

# SPACEWARP

Vol. II, No. 1

OCTOBER, 1947



monthly  
SPACEWARP

Vol II - No. 1

October, 1947

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Free sample copy. Why don't you break down and send us two bits; then you'll get the next three issues, too.

"Sapiens Dominabitur Astris"

EXCHANGE



# LUCKY!

By BILL GROOVER

The little space ship took off from Terra at 0900 hours and soared into the cloudless morning sky. The pilot, Rik Davis, sat alone in the sleek experimental job and thought of the coming journey to Alpha Centaurus -- a long hard journey, with nothing but the sight of the eternal, unwinking stars in the visiplate, nothing to break the monotony.

Rik pushed the accelerator handle to its second notch. The ship lurched ahead so quickly that it almost broke Rik's head off at the neck. He gave a low whistle of admiration for the power of the thundering jets, then set the automatic pilot and went to sleep.

The robot pilot was set to increase the ship's speed by one G every fifteen minutes for two hours. The shock of the second burst of power, however, was so much more violent than the first that it snapped a vital cam in the intricate machinery of the robot and put Rik to sleep for 48 hours with the same shock.

When Rik awakened, his first impression was of alien forms and colors swirling on the visiplate. It wasn't until



much later that he discovered the speed of the vessel had thrown it into subspace. Oh, well, if mere speed would do that, speed would put him back into normal space again.

# LUCKY!

By BILL GROOVER

Muttering in exasperation to himself, Rik fed fuel to the jets and whirled through incomprehensible dimensional corridors until the stars appeared once more.

Familiar stars -- but in unfamiliar patterns. Rik had no idea where he was. However, a planet loomed ahead, so he decided to land. Down he came, but fast -- too fast.

Rik cut his engines, but it was no use. He switched the main jets off entirely, relying on the steering engine for control, but his speed was still excessive as the spaceship neared the surface.

The vegetation was ripped to shreds behind the ship, and the hull plates were scattered through it....Rik crawled dazedly from his ship and went to collect the pieces. He was surprised to find the plates not too badly damaged, considering the punishment they had taken.

The next day, Rik was busily repairing the ship when he noticed a bright reflection from the polished hull. Drawing his gun and whirling at the same time, Rik found himself confronting a Tyrannosaurus-like monster, which handed him a hull plate and watched curiously as Rik welded it into place again. Suddenly the conception of what had occurred hit Rik and he whirled again to stare at the beast, not knowing whether to kill it or to sit down and talk things over with it. The Tyrannosaurus made no menacing move, so Rik slowly relaxed.

"Gosh," Rik murmured to himself, "The first discovery of intelligent life on a planet outside Mars. This will put me in the history books!"

The beast motioned to the ship, made a sign to indicate it coming down, then lay down on the ground and covered its head with its scaly paws.

Struck by a sudden inspiration, Rik rushed into his ship and unbolted the radiation collector. Perhaps it would detect brain waves! It finally did, after he had juggled connections and circuits for half an hour. More tuning and adjusting, and eventually Rik was able to communicate with the monster.



"What is your name?" asked Rik telepathically. The response he got was surprise, building up the scale to its highest form: amazement.

"No name!" The rest was sheer abstraction, but Rik got the idea.

The monster began building up a picture in Rik's brain. The monster stood eating berries. A roar was heard and a great shiny thing plumed out of the sky, ripping the trees, tearing them apart, finally plowing its way into the sod and rebounding again, chunks of metal and rock flying high above it. The gleaming thing hit once more, shaking the very ground.....the monster's thoughts reflected awe.....a small

white creature emerged from the thing and started collecting its pieces, after that, noisily, fitting the gleaming cylinder together again.....

"What is your planet like?" Rik asked as soon as the flow of thought showed signs of lessening.



"Planet? You mean you come from space? The fourth planet, perhaps? No? Then the sixth one? Outer space?" The last thought came with sheer disbelief. "Through sub-space! Millions of light years!"

Then the alien got the full story. Mental pictures poured through its mind with the force of an express train. By the time Rik was finished giving the monster all the information he could, the monster not only had the ability to speak the English language, but also the entire store of knowledge that Rik's brain possessed.

"Whether you know it or not," the monster said, "You saved our race."

"How?" was Rik's dumbfounded reply.

"Well, you gave me all the medical knowledge your race has, and I see that this strange substance, penicillin, will cure the plague that is wiping out my fellows."

The monster did not explain further, so Rik let the subject drop.

"How does your ship work?" asked the monster. "Maybe we too can leave our planet."

"I can't explain it to you but take a look for yourself and see."

# LUCKY!

By BILL GROOVER

So the monster went through the ship, so thoroughly that the most inaccessible rivet was not overlooked. The monster got so interested that he forgot the ship belonged to someone else. He put the power condensers on separate feed lines so they could be used either singly or in combination, then it fixed the robot pilot so the ship would start at a constant acceleration.

It was then the monster noticed that the ship would slip back and forth between dimensions, with no control over where it would go. He reasoned out the solution to the difficulty with considerable ease, and when he got through with his engineering the ship was even more powerful than before, but easier to handle.

The ship was fixed and Rik was ready to take off. Saying goodbye to the monster was a harder job than Rik had anticipated. During the long days of their work together, they had grown to like one another.

Early one morning Rik took off, and late that night he landed again. The monster was waiting to greet him.

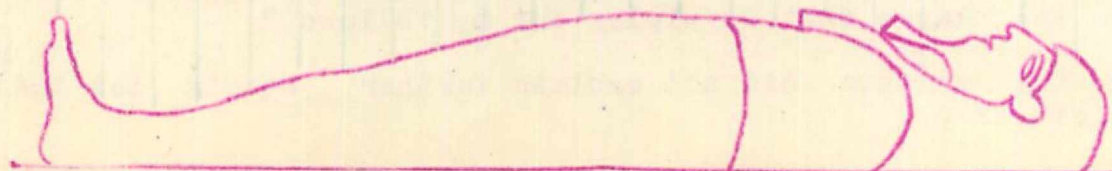
"Why did you come back? Can't you find your home planet?" asked the monster when Rik stepped out of his ship for the second time.

"I want to stay here and help you start your galactic empire," said Rik.

"Won't you be working against your own people?" the monster queried, softly.

Sadly Rik answered, "This isn't my galaxy."

--END--





This article and the one following it represent the winds of a feud which has been raging both in the Warp and otherwise for some months now. Since the main arguers in the controversy about whether H.P. Lovecraft was or was not a wonderful writer are Redd Boggs, who thinks so, and Wilkie Conner, who disagrees, Warp's editors cheered from the sidelines while the two fans threshed the matter out thoroughly. These two articles are the result.....

Regarding future comment on Lovecraft -- will everyone now kindly shuddle? The matter is done with, as far as we're concerned. Amen.

# LOVECRAFT? - PHOOEY!

Some years ago, I received a fanzine from one Francis T. Laney. It was the second copy of his soon-to-be-famous Acolyte. The one thing that struck my curiosity was the notation on the title-page: "Dedicated to the memory of the late H.P. Lovecraft."

"Who the hell was Lovecraft that someone should waste time and paper constructing a magazine in his memory?" I asked me self. Until that time, I had noticed several pot-humorous (you spell it!) stories by Lovecraft in Weird Tales, and, naturally, I remembered the name. I never remembered the stories, though, because I had never managed to get up stomach enough to read them.

I kept reading Acolyte and other publications praising Lovecraft and his works. From time to time, I tried to read some of the stories mentioned in the various articles. To this day, I have never -- repeat, never -- read one story, article or poem worthy of all the fuss made over them -- especially by those fans who fall down at HPL's feet and worship him as some sort of pagan god.

His stories, for the most part, are morbid. They are like the hill-billy songs that sing of sorrow and tears. They have an underlying current of horror that seems, somehow, out of place. I can't find the words to express it. As one reads the stories one gets the impression the author is seeking to scare hell out of the reader, even if he has to drag a mouldy corpse across the floor. All he manages to do is to nauseate. I get a sick feeling every time I try to read one of the stories.

BY  
WILKIE  
CONNER

Then there's the chuthulu stuff. That would have been fine in ONE or even THREE stories. But of the HPL yarns I've read only a few seem to be away from the chuthulu stuff. I have a copy of Acolyte someplace that lists what is called the "Lovecraft or chuthulu mythology." There's nothing great about the creation of such a mythology. Lovecraft merely took the names of some of the early Greek and Roman and Norse gods and gave them names he obviously invented simply by running his fingers over the keys of his typewriter at random. (If he had a typewriter). He then moved them from their original settings and gave them a place "Outside." Then, he let them be forces of evil against whom nothing was effective. (Shaver is doing the same thing with his savemen.) Nothing sensational there.

Howe . . . I have no quarrel with the subject matter of HPL's stories. It is his style of writing I don't go for. An out-and-out copy of Eighteenth Century writers, it isn't even a good imitation. If he had written as Ray Bradbury writes, or as his nearest imitator, August Derleth, writes, he would have had something. Derleth seeks to imitate HPL, and has unconsciously surpassed him in all his writing.

It would be unfair to HPL to write an article such as this and not mention the truth. I have enjoyed several of his stories. One, "The Hunter of the Dark," was especially good. And while I couldn't stomach the printed version of "The Dunwich Horror," I especially enjoyed the radio dramatization. Perhaps I could learn to appreciate HPL if all his stories were thus presented. Therefore, we get around to his style again. His writing style wasn't present on the radio broadcast.

"The Hunter of the Dark" was as well-written as any literature I have ever read. Had HPL written all his stuff as simply and as directly, I, too, would be tempted to worship at the Lovecraft shrine.

However, I say let HPL rest in peace. He wrote his stuff and placed it -- the most of it -- in some bureau drawer. Where it belonged. Whether he placed it away from the light or whether he hid it after it had been rejected, no one will ever know. His best stories seem to have been published after his death. Some of these, probably, were re-written by able writers, who injected enough readability into them to interest the public. Then, by printing limited editions and by using clever advertising they managed to create the great worship of HPL that has sprung up. Personally, I think most of his stuff -- well "sticks" is too harsh a word . . . it isn't quite that bad. However, I have never seen anything in any of his stories that I have read that was worthy of all the fuss made over them.

"To help me, Yog-Sothoth!"

END



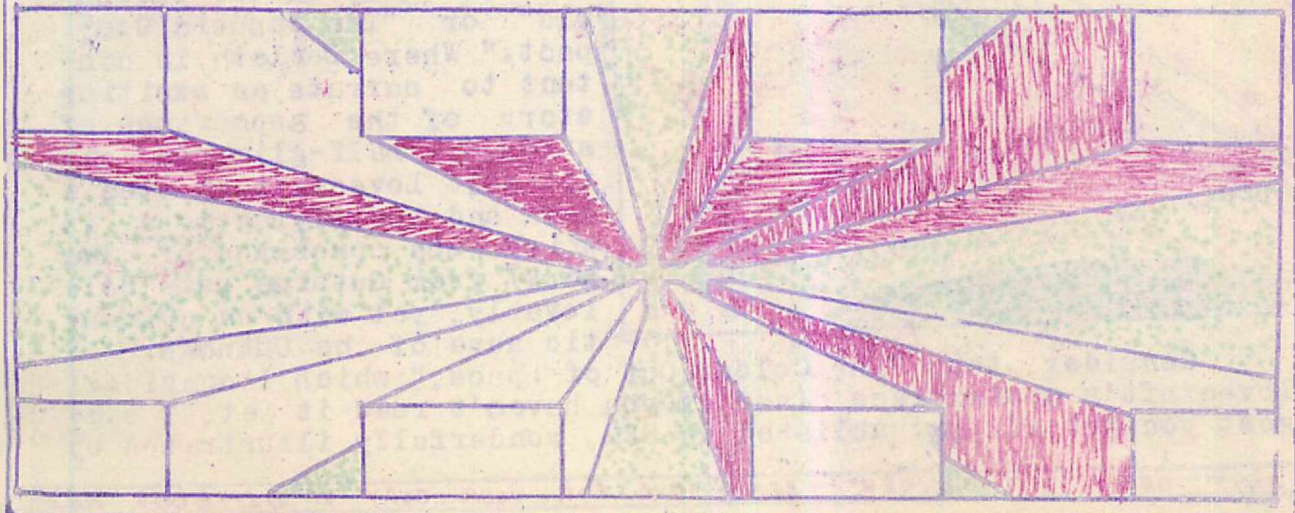
# LOVECRAFT? -HOORAY!

This year, 1947, is the tenth anniversary of Howard Phillips Lovecraft's death, but I did not realize that fact till I read it somewhere. That should prove that I am not a fanatic disciple, worshipping with Derleth, Wandrei and the others, at HPL's shrine. But however far I am from being an avid acolyte of the man, it still gripes me to hear someone state, as Mr. Silkie Conner has done in these pages, that Lovecraft merits no consideration whatsoever. I think he deserves high praise.

It would seem that the frequent anthologizing of Lovecraft's stories in numerous weird collections should constitute "proof positive" that his fiction is worthwhile, but apparently Mr. Conner holds that such popular acclaim has somehow been artificially fostered by the super-active followers of HPL, particularly through the medium of Arkham House and its several volumes of Lovecraftiana. Therefore, it behooves me to answer a few of the criticisms that Mr. Conner has leveled at HPL and his work.

Perhaps the main criticism Mr. Conner has made is that Lovecraft's style makes his fiction difficult to read. Compared with the average pulp story, carefully slanted to the allegedly juvenile taste of the "average" reader, HPL's leisurely, literary style is unique, and therefore difficult. HPL himself wrote: "My style is bad...full of obvious rhetorical devices and hackneyed words and rhythmic patterns..."

BY  
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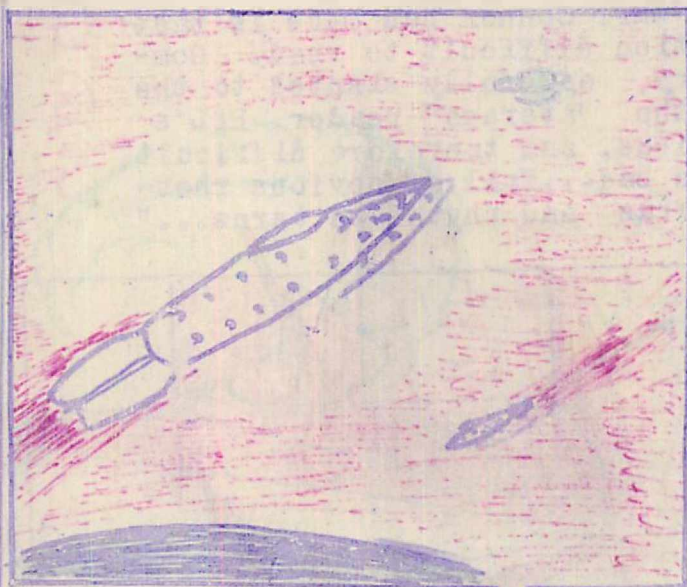




Derleth called his self-criticism "modesty" but of course there is truth in it. Nevertheless, Lovecraft's works come closer to being respectable prose than those of most pulpsters, and he can be pointed out as one of the earliest writers to enhance pulp fiction with a truly distinguished style.

Mr. Conner surprised me when he selects "The Haunter of the Dark" as one Lovecraft story which he enjoyed, because it was simple and direct in style. "Haunter" is a story written during the last few years of HPL's life, and although his skill improved hence, his style became more intricate year by year. I would suggest that Mr. Conner consider some early Lovecraft Dunsanian fantasy, such as "The Cats of Ulthar" or one of the first tales in the so-called Cthulhu Mythos, "The Festival," for simplicity in style. He might discover that simplicity in style for Lovecraft was not a virtue, and the later, more involved style was fashioned as a fine instrument for conjuring strange scenes and moods with its unusual patterns and onomatopoeic diction.

Mr. Conner's objection to the "Cthulhu" mythology seems to be based on the hypothesis that such an entity as "Yog-Sothoth" acts as a deus ex machina, or perhaps more accurately its antithesis, a force of evil, which makes its appearance merely to set things wrong for the author's benefit. On the contrary, Lovecraft's skillful use of the "thing from Outside" theme is one of his greatest achievements. Although Derleth has mentioned HPL's "sincerity" in the depiction of alien entities, it is doubtful whether Lovecraft believed in the dark gods he wrote about. It is possible that he felt the influence of the Unknown more acutely than most, and crystallized this sensation in the conventionalized "gods" he evolved from earlier presences in the fiction of Pierce, Chambers, et al.



Derleth handles the "Cthulhu" theme better than HPL did -- so says Conner. My answer is: Contrast HPL's "The Whisperer in Darkness" or "The Haunter of the Dark" with Derleth's imitations such as "Beyond the Threshold" or "The Sandwin Compact." Where Derleth is content to narrate an exciting story of the appearance of strange, half-glimpsed entities, Lovecraft creates a dark and horrifying mood, in which the presence of the gods from Outside are believably, yet with an authentic aura of the Unknown.

Consider, too, "The Colour Out of Space," which I consider Lovecraft's masterpiece (and if you haven't read it yet, I suggest you get it as published in FFA, wonderfully illustrated by

Virgil Finlay). Here, the presence of the "god" is subtly built up out of such manifestations as the scarred meadow, the uneasy swaying of the trees when no wind is blowing, the terrible insanity of the form family living nearby. Certainly, few other writers have so successfully depicted the alien mood. It requires no patent "suspension of belief" to read, and be convinced by Lovecraft.

Mr. Conner's statement that "only a few" of Lovecraft's tales lie outside the Cthulhu Mythos is, in a measure, true. It is correct to the extent that all of his stories were "based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race... who lost their foothold and were exiled, yet live on outside, ready ever to take possession of this earth again." (This is HPL's own statement). However, there are only thirteen definite titles lying within the strict bounds of the Mythos itself. Such well-known stories as "The Outsider," "The Music of Erich Zann," "The Shunned House," and "The Rats in the Walls" are not a part of the Cthulhu cycle.

Finally, I would like to refute Mr. Conner's statement that most of HPL's work was to sed in a bureau drawer and forgotten, and saw print posthumously only when revised by some "able" writer. On the contrary, Mr. Conner: HPL's best stories were not published after his death -- at least, not for the first time. There were a few that saw print only posthumously, but these were mostly minor tales or those he never completed. About the only yarns of any stature that appeared in this manner were "The Lurker at the Threshold" (completed by Derleth) and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward." Many Lovecraft stories did lie around for years before publication (for example: "The Outsider," written in 1921, printed in 1926), but this was probably due to the lack of a market, for after the advent of Weird Tales, very few of HPL's better-known tales were filed away for long. As a general thing, I doubt that many of his yarns suffered rejection and were banished to the bureau drawer for lack of literary merit.

It is true that occasional HPL tales were rejected, even by Weird Tales, because he submitted them in a sloppy manuscript, or because they didn't fit the slant of the magazine; however, this does not reflect on HPL as an author. He simply refused to be a hack. Lovecraft knew as well as anyone the requirements of the pulps; he had to: much of his income was derived from his work as a revisionist and "ghost writer."

To sum up, I submit my own opinion that Lovecraft is not worthy of the "cult" that has appeared since his death (what writer would be?), but he is certainly worthy of higher commendation than that given him by Mr. Wilkie Conner. I am sure that even the writings of Mr. Conner himself merit more praise than that!

END



# NOT SO EUCLIDEAN GEOMETRY

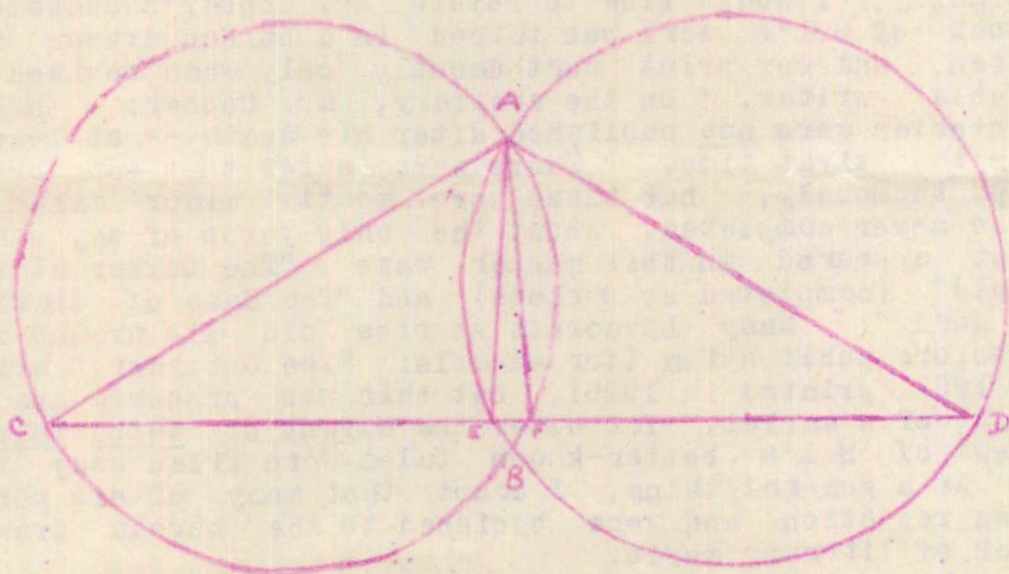
Dust off your geometry books, fellas, and send somebody out to page Euclid, because I'm sure this bit of reasoning would interest him greatly.....

Theorem. From any point without a straight line, one perpendicular can be let fall upon that line, and only one."  
(Euclid I-4)

Let you, old boy! Let's substitute a few words in that statement of yours. Let's make it read like this:

Theorem. From any point without a straight line, two perpendiculars can be let fall upon that line."

Now let's prove it.....



(a) Draw two equal circles, letting them intersect in two points, as A and B above.

(b) Draw the two diameters A-C and A-D.

(c) Draw the line C - D, which intersects the circles at points E and F.

(d) Draw the lines A-E and A-F.

(e) Now, by Euclid VI-2, any angle inscribed in a semicircle is a right angle. But angles APC and AED are both inscribed in semicircles, and therefore both AE and AF are perpendicular to the line C-D.

Q. E. D.

STARTING GUN FOR THE BIGGEST FAN FEUD SINCE SHAVER —

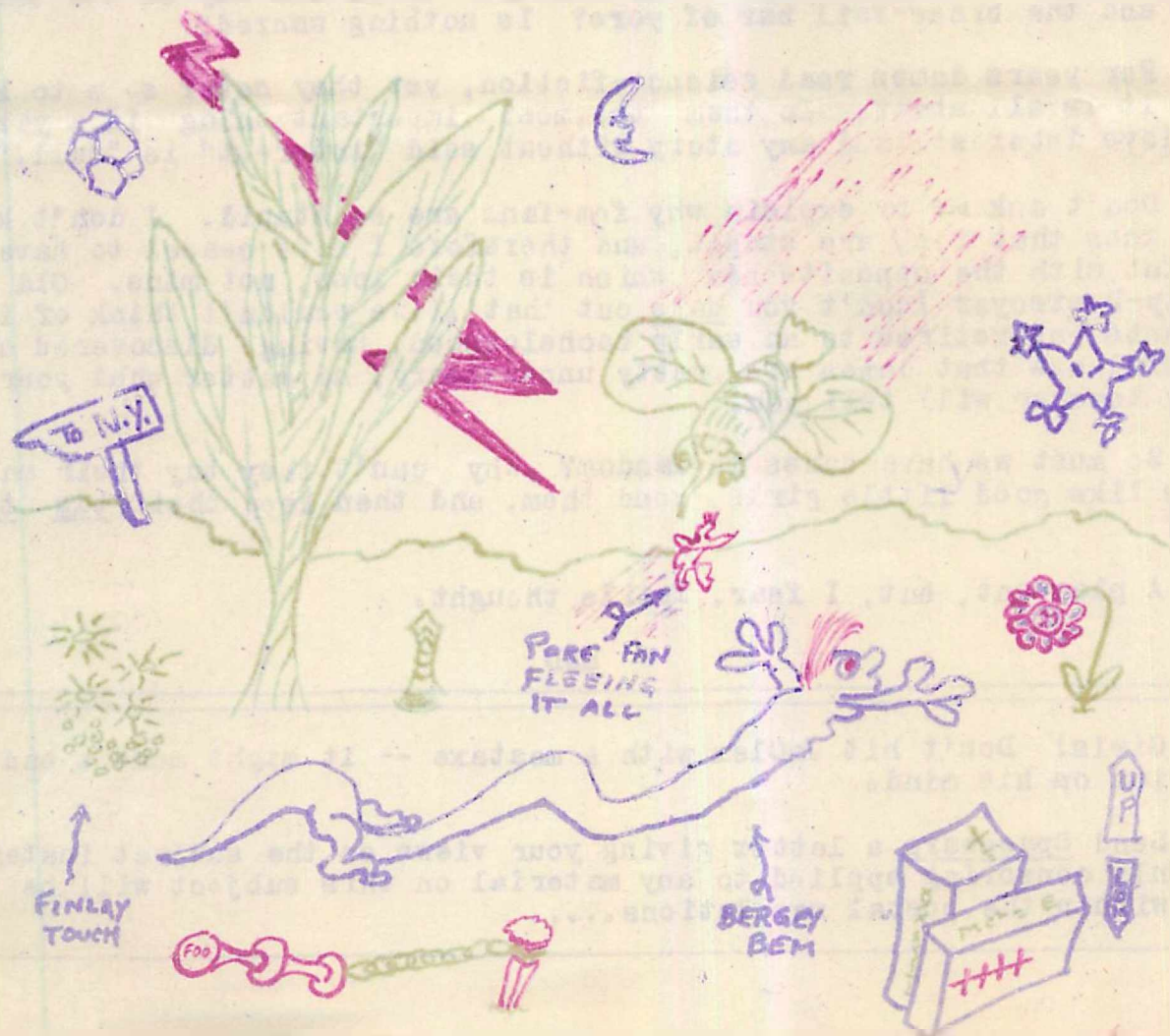
# DAMES!

by JACK (Cassanova) CLEMENTS

Let it never be said that Evolution has no sense of humor. When it created man, it played one of the most stupendous jokes that has ever been made since time began.

For when it created man, it also created woman.

Instead of making women a rational, intelligent, clear-thinking being, it created one of the most childish and stupid creatures imaginable. And therefore it seems a shame that here, in this small, relatively unknown world known as fandom, the feminine sex has infested its quarters.





Now if the dames would act with the intelligence befitting their age, it would leave no ground for complaint, but we find that they behave themselves in their usual inane and giddy manner.

The fem-fans write gushy letters to Starling, and refer to Sam Merwin as a "cute old space-dog." Patti Bowling unshamefully refers to sick Sneary, not as a correspondent, but as a -- now get this -- a pen-pal, an expression that I have not run across since my comic-book days. Ye gods!

I correspond with no dames, but I have received some letters (un-solicited and unanswered) from the creatures, and each letter lowers them in my estimation, which is like getting on an elevator in the basement and going down. They write in the language of a thirteen-year-old boy, providing that the boy is a moron.

In the pro letter columns, any story that they like is called "just swell" and their "critical analysis" of a story usually consists of, "I did not care for that story, but I suppose there are others who like it, so who am I to complain?" It must take a tremendously high IQ to turn out that sort of thing.

Such blithering foolianness is undermining the masculine sturdiness of stf. Is our beloved literature to go the way of the barber shop and the brass-rail bar of yore? Is nothing sacred?

For years dames read science-fiction, yet they never seem to know what it is all about. To them the most important thing in a yarn is the love interest, and any story without said "interest" is "dull."

Don't ask me to explain why fem-fans are so stupid. I don't know. I do know that they are stupid, and therefore I have ceased to have any contact with the opposite sex, which is their loss, not mine. Old Virginity-Destroyer (don't you dare out that!)(We wouldn't think of it!)) Clements has retired to an early bachelorhood, having discovered at a youthful age that dames are pretty unnecessary, no matter what your biology teacher will tell you.

So must we have dames in random? Why can't they buy their magazines like good little girls, read them, and then keep their big traps shut?

A pleasant, but, I fear, futile thought.

EMD

Girls! Don't hit JaClem with a meataxe -- it might make a bad impression on his mind.

Send Spacewarp a letter giving your views on the subject instead. The only censoring applied to any material on this subject will be to keep within the postal regulations.....



This month the Psycho Lab turns its repulsive inquisitive-ness upon a Kentucky fan whose third contribution to Space appears on page 17. You all remember his "Time Dredge" and "The Dome In the Desert" -- ladies and gentlemen.....

*Robert K. Paris*

Born in Madisonville, Ky., December 7, 1926. I attended grade and high school; didn't graduate.

Inducted into the Army in October, 1941. Went overseas in March, 1941. Saw very little action, most of it on Okinawa. Was not wounded. Re-enlisted for a year in November, 1945. Was discharged in December, 1946. Climbed to the grade of T/b as an electrician.

Not doing any work at the present time.....

I started reading stf with those Buck Rogers books they used to give away with cans of Ovaltine. Read my first stf magazine in 1939. Thus the vicious circle began! It was a copy of Science-Fiction with a lead story by Neil R. Jones.

Now I have over a thousand mags. My favorite author is Sando Binder. My favorite story: "Five Steps to Tomorrow," by him. My hobbies: collecting you-know-what, rifle and pistol shooting, and swimming.

Am not married.....

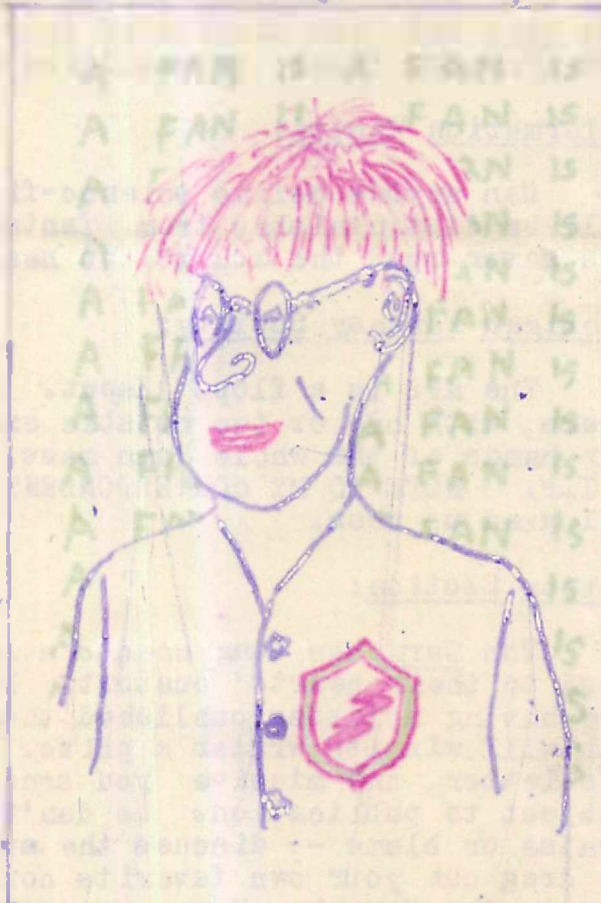
Things I like: Astonishing, T.S. Weird Tales, the Warp, beer, whiskey-and-soda, stf.

Things I don't like: RAP, Shaver, Sam Marwin Jr., Amazing, T.S.'s new policy, stom-bomb stories, The Saint, and Kuttzer.

Am five feet nine inches tall, weigh 155 pounds. Light complected with brown hair. Wear rimless glasses.

That's all there is -- but its enough.....

\*Thanks -- Ed.



# The Bulletin Board

## Contributors' rewards:

Spacewarp's new policy on payment for material goes into effect with this issue. You writers whose work graces our pages now not only get a contributor's copy of SW, as before, but in addition free advertising space in coming Warps. You'll be given details by post-card in about a week. More than ever, the Warp is worth first consideration when you're looking for a publisher!

## Advertising:

Rates for ads in the Warp are 61¢ per page, 55¢ a half-page, 30¢ for 1/4 page. Deadline for ad copy is the first of the month. Let the Warp help you dispose of your collection, get those missing issues for your files, or publicize anything else you have in mind.

## Information Wanted:

Can anyone define science-fiction in one sentence, so that it will be distinguished from fantasy and intelligible to someone who has never read the stuff? We need an answer to this problem badly.

## Michigan Fantasy Society:

The MFS is a flop. Kaput. Nobody's interested, it seems, with one or two notable exceptions. For the present we wash our hands of the whole damn mess. Maybe next summer....until then R.I.P. NOTE TO MY CORRESPONDENTS: I'll have that MFS stationery all fixed up soon.

## Letter Section:

The Warp has long needed a letter-section where fans can feed to their hearts' content. You won't get a contributor's copy for having a letter published there, but the best letter in each issue will win its writer a prize. Unless you request otherwise in the letter, any missive you send to Rapp or Groover hereafter is subject to publication. We don't want discussion of SW, either in praise or blame -- discuss the articles, the science of the fiction, or drag out your own favorite controversy. Prize for the best letter in the November Warp -- A copy of TBS for Fall 43. (Value about 20¢ at current quotations).

## Answer to the Christmas-Present Problem:

Don't let the holidays sneak up on you! Give your fanfriends a Christmas present that will remind them of you all through 1948-- give a year's subscription to the Warp! Only one dollar! Hell, give one to your non-fan pals, too -- maybe it will convert them to stf!

# ONE SIDED DEAL

By ROBERT K. PARIS

Professor Malcolm lay flat in the nose of the rocket, hurtling toward the full moon. He finished snapping a series of photographs.

The ship was entirely automatic, powered by the tireless atom. When a dial registered east-and-west, he would actuate controls, and radar would measure his distance from the moon. When automatic devices would fire the braking rockets until the speed of the ship in relation to the surface was zero.

He was on a fixed trajectory which would carry him to the dark side of the satellite. The scientists had decided they already knew all they could about the visible side.

Malcolm got his camera busy and lay still. Later, he opened a cabinet and took out a bottle of scotch. Holding the bottle up toward the moon, which now filled the entire sky, he toasted: "To you, Moon, and me, who will be the first man to set foot on you!" He took a long swig of scotch.



With a silly grin unbecoming to a scientist, he took another. The ship now began to curve around the great globe. The trajectory line lay directly under the ship. Malcolm got out his camera again. He waited for the side of the moon which no man had ever seen to reveal itself.

Suddenly his grin froze. He all but turned into an alabaster statue. Madness would have claimed his brain, had it not been fortified with alcohol. The moon was a hemisphere. At first it did not penetrate, then it hit him like a battering ram -- the moon was a hemisphere! In that instant Malcolm knew he was doomed. Frantically he set the radar into action, but without a surface to bounce the waves back, they did not return to fire the nose rockets.

Malcolm gibbered insanely. He wondered how many ships would be lost before the facts became known.

Malcolm watched the moon hurtle past. Only the distant stars lay in his path, but he would be dead long before he arrived.

He whimpered softly and took a long slug of scotch.

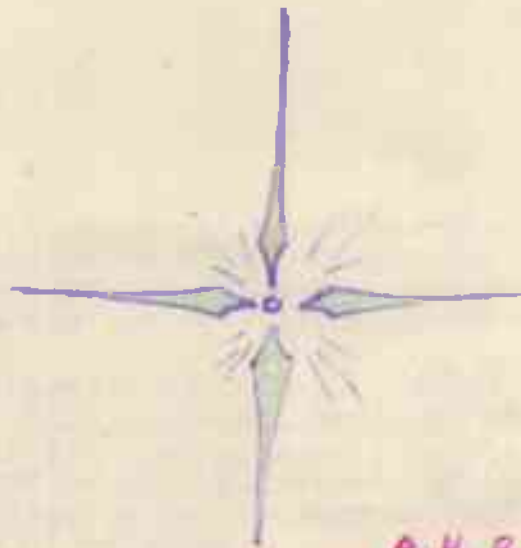


# SEETEE DUST

Spawn eons spewed from seething sun,  
Its mindless drifting finally done,  
The atoms float in vacuum vast  
Until they coalesce at last  
In fission, where before was none.

Dispersed debris; what worlds have died  
To send these cosmic sentries wide  
Through lonely void in ages past?  
From what far point?

Some beta-blasted, searing sun  
Ere yet Sol's system was begun  
Met awful end; and did the race  
Who termed that system dwelling-place  
In horror watch destruction come?  
Or touch it off.....



A. H. RAFF

THE

# BARBER ENIGMA

WORDS BY

ART RAPP

PLOT BY

BILL GROOVER

"Look at the oldie I found in a junk shop this morning!" I greeted Morgan Botts, triumphantly waving a tattered pulp mag with a lurid cover. Botts lowered his stein carefully to the table and donned a pair of greasy horn-rimmed glasses which he fished from his shirt pocket. Eagerly he bent forward to examine my prize.

"A 1952 Flabbergasting Adventures." I chortled, "and with a lead story by Barber, too!"

"Wonderful!" Botts agreed, nostalgia and several beers tingeing his voice. "Well do I remember those old days, when fan fought fan with a bitter, undying hatred, all because of the famous Barber Enigma." He applied himself morosely to his beer.

"Ho, this is a good story," I chuckled, deeply absorbed in the fog-eared pages. "Barber is telling about how every tree is inhabited by a spirit of life; and that when somebody cuts the tree down, the spirit remains in the wood, scheming and planning for revenge upon humanity."

Botts hastily swallowed his mouthful of beer in order to reply. "Yeah. I remember he once challenged any fan to prove that when a scaffold breaks and drops a carpenter to his death, it is not caused by the evil spirits of the trees. He always claimed the spirits talked to him by tapping in Morse code on the inside of his skull."

"Corny, wasn't it?" I rejoined. "Especially when the editor of Flabbergasting Adventures, Raymond A. Handley, backed Barber up by asserting that many a man has been carted off to a booby hatch for hearing noises in his head when all the time it is merely the persecution of the wood-spirits."

"What got me," replied Botts through the foam of a fresh beaker, "was the way screwballs from all over the country wrote in to FA, telling how they, too, had encountered the evil spirits, or relating how a two-by-four had once fallen on their head. Of course, Handley wove all this into the pattern of the Barber Enigma, until he had even a few of the more impressionable actifen believing him."

"There were some great feuds over the Barber Enigma," I agreed. "But all of a sudden it seems to die away, except for some minor muttering and prodding among the actives. What did happen?"

"You mean you don't know?" the Stefan-inventor asked in surprise.

"I've heard more, of course," I retorted. "I thought you might know the true story."

"As a matter of fact..." said Botta. Then he paused and held his empty glass significantly. I nodded to the bartender, who from long experience was familiar with our requirements. Botta sighed and settled himself more comfortably in his chair. With an uninterrupted supply of suds, a cozy tavern, and a tale of the olden days to tell, he was in his element.



"It is seldom realized," he began, "that Raymond A. Sandley himself never met Richard S. Barber during the heyday of the Barber Enigma. Their business dealings were conducted by mail. Barber lived in a small town in upstate New York, while PA was published, of course, in the metropolitan area."

"I, myself, have seen some of Barber's original manuscripts and the letters which accompanied them; and there can be no doubt that he was absolutely sincere in his bizarre notions about evil spirits. He had a fair talent for stringing words together, and RAA knew at once that here

was the opportunity to revive his sagging publications, Amusing Stories and Flabbergasting Adventures. I doubt, however, if even he foresaw that the gag would snowball until it rocked the entire structure of Random."

"Gradually the Barber Enigma became the most important thing in RAA's life. Letters concerning wood-spirits poured into his office -- lunatics begged for 'the real lowdown' on the Enigma -- amateur investigators hounded him in an effort to prove its truth or falsity. Oddly enough, no one ever did come up with conclusive proof that the whole thing was a hoax, although some of the best brains in the country -- the organized Stefan -- attempted to do so.

"Picture, then, RAA's situation. He was occupied with the Enigma from dawn until late at night. He was forced to formulate convincing rebuttals to every conceivable criticism of the Enigma, or else admit that it was all a publicity stunt. And over all, the stream of stories poured in from R.S. Barber, each tale breathing a passionate sincerity, persuasive in its eloquence."

"You're beginning to shed a new light on RAA's action," I observed.



"Shuddup!" (Botts hates to be interrupted in the midst of a tale.)

"Anyway, the inevitable happened. Handley, overworked to the point of exhaustion, began to lose his objectivity. A tiny thread of doubt crept into his mind. What if the Enigma were true, after all? He began to read the screwball-letters with more interest, looking for corroboration of the Barber Enigma instead of merely observing whether the letter contained a subscription order.

"Once this attitude dominated him, RAH was doomed. He became more adept than ever at twisting incidents into support of the Barber claims. He began to ignore even the most glaring fallacies when they were pointed out to him. I knew that he was finished the day I saw them move his great antique oak desk from his office and replace it with a new steel desk."

"You mean...?" I asked, tapping my forehead significantly.

Botts nodded silently, pausing for a long draught of beer.

"Events moved swiftly to a climax," he resumed. "Handley began showing his contempt for those who were not fellow-believers in the Barber Enigma, even when his attitude was against the commercial interests of his magazines. Authors who had remained on his staff for years took offense at his sweeping policy-directives and began to write for competing mags. RAH developed a persecution complex; became convinced that the walnut-paneled walls of his office were about to close in on him in retaliation for his blasphemy in printing the secrets of the evil wood-spirits.

"Ultimately, he refused even to discharge his duties as editor, for his terror extended to the wood-pulp paper on which AE and FA were printed. At that point one of his assistant editors recovered enough initiative and presence of mind to summon a psychiatrist."

"Hmmm, so the rumor was true after all?" I remarked, remembering how the incident Botts was relating had become legendary in the annals of fandom.

"RAH was dragged from his office, screaming in terror at the sight of a yardstick or pencil. He was hustled away to a small country sanitarium many miles from the metropolis; and only after he had been shown that the entire building was constructed of metal and plastic, and that even the padding on the walls contained no cellulose, would he calm down enough to go to sleep.



"Late that night he was awakened by an intermittent clicking sound. Curious, he groped his way from his unlocked cell, down the darkened hallway toward the noise, where a bar of light splashed across the metal corridor floor from a half-shut door.

"RAH opened the door and peered cautiously into a cell much like the one he had left. The padding on the walls in this one, oddly enough, was frayed and worn, as if it had taken a great deal of punishment. In one corner a thin, pale young man was peering away at a battered portable, pausing now and then to count his fingers.

"Handley coughed tentatively. The young man looked up from his typewriter, and a welcoming grin spread across his face.

"Hello," he said, "You must be the new inmate. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm one of the old-timers around here. Perhaps you have heard of me. I've-uh-done a bit in the literary line. Barber is the name. Richard S. Barber."

END

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