

THE VINEGAR WORM

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The price of The Worm is \$22.50 per copy. It is published by Bob Leman, who likes letters of comment better than almost anything. Chiropractors, ballet dancers, drug addicts, and Wayne Morse are automatically excluded from the subscription list. Almost anybody else can have a copy for the price quoted above, or a letter. There are, of course, certain sterling sculs who will receive a copy in spite of all they can do. We publish irregularly.
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OUT OF THE CRUET

Well, dear friends, the disaster about which you have been uneasily apprehensive these past few months has come to pass. Here's the fourth Worm. in all its insignificance, brought to you by the same coterie of inept hacks who produced the last three. The flood of enthusiastic letters (six) which resulted from the publication of number three has given us the courage to undertake the back-breaking task of producing another issue. In the following pages you will find thoughtful analyses of international affairs, pulse-stirring fiction, advice to the lovelorn, scriptural exegesis, kitchen-tested recipes, a new method of raising your I.Q. to 190, Tennyson's latest poetry, and fun and games for the kiddies. You can't hardly beat stuff like that.

The editors owe thanks to The Olympia Typewriter Gesellschaft, The Sure-Write Stencil Co., The Duvis Correction Fluid Co., and Seagram's Distillers, without whose useful products this issue could not have been produced. Thanks are also due to those good people who gave without stint of their advice and encouragement when problems arose: Charles Starkweather, Pandit Nehru, Casey Stengel, Aneurin Bevan, Enrico Fermi, Manolete, Frank Costello, and Floyd P. Blaudeckel. And the editor-in-chief wants particularly to acknowledge the cooperation of his wife, who cheerfully made the sacrifices which were necessary to insure timely publication of the issue. As an example, we clearly remember her saying on one occasion, "Oh, by all means work on that silly magazine instead of mowing the lawn. After all, it doesn't really need it --it's only been three weeks since you mowed it last." We are not, we trust, unduly sentimental, but that kind of thing gives us a warm feeling right down here.

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Letters acknowledging receipt of our last issue quite naturally raised a number of questions, most of which we somehow failed to answer. If the rest of you will excuse us for a moment, we'd like to take a little time to answer some of these: -- To B.M.G: You're lucky; most of the copies had only two legible pages. -- To F.P.B: "Robert Bloch" is a pen-name of Bob Tucker's. -- To M.C: The book you are thinking of is The Last of the Morticians. -- To C.A: Marriage would appear to be the best solution of your

problem. -- To U.R; You were just unlucky; most of the copies had at least two legible pages. -- To F.P: Yes, a while back I did think about leaving, but they promised me new padding for the walls, and I decided to stay. -- To J.W.D: My chief hobby is the practice of amateur necrotomy. -- To V.M.W: The quotation you are wondering about is: "It was but the work of a moment to work for a moment."

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When I first met Mr. F.M. Busby (of the Seattle Busbys) he expressed surprise at my appearance. Peering at me in a sidelong manner necessitated by his effort to keep his disreputable beaver out of his bucket of suds, he said: "I expected a more sedentary type."

We were interrupted at that point (by, if I remember correctly, the arrival of a cablegram from Brigitte Bardot--I forget whether it was for Buz or for me) and later I neglected to re-introduce the subject. I wish now that I had. If there's a more sedentary type than I am, he's either totally paralyzed or dead, and I'm curious to know exactly what kind of a critter Buz had in mind. I will grant that my general conformation gives me something of the squat, frog-like appearance of a lineman at a small A&M college, but the heavy deposits of lard at my equator and beam should give the lie to any asseveration that I am athletically inclined.

It has, indeed, been my lifelong habit to shun as the plague any form of physical exertion. Experience has shown that a bout of muscle-flexing inevitably results in gastric disturbance, severe depression, and loss of revenue, and I have always been one to profit from experience. Nor am I loath to give others the benefit of my painfully acquired wisdom. When young men about to venture forth into the world come to me for advice, I invariably tell them to avoid two things: loud ties and healthful exercise. "Avoid two things: loud ties and healthful exercise," is about the way I put it. And, armed with this apothegm, my proteges have gone on to become major-generals, bishops, industrial tycoons, supervisory bureaucrats, and the like. There have, of course, also been some failures.

These last, I am convinced, owe their unfortunate plight to their failure to follow my sagacious counsel. They are, I am sure, secret exercisers; I can readily envisage them sneaking guiltily off to a low stews to indulge their illicit passion for jai a-lai or shove ha' penny. They begin, one surmises, by simply seeking a new thrill, but before they are aware of what is happening they are, in the underworld phrase, "hooked." Occasional participation in a game of "Red Rover" or "One ol' cat" is perhaps in itself harmless, but it is likely to lead to a desire for something stronger. The foolish thrill-seeker--"just this once, to see what it's like"--tries a game of badminton or ping-pong, and from that point his descent is swift and sure. He becomes an habitue of golf-courses and tennis courts, he is found skulking about bowling alleys and cricket pitches. Some of these unfortunates, through heroic effort, and under the guidance of spiritual advisors, wrestle themselves free of their vice; but many others continue their slide toward the depths, ending

with the ultimate degradation: exercise for its own sake. Such derelicts not infrequently indulge in hiking or lifting barbells or operating rowing machines. There is scant hope for those who have sunk so low.

But I see that I have assumed a somewhat evangelistic, holier-than-thou tone, which is not at all what I intended. I am aware that A.A. (Athletes Anonymous) is probably the sole hope for these unfortunates, and that for me to preach is futile. Some few of these people can be weaned from their folly by following the A.A. regime: faith, cold baths, a bland diet, and, above all, a sincere desire to reform; but they must have first the desire, and no amount of hortative pronouncements on my part can give them that.

No, my sole purpose here is to complain a little about how badly Busby misjudged me. "More sedentary," indeed! What--I ask you--could I have done to give him the notion that I am anything other than the indolent, torpid slug that I am? He had had, of course, only my writings to give him my measure; but surely so perceptive a critic should have apprehended, from the flabby quality of my prose, the kind of person I am.

*

I missed something when I was a boy, and it's too late now to do anything about it. There are certain experiences which you must have when you're young or not at all. Such an experience is enjoying Talbot Mundy.

It's a puzzle to me how I managed to miss reading Mundy. Ever since I learned to read, the bulk of my leisure time has been spent with books, and there was a time when I'd have been the wildest kind of Mundy enthusiast. That would have been during my Burroughs-Haggard period, when I appointed myself gadfly to the public library, in the interest of getting all the works of H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs on its shelves. I had a fair degree of success, too, although, looking back, I'm sure Miss Seibert must have dreaded to see me advancing upon her desk with list in hand. I would launch into an impassioned plea in favor of, say, Maiwa's Revenge, holding up to scorn and ridicule any library so benighted as to lack that pearl among books. Miss Seibert would--somewhat wearily, but with exemplary patience--embark for the hundredth time upon her explanation that the library did not exist solely to serve as a fund for buying books for young Mr. Leman. I would depart disconsolately. But in all probability, a couple of weeks later Miss Seibert would call me over to her desk and pull forth--as a magician does a rabbit--Maiwa's Revenge. We had a very pleasant relationship, Miss Seibert and I, and I'm sure I could have worked the same dodge with Mundy's books. Somehow I just failed to hear of him.

My enthusiasm for Burroughs and Haggard died after a while, and I took up Sabatini, and then Jeffrey Farnol and then William J. Locke. I discovered mysteries and science fiction. And about that time I learned that a good many of the books my elders enjoyed were good reading. It was too late for Talbot Mundy.

I say that advisedly. I have lately looked into his writings, at the behest of a friend who is a Mundy fanatic, and I regret to say that I find him unreadable. I can still sometimes find moderate enjoyment in Burroughs and Haggard, but somehow Mundy does not get across to me. It's not that he was a poorer writer than Burroughs (nobody was), or that his narrative has less movement and intrinsic interest than Haggard. I am perfectly sure that if I were to read Tarzan of the Apes for the first time today, I would be unable to get past the first chapter. But the point is precisely that I am not reading Burroughs for the first time; and when I reread Tarzan, something of the wonder that filled a rapt and goggle-eyed ten-year-old on a long-ago day is revived. Reading Burroughs and Haggard today is an exercise in nostalgia, rather than reading-for-fun. There is nothing nostalgic in Mundy for me, and hence I find his celebrated romances simply dull. If this be treason, make the most of it!

-This is the bottom of the Cruet-

SCAVENGINGS

A department in which The Worm quotes its distinguished contemporaries

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From the mailing comments in an APazine:

Well, err, what to write. Good zine, hank, but doesnt inspire much ~~oos~~ oops comment. Dern typer. Bought it second hand about two ~~oos~~ oops years ago. Err, hmm. Your repro is getting better, I could read most of page three. Yas, yas. Liked the part you cribbed from "Post Scripts." Should have given it credit tho. Well, err. Did you hear the one about the tiger who wanted to be baptized? Hm, see I've forgotten how it goes. This was a good ~~oos~~ APOzine, Hank. Thats about all the comment I've got.

*

From a memoir of Northern Ireland Fandom, by John Perry:

I looked at Ted and Ted looked at me, each of us with a wild surmise. Could it be . . .? But no! An event so mind-shatteringly unique, so catastrophically disastrous, was unthinkable. And yet--and yet--it was true! Horrorstruck, we could but stand with mouths agape, trying to comprehend this dread turn of events.

We were running out of paper!

*

From a story, "Who Fhaans There?" by Carl Fhandon, in INSINUATION, edited by Harry Parr:

The place stank. A queer, mingled stench that only slanshacks know, compounded of mhimeo ink, bheer, musty paper and fhaans. Yet, somehow, through the rheed of hhuman bheings and their associates, came another taint. It was a qhueer, nheck-rhuffling thing, an odor alien among the smells of fhaanac and aristocratic Bherkeley Fhaandom. It came from the tarpaulin-covered thing on the table.

The object on the table dhripped weirdly alien green juices. It was an N3F publication.

BABY'S FIRST CONREP

or,

Through Darkest Solacon with Notebook and Hangover

It was a good con--a hell of a good con. Or so it seemed to this conventioneer. It was, of course, my first, so I'm not able to make comparisons with others, and it may well be that blase old-timers will damn the Solacon as much inferior to London or New York or what have you; but from where I stand, it was a hell of a good convention.

So good, in fact, that I was not in full possession of my faculties when I checked out of the Alexandria, and I left behind in room 1072 a practically new electric razor, my slippers, and all my toilet articles. The party had lasted until about seven A.M., which was only three hours before the airport bus departed. That meant that I didn't dare go to sleep, so Ron and Cindy Smith, who had had three or four hours of sleep and were--by comparison with me, anyhow--alert and bright-eyed, were good enough to stick with me and keep me awake until bus-time. Unfortunately, they stayed in the coffee shop while I went up to pack.

I was, of course, considerably fuddled by lack of sleep and strong drink (at some point when the small hours were growing larger I had come to the remarkable conclusion that a few more drinks would probably help keep me awake) and my packing consisted in snapping the catches on my suitcase. Anything that wasn't already in didn't get in. But at that point I didn't care at all: it had been a good convention, and I was deathly tired, and it was time to go home.

A big reason for my enthusiastic feeling about the con, I suppose, is the fact that it began for me as it ended--with a party. I had checked into the Alexandria at about 11:00 on Friday night. I went to my room and washed up (the ancient gnome of a bellboy told me that there was a convention of "fiction writers" going on) and then went down to the second floor to see what was happening. They were showing movies in the ballroom, and just as I came in, "Born of Man and Woman" flashed on. I sat down and watched the film. I liked it.

The lights went up after the Matheson film, and I looked around to see if I could spot either of the two fans I knew personally, Ron Ellik and Ellis Mills. As luck would have it, Ellis was almost the first man I laid eyes on. He was talking to a fellow who looked like an amiable owl, who turned out to be Ron Bennett. It augured well, I thought, meeting the TAFF representative right off.

There was a party, Ron and Ellis said, being given in support of their bid for the '59 convention by the Detroit group, and why didn't I come along? I was a little diffident about going to a party to which I hadn't been invited, but they persuaded me that it would be all right, and apparently it was, because Prophet and Broderick immediately helped me to a glass of blog. This curious potable appeared to be compounded of sweet wine and vodka. A rumor circulated that the wine had been bought for 98¢ a gallon, but I consider this a canard; it must have cost at least \$1.25. The blog was good, but not the thing for sustained drinking--it's too sweet. But since I am a dedicated drinker, I managed to sustain my consumption of it for quite a considerable time.

Blog wasn't the only beverage consumed: Jack Harness potted through the suite with a can of yellowish fluid, offering all and sundry a swig. The flavor was familiar but elusive; it turned out to be unadulterated apple juice. Adulteration would have improved it.

It was a pretty big party; both rooms were packed elbow-to-elbow, and the noise was terrific. The air was a composite of smoke, liquor fumes, sweat and profanity. I was in a neofannish seventh heaven.

Lord, the people I met! I can't possibly list them all, and that kind of catalogue isn't interesting anyhow; but a few people especially remain in my mind: Ted White prowling from group to group, his face deadpan behind the piratical beard; Boyd Raeburn, looking exactly like Dennis the Menace when he removed his glasses; Bill Donaho, that jovial mountain of a man; Bus Busby, who looked not at all as I expected him to--the beard, perhaps; Elinor Busby, who did look as I expected her to, and who is one of those people whom you warmly like at sight; and many, many more. I couldn't have begun the convention in a way better calculated to convince me that a worldcon is the cream of human foregatherings.

After a while an undertone developed in the general babble, and a curious movement, not unlike that visible in an uneasy herd of sheep, was noticeable. The crowd seemed to be perceptibly smaller. Here and there one could spot furtive conversations, following which two or three people would unobtrusively take their leaves. Somewhere a new party was forming.

To this day I'm not sure whether or not I was actually invited, but a bit later I was at the new party. I don't know who was giving it --to my shame be it said--but I met the Falascas there, and a lot of other people, including some very strange types. I later discovered that these odd folk moved with the greatest freedom from party to party, blandly assuming a welcome for themselves wherever they went. These people are of what I understand is called The Beat Generation. They turned up at a number of parties I attended, although they weren't in evidence at business meetings or any of the scheduled events, and I don't think they're fans in the ordinary sense of the word. When a party was underway, they seemed to generate spontaneously, like cheese mites in a ripe stilton. Their habit was to enter in a group, arrange themselves along the wall conveniently near the booze, and then to remain there--silent except for sotto voce conversations among themselves--until they'd had enough, at which point they'd stalk out in a group.

They ran mainly to two types: one was a weedy blonde youth with a weak mouth and spotted bluejeans, and the other a beard-beret-horn-rims model. There was at least one female amongst them, a raddled woman with pink hair, a dead-white face and wild eyes. I had one long conversation with one of these beatniks, but I ended up no wiser about the kind of life he led and why he led it than I was before. He kept the conversation--perhaps "argument" would be a better word--strictly on politics (he stands somewhat to the left of Dave Rike) and became evasive when I tried to explore the ideas of the beats. That was at an after-the-party bull session, where Bill Donaho genially poured oil when the waters became too troubled, and Mike Hinge, the representative from New Zealand, peacefully napped upon the floor.

I see that all I've written so far reads as though this report should be entitled, "An Inside Look at a Lost Weekend," but the parties were strictly a nighttime diversion, and there was a considerable amount of interesting activity during the afternoons and evenings. Aside from the banquet, the best of these was Bradbury's speech, which I think could hardly have been improved upon. Bradbury is a fluent and persuasive orator, with a highly engaging platform manner and some valuable things to say. He is also a skilled extempore speaker, as he demonstrated during a question period after his speech.

Unfortunately, I missed two of the program items that I wanted most to attend: the report from the prozine editors--which was over before I arrived in L.A.--and The Auction Bloch, which I missed through my own stupidity. I hadn't had any sleep at all on Friday night, and shortly after lunch on Saturday I began to feel the lack. The obvious solution was a nap, so I paddled along to my room, set my infallible mental alarm clock for eight in the evening, and retired. For a time my sleep was disturbed by what I took to be the thumping of faulty plumbing (I discovered later that it was some of the beats playing bongo drums in a room across the airshaft) but the noise subsided at last, and I slept well. Too well: my infallible mental alarm woke me at two-thirty A.M. I swore some, and went back to sleep. I had missed, according to what people told me next day, one of the high spots of the convention.

I consoled myself with the thought that the important thing about a con isn't the official program, but the social end of it--the people you meet, the new friends you make. But in that connection, a neo is unlikely to find a convention all he'd wished. His daydreams, you see, have been of a bullsession composed of Boucher, Tucker, knight, Campbell, Bloch, Grennell and himself as a hard core, with all the rest of the big names dropping by for a chat. The reality is of course quite another box of eels. The people the neo has been launching to meet have old friends to see and the events of a whole year to discuss. The neo, whatever his own desires, has certainly no right to expect them to forego the company of those friends to discuss Heinlein with Joe Neofan. Joe, however, doesn't see it quite that way; and when he discovers that one of the big names is having a party without inviting him, he comes down with a bad case of Convention Distemper (sometimes called The Neofan Syndrome). The symptoms of this complaint are disillusion, self-pity, petulance and a stern resolve to write a bitter conrep which will expose the haughtiness of BNF's. Two cases of this came to my attention at Los Angeles. Professional ethics prevent my naming names.

Now even if Joe was ignored, he has no right to complain; nobody owed him anything. But surely he exaggerates the snubs he has received. I came to the Solacon as a neofan of purest ray serene, with, as I have said, personal acquaintance with only two fans. By any reasonable expectation I should have spent my time in lonely searching for somebody to talk to. Actually the opposite was true. I can think of no other comparable gathering to which I have come as a stranger at which I was accorded so quickly such a great measure of acceptance. Fans--big-name or otherwise--are essentially friendly people, it seems. Of course it's possible that I was in a fool's paradise--that I was receiving the same snubs that Joe complains of, but was just too dense to perceive it--but I don't think so. I think that Joe came to the convention with expectations founded essentially upon a colossal conceit, and when he discovered that not

everybody shared his love of himself he was deeply wounded. Of course, he's a very young man.

But you'll be seeing Joe's report on the convention, so let's leave him now and plunge--all hot and quivering--into the climax of the orgy, the banquet. As the play-by-play conreps will already have informed you, Boucher was toastmaster (and unless my eyes deceived me, he was the only one actually drinking toasts--the rest of us had water in our glasses) and Matheson guest of honor. Matheson's speech, I regret to say, left a great deal to be desired. Matheson has the unfortunate physical limitation of possessing a remarkably soporific voice, and the speech itself was decidedly narcotic--not habit-forming, mind you, but still narcotic. Boucher was witty and a first-rate toastmaster all round, Bloch produced a machine-gun burst of his mordant witticisms, Ackerman made a lot of indifferent puns, and Bennett and Hinge, as foreign representatives, delivered interesting speeches. The food was tolerable. Ruth and Dave Kyle sat on my right, and Stuart Palmer on my left. I offered the Kyles my congratulations on the events of the previous afternoon.

The costume ball was a real pleasure. The fenne favored costumes that exposed an agreeable amount of skin, and many of the costumes were interesting in themselves. Most spectacular, perhaps, was Karen Anderson as a wholly convincing female vampire, while Villard Stepney ran her a close second. There was also somebody who came as a representative of Lemuria or Mars or Gormenghast or somewhere, dressed in a motley collection of robes and wearing entirely repellent facial makeup, who bore a bowl which smoked and stank. His stogy antics won him a special award (van Vogt, who made the presentation, referred to him as "smudge-pot" since he never indicated what he was supposed to represent) and he bore his prize in triumph out of the hotel and down to Pershing square and back again, collecting, as he did so, a retinue of dumfounded spectators. After he had disappeared into the hotel, the people he had collected stood on the sidewalk across the street and stared up at the windows of the Alexandria. People staring that way naturally attract others, and pretty soon half the block was packed. I went out and mingled with the crowd for a while, and asked a number of the gawkers what was up. Some admitted frankly that they didn't know, a couple said somebody was about to jump off the roof, a dear little lady who looked like somebody's grandmother said there was a flying saucer on the roof of the hotel, and a fat man (who may have been one of those who actually saw smudge-pot) was so doubled up with laughter that he couldn't talk. I went back into the hotel, and a little later the police broke the thing up. A very fannish incident, I thought.

There was more partying after the masquerade, and when that was over the con was at an end for me; I had to be at work on Tuesday morning. I've already told you about my bleary-eyed and disorganized leavetaking. I should mention that the Alexandria very kindly mailed me all the things I'd left in the room.

I'll remember it for a long time, my first fan convention. I'll remember things like these: Rog Phillips' tireless loping from duty to duty in seeing that the con ran smoothly; the Detroit group almost breaking up a panel discussion by throwing balloons from the balcony; Rick Sneary's tired face, and how it lit up at the long standing ovation the banquet crowd gave him; Ron and Cindy Smith sleeping like

a pair of tired babies, while the noise of a party roared all about them; the line from Bradbury's speech, "Go find your love"--saying which he gestured by putting up a forefinger and grasping it with the other hand, an illustration graphic almost to the point of pornography, although surely unconscious on his part; jeers and catcalls from Ron Ellick and Ted White when they discovered me at an N3F meeting; Ron Bennett's indefatigable group-hopping; Burbee telling the watermelon story; winning a raffle (I won a full run of Playboy); the group of young fans whom nobody ever saw because they spent all their time in a room working on a one-shot; Jerry DeMuth's remarkable beard; and a whole host of such trivia, which are somehow more memorable than the big events.

There are a few things about the convention that I regret: losing an entire evening because of brutish sloth; failing to have a real conversation with G.M. Carr; having only fifty-eight hours in Los Angeles; and learning that the incomparable Brandon was a hoax. But such things are overshadowed by all the rest, and, as I say, it seemed to me to be a hell of a good convention.

I'll see you in Detroit in '59.

I hope.

-The End-

THE QUESTION BOX

(A new department, in which Dr. Quagmire Throttle will answer readers' questions on fannish and stfnal subjects.)

QUESTION: From time to time in my reading I come across references to Mu and Atlantis. Can you tell me anything about them?

ANSWER: Ja, I can tell you all about them, but I don't have the space, so I'll tell you a little. Mu is Heinz Friedrich Mu, formerly financial secretary of the Bremen Rocket Society (Verein fur Biertrinken). He is a scoundrel.

Atlantis is the trademark of a brand of hygienic underwear manufactured in Leipzig from 1891 to 1926.

QUESTION: Will you please explain briefly Einstein's relativity theory?

ANSWER: No.

QUESTION: How does Hoyle's cosmology differ from previous concepts of the nature of the universe?

ANSWER: Hoyle is a pre-Clear.

QUESTION: There doing a lot of talking about sending a rocket into outer space but don't they realize theres no air out there. How can a rocket go with no air to push against?

ANSWER: By God, I never thought of that. You'll have to excuse me now. I want to consult von Braun.

THE OCULENTERATOLOGIST'S BOOKSHELF

A couple of issues ago I devoted this department to a long panygyric on Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan, which I had just discovered, and which had elevated me to such a pitch of enthusiasm that I was moved to indite a perhaps disproportionate number of words in praise of this momentous discovery. But it wasn't long before I was disabused of the notion that I was stout Cortez; quite a number of readers indicated that they had known Titus--favorably or unfavorably--for years, and several of them were good enough to call my attention to the fact that there was a sequel, called Gormenghast. I felt more than a little foolish.

Still, there were also some who hadn't heard of the book before, and who were sufficiently affected by my shrill encomia to promise to read it if they could find copies, so perhaps my effort wasn't entirely wasted. And it is the fact that there were such people which gives me the temerity once again to pose as The Poor Man's Clifton Fadiman, and to your attention to another of my "discoveries." This is a book which has languished in almost absolute obscurity for upwards of half a century, but which is, in my opinion, the greatest novel of the supernatural ever written. I am speaking of Dorcas Bagby's The Moswell Plan (New York: Thomas Collier's Sons, 1904.)

Now first of all, lest you be misled by the above, I want to make it clear that The Moswell Plan has nothing whatever in common with Titus Groan--except that each is unique. Miss Bagby (or perhaps it's Mrs.-- I haven't been able to find out anything about her) produced in this book a tour de force which stands absolutely alone, and which cannot, by its very nature, be compared with any other writing. In concept and execution this is an almost flawless book: in its power to frighten, to horrify, to persuade you that the supernatural is real, it is incomparable, and in its technique it stands as a dazzling example of the novelist's craft.

Most impressive, perhaps, is the brilliant and inspired manner in which Miss Bagby accomplished the change of mood which is so important to--which, in fact, is the novel. The Moswell Plan opens at its highest point, in terms of atmosphere, and thereafter descends steadily, surely and uncomfortably to an ending of unrelieved horror. But this is done so gradually, and with such an accomplished hand, that it is only by re-reading the opening pages after finishing the book that one becomes aware of what the author has done. Then the shock is immense: you need only compare the sun-drenched merriment of the opening scene--the Fourth of July picnic--with the powerful and terrible ending--Dover Cleek's grisly banquet in the cave--to perceive the hand of a master. The transition from the sunny beginning to the dark and murky gloom of the ending is sure, steady and consistent throughout the book's 306 pages; but it is so skillfully wrought that the reader is actually unaware.

A novel about homesteaders in Schenck County, Nebraska, in 1877, will doubtless strike you--as it did me--as a medium high on the list of those unlikely to produce soul-chilling horror; and indeed, for the first four chapters one is persuaded that he has fallen into the hands of a frontier naturalist--a female Hamlin Garland or Rolvaag--albeit a naturalist with a more gracious prose style than most. We are shown the unpainted clapboard house on the homestead, we see Orrin Fimber at his work in the fields, we are given a portrait of motherly Prudence Fimber in her kitchen, we eavesdrop on the yearnings of Dulcie Fimber (the heroine) for a less lonely life than that of a homestead. The changing seasons are described, and the growth and harvesting of crops, and such agricultural catastrophes as hail, blizzard and drouth. It all seems most ordinary, and perhaps a bit tedious; but subtly and almost imperceptibly, darkness is beginning to encroach.

The first clear look at what is to come--the first cold clutch of fingers at the reader's spine--arrives with Chapter Five, in the Reverend Myron Glaum's sermon on Blood. Reverend Glaum is minister of the Church of the Blood Triumphant, an organization which at first appears to be simply a fundamentalist sect of the kind that has always flourished on a frontier. (It is much later in the book that we are told what "The Blood Church" actually is; and the revelation is one that is likely to put butterflies into most stomachs.) Glaum is the only character in the book who is described from the outset as being unpleasant; he is, we are told, "as pallid and soft and inelastic as a dipper of lard"; his voice is phlegmy and unctuous; he seems to exude evil. He stands in important contrast to the rest of the characters, who are uniformly presented in the beginning as good people, although, as the novel progresses, they are one by one revealed to be evil, unclean and corrupt--even Orrin Fimber, the industrious father, even Dover Cleek, the loveable old hired man.

Glaum's sermon on Blood reads at first like a literal transcription of a fundamentalist sermon; but we slowly become aware that the word blood (pronounced with "luscious ardor," as Miss Bagby puts it) recurs with rather unhealthy frequency, and that Glaum's chief interest is in literal hot human blood. And once that realization has sunk in, the remainder of the sermon takes on an eerie and uncomfortable meaning. It is also in this sermon that we first hear of The Moswell Plan: "Reverend's chin almost touched the bible; the sunbeam flickered on the rope of saliva that depended from the corner of his mouth. 'Blood,' he whispered with phlegmy urgency. 'Blood. There is much blood in The Plan.'" The Plan of which he is speaking has nothing to do with Christian theology.

This is perhaps as good a place as any to tell you that Miss Bagby's book never reveals precisely what The Moswell Plan is--or at any rate it didn't reveal it to me. What we learn about it is conveyed through a number of hints and elliptical references, which appear here and there throughout the book. It is clear before the end that most of the people in Schenck County are "Disciples of The Plan" (indeed, it may be

that Dulcie Fimber is the only one who is not); and it is also clear that there is something of ancient evil--of Elder Gods--involved; but we are not told so directly. Moswell Symmes, of Surrey in England, formulated the plan in 1537--it appears; the headquarters of the plan removed to the new world in 1803--one gathers; it is a cabal intended to present control of the world to supernatural creatures of immense antiquity--it would seem. And so forth. It is necessary to draw some inferences.

But this much is explicit: Dulcie Fimber, a happy eighteen-year-old, begins to discover that all the people she knows--plain rural people of 1877 Nebraska--are displaying cracks which reveal a loathly corruption within. One by one, those she knows and loves begin to emit a stench of evil: Dr. Stoaff, who brought her into the world; Thurlow Faulbetzer, the old Indian who taught her woodlore; Audrey Smool, the school teacher; Dover Cleek; and her father himself. Only her mother, Prudence Fimber (who seems to be intended as an Earth-Mother symbol) remains as she was. The rest are revealed as agents of The Plan.

But they are revealed at intervals over a considerable period, and there is a very real terror in the closing of the circle around Dulcie: as each of the people upon whom she depends suddenly exhibits the mark of the beast, she is driven to another; and then that one displays the stigmata of The Plan, and she flees again. In the end she finds herself in the cave with Dover Cleek.

I will repeat--this time without qualification--a statement I made earlier: The Moswell Plan is the greatest novel of the supernatural ever written. The Elder-Gods lode has been worked before and since--by Machen and LeFanu and the tiresome Lovecraft--but never so well; the despair of one in the last extremity, who sees every avenue of escape close before him, has been well-described by a host of suspense-writers, but never with the verisimilitude Miss Bagby contrives; many writers have surprised us by unmasking noble characters to reveal the beast beneath, but never with as great a sense of shock and outrage as Miss Bagby evokes. Only Dracula, of all the novels of horror and the supernatural, deserves to be on the same shelf as The Moswell Plan.

If The Moswell Plan has a flaw, it is this: that there are several incidents which--although grotesquely fascinating and undeniably skillfully recounted--appear to have no real relevance to the novel. Such, for example, are the incidents of the pickled sheep's head, and of the dog in the catalpa tree. The question may fairly be asked: What is their function in the novel? What purpose is served by describing Dr. Stoaff's clandestine enterprise in the back room of the drug store? Why recount Thurlow Faulbetzer's inept efforts to be a witchdoctor? What was the point of including the almost-slapstick episode of the plow's attack on Orrin Fimber?

These are minor matters, though, and in any novel of lesser quality they would not merit mention. But The Moswell Plan is so very close

to perfection that small flaws are exaggerated by the excellence of their context.

You must by all means read this book; I think that after you've done so you'll join me in trying to drum up more readers. I won't promise that it will scare you to death--hardly anybody can actually be frightened by a story--but I will say this: if there is such a thing as a book that can raise gooseflesh, that book is The Moswell Plan.

POETRY CORNER

Up in the mountains, in our picturesque hamlet of Central City, lives a man who aspires to be the official poet of Colorado. His name is Morris Cottrell, and he gets his living by chiselling tombstones. His real love, though, is writing verse. What he writes is apparently unacceptable to commercial publishers, so he has had printed at his own expense his three slim volumes: Mountain Days, The Death of Lester P. Schroeder Jr. and Other Poems, and Poems of Central City.

Since first I saw Cottrell's poetry I have been fascinated by it. He is unarguably the worst versifier ever to see print, but he takes himself so seriously, and he is so proud of his doggerel, that I find it impossible not to follow his ineptitudes with mesmerized amazement. His rhyming is weak, his sense of rhythm is incredibly faulty, and he is without peer as a master of bathos and anti-climax. The notion of imagery has not occurred to him, but he does occasionally manage to hit upon a metaphor, which he invariably mangles most unmercifully. He is as droolingly sentimental as Edgar A. Guest, without even the small felicity of Guest's jingly rhythms. He is, I submit, the most magnificently bad poet of our time.

The Death of Lester P. Schroeder Jr. is the funniest piece of unintentional humor that I know of, but it's too long to reprint here. However, the following poem may give you some idea of the essential flavor:

A HIGH DIVE

Off of the diving board high I dived
And soon at the bottom of the lake I arrived.
The water blue was so clear I could see in every direction
And I looked at the little slippery fish with affection.
The water was so cold that I feared that I would get a cramp
For my wife had fed me pancakes for breakfast, the scamp!
Then I discovered I could no longer hold my breath
And if I stayed down any longer it would mean my death.
My vision was beginning to get blurry
So I swam back to the top in a hurry.
Into the bright sunlight with never a shadow,
It is wonderful to dive in the great state of Colorado.

A TRUE AND COMPLETE EXPLANATION
of the
PRESENT PARLOUS STATE of SCIENCE FICTION
together with
An Account of the Discovery of the Dreckmeyer Formula

(The manuscript of the curious document which follows was found in a bottle [Phillips Milk of Magnesia, Large Economy Size] floating in the backyard fish pond of Photus Knebs, 1636 Kidney St, Horner's Corner, Iowa. This confession, which is unsigned, may be a hoax; but, if so, it was certainly not perpetrated by Mr. Knebs, who has written nothing more complicated than a laundry list for the past twenty years. Much of what is recounted must be viewed sceptically; but where the facts can be checked, they bear out the anonymous author. There was, for example, actually such a magazine as Science Fiction +. In any event, what follows is offered as a possible explanation of a mystifying phenomenon. . . Ed.)

Back in the early Thirties I worked for a time as a Mad Scientist. It wasn't a very good job--the hours were long and the pay poor--but times were hard, and I had seven little mouths to feed. (No, I didn't have a family; I've got seven little mouths.) While being a Mad Scientist is in some ways less arduous than being a sane scientist (precise measurements are unnecessary, and most of the work is done by large machines which crackle ominously and flash vari-colored lights) there is an element of danger involved. One needs constantly to be on guard against the firm-jawed, clean-cut types whose function it is to Rescue The Maiden And Destroy The Mad Scientist. It gets on your nerves after a while. I was happy when I was able to get into another line of work.

But nobody can say that I didn't leave my mark on the field of Mad Science. I, ladies and gentlemen, was the discoverer of the Dreckmeyer Formula. (Kindly do not mob the platform; there will be ample opportunity after the lecture to throw vegetables at me, and I will at that time pass among you, signing autographs and vending glossy 3x5 photographs of myself in my Mad Scientist suit.) The question may well be asked, Why call it "The Dreckmeyer Formula," rather than use your own name? I will answer the question: I deliberately named the formula after the one who made the most concrete contribution to the formula's success.

At that time I kept in my laboratory, as a companion, a tortoise-shell cat named Clarence Dreckmeyer. (It may strike you that that is an odd name for a cat, and, on the whole, I suppose that you're right. Actually, this cat had been named after a rich great-uncle, in the hope of an inheritance--unfortunately to no avail: the uncle, a ginger-colored tom, left his entire fortune to be used to found a home for stray humans.) Let me tell you how

Clarence Dreckmeyer made his contribution to science.

I had been working on an expanded and revised version of the Jeckyll-Hyde formula, which I had long felt was out-moded. The job was a long and tedious one (as you doubtless know, in the Mad Scientist business one works only at night, and most experiments will come off only on stormy nights) and often I despaired of success. But at length there came a time when the hoped-for result seemed within my grasp. Conditions were perfect: it was a night of Stygian blackness, with a storm of unparalleled violence roaring about the castle. My potion, carefully refined, bubbled and smoked in a retort. The various veeblefetzers glowed, or sparked, or spun their wheels, according to their natures. To complete the conditions necessary for a successful experiment, I emitted, from time to time, a fiendish cachinnation. (A Mad Scientist without a well-developed fiendish laugh is licked before he starts.)

Tense with anticipation, I removed the subject of the experiment from its cage. It was a pallid youth named Vitus Loin, a leader of Boy Scouts, a reader of Peace-of-Mind books, a teacher of Sunday School, an officer of the Y.M.C.A. Carefully I measured a portion of the formula into a beaker and handed it to him. "Drink this!" I commanded (with a fiendish laugh).

He held his nose and complied. I gave him a piece of candy to take away the taste.

I waited.

"You don't happen to have a copy of Elbert Hubbard's Scrapbook around here, do you?" said Loin.

I gave a wild and fiendish shriek of frustration. Again, failure! Was I always to be foiled? Would I never achieve my goal? Beside myself with fiendish rage, I kicked Clarence Dreckmeyer.

The cat flew through the air, struck a shelf, and fell--directly into the retort (it was a large Kurtius retort) containing the potion. He was totally dissolved in a twinkling--or, to be more precise, in the formula.

Suddenly I was struck by a thought of incredible brilliance! A kerosene lamp appeared in a balloon over my head! (The castle had not been wired for electricity.) Hastily I dipped up another beaker of the brew and tendered it to Loin. He drank, made a wry face, and extended his hand for his candy. And even as I watched, the fingers of the hand grew longer and curled in toward the palm. The nails became hooked and horny; hair sprouted on the back of the hand. I looked at his face. His incisors had become tusks; horns grew from his forehead; he needed a shave!

Success!

Dreckmeyer had been the missing ingredient!

I laughed long and loud in fiendish triumph.

My fortune was made. I saw a vision of an enormous factory with a sign above it: "Dreckmeyer Formula, Inc." Inside the plant would be a long assembly line of Kurtius retorts, and above each, in a cage with a trapdoor, a cat to be precipitated into the brew at the proper moment. Down the line one would find the bottling works--and by George, I'd have to decide on the proper shape for the bottles, and design a label: something eye-catching and persuasive, but withal in quiet good taste. And I'd need a singing commercial; perhaps

Faster action, better taste,
With KX-3 to reduce waste.
Go out and buy a jug with haste--
DRECKMEYER FORM-U-LA!

Of course that was just off the top of my head, and possibly could stand a little polishing.

My rosy daydreams were interrupted by a growl from the creature. It was standing before the mirror, closely examining its new appearance. It didn't seem pleased. "That's right, Loin," I chuckled. "You're not a man any more."

This enraged it. It began to leap up and down, its red eyes blazing with hatred. "Yah, me man!" it screeched. "Me man!"

But the huge tusks impeded its speech, and this came out, "Me fan, me fan."

"All right, Loin," I said with a laugh. "You've just named yourself. You're a fan."

And thus was a new word added to the language.

I locked the creature in its cage and retired. That day I slept the deep, sound, nightmare-haunted sleep of a Mad Scientist who has done his work well. But it was the last good sleep I was to have for some time: when I entered the laboratory that evening it was to discover that the creature had escaped, taking with it the entire supply of the formula!

The monster--the fan--was at liberty; mankind was in jeopardy. As a Mad Scientist, I was well content. But had I realized the full horror of what I had loosed upon the world, it may be that my fiendish joy would have been tempered. I did not yet know that the creature's mind was as grotesque as its body.

I was soon to make the discovery, however; the creature lost no time in beginning its fell work. From its hiding-place--presumably some noisome cavern in the mountains--it issued the first of those loathesome publications which today threaten to destroy the human race. Smudgily hektographed on one side of the paper, illiterate to the point of incomprehensibility, and characterized by an oafish confidence that it was infinitely fascinating to its readers, this hideous spawning of a diseased brain was well calculated to strike terror into the stoutest heart. The creature combined with its low cunning a colossal conceit: it named the publication after itself, calling it the Fan Zine, or something of the sort.

The truly devilish characteristic of this Fan Zine was that the fan had mixed Dreckmeyer Formula with his hektograph gelatin. Many of those who were unwary enough to handle the thing were immediately infected, and underwent the ghastly metamorphosis into fans. They, in turn, were seized by an irresistible compulsion to infect others, and issued Fan Zines of their own. The plague began to assume epidemic proportions.

As a licenced and practicing Mad Scientist I was, of course, happy to see the world in peril; but in the geometrically proportioned increase in the numbers of fans I detected a danger to myself. It had been observed that the wild fans, hitherto solitary predators, had begun to run in packs, and I feared that my castle would not withstand a determined attack. I resolved to perform certain experiments to determine how the fans could be destroyed.

Along the trails which the fans followed to their water-holes, I set snares cunningly baited with prozines. A few days later I bagged one of the creatures. It howled imprecations at me

as I bore it to my laboratory. Its language was based upon English, but fully half the words were barbarous neologisms and uncouth coinages, and I was unable to understand all of what it said. Perhaps it was just as well; I hesitate to conjecture what such words as "fugghead" and "gafiate" may mean. Even a Mad Scientist must draw the line somewhere.

Once in the laboratory, I fastened electrodes to the fan's head, connected them to the largest of the veeblefetzers, and switched on. This machine was a lineal descendant of the famous lie-detector of Dr. van Vogt, and it announced its findings in a clear baritone voice: "These creatures will multiply faster than you can exterminate them. However, the bulk of them are recruited through reading science fiction. You should therefore seek to discourage such reading. This may best be accomplished by insuring the publication of as much bad science fiction as possible. The precise method of effecting such publication must be left to you." The machine clicked, cleared its throat, and fell silent.

I painlessly disposed of the fan, turned in my beard, and departed for the Far East. I remained there for several years, studying under the greatest sages of the East. I returned with immense mental powers, ready to begin my beneficial undertaking.

My method was quite simple: I intended, by intense concentration, to impair the judgment of science fiction editors, insuring that only the worst SF would see print. And, while it was no easy task, results of my selfless devotion to mankind's welfare soon became noticeable. Do you remember all those stories in which the last two survivors of the human race--a man and a woman--turn out to be named Atom and Neve? My work. Remember the stories in which the surprise ending is that the hero (or heroine) is a robot? I will take credit. Remember the host of semi-literate magazines which smudgily printed banal and cliché-ridden stories for three or four issues before expiring? Again my work. Remember Science Fiction +? My finest hour.

It hasn't been a bed of roses. A man named Campbell has resisted me in a most maddening way (although I did get to him once --you recall the Dianetics number), and a fellow called Boucher always entirely escaped my suasion. But every other editor has published greater or lesser quantities of crud under the influence of my powerful mental rays. I was especially successful with one William Hamling.

My crusade continues to this very day, and you may be sure that I shall not desist. The fan was created through my unhallowed experiment, and I shall not rest until he has been utterly exterminated. You may expect to see science fiction continue to decline.

This, of course, is hard on lovers of the genre; but we must recall the epistolary injunction, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." Science fiction spawns fans; therefore science fiction must go.

-The End-

"Of the boyhood of William Bodney we know but little. He was brought up as most boys in Suffix were brought up, except that he did not go out of doors until he was eleven, and then only to strike at the postman."

--Robert Benchley

THE CELESTIAL ONE-SHOT

A Fairy Tale

by

René Gundelfinger

This is our hero, this insignificant little man right here. His name is Codfield---Porous Codfield, Jr. He has an ordinary job, and he lives in an ordinary house, and he is, by and large, an ordinary fellow. In only two things is Porous Codfield out of the ordinary: first, in that he has the most sharp-tongued, shrewish, termagant, and altogether overbearing wife east of the Mississippi (and perhaps in the whole nation, for all I know); and, second, in that Porous is a fan.

All right, now, let's take a look at our hero, this commonplace little Porous Codfield, as he arrives at his home on a brisk October evening. Observe how thoroughly he wipes his feet on the doormat, notice how careful he is to discard his cigarette before entering the house. Oh, he's well-trained, is Porous. Doubtless many of you good ladies wish your helpmeets were more like him, instead of the great, clumsy, ash-scattering, mud-shod oafs that they are. But unless you possess a temperament like Mrs. Codfield's, it's impossible to train a husband that well.

Into the house goes Porous, removes his coat and hangs it in the hall closet, removes his hat and puts it carefully on the shelf, goes into the bedroom and changes into his old trousers, steps across the hall and into the living room. As he does so his wife also enters, she from the kitchen. Now, for the first time, we hear our hero speak; he has an altogether ordinary voice, with perhaps a little apprehension discernable in the overtones. He says, "Hello, Vermice."

Here is Mrs. Codfield, Vermice Codfield, formerly Vermice Hulture of the farm-implement Hultures. Vermice has cousins who ride to hounds and send their sons to St. Paul's and have their pictures in the Society Section of The Chicago Tribune, and Vermice never forgets this, although such things have never been her own lot. Her father was a family blacksheep who declined any connection with the manufacture of farm implements, and unfortunately remained poor all his life. Most of us, I think, can understand how this unhappy decision of her father's has made Vermice somewhat bitter.

Watch what she does now: not a word does she reply to Porous' timid greeting; she marches to a chair and settles herself in it with a truly pitiful sigh. Life, you would say, is almost too much for this poor lady. A strained expression steals over Porous' face, and a hunted look comes into his eye. "Not feeling well, dear?" he enquires solicitously.

And for answer, another sigh, enough to melt a heart of stone.

But I must caution you to waste no sympathy on Vermice. Save your sympathy rather for poor Porous. He knows what is coming. He has played this course many times before; he recognizes the sighing as the opening note of what will in all probability become a long and fully-orchestrated symphony of contempt, abuse, invective, self-pity, cold fury and red rage. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now for Porous Codfield.

Today, however, there is a change in the script. According to the rules, Porous should now say, "Is there anything I can get you,

dear?" But he doesn't say it! Instead he walks to the library table and begins to shuffle through the day's mail, while his wife goggles at him.

Actually, it's not surprising that he should do so. Porous, as I have said, is a fan, and what fan on the face of this troubled globe does not look first at his mail, upon his return home at the end of a hard day's toil? Porous trembles at the thought of wrath to come, he knows that he will bitterly regret his action, he is aware that he is placing himself in jeopardy. But he has no more power to resist than has the chronic boozier when the bottle is within easy reach.

And now, too late, he speaks; he stands there, with three letters, two pocsacrds and two fanzines in his hand, and says the invariably ineffective placative words which custom demands: "Is there anything I can get you, dear?"

Too late, Porous; too late, my poor friend! The bile vat overflows, with Vermice in top form. Her words are sharp as a scalpel, abrasive as sandpaper, wicked as sin. His head bloody and bowed, our gentle hero is told, without mince of words, of his thoughtlessness in failing to show a decent regard for the travails of his suffering wife, of his simple-mindedness in embracing fanac as a hobby, of his ineffectiveness as a breadwinner, of his incompetence as a lover, of his clumsiness in social intercourse, of all his sins and failings. She knows how to inflict pain, this Vermice Hulture Codfield. And when, at long last, the torrent of words ceases, she takes herself to her bed, from which point of vantage she emanates cold waves of anger.

Now, Porous, now comes your time of day. You've taken your lashing, and she'll probably leave you alone for the rest of the evening. Into the kitchen with you, heat yourself a can of soup, wash your dishes, and steal away to your haven in the basement. Ah, that's better, isn't it?

This is Porous' hideaway. Note that although the basement is commodious and there is plenty of available space, Porous' little nook is crowded into the darkest corner. Still, he feels lucky to be allowed that. Porous has partitioned this corner from the rest of the basement with tall bookcases of rough wood. In the little room thus formed he has a battered table which holds an ancient monster of an L.C. Smith, and on the floor sits a mimeograph of venerable years and quirky temperament. The bookshelves bulge with science fiction and fanzines, and there is an agreeable clutter of correspondence and carbon paper. I think it's a pleasant place, don't you?

Porous thinks so. This is the place where he feel really alive, where he can lose himself in his hobby and forget his virago of a wife and his ulcerous boss and the fact that he's almost the ultimate nobody. Here he reads his letters and his fanzines, here he composes his replies and his APAzine, here he dreams of being a BNF--for he has the wit to realize that that is his only chance of being anything big in this inequitable world. And even that, he realizes when he's honest with himself, is only a dream.

Tonight, though, he can't even dream. The peace that usually fills his soul when he enters his sanctum fails to materialize; his depression will not begone. He is struck by a chill fear that perhaps fanac has lost its charm for him, and he visualizes gray years without the solace of his hobby. He's feeling pretty bad.

I want you to watch carefully what happens next; this is where we come to the really remarkable part of our tale. There's Porous, sitting at his table, his chin on his chest, feeling as low as he's ever felt. The only light is a single weak bulb, unshaded, hanging from its cord above the table. Now look, over there in the corner. See that little point of light, about three feet above the floor? Watch it grow. Porous sees it; he's staring open-mouthed. Now the light is so bright Porous has to close his eyes. When he opens them, there's someone standing there.

Although Porous doesn't know it, this is his fairy godmother. She's quite a dish. She is wearing an extremely tight dress of some shiny black material, cut low in front, and fairy or no fairy, she is unquestionably a mammal. Her hair seems to have been to the peroxide bottle once or twice too often, and her lipstick and mascara are perhaps over-liberally applied, but she exudes a powerful attraction. Not even her rythmical rumination of a wad of chewing-gum can detract from it.

All right, Porous, speak up. Say something to her.

Here it comes, in an astonished wheeze. "W-who are you?" croaks our hero.

"Why, honey, I'm your fairy godmother," says the tarnished vision. "You called me, didn't ya?"

Poor Porous is too shaken up to answer her question. I'm not at all satisfied with the way he's reacting to this. The average man would of course be dumfounded, but after all, Porous has read every issue of Unknown over and over. At this point a man with his training should have accepted the situation.

The fairy speaks again: "I come ta grant ya a wish, honey. What'll ya have?"

Porous comes a little way out of his daze. "I--you don't look like a fairy godmother," he squeaks.

"I godmother mostly for men with battleaxe wives," says she, "And this is how they like me. Now let's get on with the wish." And she starts to unbutton her dress.

By George, Porous reacts to that. "Stop!" he shouts. "I mean, wait! I mean, maybe that's not my wish."

The dear little godmother looks surprised and a little miffed. "But everybody--well, what do you want, then?"

"Let me think," says the distraught Porous. "Let me think." And he sits down at his table and tries to concentrate.

How would you like to be in Porous' shoes right now? What would you wish? As for me, it's just possible that I might follow the godmother's original notion. She's quite a dish.

Perk up your ears--Porous is about to make his wish. Here it is: "I wish," says Porous, "I wish to be the publisher of the finest fanzine in the world--a fanzine that will make the fans forget there ever were such things as Hyphen and Grue and Inside and Skyhook. I wish to publish it monthly. I want it to make me a BNF. I wish--"

"Hold it, honey, hold it!" says the good godmother. "You're askin' way too much. I wasn't expecting to have to handle nothin' like that. Just a quick one to raise your spirits, was all I figured on."

Lord, does Porous feel let down. "You mean that's the only wish you can grant?" dithers the poor fellow.

"Well, no," she says, "But I haven't got the power to keep you publishing the world's best zine on a monthly basis. A one-shot, now. . ."

Up spring Porous' spirits. "Good, good, swell!" he bleats. "That's my wish. The best one-shot fandom will ever see!"

"O.K, kiddo," says the fairy godmother. "You got it." And pop! she disappears.

Well, you know how it is in these stories: in the morning Porous will have convinced himself that the whole thing was a dream or an hallucination. But right now he knows it was real, and, all fired with enthusiasm and energy, he pulls out a stack of postcards and begins to hammer away at the L.C. Smith. "I'm planning a really superior one-shot," he writes, "and I'd appreciate a contribution from you." He addresses these cards to all the big names and medium names and pro's whose addresses he has.

Sure enough, in the morning he thinks it was all a dream, but he goes ahead and mails the cards anyhow. (It'd be interesting to read one of these stories some time in which the character decides it was a dream and forthwith drops the whole matter, wouldn't it? But then, of course, we wouldn't have a story.) Now you and I know that the fairy's gift was real, but Porous doesn't know it yet, and quite understandably he's on tenterhooks for the next few days. And then, a glorious event! A bulky envelope addressed in blue, with a Fond du Lac postmark! "Dear Porous," reads our hero, "The enclosed was intended for 'The Skeptic Tank,' but on reading it over I decided that it was much too good for Stefantasy, and I want you to have it for your one-shot." Wow! And here's another: "I've decided to discontinue A Bas, and perhaps you can use the enclosed 'Derogation' for your one-shot." Goshwow! And here's a really thick bundle of manuscript: Carl Brandon's "The Wind in the Slipsheets." Goshwow-boyoboy!

They keep coming that way, and Porous is in a daze of absolute fannish bliss. What a fanzine this is going to be! He decides to call it PHREEB.

You've had your copy of PHREEB, of course, so you know how superbly the fairy granted Porous his wish. Over a hundred pages, photo-offset on slick paper, with a Freas cover. Grennell at his wise and witty best, a superb Derogation, Brandon's finest pastiche, poetry by Calkins, Willis' long account of his fannish trip to the continent (with Atom illos) Bloch-and-Tucker's sidesplitting debate, articles by Campbell and Boucher on the state of science fiction, knight's analysis of the late van Vogt, scores of Rotsler spot illos, Boggs' thoughtful criticism--but you know the zine as well as I do. Where is there a fan to whom PHREEB is not a bible? If such there breathe, go mark him well. He is, at best, a fakefan.

And what, you are doubtless wondering, has the ineffable Vermice been doing while Porous toils at his labor of love? The same old thing, I regret to say: keeping her tongue well-honed, and giving Porous the sharp edge of it at regular intervals. The interesting thing here is that Porous really doesn't mind; her fulminations are as water off a duck's back--if I may be permitted to coin so grotesque an image. Porous' mind is entirely occupied with PHREEB.

You can imagine how Porous' failure to react properly affects Vermice. Her diatribes develop an awesome fluency of invective; beside her, Xantippe pales into a very sucking dove. Be glad you're not present as the letters in response to PHREEB begin to pour in. Porous' spirits reach a record high; he is convinced that he has reached BNFdom at a single bound. This is almost unbearable to Vermice; I truly believe that on certain occasions she is near apoplexy. Surely no human being ever before has had to endure such

vituperation as Porous is subjected to. And it is not of short duration; it continues for weeks, and then months. And at length it penetrates even Porous' unparalleled euphoria. Bit by bit Vermice reduces him to the grovelling jellyfish we first met.

Now, gentle reader, we leap forward in time, to something more than a year after the fairy godmother paid her visit. (We may, I think, ignore the classical unities and make such a leap in a fairy tale.) Let's take a squint at the Achilles of our epic. There he is, the miserable Porous, now a Big (or at least an Upper-Middle) Name Fan. Once again we find him in the absolute depths of despair. Surely no man has ever led such a harried, harrassed, and thoroughly unbearable life. There he sits, the poor wretch, cowed and beaten, without joy in the present or hope for the future. Life is tasteless and juiceless and endlessly gray to Porous.

You've already spotted what's going to happen next, haven't you? An expanding spot of light appears in the corner, and whing! here's the godmother back again.

"Hi, honey," she says, "Things are pretty rough, ain't they?"

"Yah," says Porous.

"I been watchin'," she says. "Your damn' one-shot wasn't worth it, was it? I seen a lot of battle axes in my time, but kid, you got the worst."

"Yah," says Porous.

"I got an interest in you, honey. I been watching, and I got permission to fix up a special deal. You get another wish--and that's something that's only happened a couple of times before. What I'll do, I'll put a spell on your wife--a real doozie of a spell. I'll make a new woman of her. Just think about it honey; here's how it'll be: you'll come home in the evening, she'll give you a big smooch, she'll have the martinis all mixed, she'll have roasted some prime ribs for dinner, she won't let you help with the dishes, she'll want to go to bed early--and that'll be every day! She'll type your stencils and mail your letters, she'll jump when you give orders, she'll be your loving slave. How's that, kid?"

Porous' eyes are alight. "You really mean I get another wish?" he says incredulously.

"Sure do," replies the godmother, a light of simple happiness in her mascara'd eyes.

"Well," says Porous, "I have an idea for an even better one-shot. What I'll do is--"

A look of total stupefaction comes over the fairy's face. Then her expression hardens. "----!" she shouts coarsely. "This is the last time I'll try to do a favor for a screwball like you! Fans!" And she disappears, leaving an unprintable Anglo-Saxon monosyllable floating in the air where she'd been standing.

And that pretty well wraps it up. Most of us doubtless feel somewhat exasperated with Porous for acting as he did. But Porous, you see, is a fan--a Trufan, as I think this little tale proves pretty conclusively. And are you sure you wouldn't have done the same as he? As for me, I'd hate to testify under oath.

-The End-

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