

Operation Fantast

VOL. 1 (New Series)

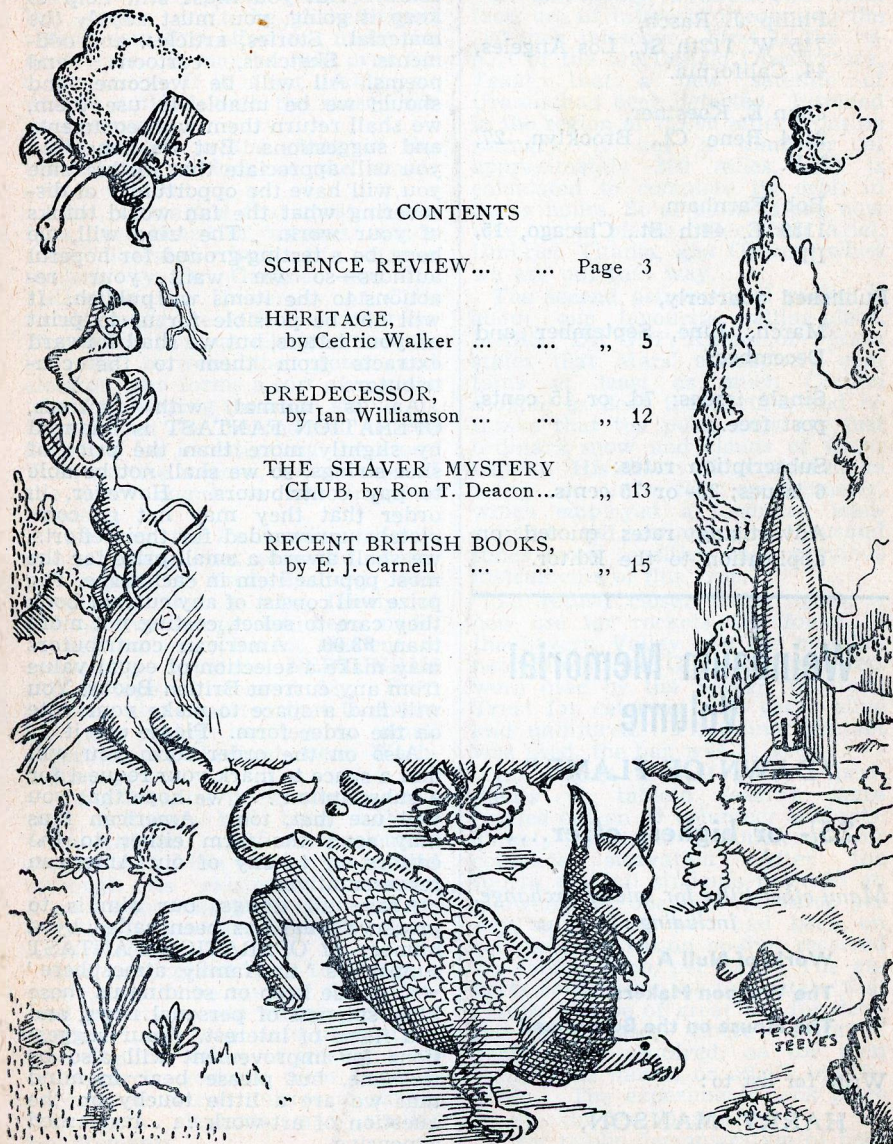
JULY, 1949

No. 1

SIXPENCE

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Operation Fantast

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NEW SERIES

With this issue OPERATION FANTAST takes a new grip on life. We hope that it will be a firm grip. But a lot will depend on YOU, the reader. The policy of the 'zine has not changed—it still remains YOUR 'zine.

Admittedly, from henceforth we fear that you will have to pay for it, but we hope that you will consider it worth the nimble tanner (or 15 cents). But you must still help to keep it going, you must supply the material. Stories, articles, and oddments. Sketches, cartoons, and poems. All will be welcome, and should we be unable to use them, we shall return them with comments and suggestions. But we hope that you will appreciate that in this 'zine you will have the opportunity of discovering what the fan world thinks of your work. The 'zine will, we hope, be a testing-ground for hopeful authors—so we want your reactions to the items we publish. It will not be possible for us to print all your letters, but we shall forward extracts from them to the contributors.

As is normal with fanzines, OPERATION FANTAST is financed by slightly more than the price of shoe-strings, so we shall not be able to pay contributors. However, in order that they may not go completely unrewarded for their efforts, we shall award a small prize for the most popular item in each issue. The prize will consist of any current book they care to select, costing not more than \$3.00. American contributors may make a selection of equal value from any current British Books. You will find a space to make your vote on the order form. Please use it.

Also on the order form you will find a space to mark your request for a subscription... we hope that you will use that, too! American fans may send the form either to the editors, or to any of our American representatives.

Above all things, our aim is to preserve what has been called by a number of OPERATION FANTAST supporters 'the family atmosphere'—so please keep on sending us those little snippets of personal news, and odd items of interest. Your suggestions for improvement will also be welcome, but please bear in mind that we are a little touchy on the question of art-work... its darned expensive.

Finally, we hope you enjoy reading the 'zine, and sign off,

Yours fantastically,
JOYCE and KEN SLATER.

SCIENCE REVIEW

By K.F.S.

This, my friends, is a new department, to which you are invited to contribute. Should you happen upon reports of any interesting new scientific facts or theories, please write a short paragraph, up to 300 words—more if the fact warrants it—and send it in.

You will receive due credit in these pages, for any such items printed. But please don't be disheartened should your first effort not make the next issue. It may be held over for a later issue. If it is not usable you will be notified, with the reason for its non-use.

But to get to the meat of the matter, let us look at the major events of 1948.

First, I imagine that most of the fans have heard of 'mesons,' which were liberated from the atomic nucleus by Dr. Gardner and Dr. Lattes, at the University of California, using the 4,000 ton cyclotron. The meson is a particle intermediate in mass between the proton and electron, and forms a sort of nuclear 'glue,' in keeping the atom stable. It is said that the mesons will be the best tool for investigating the atom. Take out the mesons, I suppose, and the atom comes to bits in your hands?

Also from the Californian masterminds (literal, not sarcastic) came the report of Prof. Seaborg, who announced that a new family of radio-active isotopes had been made, 14 in number. Parent element is artificially created NEPTUNIUM 237, isotope of element 93. Prof. Seaborg also reported that Uranium 233 was being isolated in small quantities at Hanford, near Washington.

Along the same lines, was the news that Actinium had been isolated from Radium. Actinium, element 89, has a half-life of 13.5 years, and although its existence has been known some long time, credit for its isolation goes to Argonne National Laboratories.

And in England, too, 1948 was a busy year in the nuclear field. Harwell put its second atomic pile into operation and went into production. This had the effect of freeing a lot of research workers from dependence on American sources of supply for tracer elements, and similar requirements.

Some worry was caused by the use

of Thames water in the atomic plant, but care is being taken to see that the limits of tolerance laid down by the Medical Research Council are not exceeded. So if you dwell in the Thames area, don't be expecting mutants. It is highly improbable that you will find any—and if you do, put the blame on the cosmic rays.

In astronomy, I think two main facts are of interest, discounting the 200 inch telescope. First is the report of the MacDonald Observatory, Texas, that a new satellite of Uranus had been detected. Situated in the region of 75,000 miles from its primary, it has a diameter of approximately 300 miles, and is calculated to complete its orbit in thirty hours. So st plottists can now take us to places other than Ariel, Umbriel, Titania, and Oberon, when we are out that way.

The second astronomical report is about our favourite calling-place, MARS. Dr. G. P. Kuiper of Yerkes states that Mars' atmosphere contains at least as much Carbon dioxide as does the Earth's, and he thinks that the polar caps are just ordinary snow and clouds of water vapour. His observations were made using an infra-red spectrometer, which employed a Cashman lead-sulphide cell, estimated a thousand times more sensitive than previous instruments of this type.

To return closer home again, a new use for rockets was found in the Severn Valley. In the marshes near Slimbridge, Gloucs., rocket nets were used by the Severn Wildfowl Trust for catching wild geese alive and uninjured. First time the net was used, the bag was 31 geese.

In August of last year, experiments in tabloid feeding were carried out on 96 volunteer students. Twenty students volunteered for complete starvation. After the fourth day, all students received an allowance of one pint of water per day, and those who had been on complete starvation no-diet received six tablets each, per day. The experts conducting the tests state that results will be of great use for dealing with cases where 'reserve' rations are required, as for men trapped in mines, or adrift in lifeboats. The experiments took place at Stockbridge, Hampshire.

First public demonstration of helicopter-spraying of crops was made

at Bourn, Cambs., with a Westland Sikorsky S51. The machine carries a load of 65 gallons, and will spray 40-60 acres of field crops in an hour. Previous experiments of spraying in America had been made, but in this demonstration a new method, involving the use of the air slipstream to carry the spray to the crops, was used. The helicopter can be manoeuvred only two or three feet above the ground, in all directions, which is ideal for England, with its small fields and limited boundaries. When not in use in England, it is proposed that the planes be taken to Africa, and used there for spraying of cotton and other crops.

From Londonderry, in Ireland, came news that baldness is most common among intellectual men. This is stated by Dr. Armattoe who gave percentages to prove his statements. He also stated that he found among a certain delegation, that 58 per cent. of the woman scientists who were between 21 and 45 were prone to growing moustaches. Just a tip, my friends, just a tip. But on his first point, I would draw attention to Prof. Einstein!! The exception that proves the rule, uh?

The experiments in the case of the common cold, conducted at the Harvard Hospital, Salisbury, showed that a cold develops in two to three days. That is what my mother used to tell me, but I am pleased to have it confirmed. But seriously, the experiments did serve a very good purpose. It was found, for instance, that 'controls' given saline and broth did not develop colds, and of those 'infected,' and not 'protected' 50 per cent. developed a sure-fire cold. Recent tests lead to the belief that shaking of handkerchiefs can do much to spread colds.

Dousing the dowers has been taking place in New Zealand. It is reported that of 75 dowers, claiming to 'find' anything from water to diseases, not one showed any reliability in discovering anything. The results were described as 'ludicrous.'

Professor Hans Ahlmann, of Stockholm University, claims that the earth is getting warmer. In Iceland, glaciers are shrinking to expose areas which have not been under cultivation since 1300, as since that date they have been ice covered. I would be very interested to know if that the same applies to the South Polar ice-cap, in view of the theories of Hugh Auchinloss Brown, a

graduate of Columbia University.

After 35 years' study of this globe of ours Mr. Brown has just recently put forward a new theory about ice-ages, which answers a number of previous unexplainable facts in a most unhappy fashion. Mr. Brown contends that any moment now, we shall have another flood, and the ice caps will move to places which at the moment are the sites of our most advanced civilisations. The equator will run through Greenland, and across North America; through Scandinavia, and across the European continent, coming out about the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

To support his contention, he produces some pretty weighty evidence. He asks you to picture a top, spinning in perfect equilibrium. Now, if you drop on to the top something nice and heavy and sticky, slightly off-centre, you will upset the top, and it will wobble. Hugh Brown tells us that is what happens to Earth; periodically the South Polar Ice-cap becomes so heavy it throws the Earth off balance, and the world careens. But there is more to it than that. He also believes that the event is not only imminent, it is overdue!!

The ice cap at the moment contains about five and one third million square miles of ice, steadily growing larger. At the moment it contains enough ice to cover the entire globe with a layer 120 feet thick. Well, that is how the machinery works. The rest of the evidence is more factual. First, the repeated fables and myths of floods, which Mr. Brown says are reports of the floods resulting from the last shift.

Second, the undisputable fact that raindrops in nice soft mud soon level out—but in stone (rapidly congealed from mud by quick-freezing) there are the record of rain drops, looking like the craters of the moon.

Next, the mammoths and other animals found frozen under the ice in the Arctic. In their stomachs have been found undigested meals of vegetation that could never have grown in a cold climate. And of the 21 mammoths so discovered, each has been found in a position which it would not normally have adopted in ordinary death—no, they were pretty obviously frozen speedily. The most recent discovery, near the Lena River in Russia, even had grass in its mouth!

Third in the list of supporting cir-

cumstantial evidence comes the record of trees and plants, of warm or tropical nature, that have been discovered frozen, complete with fruit and foliage. A pretty lengthy list of these can be found, and also of similar evidence in records of smaller animals found in pretty perfect and healthy condition, frozen suddenly, and preserved for thousands of years.

Fourthly, I will add one which Mr. Brown did not mention, but which I think is pretty apparent, and that is the difficulty that has been experienced in getting the times of the ice-ages in certain localities to agree with the times in others. This has usually been explained by the slow approach and retreat of the ice, but does not always tally with the facts. A sudden shift of the polar caps might explain the differences in timing.

There are many other items of evidence, too many to list here, but I think those I have stated are enough to lend some credence to his theory. And now to the timing of the event.

By a system of checking which is pretty lengthy, but which I think was logical, Mr. Brown discovered that the place where one of the polar caps from the last epoch should have been, was Lake Chad, in the Soudan Basin. The other would have been in a place that the moment is rather full of water, and not open to inspection. Now the Soudan Basin forms a four-million-square-mile dent in the surface of the earth, and is surrounded with innumerable water courses which have no apparent connection with each other. Also, Lake Chad is steadily shrinking, having lost within the last fifty years one third of its total area. And again, it is the only known large fresh-water lake that has no outlet to the sea, which makes it distinct

from all other lakes on the face of the earth. In other words, it makes the ideal spot for the remnants of an ice cap.

Using the same method of checking, Mr. Brown then tried to place the ice-caps for the previous epoch. One of these he placed in the region of the Hudson Bay, which an inspection of a map will tell you, is the focal point of the Laurentian Shield in Canada, forming a lip to a huge bowl.

Checking on geological formations gave Mr. Brown the information that a period of slightly more than six and a half thousand years occurred between the formation of the Huson Bay ice-cap, and the Soudan Basin one. Carrying it on from there, and checking his timing by semi-historical records of various races, Mr. Brown estimates that some eight thousand years have elapsed since the polar cap shifted from the Soudan to Antarctica. Which means any moment now, my friends.

To prevent this happening to our glorious civilisation, Mr. Brown recommends a project costing slightly more than £3,500,000, and which would include atomic stations for melting Antarctica's ice, and meteorological stations and patrol ships all along the coast-line. The stations would report on ice-formation, and the ships on iceberg drift. The balance between the ice formed, and the ice cast off in the form of ice-bergs, would be the amount to be melted in that period.

Personally, I say that if there is any possibility of the earth turning over on its side, let's get on with the project. At least, it would keep us sufficiently busy to stop us cutting each other's throats.

On that pleasant note of threatening wholesale destruction, I will sign off for this issue.

HERITAGE

By CEDRIC WALKER

Two little creatures were playing in the dusty ruins of a building. Once, long ago, it had been a huge glistening cinema, vibrant with noise, and the world around it had been full of voices. Now it was hushed and gray in a listless world. They were playing with a ball. They had stuck into the ground the weathered bones of some animal, and were taking turns at trying to

hit them. The "ball" was a rock, covered with hide so that it would not be dangerous to their youthful bodies.

The two had little of the boisterousness of young animals. They played quietly, and with concentration. The forlornness of the place seemed to have crept into them. Dust that they kicked up settled slowly and gratefully to earth, glad to

merge once again into nonentity and forgetfulness. Occasionally, only, come a snarl when either suspected the other were cheating.

A figure appeared from behind a ruined wall. The earth sent up a flurry of dust in indignation at this fresh encroachment.

The newcomer was a squat, savage thing with matted hair and a few dirty rags of clothing clinging to its body. An axe dangled from a strip of hide around its wrist.

The arrival could not have been more opportune. Some argument had arisen over some technical point of the game, and a sudden outburst of sound shattered the solemnity of the place. It was a strange, unharmonious noise. The harsh cries of one mingled badly with the high-pitched tones of the other. The guttural one, crouching, strove to thrust himself around and upon the other, who backed away slowly, offering a feeble barrier of tiny fists, and watching tensely for an opening. The watcher hesitated, his head on one side. His dull brain sparked into momentary life, comparing the two, and noting the oddness of the contrast. For the two creatures were fantastically unlike. One was squat and hairy, a perfect miniature of the spectator. The other seemed frail beside him; his almost hairless body was unclothed and covered with a rich tan, and there was about him a certain grace of movement which his opponent lacked.

An impulse arose in the beast-mind, thrusting out reason. With a snarl he sprang forward and separated the two roughly. The always to be alone, sitting and thinking. It was unnatural and unhealthy. Better by far that he be out hunting and feeding, and indulging in wild revelries around the fires after a successful raid on a neighbouring tribe. But they did not tell him so. Amongst themselves they excused him because of his great age, but in their private thoughts they were glad that he kept from them; in his presence they were ill at ease. He was different. Not physically—he had the same hairy, savage appearance as the rest of them; but in his eyes was something of the light they saw in the eyes of the child.

The child: Ah!—he, too, was different. Yet they treated him as well as—often better than—their own hairy, spitty offspring. Perhaps because of the difference.

A harsh voice bade the child enter; but in the voice was a note of friendliness also. Without fear the child went in, and arranged himself at Garn's feet.

"Tell me!" he said urgently. "Tell me again; I want to hear it again and again!"

Garn's face grimaced into the nearest approach to a smile such a bestial countenance could contrive. He spoke with the ease of frequent repetition: "We are hairy, you are not. We came after the Big Storm. But the tribe to which you rightfully belong was before—" As always, Garn

hairy one he flung to the ground, where it set up a hideous wailing. Grasping the other firmly, but with a surprising gentleness, he turned and made for the village. The child turned an anxious glance over its shoulder, but its erstwhile companion had arisen unhurt, and was standing, spitting and snarling. With a chuckling, relieved sound the child turned its attention to its savage rescuer, and chattered gaily to it all the way back to the village.

His protector eventually deposited him in the midst of a crowd of gabbling females who were preparing the evening meal. They fussed around him, but he ignored them. His mind was disturbed with thoughts that came to him with ever increasing frequency as he grew older. Garn had told him things—things which he only dimly understood—a story which seemed to him partly missing. A story which worried him constantly and excited him; yet one which he urged the Elder to tell him again and again.

After he had eaten he hurried out to seek the Elder. Garn was of both great age and position. The tribe respected him, and, consequently, he lived in one of the finest ruins in the village. It had four walls still standing, and even part of roof left to keep out the rain which fell occasionally. The child hesitated in the doorway. It was very dark, for these many years the Elder had sat without light, thinking and pondering over the past which none of the others of the tribe had known. The rest of the beast-folk avoided the dwelling; they whispered among themselves that it was not good

stumbled over the words; it was a tremendous effort for his mind to grasp the thought of 'Before.' "Your tribe was many, many times greater than ours—," he spread his hairy arms in an all-encompassing gesture. "This Martin told me."

"Yes, yes," The child plucked at the other's clothing in his eagerness. "Tell me about Martin—my, father!"

Garn's eyes seemed to be seeing through the wall and far across the valley where the tribe lived. "He came out of the sky in a huge, shining thing of fire. When the monster came down the ground trembled and we all ran in fear and hid from it, lest it turn upon us the flame of its wrath."

"Out of the belly of the monster he came, and we followed him for many miles to see what wonders he might perform. Many of my comrades were fearful, saying he would bring another Big Storm upon us, and would have killed him with stones from a distance. But I said no; I was curious. And after I had snarled at them, and beaten some of them they agreed with me."

"So we sat and waited, and when presently, he slept, we pounced upon him and bore him back prisoner to the village. We made much of him, and mated him to—one amongst us. At first he would not eat, nor would he speak, and what few words he had spoken at the beginning no one had been able to understand. But after a while we became friends, he and I, and he learned quickly to speak as we do. Though it was strange to listen to him when he spoke."

"We had big talks together. Many, many times." Garn smiled proudly, "The other could not talk to him as I could. We made many long journeys together. Always he was searching, searching. I do not know what it was he sought; that he would not tell me."

"He became more silent as the days passed. More and more we searched for the thing that he longed for. But we did not find it. One morning I awoke, and he was gone. He has not come back. After he had gone, you were born, and your mother died."

Garn ceased to talk. A strange light burned in his eyes. The child felt a tightening of its throat, looking at him.

"But the monster—the monster! The fire-thing! Tell me about that!"

"It is a journey from here. One day you will see it; one day when you are big." There was nothing more. Deep in thought the child rose, and, head drooping, wandered out into the night.

Many years later, Mardi, now a young man of twenty-one, sat musing on a hillock overlooking the village.

The scene presented a somewhat different appearance to the one his father had known. There had been some crude attempts at construction; Garn's house, now a shrine since his death, was no longer the only building with a roof. There had, also, been some slight improvement in the dress of the folk, a certain tendency to fasten-on hide containers, to leave the hands free. But these developments had come so gradually that young Mardi was never aware of them. What he was aware of—and more and more as the years sped by and his intelligence quickened and expanded—was the acute difference between himself and the bestial tribesmen below, who were his only companions.

His reason, spurred many times by the stories of Garn, told him that the tribe to which he belonged was a greater, a nobler one, than that with which he lived. Their clothes had been softer, their bodies fairer, their dwelling—oh!—so much vaster than these rude shelters in the valley. Superior in all ways they had been. As he was superior to the ape-folk. How sickened he was at times by their bestial snarlings and bickerings, and their filthy rites. And especially Brad . . . his face darkened with hatred as he relived in his mind the latest encounter with his sworn enemy.

Brad, the mighty warrior. Brad, whom the whole tribe admired and respected because of his fine stature, and prowess at hunting; and the manner in which he had led the tribe in battle against their neighbours in the hills. Brad, who laughed at him in contempt, and made jokes to the others about him because of his inadequacy in all things which mattered and made possible continued existence. Brad, whom he hated with a hate that gnawed into his very vitals.

His mind wandered off on a new tack. The Fire-Thing. For a long time he had not thought about it. After Garn's death he had spoken to no-one about it, or of his desire to see the monster that had brought his father to

the country of the beast-folk. But now his imagination was re-kindled; perhaps his father had intended him to go and see this thing . . .

The urge grew; on the instant he jumped up and went to seek those who knew of the whereabouts of the monster. At first they laughed at him, asking him whence had come the courage which seemed to have crept inside him, making him eager to undertake what was, even to them, a hazardous journey. But presently, under his ceaseless urgings and sly insinuations as to their valour, a number of them agreed to accompany him.

The following morning the expedition set forth. The last noise Mardi heard from the village was the voice of Brad shouting guttural jests at him.

The journey did not take so long as Mardi had expected; but, even so, when they finally topped the last rise he was trembling with exhaustion, anticipation, and a strange fear.

The monster was nothing like so fearsome as he had imagined. A huge cylindrical object, its body shining dazzling silver in the sun, it lay quietly in a valley. No sign of flame or movement. "It is dead," said one of the beast-folk, a touch of awe in his voice.

"Let us go back," said another, regretting the impulse that had led him to accompany the party. Mardi ignored them. Something akin to a feeling of intense pride consumed him; with shining eyes he started forward.

The Fire-Thing was no monster at all. In fact, Mardi decided, it was no more than an oddly-shaped dwelling. There was no trace of the flames which Garn had told about; perhaps he had been exaggerating after all. Perhaps the story was of the same sort as the other yarns the beast-people told each other around their camp fires. And yet . . .

Mardi's initial fears faded as he approached the thing. The door presented little difficulty to him; for he had had some previous experience with them. Some of the ruins 'from before the Big Storm' still had doors hanging to their hinges. The beast-folk had even attempted to adopt the device . . .

Inside the thing he stood dumbfounded; his brain struggled to find some reason in the fantastic jumble of strange objects that met his gaze. For many minutes he was hypnotised, unable to move. Gradually he came to his senses and realised then that he was alone. Through the transparent end of the 'monster' he glimpsed his companions; they still stood where he had left them, shifting uneasily around, and casting apprehensive glances in his direction.

Some of the things he found to be familiar. Books, for instance. He understood what they were. The voices of men put upon white stuff in odd little squiggles, his father had told Garn, so that others might look and understand without hearing. There were still a few lying around in some of the ruins, although he had been unable to make use of them. Other things and then Mardi found the ray-pistol. He hefted it, pleased with the feel of it. Smooth and rounded; what could be its use?

Its purpose was forced upon him with shocking clarity when abruptly a violent light sprang from it, and where the light touched the wall the latter disappeared, giving Mardi a view of the valley beyond. He dropped it as if it had become suddenly hot, and backed away. But only for a moment; retrieving it he examined it cautiously. Glancing at the beast-folk, a plan began to form in his agile mind.

Mardi did not act at once. With a sly shrewdness which was in contrast to the directness of the beast-people, he waited for the right moment.

It came on the occasion of the Festival of Marriage, a yearly ritual which was based on the ceremony initiated by Garn, when the space-pilot Martin, Mardi's father, had been united to the mate the ape-folk had chosen for him.

At the height of the celebrations Mardi appeared. Brad and his comrades were leading a wild dance around the fires. The beast-man sighted Mardi, grinned, and leapt towards him, intending to drag him into the circle of panting, heaving, leaping shapes. Without hesitation, Mardi raised the ray-gun, and in full view of the whole tribe, pressed the trigger.

The burst of light lighted all movement, and amidst the horrified gasps of the tribe Brad halted abruptly in his headlong run and crumpled to the ground, one arm shorn off at the elbow. Mardi, ignoring the crippled, moaning thing, strode into the centre of the circle of fires so that all might see and hear him plainly. His face shone with exultation at the effect his

actions had produced. He threw back his head proudly, and waved the weapon at the crowd. He began his maiden speech.

Only once was there an interruption when a number of them tried to rush him. The blast of the ray-pistol removed the head and half the side of the leader. After that they listened to the rest of his speech with no outward sign of disapproval.

The festivities were over. The tribe dispersed to their dwellings quietly, with glances of awe at the figure standing amidst the dying fires. Brad had slunk away unobserved, probably to die. Mardi dismissed him from his thoughts. He was now in undisputed control of the tribe.

For many months Mardi maintained his control, revelling in his new-won respect. No more laughing and jesting at his expense; they feared him now. Only now and again did he wonder fleetingly about Brad and what might have been his fate . . . The best dwelling in the village was his; the pick of the kill; the women . . .

One day a sense of the precariousness of his overlordship was forced upon him with an insistence that set him trembling with dread. He discovered that the destroying light no longer came from the weapon. Luckily no one was with him at the time of his discovery. He tried to think the matter over calmly; what was he to do? Could he bluff the beast-folk? For a time, perhaps—and then—inevitably, would come the moment when he would be forced to exert his power again. They were not easily cowed. And then all would be finished.

A light burst within him. Of course! He slapped his knee in delight, and forthwith made preparations for a second expedition to the 'monster.' He was fearful at first lest any objection should be raised, but the threat of the ray-pistol was not even needed. He was glad they had not noticed the sweat on his brow.

His father's ship still lay untouched in the other valley; the beast-folk still shunned it. Mardi's lip curled at the thought. He bade the warriors halt some distance from it, and entered it alone once again. His confidence had been growing during his period of mastery over the tribe; his stance was more erect, and more and more he wondered why it had never occurred to him before he found the ray-gun that it was natural that he should rule the beast-folk. He, who was so different; his superiority was in the nature of things. It was his heritage from the mighty race to which he belonged that he should guide the destiny of the lowly brutes amongst which he found himself.

It was whilst he was thinking thus, and rummaging through a cupboard that a faint sound behind him made him fling around in terror. He had scarce time to note the savage features of Brad and the filthy stump of arm before he was engulfed by the hairy mass of vengeful bone and muscle. He fought back, even though the despair in his heart told him it was useless. His enemy's hairy fingers sought his throat. A sudden jerk, and Mardi had torn himself free. He scrambled for the door; his brain was incapable of thinking, and somehow he found himself in the nose of the ship. The transparent walls; the desolation beyond; the mad jumble of strange sticks and bars behind him; pressing into his back. And Brad, snarling triumphantly, advancing slowly, relentlessly, towards him . . .

The next few seconds were a nightmare of noise and confusion. Mardi dimly remembered feeling something give behind him; there was a sudden outburst of sound that all but swamped his consciousness.

The ground glowed ruddily through the visi-screen; the floor bucked and lurched beneath him. An invisible hand grasped him and threw him violently to the rear of the ship, pressing him there. Abruptly he knew that Garn's tale of the Fire-Thing had been true. He moaned and tried to put his hands to his ears to shut out that hideous din. For the rest of that terrible flight he did nothing. His most vivid memory was of Brad, hanging grimly to the control-panel snarling and spitting defiance at the monster around him. There was about him a certain splendour . . .

Mardi closed his eyes and waited for death.

The landing, when it came, was the last that Martin's ship would ever make. It was destined to be the last the earth would witness for many thousands of years to come. The ship thumped and bounced like a child's ball; its underpart crumpled and buckled like paper. It was a marvel that it did not explode. The occupants were cut and badly bruised, but, mirac-

ulously, alive. But when Mardi tried to rise a shooting, tearing pain in his ankle made him scream in agony.

Strangely, Brad seemed to have forgotten his original intention. He made as if to leave the wreckage, then, struck by a sudden thought, he turned and dragged Mardi with him, heedless of the latter's cries.

The journey back was similar to the one made many years ago by Mardi's father, except that this time it was made in complete ignominy. After a few days they stumbled across a scouting party of the beast-folk and were escorted back to the village. The tribesmen were all for disposing of Mardi on the spot, but Brad intervened. "No, let him be; he will cause us no more trouble." Brad laughed contemptuously, and the rest jeered in mockery at the dismal figure of Mardi as he lay nursing his leg.

The beast-folk listened with awe and a new respect as Brad told them of his exploits in the Fire-Thing. In the midst of it all, Mardi crept away.

That night, when the village was asleep, Mardi slipped out quietly from the rude dwelling which had been given him. He dragged himself for many miles over the rough moonlit terrain, groaning every time he put his injured ankle to the ground. He did not think much about anything. There were no thoughts in his mind about the death of his race. He had no feelings of self-pity. If he thought of the beast-folk at all it was certainly not of what they might become in the distant future—how high they might climb.

All he felt was a sick agony from his ankle, and an increasing thirst as the hours sped by. He began to babble to himself in delirium. He stumbled and fell, but rose again. His steps grew shorter. Presently he vanished over the brow of a hill.

The inscrutable stars watched him go.

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GENERAL CHUNTERING

This time we shall open out with belated congratulations to Terry and Jean Trollope, who now live at 45, Francis Street, Bargoed, Glam. Jean was 21 on March 18th, and became Mrs. Trollope on March 19th . . . too much for one day! . . . from the sublime to the ridiculous, we note a report that a hen at Nagasaki, who survived the atom bomb, is reputed to have laid an egg with a hole in it . . . going back a bit, we also recall an interesting announcement of a two-way wrist radio; the receiver and transmitter combined only occupies a space 2in. x 2in. x 1in.—won't be long before we get the portable telephone so often mentioned by sf writers . . . Lyell Crane, of 23, Surrey Place, Toronto 5, Canada writes us a long and interesting letter, and says he is an ice-skating enthusiast, speciality ice-dancing; will any other fen so inclined please contact him . . . Operation Fantast forgets who loaned it four Weird Tales when it had its last leave . . . would the owner please write? . . . in the November '37 issue of one of the said WT, we came across the poem 'THE GREEN HILLS OF EARTH'—but not by Heinlein; verses of the song appear in a story by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner "Quest of the Starstone" . . . but it's somewhat different to Heinlein's version . . . Feb. 19 SatEvePost carried a borderline SF, 'RAIN-MAKER' by John Reese . . . Philip Rasch has sold an article to FATE, entitled 'Mexico's Strangest Story', slated for the July issue . . . Phil hopes to visit UK one day, and is interested in legends of Robin Hood and King Arthur . . . anyone who can give him lowdown on authentic spots to visit should write him . . . Walter Willis is struggling to set the type for the next issue of SLANT . . . all fen everywhere should lift their hats when meeting Walt . . . the man's a blinkin' 'ero . . . John Gunn is still looking for someone to lift from his shoulders the responsibility of the BFL . . . what about it SFS members? . . . Operation Fantast is now settled in Germany, so will all folk please use the BAOR address . . . fen expecting call-up are invited to write us for advice . . . (oh, boy, won't we tell 'em!) . . . any States folk who know USA servicemen working in the



Probability Zero

British Zone (on the Berlin airlift) should tell 'em to contact us . . . we will invite them round for a talk and a drink or two. Or three . . . Lilliput for May carried an article by S. P. Kernahan 'To the Moon and Back' which gives the rocket-ship one of the least biased reports yet seen in 'popular' literature . . . John Jones, recently returned to the USA reports the rumour that Street and Smith are going out of pulps is once more current . . . we hope it is just a rumour . . . Doctor Keller's THE FINAL WAR, a story written around the ten fantasy postcards issued by the Perri Press, has been published by the Perri Press in the form of a duplicated booklet . . . TWS Editor, Sam Merwin, Jr., gives George Borodin's novel 'Spurious Sun' a lambastin' in the June issue . . . Peter Martin's 'Summer in 3000' made the grade with Forrest Ackerman, who elected it to his listing for a basic SF library, in Winter '49 Arkham Sampler . . . Super Science Stories, who have a 'bi-monthly' schedule, produce January . . . and then April! . . . a number of British Fans want Lawrence and Finlay P/folios . . . any American fans care to help? . . . and that concludes this issues idle conversation . . . KFS.

PREDECESSOR

Long, long aeons before Man trailed the coat of his vaunted reason before the Gods, there was intellect upon the Earth. When he was no more than a half-formed reptile, gasping and flopping in the tidal mud, there were eyes that looked upon the young earth with reason and logic in their gaze. They were short-sighted eyes, true, but within their limited range they saw without error, and reasoned without superstition. Unlike the piped who was to follow them five hundred million years later, the Little Ones were not extroverts, bearing tools and belligerent weapons, but contemplative, content to confine their intelligence to their world as given, without striving to change it.

They turned their remarkably fine brains upon the processes of their own bodies, and it is sufficient proof of the quality of those brains that they completely mapped out the mechanism of their own heredity to the last gene—to the last molecule.

For four hundred thousand years they followed their inoffensive ways. Had they wished, they could have over-populated the planet and scarred its face, but they preferred to maintain a modest number of superlative quality. They aimed at nothing less than perfection—and that they achieved. They re-built their bodies, streamlined their bodily chemistry (can **you** do that, men?) organised their mode of living to the minutest detail. They planned a wonderful, intricate social pattern with survival as its purpose. Slight but significant variations from the norm were created to enable individuals to perform their specialised duties more effectively, all were **designed** with faultless perfection. Those to whom was entrusted the duty of perpetuating the race were isolated from all outside dangers and contacts, the heredity mechanism was freed of all trace of taint. They did not hurry over their gigantic understanding. They pressed quietly and steadily on, century by century amassing the necessary knowledge and skills. They had all eternity before them, they could afford to be infinitely, **infinitesimally** painstaking. They spent almost half a million years before their blueprints were complete, every molecule tailored into its place.

They chose to live in small,

detached groups, each large enough for survival, small enough to be coherent. With the whole boring business of food and shelter-getting regulated to the minutest detail, dovetailed into any environment, their intellects were freed for the highest aesthetic and contemplative activity. In the regular, unbroken round of collecting and feeding, building and working, breeding and growing, they found a wonderful harmony and peace, while their inner minds soared wider and higher in the ever-rising spiral of aesthetic development. Between group and group passed a steady flow of ambassadors, exchanging thoughts and concepts by which each advanced all, and all were bound together.

For many hundreds of thousands of years, the peaceful tenor of their ways went on. Gradually and imperceptibly the inter-group messengers dwindled and vanished, each compact social unit was so utterly self-contained, so perfectly self-maintaining, that the exchange was gradually dropped. Not intentionally, but unconsciously, as an unmoved limb will grow numb and powerless. The groups drew their minds in upon themselves, every individual in the unit partaking of a wonderful intellectual communion, almost a telepathic union, complete in itself in rapt contemplation.

During million of years they survived while other species fought and tore over the spoils of earth. For a long high noon the earth shook to the great saurians—but they passed. The giant mammals came, and passed. Ice ages swept back and forth across the heaving continents, but still the Little Ones survived. But the deadening hand of milleniums fell upon them. Deprived of the drive of sheer necessity, their intellects dulled. They never knew what happened to them—the faculties that would have perceived the change failed in parallel. They survived, of course. Their organisation—from the social unit to the smallest speck of colloid in their cells—had taken half a million years to design with only that end in view. Their survival was certain. The brilliant minds that had performed the task, aeons ago, **knew** that as long as life moved upon the earth, the Little Ones would be there. They survived.

It was their soul that died. The changeless routine grew into their reflexes, became automatic, and as million years succeeded million years, instinctive. The brain was dead, the inexorable law of life clamped down upon the Little Ones: "Security is stagnation, only in

hazard is progress."

So they lived on, automatons performing the instinctive duties which assured them of survival as long as the earth shall last—but without the earth shall last—but without appreciation, without thought, without soul. The Little Ones, the ants.

THE SHAVER MYSTERY CLUB

In 1945, in "Amazing Stories" Magazine, began what is now known, for want of a better name, as "The Shaver Mystery." Richard S. Shaver presented his alphabet which, he said, he had discovered in caves beneath the earth's surface, and from which he maintained all present-day languages were derived.

Shaver spent a long time in the caves, which he says were carved out of solid rock many miles below the earth's surface thousands of years ago. These caves are full of wonderful machines which are far ahead of anything science can produce to-day, according to Shaver, and are inhabited by degenerate humans that he calls 'deros.'

After the publication of the Shaver alphabet, in succeeding issues of "Amazing Stories," stories by Shaver about life in the caves appeared which he said were based on true happenings, and were disguised as fiction because he was unable to get them published as truth.

Shaver's story is that many thousands of years in the past the caves were created and lived in by race of beings he calls the 'Elder Gods.' These beings were so much more advanced mentally and spiritually than the earth's present-day inhabitants, that compared with them they were truly gods.

The 'Elder Gods' left earth for other planets thousands of years ago, leaving many valuable machines behind them in the caves, also some people for whom they had no room in their spaceships.

As time passed many of the surface inhabitants of earth found their way into the caves, and some of them stayed there to live. They became degenerate because of detrimental rays emitted by the machines left by the 'Elder Gods,' which they discovered how to operate and used without knowing that the metal in the machines must be renewed periodically, or it will emit radioactive rays which are particularly destructive to the mind.

According to Shaver, these half-mad 'deros' live in the caves to-day, and are a very real threat to the surface peoples of the earth. The machines they control could quickly wipe out life upon the surface should they decide to emerge and try to conquer us: Fortunately, until now their madness has prevented them from co-operating in such a venture and they fight continually amongst themselves.

I neither believe nor disbelieve in the existence of the caves, but I am interested in finding out whether or not they do exist. In co-operation with Richard S. Shaver I intend to organise all people in this country who want to do all they can to help prove or disprove his claims.

There are already more than two thousand American members of the Shaver Mystery Club, and more people are joining every day. There are no dues, but the Shaver Mystery Magazine, which is bi-monthly, costs fifty cents per copy. The high cost is due to the limited circulation of the magazine, and as soon as possible, the price will be reduced.

It is a very well-turned out magazine, printed on high quality paper, and is well worth the price to any Shaver Mystery fan.

Anyone interested in joining the Club should write to me at the address given at the end of this article. I will forward their names to Shaver, who will put them into touch with American members of the Club. They will then be able to obtain copies of the Shaver Mystery Club Magazine, and other Shaverian items by sending British fantasy books and magazines to their correspondents in exchange.

I will answer questions about the Mystery for British fans, as Shaver is already swamped with letters. Please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope when a reply is required.

Join the Club now and begin reading Shaver's two hundred thousand word novel "Mandark," which is being serialised in the Club magazine and will not be published anywhere else. If you have an open mind about the mystery and want to find out the truth, write to me now at:—

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RECENT BRITISH BOOKS

Short reviews of the last six months British Fantasy Books

By E. J. CARNELL

One of the most interesting items which have appeared on the British market, was MALLEUS MALIFICARUM, published late in 1948. This was the second edition of this rare work on witchcraft. The first printing in 1928 was taken from the original English edition of 1489, and is a valuable collectors' item. Failing that, no collector should be without a copy of the second item, if he wishes his collection to be termed 'reasonably complete.'

Two other late 1948 books worthy of note were THE PURPLE TWILIGHT, by Pelham Groom, and ALAS THAT GREAT CITY, by Francis Ashton. The former is a book with which astronautical technicians will find many faults. To the plain reader it is one of the finest space yarns yet published in this country. The first half of the story deals with the preparation of the ship, and the troubles of 'take-off.' The writer has made the story as near the real thing as possible. The second half deals with an adventure on Mars which I personally feel has been well handled, although different reviewers have had varying ideas about that. Pelham Groom promised a sequel, but this has not yet appeared. The second book: Ashton is a leading light in a society which believes in the probability of Atlantis. Several of his recent stories deal forcibly with the Atlantis theme, and this latest effort which follows his THE BREAKING OF THE SEALS is an even better attempt at portraying the probable life of that bygone empire.

More recently came SPURIOUS SUN, by George Borodin, which concerns an international scramble for atomic power; a big blow-up in Scotland; the atmosphere ignited by a chain-reaction; a fight to find damping processes. The story is well interlarded with smacks at all and sundry political set-ups, with the stress on the author's own particular axe-grinding. That would appear to be a belief that we are ALL wrong. John Russell Fearn continues the story of Violet Ray in THE GOLDEN AMAZON RETURNS, but in this tale the Amazon has a more likeable character, and instead of trying to rule the world for her own benefit, acts as a benefactor.

Just to show that Heinlein does not have total claim to worth-while-for-reading-by-adult science fiction juveniles, your attention is drawn to VOYAGE OF LUNA I, by David Craigie. Its scientific accuracy may not be quite so great, but makes a fine yarn. Boy and girl stowaways on the first test rocket to the Moon, accompanied by their dog. The space ship is reasonably accurate, and the Moon adventures are quite in keeping with adult magazine fiction, but it is a pity that the author writes about the Sun setting in space!

Two reprints of American books have appeared in the fiction field, Aldous Huxley's A P E AND ESSENCE, and Charles G. Finney's THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO. The illustrations have been replaced by others done by a British artist, Charles Noel Fish, and are 'qually as good—some critics say better—than the originals by Artzybasheff. In the non-fiction field, a reprint of Willy Ley's THE LUNGFISH AND THE UNICORN has appeared, and by the same author, a new ROCKETS AND SPACE TRAVEL, which should be of great interest to the technician.

Another non-fictional work, with an appeal to a certain class of fan, is HAUNTED BRITAIN, by Elliot O'Donnell. This latest work by O'Donnell is a worthy successor to the string of titles already appearing in print concerning haunted places in this country.

Returning to fiction, Hugh Kingsmill's THE DAWN'S DELAY contains four stories which fit more comfortably into the fantasy class than the weird. In "The End of The World" is depicted the destruction of the earth by a comet. In "Disintegration of a Politician" an accident knocks sense into a politician instead of out of him; "W.J." the third story, is more the symbolisation of Man's universal predicament; while the last story—"The Return of William Shakespeare" which was first published in 1929—makes the entire book worth buying. Dennis Wheatley's THE HAUNTING OF TOBY JUGG is in the weird vein. Of all the Wheatley weirds—there are not so many—I find this one by far the finest, although it could have been

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Forrest Ackerman informs us that production costs for Merritt's THE SHIP OF ISHTAR have been higher than expected, and the price will be 17/6, not 15/- as previously quoted. Please cancel your order if you do not want it at this new price. A few more orders can be accepted, so if you have not ordered, do so now. Copies of Robert Heinlein's SPACE CADET are still available at 15/-, as is the Bok P/f, at 7/5. Forrest is also still accepting orders for THE BIBLION OF MERRITT, priced at 10/- If you want one, order thru OPERATION FANTASY.

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written in a better vein. It deals with a Satanic Cult and of the slow horror built-up against the central character who is a paralysed ex-R.A.F. pilot, virtually a prisoner in a lonely Welsh castle. Of his attempts to get away from the nightly shadow-on-the-window and the gradually mounting tension in his mind. Only one fact mars an otherwise outstanding story—Wheatley has to grind a small political axe, which spoils part of the continuity although he does successfully tie in his political villains as more or less unwitting assistants to the Satanists.

A final reprint worthy of note is K R A K A T I T—AN ATOMIC PHANTASY, by Karel Capek. This volume was published under the first mentioned title in 1925 and has not seen a second edition until now. It is another on the atomic-discovery theme, written with all Capek's usual vitality, and it is more interesting because it was written so long before the discovery of atomic disintegration.

As so many publishers in Britain 'sneak' fantasy and sf novels onto the market, without the fanfare of trumpets given them by American publishers, many are often missed until nearly out of print. It would, therefore, be appreciated if readers would bring any items not reviewed in this column in the future, to our attention. With that plea for assistance in keeping abreast of the field, I wish you 'good reading.'