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Lovers of arcana ought to get a delicious thrill out of a story in The Dec. 27, 1954, issue of the NYHerald Tribune (p.29, Sec. 1), "Found: Long-Lost Jewish Book of Secrets". It seems that a year-and-a-half ago, a Jewish scholar, Dr. Mordecai Margalioth ran across some provocative scraps in the course of his research, and since then has devoted his time to assembling "the Sefer ha-Razim, the Jewish Book of Secrets. This was the classic -- and some thought mythical -- Jewish manual of black magic, denounced by rabbis as an 'abominable book' and lost for 1,000 years. / Dr. Margalioth not only had the complete text -- in Hebrew except for a 10-page gap in Arabic -- but he had found reason to believe the book had a single author, a Palestinian Jew with a masterly command of Hebrew, who wrote it in Palestine in about 189 A. D. / Not only that, but Dr. Margalioth discovered along the way parts of 12 other books on astrology, palmistry and various kinds of magic descended from the Book of Secrets. The 13 books comprise an entire literature of undercover Jewish writing, previously unknown." The article includes the initial scrap which started Dr. Margalioth on his gathering together this book: "I entreat you, the angels who run between the stars, that you give strength and force to the horses in this race and to their driver that makes them run, that they shall not be tired and they shall not stumble and they shall run easily and no beast shall best them and no charm or magic work against them. / And take this tablet and bury it in the ground of the hippodrome where you want to win." I wonder if this would be effective in English, or does it need to be written in Hebrew on a tablet? John?

It seems I mislaid mlg #25 at John Boardman's Christmas Eve, so for the time being I'll utilize a couple of notes I have here on mlg #24.

STEVE STILES: Well, now, Steverino, I can't argue with rich brown until I've read at least The Fountainhead, and even possibly Atlas Shrugged, but you at least admit to being an objectivist. That is, you "rather respect a philosopher who follows through", and you feel that Ayn Rand has done so. That is, unlike rich, you allow her the privilege of interpreting what she's written. Incidentally, I cannot see, really, why her adherents call Ayn Rand a philosopher. In quotes, I should have put that. I mean, a writer like Emile Zola, who is still read (though perhaps not by SF fans) had a "philosophy", but he's not considered

in texts on the history of philosophy, nor is GBS, who in *Back To Methuselah*, as well as in most of his plays, dealt with philosophical as well as political and economic ideas. And both of these writers have had more impact on their societies than Ayn Rand has had or is likely to have. Both of them were actively involved in social movements of their times, and were effective in spite of their opposition to their respective Establishments. I suppose that, in the end, what it amounts to is that you have to agree with Ayn Rand's "ideas" to enjoy her books. Zola and GBS do not make this requirement. I mean, out of the countless people who've seen *Pygmalion* (or *My Fair Lady*, which does, after all, preach the same basic idea) would even remotely consider themselves Fabian Socialists? And Zola's Lamarckian nonsense doesn't detract from his novels (though in *L'Ouvre* it led him to a rather sad extreme). So, when I get around to reading her novels, I shall demand that Ayn Rand entertain me. She may not convince me, but she had goddam sure show me something more than a couple of ideas which are not exactly shining-bright novelties. / As for laissez-faire capitalism -- did your HS history text have anything in it about the Securities and Exchange Commission? This is an example of big government interfering with business, and if it had been around in the '20's, things might have been quite a bit different. And "least to suffer"? Well, now, we were also the "least suffering" of the Allies during WW I (as well as WW II) -- why? And do you feel there's no connection between WW I and the depression? You're making a vaster oversimplification that Bill Blackbeard's, and trying to use it to refute him (I imagine John Boardman would be able to tell you more than you care to know about The Depression) (I'm avoiding dwelling on this because tears might smear my ditto master). / And where did Hitler steal his money? You say ability makes right, and you cannot deny that Hitler had tremendous ability. Starting with a Germany in the depths of depression, he built up a war machine with the potential of taking over the world. You say that that is not the highest order of ability? / I'm afraid that your comments on BB's comments do not persuade me. I was particularly unconvinced by "OOG!", and by your espousing "reason is the only guide to action". The latter, particularly. I mean, I decided when I was about 4 or 5 years old that what I wanted to be was an artist. That's about as unreasonable as you can get, particularly when you consider that this was in a small Massachusetts town where there were not only a shortage of jobs for artists but widespread unemployment even for ditch-diggers. So, for just about all my life I've used unreason as a guide to the conduct of my life. It was unreasonable for me to have left McGraw-Hill when I did a couple of years ago, but I did, and things have worked out OK. I guess what I'd have to say is that impulse is an alternative guide to action -- if I weren't impulsive I would still be living in Westfield, Mass., brooding about how lousy life is. And you wouldn't be reading this, because I certainly wouldn't have been so unreasonable (unreasoning?) as to have gotten involved in fandom.

Another guide to action is faith. Lower-case "f" faith, that is. I've just been trying to locate Whitehead's Science and The Modern World, but can't finger it for the quote I need, but he makes a pretty good case for faith vs. reason. Your Objectivists, apparently, are rationalists in the Cartesian sense, which can get pretty sticky. Look, Descartes himself got tripped up right at the beginning (and I don't mean to sound like I'm putting him down, because I'm not trying to). He starts with a fine idea: doubt everything. And you start building up a structure of what it is reasonable to believe. So, right after establishing that it is reasonable to assume that he exists, he comes up with the idea that it would be "unreasonable" to doubt the existence of God. That, of course, is Faith with a capital "F", as opposed to pragmatic faith of the Whitehead variety. And if you want a demonstration of how syllogistically "reasonable" Faith is, dig into the Scholastics of the Middle Ages. Reason, when you get right down to it, is pretty fallible, and about as mystical a concept as "Freedom", and just about as adaptive (cf the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe). Again, John Boardman could tell you more than you need to know about number theory, but it is my understanding that a belief in number (and how basic and practical a belief can you have?) is pretty much an act of faith. And it seems to me that one of the most roguish theories of all time, (Relatively, Steverino), starts with quite an unreasonable idea: that the speed of light is constant. I mean, that's just plain silly, and I'm sure Ayn Rand would have none of it.

Last time around I commented on John Campbell's Objectivism (I don't know whether he's a Randist, but his ideas tie up pretty well with Brandon's -- and so, I presume, Rand's) A few years ago Campbell wrote an editorial which is a nice exposition of this ability makes right idea. What he winds up with Steve, is the idea that people of ability naturally rise to greater heights than the common slob (probably largely true), and naturally, the guy who makes a big salary is a lot smarter than any file clerk in his office. Ergo, why do their votes carry equal weight in the polling booth? This sort of extends your statement: ability makes right. The way things ought to be, a citizen's vote ought to be weighted according (or as a function of) his earned income. This seemed to him like a democratic sort of thing, because he specified earned income. A widow whose husband has left her a fortune, you see, could very well be a complete idiot, regardless of how brilliant her fortune-making husband. Ideas like this sound somewhat reasonable in the abstract, but in practice, what would JWS's voting system have meant in, for example, the '30's? Mainly, and I doubt even JWC would argue this, that FDR would never have been elected President in 1932, or ever. Which means Truman wouldn't have been in. Who knows what kind of Presidents the enlightened magnates would have elected? Hoover, certainly. Landon quite probably in '36. In 1940 there probably would have been any elections. Or no, I mean '44 there wouldn't have been elections. We'd have been living, by that time, in one of Phillip K. Dick's

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novels (or lying buried in it, more likely). On the whole, I think T. C. Mits has done OK in the polling place, in spite of his lack of superior ability or talent. A lot better than, for example, Henry Ford would have, I guess that's enough this week -- continued next week (since you are raffiating, I can get in the last word week after week - hah!)

CLAUDE PORTER: At first I took your comments on Puerto Ricans as a satirical Reductio Ad Absurdum (like Swift's Modest Proposal), but after re-reading it, I'm not so sure. Or, on the third thought, are you Putting Us On? What this sounds more like than anything else is GMCarr. I guess I can't comment unless I know whether I'm expected to take this thing seriously

JOHN BOARDMAN: I have a note here that doesn't seem to relate to Dagon, so I guess it's an afterthought to something you said at Fistr (or maybe in an earlier issue of Dagon). Anyway, the reason I recommended Leopold Infeld's Quest rather than one of his other books, is precisely that it is not one of those "relativity for the layman" books. If that were my intent, certainly I'd have named Evolution of Physics (written with Einstein, but mostly Infeld's own book -- Einstein's contribution was mostly his name, which, of course, at the time -- and still -- was more prestigious than Infeld's). Or, if I were to recommend a biography of Einstein, I would pick Phillip Frank's over Infeld's, though the latter is shorter and simpler. What Quest is, is the story of a scientific Horatio Alger. Infeld grew up in a Polish ghetto, and though a brilliant boy, when he finished elementary school, and tried to enter the Gymnasium, he found that, as a Jew, he wasn't entitled. So, for six years he taught himself mathematics and science from borrowed books, in order to be able to go on to the University in spite of not having a Gymnasium diploma. I think that it's an interesting adjunct of our time that today such a thing -- self-education in science, that is -- is sort of like ancient history. Even Christophoulios, the Greek who was considered by Brookhaven scientists as sort of a crackpot, was an engineer with an MA. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that Quest is a social document, not a popular science lesson.

December 20, 1964

A POSTSCRIPT FOR STEVE STILES: It's just occurred to me that another guide to action might possibly be affection, or even love. Do these words exist in Ayn Rand's world? And are you the same Steverino who wrote an article about Erich Fromm? // Anyway, in a paperback buying spree, I broke down and bought a copy of For The New Intellectual, a book that is obviously not intended for me, but I'm going to read it anyway. (The first sentence goes: "This book is intended for those who wish to assume the responsibility of becoming the new intellectuals."). After glancing through the first 20 or so pages, my first critical reaction is that there can't hardly be any such thing as quoting Ayn Rand out of context. If you get what I mean. I mean, every sentence is context.

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