buff. Buff looked at him. He wagged his tail. Pep made a half whine-half bark sound. Pep turned and went back to where he had come from. Buff followed.

Soon they were back at the man. Buff looked at him. His tail drooped. He looked at Pep. Pep was licking the man's face. It was cold. It was white. Pep was sad. Buff was sympathetic. He remembered how he had felt when his man had died. Pep had been sympathetic then. Now Buff was sympathetic. Buff's man had helped Pep's man very much. Then, slowly, he had turned white and died and not moved. He hadn't moved yet. Now Pep's man was dead.

Quickly, Pep turned and trotted away, Buff behind him. They headed for the relic in which the men had worked. When they arrived, Pep set right to work. Buff soon got the idea and helped. Buff was inexperienced at this sort of work. A few minutes and two broken vials proved that.

All through the night they worked, with the cunning of a mortal. Evolution had helped them. Their paws were longer and looked vaguely like a human hand. Their sense of smell helped them to determine different liquids. Where instinct was now a brain; or mostly a brain, at least. Instincts were still guiding them, but they were processed by logic.

They worked; edged on by the love for the two men. They would make the men live again; move again; think again. When they had done that they would be happy. Until then, they would work.

They worked in shifts, a result of the logic in their minds. After two days they had progressed two broken vials and a new idea. As a result of working in shifts, and of having no definite language, they didn't know what the other was doing when they changed shifts. So now they would work on one vial apiece. That way they had a double chance of success.

The next morning they went first to Buff's man, then to Pep's man. They had not moved. Pep's man was now stiff, like Buff's man had been the morning after. They both just layed there; their faces uplifted, looking at something. Something Pep and Buff could not see. It was just like the rest; just like the countless of thousands of others had done, when the plague had started spreading. They had turned white, and then they had not moved. They had died. Now all of them were dead. Soon they would live. Pep would make them live. Buff would make them live. To do this they had to work.

The dogs turned and went back to the building. The building where they worked. The building of life. For the building was man's last hope of life; the dogs' last hope of happiness. They worked.

Inside the heads of Pep and Buff were thoughts; impulses; ideas. Imagine two dogs, working in a laboratory, mixing chemicals, hoping one of these mixtures would be the right one. They would know the right mixture if they ever made it. They had seen it before; when their men had made it, and brought back other people who were dead of this disease. Lack of chemicals had prevented use of the solution enough to let mankind dwindle to a spark, and then, just as new deposits of the chemicals had been found and refined; just as the last man started the solution; the spark died. The last man turned white and fell and didn't move. He had been caught by the plague. Imagine the thoughts of the two dogs as they worked, remembering, but not understanding.

All through the night, they worked; remembering; thinking.

The next morning they went back to the men. They were the same as always. Looking at them, Pep seemed to see in their eyes a plea; yet in those eyes were hope. Pep felt as if the men were always watching them; guiding them; hoping.

They went back to the ruins of a once great city; to the relics in them; to work. They were happy, working in that building of days gone by. Happy because they knew there could be only one end to it. Victory. Another day, maybe two, and they would have it; till then, work. They worked. If it were not for the feeling in them, they would find the work monotonous. Mix, dump out, mix, dump out, sleep, mix, dump out.....

Through the morning, afternoon, and evening it went--mix, dump out, mix, dump out, mix...all through the night it went, never stopping--mix, dump out, mix, dump out...

The next morning, they went to see the men by themselves, Pep to his man, Buff to his. They lingered, then hurried back, or at least Pep did. Buff didn't go back right away. He went in the opposite direction, following the animal that had taken his man, slowly, carefully, vengeance in his heart. Soon he could go faster, the scent led on to soft ground, and there were tracks. Buff loped on now, intent on finding his man, intent on vengeance, intent on bringing his man to life. He soon caught up to the animal, but before Buff got in sight of it, he slowed and crept along, silently, the wind blowing toward him, the scent stronger.

Then he saw it. It was a wolf, about a year older than he, eating on his man. Food was scarce these days for wolves, and this was a treat. Buff leaped from his hiding place, growling as only a raging mad police dog can. The wolf was taken so much unaware that he didn't catch a glimpse of Buff till he was sprawling, a furious police dog on top of him. Then he fought back. Lashing, tearing, biting each other's flesh, they fought. Buff was thrown off. He came back, fighting frantically. The wolf dodged

(continued on page 15)



TITUS GROAN

reviewed by

DAVID H. KELLER

James Branch Cabell states that the true artist writes only to express beautiful thoughts and, when doing this, has only one idea, the personal satisfaction obtained from his labors. This dictum is well illustrated in The Worm Ouroboros. It took Eddison thirty years to write this remarkable fantasy. Obviously it was a labor of love, written only to obtain a final peace of mind. There could have been no idea of recompense from a monetary viewpoint. He must have realized while dreaming it and placing those dreams on paper that only a relative few would buy it, or buying it, appreciate its transcendental loveliness. The American edition sold poorly. Its charm has been appreciated only by those exceptional personalities who silently watch a sunset fade or hear the music of waves beating on a rockbound coast.

Mervin Peake is preeminently an artist. He has also won some slight fame as a minor poet. Nine years ago he started to dream of an unknown world and after seven years finished his first novel. No doubt he worked as an illustrator during these years, partly because he enjoyed art and no doubt because there were obligations to meet and bills to pay; but as an avocation he wrote Titus Groan. In thus doing he followed the pattern of Cabell, Eddison, Dunsany and all writers of the beautiful. His primary object must have been writing for his own pleasure; for had he spent an equal time working as a plasterer or plumber his work would have been less time consuming and far more remunerative. For the book he wrote in these seven lean years has not been appreciated by the average reader who does not understand it and is unwilling to make the effort to do so.

The subtitle, A Gothic Novel, is, in itself deceptive, though there is a shadow of reason for its use. Elizabeth Bowen, in the Tatler comes far closer to actual analysis when she writes, "Let us call it a sport of literature." Her use of the word sport is a fine example of the incorporation of biology into literary criticism; for a sport is something unusual in nature, a white blackbird. It occurs as rarely in literature as in actual life.

The narrative centers around the Castle of Gormanghast, which, since it is located in never-never land, cannot be found in either old or modern atlases. The persons living in and around the Castle are the descendants of seventy-six generations of nobility and peasant and during all that time they have been completely out of touch with the world. For over two thousand years they have simply lived in the Castle or around it, in a weird isolation. During these centuries, the Castle grew slowly, each Lord making additions which were neglected by succeeding Lords who had their own idea of architecture. Thus, when the last of the line, Titus, is born, the Castle was so vast that few, if any, had visited all the rooms, or going into one unentered for centuries, knew who had built it or why.

As this family built Gormanghast they fabricated a code of behavior, which, written in great detail, in massive books, completely enslaved and dominated the living family. This enforced servitude to ritualism was specially onerous to the head of the family, the Lord of the Castle who had to perform the ceremonies of every day in exactly the same manner that all the previous Lords had followed on that special day. This ritual was only

known in its entire complexity by the Librarian, Sourdust, who had devoted most of his ninety years to its study. Every morning he met the Lord at breakfast and dictated to him the day's program. From this there could be, and never was, any deviation.

"Lord Sepulchrave was returning to his room after performing the bi-annual ritual of opening the iron cupboard in the armoury, and, with the traditional dagger which Sourdust had brought for the occasion, of scratching on the metal back of the cupboard another half moon, which, added to the long line of similar half moons, made the seven hundred and thirty-seventh to be scored into the iron.-----It was not certain what significance the ceremony held, for unfortunately the records were lost, but the formality was no less sacred for being unintelligible."

Living in the shadow of the Castle a number of common people continued for many centuries an existence that was in its way as bound by routine convention as was that of the Gorm nobility. The less fortunate of these served as menials in the Castle but those with artistic talent became wood carvers. Each year these artists in wood carved what they hoped would be a masterpiece. These were judged by the current Lord of Gormenghast on the first morning of June. He selected the three best. That evening the discarded carvings were burned but to the three winners was thrown the traditional scroll of vellum, which permitted them to walk the battlements above their mud huts on the night of the full moon of every second month. The three prizewinning carvings were then housed with their predecessors of hundreds of years in the Room of the Bright Carvings. There they were dusted daily by the Curator, Rottcodd, who never left the room and for years at a time had no visitors, for no one cared to look at the carvings. A book was provided for visitors to write their names, but no one came to look and write.

If this novel contained nothing but the story of the woodcarvers and the dual fate of their carvings it would suffice to show that the author has a keen sense of the values of life. For this is life, not only in Gormenghast but all over the world. Man, striving for greatness, enters into competition with his fellow. Those who fail have their efforts destroyed; those who succeed walk in glory during every second full moon, proud that their work is honored by being placed in some Hall of Fame, not realizing that no one visits that hall and lingers over the beauty of their masterpiece. The novel ends in the Room of the Bright Carvings where it began, thus, as in The Worm Ouroboros, completing the circle, the symbol of immortality.

All the characters are prisoners in the web of fate woven by the Spider Destiny. Lord Sepulchrave, fettered by tradition and finding happiness only in his beautiful library; the Countess with her hundreds of birds and many white cats; Fushia, the seventeen year old daughter who lives in a world of dreams; Flay, the valet; Sourdust, the keeper of the archives; his one-legged son, Barquentine who waits for fifty-four years till he can become, through his father's death, the Librarian; the Ladies Cora and Clarice, twin sisters of Lord Sepulchrave, congenital hemiplegics; the chef, Swelter, who commands a small army of assistant cooks, forty apprentices and eighteen Gray Scrubbers; Dr. Prunesquallor and his virginal sister, Irma; the nurse, Mrs. Slagg, tiny and fluttering like a wren; Keda, the wet nurse; the unnamed Poet, slightly psychotic, as all true poets are.

All these are so clearly drawn that they stand out, not as characters in a book, but as living persons, not so far removed from those of our world, if only we would take the trouble to find them, or finding them, recognize them. Once meeting them in the book it is most difficult to forget them. This is another reason for recognizing the greatness of the novel. Peake has not only created a world which has more than a semblance of reality, but he has peopled it with men and women, who in spite of their peculiarities, seem very much alive. There is a biological correctness in the symbiosis of their existence; though they may not acutely realize it, they are all mutually interdependent irrespective of the sharp difference in the strata of their social order. The greatest could not continue the sacred daily program unless aided by the lowest. How would Lord Sepulchre spend the first day in June if there were, by the refusal of the carvers to compete, no carvings to judge. The very existence of all depended on each one doing his work as he always had done it, and provide for some one to carry on that work when he died.

"For every key position in the Castle there was the apprentice, either the son or the student, bound to secrecy. Centuries of experience had seen to it that there should be no gap in the steady stream of immemorial behavior."

Into this community of perfectly adjusted persons comes an iconoclast, Steerpike, a seventeen year old boy, one of the Chef's apprentices, who rebels against convention and dreams of becoming the vicarious ruler of the Castle. He proceeds in unconventional ways, including arson, to secure power. As his program is entirely new to the nobility they have no power to protect themselves and thus fall victims to his attack. At last the sonless Barquentine, realizing that someday he will die, selects him as the future Librarian and begins his training. Thus the ambitious lad starts towards becoming the actual ruler of the Castle and the future dictator of the daily life of the new Lord, Titus Groan. Here again we see pictured, not a realm of fantasy, but an accurate portrayal of actual monarchies, which growing old and bound by convention and tradition, are unable to face new conditions. They either die like the royal families of France or Russia, or, if living on, find the actual rulers of the land a Prime Minister instead of a king.

Peake has shown that he is preeminently an artist by illustrating the novel with beautiful pictures drawn with words instead of a brush. His description of the various rooms in the Castle--the Library, The Room of the Roots, the Hall of the Spiders, the Hall of the Bright Carvings, the Attic where Fusia fled for solitude and dreams and painted pictures on the wall--all these are so vividly described that it is evident the writer simply wrote of pictures the artist has first seen in his dreams. Back of these pictures lies an allegory and it is easy to translate them into personalities, none pleasant, but all capable of finding counterparts in human cosmos.

All is decaying. The roofs of the Castle leak, the windows are broken, the armor rusts. Mold and dust creep insidiously; ivy clings to the massive walls and some day will tear them to pieces. The rulers share in the slow dissolution of all things that cease to grow.

Meantime there is an undercurrent of revolt in the subconscious of the Dwellers in the Mud Village. The Bright Carvers will, for a while, continue to compete for the yearly prize but the young men resent the pitifully

inadequate charity of the Castle. Mrs. Slagg, when she informs them of the birth of Titus says:

"We are all very proud. All of us. The Castle is very very satisfied and when I tell you what has happened, then, you'll be as happy as well; oh yes, I am sure you will. Because I know you are dependent on the Castle. You have some food thrown down to you from the battlements every morning, don't you?"

A young man lifted his thick black eyebrows and spat."

Just that; and nothing more.

Other young men will join him. They will cease to carve wood and instead, will swarm over the battlements and carve the Groans with the belief that their life will be happier if they can live in the Castle instead of the Mud Huts. In this will find nothing but disappointing disillusion, for the Castle will be but a decaying empty shell filled with traditions they cannot share and remnants of the past they can never understand. In changing habitat they simply lose their own traditions and for centuries will be unhappy forming a new pattern of life.

Titus Groan simply retells the story of the futility of life. It follows the historic motif of men's effort to build new ladders to enable them to reach the stars. The effort is made but too late they realize the shortness of the ladders and the distance of the stars. Wiser men would have taken the wood and built better arbors for grapevines, but men have never been wise and even philosophers fail to understand the true values of life.

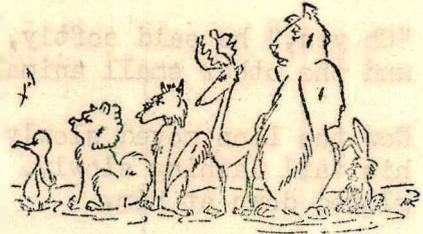
The tale ends with an implication of disaster to the House of Groan. The new Lord, Titus, when vested with authority, throws the ancient emblems of his sovereignty into the water and looks appealingly towards his foster-sister across the lake. Steerpike bivalently dreams of the equality of men and looks forward to the time when he will become the sole autocrat of the Castle. Fushia, dimly resentful of the chains which may force her to drift into a life of senile virginity, confusedly tries to make the Doctor realize that she is in love with him. The Countess continues to lover her birds and cats, broods over her vengeance and longs for the complete domination of her son. The Poet writes more poems, the Gardiner polishes more apples, the new Chef prepares meals, the Grey Scrubbers continue to wash the kitchen walls and Rottcodd daily dusts the Bright Carvings; but they all move alike phantasmogoria in a dream, without joy of life, without the stimulation that comes from the desire to attain new objectives.

Titus Groan achieves greatness because, within the confines of the Castle and the Mud Huts, it poses many of the important problems of all time. It is more than a narrative of the Groan family; it is a resume of all human behavior. To this allegory is added a weird beauty, a literary style that could be used only by an artist and presents a combination of values that is unusual in present day writing. Few will appreciate it; the masses will ignore it; but those who understand it will read and reread it; pleasuring at new found beauty and thrilling at discovering a hitherto unseen lovely picture or a philosophical truth far older than the Castle.

WANTED -- WEAPON MAKERS, SLAN, WORLD OF A, by A. E. Van Vogt. Would prefer mint copies, but will accept copies with reasonable amount of wear. If you have a spare copy or would like to dispose of yours-- please let me know how much. Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, 2116 Edsall Court, Alameda, California.

THE COUNCIL OF ANIMALS

BY WILLIAM JAMES



The last atomic war had swept the earth, and civilization lay battered and broken. The remnants of Mankind had degenerated to savages grubbing amid the ruins. There were horrible mutations, and between these and the groups of "normal" men, constant war was fought. And slowly the numbers on both sides were cut down.

But the War had had another effect. The terrible radiations that had blanketed the earth for years had also produced mutations in the animals, increasing their intelligence. And these, as their wisdom increased, banded together against the common enemy--Man. And like men, each group of animals had its leader.

The animals made fierce attacks upon men wherever they found them, and under this unrelenting war Mankind's numbers were swiftly decimated. Men fled to the forests, and here in the terrifying environment so familiar to the animals, the last man died.

And with the final destruction of their great enemy, the leaders of the animals gathered together in council in a clearing in the jungle to discuss their future. For they did not wish to make the same mistakes Man had made, that had led to such a violent destruction. Now that they had fought together with a single purpose, could they not also live together in peace?

This seemed to them good, and the discussion turned to the question of government.

"I think," said the Marmoset, "we should have a system whereby our leaders would be chosen by the votes of all of us. For then everyone would have a voice, and of necessity the best would be chosen."

There was much cheering from the smaller creatures at this, with only a few dissenting voices. The larger animals were silent.

Then the Gorilla rose to his full nine feet of shaggy height and stood before the group, glaring at them from his savage little eyes. "That suggestion is foolish," he roared. "Allowing the ignorant masses to vote would mean the election of stupid and rapacious creatures to office. The government would be a shambles. Is it not obvious to all of you that only the wisest one among us should govern?"

"Oh yes," they all agreed.

"But how are we to decide who is wisest?" the Marmoset asked timidly.

The Gorilla glared down at the tiny creature. "Is it not apparent that I am the wisest of the animals?" he roared.

"Oh yes," he said softly, bowing his head before the might of the Gorilla; and the other small animals echoed, "Oh yes."

Now the Lion moved slowly into the clear space before the other animals, his tail lashing slowly. He glared up at the Gorilla and the Gorilla glared down at him.

"Who told you that you were wisest?" growled the Lion.

"I know I am the wisest," returned the Gorilla, glowering.

"But," said the Lion, "I know that I am the wisest one. Did not Man name me the King of Beasts?"

"You are a fool!" shouted the Gorilla, and the Lion suddenly launched himself at the other's throat!

The fight was terrible to see. Fur flew and gore puddled the clearing. The combatants lurched back and forth, tearing and rending. Suddenly it was all over as the Lion's teeth met in the Gorilla's throat. He turned from his fallen adversary, tail lashing in anger, and glared.

"Well? Am I not the wisest one?"

"Yes, yes; oh yes!" said the smaller animals, groveling terrified in the dirt before him.

But now the Elephant stepped forward, uncoiling his long trunk. "You," said he, "are even as the Gorilla said, a fool. For it should be apparent to all that I am the wisest of all the animals."

And with that he wrapped his trunk about the Lion and bashed his brains out against a convenient tree.

"You are the wise one!" exclaimed the animals, groveling.

"Nay!" cried a small voice suddenly. "I am the wise one, and I shall rule!"

All the animals looked up at this, and the Elephant turned, searching for the one that had spoken. At first he could not see him. Which was not strange, for he was searching for another mightier than he. Then, looking down, he saw him; a small black animal marked with white.

"You!" said the Elephant in astonishment. And then he trumpeted his anger and was about to step forward and crush the tiny creature, when it turned and raised its tail.

"I am the wisest!"

The Elephant screamed and backed away, dropping to his knees. "You are the wise one!" he said in terror.
(continued on page 15)

The Last Fan

BY DAVE MASON

Little Joe Phanzcek woke early. It was the day of the great convention, in Wortlesburg. Little Joe had been up half the night, getting ready, mimeographing copies of VOMIT, the fanmag he ran. But Little Joe rose at six, for he could not sleep. He had never been to a fan convention before and he was dreadfully excited. Moreover, he was to be the Director of the whole convention. People might say Little Joe was subnormal--only his mother knew better. She called him an idiot. But fandom had chosen him. He would do his duty like a fan.

By nine o'clock little Joe shambled down the main street of Wortlesburg, seeking for the intersection of Fertilizer Road. He found it, and picking his way carefully among the odorous heaps, in the half-darkness of the alley, made his way to a cobwebby door labeled:

110 $\frac{1}{2}$
The Wortlesburg Stf Ass'n,
Affl. with SFL
Members Only. Meeting Thurs.

The sign was coated with dust, on which a finger had marked "Convention."

The door creaked open, and an old, old face peered out. It wore a ghastly leer of welcome.

"Did you--heh, heh--bring a bottle?"

Silently little Joe produced a bottle. He felt dimly that something was wrong. These were not the pillared halls, the gay scenes he had read of.

He entered, and saw the room. Dimly lit by a single candle, stuck in its grease on the neck of a long empty bottle of mimeo ink. A battered mimeo leaning drunkenly in a corner, with the whiskers of the resident rat visible within.

Seated on piles of crumbled decay that had once been magazines were three people, two men and a woman. All three were incredibly aged, their faces lined with the marks of a century or more of unbelievable dissipation. Yet in the gruesome ruins were the faces of fans he had seen in the old photographs, pictures taken eighty years before--Joe Kennedy, Sam Moskowitz, and the third, the Mata Harai for fandom, Ricky Slavin. As the fourth living ruin, his guide, deposited the bottle of cheap gin he had been told to bring in their midst, they grasped at it, slavering, swallowing huge gollops that seemed to bring the roses back to their leathery cheeks momentarily.

The guide, the most ancient of the lot, picked a flea from the carrot colored scanty hair that covered his wrinkled skull. He cracked and ate it, and cleared his throat.

"Fellow fans," and with a leer at Little Joe, "Representatives of allied fandom, as your chairman, I will open the eighty-sixth World Convention with a few (hic!) obscene remarks, covering the history of fandom up to this year of 2028.

"As you see, we are fewer in numbers this year than ever before, but we will not give up. In the past year..." he giggled ghastlily. "two of our members have been incarcerated, one for alcoholism and one for in-

(continued on page 16)

TWO POEMS by Jack Cordes

ON THE BRISTOL ROAD

It was on the long, weary road to Bristol,
That I sought shelter from the biting cold.
At a small and friendly wayside inn
I purchased my lodging with a bit of gold.

The fire was large and cheerfully warm;
Outside shrilled the lonely gale.
My only companion was an old, old man;
I bade him speak and this was his tale.

Life is a thing of beauty and peace;
Kindness and honor are things to cherish.
All Mankind should always remember
That love and faith will never perish.

He stood in the doorway, prepared to leave;
But there was something else--one thing more.
"Old man! What is your name?" I said.
"Illusion," he whispered, and closed the door.

THE STREAM

I was footsore and very weary indeed,
And Bristol was still many leagues away;
So I paused to rest by a deep, dark stream
As the twilight ended the scorching day.

Shadows formed in the sluggish depths
And the surface became a dark, dark shroud.
I feared to see the secret of the stream;
Then--the pale moon loered from behind a cloud.

My dyes were filled with dread and fear
At the things the moonlight revealed--
Creatures that were never meant to be seen;
Things that should forever be concealed.

I leaped to my feet and fled madly away
To where the wind was clean and free.
The secret of the stream was madness itself;
A secret that can not--must not be.

MAN'S BEST FRIEND (continued from page 6)

Buff's lunge and was on him before he could turn. But Buff was not so easily defeated. He rolled over on his back and pushed the wolf away with his feet. They both were at each other again. Buff fighting a losing battle; but valiantly. The wolf backed at last, his hind feet tearing the skin on Buff's man. With renewed ferociousness, Buff tore at the wolf. The wolf was knocked flat on his back. He tried to push Buff away, but the raging dog dodge and got a grip on the wolf's neck. Five seconds later the wolf was dead, its life's blood coming from its neck.

Buff wasn't looking at his defeated foe, he was licking his man's wounds. His mind was still racing; his heart still beating fast; his eyes still frantic. The man's right arm was half chewed off, there were cuts over his right eye and he was still looking at the sky. Buff got a hold on his collar, and dragged him away. He soon found out the fight was telling on him. He was tired. He ached all over. He layed the man down and fell beside him, panting. He woke up at dusk.

When he reached the ruins of the city, it was different to him. It seemed as if the men had never died, that he could trot to the building in which they had worked the last few days, and find the men there, waiting for him. As he stood there, he was almost compelled to run to the building to his man. But his man was dead beside him. Buff dragged his man to the building.

He looked up, shook his head, and looked again. There was Pep. Nothing wrong with that. It was the man standing behind Pep he was looking at. The man raced for Buff, then saw the man on the ground beside Buff. He bent down and examined him. The man took him in to the building and placed him on a table. Then he took some queer-looking tools, knives, and things. And went to work. Pep and Buff watched awhile, then went outside.

Outside they layed down side by side, content that they had done their work. Inside, Pep's man whistled, glad to be alive. Pep looked at Buff. Buff looked at Pep. They listened to the man, and they were happy.

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THE COUNCIL OF ANIMALS (continued from page 11)

"You are the wise one! You shall rule!" cried the other animals, backing away and groveling in the dirt.

"Very well," said the small one, turning to them. "Now we have the world to win--from those who have not gained with us in intelligence. Come--follow me for the greater glory of me and our empire-to-be!"

And the animals moved off on the road to conquest, following their glorious-and odorous-leader, the Skunk.

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SUCH IS FAME DEPARTMENT::: At a recent meeting of the Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society (Berkeley, Calif.) the following remark was overheard by your editor and another visitor: "Ackerman? Who's he?"

