

STARLING



REG
54

STARLING-3

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4 Liz Riggs
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11 Liz Riggs
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STARLING is published when ever I feel like it and maybe 1/2ly from now on by Hank Luttrell, Route 13, 2936 Barrett Station Road, Kirkwood, Missouri 63122. Send all money (25¢ per issue now; they won't be as big as the first two anymore), letters, artwork, stories, non-fiction, everything, to that address. I'll trade, most likely, if you'll send me something in the way of fanzines, or you might want to write a letter, for which you will also get the next issue. You may get it even if you don't write, or send money, or trade. But I wouldn't count on it.

YOUR MAN IN MO.

by Hank Luttrell

Well friends, this issue is late. You noticed? I'm glad. You see, it's like this: I had planed to have a mimeo a long time ago, a long enough time ago, in fact, to have published an issue two months ago. Well, as I might have guessed, things didn't happen like this. I didn't let it worry me too much, though...after all, I had a good reason. From now on we'll try to be a bit more prompt.

Who is "We" right as the moment?, you ask. Well, I'll tell you. It's me, and only me (Or is that 'I'?). Other members of the organization either never really took a very active part, such as Roger Alan Cox, and aren't listed this time around as editors (he's still with us on the contents page, however) and Tim Eklund, who doesn't like all the work and the little return of fan publishing.

If you people want to send me material, I'll be good enough to return it to you free, by the way. Mr. Eklund cut the contents page last trip, and put down the self addressed envelope business. And while we are on the subject, I think I'll mention that I have been getting a lot of good material from all you people out there. It is almost always true that young and just-getting-started fan editors 'just cant get enough good material.' I'm happy to report that I have not only been getting a lot of material, but that much of it has been, infact, quite good. Clay Hamlin, E. E Evers, Roger Cox, Dwain Kaiser, and Dave Hall have all sent either stories or articles or both. REG, Roger Cox again, and Gary Hubbard have sent artwork. I have enough stuff around here for a few more issues, and hoping for more. Gee...I hope I haven't scared any off--I promise to publish anything I accept within a year--cross my heart.

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT ADVANCED ENGLISH CLASSES

All my life--well, almost all my life--I have thought of myself as a bad English student. Then, suddenly last year, my English teacher had me transfered to an advanced class. Why, I asked myself? Umm, I had taken part in quite a bit of the class discussion...and I had taken quite a bit of trouble with that one theme...but were those the only reasons she had had? I guess so, because I've never figured out anything else. Maybe she liked me--or maybe she disliked me, and wanted to get me out of her class. At any rate, there I was, right in the middle of an advanced class.

How did I do? That's not the question, rather, How did I do it. I recieved good grades. The best I had ever gotten. Why.. Umm, maybe...

Maybe it's because the teachers of these classes are very sure that the pupils are smart, and that they know quite a bit about the subject at hand, so they don't go to any trouble trying to make sure. Or maybe I was just more interested in what the advanced classes taught, so I worked harder. But, I don't think I worked harder--I think I worked less. Any ideas?

Hank Luttrell

FUNK'S FABLE

by Hayden Cotterill

Some people would have called Charlie Funk a mutant, but those of us who know him well called him a freak. Now, Charlie looked normal enough from the front, although a bit stocky for a full grown timber rattler. However, seeing as how he wasn't a timber rattler this wasn't too much of a handicap. Charlie's problem was readily apparent from the right side. After all, it's a little hard to conceal a thirty-six foot long nose.

Charlie was naturally a bit self conscious about his nose, communly called Funk's Trunk. Consequently he tried several cures, one of which was to paint it green and pretend it was a garden hose. This didn't work too well, as once while Charlie was touring a green house a nearsighted care taker connected him to a hydrant, and he would have drowned had it not been for some old ladies who lectured to him on the evils of drinking from a hose. Another time charlie stuffed it into a suitcase while waiting for a train, and a hurried traveler mistook it for his own. Soon Charlie was bouncing along behind a train bound for Buffalo.

Understandably enough Charlie was a bit put out about this, as he had intended to go to Los Angeles.

Now there are some people who can take quite a bit and still laugh it off. Charlie was one of those people; but too much is enough and maybe a little more. After years of being threatened with a tweak on the nose by numerous belligerents who claimed they didn't like his face, he decided he had had his fill. So when he received his twenty-seventh offer for the lead in "Pinnochio", Charlie declared war on the Wise Guys of the world.

Soon after that he bought a set of weights and retired to his flat venturing out only to visit the elephants at the zoo, where he would sometimes spend the entire day.

Then one day Charlie did something he had never done before. He wrapped his nose jauntily around his arm and sluntered out into the street where upon a rather pungacious fellow said, "Hey, buddy, how would you like a punch in the nose?"

The chap had hardly time for a guffaw before Charlie reacted. Sporting a grim smile, he seized the poor fellow with

his nose (which was terrifically muscular, due to isometric contractions, weight lifting, and a few professional tips from the elephants) and within a few seconds had squeezed him into a slimy ooze which he wiped off his nose with his enormous handkerchief.

At the last count, Charlie's handkerchief had 137 notches in it. The police think he has a bad cold. So, if you tend to make derogatory remarks about other people, perhaps you had better think about mending your ways. You might end up on somebodys handkerchief.

The editor wishes to make it clear, that (a) "Cotterill" is not a pen name of "Luttrell" what ever you may think. Futher, I would like to make it clear that the "handkerchief" of this tale, fable, or what have you, is in no way related to a publication your editor from time to time brings out. Thank you.



LITRARIE, ETC., DEPT.

by Hank Luttrell

In the future my column will devote itself to books and magazines of a little bit older vintage than Mr. Cox's. This issue I'm only going to fill up this one page, 'cause I want to get those old serials finished.

The topic for discussion this trip will be NIGHT'S BLACK AGENTS by Fritz Leiber, Jr. This isn't really an old book (1947), but I think the hard bound edition (ARKHAM HOUSE, Sauk City, 237 pages) is, or almost is, out of print, so we'll consider it fair play for my consideration.

The book is divided into two parts, the longer being MODERN HORRORS, and the second being ANCIENT ADVENTURES, featuring the Grey Mouser, and Fafhrd. There is also another story, "The Man Who Never Grew Young," which has it's own little part, called TRANSITION.

The stories include, in the first part, "Smoke Ghost," "The Automatic Pistol", "The Inheritance", "The Hill and the Hole", "The Dreams of Albert Moreland", "The Hound", "Diary In the Snow". In Ancient Adventures, we have: The Sunken Land, and the short novel that recently was reprinted in FANTASTIC, "Adept's Gambit". Also, the for mentioned "The Man Who Never Grew Young" was present.

Of all the stories, the short novel was my favorite. This might have been because it was the longest, or because it featured my two favorite fiction characters. Or it might have been it was the best story. Other stories I liked were "The Automatic Pistol" about a pistol that was, well, quite automatic, "The Hill And The Hole" About a hill that was really a hole, with things in it, "The Dreams Of Albert Moreland," a wonderful little tale about chess and a chess player, "The Hound," about a rather horrible sounding wofe-of-the-city, and I don't mean the kind that watches girls, I mean the kind that bites people, and I don't mean on the ear, "Diary On The Snow" about a science fiction writer that has a bit of trouble with some elvins.

I forgot to indent up there, didn't I? That's because in all my letters, I always use a block form.

Really, it's hard to single out stories in this volume that I liked more than another. All of the stories seem to me at least quite good.

Some of the stories in this book are from Weird Tales, others from Unknown, still others seem to be in print for the first time. You would think, or at least I would, that the better stories would be those reprinted from magazines. Such doesn't seem to be the case. All the stories are good, the original ones are better, if anything. --Hank Luttrell

SHADOWS OF THE GOLDEN AGE

-----Conclusion-----by Roger Alan Cox-----

Travis went deeper into the omnipotent jungle, sloshing his way into where the vines and thick underbrush thinned and great marsh trees and much pools rose out of the ground, forming a formidable fence ahead. He had no great desire to spend the rest of the week slogging through a muggy swamp, and skirted it as best he could.

Several times he was confronted by menacing beasts, but the blaster settled the dispute after a bolt or two.

On the third day, Travis sighted a tower rising out of the mists. It was evidently a stronghold of the Old Ones, the mysterious Venusians that claimed native right to the planet. Perhaps they would help him find his way to another human settlement.

The entranceway lay halfway around the tower's broad girth: a nine-foot portal that ran under a dark arch and into the alien building. Travis was frightened, in a way--he had only heard tales of the Old One's and their dwellings--he had never been in one.

A corridor wound back into the building's innards, it's destination concealed by it's turnings. He walked warily for about five hundred yards along the winding hall, until he came to a wide intersection.

Two other corridors entered his, and joined it in a circular open space about fifty feet across. He could tell nothing of their origin or use without exploring them--and he had no great desire to lose himself in the labyrinthine mazes of this alien monolith. Best to keep going in one direction, leaving a straight and uncomplicated route of escape.

He went on for a while, then the corridor opened into a huge chamber on all sides. The ceiling was barely visible, high above his head, and he could not see the walls on either side at all. The room just faded away into the distance. But far ahead he could discern a stern alien figure on a high dais, as if waiting for him.

The Old Ones knew many things, he had heard, and at times seemed virtual oracles. Their ability to speak in the language of Men was hard to understand, but it was still there as a fact beyond denial. Travis would seek wisdom--but he might get death!

He plodded over the stone floor slowly. It was firm underfoot at first, but gradually grew faded and unreal, as if he was walking on a soft, pliable mattress. Travis finally reached the space directly in front of the dais.

The Old One stood unperturbably, scornfully, waiting--for what? The Venusian swayed, and spoke, as if from a great distance. "You have come for help in your plight--but you will get judgment!"

Travis started. He half drew his needler from his holster. "What---?"

"You are here to learn your destiny, and---of your origin. You are the shadow of a real entity..The work of the Greater, as are we

we all. Long ago, on Terra, he wrought you in his writing infancy. He was twelve when he started you, and he is almost sixteen now. He would like to kill Tim Fklund for printing the fragments of it and forcing him to finish it. He is tired of it, and realizes it stinks. Therefore, Travis L'Ron, you are finished. For this is-----THE END.

And the world around him crumbled and dissolved in ruins. His last thought was left shrieking into the flaming chaos of infinity: "I can see the furious LOCs now..." But then it was really

THE END

Bits and pieces:

In case anyone is interested, two of the stories in our first issue (STANGER and THE CONQUERORS AND THE CONQUERED, both by Bill Scheidt) were being published somewhere else at about the same time. The "somewhere else" was the Parkway Senior High School "magazine", called SAGE. It was just about as much of a magazine as this here thing is. Which is to say, not much. It was printed with photo-offset, but somehow or other, the people who did it managed to do such a bad job it was less readable there than it was in STARLING.

James Ashe, R. D. #1, Freeville, New York, 13068 wants to know: "Where are the fans that are interested in science" Interested in science? Write him and tell him you are there.

I have been telling Seth Johnson resently all the many reasons a Science fiction convention should be held in or near St. Louis (the main reason, of course, is that Hank Luttrell lives there). Mr. Johnson mentioned something about it getting awful hot in St. Louis. Indeed! it does. A few days ago it was 100°F. Today it was over 80 at 9:00 in the morning. I don't know what it was this afternoon. To this, I said that there were, after all, such things as air-conditioners. Infact, almost everything a fan might come in contact with in St. Louis is cooled. (except my house..) But then the thought came to me---there you are, cool and crisp (a crispy fan? come now) and here I am: wet, hot, red eyed and stinking of the correction fluid I spilled on my pants. Don't you feel terrible???? Don't you just want to through what ever it is you through into a suitcase and rush out to Misery? I mean, Missouri? Then you can suffer with me. I might, just might be able to find you some correction fluid you can spill on yourself.

And anyway, see, you can come on out to St. Louis and just have a horrible time. Have a sun stroke or two. Lose maybe 25 pounds in the heat. Then, you can go home and write con report after con report. Think of all the material you'd have to work with. Why, you wouldn't have to worry about anything to write for years!!!!

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WORDS
FROM READERS

Paul Gilster, 42 Godwin Lane, St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Hank: I got the latest STARLING. It's a very good issue, especially that wonderful editorial on civil rights at the back. Seriously though, I liked it a lot, and why did you say not to read your story? I thought it was very good, as was

your editorial. Say, that Roger Alan Cox has a lot of talent, doesn't he? Boy, that kid can really write. I'd like to see how his writing improves in the next couple of years. Chances are that he might very well become a pro writer.

// I told you not to read my story because I didn't think it was any good. I am much surprised that every person I've send a copy to hasn't written me a long, angry letter demanding to know why I publish such crud. I must admit I pleased, tho.

Don Fitch, 3908 Frijo, Covina, Calif.

Dear Hank and Tim: I generally try to avoid commenting on sf stories in fanzines, except to say (on extremely rare occasions) that I liked it. Maybe it would be best to keep things that way, but.... the fiction in STARLING is a step or two below that published in the prozines. That's a pretty cutting comment, and all I can say to lighten it is that your fiction (and especially that of Roger Cox) is somewhat better by quite a bit than most which appears in fanzines. "The Thing Below" was somewhat over-written, but admittedly it's extremely difficult to deal with Absolute Evil (even Lovecraft didn't come off very well at it) and also admittedly there is a grand tradition in sf/fantasy to stress environment and action at the expense of psychology and character development. Cox's book reveals show promising talent, to judge from the two books I've read--not great Insightful Literary Criticism, but better than most fanzine book reviews. (Luttrell's also--two reasonably competent reviewers in one zine is an unusual thing)

// good thing you slipped that last sentence in

Good Grief! \$175.00 for two issues of Statling?

// not really.

that's incredible. It's also ridiculous; (Unless you're Very Wealthy, that is)--no fanzine ought to cost that much for two issues. I suppose you send out an enormous number of copies, and have it professionally duplicated. (The quality of the duplication indicates the latter). There isn't much you can do if you don't have a mimeograph of your own. (or access to the free use of one), and I suspect that neither of you is close enough to a large city to be able to get low-priced stencils or paper. But you can cut down on the circulation; very few fanzines are (or need to be) produced in editions of more than 200 copies, and many of the best don't go much over the 150 mark. Send people who respond (try out those names which appear in

the letter columns of other fanzines), to those who are willing to trade (check the review columns of other fanzines), and to reviewers, to give readers who might be interested a chance to discover you. Don't, by any means, count on subscriptions to pay even the postage costs (that might happen, with luck, but...); figure that you are going to have to pay the cost of publishing for the pleasure of publishing, and act accordingly.

"Misfit Calculation" was poorly written--and I am unaccountably waiting anxiously for the next installment.

I don't feel strongly, either one way or the other, about Paul Gilster's guest editorial on intergration--it says about what I've been saying on the subject (mostly in letters in Cultzines, where The Negro Problem has been a Big Topic), but the whole thing is so complex, with so many different sides, that it's difficult to take a firm position, except, maybe against the extremists on either side.

//I left one paragraph of Mr. Fitch's letter out; it was a
//first step in taking some advise you gave in that same para-
//graph, Don.

Richie Benyo 118 South Street, Jim
Thorpe, Pennsylvania 18229

Dear Hank: STARLING #2 arrived, and it is really great. Truth is, I'm becoming a Roger Alan Cox fan. His fiction is really great, and I'll be looking forward to more of his work in future issues of STARLING.

//Rich said more, but I don't think I'll
//mention what was said; don't think
//I'm 'spose to.

Al Andrews, 1659 Lakewood Drive, Birmingham
Alabama, 35216

Dear Hank, I have recieved Starling #2, and enjoyed looking it over (my time has been so crowded lately that I've only been able to "look over fmzs."). It was an improvement over #1, in that you have reduced considerable needless "Insertions" throughout the zine. They may help fill the zine, but they do the irritating diservice of breacking up the continuity of the zine as a whole. Most injoyable and interesting features (at least for me) were the book-reviews. Maybe I'm an odd-ball reader, but I derive great enjoyment from book-reveivs....mainly because I know I can't possibly read all the sf&f books that come out, yet through the reviews I can gain a "selective edge" when I do buy by having some idea of what the book is about and its merits or lack thereof. Also, even though there are sf&f books that I know I am not going to read, a well done book-reveiw can enable me to be fairly conversant on the book.



C. W. Brooks, Jr., 911 Briarfield Road, Newport News, Virginia,
23605

Dear Hank, Where have I seen that name before? Ah yes, one of the noble members of the select and exclusive NFFF Collector's Bureau. There are quite a few of us now. I hope to get the Bulletin out by August.

Thanks a lot for the #1 and #2 STARLINGS. That first one is really something for a first issue. In general, the reproduction of the text is excellent, the art work not so good, but about what it deserves. The profanity and the typos are rather uninspired. You should read some of Phil Harrell's zines, he can really misspell with class.

It's really too bad about Cox's parents. I never heard of such a thing. I hope you can keep him in fandom, he had great talent.

Scheidt's a good writer, you should get longer things from him, though. I liked STARNGER in #1 the best, the other three just weren't developed enough.

I guess you're tired of hearing about Koch's "Military Science" thing by now, it was awfully brief and incomplete treatment of a subject that someone could write a book on. One very obvious reference he missed was Greenberg's COMING ATTRACTIONS (Gnome Press).

SHADOWS OF THE GOLDEN AGE is far the best fan fiction serial I've seen, much better than that dreadful thing in LUNATIC. LUNA is not as bad as you all make out, though. It did decline for a while but I thought the last one, #7, was very good overall. I hope you get to print all of Golden Age.

I got a kick out of Red Ratfink. I would guess that "Gumflatch" in #2 was by the same hand (paw?, Tentacle?). It's very unusual to see pure non-sense done that well.

Randall's "Impossible" was not a new idea, but it was well handled and the dialog flowed very well. I enjoyed it and must admit I didn't guess the ending.

Your article "Entertainment" makes about as much sense as most on why we read sf, which still isn't much. At least yours was short and humorous. Some of the long serious discussions on that subject that I've plowed through...Eech!

Biblecal is not spelled Biblecal, it's spelled "Biblical". I only mention this because you misspelled it the same way all through the thing. You should vary your misspellings, then people will think they are just typos. Other than that, it was a riot, one of the funniest things I've read lately. Hope you can get more such from Katz.

I don't agree with you about Heinlein. I thought GLORY ROAD was dreadful nonsense, surpassed in idioy only by RAH's newest piece of junk FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD. At least GLORY ROAD inspired some good covers on F&SF. I found STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND interesting and readable but the only RAH book I would really call great is GREEN HILLS OF EARTH.

McDaniel's "Primeval" is a good example of what you have an awful lot of in STARLING: Good ideas that should be extended into a story, not just presented in one page.

// Does anybody know anything about the comic book Character,
// THE HEAP? Was it based upon Sturgeon's short, IT? Ned
// wants to know. I had a Chemistry teacher named Ned once.
// Very nice teacher.

Cox's lists of books by a given author is an interesting idea, I may try it. I don't believe he could do it in the case of Burroughs though, seems to me ERB is suppose to have published over a hundred titles. The sample list on Howard is goo though. I don't know whether it's complete or not, I don't care too much for Howard except for poetry, which I like very much.

Your "Discovery of Importance" wasn't bad at all. In that case, the length was well suited to the idea.

((Okay, maybe it wasn't as bad as I thought. I wish I had been given a chance to rewrite it, though. The characters tended to shout a little bit too much when it wasn't needed, and not enough when it was.---Hank)))

I can't make heads or tails of "Misfit Calculation" so far but maybe it'll get better.

Mike Deckinger, Apartment 10-k, 25 Manor Drive, Newark, New Jersey 07106

Dear Hank, STARLING #1 and #2 strike me attractive and readable in appearance, but disappointing in content. The fiction in both issues was little more than mediocre and the articles weren't much better. The stories were slipshod and inept, more attention should have been devoted to form and theme, rather than developing plotless one track ideas to their inevitable conclusions. Irvin Koch's "article" in #1 completely lacked continuity or structure. Meaningless ideas were ungrammatically lumped together with lame conjectures.

Your greatest need seems to be competent writers who know what they're doing, rather than over-enthused students who have absolutely no concept of the complexities of story development. The typos were most distracting too. Since the repro of STARLING is so uncommonly good that it can be read with no trouble, you should make a special effort to eliminate all the errors.

// You wouldn't think he could fit that all one little post
// card, would you?

Hank Luttrell is a nasty

James Ashe, R. D. 1, Freeville, New York

Dear Hank, With due regards to Tim and the others, I'm writing to you because your name is on the second STARLING. Since nos. 1 and 2 are joint efforts, I'm sure the others will appreciate my comments when applicable.

In the first place, yours is a good effort. It's hard to believe you are as young as you say; however, your absolute age in years is not important.

There is one thing I would criticize. It is spelling. A misspelled word or a syopgrphical error can jar the reader and spoil an otherwise excellent job of writing, editing, and printing. Eliminating these is a very worthwhile thing to be doing. I'm a little surprised that a group able to conceive and carry out a project like your zine stumbles on this point.

Your have a good selection of material. Try to leave out those surprise ending things--they are a drug on the market.

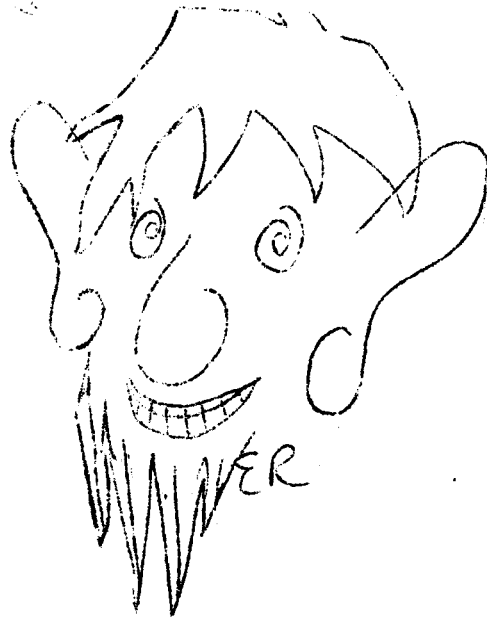
A word of advice. It's too early to print editorial policy. Get a zine out and let the heavy thinking wait until you have more experience to think from. You will find perspective and policy developing. Try very hard to make it good perspective and policy. That will be sufficient.

//Tim' "Policy" of having an "Official Policy" isn't mine.
//I don't think STARLING, under this person at least, will
//ever have an "Official Policy."

Critical letters might be placed in two classes: those offering suggestions and reasons, and the ones belonging in the wastebasket. Discarding without mercy the type two letters and save only the meat from the others. I'm sure you have a lot of this material to work with.

A little about my wife and myself. We operate the Eli Scientific Co. This organization exists for various purposes. Not the least of these is making money. . .another might be the very real peoblem of getting science into science fiction fans. They are mostly as completely unscientific as the general public --and that's pretty darned ignorant. I think the major blocks are two: That the necessary information is not generally available, and that once you have it, you have to work like blazes to assimilate it.

Many people think that science, be it math, physics, engineering



etc, is a strange and somehow intrinsically incomprehensible subject. This is not so. It is simply a tough and demanding field of work, but is no tougher or demanding than lots of things people do, if they excell at them.

Who's the editorial staff now?

//Hank(that's me) and Roger are now in control. Tim is no able to take part

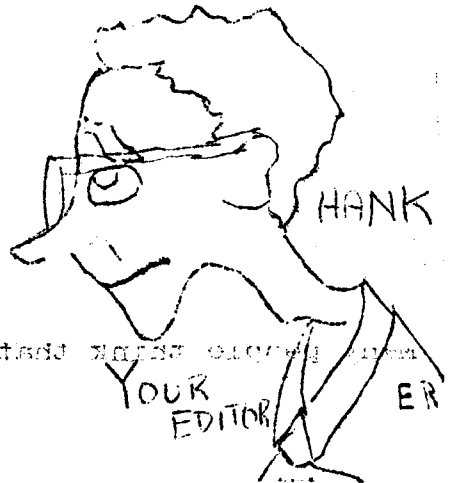
Irvin Koch, 835 Chattanooga Bnk. Bldg., Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

UnDear Hank,

//What have I done?--HL

1. I am very sorry to hear Tim will no longer be editor in chief.
2. The artwork of ish 2 could be better.
3. It's a shame more ppeople haven't chipped in \$ for STARLING, ~~I guess the complaint of LOMFLA (Lack Of Money For It All) is a universal among fen.~~
4. As I told you, I now tell in print: I no longer aggree with my own article. But. . .I have read a lot of Hamilton, and I have read SIXTH COLUMN. Most of Hamilton that is military is not especialy military science. SIXTH COLUMN is straight paramilitary science!!!
5. I suppose that by the time Tim finds out what his address in Germany will be, I'll know what box # I'll have at Melrose Hall, Knoxville.
6. Everything in STARLING #2 was too short, this is another universal illness of fandom. There were too many good serials, also. The rule is one serial per issue; LUNA B. N. broke the rule..it folded..and I never knew how the serials ended.
7. You obviously read "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY" before writing "Discovery of Importance."
8. Please let RAC's parents let him finish those serials..they are superb.
9. Is Ursy Underhimmelslobber really Hayden Cotterill?
//No; he's Roger Alan Cox.
10. What do you know about the Non Cons? Why not one for our Mo.--Tenn.-- Ga.--Dixe area?
~~I do not aggree with Gilster; why else would I be in politics against the Damnacrats(Irvin's spelling-HL)~~

I have more letters this time, but I'm forced to cut it short. Look for more next time; and don't worry--if you sent me a LOC, and it was forced out of this issue, you'll get the next STARLING anyway.--HL



INTRODUCTION: The Vastari Series
by Roger Alan Cox

Vastari arose in my mind at first as an imitation of Conan, but he gradually took his own personality (or the lack of it) as time went on. He is tall, dark, and strong build, with a fiery, uneasy aura of power about him that effects the beholder toward thinking of him as a bad enemy to have. His personal history is best recounted in THE THING BELOW (Starling #2), and in THE WINGS OF DARKNESS (Galactic Outpost: very shortly); also in THE NAMELESS WAYS, a Narla story without without the presence of Vastari, his world's history is told. However, I sent the ms. to Paul Gilster a few months ago, and it was lost in the mail. I am in no mood to rewrite it with so many other stories lined up to do. I first wrote of Vastari in THE HILLS OF SHADOW, which was written for about four pages, then discarded. Later, I plan to retitile it THE HILLS OF NARAKA, and write it as a sequel to THE SHADOWS OF THE DEATH STONE, another Vastari tale planned. I think Richie Benyo has the partial ms. now, but I degress, I have a long and exciting sword and sorcery career outlined for Vastari, and you will probably be seeing a lot more of him in these and other pages. If you enjoyed the Vastari tales (or even if you didn't), write me a line or two and let me know. My address is: Roger Alan Cox, 436 Amond Road, Augusta, Ga. 30904. Reply guaranteed.

RAC, July 24, 1964

"WHEN DARKNESS LIFTS-----"

Fiction by Roger Alan Cox

"Dawn comes not swiftly on the wings of night,
But when darkness flows from the sun's light
All fears fall behind and evil flees,
We fall on our knees,
As to our favor the wind of fortune shifts,
The death and horror go and the darkness lifts!"

--THE FIRE AND THE THUNDER, by Aron Lar
3rd verse, Book II

1.

Whithin the temple darkness reigned hand in hand with an aura of prehuman fear and awe of the unknown.

Then came a burst of blue fire that flooded the huge chamber with a flickering, unearthly light. All Narla got from this brief illumination was a lasting impression of mind tottering, screaming void, and vast, monolithic forms that reared in inhuman splendor to the eldritch stars, forms that were ancient when the earth had been yet unborn.

The light departed as quickly as it had come.

A voice seemed to echo in the tensely still air, but strain as he would, Narla could catch no sense or meaning in the barely audible mutter that reached him. Still--it was a screaming mutter, a call from far away; whether in distance or time or stranger dimensions, Narla could not tell.

Then--a grasping, unsure hand touched his mind, and an alien force groped for an entrance. An inhuman life-force that sought--what?

Contact!

Mad, purple-yellow things shrieking through star speckled nightmares: wild fleetin glimpses of the alien that had entered his brain.

The reaching alien settled, and adjusted, as if seeking a proper fit in Narla's mind.

Now--a message? A warning?

Silver pylons piercing purple clouds; blue fire raging from the muzzle of some strange weapon; a ship on a stormy sea, the waves stained by a great battle that was taking place; weird, slinking shadows stalking through the rubble-strewn streets of a ruined city; a metal-lined tunnel filled with scurrying men, grim-faced and fearful, carrying weapons in their hands; a flaming sword lifted against a horrible creature whose outlines loomed indistinct; a giant bird-like thing flowing across the clouds and into a buffeting wind that threw it toward a misty chain of mountains in the far distance.

The scenes came and went so swiftly that Narla was left with only a fleeting memory of riotous color, and a rift of thought that opened in the endless hall of time.

Gradually, painfully, a message came. The magnitude of it stunned him. The voice vibrated restlessly in his brain, commanding and forceful, "You have come for judgment, and you have recieved it. I lay upon you a new destiny--find it if you can. You no longer live in this world. I, Daflom, lord of the universe, cast you through the veil...to a world ~~separated from this by wide gulfs of time and~~

space. You may never return."

The voice hesitated, drew itself for word. "Go!"

And the darkness whirled, the floor fell away from him, and Narla spun into an insane vortex of color and timelessness. He knew not how long he drifted through that void between the worlds. Only when he felt himself sleepy, and the vortex fled from around him, did he realize that he had arrived.

Arrived in another world.

2.

Narla blacked out before he felt the ground reach up and hit him. Apparently that was an after effect of inter-time plane transfer. But Narla didn't know it by that name. He only knew it as the magic of a god to whom he had appealed.

Narla's world had been in the far mists of an unimaginable future. In his age man had long ago conquered the stars. Many peoples and many gods had been found among the far-flung stars, and man with them had mingled.

Terra had been colonized by by many other steller races in the century of Narla's birth, there was a ratio of eight aliens to one terran. When earth had been forsaken by earth's own people, in favor of other planets, others took it. Slowly, but the result was the same.

On terra Narla had been a fighter. He had been assassin, protector, hunter, and quarry, for many masters. His blaster and quick wits had been his only dependable friends. But the time had come when he had taken on an enemy too powerful, a hunter with too many helpers. Narla had no chance to escape. Or so he thought.

He had been cornered in a secluded, sinister-looking alien temple by a sirian. He had run past the dark portal--and into a new life. Daflom--he had never heard of the god before he entered--had judged. And so Narla was alive.

But where? And when?

Narla gradually returned to full consciousness. He was lying on the stone of a dank, wet alley between two old stone buildings. He looked more closely at the erections. The stone was old, moldy and emitted an unmistakable aura of age. A stout wooden door set deep in the wall of one building was visible from where he lay.

The bulidings rose to a height of no more than three stories and met the sky with flat, wildly engraved overhanging parapets. The alley wound between the two dwellings one way, and met another wall. This was also set with a featureless door. Dead end, he thought.

The other way led into a dark, narrow street. Refuse and filth filled its corners. It ran in front of and along stone houses similar to the ones bordering the alley. No human being--or any other kind of being, for that matter--could be seen.

As far as Narla could tell, it might be early morning, and still very dark. He could see not very far. The night was unilluminated

by any but a very few stars.

This was evidently a primitive world. That Narla could see. Here there were no great steel metropolises. Here there were no ships of silver to scorn the skies on a lifting pillar of flame as they spanned interstellar space. Here was an earth far removed from anything Narla had ever known but two--survival and death.

This was not a terra of recorded history. It was a parallel time track that could resemble only vaguely the shadows that peopled earth's (or at least as the men of his time knew it) real past.

Narla moved off down the dark street. Alleys leered at him from time to time, but all the doorways lining the street were barred and shut, the windows tightly shuttered. He had to watch every dark opening for danger. He knew nothing about this world, and it paid to be cautious.

As he went the way narrowed and the close-set buildings grew more decayed. Further along other streets branched away, but Narla stuck to one. Houses began to look uninhabited.

There was an aura of death and danger here--and something else. Something that Narla could sense but not explain. But something to be feared.

A door slammed somewhere amid the cluster of the sinister-looking houses behind him. Narla stopped for a few minutes, and then went on after hearing nothing more. But it was odd that a door should open now, when none had before.

As he progressed deeper into the old city, he noticed that he seemed to be entering a shunned district, a slum area. His reasoning was supported by the warning of a human skull set atop a stout pole and further attested by the black, sinister dwellings.

Nevertheless, he continued past the skull, and into the street beyond it. As he passed the warning by, it seemed to him that he heard a hideous muffled cackle behind him. He whirled and looked, but the night enshrouded everything more than a few yards away.

Half an hour later, deep in the shunned district, he heard a fight in progress ahead. The clash of steel met his straining ears, mixed with odd, low-voiced non-human cries of pain. . .and of battle.

Narla ran swiftly toward the sounds.

He turned a last twist in the winding way, when he saw the fight in progress. Six shadowy, bestial forms circled warily about a tall, powerful man wielding a great sword against them. One of the creatures leaped at the man suddenly, a flash of stinking fur in the choking night.

The thing was met in mid-air by the man's blade, and cut half in two by his reaching swing. He tried to break through the ring of enemies, but was thrown back by the fangs and claws of his adversaries.

Obviously, it was only a matter of time before the man was overcome. Narla did not ordinarily interfere in another's battle, but he hated to see a pack of beasts subdue a man when help was nearby. Besides, he needed friends, and the surest way to gain friends is to save their lives.

Narla had eight full blaster charges on his belt--enough for many weeks--and a nearly full charge already in the weapon. Since the man didn't have a chance with a sword, he moved forward with the blaster set at full beam.

The first beast received a flaming bolt behind the head, and fell to the street, charred and bloody. The victim of the beast looked startled--not so much from Narla's presence, which he must have been aware of for some time, as from the blast of Narla's weapon. He had forgotten that this was a primitive time-plane, and no one here had ever seen an energy weapon.

Still, the man wasted no time to wonder, but set upon the nearest animal with his blade. Narla motioned him back, and swiftly blasted the remaining creatures before they could again turn on either of them.

The man cried a warning, and gestured behind Narla. Narla turned in one swift movement, just in time to burn down a man-like thing that had crept up on him from behind.

And it was over.

Narla stood impassively before the man, watching him for any sign of amnesty. Suddenly the man broke into a grin that Narla could see even in the dim starlight. He said something in a language Narla could not identify. He shook his head in an obvious gesture of ignorance. Narla decided to begin communication with that old classic example--self identification.

Narla indicated himself with a thumb, and pronounced his name. Patiently, he motioned the other to do the same.

The other man caught on with only a moments hesitation. "Vastari" he said, using the same process as Narla.

Well, that was a beginning, thought Narla. But what now?

Vastari seemed to have an answer for that. He turned, and sheathing his sword, motioned Narla to follow as he set off down a nearby alley.

Narla followed with misgivings, but nevertheless had nothing to do but put his trust in the stranger.

He was taken down many deserted way, until he lost all sense of direction or time. They seemed to have walked for hours. The misty glow of dawn was creeping into the horizon when Vastari pulled Narla into a doorway opening on the end of a secluded alley much like all the others he had seen. Indeed, most of the city was uniform as far as Narla had been able to discern in the night as they had plodded along.

Beyond the threshold was a small, bare chamber with a table but a simple table and another door in the western wall. After slipping a bolt into the outer door, Vastari moved to the other, and pushed Narla through it. Past this door was a wide, richly-furnished room with a huge, polished table in the center, two chairs, a large, intricately-woven rug that covered most of the stone floor, crimson draps along the walls, gleaming candle holders along the sides, and a bed with only ordinary features in the corner of the Northern wall.

Vastari had Narla sit in one of the chairs, and then took the other for himself. For a long time they just studied each other thus. Then the stranger made it plain that he wanted to examine Narla's blaster. Vastari took the weapon calmly as a reality, though nothing like it had ever been dreamed of in this world.

Narla had no intention whatsoever of letting the barbarian handle his blaster. He might burn them both down in his ignorance.

Narla shook his head, hoping that this meant a gesture of denial here as well as in the terra he knew. Evidently it did. The Barbarian

withdrew his hand.

Again they sat and stared at each other.

It was delegated to Narla to break the ice. He was curious about Vastari's sword. Narla had never seen anything like it. The weapon appeared to glow with a strange life of its own in Vastari's hands, but when it was sheathed it took on the look of clod steel once more.

He copied Vastari's motions in asking to see the sword. For a moment, a cloud seemed to pass over the barbarian's face. Narla decided that Vastari was not inclined to let others handle his sword. Vastari touched its hilt, and said, "Conalan."

It might have been a name, a warning, or simply the designation of property, but Narla thought it was its name. He was right.

Finally, Vastari showed Narla into another room opening off one side. It was small, but liveable, with a bed and a table and bench. While not as sumptuous as Vastari's chamber, it was better than nothing and Narla took it thankfully after being fed a greyish gruel by the other.

Vastari instructed him to stay in the room until he returned. Then the barbarian left Narla alone in the house, if that was what it was.

Narla needed sleep as he had seldom needed it, having been on his feet most of the previous night. As he drifted off, he wondered just who Vastari was.

3.

When Narla woke he found Vastari waiting for him. Again he was fed, this time with meat and wine that suited him much more favorably than the former meal.

After eating, Vastari began to teach Narla his language. At first it was difficult, but progress was made as time went on.

For many weeks Narla stayed there, never leaving the place. Finally, he was at a point where he could speak the language fluently.

Up to this point, Vastari had refused to talk, but now that he felt that Narla knew the language, he was ready to answer questions.

"Who are you?" began Narla. "What is the name of this city?"

Vastari smiled. "Who am I? You already have my name. I am not from Farthon--this city--but from far across the Mountains of Darkness, where I was once king of Alonos."

The names rang empty in Narla's ears. But Vastari explained as well as he could the customs and important things about this world to Narla.

He was not surprised or disbelieving when Narla said he had come from another world, and had been sent by a god. Vastari took it as a matter of course. Strange things were the rule and not the exception here, as Narla was soon to discover.

This was a world where evil took many forms. There were many races besides man, as in Narla's world, but there was a difference: whereas the aliens in his world mingled and lived side by side, here

the others were natives, having evolved along with man, and they did not mingle, but fought among themselves as a rule.

Vastari told Narla of the black one and his minions, of the Wraiths of Darkness, and the Kings of Alonos* and the strange things that made up his everyday life. But Narla was impressed most by the tale of Conalan's, his swords, history.

After a few more weeks of instructions, Vastari felt that Narla was ready to face the world alone. "But what will I do? Where will I go?" asked Narla.

Vastari didn't come up with an answer.

"What do you do, Vastari?" Narla inquired.

With a sigh, Vastari told him, "I suppose I can trust you. But you know little. . . I was brought here by the urgent plea of a friend . . . Hearon, a necromancer from Kullar to the south. . . who is held prisoner in the fortress of Gurlon here. It is my duty to rescue him; he saved my life once, and I must repay him."**

"Who is this Gurlon, and how strong is his fortress?" inquired Narla. "You just might need assistance."

Vastari smiled at his offer, and replied, "Yes, you could be of great aid to me in fighting my way out. Your weapon would turn the tide for us unless something necromantic is brought against us by Gurlon himself.

"Gurlon is a sorcerer, the answer to your first question in part. He has ruled this city for five hundred years, and none have risen to replace him. He can not be defeated. Every adventurer to try to kill Gurlon has found himself inside the stomach of one of Gurlon's pets--most unpleasant beasts indeed, I assure you.

"We must enter his strong hold at night, and proceed with utmost caution to the dungeons and crypts beneath his castle, where Hearon is imprisoned. After that, it is simple--get him out again. If we meet any supernatural opposition, I fear you--what did you call it--blaster?--will prove of no avail. We may have to depend upon my sword escaping, but we will need your weapon entering. Will you aid me?

Narla wasted little time in answering. "I shall stand by your side in your quest least death sunder us. Will you call me brother?"

Vastari hesitated, but already an impenthrable bond had sprung between the two. "Brother!" he returned, and clasped his hand in a steely grip."

"So it be!" quoth Narla.

4.

The night fell with startling abruptness over Farlon. It mattered little to Narla whether it was night or day. In the terra of his birth, he had been by profession a man of the night, sleeping by day and earning his living by the light of the stars. Here he had come by night and here he would again come by night. He had never seen day in Vastari's world.

They left in a different direction from the place of Narla's

*See THE WINGS OF DARKNESS, in Galactic Outpost

** In THE VAULTS OF NOSA, a forthcoming story

arrival. After a time, they saw the ominous bulk of Gurlon's fortress against the deep purple sky.

Vastari and Narla stopped after another half-mile, and surveyed their objective. The stronghold of Gurlon was a huge, looming mass of towers, and the main fortress within. The place was surrounded on all sides by a thick stone wall, with sentries ever pacing upon their ramparts.

The situation looked bad to Narla. He thought they might get in, but the advantage of surprise would be lost. He said as much to Vastari. "Our only hope to begin with was to enter silently and secretly, and depart, if at all feasible, by the same means. What are we going to do?"

Vastari's face had a pale cast in the moonlight, but it was colored with a faint humor now. "Gurlon has one weakness in his armor. There is a secret way under the wall that will bring us out near the stairs leading down to the dungeons. It cost me much to learn of its existence, but it will be worth it, I'll wager."

"Then we should not waste time on pleasantries, Alonian. We have but nine hours until dawn. Let us go while we can." Narla motioned toward the looming fortress. "Where is the entrance to this secret way of yours?"

"Not far, once we reach the wall."

Vastari led him through many winding, narrow streets until they finally reached the wall around Gurlon's stronghold. They had purposefully avoided the huge main gate, and they had approached far to the left of it. "Only a little further," whispered Vastari.

Narla noted that the wall was set with large, rounded stones that were held together with a greyish mortar. The ground around this part of the wall had been burned clear of vegetation to prevent any means of climbing the wall by creepers or other such vialish plants.

They came upon a point where the wall reared against a large hill-mass, and buried itself in a tangle of green. It was the only place where frequent burn-offs had not been made, because of the impregnability of the wall, where it loomed at its highest point, and because of the difficulty of needless clearing the entire area about it.

Amid the growth, a hole lurked, covered with the gathered leaves and decayed vegetation of the years. This they uncovered, finding a hole just large enough for a large man to squeeze through.

Narla did just that, and found himself in a dark, moldy tunnel that wound around a sharp corner, and into the earth below the wall. The hole showed with a ragged edges a few feet above his head. He murmured softly that it was alright to come down.

Vastari came down with a few falling clods of dirt, on his feet, wide alert, and with his right hand on Conalan's hilt. As he saw everything was under control, he relaxed.

Narla drew his blaster, put a full charge into the chamber in place of the partly used other charge, and followed the Alonian into the tunnel.

The walls were featureless and rough, hewn from the naked rock. The tunnel dripped with moisture. At first went down, then, after a few yards more, it went up once more. Once, another tunnel inter-

sected it, but they avoided it to be on the safe side.

Soon a light appeared ahead, faint at first. Then it grew brighter, and they found themselves looking into a room that opened onto a broad courtyard on one side, and a large black wooded door on the other. They were peering down from a gap in the ceiling, up among the rafters, where it had gone unnoticed for centuries.

The door led, they knew, to the stairs leading down to the dungeons, and Gurlon's storerooms, and the innermost vaults deeper. A guard stood in a relaxed position against the door, obviously at ease, and completely unprepared for anything. Why should he be? He was safely inside the strongest fortress in two hundred miles, and it would take an army to break into this deep in his stronghold.

"Now, use your fire weapon," urged Vastari in a whisper. Narla nodded silently, and burned down the guard. He crumpled in a charred heap.

They jumped down, finding no other immediate opposition. Narla led the way past the courtyard, which they safely passed, and to the door leading below.

A long flight of time-worn steps went below the castle lit by torches set in high wall sockets. It wound out of their sight around a corner after a few yards.

Narla and Vastari went down cautiously, weapons at ready.

"One of these days, Gurlon will fall," mused Vastari, as much to himself as to Narla, "and when the darkness lifts there will be a new lord here. May he be one deserving of the honor, and not a creature like Gurlon. For years he has levied unpayable tributes on Farlon's population, and his soldiers and servants loot and rape the city without anyone to stop them. Anyone who resists meets a very unpleasant death--and a slow one."

He sighed. "But that task is for another. I have not the strength."

Together they went, silent shadows drifting down the endless stairs. After a while the stonches and fetid nausiousnes of the pits waived up to them, and they knew they neared Gurlons lower halls.

With Vastari in the lead, they came upon a large space from which three corridors branched. The torches were spaced only half as often as before, and great areas of shadows lurked in places. Filth was ingrained in the very stones. Evil things had been done for five hundred years here.

They saw no guard, but that meant something else than a human watcher was stationed here. And that was not a resuring thought.

Vastari had no idea which corridor held Hearon's cell, or even which cell it was. He chose one corridor, and together they moved toward it.

But, even as they began to walk, a slobbering muffled cry came from their left, and an unholy smell assailed their nostrils.

5.

Narla whirled, blaster in hand, but he could not see anything.

"What was that?" he asked of the Alonian.

Vastari remained silent, and motioned Narla to follow hi example.

The Alonian stood for a minute undecided, while strange sounds came to their fearful ears. Then he pointed to the middle corridor, and only then did Narla discern a darker blotch against the lurking shadow.

They moved closer, knowing they must face it now, or die. Jaber, hunted relentlessly through places of which they knew nothing. A bloated snake-like body crawled ponderously in their direction, and stopped only a few yards away from them. It was bright crimson scaled, and had a large, wedge-shaped head that possessed two long waving protuberances, proboscis like as not, used to feed upon victims.

Suddenly the darkness was lit with a brilliant blue blot of blaster fire, and the things head withered and charred into smoking ash. Its ponderous body still writhed monstrosly even in death. Again and again Narla sent bolts into its carcass, until there wasn't enough of its horrible body to move.

"Thank you, friend," Vastari said. "But we had best hasten. The creature died noisily, and may bring more of its kind--or something worse. We'll try this way first."

Down a dimly lit corridor they went, over the age-stained stones. At each barred wooden door, the Alonian paused and uttered Hearon's name. With no results, at long last, they reached another set of stairs leading even deeper into the earth.

"Our search ends here, in this corridor," said Vastari. "These steps lead to Gurlons torture chambers, and to the pits where he keeps his many horrors chained in the awful blackness. There are some places down there where a light has never shown."

They turned back, and tried the second corridor. At the fifth door, an excited reply met Vastari's queries. "Hearon is within," he told Narla, "could you burn the door's lock? The wood is many feet thick, and much too large to batter down or burn completely through."

Narla assented, and after the Alonian instructed Hearon to stand away from the door, he blasted through the heavy iron lock. It fell away from the burned wood around it, half molten from the heat of the blaster.

Vastari swung the door back on its heavy hinges, revealing a lightless, stench-filled hole covered with straw. The straw was wet and filthy, but was obviously replenished every few weeks or so. A short, swarthy man stood in the left corner.

Hearon rushed forward and embraced the Alonian enthusiastically and rewarded Narla with the same treatment. (Personally, Narla would have preferred a cleaner reward--the man was covered with sores, and evidently not washed in years.)

"Come--there is no time now for pleasantries, my friends," counseled Vastari seriously. He pulled the sorcerer out into the corridor, and they moved out into the space before the stairs leading upward.

Before they could reach them, however, a shadowy bulk blocked them off. With barredfangs, it stood its ground against the human intruders. It was humanoid, with a serpentine body, covered with brilliant green scales, and its talons gnashed in and out of its great clawed hands.

Before Narla could re-draw his blaster, it was on Vastari,

shrieking in inhuman fury. The Alonian met it head-on with his sword and it flamed silver as it swept off the thing's head.

Narla wanted to take the grisly trophy, but Vastari informed him that horrors were best left untouched, even as trophies of victory.

They went up the steps swiftly, but tired as they still wound their way upward with no sign of an ending. They slowed, but soon reached the room of their entrance.

They had been in the hope that killing the guard would go unnoticed until they escaped, but such was their luck that the guard was to be changed as they arrived.

A dark skinned man had come upon the charred body, and let cry even as the trio reached the guardroom. Narla stilled his cry with a bolt of blue beamed into his midriff, cutting him in two. But it was too late. The fortress was already warned. They had only seconds now before others came running.

"Quick!" shouted Vastari. He made Narla take the sorcerer into the hole above, and stayed below for just a minute before taking flight himself. But then it was too late.

The door to the courtyard burst open, and a blue-skinned Daralar saw Vastari. The reptilian being let out a yell, and came at him, but a bolt from Narla's blaster killed him before he could get within reach of Vastari's sword.

Other feet pounded outside.

Vastari swung up into the hole, and they all ran on into the darkness, leaving the confused cries behind them as the enemy found three bodies and no enemies.

6.

Not until they had left the tunnel behind, and were safely within the maze of city streets, did anyone speak.

Hearon sighed lustily, "Would that I could destroy the demon in that castle. Gurlon has caused much sorrow for this city, and I feel no affection toward him for my own treatment in his black hands. Someday the darkness will left over Farlon--for I shall drive it forth, and my hands will be wrapped around his throat.

"But," the sorcerer continued wistfully, "half my powers are lost to me forever. It will take many years to gather my strength enough to kill Gurlon. And when that day comes--may I count on your aid, Vastari?"

"Ah, yes, I know--your land has been taken from you by Xoto. Alas, but he is beyond the power of either of us. Someday, maybe ten years hence, I shall ride with you against him. But, now is not the time. You have a comrade now, a man from a world you could never imagine. But Narla is the most trustworthy person I know for you. You are more alkic than any other two in this world, though you may not realize it.

"I go now on a long voyage across the Sea of Goril, to an Island where I may regain some of the wisdom stolen from me by Gurlon in my imprisonment.

"It may be many years until I see you, either of you, once more. I may only give you advice. Wherever you find evil, wherever the nameless servants of the Black One lurk and fester, destroy them.

"My sons, much of the fate of our world lies in your wits and

FICTION

by E. E. Evers

TIME

dissolved into

rain

He pressed his back to the tree trunk and failed in his attempt not to think. Rain dripped from branch to branch and soon would work its way down the tree to him; he pressed his packet of tinder closer into that inaccessible hollow under the chin next to the throat and waited to be soaked. Shelter, these days, was a relative term: it applied to tinder, it didn't apply to castaways. The house of my body is a house itself...

His Royalist-issue uniform would never wear out, but it wasn't meant to be waterproof. He could throw it away, out of pride, and go naked, fashion his own crude body-covering out of bark stripped from alien bushes or the pelts of things whose fur was never meant to cloth a human body. But he kept the alein uniform: a savage, anyone forced to survive as a savage, has to direct all his energy to seeking food and has no time to worry about clothing unless bitten by exposure, has less time to worry about the color and the cut of what clothing he has.

Almost, he thought, it would be better on a planet where he would have to fight to stay alive, one with large fauna or native intelligence. One capable of feeding an animal the size of a human easily. To his knowledge, he was the largest animal on this planet; somewhere he recalled that the maximum size of animal life depended on available food supplies. In any case, he was hungry. Only his body thought about that though, his mind was...

His mind was doing its best to kill him. If he supposed to be thinking at all it should be about nameless roots and edible barks and little things that crawled until he stopped them. Not about how to build stone and wooden weapons he had nothing to fight with, or the shelter that would be completed just about the time he had exhausted the food within walking distance and would have to move on. Nor even about designing himself a portable shelter. How does one build a waterproof jungle hammock? Out of fabric, for a starting point at least. And where does one get fabric? Tree barks should provide the fiber, but where would he get the tools to separate and weave them into thread, make and sew cloth? He hadn't the slightest experience in any of the required skills either, and knew he couldn't re-invent the whole art just because he knew of its existence.

Answer. You sit under a tree and get soaked and keep your chin down and your tinder under it. When it stops raining you walk and grub.

grub food. Did he walk in circles, this migratory animal thought. He didn't know. Didn't know if he cared. But he still couldn't stop thinking, and the more he thought about something with nothing concrete to turn memory into reality, the weaker each memory became, the more each scene of his life sunk and faded into his mind like each tree fading into the saturated air behind him as he walked.

Were there other castaways on this world, other followers of Saint John? Again he realized it mattered very little. One man in a rain-forest on a featureless world without tools, basic skills, or hope is no worse off than ten men in a similar predicament. One man alone or one man of hundreds, he was a migratory animal. And if he did meet and join others they would doubtless fight over the meager food supplies. Just the same he'd never seen signs of fellow castaways. Or was a prisoner the right word?

A Royalist prison: a whole world where the followers of Saint John could be left in piece, unrestricted by the Royal House and its restrictive covenants...That was what the whole Johnney War was about and ironically, what his captors had given him. A world where one could be free, but a world for one...Small matter really, he thought whether they left him to die or to go mad: it takes a lot to kill a man and still more to drive him mad. And still more to drive him mad.

The rain drove a mouselike animal toward the base of his trunk; seeking shelter it got a quick brown had around the abdomen and a twisted spine a fractional second later. The man ate it raw with the blood still running in the capillaries.

Over time a clock would call twenty minutes the rain turned gray and slowed unpretentiously to a stop. When the drizzle no longer made fine brown dots on a flat piece of tinder, the man got smoothly to his feet and walked away from the dripping tree and on about his animal rounds.

He didn't talk to himself anymore, he didn't shout into the sound-smothering forest, he didn't even sing though sound didn't seem to bother his occasional prey. This simply wasn't the place for sound, this silent planet. How many miles had he traveled and how far from the point where the Royal ship had dumped him? A good many thousand miles he'd walked, he knew, though he no longer tried to reckon days or miles or direction without sun or star in the cloudy sky, without wind or terrain feature in the forest.

Lean and wary, time went on, and the man...He'd been marooned, by clock and calander, how long? Months, he supposed: his body had thined and hardened to a point, then stopped. He knew he hadn't aged appreciably: his hands and feet appeared no older, no vein was more prominent, no joint more swollen.

He thought sometimes the thoughts were long ar' slow and went through many rains and feedings and sleeps and other times short, quick, and ...gone. He had lost his mathematics first, strange, he'd always thought that was the last skill he would lose under any circumstances, but he could no more set up a battle computer now, ever: if he had one,

than he could...what? Fly?...on this world nothing could fly, except something of metal built by man, and that was only once.

His childhood, his world, his life before, his occupational and military skills left him and he was alone with Saint John and God. Finally God became Saint John's God alone; finally his religion left him too. Did he forget his name before or after he forgot how to pray? No matter. He was left alone with...what? His soul? Perhaps. His body, certainly, and hunger that never quite hurt and never was quite satisfied.

And so the man survived, in a Royal Navy coverall, this spacefighter, this castaway POW, this Johnney. He lived, his language forgotten, his name, the names of his God and his Saint forgotten. And he lived. He lived for...

* * * * *

He lived for six hundred years. Six hundred years. The cult of St. John of the Galaxies lost its fervor and the Royal House fell, and the Third Empire one year decided to survey a jungle world, empty and ageless. And a place where man did not age. Or at least one man had not aged. A few weeks aboard the ship and he aged, wrinkled leather and bones and never told his story, but curious brains were stirred and somewhere they checked records, finger skin patterns and brain wave patterns, somewhere they found him identified in a computer file of personnel from the Jonney space navy. Six hundred years...

The shadow of time hung even heavier over the leaders, leaders are always old, and they pressed the experiment. Thousands of tests and nothing, air, water, a thousand trees and herbs and microbes and small, crawly things, nothing. So they set us out as he lived, hopefully forever. First out days to eat roots and chase mice and back nights to sleep in prefabs and play games with computers and make love to robots and nothing, we were a year older when twelve months passed. So we were out nights, too, back-to-tree, rain and forest giving way only to daily med check. And nothing. Then they started running the checks while we slept so we wouldn't know. "Taking the psychological factors into consideration." they said. I do not envy his years. This started a few months ago.

I've lost track of time, but I'm sure the experiment is succeeding and I'm no older. Months should be long enough to tell.

Once I came across a mound of humus the size and shape of a toppled ship. The surrounding soil was stained with rust. I couldn't bring myself to dig into it.

END

A HANDFUL OF WONDER

by Roger Alan Cox

For about a decade now, Avalon has steadily released bad science fiction. Every month they put out another piece of junk. They have added nothing to the field in general, and turned away many potential fans.

Of course, there have been a few good titles...VIRGIN PLANET by Poul Anderson, THE GLORY THAT WAS, TOWER OF ZANID, THE HAND & THE SEARCH FOR ZEI by L. Sprague de Camp, WALL OF SERPENTS by de Camp and Pratt, etc.

The trend now is toward worse and worse, , I regret to report. Their recent releases have been juvenile, poorly written, poorly plotted, and fairly unentertaining. The only good thing I can say about them is that they use the best cover artist in the science fiction field ...Ed Emsch-. But its what's between the cover that counts, and thats mostly a blank space in Avalon's case.

In Starling #2 I tore up Long's THREE STEPS SPACEWARD. It did, of course, much deserve the lambasting.

Now, I fear, it has been delegated to me the job of wrcking another of FB's lesser works.

This novel (THE MARTIAN VISITORS, Avalon, c. 1964, 191 pp.,) has all the elements of ultimate corniness--a dastardly (look at the mustache curl...) villain with most dishonorable intentions, a bunch of little kids who play hero too often, a dumb and sometimes pathetic shadow of a character, the father of the stupid aforementioned kiddies.

The plot would bore the staunchist TOM CORRBETT & THE CORNBALL SPACE CADETS fan.

I don't want to waste my time (and yours) detailing its sick plot. The book is simply an infantile, amaturish attempt, that I wouldn't even serialize in this fanzine (that's pretty bad, friends.)

RAC rating: *

DEMON'S WORLD by Kenneth Bulmer, Ace Books, F-289, C.1964, 137 pgs.
cover by Jack Gaughan
& I WANT THE STARS by Tom Purdom cover by Emsch, 115 pp.

Quite in opposition to the motto of Avalon (" We make the worst sf our business!"), Ace has been steadily putting out the best in real "sense of wonder" in sf, about 4 volumes a month.

Bulmer has written us a taut, well-written novel about a society parasitic upon another. The humans are merely pests living beneath the houses of alæen "Demons", and basing their entire life on the gathering of crumbs left by thegiant Demons.

This does not come out until much later in the book, however, and the plot keeps your interest up to it with the descriptions of underground life, foraging, fighting, etc. The interesting elements thrust into the novel to create a workable plot are: 1) An Earthman crashed on the planet who lost his memory completely, 2) The Demons begin an extermination program on the terran pests.

This is an altogether interesting novel, and one I shall be glad to recommend to anyone.

RAC rating: ****

Purdom's novel is an apple of a different tree. The author creates a time in which there is no human warfare, and when anything can (literally) be had for the asking. Even a starship.

Because this is what the hero asks for.

This is an interesting, but in some places, poorly plotted book. The author raises some very interesting questions, that might give the reader some food for thought. His one mistake was making the setting so soon in the future...400 years. I can't believe mankind will abhor any kind of combat in only 4 short centuries.

Read it. I think you might not like it, but it will still provide something to think about.

RAC rating: ****

MOON BASE

BY E. C. Tubb, Ace Books, F-293, 191 pages, cover by Ed Valigursky
c. 1964

Ace has had quite a few "moon" novels in the past few years--notably the Jeff Sutton series.

But Tubb's novel deals with a setting at least forty years in the future, when all the major, and even some of the minor powers, have posts on Luna.

There is something wrong in the British base, something elusive and uncertain, but still something wrong nevertheless. Felix Larsen was sent there to find out what it was, posing as a mechanic sent to install laser weapons to the station defenses.

He meets normality at first, but spots inconsistencies in base routine, and in happenings that have no right to exist, after a time. The presense of Abic, an artificial brain made from organic matter, throws the piece needed for the plot itself. Abic turns out to be the villain, causing the "accidents" by long distance telekinetics and such things. This much is fairly transparent from the first of the

the book, after the brain is introduced into the plot.

This is a good, fairly absorbing mystery, and worth while reading, but I've seen better. It strikes me now, that, as a mystery, I've already given away the climax--the uncovering of the culprit. Tch, tch. I'll have to watch that, won't I?

Tubb raises some intelligent conjectures on possible Lunar life, and writes in an interesting manner. I think you'll enjoy it, if you can forget who-did-it.

RAC rating: ****

"WHEN THE DARKNESS LIFTS" concluded

your blades. Now, I leave you. Go with high hearts, and may your swords shine clean beneath the moons of your life."

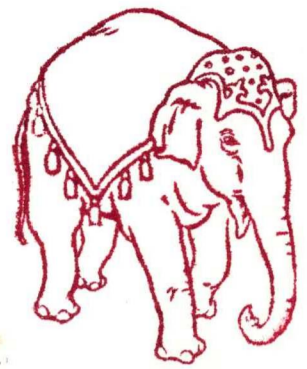
Hearon walked on with them after a while, and then faced them with a sad smile, and said, "Goodbye, for a long time, I fear. I must go now, as I am now free of Gurlon's spells preventing necromancy other than his own in an area surrounding his fortress. Once again, farewell."

And the old, tired sorcerer faded into a stringy mist that drifted swiftly skyward, and lost himself in the grey clouds that gathered above.

A light rain pattered along the silent streets as Narla and Vastari went down the narrow, dirty streets of Farlon, sword and blaster bearer, side by side.

END

SPECIAL
APA 45
EDITION



30

END

Several persons' side by side
The first man, the tallest, was
... the second man, the shortest, was

... the third man, the tallest, was
... the fourth man, the shortest, was

... the fifth man, the tallest, was
... the sixth man, the shortest, was

... the seventh man, the tallest, was
... the eighth man, the shortest, was

... the ninth man, the tallest, was
... the tenth man, the shortest, was

... the eleventh man, the tallest, was
... the twelfth man, the shortest, was

... the thirteenth man, the tallest, was
... the fourteenth man, the shortest, was

... the fifteenth man, the tallest, was
... the sixteenth man, the shortest, was

... the seventeenth man, the tallest, was
... the eighteenth man, the shortest, was