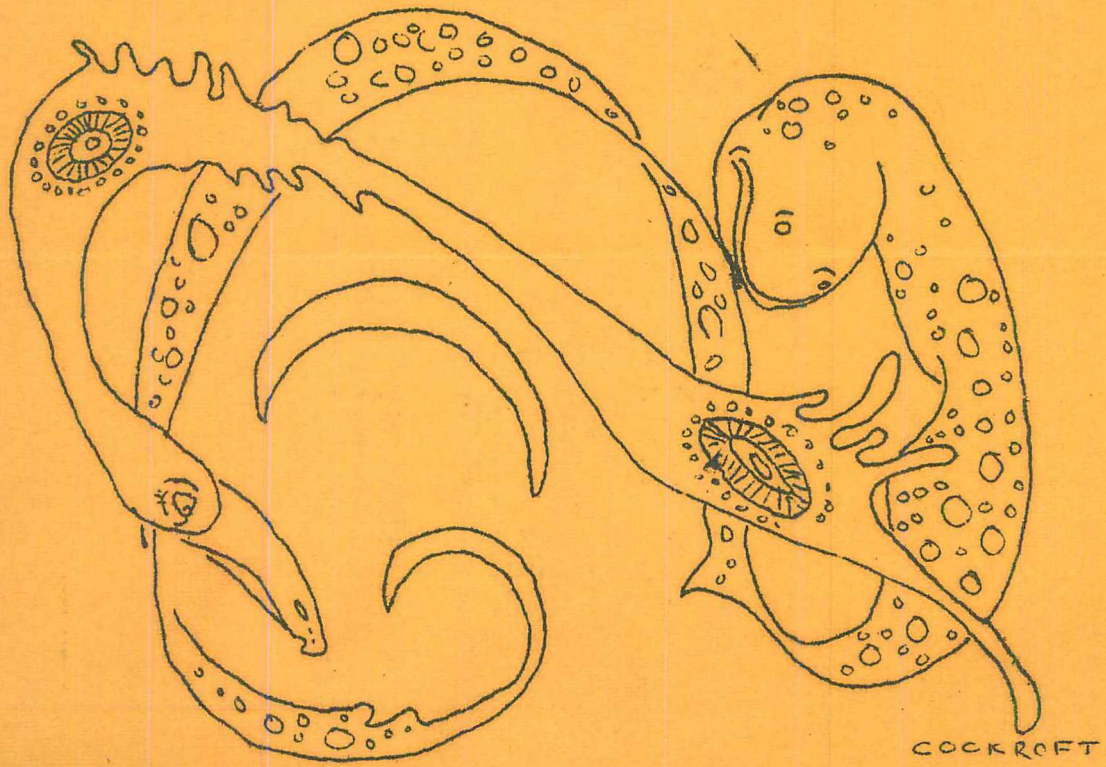
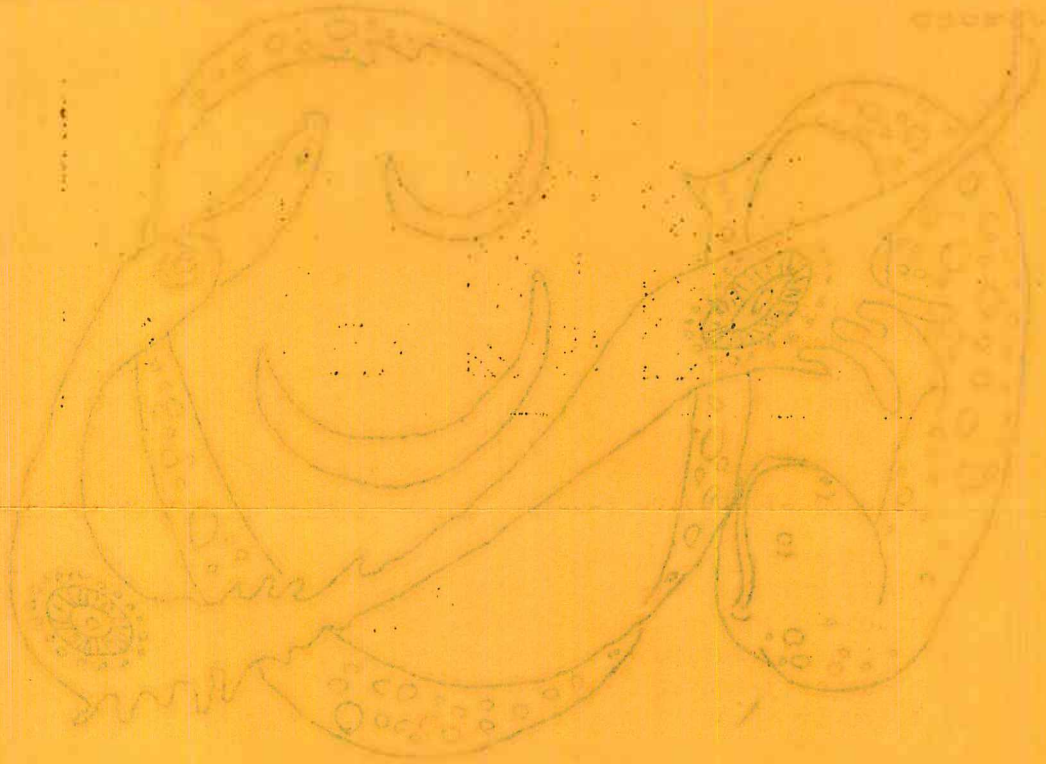
LEER

NUMBER TWO
OCTOBER '50





TEK

October 20
Number 100

Ray Bradbury—Non-Scientist

A. AARON AARDVARK

The six words of the next paragraph will constitute deliberate commission of heresy, barratry, treason and the misprision thereof, sacrilege, aggravated assault (we will omit the battery because the character in question wouldn't know how to hook up a battery) and sundry high crimes and misdomeanors. Here goes:

R a y Bradbury should hire a collaborator.

There! I've said it and I ain't sorry yet. And if a bomb arrives in my mail, I shall at least have the faint satisfaction of knowing, as it plasters the bloody shreds of what used to be me against the walls, that Bradbury didn't build the bomb himself. He obviously doesn't have the technical savvy.

-o-

Ray Bradbury, in posing as a science-fiction writer, is committing a fraud and operating under false pretenses. In all his work of recent years (certainly I read Bradbury; everybody reads Bradbury, albeit sometimes with twinges of nausea) there is not a single genuine science-fiction story. He is perpetrating sheer fantasy, and through a tour de force of perverted genius conning it off on editors and the public as the real McCoy.

For genuine science-fiction, some science is essential. And the internal evidence of Bradbury's work shows incontrovertibly that the man is a mechanical moron, an engineering imbecile and an astronomical ignoramus; who knows no practical physics; whose chemistry is a stench and an abomination; and whose rudimentary notions of electronics are badly short-circuited.

The guy just ain't no scientist of no sort nohow, and this fact he is unable to hide under a flow of pretty words even though he is unquestionably a genius of the Sare-

yan class.

Furthermore, because he is a fast-working genius whose tremendous sometimes makes me suspect him of being a factory rather than an individual, he apparently never bothers to go back and catch up on the technical boners and inconsistencies. He just doesn't seem to give a damn.

When reading a Bradbury yarn, one is liable to encounter a character who "gazes through the thin, clear air at the far-off horizon of Mars." The details seem to indicate that a Martian horizon is more distant than a n Earth horizon. Bradbury has evidently never bothered to look up the diamoter of Mars and make a few line-of-sight calculations. And his Earthmen on M a r s -- likewise without t h e slightest attempt at consistency and strictly according to Bradbury mood of the moment -- either walk and carry burdens as they would on Earth, or go about jumping like jet-propelled kangaroos. What's he got there? Variable gravity?

These bloopers, for the technically trained reader, have an emotional effect disconcertingly like finding half a worm in a partly eaten apple. They spoil one's taste for the rest.

This would not be such a sad befouling of the fair name o f science-fiction if Bradbury were merely a low-grade hack. Then he could be ignored. But that man--although like Saroyan he knows only one plot and has only one set of characters, all of whom resemble each other and Bradbury--can spin his yarn very entertainingly. Like Saroyan, he can set up a terrific illusion of "humanness" and "poignancy."

And he can sell that same story over and over and over again, and to all sorts of markets. His agent must be something of a hypnotist; perhaps a Martian.

So persons just becoming acquainted with the field are liable to accept Bradbury as a genuine science-fiction author. A mistake to be sure! and there is a grave

peril that innocent young writers will take a look at Bradbury's sales record, decide they too want fishtail Cadillacs and private swimming pools, and try to follow the same pattern.

That would be tragic. There is room for one Bradbury, even tho his ideas of "science" have a mephitic reek. But one Bradbury is enough; a dozen would be as intolerable as a dozen Shavers.

Of course Bradbury could take a few correspondence courses in basic sciences. But he won't, because he's a genius.

He should therefore have a collaborator. Or maybe a keeper. This individual would peer over his shoulder as he pounds his typewriter or (being a genius) scratches away with a quill from a wild goose. Whenever a scientific and/or technical inaccuracy appeared, it would be the keeper's duty to step in with a firm "Nyah" before the rotten egg hatched into print.

But even such a collaborator/keeper wouldn't be able to make a technically accurate science-fiction writer out of Bradbury, even though he could eliminate the more obvious blunders. Bradbury just doesn't have a scientific mind.

John W. Campbell, Jr. -- who, although he isn't God, has some fairly sound ideas about science-fiction -- maintains that the basis of science-fiction is the projection of current trends and developments into the future.

But Bradbury goes blithely ahead with his fantasties, paying not attention to current trends and by ignoring certain inherently important factors creating unrealistic and far-fetched situations. He seems to have no understanding whatsover of the tremendous mass of detail work involved in rigging the complex mechanisms he so casually dreams up, no conception of the man-hours and economics involved.

Thus he habitually has unskilled characters manage, despite shoestring economic and total lack of technical training, to invent

and build extremely complex and delicate mechanisms. In one such story, believe it or not, he actually had a junk dealer power such a complex gizmo with half a dozen old automobile engines. Whew! Also Phew!

His humans on Mars, a peculiar and illogical breed, seem to spend at least 36 hours a day setting up extremely complicated and utterly pointless electronic circuits--merely to fulfill some whim. They aren't balanced humans at all, but monomaniacal psychopaths.

And these circuits last and last across the years, never breaking down, always ready to function despite their necessarily delicate adjustments. He is ignorant of, or has deliberately ignored, the basic engineering formulae for probability of malfunction, circuit entropy and deterioration of materials, to name only a few.

To any technician who has battled the inherent instabilities of any peice of complex electronic gadgeteering, Bradbury's machines are positively infuriating.

His people are likewise infuriating, because they frequently do not fit the situations in which he places them. In the much-reprinted MARS IS HEAVEN, for instance, a very expensive spaceship is turned over to a bunch of technical incompetents and psychological misfits with unconscionably low emotional stability factors. The backers of that flight seem to have exercised less selectivity in choice of personnel than the average business firm uses in hiring typists and janitors.

But I'll keep on reading everything Bradbury publishes. There's a certain perverse fascination to the various versions of his one story, and besides I agree wholeheartedly with his vehement distaste for civilization circa 1950.

And furthermore, I'm curious to see what outlandishly unscientific notion he manages to perpetrate next.

LEERINGS

Well, about a year ago, when I first gave you LEER, I said the next issue would come from a different address than California. At that time I also said I would be as surprised as you if there were another issue, but at the last moment, I've decided to remain in FAPA for another year at least, so here is my contribution to the post-mailings. I don't know what mailing this will tie in, as I'm so far away from the coast and the mailer, I am not sure what mailing is on the way. Frankly, this issue of LEER is merely to satisfy the activity clause in the constitution, and outside of the article on Bradbury, contains nothing that might be of interest to you. The article by Aardvark, will also appear in the forthcoming issue of my subzine, PEON, and is one in a series of columns by this author. The name of course is a fictious one, but the author is well known on the west coast. It took some fast talking to get him to do the series, but it has proved to be the most popular feature of PEON, judging by the letters I've received since beginning the series....What follows on the remaining pages is nothing more than a series of thought items which I hope will answer some of the questions I've received in the mail since moving out here. If you're not interested in reading purely personal stuff, stop here!

This life in Hawaii is not very conductive to creative work, I can assure you. At least it is not to me. I used to be able to sit down and pound out on the typewriter reams and reams of copy for the AAPA when I was a member of that fine organization. That was before the wife and I were moved to California by the navy. Living is carefree enough in the golden state, and after four and a half years of that, I slowed down to a crawl. There is just too much opportunity to lay around and soak up the beautiful sunshine out here. I used to laugh at the jokes on the radio about California sunshine, but the sunshine here in Hawaii is no joke---it's real. Who wants to sit around and pound a typewriter when he can drive about five miles in any direction (less if you live in downtown Honolulu) and go swimming or just loaf around the beach. If it weren't for my wife (who certainly is NO fan) I don't believe the last two issues of PEON would have been out--and likewise for this issue of LEER.

Millions of words of copy have been written by advertising agencies about the beauties of Hawaii. You've all heard Hawaii's adopted son, Arthur Godfrey, rave about the climate, the scenery, the friendliness of the people here---well, advertising propaganda or not, it's the gospel truth. I don't believe that you can find anywhere such a mixture of races and nationalities living side by side and in harmony as you can out here. The U. S. has been called the melting pot of nationalities--this group of islands is the perfect example of that saying. The people of Hawaii at this time are hoping for statehood. They deserve it! In spite of certain senators in our deah Congress, the Hawaiian Islands should be the 49th state of the Union. Nothing could prove more to the rest of the world that we are a democracy than admitting Hawaii to

statehood in this present congress session.

There are a few aspects to living out here that make you realize you are a few thousand miles from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc...All the radio prgrams, with one or two exceptions, are from two to three weeks behind those in the states, being transcribed and flown out here. It's not so bad now, but during the war when shipping space was scarce, it was murder. I can remember hearing a May Day program on Christmas Day. We get the "Hit Parade" by direct shortwave and then re-broadcast over the local NBC station, KGU. Quite a few of the programs heard out here have different sponsors, and some of the old timers heard in the states are not heard out here at all, the sponsors evidentally believing there would be no sales for their products on the islands....The comics (and don't tell me you don't read them) on the weekly pages are usually up to date with those on the mainland, but the Sunday comics are from two to three weeks behind. Makes for confusion when the Sunday comics tie in with the weekly strips, such as "Steve Canyon", etc. The two papers here are rather mixed up in their comic sections, also. One will carry the weekly strip and the other will carry the Sunday comic of the same strip!.....Also confusing to the newcomer is the mixture of Hawaiian and English words in everyone's language. Ask a policeman the direction to get to a certain place, and he's more likely to tell you to go three blocks ewa, one block mauka. Translated, that means you go three blocks in the opposite direction from Diamond Head, and one block towards the mountains. Once you get onto it, it's really simple! Or so it says here! Everyone mixes in common Hawaiian words with their sentences, and after you've been here only a short while, you begin to understand what they mean, and in fact, start doing the same thing yourself! So, if in future LEER's, you see a few Hawaiian words, don't be too surprised!

Actually, the one and only drawback I can see in living out here to such a person as myself is the distance from fan activities in the states. There are a few "fans" here on the island of Oahu--Roy Cummings of the Star-Bulletin, and Shirley Rubin, recently of Los Angeles. Of course, there's Mike Fern over on the garden isle, Kauai, who may be remembered by some of you west coast fans, as he lived in L.A. for about a year and a half recently. Another fan, Eric Holmes, returns soon from Stanford University. Only one pro-author lives out here that we know of, Erik Fennel, who resides up at Mokuleia, about an hour's drive from Honolulu. But I miss being able to call up somebody and talking over the latest news of what's going on in the fan world. Roy and Shirley and I do manage to keep up with most of the activities, but usually our news is cold when we get it. We're also handicapped by the slowness of magazines arriving out here---those that do. Some of the new ones we never see. We've heard about a new quarterly, "Fantasy Fiction" or something like that, but never have been able to see a copy of it as yet. Books are practically impossible to obtain downtown, so I've been ordering them direct from the publishers for those out here that want them. Fanzines are about our only direct link with the states, and if it were not for Tucker's News-Letter and Taurasi's Fantasy Times, we would be in the dark about new pocket books and magazines. Dianetics is going strong out here, however, especially with the return of Steve Lee, who attended the foundation at Elizabeth and is a certificated auditor. About 100-150 people are taking instruction from him in Honolulu alone, and there are groups all over the chain of islands who have started "auditing" each other. So far, I've been too busy with work for the squadron and off-duty avocations to get too deeply into it myself. Speaking of Dianetics, it was reported that one bookstore in Honolulu was refusing to sell the book to anyone but a doctor at the first!

LEERINGS HERE AND THERE:::I was quite interested in reading Artist Rotsler's remarks about other fan artists a few months back in a FAPA mailing. Admitted, he is a good artist, but not the best. What he seems to forget that other artists may not have had the education in art that he says he has, and have to have practice just like he had to have. No better example of needing practice is shown that the cover he drew for the National Fantasy Fan for August 1948.....How would you get rid of a Poltergeist who had been haunting a young girl for years? Erik Fennel has written a fast-moving short story about this and how the girl's lover rids her of the ghost. The story appears in the current PEON, and I'll be most happy to send you a copy just for the asking. Other authors featured in this issue are E. Hoffman Price, Ed Ludwig, Roy Cummings, and others. Ask and you shall receive.....If any of you FAPA members are lucky enough to come to Hawaii (perhaps as guests of Uncle Sam) be sure to look us up. We live about five miles outside of Honolulu, right outside the main gate at Pearl Harbor. The telephone number at the house is Honolulu 403-702. At the office, Monday through Friday between 8 and 4, you can reach me at Pearl Harbor 64143 or 62144. We'd be more than happy to have you out for a visit.....Congratulations to Charles Burbee and Fran Laney for guest-editing Rapp's SPACEWARP. An excellent issue of a usual excellent fanzine. Wonder how guest-editing would work out should the idea spread to the pro-zines. I could just see Campbell at the head of AMAZING; Palmer editing THRILLING WONDER; Merwin at the controls of ASTOUNDING for one issue. Wouldn't those be collectors items, though! Or would the magazines survive? Speaking of Campbell, understand he's leaving ASTOUNDING come November to work entirely with the Dianetics Foundation. Also hear that Donna Stuart will be Mrs. George Smith one of these days. At least she keeps science-fiction in the family.....Aloha for the time being...See you soon.

AND THE CULPRIT FOR LEER—

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