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Redd Boggs' SQUOZINE

PUB YOUR ISH: A MEMO TO MYSELF

There are those who must set the table in a formal fashion, knives, forks, and spoons all arrayed in a certain configuration dictated by tradition and fashion, else they cannot enjoy the meal. I can never remember the order that these table utensils are to be laid out, and usually jumble them handily on the righthand side of the plate. I own that I privately think, and have thought all my life, that the only rational way to set the table is the old farm and ranch practice of laying the silverware on the oilcloth and inverting the plate over them (to keep off the flies and the dust). My fanzines for the most part are like that, I am afraid, a helterskelter of things arranged in a very informal configuration: cracked and crazed chinaware plopped over tarnished forks and spoons. A fanzine like mine is hardly an inspiring picture as judged by the standards of literature and visual art, but it's handy and familiar, and I will never change.

At the same time I feel hovered over by great essays, poems, and stories that have yet to be written down, too many ever to be written. In a short lifetime one should be at work getting as many as one can of these fugitive literary works captured and confined to print. Don't worry about niceties; get the job done some how. One shouldn't let his or her typewriter, word processor, or computer faunch impotently with nothing to do. Time presses, and there are many things in the air that implore to be written down and published. Pub your ish.

SPACEHOUNDS OF IPC: A NOTABLE FAILURE (Second of Two Parts)

The traditional "castaway" story is essentially science fiction, if carried out by the rules formulated by Daniel Defoe. Indeed, *Robinson Crusoe* itself has actually been called "Defoe's science fiction novel." Almost alone among the great classics in the language *Crusoe* owes its popularity to its delineation of a situation that does not fall neatly into the provenance of the two eternal themes of novelists and poets: love and death. There is nothing to laugh at in the book, and it suffers, according to Dickens, from "an utter want of tenderness and sentiment." Its fascination to generations of readers derives entirely from its depiction of one man's battle against the implacable forces of the universe, and from the depiction of that grim struggle in vivid, convincing, and above all *technical* terms.

Science fiction writers must contend with a sort of illiteracy in their readers that most writers never have to face: science illiteracy. As Andy Young once pointed out, not even science fiction fans have any intellectual grasp of scientific principles or terminology. But we all find technology interesting for its own sake, as any casual conversation about car troubles will show. *Robinson Crusoe* would have been forgotten long ago had not Defoe described Crusoe's existence on the desert island with an imaginative emphasis on its minute details: building a shelter, domesticating goats, making himself a boat. The book would have failed to attract a large audience if the struggle against nature had been ignored or glossed over in favor of Crusoe's campaign to make himself king of the cannibals or to learn the secret of buried Spanish treasure on the island -- to suggest two plots mostly likely to occur to a pulp writer. His relationship with the cannibals from whom he rescues Friday, and with the mutineers on the ship that finally rescues him are less interesting than his solitary life on the island.

Smith plays the game largely by the rules, despite his use of the two fortuitous occurrences already mentioned. Stevens does not intrigue among the savages, or seek his fortune in pirate

gold. His adventures on Ganymede give us some inkling of the difficulties that even a technically trained man with a well-equipped machine shop would have to overcome to build a radio transmitter from scratch. This part of the novel is intelligently conceived and well told. Unfortunately this story ends on page 136 (Fantasy Press edition), when Stevens' radio message reaches Brandon and Westfall. The rest is almost as distinct an anticlimax as "The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe," often published under the same covers with the original novel. It is a different story altogether, a sequel to the first, and Stevens fades out as the hero, his place usurped by Brandon and Westfall, the two men who together make one scientist: the thinker. We are given no opportunity to learn whether Stevens has grown or matured as a result of his ordeal on the satellite, but then, except as a lover, he was almost perfect at the start.

Doc considerately supplies a fresh heroine for the benefit of his new heroes: Verna Pickering, whose sudden and unexplained appearance is a surprise to the reader. The erstwhile heroine, Nadia Newton, abdicates her position as heroine following her marriage to Stevens in one of those wedding ceremonies Smith loved to describe in lush and sentimental detail.

The Stevens-Nadia love affair is one of the chief and most obvious flaws charged against the novel. To make sure that their passions won't run away with them, Stevens and Nadia spend seven months together on Ganymede without touching one another. "We couldn't have stood it at all any other way," Nadia points out when their rescue is at hand. "Thank Heaven we won't have to fight ourselves much longer!" When Stevens returns Nadia to her father on the rescue ship he announces solemnly, "Here she is; alive, well, and...unharmed." Shortly afterward, Nadia blushes -- God knows what she has to blush about -- when she confesses to her father that she wishes to marry Stevens. The biology of the sex urge can hardly have changed since the mid-twentieth century, but of course the blush may be explained by a radical difference in mores.

This explanation hardly supplies a reason for the lovers' astounding continence, however. The same Christian faiths of the twentieth century are still in existence. Stevens is a Quaker (!) and Nadia is a Presbyterian, and there is no evidence to indicate that a sun-change in morality has occurred to modify their beliefs toward a state in which puritan morality actually has some inhibiting effect. The "real and chivalrous manhood" of Stevens is held up for particular approbation, as if it were as unusual and unlikely in that day as in this.

In a pulp magazine of the early 1930s Smith could hardly have handled the sex situation on Ganymede honestly and openly, but much might have been accomplished by indirection and symbolism. Lacking any artistic cleverness Smith not only winds up trying to stuff a preposterous romance down our throats, one that Zane Grey would have choked on, but even calls our attention to the cloying sirup exuding from it, ending up doubly damned.

Pure and virtuous love like this, played to the dulcet strains of "Hearts and Flowers," may happen between a fairy princess and her prince charming (though not in the fairy tales of Charles Perrault), and of course Nadia *is* a fairy princess, being the daughter of a big capitalist who is the chairman of the board of the Inter-Planetary Corporation. Stevens calls her, only half-teasingly, the "tenderly-nurtured maiden of the upper classes." But it is at least questionable whether science fiction is the proper genre for the depiction of fairy-tale romance. The reader loses his

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patience with "love interest" very quickly, I suspect, and in this case his respect as well for the improbable confection who plays the heroine. As for Stevens, his ideas of honor reveal to the unhappy reader that his hero's heart is made of cast-iron. Utterly virtuous people seldom win our love or respect. We are too ready to suspect them -- not without reason -- of wallowing in a vast hypocrisy.

It's too bad that this flaw fractures the book through the choicest parts of the tale. Doc was definitely on the right track and moving into touch with believability and with living humanity. Stevens possesses some potential as a real living man and he faced a situation on Ganymede that could have been made vital and exciting (vide *Robinson Crusoe).* But the author not only allowed his hero to escape from his predicament through the favor of the gods but to become entangled in a prissy love affair with a pink-sugar princess.

Unfortunately, things go downhill after the castaways are rescued and Stevens is reunited with Brandon and Westfall. The final chapters of the novel take place in a world of overwhelming optimism and success. Once the doer and thinker have joined forces, victory becomes as easy and inevitable for them as for Dick Seaton in *Skylark of Valeron.* All problems in this rosy realm of Spacehounds Triumphant can be solved by young resourceful men trained in science, and no setbacks are of more than passing consequence. In this world, moreover, everyone is perfect and admirable, and human affairs are conducted under the same terms that shaped the Ganymedean idyl: the pre-lapsarian state of innocence, virtue, and idealism. There are not even any human villains in this world, nobody like Blackie Duquesne or Gray Roger, to take some of the curse off the fantastic goodness and perfection of these story-book people. The lack of shadow turns the all-white of the picture into one blinding glare.

This crew of space age Lancelots and Lily Maids proves tough, however, on alien races who are "nonhuman" and therefore can be butchered without a qualm. The only touch of sanity encountered during the humans' jehad against the Hexans is provided by the Vorkuls who are not impressed either by humankind's strength or peaceful overtures but remain coldly neutral to the end. Their attitude tempers a little the exasperating and terrifying smugness of the high and mighty representatives of human aristocracy.

Spacehounds of IPC is a failure, I believe, but in many ways is a sound and entertaining science fiction novel. For all its gaping flaws, it contains some of Doc Smith's smoothest writing, most spacious concepts, and most forceful descriptions. It makes good reading today, decades after it first saw print, which is certainly evidence that it transcends -- in craftsmanship if not idea-content -- most of the stories of the same era. It plunges us back into the shadowless world we have lost sight of amid today's black nightmares. Once again we can thrill to the strange spectacle of lyric youth winging forth to settle forever the control of his destiny and his place in the sun.

But I can't help but feel that the novel fails for this very reason, collapsing ultimately under its burden: that of its naive view of the world, its crude depiction of the cult of humanness that has not the saving sense of humanity, and its blind belief that evil is exterior to ourselves and is equated with things alien. I hazard the guess -- in the face of a theory formulated at the story's first appearance -- that it was not the matter of its narrow physical setting that made *Spacehounds of IPC* to succeed less resoundingly than the other Smith epics and sent the author scurrying back to galactic-size fish-stories. It is not the positive, but the negative, of the setting. Parts of it are real, at least in contrast with that which came before and after: the depiction of a scaled-down hero and his adventures in a universe that actually shows up in our telescopes. But its world is unreal in a larger sense: no human being has ever lived in a world like that, a world that has no hell opposed to the vast and frozen heaven.

FRANCE, FAST AND FURIOUS

On the day I was inducted into the armed forces in June 1942 I caught a ride back from Fort Snelling to downtown Minneapolis with a fellow inductee. On the way somebody in a big car tried

to cut in on us. Immediately my companion jammed his foot on the accelerator and his finger on the horn. "Out of the way!" he yelled merrily out of the window. "We're in the army now!" Three years later, in June 1945, a fellow GI and I spent one memorable afternoon doing much the same brash thing on the highways and byways of northern France.

Ostensibly we were on an errand to Headquarters in Reims to pick up some office supplies, but as Novak patiently explained to me, "They didn't check out this jeep to us, with a full tank of gas, and give us 24-hour passes expecting us to get back to Sissonne before noon. Wake up, buddy, the War Is Over!" He drove down the roads of France with the same reckless abandon that my friend in Minneapolis had exhibited. I said nervously, "For godsake, be careful. All by ourselves we're giving Americans a bad name all over France. Look out where you're going! Running down a pedestrian would be bad enough, but you're liable to hit a cow."

Like the barbarians we were (I suppose) we rolled rapidly through the historic places of northern France heedless of their importance in old battles, rebellions, and invasions. Churches, cathedrals, and castles: it was all the same to us. But I enjoyed the scenery. The countryside and little towns looked like Impressionist paintings, and I have always preferred that mode of art to any other. In a small town we stopped at last, under a balcony where, as it happened, a wedding reception was going on. The bridesmaids, or so we took them to be, were incredibly pretty and vivacious, as only young Frenchwomen can be. Giggling, they regarded us with the marvelous bold insolence of the French, only without malice, for they found us amusing.

We wambled across the street to a tavern where the atmosphere was far less friendly. The customers and the bartender, all elderly men, each of whom, I seem to remember, wore mustaches like Marshal Pétain, stared at us with disapproval or at least indifference. Nobody moved or spoke to spoil the tableau of men poised over drinks. "Beer?" we said. The bartender shook his head, moving his lips but not speaking, and we went back into the sunshine. As we emerged, I noticed with surprise that the name of the bistro, painted on the wall, was Le Bout du Monde. "We can't go any farther than this," I said. "We had better head back now." I didn't want to take any chances of falling off the edge.

But we did go on, and more memorably and somberly we visited the Château-Thierry military cemetery on the banks of the Marne, where the German offensive of May-July 1918 was halted by the French and American forces. A shabbily dressed young Frenchman showed us *le Mémorial Américain* and pointed out the chips in the stone where, he said, French Resistance members had been executed by the Germans a year or two earlier. The cemetery lies in a great swale of grass, with distant trees, and the white crosses and Stars of Davids marching in strict ranks up and down the little hills mark the graves of 2288 Americans. Its great size was solemnly impressive — that and the immense silence. We were the only visitors for the moment. Just outside the walls of the cemetery itself was perhaps the most bizarre of all the grim aspects of Château-Thierry: the graves of eight or ten Germans who had died in the battle of 1918, whose bodies were for some reason not returned home. Interred by the Americans, they were denied a place inside the walls where their bones might mingle with those of their enemies. Their only monument, out here, was an old rusty pump. We paid respectful homage to all the war dead.

"You know where this road goes?" Novak said, as we left Château-Thierry. "Well, sure," I said, "but — *b-but!*" "No buts, damn it!" he snarled. "How would we explain, even to General Eisenhower himself, if we were this close and didn't go on? Wouldn't you be ashamed? Of course," he added sarcastically, "we'll probably do things that will sully the reputation of the American forces for the next thousand years!" He gunned the motor and the poplars along the road flashed by like a picket fence. I held onto my overseas cap in the rush of wind, and thought about the matter. "Well," I said finally, "I guess it's the least we can do." Already I imagined I could glimpse Paris up-swinging, grandly, gloriously, on the evening horizon.

If Jesus Christ had been a woman, I might be a Christian now. Jesus Christ!
