

# Operation Fantast

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SIXPENCE



FR JAN '50

“TITUS GROAN”

AN APPRECIATION BY DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.



# Operation Fantast

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## MORE OR LESS?

The voting on issue 2 was a little better, a total of 62 votes came in. So far, only 39 have been received on issue 3, although many more "Order Forms" than that were returned. Some folks just couldn't make up their minds which item was the worst? Please let's have YOUR opinion THIS time.

A couple of suggestions have come into our editorial "office," that are worthy of consideration, and as this is your magazine, they are being passed on for your comment. The first is that some of the better material published in the duplicated O.F. be republished in the more lasting print format. Is there anything you would like to see reprinted?

The second idea was from G. R. Kay, who suggests that a set of "Fantasy Postcards" be printed from drawings by British fans, similar to those issued by the Perri Press. We haven't explored the costs yet, but we'd like fan-artist to send in a few samples, and we'd like to hear from folks who would consider purchasing sets. Then there is a similar note about a British Fan Art Folio. The snag with printing such things is that either there must be a good market, or else the individual price is exorbitant. So let's have your comments, and we'll see what can be done.

You will note that we've dropped most of O.F.'s own advertising from this issue, and duplicated lists of stock have gone to British subscribers only. If any O-seas subscribers want to be included among folk who get the magazine lists, please let us know. But by doing this we can give you more space for actual reading matter. Even so, a pretty good article by Cyril A. Harper was squeezed out; it will be in the next issue, as will a new 3,000 word tale by Cedric Walker, titled "The Last Straw." This, we think, will have a more general appeal than did Cedric's "Survival" and "Heritage."

It is a bit late to wish you a prosperous NEW YEAR, but as the financial new year is not far off, let us wish you instead . . . small Income Tax Returns!

Fantastically,

Joyce and Ken Slater.

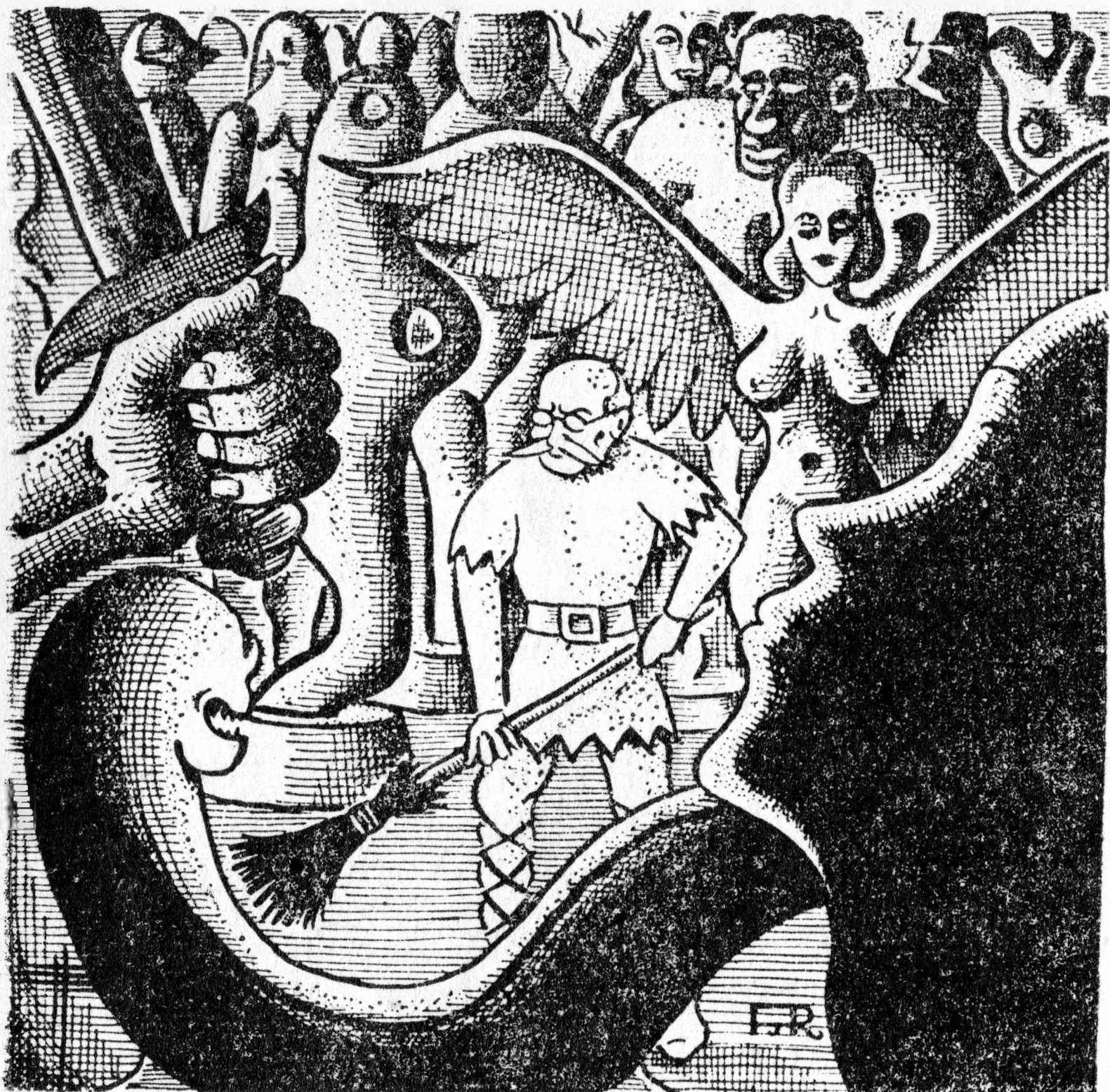
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## READERS' VOTES ON THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Dell Beaker	...	...	...	...	24 votes
Charles Duncombe	...	...	...	...	19 "
P. J. Ridley	...	...	...	...	5 "
Ron. T. Deacon	...	...	...	...	5 "
Ken F. Slater (Science Review)	...	...	...	...	5 "
Laurence Sandfield	...	...	...	...	5 "
Kirby Frazier	...	...	...	...	1 "

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# Titus Groan

AN APPRECIATION

by

DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

James Branch Cabell states that the true artist writes only to express Beautiful thoughts and, when doing this, has only one idea, the personal satisfaction obtained from his labors. This dictum is well illustrated in "The Worm Ouroburos." It took Eddison 30 years to write this remarkable fantasy. Obviously it was a labor of love, written only to obtain a final peace of mind.

There could have been no idea of recompence from a monetary viewpoint. He must have realised while dreaming it and placing those dreams on paper that only a relative few would buy it. or buying it, appreciate its transcendental loveliness. The American edition sold poorly. Its charm has been appreciated only by those exceptional personalities who silently watch a sunset fade or hear the music of waves beating on a rockbound coast.

Mervyn Peake is pre-eminently an artist. He has also won some slight fame as a minor poet. Nine years ago he started to dream of an unknown world and after seven years finished his first novel. No doubt he worked as an illustrator during these years, partly because he enjoyed art and no doubt because there were obligations to meet and bills to pay, but as an avocation he wrote "Titus Groan." In thus doing he followed the pattern of Cabell, Eddison, Dunsany and all writers of the beautiful. His primary object must have been writing for his own pleasure; for had he spent an equal time working as a plasterer or plumber his work would have been less time consuming and far more remunerative. For the book he wrote in these seven lean years has not been appreciated by the average reader who does not understand it and is unwilling to make the effort to do so.

The sub-title, "A Gothic Novel," is, in itself deceptive, though there is a shadow of reason for its use. Elizabeth Bowen in the "Tatler" comes far closer to actual analysis when she writes, "Let us call it a sport of literature." Her use of the word **sport** is a fine example of the incorporation of biology into literary criticism; for a **sport** is something unusual in nature, a white blackbird. It occurs as rarely in literature as in actual life.

The narrative centers around the Castle of Gormanghast, which, since it is located in never-never land, cannot be found in either old or modern atlases. The persons living in and around the Castle are the descendnats of seventy-six generations of nobility and peasant and during all that time they have been completely out of touch with the world. For over two thousand years they have simply lived in the Castle or around it, in a weird isolation. During these centuries the Castle grew slowly, each Lord making additions which were neglected by succeeding Lords who had their own ideas of architecture. Thus, when the last of the line, Titus, is born, the Castle was so vast that few, if any, had visited all the rooms, or going into one unentered for centuries, knew who had built it or why. ,

As this family built Gormengast they fabricated a code of behaviour which, written in great detail, in massive books, completely enslaved and dominated the living family. This enforced servitude to ritualism was specially onerous to the head of the family, the Lord of the Castle who had to perform the ceremonies of every day in exactly the same manner that all the previous Lords had followed on that special day. This ritual was only known in its entire complexity by the Librarian Sourdust, who had devoted most of his 90 years to its study. Every morning he met the Lord at breakfast and dictated to him the day's program. From this there could be, and never was, any diviation.



"Lord Sepulchrove was returning to his room after performing the bi-annual ritual of opening the iron cupboard in the armoury, and, with the traditional dagger which Sourdust had brought for the occasion, of scratching on the metal back of the cupboard another half moon, which, added to the long line of similar half moons, made the seven hundred and thirty-seventh to be scored into the iron.—It was not certain what significance the ceremony held, for unfortunately the records were lost, but the formality was no less sacred for being unintelligible."

Living in the shadow of the Castle a number of common people continued for many centuries an existence that was in its way as bound by routine convention as was that of the Groan nobility. The less fortunate of these served as menials in the Castle but those with artistic talent became wood carvers. Each year these artists in wood carved what they hoped would be a masterpiece. These were judged by the current Lord of Gormengast on the first morning of June. He selected the three best. That evening the discarded carvings were burned but to the three winners was thrown the traditional scroll of vellum, which permitted them to walk the battlements above their mud huts on the night of the full moon of every second month. The three prizewinning carvings were then housed with their predecessors of hundreds of years in the Room of the Bright Carvings. There they were dusted daily by the Curator, Rottcodd, who never left the room and for years at a time had no visitors, for no one cared to look at the carvings. A book was provided for visitors to write their names, but no one came to look and write.

If this novel contained nothing but the story of the woodcarvers and the dual fate of their carvings it would suffice to show that the author has a keen sense of the values of life. For **this is life**, not only in Gormengast but all over the world. Man, striving for greatness, enters into competition with his fellow. Those who fail have their efforts destroyed; those who succeed walk in glory during every second full moon, proud that their work is honored by being placed in some Hall of Fame, not realizing that no one visits that hall and lingers over the beauty of their masterpiece. The novel ends in the Room of the Bright Carvings, where it began, thus, as in "The Worm Ouroboros," completing the circle, the symbol of immortality.

All the characters are prisoners in the web of fate woven by the Spider Destiny. Lord Sepulchrove, fettered by tradition and finding happiness only in his beautiful library; the Countess with her hundreds of birds and many white cats; Fushia, the 17-year-old daughter who lives in a world of dreams; Flay, the valet; Sourdust, the keeper of the archives; his one one-legged son, Barquentine, who waits for 54 years till he can become, through his father's death, the Librarian; the Ladies Cora and Clarice, twin sisters of Lord Sepulchrove, congenital hemiplegics; The chef, Swelter, who commands a small army of assistant cooks, 40 apprentices and 18 Gray Scrubbers; Dr. Prunesquallor and his virginal sister Irma; the nurse, Mrs. Slagg, tiny and fluttering like a wren; Keda, the wet nurse; the unnamed Poet, slightly psychotic, as all true poets are.

All these are so clearly drawn that they stand out, not as characters in a book, but as living persons, not so far removed from those of our world, if only we would take the trouble to find them, or finding them, recognise them. Once meeting them in the book it is most difficult to forget them. This is another reason for recognizing the greatness of the novel. Peake has not only created a world which has more than a semblance of reality, but he has peopled it with men and women, who, in spite of their peculiarities, seem very much alive. There is a biological correctness in the symbiosis of their existence; though they may not acutely realize it, they are all mutually interdependent irrespective of the sharp difference in the strata of their social order. The greatest could not continue the sacred daily program unless aided by the lowest. How would Lord Sepulchrove spend the first day in June if there were, by the refusal of the carvers to compete, no carvings to judge? The very existence of all depended on each one doing his work as he always had done it, and provide for some one to carry on that work when he died.

"For every key position in the Castle there was the apprentice, either the son or the student, bound to secrecy. Centuries of experience had seen to it that there should be no gap in the steady stream of immemorial behavior."

Into this community of perfectly adjusted persons comes an iconoclast, Steerpike, a 17-year old boy, one of the Chef's apprentices, who rebels against



convention and dreams of becoming the vicarious ruler of the Castle. He proceeds in unconventional ways, including arson, to secure power. As his program is entirely new to the nobility they have no power to protect themselves and thus fall victims to his attack. At last the sonless Barquentine, realizing that some day he will die, selects him as the future Librarian and begins his training. Thus the ambitious lad starts towards becoming the actual ruler of the Castle and the future dictator of the daily life of the new Lord, Titus Groan. Here again we see pictured, not a realm of fantasy, but an accurate portrayal of actual monarchies, which growing old and bound by tradition, are unable to face new conditions. They either die like the royal families of France and Russia or, if living on, find the actual rulers of the land a Prime Minister instead of a king.

Peake has shown that he is pre-eminently an artist by illustrating the novel with beautiful pictures drawn with words instead of a brush. His description of various rooms in the Castle, the Library, The Room of the Roots, the Hall of the Spiders, the Hall of the Bright Carvings, the Attic where Fushia fled for solitude and dreams and painted pictures on the wall; all these are so vividly described that it is evident the writer simply wrote of pictures the artist has first seen in his dreams. Back of these pictures lies an allegory and it is easy to translate them into personalities, none pleasant, but all capable of finding counterparts in human cosmos.

All is decaying. The roofs of the Castle leak, the windows are broken, the armor rusts. Mould and dust creep insidiously; ivy clings to the massive walls and some day will tear them to pieces. The rulers share in the slow dissolution of all things that cease to grow.

Meantime there is an undercurrent of revolt in the subconscious of the Dwellers in the Mud Village. The Bright Carvers will, for a while, continue to compete for the yearly prize but the young men resent the pitifully inadequate charity of the Castle. Mrs. Slago, when she informs them of the birth of Titus says:

"We are all very proud. All of us. The Castle is very very satisfied and when I tell you what has happened, then you'll be as happy as well; Oh yes, I am sure you will. Because I know you are **dependent** on the Castle. You have some food thrown down to you from the battlements every morning, don't you?"

"A young man lifted his thick black eyebrows and **spat.**"

Just that; and nothing more.

Other young men will join him. They will cease to carve wood and instead, will swarm over the battlements and carve the Groans with the belief that their life will be happier if they can live in the Castle instead of the Mud Huts. In this they will find nothing but disappointing disillusion, for the Castle will be but a decaying empty shell filled with traditions they cannot share and remnants of the past they can never understand. In changing habitat they simply lose their own traditions and for centuries will be unhappy forming new patterns of life.

Titus Groan simply retells the story of the futility of life. It follows the historic motif of men's effort to build new ladders to enable them to reach the stars. The effort is made but too late they realize the shortness of the ladders and the distance of the stars. Wiser men would have taken the wood and built better arbors for grapevines, but men have never been wise and even philosophers fail to understand the true values of life.

The tale ends with an implication of disaster to the House of Groan. The new Lord, Titus, when vested with authority, throws the ancient emblems of his sovereignty into the water and looks appealingly towards his foster-sister across the lake. Steerpikie bivalently dreams of the equality of men and looks forward to the time when he will become the sole autocrat of the Castle. Fushia, dimly resentful of the chains which may force her to drift into a life of senile virginity, confusedly tries to make the Doctor realize that she is in love with him. The Countess continues to love her birds and cats, broods over her vengeance and long for the complete domination of her son. The Poet writes more poems, the Gardener polishes more apples, The new Chef prepares meals, the Grey Scrubbers continue to wash the kitchen walls and Rottcodd daily dusts the Bright Carving; but they all move like phantasmogoria in a dream, without joy of life, without the stimulation that comes from the desire to attain new objectives.



"Titus Groan" achieves greatness because, within the confines of the Castle and the Mud Huts, it poses many of the important problems of all time. It is more than a narrative of the Groan Family; it is a resume of all human behaviour. To this allegory is added a weird beauty, a literary style that could be used only by an artist and presents a combination of values that is unusual in present day writing. Few will appreciate it; the masses will ignore it; but those who understand it will read and reread it pleasuring at new found beauty and thrilling at discovering a hitherto unseen lovely picture or a philosophical truth far older than the Castle.

## HOME

By  
JOHN NEWMAN

The planet was not Earth, the sun was not of the Solar system; yet the house nestling under the green hills could only have been designed by an Earthman. Its structure was alien when compared with the small town built in the valley and the other houses on the slopes, yet it fitted into the countryside as if it had stood there for countless centuries, blending into the earth and trees. Its garden spread down to the river in the valley, at first sight unplanned but pleasing to the eye. Only after careful examination could it be seen that every plant and tree had been carefully selected and cultivated to this very effect.

Within the house a young boy, he couldn't have been more than ten, sat gazing into a fire; soft light fell from the ceiling lamps, for it was evening. He turned from the fire, "Father! Why don't we go back to Earth, not to stay but to let me see what it is like?" The man seated by the fire put his book down and looked at his son. "I'm afraid we can't. It's a queer story, and it's about time you knew the whole of it. The story goes back some time. Back to when I was at school and the fields of rockets and atomics were being explored. American engineers had built chemical rockets which had been sent to the other planets, yet it wasn't until the two fields had been unified that mankind was really able to think of itself as 'freed from the bonds of Earth.' That was what the politicians called it.

"The two fields were unified by one man, one of the genius's who turned up in that decade. Clarke was his name. It wasn't until he was 60 that the first idea came to him, but within five years he had turned theoretical physics inside out, and, incidentally, developed the theory of the interstellar drive."

The man threw another log on the fire, relit his pipe and went on, "That was where I came in. An interstellar drive isn't the sort of thing one tries out on a planet. You need plenty of space, interstellar space. And you need test pilots. The engineers couldn't design a perfect engine by using a slide rule and drawing instruments, they had to build models or full size test jobs to find the defects, if any.

"It turned out that the models weren't much good. You pointed one at the stars and 'Whoosh!' it had gone. To the stars and the engineers hadn't got there to collect it. That was the trouble you shot your model off and to all intents and purposes it disappeared faster than light, leaving the designer wondering which star it had reached. They couldn't tell in what direction or how far it had gone. Even those fitted with reversal controls didn't return, there was some factor which made just that difference. You just couldn't calibrate them.

"So they built ships large enough to carry a man, stocked one with food and air to last three months and enough test equipment to last a lifetime, and called for volunteers. Then they closed the hatches and 'Whoosh!' he'd gone. And he didn't come back.

"They built a number of ships with different control systems. Two were sent off and didn't return. I was pretty fed up with life as it was then and I was in the third. And I didn't go back!"

"Why not, Father?" asked the boy.

"Well, it's not easy to explain. The Americans had control of about half the Earth, and the Russians the other half. The governments disliked each other's politics and had been piling up atomic bombs and other weapons for some decades. Both sides had police states; freedom of political speech—or even thought—was absent in both due to fear of the other. The governments



were waiting for the moment most favourable for their side to deliver a crushing blow to the opposing state.

"I was brought up in that world. I grew up in an atmosphere of tenseness and distrust, in which you never dare speak your true thoughts to anyone in case they were reported.

"There I was, a volunteer test pilot in a new interstellar ship. I pressed the button as told, and reached the stars. It took only a few seconds to travel a dozen light years; I jumped from one star to another. The drive worked perfectly and the director unit was only a few minutes of arc in error. I was lucky. The fourth star I visited had an inhabited planet. It was Earthlike, as I later found out, were most of the inhabited planets. Most stars had planets and about one in twelve had habitable planets.

"I didn't have to bother about landing, an almost impossible job with an interstellar drive. The surface seemed to flash up to me and I was landed. They had pulled me **round** space in an inverted drive.

"It was there I found peace. This was a true Galatic Civilisation. A civilisation that was not made up of warring factions, but one in which the individual was recognised as the most important factor. You have grown up in it, son, and you understand. It would be almost impossible to fully describe it in terms of the human race. The state was non-existent, yet all strove for common good. It was a civilisation of many races differing in all physical degrees, yet, with no direction, they worked together on millions of planets.

"It was so different from the strife and turmoil of Earth that I didn't want to go back. They understood, for they knew of Earth, which was about ten light years away, and they had beacons off as a plague planet, warning chance ships of the danger of contacting it. The whole Galaxy was bound together by a fast transport system. You could walk from one side of a planet to the other, or to the further side of the Galaxy, by stepping into a travel room and dialling your destination.

"Anyway, I didn't want to return so I settled down here. The other two pilots visited me occasionally, for they had settled down on other planets for the same reasons as I had.

"About a year later our peace was almost shattered. Another rocket arrived, only it wasn't from the U.S.A. this time—it was a Soviet one. The pilot was a woman, your mother.

"She didn't stay. She wanted to take the information about the Galatic Empire back to her government. After about a week she went off and that, we thought was the end. The inhabitants of the Galaxy weren't warlike, and wouldn't have attempted to prevent the Earthmen from bringing their greed and vices into their midst. A few Earthmen could be assimilated into their culture, but a million or more would disrupt it.

"Only we were wrong. She was back within half an hour, and wouldn't explain why we were wrong, why she had returned. We didn't understand until later. She settled down here and later I married her. Still later you were born. That's about all there is to it. We are happy here, feel at home and don't want to go anywhere else. Perhaps later on you will want to travel. You will be able to do so, the whole Galaxy will be open to you, yet there is one planet you won't be able to visit. That is Earth."

The man got to his feet. "Come up to the roof and I will show you the sun from which I came." Together they went upstairs, on to the roof. "There it is, son, that star just to the right of that tall tree. Yes, that's it, that NOVA!"

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## THANKS!

The thanks of a number of British fans go to F. Edwin Counts, of Battle Creek, Mich., USA, who through the channel of OPERATION FANTAST has now distributed some fifty or so magazines to them, for free. OPERATION FANTAST is doing its best to distribute them on a fair and equitable basis, but if you have not had one or more yet, please drop us a line—we have still some recent PLANET, TWS, and AMAZINGS undistributed. We hope that receivers will all drop Edwin a line sometime, and let him know just how much we like him.



# FROM FANTASY TO FACT

By JOHN WILSON

Mythology is riddled with mentions of Giants. Greek, Norse, and Celtic legends all contain references to men larger than normal. The Bible, in Genesis, says "There were Giants in those days." Just how much truth is there in these varied assertions? Fifty years ago the vast body of scientific opinion would have ridiculed the whole idea, to-day, even the most conservative of scientists will admit that there is a grain of truth in these, previously derided, "fairy tales." In 1944 the American Ethnological Society heard a paper by Dr. Weidenreich which certainly struck a blow for the colossus of tradition.

Fossils and fragmentary skeletons found in both China and Java indicate that some, at least, of our predecessors were considerably larger than modern man. The first discoveries were made some 50 years ago, in Java, by a Dutchman, Dr. Dubois. Amongst many other fossils, buried by volcanic eruptions, he found the top of a skull, a femur, and a piece of jaw bone. From these remains Dr. Dubois deduced that the creature, of which they had once formed part, was the "missing link" of Darwin. He named the species *Pithecanthropus erectus*, and estimated that it lived in the late Pliocene era. Modern opinion however, doesn't credit the creature with quite the antiquity assigned it by Dr. Dubois, and placed it in the early Pleistocene period.

*Pithecanthropus* itself was not very much larger than a normal man (judging by the size of the pieces found), but a later discovery by Dr. von Koenigswald of the Netherlands Indies Geological Survey, put a new complexion on the matter. A jaw was found corresponding to that of *Pithecanthropus erectus* in every respect, except that of size. This fossil jaw was larger than any previously known human jaw. At first it was thought that this super *Pithecanthropus* was the male of the species, but later it was dignified with a name of its own, and called *Pithecanthropus robustus*.

Not long after the discovery of the "robustus" jaw another, even larger jaw was found, again in Java. This new early man was named *Meganthropus palaeojavanicus*, and must have been about the size of a big male gorilla. Switching the scene of his activities to China, Dr. Koenigswald found, in the shop of a Chinese Apothecary under the name of dragons teeth, some near-human teeth twice the size of the molars of a gorilla. Dr. Koenigswald believed these to be teeth of some huge prehistoric ape, which he named *Gigantopithecus*. His opinion was, however, challenged by Dr. Weidenreich, who brought evidence to prove that these teeth were in fact, human, and suggested that the name of this monster be changed to *Gigantanthropus*.

From these discoveries, particularly that of the bi-gorilla sized *Gigantanthropus*, Dr. Weidenreich deduced that "gigantism and massiveness may have been a general or at least a widespread character of early mankind."



## General Chuntering

Either I am subject at the moment to a high incidence of co-incidence, or else I am growing "telespathic tendrils." On January 9th, I sat down and wrote to Ben Abbas in Holland. I've never corresponded with him before . . . In my mail on January 13th, comes a letter from Ben, which he must have written on 9th or 10th. One such incident is nothing, but in the past few months I've had that happen several times . . . I wrote Zeda Mishler, and at the time of writing she wrote a letter to me (which she did not post, as a

matter of fact) . . . again, we'd never swapped letters previously . . . Zeda, by the way, is no longer N3F Hostess . . . she has "retired" . . . to operate a fantasy book-shop! . . . N3F Hostess to-day is Eva May Firestone, Upton,



Wyoming, USA . . . Ben Abbas was publisher of the ill-fated Dutch mag. FANTASE EN WETENSCHAP and is a fan-artist of no little skill . . . you'll be seeing his work in these pages, we hope . . . a Birmingham firm are planning the mass-production of a development of the U.S. "Hoppicopter," powered by a British motor-cycle engine . . . estimated cost just below £500, but much cheaper if demand warrants large scale production . . . Donald E. Keyhoe, former information chief of U.S. Commerce Dept., claims in an article in "TRUE" that Flying Saucers are space vessels from another planet which has had Earth under observation for 175 years . . . "Sarlie, voz you there?" . . . Professor Adrien Daninos has returned to Egypt with a "new" idea—solar power—he hopes to get this by using aluminium mirrors to concentrate sunlight onto a boiler. Steam generated is to produce electricity . . . lots of sun in Egypt, but the scheme sounds awfully familiar to me . . . not only are the postmen of 1950 staggering under increased numbers of prozines, but there seems to be a healthy new crop of fanzines, also . . . Kroll and Grossman's SCIENTIFANTASY expires with its fifth issue, we are sorry to note, but FANTASY ADVERTISER is back in the running again, now published by Roy Squires . . . a listing of fanzines currently received is given elsewhere in this issue . . . send 'em in. you editors, and we'll note 'em down . . . Doc Innes sends a report about hens . . . at a meeting of the Physiological Society it was demonstrated that a hen injected with radio-active phosphorus laid radio active eggs for weeks afterwards . . . Doc Innes suggests that a good live-wire salesman can now make a living selling P32 and Geiger counters to chicken farmers who have wayward hens . . . Daily Express, January, gives an odd mention of popularity of "space-opera" in the USA . . . Roger N. Dard, of Australia, who is an admirer of Lee Brown Coye's artwork in WEIRD, learns that if there is sufficient demand. WEIRD may publish a folio of Coye's pics . . . get the paper out and write to WEIRD TALES now! . . . Doc Keller, who's THE HOMUNCULUS is reviewed in this issue, has two more books due for publication in next six months . . . THE ETERNAL CONFLICT, and THE LADY DECIDES . . . Richard Wall draws our attention to a very curious metamorphosis in Murray Leinster's tale THE OTHER WORLD . . . the incident is that of a plumber who "turned into a doorway!" (SS Nov. P. 11) Derek Pickles of Bradford, England, has started a new service for fans . . . a newspaper clipping agency . . . if you are interested, there's an advert in the smalls with Derek's address . . . the DAILY HERALD, October 21, under the banner "THE ATOM IS QUITE A FILM STAR" reports very favourably on the film ATOMIC PHYSICS, listing as the cast: "Professor Einstein, Lord Rutherford and a vast supporting cast of nuclei, neutrons, isotopes, etc." . . . some other odd clippings around October mentioned Flying Saucers again . . . one report from Baltimore mentions the finding in a barn of two oddly designed aircraft, which are considered as possible prototypes of the Saucers . . . another from Los Angeles states that officers at White Sands proving grounds have seen "space ships" flying at 35-40 miles high, these ships being described as "egg shaped craft of fantastic size, and travelling at speeds of three to four miles per second" . . . pass the salt, please, Joyce . . . LEADER January 7th, has article about Einstein, in which the worthy professor is elected greatest man of the half-century . . . an Algernon Blackwood story appeared in December Courier . . . STRAND January 1st carries an article on the prophecies of Monsieur Robida, made in 1883 for 1950 . . . like many other prophets, M. Robida was surprisingly correct in many things, and laughably "off-net-" in many others . . . STRAND'S choice of "thirty books of the year" included Orwell's 1984 . . . December issue contained a pretty good ghost tale by L. A. G. Strong, by the way . . . Dame Rumour has it (that woman does get around!) that shortly to join the BRE list are AMAZING and FANTASTIC ADS, some unspecified firm is reported to have signed a three-year contract with Ziff-Davis . . . first issues due out in March . . . maybe before O.F., I dunno . . . and to follow, there is a possibility of FANTASTIC NOVELS . . . LEADER, January 14th, devotes three pages to "BRITAIN IS GETTING WARMER," an article of interest to fans . . . we pulled a boner in the Sept. ish . . . I said Fantasy Artisans were publishing SCIENCE, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION . . . this is not so . . . publication is by Franklin M. Dietz, Jr. although the club does use the mag for its purposes, this is because Frank is a club member . . . J. B. Coltherd tells me his time is monopolised by one of the fair sex, he can hardly get peace to read even aSF! . . . with paper



# G. KEN CHAPMAN

(BOOKSELLER)

Britain's largest fantasy bookdealer. Exclusive Representative in Great Britain of the Arkham House chain of Publishers.

*Forthcoming from Arkham House:*

*Coming in Spring 1950:*

## **The Throne of Saturn**

by S. Fowler Wright. 19/6

## **Something About Cats**

by H. P. Lovecraft. 16/6

## **Away and Beyond**

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### **GENERAL CHUNTERING—continued**

controls off on March 1st. we can look forward to a regular, dated, quarterly **NEW WORLDS**. Ted Carnell, by the way, appears as a fictional character in a tale by Frank Patton, in **OTHER WORLDS** March issue . . . **GNOME PRESS** have a fine line up for the future; including Asimov's Positronic Robot stories, maybe the Foundation tales (unofficial, that), and we hear that Martin Greenberg has approached Hal Clement with the idea of Hal putting several of his yarns into a novel about Space exploration . . . **TWS/SS "Q"** **FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY** should appear any moment now. **THE HIDDEN WORLD** (Hamilton) having lead spot in in first issue . . . K. F. S.

## **DEAD WORLD**

By PETER J. RIDLEY

He returned to consciousness, and with heavy hand stilled the irritating noise of the alarm clock. His head was fuzzy and his mouth dry. With a groan he sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and pawed vainly at a shock of hair. Heaving another groan he climbed slowly out of bed, and made for the wash stand.

It was then he realised something was missing. He paused stupidly, and pondered. Then he had it! There were no noises from the street! He walked over to the window and looked out. The street was empty, nothing moved, no traffic, no pedestrians, nothing. An air of deadness hung over the scene. It seemed that nothing had ever moved in the road below, that it had always been so deserted and still as it was now.

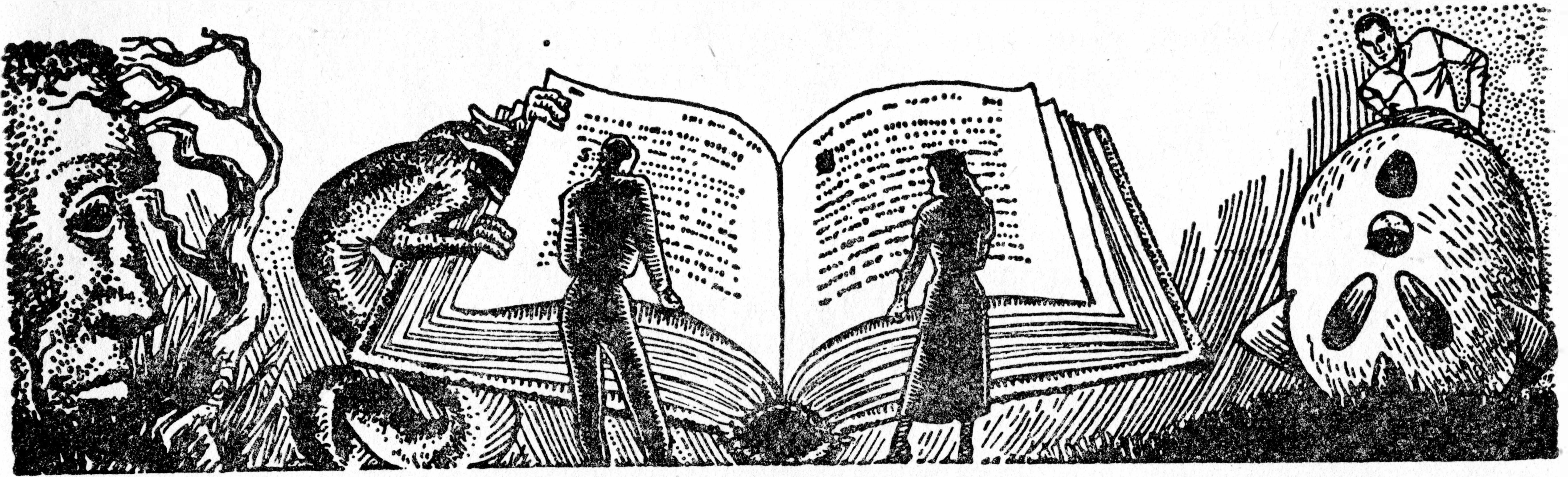
Shaking his head, as if to clear the last numbing vestige of sleep from his brain, the man returned to the washstand, and splashed some water on to his face. Funny, he thought, the street was usually busy on Monday. As he washed he became worried, still drying his face he opened the door of his room and looked down the stairs. The passage was empty, none of the usual bustle, no one was cleaning, no one rushing off to work, no one at all. He closed the door and stood for a moment. Perhaps it was just a coincidence. yes, that was it. By now the street would be filled with traffic and pedestrians. He crossed again to the window. The scene was unchanged, nothing stirred.

He began to theorise. Could the whole population of London have over-



slept? Perhaps a "purple cloud" had come during the night, and killed everyone but him? Possibly the water had become poisoned? He had drunk no water the previous night, which would account for his immunity. Where had he been last night? Oh yes, at the White Horse, with some fellow fans, celebrating a demob. He wondered if they were still alive, possibly they were, as far as he could remember they hadn't bothered with water last night, either. With an effort he made up his mind to investigate.

Feeling as if he was desecrating a tomb, he crept downstairs. Suddenly the hairs along the back of his neck stood upright. A door opposite him began to open. The homely face of his landlady appeared. "Whatever are you doing up so early on Sunday, Mr. Smith?" she asked.



## BOOK REVIEWS

**THE HOMUNCULUS**; David H. Keller, M.D. Prime Press.  
\$3.00 (16/6). (Reviewed by K.F.S.)

The good doctor, who has been authoring s-f tales for some long time, can generally be relied upon to pull a fresh rabbit out of his hat periodically. In this book he pulls out a baby, or rather his hero does. The method used is that of paracelus, and this little experiment in masculine parthogenesis, as performed by Colonel Bumble, is definitely first-grade fantasy.

Apart, however, from the fantastic—in our sense of the word—appeal of this book, it has many other good points. Dr. Keller has excelled himself in the whimsical treatment of his hero, Col. Bumble, and the other characters in the story. Humour is present in plenty; a dash of bitters in the form of pathos is added so that the book will not be too sweet for our mental palates.

Interwoven into the plot are a number of finer threads; Col. Bumble's explanation of evolution, forced upon man by the greed of women; the "true" birth of man, as expounded by a character who should know. The efforts of a "sob-sister" reporter to bring disrepute on the name of Bumble are "epics;" however, it does not pay to take a story to bits, it is meant to be read as a whole and should be treated as such, I imagine. Incidents from the book stick in my mind, nevertheless, and so I note them . . . the desire of the good Colonel to go to gaol, in his own home town . . . he describes it as "a life long ambition"; I wonder if it is—or was—also an ambition of Dr. Keller's? I think the Doctor has drawn heavily on his own personal experiences for many parts of the book, and for the many facets of Col. Bumble, who starts off the story with a desire "to build a hole," and who refutes his wife's claim that you can't build a hole, you can only dig one. But from where did the Doctor draw the character of Lilith? She who is every man's desire, and who fills that part in the lives of some of the characters to their disadvantage.

But perhaps I appear to wax too enthusiastic. There is a reason, and it is simple. I have long wanted to add to my collection of books a story that was fantasy, and contained much of that delightfully dry humour often found in "detective" fiction, but so very rarely in "fantasy." And now I have . . . THE HOMUNCULUS is it!

### RECENT BRITISH BOOKS by E. J. Carnell.

There is, I regret to say, very little news for this column, at the time of going to press. The only book not included in the last notes which may have escaped your attention is ON A DARK NIGHT (10/6), by Anthony West. It deals with a modernistic hell, wherein the adventures of two men are described. One is a lawyer, who has been instrumental in bringing about



the conviction and consequent execution of a German war criminal, and the other is the war criminal. In this hell their activity is linked, they progress together through concentration camps, through a hell of misdirected, unproductive energy. The lawyer goes on to a hell—of luxury where torture is by satiation, until he returns to join his war-criminal-companion in a hell of faith, and passivity. In other words, this overpowering depiction of a hell is very similar to our own modern world . . . This book will not appeal to the science-fictionist, nor to the lighter fantasy fan, but it will have a definite appeal to the more serious reader, and to the "horrific" enthusiast.

Two other books which may be of interest are **CLOVIS**, by Michael Fessier (Allan Wingate, 7/6) which is the tale of an intelligent parrot, and for the POE enthusiast, a translation of Marie Bonaparte's **THE LIFE AND WORKS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE** is available from IMAGO Publishing Co. at 35/-.

Most enthusiasts now know that reprints of E. R. Burroughs early tales are appearing from Methuen at 6/-, **TARZAN OF THE APES** and **THE RETURN OF TARZAN** being currently available; a collection of Algernon Blackwood's work under the title of **TALES OF THE UNCANNY AND THE SUPERNATURAL** is in print at 12/6.

For those who missed the USA edition, **THE LOST CAVERN** and Other Tales, by Gerald Heard (Cassel 9/6) is a very good buy. This contains four long-short stories, two being religio-fantasy, and the others science-fantasy. The title tale is one of the better subterranean yarns available, dealing with intelligent bats, and **THE THAW PLANE**, the second of the s-f theme, covers the melting of the polar ice with atomic power, and its consequences.

## **FANTASY FILMS**      By JOHN ALLEN

All films may be regarded as fantasy, in a general sense, for with very few exceptions, they are a form of escapism, of presenting life as one would like it to be, and not as it really is.

But we are concerned with the narrower limits of Fantasy and Science, and the man who discovered the potentialities of the film for fantasy and science was Georges Melies.

He gained his grounding in the Houdini Theatre in Paris, and when he entered the craft of film production he put his knowledge of illusions and trickery to good use, implementing the standard usages of film-craft, and discovering new ones.

Quickly he realised anything, however improbable, could be given an air of reality, and on this he proceeded to capitalise. In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, he turned out a string of fantasy films, remarkable for their ideas and finish, even by modern standards.

Typical titles were "The Bewitched" (in 1896), "The Devil's Castle," and "The Laboratory of Mephistopholes." then after 1900 the accent turned slightly from the truly "fantastic" to the "pseudo-scientific," a spate of this latter type being produced, which have been described as "a delightful combination in which monstrous machines from 'La Science et la Vie' were allied to Jules Verne's plots."

Amongst these was "A Trip to the Moon" in which the intrepid explorers were shot Moonwards from a gigantic gun; apparently they found the Moon had an atmosphere, for the film shows them wandering around in knee-breeches and periwigs, and other normal apparel of their day, without any obvious discomfort.

Melies' remarkable foresight may be seen from the titles of such films as "Under the Sea," "Rip Van Winkle," and "An Impossible Voyage."

In 1912 he produced "Conquest of the Pole," with a bearded Father Pole who devoured any explorers who unwarily ventured near.

With these films Melies opened the road for the fantasy film directors of the future; his pupil Abel Gance directed "The Folly of Dr. Tube" which was the direct forerunner of "Caligara," with the technique used in the production, and the strange surrealistic backgrounds to the story of a madman who succeeded in breaking up light rays and creating a strange world of deformities. Gance continued the movement begun by Melies, a movement which has led directly to such epics as Wells' "Things to Come," and the more recent "A Matter of Life and Death." It may truly be said that Melies was the Father of the Fantasy Film . . . let us hope that his children, at present being considered by film producers, may be worthy of his name.



# IT MAKES YOU THINK!

By F. J. ROBINSON.

Have you ever, whilst looking through your newspaper, noticed a little item at the foot of column, titled "Strange Occurrence at—," or spoken to someone who has said, "Heard of a queer thing the other day . . ." ? Yes, of course you have. Who hasn't

At sometime in our lives nearly all of us come across things which are outside the realm of human understanding; many people seek to find explanations for such things, but few are successful; so they are usually passed off as "hallucinations" or "Acts of God." As the most known example the case of the "Marie Celeste" comes to mind. Literally hundreds of explanations have been proffered for this, but they all fail, somewhere, to adequately explain the mystery; many guess, but none know.

I have quoted the "Marie Celeste" for it is probably the most famous instance of what is now known as "Fortean." Many readers have heard of Charles Fort, whose life has aptly been described as one of enlightened scepticism. Probably no man in history had a more unusual occupation for Fort spent his life collecting all the data he could obtain about unusual occurrences, such as falls of fish, frogs, stones and worms, lights in the sky, red rain, comets, strange flying machines, footprints and poltergeists; in fact, every type of strange or inexplicable happening. Many others followed his example and in 1930 the Fortean Society was formed to co-ordinate the activities of people throughout the world who took an active interest in the unusual.

Most of these things seem to take place in some out-of-the-way part of America, or in some inaccessible European or Asiatic village, and are either ignored or "taken with a pinch of salt" by most people. However, something occasionally happens which causes a minor sensation with headlines in the local papers, and soon a town is talking. But without explanation the matter is soon forgotten, and becomes as dead as only yesterday's news can be. Sometimes explanations are offered and shattered. And then either some stout son of the Church comes forward and says "This is an Act of God, and we must not seek to probe too deeply into it, for the ways of the Lord are many and strange;" or some scientist proclaims that it is impossible, and could never have happened, and the witnesses were deluded. So the many forget and life goes on, until something else occurs some other place, and the cycle of events is repeated.

Perhaps there are still fans who refuse to believe that these things do happen. For them, and for the interest that may be found by others, I give the following instances, which I can personally vouch for, and of which clippings from papers were forwarded to the Editor to bear out my statements.

On Saturday, 15th October, '49, the occupant of a house in Cardiff went to the local cinema. While she was away, neighbours heard a loud crash, and on investigating found a large hole had been driven in the roof of this house. This was reported at the local police station, and an inspector and a constable came to the scene. They entered the house and found that below the hole was a bedroom and resting on the bed was a large block of ice, while debris from the roof and ceiling, together with fragments of ice, was scattered around the floor, and on the other furniture. A thorough investigation was conducted, and although even persons only remotely connected with the incident were questioned, no light could be thrown on the matter. A few hours later the tenant, a widow, returned from the cinema and was naturally horrified to find that the house had been severely damaged. The main block of ice was still solid four hours after the crash, although it had remained in the house, which was comparatively warm. For that matter, the weather at this time was not abnormally cold. Some of the ice fragments were taken for analysis, but did not disclose any peculiarities.

The possibility, very remote, of the ice having dropped from an airplane while de-icing was checked, but both the R.A.F. and the civil aircraft authorities disclaimed the knowledge of any aircraft in the vicinity.

On the Monday, two days later, the local paper carried an article on the page giving details of the affair, with a photo of the damage. As this was not the "silly season," the report was not repeated in any national papers, other than a small mention. Nothing more was heard of the matter until a further two days, when an article appeared giving details of a similar



occurrence a fortnight previously in a small village near Taunton.

A farmer tending some sheep had heard a whistle, which he likened to a bomb falling. He saw something hit the road, and burst; going to the place he found a large block of ice with fragments scattered over the road surface, and on the sides of the road. It was estimated by the farmer, and other witnesses that the block must have weighed about 28 lb. before it was shattered. This incident was reported to the Meteorological Office, London, where no explanation could be offered. No aircraft were reported in the locality, and the farmer could not recall seeing any craft, although, naturally he had looked up at the "whistle." The suggestion was again made that the ice could have fallen from a high-flying 'plane de-icing, but in view of the weight of the ice this theory is unsupportable.

These two examples, which appear to bear some relationship, are things which I personally know about, typical of things which are probably happening all the time, which have been happening throughout the ages, and which will undoubtedly continue to happen. And man will continue to close his eyes to these things, and deny them; all men that is, except a few like myself, who prefer to ponder over them, and wonder.

Are we all masters of our own destiny, or are we like ants in an ant hill, watched and studied with amusement and understanding by intelligences vastly beyond our comprehension?

When you stop, and look at it—it makes you think!

## FANZINES

S.F. NEWS . . . the official organ of the British SCIENCE FANTASY SOCIETY, Editor: A. Vincent Clarke, 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, London, N.5. duplicated, free to members, irregular.

WONDER . . . Editor: Mike Tealby, 8 Burfield Ave., Loughborough, Leics. irregular, free to SFS members. irregular, duplicated.

SLANT . . . Editor: Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownwards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Printed, irregular, four issues one prozine, or 2/-.

THE ALEMBIC . . . Editor: Norman Ashfield, 27 Woodland Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey. Duplicated. irregular, 3 issues one prozine.

NIRVANA . . . a NOSTALGIC PUBLICATION . . . editor, H. K. Bulmer, 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, London, N5. No price given, irregular, duplicated.

SCIENCE FANTASY REVIEW . . . Editor: Walter Gillings, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex. Printed, Quarterly, 4/- per year, or \$1.00.

FANTASY ADVERTISER . . . Editor: Roy Squires, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif., USA. 50 cents. or 2/6 per year, bi-monthly, planographed.

INTERIM NEWSLETTER . . . Editor: Lyeel Crane, 23 Surrey Place, Toronto 5, Canada, irregular, free to members of SFI, duplicated.

THE TALISMAN . . . Editor: Roy W. Loan, Jr. PO Box 3224, Columbia Heights Station, Washington 10. D.C., USA. \$1.00 or 9/- for 7 issues, multilith, periodicity not known.

BLOOMINGTON NEWS LETTER (probably now SCIENCE-FICTION NEWS-LETTER). Editor: Bob Tucker, PO Box 260, Bloomington, Ill., USA., Planographed, price uncertain. bi-monthly.

POSTAL REVIEW . . . a circular to purchasers giving news on books . . . E. J. Carnell, 17 Burwash Road, London, SE18, duplicated, free, monthly.

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN . . . O.O. of the N3F . . . free to members, bi-monthly, other details in state of flux!

ORB . . . an eye on fandom. Editor: Bob Johnson, 811-9th St., Greeley, Colorado, USA. B-monthly, 75 cents. 6 issues, semi-multith, semi-mimeo.

THE EXPLORER . . . official organ of the ISFCC . . . Editor: Ed. Noble, Jr., Girard, Penna., USA., mimeographed, bi-monthly, 50 cents. per year.

SHIVERS. Publisher, Andrew Mahura, 230 Princes Street, Bridgeport 3, Conn., USA., mimeographed, quarterly, 10 cents. per issue.

STF-TRADER . . . Publisher, K. Martin Carlson, 1028-3rd Ave. S., Moorhead, Minn., USA. bi-monthly (?), 5 cents. per issue, mimeographed.

THE FANSCIENT . . . Editor: Don B. Day, 3435 NE 38th Ave., Portland, 13, Oregon, USA, quarterly, photo-lith. 6 issues \$1, or 5/-. Subs may be placed thru O.F.

THE BLACK SKULL, Publisher, Arthur Tate, 917½ Park Ave., St. Louis, Mo., USA., quarterly, mimeoed, 10 cents. per copy.

UTOPIAN . . . Editor: R. J. Banks, 111 S. 15th St., Corsicana, Texas, USA. Quarterly, Mimeo-ed, 4 for \$1.00.

FANZINE EDITORS . . . for inclusion in this list, all you need to do is send a copy of your 'zine along. This list as known at 31st Jan, '50.



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## MAGAZINE NOTES

It is with sorrow that I note ARKHAM SAMPLER expired with its eighth issue. This was not unexpected, however. The SAMPLER, one hundred pages of rather high-brow offerings, was priced at \$1.00. In effect, although of a decidedly higher standard, it was really little more than a fanzine. I am sure that Mr. Derleth would dispute the fact, but in the essence, what is the difference between the "connoisseur" of s-fantasy, and the "fan"? Mainly height of brow, and little else. The former may be a mite more discerning, the latter is very rarely a litterateur and always something of a sciolist.

The appeal of the SAMPLER was directed mainly to the "highbrow" of fantasy, and to that particular trend of fantasy that, in the main, I classify as "morbid." The normal "fan" has a knowledge of the subject, but is not interested to the length that will permit him to expend what amounts to a very large sum of money for a very small amount of material. If the appeal of the SAMPLER had been greater to the general range of "fandom," if it had been printed on lower quality paper, and cost less, it might have lasted longer. As it is, it has now joined that back-log of defunct magazines that rapidly acquire the elevation of "collectors' items."

Another magazine that I feel will not last long, although of the "pulp" variety, is the new A. MERRITT'S FANTASY. If, as one gathers from the title, it is to be devoted to the republication of Merrittales, it has some ten long stories to work through, and a slightly larger number of shorter pieces. Merritt was not a prolific writer; the majority of his works have appeared at least twice in magazine format, and a number have had book publication; not counting those which have been reprinted in pocket-book format. I should think that readers of fantasy must be almost satiated—if not saturated with Merritt.

The inclusion of 55,000 words by Ted Sturgeon in the February FANTASTIC ADVENTURES may denote the first upward trend of the Ziff-Davis magazines. A change in interior artists would also heighten the standard of these magazines. Another slight change that is noticeable is the replacement of many of the short articles by short "fanzine-type" tales. Whether this is an improvement or not depends on the reader's taste. Personally, I'd prefer not to see these "bitty" items.

The promised quarterly from TWS and SS should be interesting—if Editor Merwin makes some good selections from the "oldies." But there is also some terrible "crud" which might be dug up and dusted off, for our not-very-appreciative perusal.

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