"HOUSE OF USHER? —NEVER HEARD OF IT!"

I have a feeling that caption should be "Tower of Babel?" not "House of Usher," but who understands Andy Porter anyhow? Oh, this is OPO 25, dated December 25, 1964, and a Merry Christmas to yez all, Ellers & Effers.

This is a before-bed chore, and it's actually being typed on Wednesday, December 9...how's that for getting ahead? I've been attending school for three days now, putting me 15% into the four-week Basic Programmer Training, Phase I, which will be followed, if I pass it, by... oh, you guessed...and then...right again... for a total of twelve weeks.

We go to school from 8:30 to 5:12 with two five-minute coffee breaks and a lunch hour off each day. The first night there was no homework; last night, a 95-page reading assignment and a problem; tonight, three problems. Some fun!

I complained a week or two ago that responses to the Hugo Investigating Committee were slow in coming; well, even in those few days they've picked up, much to my gratification. I guess I was just not allowing enough time. So far I've received long and thoughtful letters from Bill Donaho, Ethel Lindsay, Rick Sneary, F.M. Busby, Dick Eney, and George Scithers... plus the Fanoclast petition, plus fanzine reaction...whoops, another l-&-t letter from Roy Tackett.

BOOK WEEK: THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, H.G. Wells, 1898, Looking-Glass Library, 1960 [And people who reissue books without giving original publication data should be boiled in oil.] Another classic, of course. Wells was learning his craft, The Time Machine having already been published, I think he was trying to slow down his pace, and get more atmosphere. In WotW he succeeded, perhaps a bit too well for it does lag here and there, but nonetheless a genuine all-time landmark of SF.

THE MACHINE GOD LAUGHS, Festus Pragnell, serialized in Fantasy Book magazine, 1947; book edition distributed by FPCI, 1949. This is a remarkably early story about a very large scale computer; in fact, some American scientists invent such a computer, while in China, under the guidance of a Fu Manchu type, a brain-complex of unskulled human brains is assembled. The two brains fight it out for world dominion, and "our" brain finally wins...but the old question "Machine: Man's Servant or his Master?" remains.

Most surprising in a 1947 work (the electronic computer was only invented in '46) Pragnell has his gigantic Frank (short for Frankenstein) design and build a briefcase-sized Frank II, not only miniaturized, but improved in design and performance. And Pragnell comes within an eyelash of having F-II design and build a tooth-sized Frank III.

These are exactly the techniques that are in use today, and the sizes are not far off, although F-III is still a few years off.

The story is pretty poor, but the technical prediction is very good; perhaps The Machine God Laughs deserves a little more remembrance than it gets.

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