

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

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THE BEST OF MY BEST

by A. E. van Vogt

Aside from SLAN—

There was a time when I thought my long fantasy novelet, "Asylum," was the best story I had ever written. The writing of the final scene—where I had to depict a being with an I.Q. of 1200—seemed to strain my brain. Yet so far have I progressed that I'm considering a sequel.

Another story I once put first, and which was incredibly hard to write, was THE PAWNS OF NULL-A. I can still remember when a friend of mine read my original weak ending; I had shirked the ultimate task. It was as a result of his urging that I wrote the final confrontation between Gosseyn and the Shadow being, a highly original ending and the only one that was truly logical.

I have always had a tender place for the short stories "Far Centaurus" and "The Monster," but the latter has too much fantasy for the way I feel these days, and the former, after all, gains a lot of its power from the ending. Of the two novels, THE WORLD OF NULL-A and THE MIXED MEN, I still respect the former and consider the latter full of good things. But it was THE WEAPON MAKERS, with its famous last line (about which so many people have asked me) that was for years my favorite novel.

Nevertheless, as I came progressively to terms with the present era, all these stories lost their immediacy for me. I realize this is a dangerous criterion. By that standard, my latest novelet, "The Silkie," is my best; it has the immediacy.

But I'll dispense with such Jesuitic logic, and I will report that when THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE was reissued recently in paperback, it won my accolade. I observed with pleasure the moment by moment detail of action. I was impressed anew by the continuing invention, the sustained intensity of every scene, and how real the alien beings seemed. These many years after writing most of it, I still believe that we humans are as vulnerable mentally and emotionally as my Nexialist main character proved them to be.

Even as Grosvenor fought the alien creatures, he was engaged in a struggle with his own associates. With consummate skill, he parried their specialist knowledge with his new science. In the end, he established once more that men can take a step forward to a higher analytical reality.

Of my most famous story, SLAN, I'll say this: it has feeling. Yet it is not the kind of feeling I would express these days. My loss, perhaps, and maybe I'll go back to the simple purity of purpose that both my slan characters, Jommy and Kathleen, had.

It may be that an author needs to be wary of his progression towards sophistication. And I do plan to look into this. But I choose VOYAGE over SLAN, because it is more knowingly scientific. Its main character is visibly a trained person, who understands what he's doing.

I expect to be in this analytical phase for a few more years. After that, ask me again what is my best story.

—A. E. van Vogt

SFR STORY RATINGS

Story category Length in words	SHORT STORIES (up to 9,000)	NOVELETS (10-18,000)	NOVELLAS (19-39,000)	NOVELS (40,000+)
Worth buying	a-b	A-C	I-IV	1-5
Worth reading	c-d	D-E	V-VI	6-7
Not recommended	e-g	F-H	VII-IX	8-10

The rating designates how well the story is liked. Collections and anthologies are not rated. "Worth buying" means that the story, by itself, is worth buying a magazine or book for. Two or more stories "worth reading" often make a magazine or book worth buying. For a detailed discussion of the rating system, see SFR #7.

I, ROBOT, by Isaac Asimov. Signet, N.Y. D2458, 1964. 186 pp. 50¢

In the year 2058 a young reporter has an interview with the elderly robopsychologist of U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men. The stories that are told in this interview trace the history of robotics through the first fifty or so turbulent years when they were first introduced into society.

The stories range in content from the plight of a little girl who has just lost her playmate robot to the confusion that results when a super-computer with almost infinite ability but with the personality of a twelve-year-old designs a hyper-space ship and sends two men on a merry trip 300,000 parsecs into space. Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics play an important part.

This book, which was first published as a whole in 1950, remains a favorite and is a quite prophetic view into what we may expect from computers and robot devices in the future.

NOVEL - 3
—Robert Merryman

TEN YEARS TO DOOMSDAY, by Chester Anderson & Michael Kurland. Pyramid, N.Y. R-1015, 1964. 158 pp. 50¢

As this novel starts off it reminds one of some of Everett B. Cole's work, but it manages to degenerate from this level despite the promising plot. The galaxy is about to be invaded and Terra decides to raise the technological level of a planet by several hundred years within a decade, so this planet can not only defend herself but slow down the galactic invaders. Interesting in places only.

NOVEL - 8
—The Editor

THE FALLING TORCH, by Algis Budrys. Pyramid, N.Y. F-1028, 1964. 158 pp. 40¢

This composite novel has more cohesiveness than it did as magazine stories, but it seems to be lacking in impact. Unfortunately, this is inherent in the book, as it tells of the hero's efforts to find his place in society, first as the son of the president of the Terran Government in Exile (in the Centaurian System), and then as an agent sent to the occupied Earth to help attempt a revolt. It takes him too long, and there is too much semi-incident detail. It should have been left as a loosely-connected series.

NOVEL - 7
—The Editor

TO CONQUER CHAOS, by John Brunner. Ace, N.Y. F-277, 1964. 192 pp. 40¢

This good story first was in New Worlds (Aug.-Sept.-Oct., 1963). It tells of a time when man lives in scattered villages, at the level of our own eighteenth century. On this future Earth is the barrenland, an unexplored area a hundred miles across seeming devoid of life except for unearthly animals that come from it which terrify the nearby settlements. Two men determine to enter it and solve the mystery, one of whom has what are evidently visions of a village in its center; intertwined with their tale is that of a girl in this village. The village's secret, unknown even to its inhabitants, is uncovered to form the climax of TO CONQUER CHAOS, a book whose mood makes you wonder what the secret is and makes it worthwhile to find out.

NOVEL - 5
—Dean M. Sandin

MAGAZINE REVIEWS by Dean M. Sandin

Serials are not rated until the review of the final installment. Non-science fiction is not rated.

If, July, 1964. 130 pp. 40¢ (2/10)

If is now monthly (and in the position of being dated two months ahead of its appearance instead of one, as the other monthly magazines). The contents page includes a couple of authors who aren't found in the magazines often enough any more:

Robert A. Heinlein. His three-part serial, "Farnham's Freehold," begins in this issue. With respect to style, this of course is good Heinlein—nothing more need be said. The story itself is not yet as good as many of his others; so far it has mainly concerned the interplay between the six characters who emerge from their bomb-shelter after an atomic attack and find themselves in an unspoiled (uninhabited?) world, perhaps in a different time track. The story suddenly becomes quite a lot more interesting at the end of the installment, when we learn a startling new fact about this other Earth. Get this serial—it most likely will turn out to be at least very good.

A.E. van Vogt. "The Silkie," his second magazine story within a year after a more than ten years' hiatus, is about a breed of artificially mutated men who have special powers and who must use them to fight an interstellar menace.

NOVELET - D

Nova, No. 19. 91 pp. (price?)

Another foreign publication that SFR has received, this is a German SF magazine that you might be interested in if you know Deutsch. Write to:

Horst W. Margeit
Osterbekstr. 44
2000 Hamburg 22, W. Germany

Analog, June, 1964. 96 pp. 50¢, 5/-

James H. Schmitz' two-part novella, "Undercurrents," concludes here. It is a sequel to "Novice" (C), which was in Analog in June, 1962 and in the anthology ANALOG 2. This serial is the entertaining story of Telzey Amberdon, a teenage girl of remarkable intellectual and telepathic abilities. It concerns both Telzey's psionic development—how she learns her powers and their scope—and the way they are used by her and her father's bank in protecting her best college friend from a murder plot. The door is left wide open at the end for another account of Telzey and how far her abilities extend (in particular, there's a government agency interested in her).

NOVELLA - III

Fantastic, June, 1964. 130 pp. 50¢ (3/7)

"Testing," by John J. McGuire, deals with the efforts of a group of seven people who land on a planet, leave their ship, and then suddenly find themselves transferred to a barren desert on another part of the planet. They find an alien, a balloon-creature that follows and observes them as they slowly make their way back to the ship, gradually losing members of the party to the hostile planet's mountains and wildlife. "Testing" effectively holds the reader's attention throughout its length. (C)

Albert Teichner's "Body of Thought" is the thoughtful story of an elderly mathematician who is asked to become part of a government project which will use his genius brain, linked with others to a computer, when he dies. Teichner's well done examination of the problems that arise in the project and his portrayal of the mathematician are slightly reminiscent of Isaac Asimov, and make this a good tale.

NOVELET - D

Subscription rates: 10 issues for \$1.00, 22 issues for \$2.00, 45 issues for \$4.00. Advertisements are five cents per word, minimum remittance \$1.00. Back issues are ten cents per copy; all are available.

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THE BRITISH SCENE

by John Carnell

The first of the new Science Fantasy issues under the new management (#65, price 2/6d) was published here on May 27 and bears out editor Kyril Bonfiglioli's statement that he intends turning it into a science fiction magazine. Apart from one four-page short, the fantasy flavor has disappeared. Lead stories are by Aldiss and Bulmer.

Innovations are a poem, a short translated Finnish item, the inclusion of two fan writers, Bradley and Potts, and the announcement of a prize for the best s-f story written by a scientist.

WHAT'S IN A NAME DEPT. Herbert Jenkins Ltd, who have launched their new series of hardcover s-f with Ted Tubb's MOON BASE ("Window on the Moon" New Worlds serial) have now bought Lan Wright's "Dawn's Left Hand" from the same source and re-titled it SPACE BORN. Note: Tubb's 1956 NW serial "Star Ship" was re-titled THE SPACE BORN by Ace Books; Brian Aldiss' 1957 UK book NON-STOP was re-titled STARSHIP in the USA. Suggested title to Ace, who have also bought the Wright: NON-STOP ?

Editor's note: And perhaps Andre Norton's STAR BORN will be reprinted as THE NON-STOP STARBORNE SPACESHIP.

THE INVISIBLE MAN, by H.G. Wells.
Popular Library, N.Y. K71, 1964.
125 pp. 40¢

This story as one of the earliest in science fiction is still good reading. Wells' writing has suffered very little from the progress of science within the intervening years. The explanation of Griffin's invisibility is logical and concise without being precise. In this way new discoveries in science do not conflict with the book.

The story itself describes what happens to a man who is experimenting with optics when he makes himself invisible. He believes that the world is his for the taking as long as no one can see him. Disadvantages of being invisible soon become apparent making him less optimistic about his future. NOVEL - 6
—Lawrence Beckwith

FEATURE SELECTION

SINISTER BARRIER, by Eric Frank Russell. Paperback Library, N.Y.
52-287, 1964. 176 pp. 50¢

First appearing in Unknown in 1939 and revised for Fantasy Press in 1948, makes its first appearance in paperback in fourteen years—it was Galaxy Novel #1. This is a rather long wait for a novel of such quality.

The novel begins with the deaths of several noted scientists. One by one these come to the attention of Bill Graham, liaison officer between the U.S. department of special finance and the scientists it subsidizes, who notes that the unusual circumstances under which the scientists have died are all related to one another. In order to find the cause of these deaths Graham travels to Silver City to question a scientist before his suspected imminent death. He eventually finds him and learns the nature of the Vitons, the mysterious life form which is dominant over but yet unseen by humans, and which has been causing the deaths of scientists who suspected their existence.

In addition to its engrossing plot, this novel is quite smooth, fast reading, with the mystery carefully unfolded right up to the end of the book. Embellished with Eric Frank Russell's characteristic light style, it is a must for any science fiction collection.

NOVEL - 1
—Bill Pond

ADDING A DIMENSION, by Isaac Asimov.
Doubleday, N.Y., 1964. 202 pp. \$3.95

Here we have another collection of seventeen essays on science from Asimov's F&SF column. Emphasizing the history of science, he unearths facts both surprising and interesting—a good many of which you will probably not have heard of before. My own favorites include "T-Formation" (exponential mathematics) and "The Rigid Vacuum" and "The Light That Failed" (both on ether). In addition to the Good Doctor's many other abilities, there is (and possibly the rarest of them) the ability to make any subject he writes on not only interesting but fascinating—be it fact or fiction.—The Editor