

... but who knows

By ROG PHILLIPS

Illustrator SUMMERS

HUER, or HUEN?

Some of you old timers will remember the Lefty Baker stories that appeared in AMAZING and FANTASTIC in the late 40's. We are glad to have him back again. To find out why we were particularly receptive to this story see note at conclusion.

LEFTY BAKER! I heard the voice and turned my head in the direction I thought it came from. There was no one there. Nothing but lawn and geranium beds all the way to the Ward H Building a couple of hundred yards away.

What sent me!

This time the voice seemed to originate just a few feet in front of me, but no one was there.

The thing to do when you hear voices is not to answer. I turned back to weeding the geraniums. The weeds had gotten a good start down in this end of the State Hospital grounds, and my buddy, Fred Mayhem, wasn't doing his share. He was studying a rusty old bobby pin he had found—and probably making scrambled deductions about it with his scrambled brains.

Fred is a retired detective who took too many sappings in his time. He showed no signs of having heard the voice.

We need your help, Lefty.

I pulled weeds a little faster. I could ignore the voice, but I couldn't stop from thinking, and what I was thinking was making my head spin.

I had transposed *what* to *Huat* in my mind, and Huat was the Venusian scientist who had come to Earth a few years back to correct the gene pattern of the human race, when I was at the other hospital. Huat had had an invisible space ship.

If the voice I was hearing was real, then there was an invisible space ship setting on the lawn behind me, and someone Huat had sent was trying to get my attention.



Lefty! You must listen!
The voice was getting impatient.

"Why don't you answer the man?" Fred Mayhem said, turning the rusted bobby pin over thoughtfully.

"Answer who?" I said. "There's no one here but you and me."

Fred Mayhem took his eyes away from the bobby pin and looked, then stiffened in surprise.

"Oh oh," he groaned. "I guess one of my attacks is coming on again."

Lefty! Please! All civilization is going to be destroyed if you don't help us!

"I'd better get to the doctor fast," Fred said, dropping the bobby pin and starting to get up.

"Relax, Fred," I said, taking pity on him. "I heard the voice too."

Fred looked at me, his eyes filled with suffering.

"You're just saying that to make me feel better, Lefty," he said.

"No I'm not, Fred," I said. "I can prove I heard it. It said, 'Lefty! Please! All civilization is going to be destroyed if you don't help us!' Now, am I right?"

He collapsed with relief. "That's right," he said. "You really did hear it. For a minute there I thought I was going crazy again."

I didn't blame him for being relieved. When he had it bad they put him through the shock treatments, and that's worse than dying, even though it does snap you out of it.

Fred was so relieved that he forgot about the bobby pin and started helping me pull weeds. In no time at all there wasn't a weed left standing. That didn't make me feel bad, because I wanted to get out of there.

We went on to the next geranium bed, a hundred feet away. I was careful to give the invisible space ship a wide berth. I wasn't afraid of us bumping into it. You can walk right through the space where one is without feeling a thing.

What I was afraid of was that you can't see an open hatch until you step through it—and then it's too late. You're already inside the ship.

WE WERE almost to the geranium bed when Fred Mayhem disappeared into thin air. The guy on the space ship had outsmarted me and moved it.

I thought of making a run for it but I knew it was no use. Even if I got away, how could I explain Fred's disappearance? So I resigned myself to the inevitable and kept right in Fred Mayhem's footsteps until, suddenly, there was no lawn, no geranium beds, no hospital buildings.

There was the interior of a very solid ship, so like the one that Huat had come to Earth in that it might have been the same one. But the thing standing there wasn't Huat, nor even human. It could have been either a robot or some kind of alien insect from its appearance.

Fred Mayhem was dancing around in front of it with his dukes up, and before I could tell him to stop he had stepped in with a short right hook to the glossy brown breastplate of the thing.

What happened when he connected was quite remarkable. He seemed to lift himself up and toss himself backwards, turning over in the air and landing on his feet so close to me that I was able to keep him from falling.

"Please don't try that again, sir," the thing said. "Next time I'll give you a big enough charge to carbonize you."

"You do," I said angrily, "and I won't save Civilization for you. Fred's a nice guy. We're pals."

"You bet we are," Fred said, giving his head an up and down jerk, his gimlet eyes flashing. "Maybe I was wrong about you though. You sound okay, even though you look like a bug."

"Oh." The thing laughed. "I'm so accustomed to wearing my fighting suit these past few months that I forgot I was wearing it. Just a moment."

The two upper arms of the thing took its head and twisted it half around so that one of the two bulbous faceted eyes was straight ahead. Then the claw fingers lifted the head free, revealing a fairly normal human face with a burnished gold tan. The man's hair, combed straight back, was taffy white. His eyes were blue. There were wrinkles of good humor around his eyes. His face was thin, his chin prominently pointed, his nose like a bronze wedge above firm red lips that were smiling.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said, struggling with the body of his suit. "I am Huer, Admiral of the Galactic Fleet." His smile faded. "What's left of it," he added sadly.

"Only two arms?" I said in surprise as he shucked the suit down around his hips. "How could you work those other four?"

"By controls attached to my ears," Huer said, wiggling his ears independently to illustrate. "And the lower arms by relays attached to my eyebrows." He wriggled his eyebrows in rapid independent motion to prove it. "It takes months of training, but it becomes second nature so that you become aware only of the arm movements. Believe me, our war suits are functionally superior to anything ever devised. The bulbous faceted eyes, for ex-

ample, give full circle vision—dome vision, we call it. But we'd better get down to the purpose of my coming here all the way from Polaris right when a major battle is being fought with the enemy. It's almost a hopeless battle, but our most brilliant Venusian scientist, Professor Huat, is certain that you can find a way for us to win."

"Why should he think that?" I asked. "I'm not nuts, even if I am in a State Hospital. But I'm not very bright or I wouldn't be here."

"ON THE contrary!" Admiral Huer said. "Oh, by your Earth standards that may be so, but Professor Huat estimates your I.Q. at $84 + i420$. You see, Earth psychologists know only of the real number I.Q. value and don't know about the imaginary number I.Q. . . . Everyone has it, nevertheless. Some call it luck, others call it E.S.P., but it is really a form of intelligence."

"What's that?" Fred Mayhem asked suspiciously. He darted me a warning glance and whispered in my ear, "Watch out for this guy. I ran up against a confidence boy in Miami that had a line like his."

"I'll put it another way," Huer said. "Real number I.Q. produces what is called logic. Imaginary number I.Q. produces what might be called hunches that

turn out right, premonitions. It can be measured on the psychometer and Professor Huat reported in one of his published papers about his Earth expedition that you are the greatest imaginary genius in the known universe!"

"Well now," I said self consciously.

"Watch out, Lefty!" Fred Mayhem whispered out of the corner of his mouth. "We'd better get out of here." He dug his elbow into my ribs and added, "He's pulling your leg."

"I wasn't born yesterday," I whispered back at Fred. Then, to Admiral Huer, "We're going to have to get back to work, so just what is this problem you have?"

"Yes, of course," Huer said. "I'll come straight to the point. The enemy we are fighting is a species of humans, and may be descendents of the crews of some of our earlier ships that went out to the stars. They outnumber us, and they are destroying all life. Even on planets we have not colonized, which have an abundance of life but no intelligent species, the enemy stops long enough to burn off every square inch of land and bring the oceans to a boil so that even the sea life is killed."

"Why would they do that?" I asked.

"There can be only one reason," Huer said. "Religion."

"I think he's right," Fred

Mayhem said. "I solved a murder case once where a woman killed her husband because he wouldn't stop smoking. It was against her religion."

I shook my head. "I don't believe it," I said. "What kind of a religion. . . ?" I was beginning to suspect Admiral Huer needed a rest cure.

"They believe," Huer said, "that all life except themselves is evil. They're spreading out over the universe in a Holy campaign to cleanse the universe of Evil."

"That's a shame," I said soothingly. "Well, Fred and me have to get back to the geraniums. I hope things work out for you, Admiral."

I gave Fred a nudge and headed for the exit hatch.

"Wait!" Huer said. "I can prove it!"

"Sure, Admiral," I said, making a run for it with Fred at my heels.

Suddenly we were back on the lawn, with the sun high in the west, the hospital buildings in the distance—and a man and a woman and a girl about nineteen standing a few feet away, staring at us.

I saw the woman's eyes turn up under her forehead until only the whites showed. Then she sagged at the knees and went down. The man turned a sickly shade of green.

The girl said, "See, papa? I'm NOT crazy! They did vanish, just like I said. And now they've come back!"

"Shhh!" Fred Mayhem hissed, giving the girl a sharp, warning look. "We're under cover agents for the Government. Don't breathe a word of what you've seen!"

"N-n-n-no, sir," she stammered.

I headed for the protection of Ward C Building as fast as I could go, with Fred Mayhem right behind me.

WHILE we weeded geraniums for the rest of the afternoon I filled in Fred Mayhem on Professor Huat, the Venusian scientist who had come to the Earth to correct the human gene pattern and had selected me and Marge Afton, the receptionist on the day shift at the old hospital, and had taken samples from us to grow a lot of babies in vats, and leave them on doorsteps all over the world.

I could see Fred didn't believe me, but then, I found it hard to believe, myself. It had happened though.

I thought of telling him some of the other things that had happened to me, like Dr. Winters and his drug that produced immortality, and how he and I had escaped from the old hospital to complete his experiments with

the drug on rabbits, and Dr. Winters had died of a heart attack and the immortal rabbits had gotten loose, and if they multiplied like rabbits usually do and all their offspring were immortal like Dr. Winters had said they would be just before he died, in a few years the world would be two feet deep in rabbits. I had tried to warn the people about it, but I had just been sent back to the hospital for my pains, and for some unknown reason the world hadn't been overrun with rabbits after all. Maybe some disease killed them off, or maybe Dr. Winters' drug didn't work like he thought it did.

And there was the robot with a loose nut . . .

But there was no use telling Fred any more. He would just become convinced I'd imagined it. Sometimes I wondered if maybe I had. The docs tell you that anything that isn't nice and normal is imaginary, and maybe they're right. Admiral Huat had said I was an imaginary genius. He might be right.

In fact, that was the only thing he had said that made any sense.

A race of people destroying all life on all the planets because their religion said that all life except themselves was Evil. Ha! If they succeeded, what would they have to eat? Dirt?

But even as I tried to convince myself, something in me kept whispering that Admiral Huat wasn't crazy, and that there was such a race, and sooner or later if they weren't stopped they'd reach the Earth and destroy us.

Then I thought of Dr. Winters and his immortal rabbits, and how, with his dying breath, the scientist had begged me to save the world. I had failed—and the world had gone on just as always.

It would this time too, so to heck with Admiral Huer!

Fred Mayhem broke in on my thoughts with a sporadic titter that became a burst of uncontrolled laughter.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"I just was thinking, Lefty," he laughed. "Suppose this Huer character has an identical twin brother named Huen. Then you could never tell if it was Huer or Huen."

"You know what?" I said, grinning.

"Nope," Fred said. "Never met the fellow."

By quitting time me and Fred had laughed ourselves sick. And by bed time the whole thing was so remote that we had forgotten about it.

I should have remembered that the Venusian space ships can be moved right through solid walls. Professor Huat had moved his into the bad ward and res-

cued me from a straitjacket once.

I didn't remember, though.

FRED and me were room-mates. We'd worked pretty hard all day. When lights out came we were ready for bed. I was asleep in less than five minutes. I wasn't even awake long enough to say goodnight to Archy, the night attendant, when he came around, like I usually do.

The next thing I knew I was wide awake, and back in the ship again.

"What the . . . !" I said.

Fred was with me, his eyes blinking like those of a sleepy hawk.

"Ah, I see you have awakened," Admiral Huer said. "I gave you an injection that is the equivalent of ten hours sleep. You needn't worry about being missed. While you were weeding the plants I was busy making life size models of each of you, complete with breathing mechanism and a pulse, so that even if the night attendant turns on the lights he will think it is you in bed asleep."

I became aware of something different about the ship. A faint hum.

"We're in space," Admiral Huer said. "I realized I hadn't convinced you. The only way to convince you is to take you to

Venus to a prison camp where we are holding a few of the enemy, and let you see for yourselves. We'll be there in a few moments now."

"And how do you expect to get us back to our beds before morning?" I asked.

Huer smiled. "The trip takes only ten minutes Earth time," he said. Lights blinked on the instrument panel. "Ah, we're here," he said.

He made a few adjustments on the instruments. The humming stopped.

"Before we leave the ship," Huer said, "I want to complete what I was saying this afternoon. I think you may understand better if I tell you something from your own history. Once Earth and Venus had avenues of commerce, and we had our representatives on Earth. Since we are accustomed to a thinner atmosphere than yours at sea level we had our various embassies on mountain tops, such as Olympus. The people of those times, all over the world, knew of us. But what happened? We found it no longer profitable to carry on commerce with Earth. In a few generations the people of Earth stopped believing the stories of their elders about representatives from another world. The facts became distorted into legends, the legends became fairy tales. Today your civilization is

absolutely convinced that Loki and the rest never really existed. That is quite natural.

"Our ships that go outward to the stars, as I have told you, carry machines that make food out of nonliving matter. The crew knows of its own knowledge that plants and animals exist. But what if one of those ships is wrecked on a barren world and its crew builds airdomes, more food machines, and has children? The children are told of their heritage and their origin, and tell it to their children. In fifteen or twenty generations the original facts become distorted. *No one alive has ever seen any living thing other than human beings!*

"They see the ancient pictures of dogs and cats and plants. They come to believe they are the products of the imagination of ancient artists, and never existed.

"In time they come to believe that human life is unique. This belief becomes the foundation of their religions. Then, as their numbers increase to a few billions and their industry expands, they build fleets to explore space.

"Imagine their horror when they encounter other life, as they must eventually. It is to them as horrible as leprous fiends from Hell would be to you. Somehow, to them, God's clean universe has become contaminated, and it is easy for them to believe that it is their Divine duty to cleanse the

universe of this unspeakable filth called non-human life.

"They encounter other humans. But what humans! Stinking from the odor of the unspeakable filth they have eaten. The plants that grow like a disease above the pure granite, the muscle tissue of the horrible animals. They have eaten them. They belch, they pick the bits of filth from between their teeth. They are worse than the unspeakable plague upon the universe that is their subsistence!"

Admiral Huer stopped talking. Suddenly he chuckled, and I became aware that I had been horrified at this picture of myself.

"Now you can understand what they think of us, Lefty," he said. "And why they kill us and will go on killing us—unless YOU find a way to stop them. We've tried everything. We've finally had to admit defeat."

He strode to the exit hatch. There he turned and looked at me and Fred, smiling sadly.

"Are you ready now to see these unbelievable but inevitable byproducts of human error?" he said.

"**THEY** can't see or hear us," Huer said as he led us along corridors that seemed to us to be catwalks between rows of glass cages.

In each cage was a man, but what a man! Perfectly propor-

tioned and so handsome that he made the average person seem a distorted freak. So clean looking that it was impossible to imagine them ever becoming dirty.

"They are germ free," Huer said quietly. "When they die they don't rot. Flesh can only rot if it contains bacteria, and not so much as a microbe exists where they came from."

"Have you tried putting animals in with them so they'll get used to them?" I asked.

"We've tried everything we know," Huer said. "When we've put animals in with them, they either go into convulsions caused by extreme revulsion, or they kill the animals. We've tried giving them only cooked meat and vegetables to eat. They die rather than eat it. We've tried reasoning with them. They consider our common sense blasphemy."

"If you gave them a ship do you think they'd head back to their own people?" I asked.

"I'm sure of it," Admiral Huer said, giving me a sharp look.

I grinned. "You know what?" I said.

"Of course," Huer said. "I'm sorry he isn't here but—"

"It was just a figure of speech," I said. "What I mean is, I know the answer. Take us back to the hospital."

"Can you tell me what it is?" Admiral Huer asked.

I shook my head. "Fred knows the answer too, I think. Don't you, Fred?"

He frowned for a second, then his face cleared. He chuckled. "If you're thinking what I'm thinking," he said.

"I am," I said. "Take us back to the hospital, Admiral, and in maybe twenty-four hours we'll give you a secret weapon that will win you the war without firing another shot!"

I WASN'T as sure it would work as I made out to Admiral Huer. It wouldn't—if the allies we were going to enlist were as finicky as the enemy about their food. I doubted, though, that they would choose death rather than eat.

As Admiral Huer's space ship sped back to Earth a thousand thoughts flashed through my mind. From the occasional chuckle from Fred the same thoughts must have been going through his.

To test him I said, "An army travels on its stomach."

He laughed his head off. Then he said, "If you can't lick them, join them."

We rolled in the aisles.

"To know them is to love them," I gasped.

We roared.

Admiral Huer became more and more mystified. Finally I took pity on him.

"On Earth," I said, "there is a race that is perhaps as intelligent as the human race. At least those who are friends with it say so. They're a gypsy race. They travel in caravans all over the world. You're liable to meet them anywhere, and if they like you they'll join you and go where you go. We get them at the hospital quite often. In fact, they're the only non-human species a state mental hospital can legally accept. The hospital has special facilities for handling them, too."

"This is most interesting," Admiral Huer said. "Professor Huat mentioned nothing of this in his papers. What are these interesting creatures, and how can they help us turn back the enemy?"

"They'll live right with the enemy," I said. "The enemy will either learn to accept them or go crazy trying to get rid of them. Maybe ninety-nine out of a hundred of the enemy will go crazy, but one out of a hundred will eventually become attached to them. Once they accept one form of life that isn't human, they'll begin to accept the rest."

Huer was shaking his head.

"It wouldn't work," he said. "The enemy would kill them at once. If, for some reason, they couldn't all be killed, they'd certainly keep these creatures away from their supply of food and starve them to death."

Me and Fred rolled in the aisles again for five minutes, while Admiral Huer watched us, puzzled.

Finally I stopped laughing long enough to gasp, "The enemy can't keep them away from their food supply, because the enemy will BE their food supply. They're fleas. Lice. Cooties. You'll see."

He still didn't understand.

"Little creatures," I explained, "that live on people, lay their eggs on them, hatch out on them."

He still didn't get the idea.

"You'll just have to take our word for it," I said. "Now here's what we'll do. When we get them we'll have them in a paper bag. Whatever you do, don't open that paper bag. Have all your prisoners ready on a ship that can take them back to their main fleet. At the last minute before you let them go, throw the paper bag in with them and close the hatch. Then let nature take its course. If it doesn't work—well, that's the end of our civilization."

"HOW'RE you going to work it?" Fred Mayhem said the next morning after breakfast when we headed for the geranium beds.

"I've been wondering that myself, Fred," I said. "I think I've got an idea. In fact, I think it's

the only thing that would work. Neither of us could just walk into the in-patient building, because our shirts and trousers have *Mable Farnsworth* stamped on them, showing we're already living here. So one of us is going to have to get some civilian clothes some way. Right?"

"Right, Lefty," Fred said. "But how?"

"Take that guy coming toward us," I said. "He's about my size."

"So he is!" Lefty said, a light dawning. "Hey!" he called to the fellow.

"Yes?" the man said, smiling.

"I'm Joe," Fred said. "This is my buddy, Alfred."

"Pleased to meet you," the stranger said. "My name is Oscar Fell. I drove down from the city to visit my brother, George. But it's over an hour until visiting time, so I was just walking around."

"So you have an hour to kill, eh?" I said. "That's fine. Joe, here, and me, we have a problem. I wonder if you could help us."

"Be glad to," Oscar Fell said.

I glanced toward the nearest building nervously. "We can't talk here," I said. "Let's go over behind those bushes where the guards won't see us."

"Well, I don't know . . ." Oscar Fell hesitated.

"Would we be given the freedom of the grounds if we were dangerous?" I asked innocently.

"Okay," he said, guardedly.

"We're gardeners," I added, showing him the claw toothed tool I used to dig weeds with. You can buy them in any dime store.

"Let's go," Oscar said.

We fell in on either side of him. Our goal was a thicket of bushes with a picnic arbor in it. We went in, and no one would be able to see us unless they came in too.

"What's your problem, fellows?" Oscar Fell said.

"Just this," I said, smiling happily. "I have to escape so I can kill some people they wouldn't let me kill when I was out before."

He turned pale. "H-h-how many people?" he asked.

"Six," I said. "I've always wanted to make it an even twenty, and I've only killed fourteen so far. Joe here has killed his twenty, and I'm jealous. Isn't that right, Joe?"

"Why don't you kill our friend here?" Fred said. "Then you'd only have to kill five more."

"Nah!" I said, shocked. "Fair is fair. If he lets me have his clothes so I can walk out the gate, I should let him live."

Oscar Fell was already taking off his clothes. Two minutes later I had them on, and he had on mine.

"Keep him here until I get back," I said to Fred. "And just

in case you cheat and kill him while I'm gone, I'm going to kill seven people. The first seven I meet."

"But Alfred," Fred whined. "That will make you one up on me."

"So it will," I sneered triumphantly, and hurried out of the picnic arbor.

ALL there was to do now was hang around the entrance to the in-patient building and wait for the police truck from town. I was safe enough, so long as Fred kept our patsy quiet.

I had less than half an hour to wait. I stood near by when they unloaded, and was glad to see that two of the new patients were far gone winos whose clothes were fairly black with little friends.

I had no trouble joining the line. After all, the cops weren't expecting anyone to break into the line.

I knew the routine inside. I'd been committed once myself. We went past a desk where a guy took our names. We were herded into cubbyholes to undress.

I knew the orderlies would have their eyes on the two winos and want to grab their clothes and get them to the incinerator as fast as possible. As I entered one of the cubbyhole dressing rooms I heard an orderly tell one of the winos to put his clothing

in the paper bag, and set it in the corridor.

I waited, peeking through the curtains, until I saw the paper bags.

Quick as a wink I was out and had grabbed the two paper bags. I could feel them rustling with movement.

"Hey you there!" a voice exploded behind me.

I broke into a run. Out through the reception room, out through the door where the police were just getting back into their padded wagon.

They saw me. Suddenly I knew I would never make it.

The next instant Admiral Huer materialized out of nowhere. I thrust the two paper bags into two of his hands and ducked to one side.

A cop who was making a flying tackle to bring me down seemed to freeze in mid air, his eyes bulging with terror. Then he crashed into Admiral Huer. Both of them fell backward—and vanished.

The next second the cop came flying out of nowhere. He was babbling in terror. The other two cops pulled their revolvers out and started shooting. Two flashes of blue light materialized and connected with the guns. The cops holding them started to jerk spasmodically like they were connected to high voltage wires.

Nobody was paying any at-

tention to me, so I ran. I made it back to the picnic arbor.

"How many did you kill?" Fred Mayhem asked eagerly, his face twitching.

I sneered triumphantly. "I'm TWO up on you now," I said.

"Dog gone!" Fred said in awe.

Oscar Fell was practically paralyzed with terror. He took off out of the picnic arbor, crashing through the bushes and running toward the parking lot near the entrance to the grounds. He never made it. The cops took after him, firing shots over his head.

Fred Mayhem and me slipped out of the picnic arbor to the nearest geranium bed and began weeding industriously.

A month passed. I began to wonder if my scheme to save Civilization had worked. The more I thought about it the less sure I was. Fleas are particular. They don't take to just anybody. Even if they did, DDT would get rid of them—except that a race of people who didn't believe in the existence of fleas probably wouldn't know about DDT . . .

Then, one day, when Fred and me were weeding a flower bed around back of the Ward J. Building an arm materialized near us and beckoned.

Fred and me stepped into the invisible spaceship.

It wasn't the same ship. It was about ten times bigger and there were hundreds and hundreds of people, half of them Venusians and the rest looking like those prisoners we had seen, except that these were dressed in military uniforms and togas and kilts and other styles of clothing. But they all had one thing in common—little red welts and little black things crawling on them. They were the fleabittenest bunch I'd ever seen, and they seemed happy about it.

Admiral Huer quickly informed me what it was all about. Peace had been declared and I was to receive some sort of award for having saved Civilization.

The ceremony lasted almost two hours, and when they pinned the medal on my chest (I was only the third person ever to receive this highest award) I felt humble and proud.

I wear that medal now. Sometimes when we are weeding the geraniums Fred Mayhem comes over and feels of it, and we both choke up with pride. But of course no one but Fred knows I wear it. Nobody can see it.

It's the Invisible Galactic Star-and-Crescent.

THE END

**During the week-end of July 1st and 2nd, your editor attended the 14th Annual Westercon-Baycon—held in Oakland, California. At that time she was presented with an award for efforts toward the improvement of the Z-D twins. Given by a group known as The Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society, it is the Invisible Little Man award (presented but twice before to George Pal and Ray Bradbury). Though the trophy itself is a handsome one, the top bears only two footprints. Proof enough that the little man is, and always will be there. Hence, our special fondness for this Lefty Baker adventure.—Ed.*

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FA-111

(Continued from page 6)

Greco, who rather dramatically reprimanded (and that's putting it mildly) a Mrs. Alvin A. Stewart for not liking David R. Bunch. So, let's start all over again—

Dear Mr. Greco:

You say that Mrs. Stewart's letter was inane babbling, yet an analysis of *your* letter sums up absolutely nothing. You say that Bunch can be compared with O'Neill and Wilder, and that he writes delightful fantasies. Well, I can say that Cele Goldsmith is a polka-dotted mudhen, but that doesn't mean she is one, does it? I have furthermore come to the conclusion that you are either Bunch's grandmother and/or an employee of American Can Corporation.

You seem to be such an intelligent chap and competent Bunch critic that my native curiosity has been aroused. Won't you please write another letter, and this time give us something to substantiate your beliefs of Bunch's greatness? Mrs. Stewart and I, not to mention FANTASTIC's other 38,000 readers, await your answer.

I personally believe that Bunch is president of Alka-Seltzer, and that this is some gigantic sales gimmick to tempt people to buy his product after reading about Moderan. I also believe that if you took *any* Bunch story and

waved it in front of a flock of low flying hawks, the stench would knock them all over. Of course, this might prove to have great commercial value in areas overpopulated by hawks, mightn't it?

James Turner

R.R. # 1, Box 415

Collinsville, Illinois

● *Just keep those hawks away from our polka-dotted mudhen. And how did you guess about Cele, anyway?*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for the past year or more, starting with the issue in which appeared Ward Moore's "Transient." I prefer AMAZING and FANTASTIC over all corresponding magazines in the field.

Ye following consisteth of ye plaudits and ye questions:

Enjoyeth I ye reprints, especially ye Howard effort (for are not all writings efforts?) Ye work of Leiber concerning Fafhrd and ye Grey Mouser, plus ye works of Herr Sharkey, whether jestingly or horrifically ("No Harm Done"). I be addicted to Howard, and enjoy all stories of the type done by he and Leiber (an escape device, I'll wager!)

Concerning "Transient," I have trouble seeing ye world in a normal way after reading it. Ye common and ordinary things appeareth in a way distorted as

though ye observer were partaking of ye cinema. Has another been affected ye same?

Couldst thou print a bit of work by Abraham Merritt? Heardeth I much of him, but alas, seeth I nothing.

Concerning ye issue number seven, volume ten, July: all was done well, especially "Forest of Unreason" and "No Harm Done."

Ye statements which starteth controversy: Herr Sharkey enjoyeth I. A talent great, and ye humor large is his. Wroteth he one weak tale, which, fortunately, recalleth I not. But does not each writer have weak moments, which, unfortunately, are used as examples of his work by those who say, "He hath a lean and hungry look." (Yea, verily, yea)?

I also enjoy fantasy, such as de Camp's (pause to duck brickbats of evil thought thrown by ye inveterate *science-fiction* enthusiasts who read ye magazine to scorn the works enclosed). While each formeth his replies, I close.

J. J. Tilton
Box 799, Fort Clayton,
Canal Zone

● *Ye manner of writing dri-
veth us nuts, but, forsooth, ye
comments ye maketh sootheth
our souls. Verily!*

Dear Cele:

Herewith a clarification of my

letter in the August FANTASTIC.

I admit my letter was a *little* muddled; but the point I was trying to make is that a fan will remain true to the mag that gives him/her/(it?) an introduction to Fandom. The fan will continually buy the mag, even though it may drop in quality or his reading time is cut short by fanac or a job. The fan becomes sentimental about the mag, and doesn't care if he has to sacrifice valuable fanzine reading time to be able to keep up with the stories. Clearer now? I thought not . . .

As to the stories, "Passage to Malish" and "Stranger in Paradox" both vie for top story; but the former gets my vote for best of thish. As to the rest, Sharkey's and Porges' tales both showed slight originality, though Porges' seemed a trifle trite in the theme; but was offset nicely by the manner in which it was handled. The rest of the stories—including the 'classic'—were, I'm afraid, rather poor.

Norm, how *could* you?! It's *The NINE Billion Names of God*; not *Ten*! Check up when you're writing your editorials, eh?

Lawrence Crilly
951 Anna Street
Elizabeth, New Jersey

Dear Editor:

In your August issue of FANTASTIC, you made mention in the editorial about Arthur C.

Clarke's "The Ten Billion Names of God." If I am right, which I feel I am, it should have read "The Nine Billion Names of God," unless he had two similar stories with different titles. I would like to know if I am in error or you are. If you do feel you are right, your ideas clash with those of Ballantine Books and Frederik Pohl.

Bruce Serkin
3876 Berger Avenue
Bethpage, L.I., N.Y.

● *All you folks are right, and we are wrong. But what's a billion names to God?*

Dear Editor:

A belated note of congratulation—the July FANTASTIC was the best sf mag to appear last month. Not that it was so great—not up to the May ish, for instance—but all the others were worse. A sad state of affairs. But your zines are the one sign of improvement in an otherwise bleak world.

Now to the August ish. My verdict—excellent! To begin at the beginning:

Cover: mediocre in concept; excellent in execution. But I don't think Atlantis would have looked *that* much like New York.

"Goodbye, Atlantis"—not bad, but not so good for Anderson. It sounds like something PLANET rejected 10 years ago and he just

got around to rewriting. Still, it moves.

"The Root of Ampoi"—CA Smith is never bad, but you've gotten one of his lesser stories here. Scientifically nonsense, of of course—but thank heavens you don't balk at fantasy!

"One Small Drawback"—Is this guy really Garrett? His weird sense of humor seems to resemble. Anyhow, this is one of the neatest twists on the psi story I've yet seen.

"Stranger in Paradox"—Thank the Lord somebody is still writing good action-adventure; that somebody being Keith Laumer, who is on his way to becoming my favorite current author. This is in the fine tradition of "Worlds of the Imperium". Laumer reminds me of early Williamson, before he went philosophical and was just writing stories.

"Report on the Magic Shop"—will this Porges fellow never run dry? This makes *four* straight months he's come up with a little gem now.

"Passage to Malish"—from an author whom I usually dislike, this was good, but not quite up to the three preceding it. If the Laumer was reminiscent of Williamson, this calls to mind van Vogt.

"Policeman's Lot" was the weakest story in the issue, although it started out well in-

deed, primarily because it violated scientific principle in the ending. This is a delicate point—I said I didn't mind in the Smith yarn, yet it ruined this story. Why? Well, I can swallow the assumption that the Root of Ampoi can make a man grow larger without asking the obvious questions about where the extra mass comes from, or how hardened bones grow, because of the spirit in which it was given. And indeed, I don't boggle at the size—shifting in this same story. But it's an elementary fact that if a man is shrunk down to microscopic size, he won't be damaged by a fall that would kill a full-sized man, not only relatively but absolutely. The strength of his body goes down with the square of his height, while his mass—and therefore the force of his impact after falling a given distance—goes down with the cube of his height. Actually, air resistance would heighten this effect—I have considerable doubt that he would land at all, if he were as small as the story indicates. Brownian movement would keep him aloft. But in any case, the author should be consistent. On page 121 he clearly states that Dexter was subject to the cube-square law as regards growing—he should stick to his guns when size goes the other way. If he had made the story an out-and-out fantasy, in which somehow the

fellow could change size without changing weight or strength, I could have swallowed it, but when he tries to be scientific then he should be scientific all the way. The story was otherwise enjoyable.

Couldn't you expand FANTASTIC to the same size as AMAZING? Your small size is your main handicap in becoming the very best of prozines. Come up to 148 pp, devote 8 of those pages to a lettercol in very very very small type, with the sort of interesting answers you usually print, and I'll guarantee you the fans will love you, even if you don't add fanzine reviews (which I agree should be left out—though it be heresy for a trufan). There is nothing like the ego-boost of getting a letter published to get a reader to talk up your zine. He'll show it to all his friends—and some may become interested. I know I've become much more active since you've printed a couple of mine. And added a couple of readers to your list, though your mag sells pretty well here in Huntsville anyhow.

David G. Hulan
132 Goss Circle, 9B
Redstone Arsenal, Ala.

We constantly strive for additional space in Fantastic, but the economics of publishing are made of stein stuff. We will keep fighting the good fight, however.



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EDITORIAL

(Continued from page 7)

ments can be construed to mean almost anything you want. So don't take the test to find out deep inner meanings; do take it if you want to have a bit of fun.

* * *

CAN it be that there is a revival of interest in fantasy among non-fans? A small sign of such a resurrection is the publishing this month by Crown Publications, of The Xanadu Library, a new paperback line that will reprint celebrated works of imagination, mysticism and fantasy. Modestly-priced (and with illustrations where the original edition had illustrations), the first four titles in the series will be: *Jurgen*, by James Branch Cabell; *Kai Lung's Golden Hours*, by Ernest Bramah; *The Lost Continent of Mu*, by Col. James Churchward; and *Om, the Secret of Ahbor Valley*, by Talbot Mundy. We dedicate this free plug for Crown in the interests of more and better fantasy—and fantasy readers.

—N. L.

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