

LETHE



NO. 4

Table of Contents

FICTION:

All Work and No Clay	by Tigrina	page 2
A Superstitious Man	Drake Errol	page 6
Diary of Omega	Walt Leibscher	page 12

POEM:

The Darkening Path---"an appreciation of Robert Browning's "Childe Roland"---Redd Boggs----	page 15
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EDITORIAL

It is odd indeed when you (the "you" being me, or am I being confusing?) offer a fanzine to any interested reader for nothing but a letter of comment, or even a postcard of comment, and receive so few answers. Perhaps the contents aren't up to the standards of the professional science-fiction magazines, but I have tried to obtain interesting material for Lethe, I might have failed. The contents of this issue are with one exception, fiction, and is in the way of an experiment to see if that type of fanzine can meet with a small measure of success.

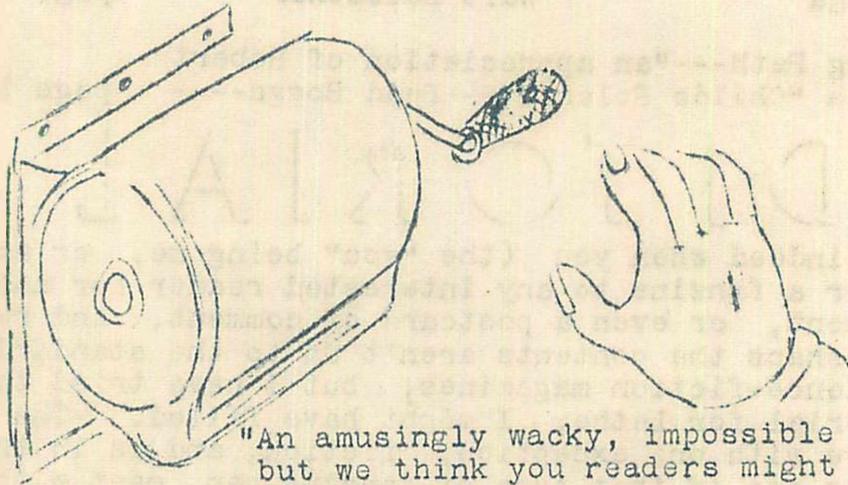
Lethe No.5 will cost anyone who wants it, one nickel. That is of course all others with whom I do not trade fan-mags with, or give Lethes gratis for personal reasons. All contributors will also get a copy of the issue in which their effort appears.

Each issue costs me over one dollar in stamps alone. The ink, paper, and stencils come to several dollars, depending upon the number of different colored illustrations, headings, etcetera, etcetera and the number of copies mimeographed. I was willing to stand the entire expense, but I have come to the conclusion that there is no sense of personal satisfaction in sending out free copies to people who do not appreciate all the effort that goes into each issue, along with each contributors trouble in writing the particular piece, printed therein. So...if you are at all interested in Lethe I don't think a lousy nickel is going to force anyone into bankruptcy, and when that nickel arrives I will know that someone is interested in Lethe and strive for better results.

* * * * *
 Lethe is published whenever he feels like it by Jack Riggs, 1620 Chestnut St. Berkeley-2-Calif. Price from next issue on will be one fat, chubby little nickel. To be honest, Lethe comes out sometimes two months apart, sometimes four, but never more. Any contributions of material will be gratefully received and always acknowledged.
 * * * * *

All Work and No Clay

by Tigrina
(With apologies to Ray Bradbury)



"An amusingly wacky, impossible tale;
but we think you readers might enjoy it."

It was a sad day when Miss Snerg decided to incorporate ceramics into the grammar school fifth grade curriculum. But drastic action was essential.

"After all," she remarked to Professor Snadbury, "if they immerse their sticky little paws into wet clay, it will keep the little b---s* from throwing spitballs."

It was inevitable, of course, that the fifth grade should sponsor an inter-class contest for the best young sculptor in the group. The good American spirit of competition was ever being fostered within the school what with baseball teams, spelling bees (the bees were very smart in this district), memory tests and taffy pulls but especially now since attendance in the class was falling off at an alarming rate for some unexplainable reason, Miss Snerg decided a sculpting contest would now be in order.

Mounds and mounds of slimy wet clay were imported into the classroom. Mortimer Jones lost two fingers in it while trying to fashion a jet-propelled kiddie car. Mary Jane Jukes got some twisted into her pigtailed, and had to have them cut off (which proved disastrous for her pigs). Timothy Rutherford Heaslip Fotheringay the Fourth mistook the clay for chewing gum, and lost his two front teeth, which turned up later in a miniature piano that little Ima June Bugge was laboriously shaping with her thirteen pudgy little fingers. (Ima June's mother was frightened by a centipede, but fortunately this happened only an hour or so before the birth of Ima June.

The potential sculptors sculpted laboriously for several weeks, but each day Miss Snerg would notice that more and more children were absent from her classroom. A carefully conducted poll showed the children liked their ceramic instruction, so this could not be the reason for their staying away. After a few days, some of the

*Miss Snerg really meant to refer to her diminutive charges as brats but she was very ladylike and watched her language carefully, so the blanked out word.

parents became rather anxious as to the whereabouts of their various offspring. Miss Snerg decided to hire a detective to investigate the matter of the missing children, so she called the firm of Tracy, Tracy, Tracy, and O'Boo.

Since the Messrs. Tracy were busy working on the notorious case of Goiter Gertie's Gargantuan Garter (Goiter Gertie, cute goil had a habit of strangling people with it, I understand), they sent their junior partner, Mr. O'Boo.

"Just call me Peek," said this young man affably, as he greeted Miss Snerg with a casual kiss on the hand, and then continued all the way up her arm--clear up to her vaccination mark.

Mr. O'Boo, or Peek, as we will refer to him henceforth in this story, since he is a young man, and I'm sure won't mind being called by his first name, looked very carefully through the huge mounds of clay for the missing children, but alas, to no avail. With the exception of two slingshots, a copy of "Memoirs of Hecate County", and six wads of bubble gum, nothing noteworthy was located in the mass of malleable mire.

Peek puckered his puss in perplexity. "I must say this case beats me," he remarked, and with that astounding observation, he began searching all the desks in the classroom. Outside of a few textbooks, rotting oranges, bats (both baseball and winged variety), lunch pails and other accoutrements of school children, nothing pertinent to the case was found.

It was while going through the desk of little Sylvester Bedlington that Miss Snerg found the clay dolls, beautiful little miniatures of the school children.

"Oh look, Peek," she enthused, sounding like a magazine commercial on the radio, "wasn't it just too darling of Sylvester to do these miniatures of his little schoolmates? Why, they're perfect replicas, even to the chocolate on Milly Macc's mouth and the wax behind Ernie Dipplekoos' ears. I do believe that Sylvester will win the first prize."

Peek studied the little statuettes most assiduously, and then ventured his opinion on the matter. "I do believe you are right, Matilda," quoth he.

It was the day of awarding the prize to the child adjudged the most talented sculptor. The classroom would have been in a state of excitement had it not been for two things. Firstly, it was located in the state of Kansas, and secondly, there were only two people there to get excited---Miss Snerg and the little ceramic genius, Sylvester Bedlington. And since Miss Snerg did not find ten-year-old Sylvester very exciting, she decided to remain the usual calm self.

"Well, young man, I suppose that you know you are to win the prize for being the best sculptor in the class?" Miss Snerg beamed all work and no clay

down at Sylvester. "And," she continued, "even had you not been the only one left in the class, you still would have won first prize, for your miniature statues are so lifelike, so real....."

"I know." replied Sylvester. "Now I have replicas of all my little school friends. I only need one more to complete my collection."

"Oh, but you couldn't possibly sculpture a likeness of yourself Sylvester," cooed Miss Snerg.

Sylvester smiled knowingly. "Miss Snerg", her looked at her helplessly, "would you please come over here and help me sharpen this pencil?"

Miss Snerg obligingly complied, and approached the large pencil sharpener. There was a sound of a scream, which was cut off suddenly, to be replaced by the grinding noise of the school pencil sharpener.....

When Peek O'Boo came by to call for Miss Snerg after school (they were keeping kompanie quite studiously now) and incidentally.. congratulate little Sylvester on his fine promise as one of the world's great sculptors in years to come, he found only the little boy in the goom.

"Where's Miss Snerg?" he asked.

Sylvester proudly held up a small clay statue of the teacher. The young genius could contain himself no longer. He had to tell someone of his prowess. "Sit down," he imperiously motioned the amazed detective to a desk. "You've been wondering about the disappearance of my playmates here at school. I have them all here," Sylvester indicated his little group of figures. "And now I have Miss Snerg too!" he added triumphantly.

Peek O'Boo regarded Sylvester somewhat suspiciously.. "What do you mean by that statement?"

"See this pencil sharpener?" Sylvester indicated the huge contraption affixed on the wall nearby. "Ever notice how a nice new pencil eventually gets shaved down to half or even a third of its size? Well, one by one I just called my schoolmates up here and/... A coating of clay keeps them well preserved."

Peek didn't wait for the little monster to finish his story the import was too horrible. He fell over in a dead faint. The unfortunate detective never did recover his sanity. Notice, sometime, when you pass by Hollyvine and Wood Streets that the sign of the special investigator's office just reads "Tracy, Tracy, and Tracy" now.

Sylvester? Oh, he just gathered up his clay figures and went home. No use going to school if there was no body there to teach.

With juvenile cunning, Sylvester cleverly incorporated his

statues with the rest of his toys, and they were never discovered. Thus, the mystery of the disappearing pupils and their teacher remained forever unsolved in the annals of crime. And Sylvester Bedlington continued his merry little career in the unsuspecting world.

Say....ever notice those cute ceramic figures in so many of the shops nowadays? It's funny how sometimes they'll remind you of the guy that used to usher in the theatre back home, the waitress in the restaurant across the street, or a classmate you knew back in your college days.....

end

The Unknown Index

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NOTICE!

Included in this issue, probably serving as a back cover is a sample of the Unknown Index.

Superstitious Man

A

by Drake Errol

"Best piece of fan fiction we've seen for a long time."

Dinsher seated himself resoundingly upon the wilting library chair, permitting his flabby and abnormally round body to flow over that poor straining piece of furniture.

He heaved a long and heavy sigh and relaxed. And where better a place for a man to relax than in his own library? Libraries are made for relaxing within, whether you read or not. There is something unaccountably comfortable about being surrounded by shelf upon shelf of books. The flowing lines of the words seem to transport themselves to you in some way, and you leisurely contemplate that about you, their bound backs, staring Buddah-like from the near inaccessible heights of the dusty cases, are the thoughts of a planet; the truest and noblest work of mankind--the setting down of these thoughts for future generations to study and gain thereby the knowledge so-far gathered.

But in Dinsher's repository of knowledge, the leisure seekers would find little relaxation if they depended upon the thoughts bound within the volumes that walled them in, to lull them to the degree of rest that they desired. The thoughts contained in written form in Dinsher's library would be downright alarming, if not frightening to any complacent individual rash enough to investigate any of the books on the shelves.

Dinsher collected for his shelves the many little known volume and the obscure, providing that all foregathered wisdom of the supernatural. He had studied them so avidly that he had become an expert in the subject of the mysterious and often horrible dictu. But his mind went a little further, for he believed so eagerly--so forcefully in his chosen field, that he had driven himself a little insane. If he could not see an honest striving spook, he would imagine one. Often times, upon hearing some poor mongrel pup baying at the moon, he would sallie forth from the house out into the clammy New England countryside, a revolver loaded with silver bullets clutched in his hand. Hours later he would return panting triumphantly that he had ridded the world of another "dastardly werewolf..". The next day a raggedy hound would be found dead, nearby.

In his rambling gloomy mansion he would sit enjoying every minute of his superstition--imagining all the countless phantoms that must be slinking about him at that very moment. At times he would frighten the corps of servants half out of their wits with his mysterious chanting rites, filling and echoing throughout the manor-house.

At this present moment he sat waiting for his carriage to re-

turn with a visitor; a chap he had met upon a train, and who was very interested in the lore of the occult. When Dinsher had mentioned his library he could see the man, Vanning by name, fairly glow with an intense desire to view it. So he had invited the gentleman up for a visit of meditation upon the supernatural.

He closed his eyes, running over in his mind some ancient rite, to pass the time. His lips began the intonation and he shuddered with glee as he heard the phrases again.

"Vampire, vampire of the night.
Where goest thou on they batlike flight?
to the glen?
To the moor?

Seeking some maiden who's blood's allure
Thou dost....."

Suddenly he stopped. His carriage had drawn to a clattering stop outside while the horses whinnied, glad to return to the warmth of the barn. With a supreme effort he left the chair to its sagging relief and hurried, as a fat man might, to the hallway.

"Welcome!" he boomed, as his visitor stepped forth to greet him. "Come in, come in. You appear in need of some brandy. Charles!" he addressed a servant. "Some brandy. Come, Vanning. Into the library. My men shall put your things in your room."

"I shall be glad to accept your brandy." answered his visitor. "Your coastal air is new to my lungs, and I'm afraid its chill has stolen into me."

Time had passed. The visitor had made himself at home, and they had retired again to the library to chat. They had dined, and, now by a single oil lamp and a roaring fire, dancing like Satan's furies in the fireplace, the two sat over the remains of the meal; Vanning reading, Dinsher brooding.

Dinsher's thoughts were strange for an amiable host's. His face was drawn up piggishly in concentration. His tiny eyes stared across at his unseeing visitor. What could be wrong? Dinsher's thoughts ran on: "Who is this man really? He certainly does not appear as I remember him. On th rolling train he seemed thin; yes! But not emaciatedly so, as is this chap. And his face--so long and sharp. The thick mass of black hair--and his teeth--sharp as an African savage's. And his face is so pale--but the lips are red--blood red. No, he appears to have altered since I met him first. And yet how could he be someone else? He..."

Vanning had glanced up, meeting Dinsher's gaze squarely. Dinsher rapidly dropped his eyes to the licking flames within the fireplace. God!--he thought--those magnetic eyes!

"I especially like this book," said Vanning simply.

Dinsher raised his eyes again to stare with beginning comprehension at the volume in Vanning's hand.

"Yes," Vanning went on, "The subject of Vampirism has always intrigued me. Do you believe that there are certain individuals who through their craving for human blood, can change themselves into bats, wolves, and so on?"

The blood thickened in Dinsher's throat preventing an immediate answer. He blanched, and shook for an instant like suddenly chilled by an icy wind. Further thoughts ran swiftly through his mind. Vampire! What else? Those teeth, red lips--and those unholy eyes that bored like steaming brand-irons into one's senses. A Vampire! He had invited a vampire into his own home!

And strangely his fright turned suddenly to a hidden, gloating glee. Here sitting calmly, unsuspecting that Dinsher knew his dark secret was a creature of the super-normal. It was his chance! How thrilling to have a vampire as your guest.

He realized that he must make some reply to Vanning's question. He cleared his throat.

"I-I do. Vampirism is extremely fascinating. Let your mind wander for a moment to the life they must lead." Did he see a malicious gleam in his visitor's eyes? "At night to change into a giant bat--feeling your wings against the whipping air as you push higher looking for some victim--longing to feel the warm blood trickle down your throat, one can't hardly imagine such an emotion."

What was that strange look upon Vanning's face? Was his vampire-visitor intending to feast upon Dinsher, his host? But after all he could come to no harm. Dinsher knew all the ways of preventing a vampire to revel in its sport. And of killing one too.

Kill--yes, that very night, before midnight, after midnight he would be to dangerous. He could picture himself now, stealing into Vanning's room, wooden stake held in readiness. The curtains would breathe--the room would be alive--alive and crawling with hideous shapes--invisible, come to view the passing of one of the un-dead into the realm of God's dead. Ha! Ha! How they would whisper when he placed the stake over the sleeping vampire's heart. He would view the creature's face and the pale light from the window would be falling lightly upon it, touching it with willow-like fingers. It would look so peaceful, ashen grey, flesh relaxed, the red lips puckered in sleep, the sharp chin lax. And how it would contort when he drove the stake down--down, biting ever deeper into the flesh as he swung again and again the mallet upon the stake's head. The eyes would bulge, the blood--vampire blood--would flow from the mouth, a scream of agony would ring throughout the house. But no one to hear for the servants would be gone. No one around for miles. Only the sea, and the crawling, whispering shadows.

Then the face would become peaceful, radiant--for it would be of God's dead. And perhaps, if Vanning was long a vampire, the body might crumble to dust. It was an interesting thought. Which of the degrees of demise would the body become?

"You paint a very pretty picture, Dinsher," Vanning said referring of course to Dinsher's previous description of a vampire's method of living and sustenance.

"What? Oh, yes," stuttered the host, startled for the moment at returning to reality.

"But think of the horror--the sickening lust for human blood," Vanning continued. "Imagine drinking from some innocent victim the life blood, feeling the sticky liquid pour down your throat. Horrible!"

Was Vanning mocking himself? Was he poking fun at his own terrible lust? Yes. He must be. That humorous twinkle in his eyes belied his words. So thought Dinsher.

"Think," he went on, "of plunging your fangs into some white throat--!" He illustrated this statement by thrusting at some imaginary neck, a two pronged meat fork, resting upon the table of the recently devoured meal. "Think of feeling them sink in," (further use of fork)"and-and... Ugh! The thought sickens me."

What a macabre sense of humor this vampire must possess, to humorously deride his own life--laughing up his sleeve all the time.. drinking in gleefully his phrases--longing to be at another victim.

These thoughts intigued Dinsher. He absorbed them thirstily. This man before him was something novel--out of the ordinary--and, Dinsher was positive, wholly vampire.

The talk continued along these lines for some minutes, until the dinner remains were removed. It was a few minutes after ten o'clock and, as Vanning was weary, they both retired.

When Dinsher entered his room he decided upon the hour of twelve as Vanning would no doubt arise after the stroke of twelve to go about his gruesome business. The equipment for Vanning's death was ready; he always had such implements on hand, for he could never tell when an occasion would arise which would deem their use necessary. Dinsher was ready for anything that might arise.

The downstairs clock mournfully proclaimed for all to hear, that the hour of twelve thirty had been reached. As its droning chimes echoed and reechoed throughout every musty corner in the antiquated manor-house, Dinsher silently returned to his room, and bed.

It had been an excellent and worthwhile night for this morbid individual, and his spirits were soaring. He had had the great earthly honor of removing from society, a vampire. Oh! It had been a most interesting experience, and had transpired just as he had imagined it. The night's whispers; the nether-world audience; even the peaceful expression upon the ex-vampire's countenance, after the driving of the stake. Yes, the night had been a memorable one, and now he could sleep in peace--the knowledge of a job well done to sooth him.

He slipped from his robe and crawled like a well fed rodent into the sanctuary of his bed. He sighed, closed his eyes, and peacefully drifted off to sleep. His conscience was clear.

* * *

Ghosts live by certain rules and regulations even on the astral plane and one of them is that no newly-dead can harm the living with any earthly tool. The object of a spirit's wrath might justly deserve it, might even have been the cause of the wraith's death, but the law holds. After a time, if time can be measured in that other dimension, the ghost is able to reach into the three-dimensional world that is Earth, and manipulate three-dimensional objects, but it takes practice, as witness the clumsy poltergeist, a beginner.

* * *

Sometime later he awoke. As his senses came to life, he strained to hear what had awakened him. Had it been a sound? Or had it been something beyond the ordinary senses? Perhaps it was something he had felt; not physical touch, but a warning, a message, from other than five senses. Or was it the utter quiet of the room? Strange how not a sound fell upon his ears. He could see the curtains move in a slight breeze, yet he could hear nothing; not even the accustomed sea breaking ponderously over the cold battered rocks far below. And in this tomb-like silence he experienced an eerie chill; it stole over his body like the tide sweeping over the shore. In the pit of his stomach was a sensation of a terrible tightening, like interlacing fingers suddenly grown taut. Why was this? Why had he suddenly awakened to experience this sensation of horrible dread. Yes! That was it! Dread! An apprehension of something--something wholly evil--some occurrence yet to come, and soon!

He tried to move. He could not. His brain fairly screamed in anguish (his throat could not) as he ordered his muscles to respond--to move; to rise and flee--his soul was filled with panic--he could do nothing. Helpless. His muscles remained lax; only his brain could operate, and his eyes see. His body was in a state of seeming suspended animation; it existed, but could not move.

Through the pounding, roaring tumult of fear that swirled in his mind came that dreadful feeling of waiting flooding over him. Wait for what? The room was like a stage. Like the last moment before the rising of the curtain upon some macabre play. The room was hushed, expectant. The light from the moon bathed the stage with pale luminence. The stirring shadows waited--the night breeze waited--the rolling sea waited--the silver globe of the moon waited--and a helpless fear-ridden creature, lying in a wide antique bed, waited.

And abruptly the stage was complete, the leading role filled.

Dinsher knew who the leading part would be played by. He had known all along that it was he--he and Vanning who were to be the only actors in the hideous play of vengeance.

All attention was centered upon Vanning. He took his role well and appeared quite the opposite from what he had a few hours ago--

blood spattered and dead. Now he was neatly garbed, tall, lithe, His sensitive thin face was partly in shadow, partly lit. The delicate nostrils were flared, the mouth set in a grim, straight line, and the eyes glowed like flickering coals. The thin body was garbed in evening clothes and cape. It was lean and tigerish, yet at ease.

For an eternal instant he stood gazing down mockingly at the supine shape before him. He moved forward, slowly, silently, and... implacably. Dinsher watched horror-stricken, held in the paraletic grip of his ghastly guest. Vanning seemed to float to him, his feet not touching the floor. The cape cast a silhouette of wings--bat wings. He was like a gigantic, grotesque bat, gliding down to a victim. And as he came forward, Dinsher noticed that he cast not a shadow, and as he passed the dresser mirror, no reflection appeared therein.

"Vampire! Vampire!" Dinsher's mind rang with the intensity of his thoughts. There must be some way to break this hypnotic hold upon his body. But he realized he was lost--he vaguely wondered how a vampire could live after the driving of the stake. Perhaps all of his wisdom was wrong--that meant his whole life had been wasted. He had lived for that wisdom--and now he was to die for it.

Vanning was standing over him now--his glowing eyes fixed upon Dinsher's bare throat. Slowly, calmly he bent over the prostrate figure. Dinsher could now see only the side of Vanning's head, he felt the hot breath on his throat, he closed his eyes. Now he could feel the fangs. His head swam. His brain was weak, his soul sick. He grew weaker, and as he grew weaker the figure of a bat seemed to expand until everything was blotted out, and as it did, Dinsher knew no more.....

The next day the village was shocked, amazed and horrified at the news it received of the old Dinsher place. The servants had discovered the carnage. First they discovered the ghastly corpse of Dinsher's late guest, blood spattered and a stake protruding from his chest. A nice, neat, friendly man he had been too, some of the servants recalled, what an end for such a gentleman.

Next, Dinsher was found. The circumstances of his death were even stranger than Vanning's. The doctor could find no reason for death whatsoever although the face was frozen into a mask of fear... Not a mark on the body, a healthy heart and no ailments. Entirely inexplicable to the old country doctor who investigated the gruesome finds.

This incident aroused a great deal of speculation from the villagers. But none even remotely guessed of a physically impotent spectre who had cast a perfect illusion and let a superstitious man's imagination do the rest.

end.

Thanx 2 Walter Coslet and the Manuscript Bureau for A Superstitious Man and The Darkening Path, good stuff.

OMEGA'S DIARY

by Walt Leibscher

"Hmm. Could be. Could be. Hmmm."

I've read many a narrative which began: "You may think I'm mad and etcetera, etcetera." I don't know for sure whether I'm mad or not. I could be, the whole world probably is.

I can remember several years back when the first atomic bomb was announced on the radio. Then the glaring newspaper headlines. Suddenly the general public, hitherto completely unaware of the power wrapped up in the atom, became atom conscious. Utopian views of a free world which ran by atomic power, ships and planes that crossed continents and circled the globe on a spoonful of sand, controlled weather, power unlimited. And of course the iconoclasts who predicted dire happenings were ignored. Mankind had a new toy. An almost uncontrollable toy. And he meant to play with it.

I was one of those simple people who was completely oblivious to the science of atomics. I vaguely recall something about a "crackpot" scientist splitting the atom. Some big shot predicted the end of the world, and five or six new religious organizations took advantage of the opportunity presented. But the atom was divided again and again, and we lived. So the world forgot the atom, except the scientists who were interested. Humanity laughed and little men with mad brains plotted destruction. The earth gave freely of her products so her loins could be girded for war.

Then one of the mad little men threw a sink stopper into the whirlpool of Europe. Milling humanity stopped their mad, whirling search for happiness long enough to discover this madman--Adolph Hitler. Hitler lit the fuze and the world burst into an insane orgy of killing, and destructive but ingenuous weapons.

Rockets were commonplace, electronics and radionics were employed with deadly accuracy, science impregnated humanity with thousands of ideas designed to obliterate itself. But we heard very little of the atom. Consorship was strict, the atom was tabu.

But the atom was still around. It gave two powerful displays of unheard of destruction and the Second World War ended.

Then the fun began. Every nations in existance claimed to have a better mousetrap than the other. The deadliest mousetrap ever, designed to kill not one, not a hundred, but thousands of creatures who had learned to live like rats, in holes under the ground.

So we decided to put on a show. We would display our mousetrap Destroy a whole Navy with one fell swoop, that's what we'd do. And we ded. Somehow these dainty little destruction soirees caught on with the brass hats and we gave one of these searing parties once a year. It was delightful to spend a couple of million dollars.

And so scientists were finally recognized by the governments. And they took the atom in hand and tried to wring it inside out. Some queer quirk of justice the atom refused to be man's slave, only his killer. Here was something man couldn't conquer, something he couldn't louse up with his so-called civilization.

The common man drifted back into his beloved smug complacency, the atom could do nothing to make his life more enjoyable, so he promptly forgot it.

About 10 years after the first atomic bomb the first human with two brains was born. Oddly enough the second brain was at the base of the spinal cord; enclosed in a sort of tumorous sac which jutted out of the child's back. Soon babies were born with four arms, multiple legs, heads, reversed innards, almost any biological monstrosity conceivable. Sextuplets and even septuplets were not uncommon, and rarely were any of them perfect specimens. And the world wondered.

I cannot offer any explanation of these things, but neither could the world's outstanding physicists, or biologists, or the Catholic church for that matter. Something of a basic nature had been upset and the earth went mad in a quiet, matter-of-fact manner, until recently.

Most of these new baby things lived, and acted, like normal babies, excepting they were unusually precocious, at extremely early ages.

Then the fireballs came. And they took life after life, as one of them will probably take my life. They just bubble up out of the ground; green, phosphorescent, fungous-looking lumps of flame. They grow until they are about 6 feet in diameter, then start their searing race to nowhere in particular. Sometimes they take long leaps into the air and light the heavens with redolent azure flame, the stench of which now seems to pervade every atom of everything. Then they return to earth, the earth which spawned them, to roll over buildings, people, anything. What they touch vanishes--vanishes immediately into universal nothingness. Anything but the earth, which at times seems to heave up as if to caress its offspring. For the earth, too, loves its monstrosities, as humankind did theirs.

And thus mankind is being erased from the face of the earth. A face now scarred and tortured beyond recognition, with ghastly ulcerated pits, yawning open sores, ever breaking out with pustules of green, writhing flame.

What a cosmic joke. What a huge cosmic joke. In trying to attain the innermost secret of the dust of which he was formed, man unleashed something even the most brilliant of his kind never would or could understand. Ah ha, Ah ha, Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Yes, I laugh, I have to laugh, I have to do something to hold on to what sanity I have. The rest of them are all gibbering idiots what there are of them. They dance madly, they sing, they run amuck

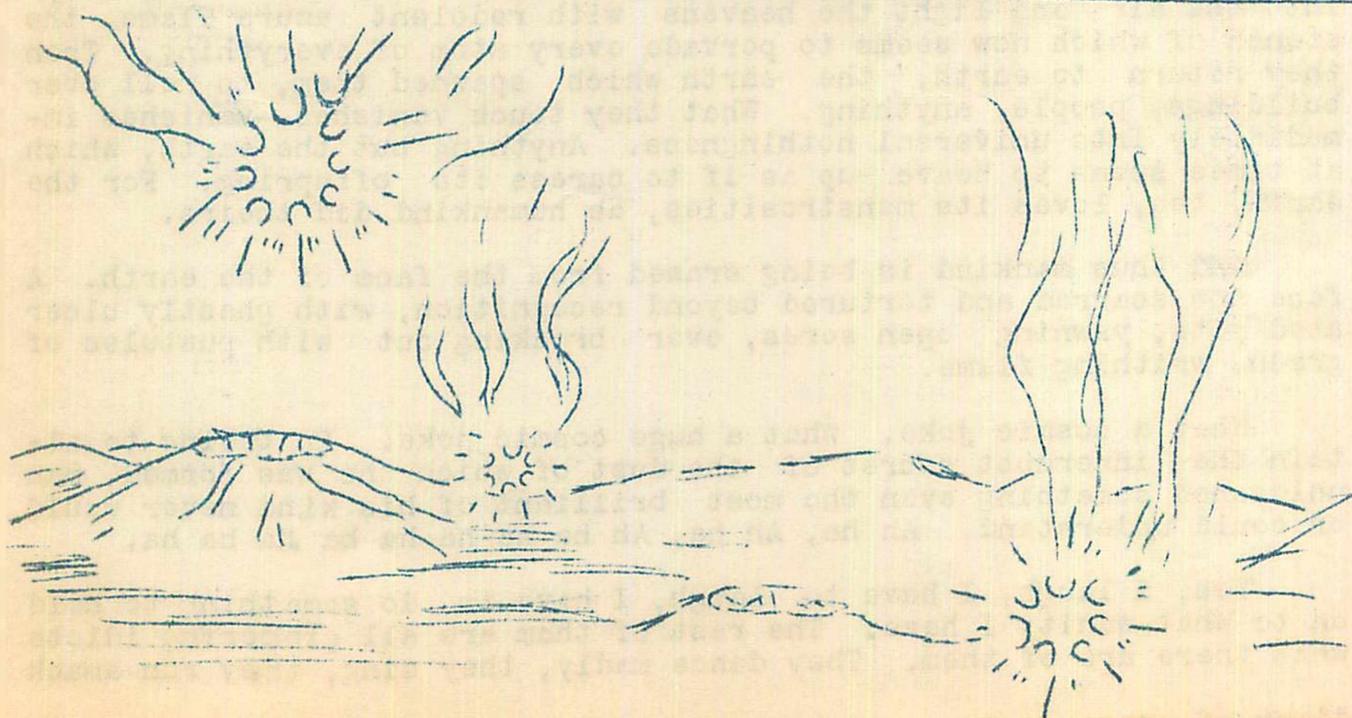
and fall to claw at the ground. They try to escape by indulging in what is now purely the mechanical aspects of sex---couples locked in each others arms for hours on end, even days. They kill for the love of killing. They even eat each other. Anything goes. Everything is going to go.

I'm going to go too. I don't care. I think I'm going mad, too. Last night I took a young girl and bashed her head in with a rock. She knew I was going to do it and she laughed. And I laughed. And they laughed, all except one man who seemed to view us all with a curious apathy. He neither approved or disapproved, he just came over afterward and talked to me.

Quite unusual it was too. He talked like a normal man, didn't slobber or gibber. We had quite a chat, that man and I. He seemed to know quite a bit about the atom. What amazed me was the way he took everything. He laughed, not the short mad kind of laughing, but a quiet, soothing chuckle. I believe we even discussed the weather. We talked for a long time, of what I don't remember, but it was a nice talk, really nice talk. I believe we were the only sane humans left in the world, that man and I. That was last night. Today he probably is gone, as I will probably go any minute, the fireballs are increasing. Yes I'm sure he was sane, saner than I was. But now he's gone now. We talked and then he left. As I watched him disappear over the hill he seemed to mutter something which I don't quite understand. He stood on the ridge of the hill, surveyed the valley below, then said: "Gosh, wow, boyoboy, science-fiction." and walked out of my sight.

the end

Thanx also to 4e for Tigrina's tale, and to FTLaney for the above piece by Leibscher, (I'll pub the other one next ish, Laney, OK?)



The Darkening Path

an appreciation by Redd Boggs

"What in the midst lay but the Tower itself!
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world....."

A poem "instinct with hideous menace" wrote H. P. Lovecraft of Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", part of which is quoted above, but don't turn to this poem expecting a typical Poesque nightmare of "daemonic patterns and presences....a vision of the terror that stalks about and within us" (as HPL says of EAP). "Childe Roland" is totally different from "The Raven", for example, in form and expression, but as crafted in Browning's own peculiar style, it is subtly effective.

Physically, the poem is composed to 34 stanzas of six lines each (204 lines in all), and is written mostly in iambic pentameter, with a rime scheme of abbaab observed throughout. It is one of Browning's Dramatic Romance series, and as that term indicates, it is narrative in form, told in the first person, although it is not strictly a monologue such as the popular "My Las Duchess". While not a real "anthology piece", "Childe Roland" may be found in any volume of Browning's selected verse, such as "Best Known Poems of Elizabeth and Robert Browning" (Blue Ribbon Books, Garden City, N.Y., 1941, \$1.00)."

Most of Browning's poetry shows him to be joyous, valiant, and optimistic. In fact, Browning's contribution to the sum of human experience recorded in verse can be summed up in that word: Optimism. But, however uplifting such poetry can be, triumphant optimism is not a poetical asset to one who writes in the weird genre. Only a fatalist, to whom man appears as a mere insect vainly struggling in the web of a complacent spider, can express the feeling of true cosmic horror. Despite this handicap, Browning succeeded strikingly in conveying a mood of brooding menace.

"Childe Roland" showcases Browning's skill as a dramatist. His poetry, as he himself said, "though often lyric in expression (is) often dramatic in principle." He had a gift of narration, if not one of mastery of verse form, equal to that of Poe. Few of Browning's poems have ear-appeal, but conversely his style appears more modern today than does that of Poe. This modernity is apparent in "Childe Roland" in both pattern and mood.

The story of "Childe Roland" unfolds in a medieval setting some where in a fabulous land remindful of Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd-Gray

Mouser stories. The narrator, a lone traveller on the road, encounters a "hoary cripple" who counsels him to turn from the highway into the forbidding plain. The traveller immediately suspects the old man of being a decoy maliciously posted to "ensnare all travellers (who) ask the road" and direct them "into that ominous tract which, all agree, hides the Dark Tower."

Yet, well knowing that peril lay in his path, the traveller turns in the direction pointed, for as he said, "I had so long suffered in this quest." He was a knight among "The Band", a group of adventurers who sought the Dark Tower. "Quiet as despair" he enters the plain.

No sooner than he left the road-- "only a pace or two" beyond --he looked back at the safe highway, and found "'twas gone!..... gray plain all around; nothing but plain to the horizon's bound." But he went on, on into a strange land where no flowers grew, where the thistles were weirdly chopped off at the same height; where the "dock's harsh swarth leaves" were rent and bruised, and the grass "grew scant as hair in leprosy" up through the mud "which underneath looked kneaded up with blood."

Following the darkening path, he came to a river which as he described it frothing by; "might have been a bath for the fiend's glowing hoof--to see the wrath of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes." He fords the stream, describing the crossing in one of the poem's best passages:

" -- good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek."

Beyond the river there was a bit of stubbled ground, once a wood, then a marsh, where "some leanness of the soil's broke into moss or substances like boils." Beyond was a palsied, riven oak, and beyond that. . . . Suddenly he looks up into the encircling dusk and realized that the plain had given way to mountains.

"Burningly it came to me all at once: This was the place!" he said. "Dunce! Dotard! a-dozing at the very nonce, after a life spent training for the sight!"

Two hills on the right "crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight, while to the left, a tall scalped mountain..." And in the middle of the scene, the Dark Tower itself! At that moment, "the day came back again before it left; the dying sunset kindled through a cleft." The hills lay "like giants at a hunting . . chin upon hand," watching.

"Noise was everywhere! It tolled increasingly like a bell." He heard the name of all the gallant adventurers, the strong, the bold, the fortunate, who sought the Tower -- all lost, lost! "One

moment knelled thw woe of years." He saw them standing on the hei
ghts, watching as he dared the same fate that befell them.

"There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.'"

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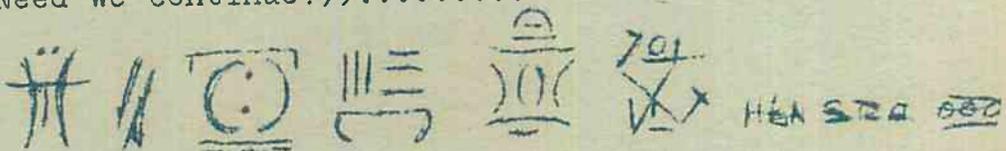
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 3456 Tallyho Street chap, simply ripping. What I mean old
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 England Really old thing the utter drivel that
 nonsensical rag contained; wheer waste of time sending the beastly
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 134 Banker Place a knickel now? You shouldn't do eet. Efen mit
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 leettle piece uf paper. I qvit! You robber!

George Flaccid Dear Editor; This is my first letter to a fanzine.
 Box 4Q2 I think the whole thing stinks, (I'll bet you don't
 Bizzoula print this letter). I'm about the youngest fan in
 Idaho captivity, you must have got my address from that
 super, colossal, utterly fantastic, besta of the
 mosta and other things, I mean Asteroid Stories. The votes for the
 things in the ish I'll rate in my own way, "Conclave" one sardine.
 Taboo ((Ed. Need we continue?)).....

Han Gog Goo
 Hankow,
 China.



((Ed Next issue we'll print some letters, and or postcards from
 real slans, (((Ed's Ed. If we get any you mean)))real guys and maybe
 even slen, (((Ed's Ed. pant! pant! pant! Can't buy a decent pair
 of pants these days))), so until then we'll see you in the letter
 section of Stupid Stories.

W (continued)

Wisdom of an Ass	Silaki Ali Hassan	2/40-Nov
Wisdom of the East, The	L. Sprague de Camp	8/42---S
Wishes We Make, The	E.M. Hull	6/43---S
Witch, The	A.E. van Vogt	2/43---S
"With a Blunt Instrument"	Eric Frank Russell	12/41--S
y		
Yesterday Was Monday	Theodore Sturgeon	6/41---S
You Thought Me Dead	William G. Bogart	4/39---S

CORRECTION: Nightmare Island was by Edward Hunter Waldo
not E. Waldo Hunter, the author himself was
responsible for the mistake.

