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Fillyloo, or Looking Backward - part 2.
Some Australian ephemera of the thirties;
Tentative Tales of Wonder; the lively
American specialist pulp scene

by Graham Stone

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An occasional message best described as a personal view of the
scientificfictional situation in Australia from

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Part 2

As well as the Crabbe and Weissmuller film travesties of Tarzan, I suddenly remember that there was a version to be heard on radio. I wasn't impressed, not having yet found the books. And I heard Flash Gordon in radio too, which wasn't convincing. What else was there? I didn't much care for any of the stuff meant for kids as far as I recall. Leafing through Wireless Weekly and Radio Pictorial of the mid-thirties at the State Library I get glimpses of various things though not much I remember hearing. Perhaps radio in general just wasn't my cuppa.

But there were two radio serials about which I was confused. They had similar titles and overlapped in time. **Drums** was on four nights a week from 1 Aug 1937. I never heard it and publicity indicates it wasn't of SF interest. **Jungle Drums** was in ten one-hour episodes from 4 Oct to 6 Dec and I seem to have heard only the last. Press synopses indicate it was an extravagant lost city yarn with scientific marvels, villainy and the conventional volcanic destruction of the place at the end.

"DRUMS"

No sound holds so many variations of feeling and mood as the beat of a drum. William Farnum, famous star of the screen and the stage, takes the part of Philip Lawrence in this exciting, mysterious and exotic drama played against the ever-changing background of the colorful and mysterious East.

2GB

Every Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday and Thursday,

At 7.0 p.m.

THE scattered collection of jewelry which seems destined to play a large part in the solution of the Lawrence Family's troubles in India, seems in some way to be bound up with the hiding place of the second emerald. As "Drums" is unfolded to the listening audiences on 2GB every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 7 o'clock, so the intensity of the drama grips every imagination. Who is Sarojini Nayada, the mysterious Hindu woman? What will happen when the search for Stephen Lawrence leads the Lawrence family into Tibet?

"JUNGLE DRUMS" New Radio Serial

FOLLOWING "As Ye Sow," Edmund Barclay's Australian saga, which ran for nine months, the next serial to be relayed on national wave-lengths will be "Jungle Drums," written by Maxwell Dunn, of Launceston, Tasmania.

This is a serial in 10 episodes of half an hour each, dealing with an English party which embarks on an expedition to darkest Africa, to discover the whereabouts of the long-lost father of the heroine. The chief characters are Edward Gordon, a noted African explorer; his friend, the honourable Terry Clare, Earl of Truscott and Inverness, who finances the expedition; Jill Trelawney, the heroine; and Dr. Quintin Vaughan, an authority on African native customs, who quickly reveals himself as the villain of the piece. As well as the sinister Dr. Vaughan the forces arrayed against the party include a curious jungle plant which breathes and kills men, a race of giants, and a pigmy tribe of killers. The party is caught in a cave, and earthquakes, and other horrors add to the danger.

From all this, it will be apparent that the story material recalls the series of romances written by that master of African legend and adventure, Rider Haggard; but Mr. Dunn's treatment is entirely fresh and modern. The mysterious sounding drum which glows red and speaks like a wireless set, and the frantic search for a huge radium field in Central Africa, are two of the more modern elements in the story.

Written out of a full knowledge and understanding of the dark African interior which is its central scene, "Jungle Drums" should find a wide listening public. The serial will be produced from Melbourne by John Cairns on Mondays at 8 p.m., beginning Monday, October 4.

...And also running at the time was **The Cities Under the Sea** by E.V. Timms, which would later be novelised. I didn't know about it then. Another serial that I missed entirely in 1938 was **Dalt and Zumba** which looks interesting.

CONQUERING THE WORLD

IN the past men have dreamt of world Empire; there was Alexander and Caesar and Napoleon. To-day, to conquer the world would seem a task beyond the dreams of a super man, yet for all we know there may be some mad scientist who has stumbled on one of the hidden secrets of nature, and has within his power the means of subduing the nations of the world. Such a man is Koski, the mad Russian Duke, whose plans of world conquest are now the subject of attention from Detective Steve Dalt and his willing, if sometime impractical assistant, Zumba the Zulu. The adventures of "Dalt and Zumba" continue to thrill old and young, from 2GB every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, at 6.15 p.m.

But to continue with the personal history. A few months after reading *Planet (ugh!) Plane*, a few months later when looking for the latest *Buck Rogers* I spotted a magazine with the arresting title *Tales of Wonder*. It was no. 2, no date, but released in England in March, so this was May 1938 or later.

The cover picture was no great masterpiece as art, but never mind. It showed a rocket grounded in a red desert landscape that had to be Mars. Spacesuited figures climbing a ladder to board it, more sprinting for it pursued by mechanical monsters: box bodies scurrying on jointed legs and raising jointed arms (not the tentacles specified in the text). And the story here illustrated was **Sleepers of Mars** by John Beynon, obviously a sequel to **Planet (Ugh!) Plane**. The contents page said as much, and: "On their dried-up planet the Martians slept on, cheated of a new world that had died long since." And there were five more stories in the issue, all promising...

But above all, this magazine had a name for what it offered. Science Fiction! Immediately I understood. I was like the lady who had been speaking prose all her life and never known it. I already knew what I was most interested in reading, but now I knew the name for it. The term had only been in use for nine years then, but it was obviously right. It needed no explanation, it was self-defining. Everyone had immediately said "Of course, that's what you call it."

Knowing magazines existed I started looking and soon found the others. They had little distribution in the beautiful city of Adelaide but I learned there were a few places to find them. I remember, not quite like yesterday but tolerably well, the first dozen or so issues I found and what stood out in their contents, so let's take a look at them. This is not quite all from memory, I have found these issues to refer to.

Tales of Wonder, then, nos. 1, 2, and 3. I realise now that behind this magazine there had been painful years for its editor Walter Gillings trying to get publishers interested in the exuberant new American movement enough to try a local version. The industry was run by men of low intelligence who hadn't had a new idea in their lives and only wanted to keep doing what their grandparents had done.

But one firm, The World's Work, which ran the magazines *Mystery Stories* and *Mystery & Detection*, also had an irregular *Master Thriller Series*, five or six a year, one-shot magazines of mystery and adventure with some vaguely spooky stories, tired and timid stuff it was but evidently there were readers. It included such oddities as *Tales of the Foreign Legion*, *Tales of the Levant*, *Tales of the Far Frontiers*. Gillings put together a one-shot *Tales of Wonder*

for them, it sold well and they made it a quarterly.

Tales of Wonder, unnumbered and undated [1937] then, was the first English magazine meant to be something like those running in the USA. Its contents were generally fairly good, all first printed there but written by men who knew what they were doing. By contemporary American standards the tone was restrained and polite, the imagination not very fevered. The World's Work management thought American magazine science fiction was too advanced for the English public, who needed preparation.

The cover story **Superhuman** by Geoffrey Armstrong (who was John Russell Fearn, of course I didn't know that) used the thirty-three-year-old basis of Wells' *The Food of the Gods* and didn't consider any of the problems of rampant gigantism, telling only of the production of a pair of human giants who intended to take the over world. Didn't make it. **Seeds from Space** as Fearn had Earth overwhelmed by plant growth of alien origin, a world-smothering menace that proved actually beneficial. The unseen aliens were helping us survive the real threat. In **Revolt on Venus** by W.P.Cockroft the first flight there found hostile natives and set them back for the time being. **Man of the Future** by Festus Pragnell did no more than introduce the idea that the species might be improved a lot by suitable treatment. **The Perfect Creature** by John Beynon burlesqued the same thought in a tale of a synthetic monster (much later he would satirise this story in turn as **Una**). In **Monsters of the Moon** by Francis Parnell a Lunar colony had trouble with wild life. **The Prr-r-ect** by Eric Frank Russell was a sole ET visitor. I thought this was all pretty good stuff.

No. 2 had got my attention with **Sleepers of Mars**, which told what happened to the men of the Russian rocket that landed soon after the English one in Planet (ugh!) Plane and didn't make it home. They met the Martians and their Machines, but then found a city full of Martians in suspended animation from a much earlier time who had expected to be revived when the active population had licked the environmental problems. But the problems remained unlicked and the active Martians had enough worries without adding a lot of revives to the population. You can guess what the Sleepers thought of that.

TALES OF WONDER

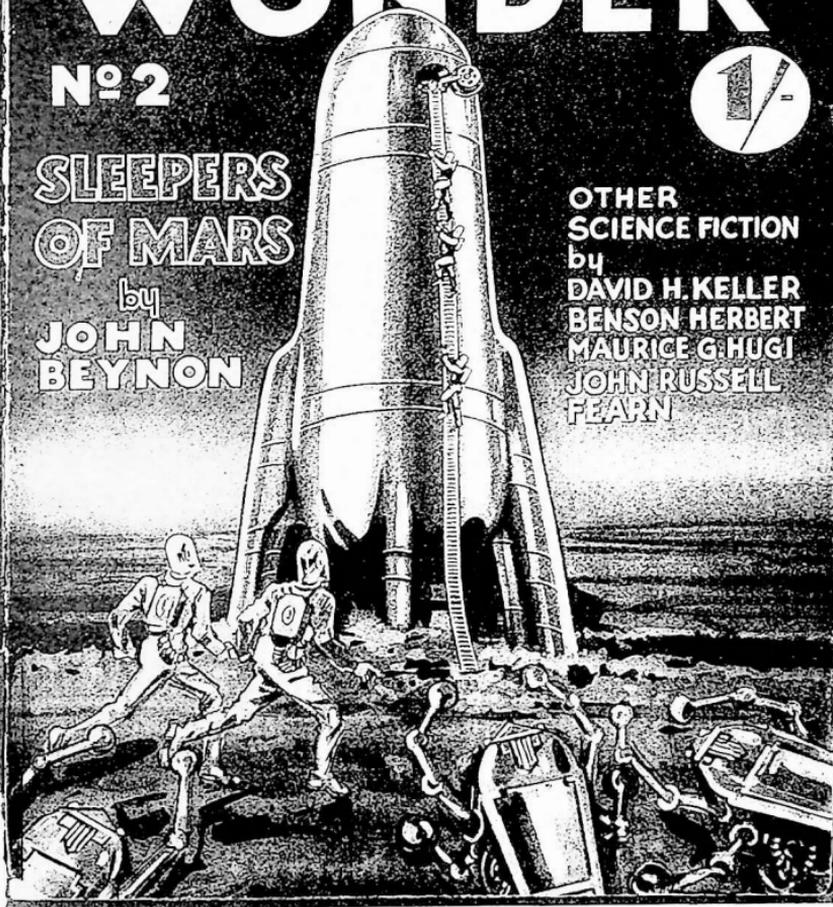
№ 2



**SLEEPERS
OF MARS**

by
**JOHN
BEYNON**

**OTHER
SCIENCE FICTION**
by
**DAVID H. KELLER
BENSON HERBERT
MAURICE G. HUGI
JOHN RUSSELL
FEARN**



Then there was **Super-Senses** by Maurice G.Hugi: the viewpoint character had perceptions greatly, and fatally, amplified. So what? Yes, that's what I thought even then. In **Lunar Lilliput** by William F.Temple a first Moon flight found the last survivor of original Lunarians and a civilisation of midgets he had cultivated for reasons not made clear. In **Stenographer's Hands** by David H.Keller big business planned to get better office staff by breeding them. Who would laugh? They would if they could.

No. 3, Summer 1938, featured on the cover a scene from **The Horror in the Telescope** by Edmond Hamilton, a story that didn't win my approval. On taking a look through a ginormous new telescope of prodigious power the observer saw Earth as it was fifty million years ago by light passing round the curve of space. Sure. And saw people, dominated by clearly intelligent reptiles. What a lot of garbage! was my indignant reaction. Even if space was curved so that you could see right round the universe to your own position, and fifty million lightyears then seemed a long distance, you would never get that good a telescope to form an image from that light source to resolve people-sized objects well enough to recognise them. And humans fifty million years ago? Not even one million, I already understood. And the observer reacted by going bananas. Why?

By the way, stories by American writers in Tales of Wonder were sourced from earlier printings in the US, but this one was a first appearance here. Too bad for American editors? But this is absurd.

Wyndham had two, **The Puff-Ball Menace** as Beynon and **The Last Lunarians** as John B.Harris. Disgruntled Asians used biological warfare experimentally, trying out a deadly parasitic fungus on England. Ancient Moon dwellers put themselves in suspended animation (like the ancient Martians of Sleepers of Mars), hoping for unsuspecting spacefarers to come along some day.

In **The World's Eighth Wonder** by Eric Frank Russell Martians came to Earth to look us over and didn't much like what they saw; locals put a tent over their ship and charged admission to look at it. **The Man who Lived Backwards**, by Charles F.Hall -- well, he lived backwards. This was my introduction to time manipulation stories. **Satellites of Death** by L.J.Johnson proposed the idea of disposing of an inconvenient corpse by

launching it into orbit. **The Giant Bacillus** by H.O.Dickinson borrowed Wells' induced gigantism in a much exaggerated form, enlarging a microbe to dog size. In **The Midget from Mars** by Thomas Sheridan another human Martian, abbreviated this time, visited. As well, nonfictionally I.O.Evans asked **Can we Conquer Space?** and said we could. Well, in 1938 it had to be carefully explained. And Gillings editorialised on *The Evolution of Science Fiction*, giving few facts but dropping names and showing newcomers like me that there had been some background besides Wells and Verne.

So far, so good. *Tales of Wonder* was meant for readers new to modern SF, and I was certainly one of these. These three issues were enough to show that science fiction wasn't all of a piece. There was the good, the bad and the staggeringly awful. I was soon to realise that a lot of these stories had the same thing wrong with them: they weren't really *stories* at all, they had an idea, a possibility, some new departure from what we were used to, but they did nothing much with it. They could be adequately summarised in a few words as I've been doing here.

I found the ideas, some good, some less than half-baked, interesting enough to compensate for often rather dull writing. There was a faint touch of condescension there, and more than a hint from the editor that his product was something respectable in contrast to what those uncouth people across the Atlantic were producing.

Tales of Wonder had been a revelation. But I realised what a weak effort it really was when I saw the real thing, the American magazines. They were something else again.

I found three issues of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, surely a pretty silly title. It had run six years as *Wonder Stories*, but the firm that then took it over published a lot of magazines called *Thrilling something*.

First impression, the art work: *Tales of Wonder's* weakest point. Its covers were pale and static; interior illustrations were tiny amateurish sketches, it was strange that anyone thought them fit to print. *Thrilling Wonder* – what a contrast. The August 1937 cover had color, action, spectacle: a magnificent Tyrannosaurus-like beast licking up a man with its long tongue (Dino-

chameleosaurus?) while others reacted, one of Howard Brown's best paintings. And the opening illustration pages inside were lively scenes that helped introduce the stories and set the scene.

But the content? Let's take the themes and settings in those issues: Aug 1937, Feb and Apr 1938.

Space flight figured in eleven of the twenty-two stories.

In **Holmes' Folly** by Edmond Hamilton, tinkerer Holmes developed flight by manipulation of gravity and was preparing for the first lunar trip: but he learned that the Martians had been secretly watching, fearing aggressive Earth would destroy non-violent Mars. Holmes gave up his project to delay it.

A Comet Passes by Eando Binder was a series of episodes of a comet appearing, from ancient times to the first trip to visit it.

Via Etherline and **Via Asteroid** by Gordon A.Giles (who was also Binder) began a series. The first Mars expedition went through vicissitudes there and elsewhere.

The Immortality Seekers by John W.Campbell Jr was third in a light-weight series with the first space fliers in trouble on successive worlds, here an already impossibly Earthlike Callisto. The title? The local humanoids proposed using genetically engineered micro-life for internal repair and maintenance.

In another six stories space flight was well established as background.

The Hothouse Planet by Arthur K.Barnes had its setting on rain-forested Venus (alas!), not unlike Amazonia as portrayed in popular fiction a few generations ago. The action was collecting examples of novel fauna for a zoo.

Hollywood on the Moon by Henry Kuttner as the title indicates had the future film industry moved off Earth for vague reasons. These two stories began a collaborative series with Barnes.

A NEW TUBBY STORY BY RAY CUMMINGS

THRILLING

WONDER STORIES

OCT.

15¢

**CAVERN OF THE
SHINING POOL**

A Novelette of
Time's Vortex

By
**ARTHUR
LEO
ZAGAT**

THRILLING
PUBLICATION

THE IMMORTALITY SEEKERS

An Interplanetary Novelette
By **JOHN W. CAMPBELL, JR.**

Dream-Dust from Mars by Manly Wade Wellman was about future wickedness on Earth, but the bad guy (a dope peddler) was one of Wellman's Martians found in many of his stories as good, bad or indifferent characters. Soft tentacled bodies, prosthetic legs to walk with on Earth, petal-covered heads, artificial voice-boxes as they lacked vocal chords.

The Cavern of the Shining Pool by Arthur Leo Zagat had a future of regular interplanetary traffic and a ship slipping through a hole in the fabric of space, an "ether eddy" – now we'd say a wormhole or a singularity -- into another universe, or a distant part of this one.

In **Roamer of the Stars** by Clyde Wilson, not heard from again, extrasolar beings made of ultradense matter passed by.

Life Eternal by Binder -- well, life extended indefinitely. There was no consideration of the social impact and obvious problems, it wasn't going to be available to the masses without some massive changes. Again one of a series. A long-living couple came back from a long interstellar excursion to an occupied solar system and had to fight a sinister band of immortals developed in the mean time.

I am uncomfortably aware now of something about this story. It is representative of the power-fantasy theme in SF, generating many stories of individuals acquiring superhuman talents and capabilities and engaging in spectacular deeds. I think how SF bears some responsibility for the concept of the superstrong character with magical powers that grew in the comics and later came to dominate children's television and much supposedly for adults.

Other-dimensional worlds were another common theme. In **Easy Money** by Hamilton a proletarian hireling told of his visit to somewhere else via matter transmitter: reading it again I find it's still pretty good satire, should be reprinted but hasn't been that I know of. In **The Infinite Enemy** by Jack Williamson there was access to a whole parallel universe of anti-matter, and that was just for a start. **Alchemy of Outer Space** by D.L. James was, I later realised, a variant on the theme of the message from beyond giving directions which lead to Earth being invaded (remember Hoyle & Elliot's **A for Andromeda?**). In this instance a robot apparently opened and closed an interdimensional route. **We, the Invisible** by Frank Belknap Long had a sort

of parallel world.

Time travel? Sure. There were time-travelling people-eating giant ants in **Lords of 9016** by Fearn. In **The Changer of History** by Alexander Samalman (later to be the last editor of Thrilling Wonder Stories) the researcher time-scanning the past tried to influence events by will-power.

Kuttner in **When the Earth Lived** assumed vitalism, the idea that life is a supernatural force or principle. Here it was being generated by alien experimenters and applied to Earth so that inanimate matter began getting active. **Zones of Space** by Max C. Sheridan proposed that natural fundamentals actually might only apply in a particular region of the universe, not all of it: but it is scarcely plausible that conservation of energy or the value of Pi might not be constant.

Sublime to gorblime: Oct 1937, the first issue I sighted, had the last episode of a comic strip, **Zarnak**, by Max Plaisted. Not a good one: a long way short of Buck Rogers. Not popular with readers, it was ended at a convenient cliff-hanger.

So in these issues were found some of the writers who had made SF what it was by 1938. And they displayed the spirit of the movement then. The optimism, enthusiasm for the future, expectation of new worlds to be found and endless benefits from science. It was the real science fiction of which the English efforts I had seen were but a shadow.

Thrilling Wonder had some factual matter as well as the stories. Scientifacts was trivia like "It would require a gigantic steel tank 691 miles on a side, forming a cube, to hold the 330,000,000 cubic miles of water comprising all our rivers, lakes and oceans..."

But look at this bit of history: "A one-ton machine that in a single action can solve nine simultaneous equations with nine unknowns...has been developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Although the calculator was originally designed for the solution of problems in civil engineering it is expected to prove equally useful in such diverse fields as nuclear physics, geodetic surveying, genetics and psychology. The machine

weighs approximately two thousand pounds and has more than thirteen thousand separate parts, including six hundred feet of flexible steel tape and almost two thousand ball-bearing pulleys. A single movement of the mechanism performs automatically in a few seconds, computations that might take days by ordinary methods."

Sir James Jeans, of all writers, was there with two more substantial straight popular pieces, *Eclipses of the Sun and Giant and Dwarf Stars*.

A pictorial feature, *If*, by Jack Binder, illustrated such possibilities as "If evolution speeded up", "If the Earth stopped rotating", "If the oceans dried". A lot of plot ideas thrown out there.

So with these samplings of two magazines we had two very different kinds of science fiction. In *Tales of Wonder* it was cautious, even diffident. It had what its writers thought were reasonable possibilities for the scientific future, presented in an entertaining fashion with care not to upset anyone. In *Thrilling Wonder Stories* it was boldly confident that a lot of changes were coming and was romancing about some of the likely prospects, opportunities, dangers.

Let me just insert a little background that I didn't yet have in 1938. Science fiction had been a distinct entity for only twelve years then. Hugo Gernsback, the only world figure born in Luxemburg, had given it a name. Actually his first thought was the neologism *Scientifiction*, which wasn't quite right but invited the useful adjective *scientificational*. The starter's gun punctured the air with the first issue of *Amazing Stories* in April 1926, and Gernsback did more than start the first magazine specialising in the new literature - he started the first six, or seven if you counted the marginal *Scientific Detective Monthly*. These however were variations that shook down to two, *Amazing Stories*, and *Wonder Stories* which by the time I came on the scene had become *Thrilling Wonder Stories*; meanwhile *Astounding Stories* had been started independently. Those unfortunate titles were followed by *Startling*, *Marvel*, *Fantastic*, *Miracle*, *Astonishing*, *Super Science*, *Absolutely Incredible Stories* - no, for some reason that wasn't used.

But there emerged three strands with different characteristics through the early and mid thirties. The more active authors generally wrote for all

three, but different publishers and editors had their own policies and approaches. The weak English imitation was deliberately meant to be different again.

So when I picked up the October and November 1938 issues of *Astounding Science Fiction*, as the title had recently been improved, I found it noticeably different again.

The cover artist was the same Howard V. Brown whose Venerian reptile had impressed me on *Thrilling Wonder*, but his covers for *Astounding* were quite different from his work there. *Thrilling Wonder's* covers were all action: that Tyrannosauroid scooping up a man for lunch; a space vessel directing a heat ray on Mars (the cover made it seem a warlike act, actually in the story it was melting a polar icecap to augment the water supply); more monsters threatening people; a Western-like confrontation on an alien world; novel aircraft in combat; a highrise-sized giant devastating a city; men fighting hippopotamus-sized ants...

Astounding covers tended to be more scene than action, often featuring machinery, suggesting another world or time. By the way, *Astounding* had its edges trimmed, giving it a better look than the ragged edges of most pulp magazines that added to their general look of haste, informality, cheapness. Magazines aiming at a touch of class like *Blue Book* and *Golden Fleece* were trimmed to show it. Trivial, but it made a difference and in those days we thought it important: SF had low prestige and the first impression was important. *Astounding* managed to look as sober and reputable as was possible with such a title.

These two covers, then, both had spacesuited men on another world. For October, traversing a plain, surrounded by small luminous objects, with a building in the distance: details in the story illustrated, as the reader expected: a cover picture not related to any of the contents was then a rare departure. On November they are seen at some distance in a frigid landscape, with the arresting spectacle of Jupiter in the the sky showing the location as a Jovian satellite, Ganymede we are told. Alas, Brown represented Jupiter with an impossibly shaded area, a horrendous blunder that editor Campbell left there and invited readers to write in saying what was wrong with it.

Fillyloo, or Looking Backward

In November the cover story, **Reunion on Ganymede** by Clifford G.Simak, is as illogically contrived as Hollywood at its silliest. But it takes the then common idea of war between planets and, assuming all that, considers what happened afterwards. (If we go right back to Wells' **The War of the Worlds**, the probable answer is that later the Martians came again a lot better prepared). But here, when Earth and Mars grapple in space and fight over satellites and Earth wins, then what? The story tells of an unlikely series of accidents at a later reunion of veterans of the decisive action. Something to think about, for all the heavy sentimentalising.

Cover story in October was **Magician of Dream Valley** by Raymond Z. Gallun, and three more names were listed above the magazine title: L.Ron Hubbard (there's a name to shiver at, the prophet of Scientology; but just a pulp writer then), L.Sprague de Camp, Eando Binder. The Hubbard was part of a serial novel, **The Tramp**, in which after head injuries and experimental brain surgery (something that didn't really exist yet) a nonentity developed a supernatural power, miraculously emitting beneficial or mostly harmful radiation. Sure. And another suggestion of the superman theme. The de Camp was **The Command**, which on the other hand was about a bear given augmented intelligence to approximate human level, not bad; later sequels though were unnecessary. The Binder was a weak robot story.

-- to be continued

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